

SHARING WITHHOLDS

Every single day we have dozens of thoughts, feelings and reactions that we “withhold” from sharing with those we love. Those “withholds” can be both positive or negative. For example:

“I think her tone was very rude” or “I think that shirt makes him look good”

In order to improve communication, it is important to share both of those things you withhold to not only encourage your partner but safeguard yourself from building resentment in unspoken frustrations. This exercise takes about 10 minutes of a couple’s week. Here is how it goes:

Each person simply shares three things that they haven’t talked about that have registered in their mind. We suggest two of them be positive and one of them negative. You alternate sharing your withholds - for example:

Husband: “I so appreciated the dinner you cooked for our family last night”

Wife: “It was wonderful to watch you play catch with our son”

Husband: “It frustrates me when you schedule outings with the Harpers without asking me”

Wife: “It hurt my feelings when you came home late on Monday from work and didn’t call to notify me.”

Husband: “It was so encouraging when you complimented the presentation I had at work last week.”

Wife: “It made me feel loved when you stopped in the middle of your workday to see how my day was going.”

Seems easy enough, but here are some VERY important ground rules to make sure this doesn’t go off the rails:

- 1) The response from your partner is limited to two words, and the two words are just “thank you”. In other words, you’re not going to ask them questions or grill them on anything or explain anything. You’re just going to say “thank you” for sharing that information and leave it in a nutshell.
- 2) Keep the rearview mirror looking back for 7-10 days. No bringing up an issue from 2003. Keeping short accounts is the name of the game. If you have old wounds that need to heal, by all means, handle it. But that is not the goal of this exercise.
- 3) For the next thirty minutes, we say that the negative information is off limits, we can’t talk about that. Tensions can be high after negative information is received so cool off and rehash later if it is needed.

Every day in every marriage there’s information that we bury, that we don’t talk about. If it’s negative information that we bury, it has a high rate of resurrection. When it pops up to the surface, it’s uglier than when we first buried it and we go “where did that come from?” So this exercise is designed to kind of clear the minefields from your marriage and create a really clean and level playing field.