

Understanding Your Conflict Triggers – April 2024

LWCC Marriage Email For April 2024

Well, how the year moves on!!! School holidays are in full swing, and Autumn colours are becoming more and more vibrant by the week. I love moving around the city at this time of the year and drinking in those Autumn colours. Thanks to those of you who sent feed-back re last month's email. I am pleased to hear that a number of you recognised the issue and had some good dialogue around generating those extra snippets of quality time together.

This month I want to look at an important aspect of conflict: Understanding your Triggers. As always with these emails, our intent is to give you material that will help you have, as it were, a health check on different aspects of your relationship, and generate helpful and healthy discussions together.

I'm sure most of us would accept that, from time to time we have had an emotional reaction disproportionate to the comment or moment that spurred it, or we've had a conversation that goes off the rails when our emotions escalated out of nowhere. Sure, some conflict is unavoidable, but constantly lashing out when you're triggered can be pretty hard on your relationship. If this is you, instead of waiting for the next time you're triggered, can I encourage you to take some time to draw aside and consider what it is that causes you to react! Have a look at the list below, and see if any of these could be your trigger.

- Your spouse has no sense of timing, and comes to you with important or stressful stuff when your mind is definitely on other important stuff, and this frustrates the heck out of you:
- You just hate, and therefore shy away from, conflict:
- You get defensive or feel threatened whenever you suspect you are about to be challenged - you know there's no justification for feeling that way, because, other than perhaps a tone in your spouse's voice, you have no real idea what they are coming to you about - it's just the way you are wired; and you certainly don't like the way you react, but you do:
- You are over-stressed right now, feeling unwell, or extremely tired, and your spouse has either not read that, or is not aware that's where you are at.

This is not an exhaustive list by any means, and perhaps by thinking the situation through you will realise that the trigger for you is something quite different altogether. Perhaps you just over-react or are too sensitive. Whatever the trigger, once you recognise it, you can begin to determine to make the extra effort to control those emotions and reactions, and when you do the work to better understand your hot spots and triggers, you'll begin to reap some significant benefits:

You'll avoid unnecessary conflict:

Understanding your own triggers gives you a chance to temper your emotions with rational thinking so you can respond more appropriately. When you feel your heart rate starting to ramp up or your first instinct is to get defensive, it's natural to let the emotions take over, which usually leads us down the fight path. When you know your triggers, you're more able to recognize that you're having an emotional reaction because you're particularly sensitive to a certain topic. This insight helps you take on a more objective perspective of the situation and respond with more intention.

You'll be able to take responsibility when your response is less than ideal.

We're not robots. Emotions will sway you from time to time, and you'll inevitably respond in ways you wish you hadn't. But when you know why you overreacted, you can call yourself on it and try again. You can also help yourself immensely by determining to say, "I'm sorry," a little more quickly. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have snapped at you like that." Then, try acknowledging with your spouse how insecure you are feeling about that topic and or the timing, and make time to talk it through together. This will also help to reroute the conversation down a more positive path – creating an opportunity for connection instead of distance.

You'll foster a cycle of empathy:

When you understand your own triggers, and communicate this to your spouse, you are better positioned to communicate, and help them, understand where you're coming from. Instead of being blind-sided or in the dark about your sensitive topics, they can be more empathetic. They then have the knowledge that allows them to be more thoughtful and aware of tone, phrasing, or timing, and how they affect you, when addressing certain topics. When your spouse responds to you in such a supportive and understanding way, you're much more likely to reciprocate that response.

You'll grow together:

It takes self-awareness and vulnerability to identify your triggers and share them with your partner, but it's a really powerful way to grow – both as individuals and as a couple. The areas we're sensitive about are often tied to some of our biggest vulnerabilities. When you open up to each other and learn to communicate about them in an honest and accepting way, intimacy grows. You'll learn new ways to support one another and even help each other work through some of those deep-seated fears and insecurities.

Self-awareness is important in all aspects of life. Understanding your strengths and weaknesses can help you optimize your performance in every area of your life. Knowing what energizes and drains you allows you to be at your best in your day-to-day life. And understanding your triggers can also transform the way you relate to your spouse, avoid unnecessary conflict, and strengthen intimacy and connection.

We trust, as always, that you find this stimulates some discussion, or causes you to do some introspection that will bring some significant deepening of your relationship and journey together.

Blessings on you all from The Marriage Ministries Team:

Stan & Ronnie, John & Karen

(Content adapted from article from Prepare/Enrich)