

RELATIONSHIP RESCUE: NINE METHODS FOR RESOLVING RELATIONSHIP CRISES

RECENTLY WHILE SHOPPING IN A HEALTH FOOD STORE, I CAME ACROSS A FLOWER ESSENCE CALLED RESCUE REMEDY[®]. IT'S AN ALL-PURPOSE REMEDY FOR EMOTIONAL OR HEALTH CRISES TO HELP CALM DOWN OR HEAL. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE A SIMILAR REMEDY FOR RELATIONSHIP CRISES AND IMPASSES, THOSE TIMES WHEN TEMPERS FLARE AND CAN THREATEN THE BASIC EQUILIBRIUM. THESE NINE METHODS ARE DESIGNED TO BE YOUR RELATIONSHIP RESCUE REMEDY[®], TO HELP YOU QUICKLY BREAK THROUGH RELATIONSHIP IMPASSES AND RESOLVE CRISES. IF YOU ARE GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP, CUT THEM OUT AND KEEP THEM IN YOUR WALLET OR PURSE OR HANG THEM ON THE REFRIGERATOR SO THEY'LL BE HANDY IN CASE OF A CRISIS.

1. CHANGE YOUR USUAL CONFLICT PATTERNS OR STYLE

THIS METHOD REFLECTS THE OLD SAYING *INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS*. IF YOU ARE HAVING RECURRING PROBLEMS, DETERMINE WHAT YOU KEEP DOING THE SAME WAY AND CHANGE YOUR APPROACH. IF YOU USUALLY GET LOUD, SOFTEN YOUR VOICE VOLUME. IF YOU USUALLY RUN AWAY OR WITHDRAW DURING AN ARGUMENT, STAY PUT. IF YOU USUALLY TRY TO ARGUE YOUR POINT OF VIEW WITH A LAWYER'S PRECISION AND AGGRESSIVENESS, JUST STATE YOUR FEELINGS IN THE MATTER AND LET IT REST. IF YOU USUALLY INTERRUPT YOUR PARTNER'S TALKING TO REBUT OR REFUTE WHAT THEY ARE SAYING, JUST LISTEN UNTIL THEY ARE DONE TALKING, THEN REPEAT WHAT THEY HAVE SAID BACK TO THEM AND ASK

WHETHER YOU HAVE UNDERSTOOD WHAT THEIR POINT IS OR FEELINGS ARE. IF YOU USUALLY POINT YOUR FINGER DURING AN ARGUMENT, SIT ON YOUR HANDS WHILE YOU ARE HAVING THE ARGUMENT.

YOU MIGHT ALSO TRY CHANGING THE MODE OF EXPRESSION YOU USUALLY USE TO COMMUNICATE. INSTEAD OF TALKING, SWITCH TO A PIECE OF PAPER AND WRITE OUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY. OR RECORD IT ONTO A CASSETTE AND ASK YOUR PARTNER TO LISTEN TO IT IN ANOTHER ROOM.

YOU CAN ALSO CHANGE THE LOCATION OR THE TIMING OF YOUR USUAL CONFLICT PATTERNS OR STYLE. INSTEAD OF ARGUING IN THE LIVING ROOM, GO TO THE FRONT SEAT OF THE CAR OR TO A RESTAURANT TO ARGUE. IF YOU USUALLY ARGUE LATE AT NIGHT, MAKE AN APPOINTMENT FOR THE NEXT AFTERNOON AND HAVE THE ARGUMENT THEN. OR LIMIT THE ARGUMENT TO TEN MINUTES USING THE KITCHEN TIMER AND THEN TAKE A BREAK FOR TEN MINUTES, GETTING SOME PHYSICAL DISTANCE FROM ONE ANOTHER AND REMAINING SILENT. THEN ARGUE ANOTHER TEN MINUTES, FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER TEN MINUTES OF SILENCE. CONTINUE THIS PATTERN UNTIL THE ISSUE IS RESOLVED OR UNTIL YOU BOTH AGREE TO STOP.

2. Do a 180: CHANGE YOUR USUAL PURSUER-DISTANCER PATTERN

THIS IS A VARIATION ON THE LAST METHOD, BUT IT IS MORE SPECIFIC.

MOST COUPLES FALL INTO A TYPICAL PATTERN OF WHO PURSUES AND WHO WITHDRAWS, BOTH IN THE RELATIONSHIP IN GENERAL AND

DURING CONFLICTS. FIGURE OUT WHICH PART OF THE PATTERN YOU USUALLY PLAY OUT AND CHANGE YOUR STYLE (FROM THE PERSON WHO WITHDRAWS TO THE PERSON WHO STAYS OR PURSUES OR *VICE VERSA*). OF COURSE, BOTH OF YOU CAN MAKE THESE CHANGES OR EITHER ONE OF YOU MAY DO SO.

3. CHANGE VAGUE, BLAMING, AND LOADED WORDS INTO ACTION TALK

NOTICE WHAT WORDS YOU ARE USING THAT GET A RISE OUT OF YOUR PARTNER AND FIND A WAY TO USE LESS LOADED OR PROVOCATIVE WORDS OR PHRASES. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MIGHT FIND THAT WHEN YOU SAY THINGS LIKE, “YOU’RE BEING SELFISH,” OR “YOU’RE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER,” YOUR PARTNER REACTS BADLY. THE SIMPLEST WAY TO DEFUSE SUCH PHRASES AND WORDS IS TO TRANSLATE THEM INTO WHAT I CALL ACTION TALK. INSTEAD OF SAYING, “WELL, WHEN YOU WERE JUDGING ME, I GOT DEFENSIVE.” YOU COULD TRY SAYING, “WHEN YOU POINTED YOUR FINGER AT ME AND SAID I WAS IMMATURE, I GOT DEFENSIVE.”

4. CHANGE YOUR COMPLAINTS INTO “ACTION REQUESTS”

PROBABLY THE MOST CRUCIAL AREA TO USE ACTION TALK IS IN TELLING YOUR PARTNER WHAT IS BOTHERING YOU ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP. INSTEAD OF INDICTING THE PERSON FOR PERSONALITY FLAWS OR FOR HAVING THE WRONG FEELINGS, DESCRIBING THEIR BEHAVIOR IN ACTION TALK USUALLY SEEMS LESS BLAMING AND IS MORE LIKELY TO GIVE THEM A HINT ABOUT WHAT THEY MIGHT CHANGE TO MAKE THINGS BETTER. INSTEAD OF “YOU ARE TOO SENSITIVE,” TRY, “I WOULD LIKE YOU TO TELL ME WHEN YOU ARE

UPSET RATHER THAN GOING OUT WITHOUT TELLING ME.” INSTEAD OF
“WE NEVER GO OUT ANYMORE BECAUSE YOU DON’T LIKE TO DO
ANYTHING,” TRY, “I WOULD LIKE TO GO OUT TO MOVIES WITH YOU AT
LEAST ONCE EVERY TWO WEEKS.”

5. CATCH YOUR PARTNER DOING SOMETHING RIGHT

THIS IS A QUICK WAY TO CHANGE THE CLIMATE IN THE MOMENT. MOST
OF US FEEL ATTACKED AND UNAPPRECIATED DURING CONFLICTS. TRY
NOTING TO YOUR PARTNER ABOUT SOMETHING IN THE RECENT PAST
THEY HAVE DONE THAT YOU CAN THINK OF TO GIVE THEM CREDIT FOR.
OR TELL THEM ABOUT TIMES WHEN YOU FELT CARED ABOUT, HELPED
OR UNDERSTOOD BY THEM AND THE SPECIFIC THINGS THAT THEY DID
THAT LED YOU TO FEEL THAT WAY. CATCH THEM DOING OR ALMOST
DOING SOMETHING YOU WANT THEM TO DO DIFFERENTLY AND PRAISE
THEM FOR IT. NOTICE WHEN THEY DO SOMETHING DURING AN
ARGUMENT THAT SEEMS MORE FAIR, MORE COMPASSIONATE OR MORE
FRIENDLY OR THAT HELPS YOU TO RESOLVE THINGS. (HINT: YOU CAN
ALSO CATCH YOURSELF DOING SOMETHING RIGHT AND SILENTLY GIVE
YOURSELF CREDIT. NOTE THAT BEING RIGHTEOUS, THAT IS, MAKING
YOURSELF RIGHT AND YOUR PARTNER WRONG, IS NOT ENCOURAGED.
RATHER, NOTICE WHEN YOU ARE BEING FLEXIBLE, COMPASSIONATE
AND UNDERSTANDING.)

**6. FOCUS ON HOW YOU (NOT YOUR PARTNER) CAN CHANGE AND TAKE
RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING THAT CHANGE**

EVEN IF YOUR PARTNER IS THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM, THIS
METHOD INVOLVES YOU ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING
CHANGES. THIS IS BASED ON THE SYSTEMS IDEA THAT PEOPLE ARE

RESPONSIVE TO CHANGES AROUND THEM. IF YOU STOP DOING THE TANGO AND START DOING THE FOX TROT, YOUR PARTNER WILL HAVE A HARDER TIME DOING THE OLD TANGO STEPS. SO, FIGURE OUT PLACES IN THE USUAL COURSE OF THINGS THAT GO WRONG IN WHICH YOU HAVE A MOMENT OF CHOICE TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND NEW THAT ISN'T HARMFUL OR DESTRUCTIVE.

7. MAKE A SPECIFIC PLAN FOR CHANGE

OFTEN WE DO BETTER AT MAKING CHANGES IF WE SIT AND PLAN A STRATEGY OF ACTION, WRITE IT DOWN AND CHECK ON WHAT WE HAVE WRITTEN DOWN ON A REGULAR BASIS. THIS CAN BE DONE WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR PARTNER. IN MAKING SUCH A PLAN, IT IS IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT YOU, YOUR PARTNER, OR BOTH OF YOU ARE GOING TO TAKE. YOU MIGHT MAKE A TIMELINE FOR TAKING SUCH ACTIONS OR A COMMITMENT ABOUT HOW FREQUENTLY YOU WILL TAKE SUCH ACTIONS. YOU MIGHT ALSO NEED TO MAKE A TIME TO CHECK BACK ON THE PLAN TO SEE IF IT'S WORKING OR TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU BOTH AGREE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPEND MORE TIME ALONE WITHOUT THE CHILDREN, DETERMINE WHICH OF YOU IS GOING TO ARRANGE A BABYSITTER, WHO IS GOING TO MAKE RESERVATIONS FOR THE RESTAURANT OR CALL ABOUT THE MOVIE, AND SO ON. OR IF YOU DECIDE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK ON INCREASING YOUR INTIMACY, MAKE A PLAN FOR WHAT ACTIVITIES YOU WILL DO (SUCH AS READING ALOUD TO ONE ANOTHER OR GIVING EACH OTHER BACK RUBS), HOW OFTEN YOU WILL DO THOSE ACTIVITIES AND SOME SPECIFIC TIMES AND DATES TO CHECK IN WITH EACH OTHER TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE FOLLOWED

THROUGH WITH THE PLANNED ACTIONS OR PLAN OTHER ACTIONS IF THOSE DIDN'T WORK.

8. BLOW YOUR PARTNER'S STEREOTYPE OF YOU

SOMETIMES THE PEOPLE WE LIVE WITH GET A STEREOTYPED IMPRESSION OF WHO WE ARE. AND WE CONFIRM THAT BY ALWAYS PLAYING OUR TYPICAL ROLES. FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR PARTNER'S STEREOTYPE OF YOU IS (YOU NEVER DO ANY WORK AROUND THE HOUSE, OR YOU ARE ALWAYS CRITICAL WHEN THEY WANT TO WATCH FOOTBALL) AND MAKE A DETERMINED EFFORT TO SHATTER THEIR EXPECTATIONS. SURPRISE YOURSELF AND THEM BY DOING SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE ENTIRELY OUT OF CHARACTER FOR YOU (BUT AGAIN, MAKE SURE IT IS NOT DESTRUCTIVE OR MEAN SPIRITED). FOR EXAMPLE, YOU COULD BLOW THEIR IMAGE OF YOU BY BEING APOLOGIZING IF THAT IS UNLIKE YOU.

9. COMPASSIONATE LISTENING

SOMETIMES THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION IS TO JUST STOP AND LISTEN TO WHAT YOUR PARTNER IS SAYING AND IMAGINE HOW HE OR SHE COULD BE FEELING THAT WAY OR SEEING THINGS IN THAT LIGHT. DON'T TRY TO DEFEND YOURSELF, CORRECT THEIR PERCEPTIONS OR TALK THEM OUT OF THEIR FEELINGS. JUST PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR POSITION AND TRY TO HEAR WHAT THEY ARE SAYING AND IMAGINE HOW YOU WOULD FEEL OR ACT IF YOU WERE SEEING THINGS THAT WAY. LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THEIR PERSPECTIVE (EVEN IF YOU DON'T AGREE WITH IT) AND YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW DIFFICULT IT

MUST BE FOR THEM IN THE SITUATION, GIVEN HOW THEY ARE
FEELING ABOUT IT.

WHEN YOU ARE STUCK IN A RELATIONSHIP PROBLEM, THINGS CAN SEEM
HOPELESS. THESE METHODS CAN GIVEN YOU SOME IDEAS YOU CAN USE TO GET
YOURSELF UNSTUCK. OF COURSE, IF PROBLEMS PERSIST OR YOU FIND
YOURSELF TOO DISCOURAGED TO EVEN CONSIDER THESE METHODS, IT IS WISE
TO SEEK THE HELP OF A MARRIAGE OR RELATIONSHIP COUNSELOR.

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30 BOOKS, INCLUDING *DO ONE THING DIFFERENT* (HARPERCOLLINS, 2000), FROM
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