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The Listening Course

LESSON 7 – Defensiveness and criticism interrupt connection

Defensiveness and criticism work together to undermine your connection. When argument repair is not understood, the defensiveness and criticizing responses have no end.

JENNIFER:

I heard about a car accident tonight on the road that you drive, and you got home an hour late. I was really afraid you were in a car accident.

MICHAEL:

That's not even the road I take, and I was only 45 minutes late. You really didn't need to worry.

JENNIFER:

You're so in your head. Why do you always tell me not to worry? I didn't even say I was worried.

Above is an example of over-reactivity to each other, staying in negative responses. This example shows a couple that is allergic to criticism. They are both often waiting for this bad habit to happen, even when one partner starts off being honest and sincere. They are both always watching for evidence to prove their partner doesn't care.

Telling the truth to each other about this is the start of changing it. When one of you says you feel criticized, your partner might then respond and say they are feeling criticized. So yes, this is the same negative response. Move past doing that and attempt to listen to each other about criticism and defensiveness ruining conversations. It hurts both of you.

Take a moment and become aware if you have an allergy to criticism in your relationship. If one of you says "did you remember our anniversary this weekend?" Is that now a question that makes you feel criticized about your loyalty, your lack of showing love to your partner, and your poor memory? Try to map this over to the real issues you argue about.

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