Three Common Mistakes People Helpers Make When Working with Destructive Marriages

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TEXT EQUIP to 38470 for free resources and to be entered into a drawing for a 30 minute consultation. Must be entered by October 1.

Mistake # 1  Misdiagnose the Problem

What’s Wrong?

Difficult marriage
Disappointing marriage
Destructive marriage

“A good working definition of domestic abuse is a "godless pattern of abusive behavior among spouses involving physical, psychological, and/or emotional means to exert and obtain power and control over a spouse for the achievement of selfish ends.”  John Henderson PhD

Controlling behaviors – When is the line crossed?

Looking for patterns of controlling and other destructive behaviors that increase in frequency and intensity over time.

Controlling abuse can be physical but it’s often much more.

Emotionally abusive behaviors and attitudes:  Rage, constant criticism, ridicule, demeaning, belittling, withholding, restricting, isolating, threatening, abandoning, coercing, accusing, ordering, ignoring, minimizing, subtle non-verbal cues (rolling eyes, snickering), repeatedly denying one’s reality, negative labeling (you’re crazy, you’re sick, you’re demon possessed), chronic deceit.
Sexual abuse in marriage
Economic control and abuse
Spiritual control and abuse

“Hyper-headship is a satanic distortion of male leadership, but it can fly under the radar of discernment because it is disguised as strong male leadership. Make no mistake - it is harsh, oppressive, and controlling. In other words, hyper-headship becomes a breeding ground for domestic abuse.” Jason Meyer

Critical distinction in discerning “what’s wrong”. Don’t confuse resistance to controlling abuse for mutually abusive behavior.

Three other destructive behaviors: Chronic deceit, emotional dependency (I NEED you to be god for me, or I NEED to be god for you), and chronic indifference.

An emotionally destructive marriage is one where one’s personhood is regularly denied, criticized or crushed. This can be done through words, behaviors, economics, attitudes and misusing the scriptures.

Characteristics of a Healthy Relationship

Mutuality:   Mutual caring, mutual honesty, mutual respect, mutual responsibility and mutual repentance

Reciprocity: A healthy relationship is one in which both partners give and both receive. There is safe and open exchange of thoughts and ideas and all perspectives are valued.

Freedom: There is also the freedom to respectfully challenge and disagree with one another without fear of retaliation or danger.

A healthy adult relationship is one where both people in the relationship give and both receive. There is a safe and open exchange of ideas, feelings and thoughts and all perspectives are considered and valued. There is also the freedom to respectfully challenge, confront, and strengthen one another.

What to Listen For

1. Imbalance of power and control in the relationship
2. Consistent lack of mutuality.
3. Lack of freedom to speak up, have an opinion that is different, disagree, or make choices on his/her own.
4. Consistent indifference to his/her partners needs, feelings, desires, thoughts.
5. Blame-shifting, minimizing, and lack of responsibility for wrongs committed in the marriage.
6. An attitude of entitlement.

Helpful Questions to Ask (when, where, why)

1. Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in this relationship?
2. Have you ever been an unwilling participant in a sexual act?
3. Have you ever felt fearful around your partner?
4. Are there times you don’t trust your partner’s honesty?
5. Do you have the freedom to be yourself, make decisions, give your input and say no to things?
6. Can you respectfully challenge and confront the attitudes, decisions and behaviors of your partner?

If Yes, Dig Deeper (Lenore Walker’s Survivor Therapy)

1. When was the first time?
2. When was the last time?
3. When is a typical time?
4. What was the worst time?

Look for imbalance of power and control as well as patterns of abusive/destructive behaviors often escalating in frequency and intensity over time.

# 2 Mistake Doing Couples Counseling

When is Marital Counseling NOT Appropriate?

1. When there is no safety. One person cannot speak honestly about what’s going on.

   Must be able to practice time out’s, respecting stated boundaries, identifying triggers, giving the other the freedom to say no, and learn to tolerate negative emotions without abuse or escalating.

2. When there is a lot of insanity (wrong unbiblical thinking) that needs to be worked through and changed. Usually better accomplished in individual or group work.

   Common beliefs in destructive Individuals:
   - It’s not my fault I act that way.
   - She’s overreacting
   - It’s her fault, if she would only do what I say…this wouldn’t happen
   - I’m the head of the house, therefore I always get my way.
   - My money is my money. She is not an equal partner.
   - If she respects me, she won’t disagree or challenge my decisions.
- I’m entitled to sex, no matter what. She’s my wife (object to use rather than person to love)
- If I get hurt, then she deserves to get hurt back.
- Forgiving means forgetting and never bringing it up again.
- If I said I’m sorry, then everything should be better.
- If she doesn’t know, it won’t hurt her or our marriage (porn, adultery, financial deceit, emotional affairs).
- If I don’t hit her, then she’s not abused.

Common beliefs for those who allow themselves to be mistreated.

I must be doing something wrong, it’s my fault
- If only I try harder, he will change.
- God wants me to stay no matter what.
- If I leave, God will punish me.
- It’s better for the children for us to be together as a family no matter what.
- I can’t live alone (or without this person).
- If only I could get through to him, he would be a great person.
- He needs my help.
- No one else would want me.
- I don’t deserve to be treated any better.
- There must be something wrong with me that he would treat me this way, especially when he treats everyone else great.
- This is normal, I don’t know any different.
- I must suffer quietly for Christ.

What does Biblical love look like in these marriages?

No healing can take place until both individuals are willing to look at themselves, renew their mind with God’s truth and see the things that they think and believe that contribute to their destructive relationship.

3. When you only have one client even with two people in the office.

Indicators that someone in your office is not a client.

✓ Consistent resistance to your counsel.
✓ Blameshifting, denial, and excuse making
✓ Lack of personal goals. Why are you here?

Why wouldn’t you still work with the willing person?
✓ Gives her false hope that if she does her work, he will do his.
✓ Gives him the impression that you agree with him that she is the problem.
✓ Gives him ammunition to later use against her.

4. When you cannot or should not stay neutral.
“In the end what hurt the most was not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.” Martin Luther King Jr.

Mistake # 3 Valuing the sanctity of marriage higher than the safety and sanity of the people in the marriage. Jeremiah 6:14

Peace-keeping attempts that do not result in a healed marriage (vs true Biblical peacemaking).

Let’s start with a clean slate
Forgive and forget
Superficial changes without dealing with the roots
Only one person doing the work

Sorrow isn’t necessarily Biblical repentance. Words without behavior change is meaningless. (1 John 3:17,18 Jeremiah 7:8,10; Luke 3:8)

Fruit of repentance

- Accepts full responsibility – no more blaming or excuse making
- Shows empathy for the pain he’s caused
- Accepts consequences without conditions or bargains.
- Makes amends for the damages he’s caused.
- Continues to grow and learn how to be a better husband and man.
- Willing to work hard over the long run
- Willing to submit to long term accountability

What Makes Marriages Unable to Heal?

- Blindness, not brokenness
- Unwillingness to see Unwillingness to confess. Unwillingness to get help. Moses and Jesus called it “hardness of heart”
- Unconditional love does not mean unconditional relationship (Isaiah 59:2-5)
- Marriage is a covenant relationship but it’s not an unconditional covenant made only by one person, but a covenant based on promises made by both parties. When one person repeatedly breaks the covenant promises – to love, honor, protect and be faithful, what happens to the covenant?
- Wrong thinking/wrong theology

Entitlement thinking, Forgiveness means reconciliation and restoration, grace and love means letting go of consequences and
having no boundaries, suffering is a virtue, therefore an abused women should be willing to suffer well.

**When is Separation Warranted?**

1. When there is a lack of safety (physically, emotionally, spiritually, sexually and/or financially).

2. When all else has been tried to bring the destructive partner to awareness and repentance.

Jesus values safety: Rahab and the spies, David and Saul, Joseph and Herod.

Separation is a consequence of a hard and unrepentant heart: “Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is. How it pierces to the heart. Jeremiah 4:18

**Pain can be instructive – if you let it be.**

**Ground rules for separation:** Discussions need to be made in the presence of a mediator or witness on boundaries, finances, visitation of children, phone calls, texts (frequency), who lives where. It is unrealistic to define a set amount of time for the separation because it much of it depends the abuser’s willingness to take appropriate steps and his faithfulness in walking them through (safety and sanity steps are crucial).

Leslie’s Books and DVD’s will be at BOOTH #329

**FREE RESOURCES by Leslie Vernick**

E-book by Leslie Vernick - The Art of Asking Good Questions  Text EQUIP to 38470

Free Report on The Biblical Guidelines for Separation  Text EQUIP to 38470

Do this before October 1 to be entered into a drawing for a 30 minute consultation with me to discuss career goals, case consultation or a personal problem.
NEW Website for counselors, pastors, people helpers

AT: www.leslievernick.com/counselors

There are free articles and short video’s on this website for counselors, people helpers, Church leaders and pastors that will help EQUIP you to better serve those in destructive relationships

For Additional Training to Wisely Help People Stuck in Destructive Relationships

EQUIP is a monthly membership group led by Leslie Vernick and Chris Moles (Senior Pastor, Batterer Intervention Specialist and author of The Heart of Domestic Abuse) for pastors, counselors and lay leaders who work with individuals and couples in destructive marriages. For more information go to: www.leslievernick.com/equipsignup

Educational Resources


http://www.leslievernick.com/blog/ Each week I write a blog regarding destructive relationships and marriages. Lots of community interaction.

www.cryingoutforjustice.wordpress.com a blog that addresses the needs of the evangelical church to recognize and validate the reality of abuse in the Christian home.


The Rave Project www.theraveproject.com

FOCUS Ministries, Inc www.focusministries1.org

Support Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233 or 800-787-3224 (TDD). Staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
The Gatehouse A residential center for women who need help.
https://www.gatehousegrapevine.com/

Women’s Law (womenslaw.org) State by state legal information and resources as well as information on how to gather evidence of abuse and prepare for court

Vine (vinelink.com) Available in 47 states allowing victims to search for an offender in custody by name or ID number and then register to be alerted if offender has been released or escaped.

**Recommended Books**

*A Cry For Justice* by Jeff Crippen and Anna Wood

*Character Disturbance: The Phenomenon of Our Age*  George K Simon Jr. Ph.D

*How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* by Leslie Vernick

*Is it my Fault* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb

*Not Under Bondage* by Barbara Roberts

*The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men who Use Control and Violence in the Home* by Chris Moles

*The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* by Leslie Vernick

*The Emotionally Destructive Relationship* by Leslie Vernick

*Why Does He Do That: Inside The Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* by Lundy Bancroft