

Couples and many other people speak with frustration about their communication difficulties. Having one's words be misunderstood, misinterpreted, resisted or taken as offensive is exasperating. In verbal exchanges, as in any other sound transmission, a failed connection may be attributed to difficulties in transmission, reception or both.

Understanding and Helping a Jealous Mate

It is necessary to understand the psychology of a jealous person; otherwise we remain blind to the actual causes. Psychological information must be handled very carefully, however, if worse disaster is to be avoided. Let us stop for a moment to consider the value of the preceding paragraphs. For the jealous person himself they are of scarcely any use, because he cannot see himself clearly when he is succumbing to emotions. Anyone confronted with a jealous person will not find it difficult to recognize the psychological factors. But what use will he make of them? That is the decisive point for any psychological information. We must realize that psychology, like any other human device, can be used to good or bad purposes. It can be used as a most powerful weapon of destruction--or it can be the basis for sympathy and understanding. If the victim of a jealous person refers to scientific discovery in pointing out to his adversary that he uses his emotions only to get attention or to tyrannize, the result will be far from beneficial. It will only infuriate the more and aggravate the unhappy relationship. Psychological insight can be used properly only by avoiding carefully any verbal expression of what one knows, using instead the knowledge for adequate behavior and helpful action.

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Can we help a mate who is jealous? What can a husband who has a jealous wife do? Most people who experience this predicament will deny that anything can be done. They may point out that the other person is not susceptible to "reason." They do not know that they mean by reason an utterly futile attempt to persuade. Because they resort to wrong methods, they consider the condition incurable.

Let us imagine a rather common situation. The

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In love relationship, we want to avoid perceiving the mate as a threatening opponent. We also need to understand that our emotions serve as cues to help us restore our sense of worth rather than as a cue to retaliate.

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husband, coming home in the evening, finds his wife in sullen silence. She does not respond to his greeting. There is tension in the air. "What is the matter with you?" Still she does not speak. Obviously she is angry. He, too, becomes angry and demands some explanation. Finally she bursts out, "You can go back to your girl friend. Why trouble to come home at all?"

What does the husband in such a situation generally do?

If he is kind and considerate, he may attempt to talk her out of it, trying to convince her that she is wrong. Very soon he will make the typical mistake of apologizing for his tardiness. She will not believe him, no matter what he says. He himself will get more excited and angry. (People talk too much-in anger, in bitterness. Talk can bring

people together when they are in a friendly mood; but when they fight and are angry, words are as bad as slashes and whips and hurt more than any physical assault.)

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This is the usual procedure in a jealous love quarrel: The accused tries to exonerate himself. We all believe so much in logic and understand so little of psychology! Instead of acting psychologically, we try to talk logically.

Logic is far from being as effective as we are inclined to believe. We can be entirely right, but we are wrong when we try to explain that we are right. We forget to take into consideration whether or not the circumstances are conducive to logical reasoning. It is unimportant whether we are right or wrong, and it is definitely insufficient to be right. Even if we are wrong, we may succeed if we act right psychologically. But we will never succeed if we are logically right and act wrong psychologically. The attitude of our opponent, backed by strong emotions, will never be changed by arguments, logical or not. For every clever argument we may use, the other person has three better ones. The outcome can be only mutual indignation and anger-a quarrel to the bitter end until both have become exhausted and repentant, having punished each other to the utmost.

Another mistake is characteristic in dealing with a jealous person. Because we do not understand what is going on in his mind, we do not realize what causes his actual suffering; we recognize only the injustice done to us. We feel accused without reason, hurt without justification. Our own inadequacy in the precarious situation

makes us angry. As we do not know what to do, we become hostile and fight too. Instead of one person being wrong, now there are two.

Often enough jealous feelings can be assuaged in a clever and subtle way-if we are sure of ourselves, if we refrain from regarding ourselves as being humiliated and abused. A little smile, a kind expression of patience, a kiss full of tenderness, a word of sincere affection may work wonders. We may find a pleasant distraction, soothing the excitement, if we can wait a little. Scolding and arguing never will promote essential relaxation. Only after the atmosphere has cleared and tension is gone is there opportunity for effective help.

And the jealous person needs our help. Telling him that he is wrong is superfluous. Everyone knows the wrongness of yielding to jealousy. Actually, he is far less wrong than it seems from a logical point of view. But since he does not understand himself he expresses himself wrongly. The accusations are wrong, logically. But the feeling of being inadequate or neglected is not false. It is a psychological fact. The sympathetic mate can do a great deal toward encouraging and providing a certain sense of security. The mother-in-law or the imaginary other man or woman is only incidental. Keeping up an argument about them is beside the point. But assurances of one's love and affection reach the roots of the disturbance. Signs of appreciation and esteem may avert any inclination toward jealousy. Letting the other person know how much he is needed may help him to overcome his feeling of inadequacy.

Another frequent mistake must be avoided. While we reproach and quarrel, resent and scorn, we generally succumb to the demands of the jealous person. We try to appease by giving in. We promise not to see the other man or woman any more, or to visit mother less frequently. But this brings no solution. It stimulates the conviction that if we are scolded enough, we will yield. Besides that, it does not produce a good conscience in the accuser. Although jealousy triumphs, the triumphant partner realizes the discomfort he has caused, and each victory only increases the fear of unavoidable final defeat. These few points should be remembered whenever you are dealing with a jealous person: don't excuse yourself, and don't try to reason or to convince; but do not give in either. Be firm, and do what you think is right. Surrender will help as little as fighting. But give the partner what he actually needs-affection and devotion.