

THE 10 INVISIBLE PROBLEMS

My name is Paul Lipman and I have been helping people develop fulfilling relationships for nearly 10 years now. Many I help can see the obvious difficulties in their relationship and wonder why that is not enough to be able to solve their problems. The reason for the vast majority is, what they come to therapy with are the symptoms of their problems and not the underlying difficulties – often because these are not obvious.

In this booklet I have set out 10 of the most common and significant hidden difficulties which once highlighted and resolved can lead to lasting change and the kind of relationship you had hoped for.

Should you like to know more or have any questions please feel free to contact me. If you call and I am available, we can speak. If not, I will come back to you at my earliest time during the same day.

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The Relationship

One of the most useful places to begin is to understand there are 3 of you in a relationship - you, the other and the relationship. And like a flower the relationship needs tending to carefully. If you put a flower in the corner of a room and leave it to survive, it might exist, however it will not flourish, and some day, might die. Your relationship is the same. It is also important to remember that whilst one of you might enjoy being the gardener of your relationship and the other tended to, it eventually becomes tiring and unfulfilling when only one of you is the willing gardener.

Developmental changes.

When we enter a relationship, we show only parts of who we are. Like two moons facing each other with sunlight showing up only part of the surface. Life then takes over and we continue to fit nicely into a pattern of being together. As time passes, we may begin to show more of who we are or realise we have changed during the years together. This can be after 2 or 30 years - each relationship is different. When this happens, you may feel " he or she is not the same person anymore, think they no longer care or are behaving in not OK ways". Although this is a natural growing stage of all healthy relationships, like when a child grows, it can be a painful stage and difficult for a partner.

Co- Dependency

This is difficult to identify outside of a therapeutic environment because it is rarely obvious that what you are dealing with is a "dependency" or put another way, an unmet need from earlier in life. A dependency is something you unconsciously need more than want from your partner to feel or be OK. Whilst all relationships are co -dependent to some degree difficulties begin to surface when one person unknowingly stops providing what the other has never developed for themselves. This leaves that person with their own gap inside and not knowing how to manage and judging their partner as having taken something away or changed in a negative way.

How transference distorts your relationship !!

Transference distorts relationships. Transference is reacting and perceiving another person as if they are someone (often parents or parent figures) from our childhood. Usually we are not aware we are doing it. We believe we are really seeing that other person in the, hear-and-now. We may think we know what they are thinking and feeling, what their intentions are and what we can and cannot expect from them.

When we are in POSITIVE transference, we generally feel that the other person is ideal if not perfect. They are capable of giving us all the attention we want and have always wanted. We experience this when we fall in love. The other person seems to be everything we need or want. At these times we often cannot listen to other's comments about that person unless they match our own views.

We often feel understood by them and so pleased to be in their presence we can give our power away to them: we can lose ourselves and become confluent like two rivers merging into one.

When we are in NEGATIVE transference and which is far more common occurrence for most of us, we feel the energy and certainty about the other person's wrongness. Transference can be triggered by behaviour: They don't look us in the eye, or they do. They may criticise our work or be sarcastic or have a tone in their voice.

We then go into a viscous cycle within ourselves as we feel something wrong has been done to us by the other person. We think we know all about them, what they did and what they will do, think, or feel.

We then give away our power and often feel little, like a child in the face of a negative parent. That is where we went internally even if we didn't recognise this.

We have all experienced going into transference with lovers, spouses, friends or bosses. It happens all the time. As quickly as we can pop into transference we can pop right out.

In relationships the other person starts off as being seen as perfect. As times go by they suddenly fall off their pedestal. We ask how we could have got it so wrong and blame the other person. We then go into negative transference until they redeem themselves in some way and we then forget, and everything is all right again.

Being aware of and understanding your transference is essential in any relationship. In transference we are the ones going into patterns. The other person may have done nothing wrong. It is our reaction which throws us into vicious cycles – and keeps us there.

The actions of others triggers us because we have the pattern in ourselves.

Behavioural patterns

One of the biggest complaints I hear is how conversations end badly. Shouting, abuse, walking away

This happens because of internal patterns which make it difficult to stay respectfully in the conflict of difference. At these times what you can describe as “defences”

kick in. They are unconscious patterns of behaviour designed to avoid what you are feeling. Or put another way they are Childlike behaviours re-acted in adult life.

Peoples patterns kick in because they lack a language (emotional literacy) for their feelings and the ability to contain what they are feeling.

Relational Needs

We all have 8 basic biological needs when in a relationship. These are not gaps in our development or faults but cradle to grave needs we all have. When we do not have our needs met it is like having a stone in your shoe. At first irritating, then you get angry and ultimately upsetting. And when you have done everything you know how to get that need met you will revert to extreme behaviour, often developed in early life.

Where the need was never sufficiently met in early life some individual work may be required (as the need may result in co- dependency or negative transference) however meeting this need sufficiently now can heal the gap from early life. When no amount of meeting the need or a very high level is constantly demanded some compromise or individual work is required or otherwise this can become a drain on the other.

The 8 needs:

1. To feel safe and know we can share anything without being rejected or judged.
2. To be able to rely on our partner as a source of wisdom and support in times of difficulty
3. To have our emotions, dreams and goals valued and validated and supported.
4. To have the love and care we wish to offer, received by the other person.
5. To have our partner show they are interested in us and to instigate attention, give care and show affection without having to ask for it.
6. To have someone who is willing to try to understand our struggles and difficulties in life.
7. To know we have made an impact on the other person and have them co- operate if possible.
8. To be able to be the individual you are and say “no” without rejection and to say, “this is who I am, I am not you and I am different”.

Empathic communication

In counselling you will learn to listen and respond in ways that you would not normally do. These will bring you closer and allow solutions to be found and for you each to feel really listened to, heard, and understood. These alone can create the conditions and go a long way to helping solve even the most difficult of problems.

Attachment styles

We each have a different attachment style. Your style will affect how comfortable you are sharing feelings and letting your partner really see what is going on inside you. Some find it difficult to open- up, preferring to cope alone and struggle with their emotions, maybe even seeing themselves as weak when showing them or asking for help. For others showing emotions and sharing is comforting and enriching. Understanding each other's attachment style will allow you to find ways of both having your needs met and to stop feeling rejected.

It is possible to change your attachment style either by creating the environment in which you can feel safe and practicing new behaviour or in individual therapy as styles are formed in early life in response to early life relationships. For example: if your parents weren't comfortable showing emotions and lacked sensitivity with you, it is possible you created an Avoidant style, became used to coping alone and now become nervous around intimacy and when feeling vulnerable.

.... The attachment Dance.

A conflict in styles can create a dance. As one of you tries to get close to the other, they step back and withdraw or close -down. Once they have withdrawn, they feel safe again and take a step towards you. However as soon as you go to meet them, they again step back and the dance continues.

Becoming your parents or a child again.

Our personalities are like having 3 people running around inside ourselves. We have a Parent, Adult and Child part. And we can think, feel, and behave in different ways depending on which part we are coming from. Sometimes in relationships one partner takes a dominant role (like a parent) and their partner experiences them as treating them like a child. At other times you may experience your partner as acting like a child. Both positions are unhelpful. The reason we can slip into either a Parent or Child state is because of patterns of behaviour developed long ago and which we slip into when under pressure.

Understanding when you are coming from a Parent or Child state and learning to adjust how you respond can erase unnecessary conflict and lead to respectful communication which brings you closer.

The Golden Rule of Communication.

When we say something to another person, we send two messages. The first message is the words you say, and this is called the social message. The second message is what you mean or what your intention is behind the message. This is called the psychological message. When the two are different your partner will react and behave in response to the psychological message and not your words because the psychological message is felt. Therefore, honesty is vital.

When what you mean, isn't what you say others know something is wrong, even if they do not know what it is. For this reason, in your relationship the truth is vital, no matter how difficult if serious about creating lasting solutions.

And finally, Why counselling does not work.

There are 6 main reasons:

- You do not wish to save your relationship.
- You do not wish to come to counselling.
- You are not willing to self- reflect on the part you play in your problems.
- You see the other person as being the only problem.
- You choose not to put in the effort.
- One or both need individual work before couples counselling can work. For example: When drink or drugs gets in the way, when you cannot contain your feelings or behaviour or when the effect of your past is so great, it gets in the way.