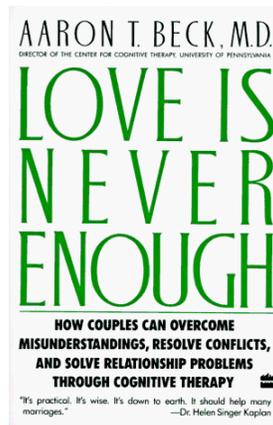




Love is Never Enough

How Couples Can Overcome Misunderstandings, Resolve Conflicts, and Solve Relationship Problems Through Cognitive Therapy



By
Aaron T. Beck, M.D.

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The Big Idea

In this book, Dr. Aaron T. Beck examines the most common marriage problems in order to help troubled couples sort out their differences. This book illustrates the use of cognitive therapy in helping intimate partners clear their thinking and communication to avoid misunderstanding.

I. The Power of Negative Thinking

When spouses are disappointed in their high expectations towards each other, they are likely to jump to negative conclusions of the other person's state of mind and the state of the marriage.

The Cognitive Approach

We can never really know the state of mind of other people. We depend on signals to understand the attitudes and wishes of other people, and sometimes, we misinterpret these signals. This is because we use our own coding system, which may be faulty, to decipher these signals. Depending on our state of mind, we may be biased in interpreting other people's behavior.

How We Misinterpret

We develop a coding system, which is a system for understanding signals, early in life. Although it provides instant explanations, it is frequently wrong when applied to other people.

Misreading the Signals

Decoding messages requires reading the sender's mind. Signals may be ambiguous, leading to misinterpretation. Checking deciphering accuracy by asking the other person helps prevent this.

Symbols and Meaning

Coding systems consist of beliefs, assumptions, rules, precognitions and formulas. When an event consistently evokes highly personalized meanings, it becomes a symbol. When a person attaches a symbolic meaning to an event, his reaction may be excessive, involve distortion of the situation and lead to multiple meanings. Couples need to be aware of the symbolic meanings of the specific events that produce the exaggerated negative reactions.

Bias

Many misunderstandings in marriage have their roots in prejudice, which causes a negative cognitive set.

II. The Light and the Darkness

Infatuation forges a powerful bond that makes couples commit to a relationship. The expectation of regular sexual gratification also serves as an impetus for people to live together.

The Infatuation "Program"

The infatuation program prevents or downplays negative evaluation, Attention is fixed on positive images, memories and expectations, and resists a shift to anything negative. It may jeopardize or destroy a marital relationship.

The "Turn-Ons" (Activators)

These are characteristics that evoke feelings of excitement and the desire for intimacy that are influenced by symbols, which produce an automatic reaction.

Disappointment

In marriage, the failure to live up to expectations may not lead to a lowering of these expectations. Expectations in marriage are less flexible than those in an uncommitted relationship. Lapses may be seen as a general failure within the relationship.

Broken Promises

Unfulfilled promises may lead to a period of disillusionment, and are seen as signs of a lack of care. Keeping these is necessary, but requires proper communication, especially for implicit promises.

The Grand Reversal

As disillusionment grows, single occasions of disappointment become sufficient reason to attach a negative label to the partner. The absence of a virtue is seen as a vice.

Making Balanced Judgments

Important changes can occur if communication skills are enhanced. Negative beliefs must be released, and spouses must specifically state what they consider to be positive actions.

III. The Clash of Perspectives

Differences between couples may stem from differences in their view of each other and themselves.

Open and Closed Perspectives

In normal interactions, perspectives are often open to modification as more information becomes available. Closed perspectives, are defined by personal frames of reference, with people viewing events according to how they relate to them.

Conflicts of Personalities

Friction between spouses may also be caused by differences in personality traits.

- Partners need to realize that much of the friction between them is due to misunderstanding arising from differences in perspective.
- They have to realize that the other's traits are not bad, but merely go against their own.
- They must realize that, when personalities differ, neither is necessarily right or wrong.
- They need to reframe their perspectives of each other, releasing negative features and seeing each other more positively and realistically.

IV. Breaking the Rules

Rules are created at different stages in the marriage. These include the early years, and when a child is born.

- **Making the Rules** - Rules are formulated when partners clash on a number of principles. They often do not take into account the other's wishes and needs.
- **Applying the Rules** - Rules become seen as rights and eventually evolve into demands. Rules that may seem reasonable and obvious to one may appear unreasonable to other, causing conflict.
- **Rules That Sabotage** - When a rule is violated, it is also seen as a violation of its author. People are inclined to punish their partner for any breach of the rules which they established.
- **Enforcing the Rules** - Hidden expectations from unspoken rules disrupt relationships. Even reasonable rules cause problems when improperly applied.
- **Tyranny of the Shoulds** - Unreasonable demands and claims based on an assumed right cause problems in marriage when they are not fulfilled.
- **Breaking the Rules** - When the shoulds and should nots of rules are violated, this may be perceived by the author as a personal attack.
- **Punishment** - People can check their internal commands to punish when rules have been broken or even at the moment when they first feel offended. This breaks the chain reaction of reproaching and criticizing to control the partner's actions.

Dealing With Rules and Attitudes

The more problems a person perceives in a relationship, whether real or not, the higher the chance of their having a counterproductive belief or attitude.

V. Static in Communication

Even mild differences in communication can lead to serious misunderstanding.

- **Indirectness and Ambiguity** - Indirect and ambiguous messages can easily lead to misunderstanding. When the relationship is working well, hints and allusions may suffice. When the relationship is strained, these will not be enough.
- **Defensiveness** - The defensiveness stemming from a personal agenda obscures messages, increasing the chance of misinterpretation.
- **Missing the Message** - Good communication involves both the proper transmission and reception of messages.
- **Monologues, Interruptions, and Silent Listening** - Some problems in communication are caused by differences in the speaking styles of partners, such as timing, pausing and pacing. Men are more likely to listen quietly, which can be seen by women as a lack of attention.
- **Deaf Spots and Blind Spots** - These may come from hypersensitivity and defensiveness. People tune out what they do not want to hear.
- **Differences in Pacing** - These may lead to disruptions of personal codes of etiquette, causing friction.
- **Use of Questioning** - Questioning, when not done properly, can lead to misunderstanding and distress. Questions may be seen as a threat, and those that start with "why" may carry negative connotations.

Differences Between the Sexes

Men and women behave as though they belong to different subcultures. The difference between the masculine and feminine conversational styles may cause conflict if it is not understood that these are the causes of particular behavior.

Origin of the Sex Differences

The world of Girls

- Friendship is largely based on talking together. Talking is a bridge.

The world of Boys

- Boys play in larger, more organized groups and place a higher premium on status and dominance. Words are used as weapons or instruments of dominance.

Summary of Differences

- Women regard questions as a way to maintain conversations, while men see them as requests for information.
- Women connect what their conversation partner says and what they have to say.
- Men do not follow this, often appearing to ignore the preceding comment by their conversational partner.
- Women see aggressiveness by their partner as a disruptive attack, while men see it as a form of conversation.

- Women are more likely to share feelings and secrets, while men prefer less intimate topics.
- Women tend to discuss problems with each other, share experiences and offer reassurances. Men see discussing problems as requests for solutions.
- Men prefer not to talk about problems and instead find quick, practical solutions. Women prefer to talk problems out.

VI. Breakdown of the Partnership

Threats to the Marital Compact

A partner's self-interests are closely linked during courtship, allowing them to feel little sense of self-sacrifice.

- From fusion to fission
In marriage, as gratification from altruism wanes, partners become driven more by "shoulds" than genuine desire to please each other.
- The self-serving bias
People have a tendency to interpret events in a way that puts them in the most favorable light or serves their own self-interests.
- Setting standards and judging your spouse
Partners are likely to judge each other more harshly than they do people in their other relationships.
- The intrusion of symbolic meanings
Symbolic meanings, perfectionism and moralistic evaluations compound greatly problems caused by poor communication and hidden meanings.
- Differing expectations about roles in the family
Spouses often differ in their beliefs on issues such as earning, spending, parenting, social and leisure activities and division of household labor.

Usual Areas of Conflict

- Quality of time together
- Division of labor
- Child rearing
- Sexual relationship
- Budgetary problems
- Problems with in-laws

VII. Silent Thoughts: The Eye of the Storm

Once people tune in to their automatic thoughts, they can better understand their reactions.

Secret Doubts

Most overreactions can be avoided if the person transfers his preoccupation with the partner's injustice or impropriety and examines the preceding, hidden hurt.

Origins of Doubt About Self and Spouse

Some doubts that people experience are derived from rules from, and memories of, their parents' behavior.

VIII. Tricks of the Mind

Thinking in extremes leads to an exaggerated view of the partner and marriage.

How Symbolic Meanings Twist Our Thinking

Errors in thinking usually occur when people perceive threats to vital aspects of their lives. This leads to the perception of being in a do-or-die position.

The Spreading Factor

As problems arise in a marriage, conflicts spread to areas that previously have been problem-free.

Examples of Typical Cognitive Distortions

- Tunnel vision
- Selective abstraction
- Arbitrary Inference
- Overgeneralization
- Polarized thinking
- Magnification
- Biased explanations
- Negative labeling
- Personalization
- Mind reading
- Subjective reasoning

IX. Mortal Combat

Behind the Fights: Basic Beliefs

Basic beliefs influence the way a person interprets a situation and how he will act.

Battle Tactics:

- **Barbed Messages** - Threatening tone of voice, speed and volume of speech can be more provocative or harmful than the literal meaning of the words themselves.
- **Preemptive Strikes** - Attacking to avoid the risk of getting hurt.
- **Overkill** - Taking conflict to a high level, which may become physical.

Controlling Anger

- Partners can be unnecessarily provocative when talking.
- Partners often use these ways of talking because they feel they are right.
- Emotions of primitive anger and hostility are out of place in domestic life.
- Techniques of control such as not acting on anger, moving into the temperate zone and calling time-out periods should be used.
- When partners identify their automatic thoughts and basic beliefs, they can find constructive solutions.

Inhibition, Anger, and Self-Assertion

Inhibition, which prevents proper self-expression, and problems with self-assertion, lead to frustrations and hurt. Anger includes a sense of pressure to act, rooted in basic survival mechanisms, which may lead to hostility.

Sometimes, this motivates us to inflict psychological pain. Psychological pain, which causes sensations different from physical hurt, is roughly parallel to it.

Retaliation and Punishment

In a marital fight, the mobilization to retaliate is automatic. This is a preparation to act and not the act itself.

X. Can Your Relationship Improve?

One must always have faith in the possibility of improvement. The belief that the situation cannot get better inhibits any positive change.

Resistance to Making Change

Certain attitudes can weaken motivation to change.

Defeatist Beliefs

- My partner is incapable of change.
- Nothing can improve our relationship.
- Things will only get worse.
- My partner won't cooperate and nothing can be done without his/her cooperation.
- I've suffered enough.
- If we need to work on it, there's something seriously wrong with the relationship.
- Too much damage has been done.
- My marriage is dead.
- Working on the relationship will make it worse.

Self-Justifying Beliefs

These confer a sense of reasonableness and self-righteousness to continue current behavior.

Reciprocity Arguments

- I won't make an effort unless my partner does.
- It's not fair for me to have to do all the work.

The Problem is My Partner

- There's nothing wrong with me. If my partner would shape up, everything would be fine.
- My partner is crazy.
- My partner is impossible.

What Should Be Changed

Behavior should be modified before thinking patterns. The positives should be emphasized before the negatives are eliminated.

Creating Problems Instead of Solving Them

Problems should be seen as problems and not as broad characterizations or caricatures of the person.

How Do People Change?

Sensitivities should be recognized and their expression corrected. People should be properly motivated and use the right techniques.

A Program for Change

A practical decision should be made regarding which changes should be attempted first. The proper mental state of being open-minded should be achieved, then the proper motivation should be found.

XI. Reinforcing the Foundations

Love is not enough to keep a relationship going. The other foundations are:

- **Cooperation** - Cooperation is essential to solving problems. Special interests may be submerged or negotiated.
- **Commitment** - After passions subside, dedication to each other's welfare and happiness become the major binding force in a relationship. This is especially true in terms of fidelity.
- **Basic Trust** - The roots of basic trust are established even before marriage. Traits such as truthfulness and dependability should not be thought of in absolutes.
- **Loyalty & Fidelity** - A sense of alliance has great symbolic meaning in a relationship, and can be enhanced by placing the partner's interests above those of others. Infidelity is seen as a direct attack on the marriage itself.

XII. Tuning Up the Relationship

Sensing the spouse's needs and meeting them provides a tremendous boost.

Loving and Being Loved

The ingredients in mature love are:

- Feelings of warmth
- Caring
- Expressions of affection
- Acceptance
- Empathy
- Sensitivity
- Understanding
- Companionship
- Intimacy
- Friendliness
- Pleasing
- Support
- Closeness

Keeping Track of Positive Behavior

Couples should be aware of what their mates do and respond accordingly.

XIII. Changing Your Own Distortions

General Guidelines

- Identify troublesome situations and the meanings attached to them.
- Resist the tendency to accept these thoughts as true.
- Oppose the temptation to slip into self-defeating reactions.

The Nine Steps

1. Link emotional reactions with automatic thoughts.
2. Use imagination to identify thoughts.
3. Practice identifying automatic thoughts.
4. Use replay technique.
5. Question your automatic thoughts.
6. Use rational responses.
7. Test your predictions.
8. Reframing
9. Labeling your distortions.

XIV. The Art of Conversation

Finely-tuned conversation expresses the essence of rapport. The rhythm can be upset by problems that disrupt conversation.

Pinpointing Problems in Communication

- Total honesty is impossible in marriage.
- Spontaneity depends on certain automatic modes of speech.
- Perfectly-tuned conversations are interrupted by signals of discord that create static, and problem-solving discussions should be kept apart from pleasant conversation.

Rules of Conversational Etiquette

- Tune in to your partner's channel.
- Give listening signals.
- Don't interrupt.
- Ask questions skillfully.
- Use diplomacy and tact.

XV. The Art of Working Together

Explanations of Differences

There are two kinds of marital fights:

- Problems caused by miscommunication rather than real issues.
- Problems caused by real issues.

In conflict, spouses should try to clarify the other's position and be receptive to possible solutions.

Levels of disagreement

- Differences in specific wishes
These are transient differences magnified into real conflict by existing tension.
- Differences in tastes or sensitivities
- All couples differ to some degree in the activities they prefer.
- Differences in policy, attitude or philosophy
Partners may have vastly differing attitudes with regard to specific issues, and may either refuse to change their stance or attempt to compromise to some extent.
- Differences in personality
In time, personality differences can become a source of conflict rather than a point of attraction.
- Differences in perspective
Even small differences may be blown out of proportion due to different perspectives.

Use of Questioning

Questions get and give information. The partner who is asked may confuse information requesting and giving.

Flexibility

Seeing things in absolutes leads to conflict.

- Rigid standards and absolute rules should be relaxed.
- Hidden fears and self-doubt are often the reason for rigidly-held ideas.
- Self-questioning allows couples to better understand their rules.

Compromise

Compromise may be different for any number of reasons. A desire for power may be part of these reasons.

Accommodation

- There are always differences.

- These differences should be accepted and overlooked.
- Looking at them through a different perspective may show an attractive quality.
- Capitalizing on the differences strengthens the marriage.

Setting Priorities

A balance between priorities should be found.

XVI. Troubleshooting

Clarification of Differences

- Partners should not try to defend themselves, make excuses or counterattack.
- Couples should try to clarify the issue.
- Spouses should give a summary of the other's complaints.

Understanding Your Mate's Perspective

Assuming the role of an investigator allows for clarification of points of view.

Specific Rules for Troubleshooting Sessions

- Decide on a specific time.
- Keep a list of things to discuss.
- Agree on an agenda at the start.
- Take turns and discuss one problem at a time.
- Suggest possible solutions.
- Brainstorm for other solutions.

Principles for the Speaker

- Be brief.
- Be specific.
- Do not indulge in insults, accusations or blaming.
- Avoid the tendency to use labels.
- Avoid absolutes.
- Try to state what you would like rather than giving a criticism.
- Do not try to read your partner's intentions.

Principles for the Listener

- Find points of agreement or mutual understanding.
- Disregard your mate's negative statements.
- Ask yourself questions.

- Check out your understanding.
- Clarify your motives.
- Don't be afraid to say you're sorry.

Translating Complaints Into Requests

More progress will be achieved if the goal and not the wrongdoing is the focus.

Contaminated Requests

Put-downs, needling and / statements should be avoided.

XVII. Taming the Furies

Mutual hostility mars most troubled relationships. Expression of anger can cause substantially negative results. Cutting the roots or controlling the expression of anger can switch the image of the partner from negative to positive.

Source of the Problem: You or Your Mate?

Spouses should ask themselves if their anger is warranted, appropriate and based on a real problem.

- What are the automatic thoughts?
- How are the partner's actions interpreted?
- Is the interpretation objective or based on the meaning attached to it?
- If the anger is appropriate, is it the result of errors in the partner's own thinking?
- Is there an element of satisfaction in attaching the spouse?

Changing Your Thinking

- Look at automatic thoughts and note responses.
- Reframe image of the spouse.
- Attempt to see the partner's perspective.
- Distract yourself.

Gains and Losses From Expressing Anger

- What do I expect to gain?
- What do I lose?
- What is the point I want to make?
- Are there better ways than punishment?

Defusing Hostility in Your Mate

- Clarify the problem.
- Cool off your mate.
- Focus on solving the problem.
- Divert your mate's attention.
- Schedule ventilation sessions.

- Leave the room or house.

XVIII. Special Problems

Reduction of Sexual Desire

This naturally happens as the marriage matures. However, the major factors are psychological. Communication is crucial to solving this.

Infidelity

The aggrieved party can put things in perspective. Polarized thinking can make the situation seem more serious than in reality is.

Stress

Marriage has many stress points, which often impairs partners' capability to deal with the problems caused. Stress factors should be avoided or minimized.

Two-Job Families

- Emphasize the positive.
- Set priorities.
- Be ready to compromise with yourself.
- Separate your work and family roles.
- Be realistic about your standards.
- Organize domestic duties.
- Cultivate a sharing attitude
- Try to maintain a balance between responsibilities and recreation.

Problems in Remarriage

Remarried life demands many compromises, but these can be achieved through effort.