

AFTER THE CHOCOLATE HIGH: KEEPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP POST-VALENTINE'S DAY

Working through Anger, Overcoming Fear, Being Loving

Third Thursdays, February 17, 2005

Vignette #1

Rita: Now I've become the problem, again. I started off with the complaint, but now I am the problem. That always seems to happen.

Mack: Yeah, I do that, I know. *(Pause)* But your tantrums and childishness are an embarrassment to me and my friends.

Rita: If you would control your drinking at parties, puh-leese...

Mack: *(Looks down, avoids eye contact, says nothing)*

Rita: Because I think *(laughs)* for the most part, we get along pretty well, really. *(laughs)*

Mack: *(Continues to remain silent, looking down, no facial movements)*

Rita: Don't you think?

Mack: *(No response.)*

Rita: Mack? Hello?



Vignette #2

Dara: I've tried to get you to do these things. I've tried making up lists and that doesn't work. And I've tried letting you do it on your own, and nothing got done for a month

Oliver: Well, you could put the to do list on the refrigerator.

Dara: Yeah, like you would pay attention on the way to the beer. Gimme a break. Just like when I write stuff in your Day-Timer it gets done.

Oliver: Well, I don't always have a chance to look at my Day-Timer during the day. And I do some things, like the time I stayed up and redid your resume. You never take stuff like that into account.

Dara: Like I don't do stuff for you, huh?

Oliver: That's not what I meant! You need to relax!

Dara: Hmm. Well, that sounds like we solved a lot.



Signs Your Relationship is in Trouble

- Harsh Startup to a discussion
- The Four Horsemen (Criticism of your partner, Contempt for your partner, Stonewalling your partner's concerns, and Defensiveness/avoiding)
- Emotional "flooding" or overwhelming your partner with complaints
- Body Language reflecting the above
- Failed Repair Attempts
- Bad Memories overwhelm and displace good memories

"We are instinctively programmed to respond to a threat with a fight-or-flight response. This response leads to all the situations described above. Understanding your fear (for example, of being abandoned or trapped) can help defuse it, and begin the process of reconciliation, and ultimately, being able to respond with love and awareness."

(from Gottman and Silver, The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work and the work of Seymour Boorstein, MD and Ravi Chandra, MD)

Some Principles for Making it Work

- Really get to know each other
- Nurture fondness and admiration
- Turn toward each other, emotionally, instead of away from each other
- Let your partner influence you
- Create shared meaning
- "Five strokes before a poke"