

go to the root

By Travis E. Frye, MA, LPC



Time and time again, I have couples come into my office reporting that they have communication problems. The couple reports that no matter how hard they try to improve communication, they usually end up right back where they started—frustrated, misunderstood, and clearly not validated. While I believe communication is an issue with these couples, I do not think it is the main one. You see, communication problems are like the fruit of a tree. In other words, it is a symptom of a root problem. In order to change the fruit of the tree, one needs to go to its roots. In my experience the root causes of communication issues (and of so many other relationship problems) stems from a lack of connection, safety, and security in the relationship.

When I talk about connection what I am referring to is knowing and feeling deep in the core of your being that your husband, wife, or significant other loves you. You see, every person on earth has a deep rooted emotional need for connection that is met in relationship with others. Isolation from others is inherently traumatizing. Being close to others both physically and emotionally soothes our anxiety, fear, and can even improve our health. This is why doctors now keep twins together after birth and focus so much on touch from a caregiver. Amazingly, the research shows that

this connection or emotional closeness to others enables babies to grow stronger!

Connection to others is also the same reason why Tom Hanks in the movie, “Castaway” created his blood stained volleyball friend, Wilson. He needed “someone” to talk to, connect with, and share both the hardships and victories of life on a deserted island. Tom Hanks’ character became so attached to Wilson that he even risked his life to save him. This seems like a totally irrational thing to do, but it makes perfect sense when it is seen through the eyes of connection and attachment to others.

Safety and security in relationships essentially means that I can be who I am without fear of rejection or isolation. It is believing that your significant other will be there in your darkest hour in the same way a mother stays by her newborn’s side. It is being able to approach that person without worry that you may be attacked, pushed away, or abandoned. Unfortunately, people in relationships grow disconnected from each other and lose their sense of being safe and secure. This results not only in relationship brokenness but individual problems such as anger, depression, and anxiety.

So when couples come into my office talking about communication problems over issues such as finances, the children, or other issues, I help them to not focus on the fruit. Instead, I help them to go deeper into the root of the problem where we discover that these arguments are some form of protest from one partner about not feeling safe, secure, or connected in the relationship. We go to the roots and work on creating safety and security so that the process of rebuilding connection can begin.

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QUESTIONS? ASK TRAVIS!

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