

WHEN NEEDS AND HURTS TALK FAILS

by Stephen B. Karpman, M.D.

The open discussion of personal needs and hurts between love partners promotes intimacy by removing the blocks of suspicion and bad feelings. The gamey discussion of needs and hurts can prevent intimacy by adding new blocks of frustration and resentment.

To talk problems through requires straight talk and a clear contract. Two types of clear contracts are the *commitment contract* and the *acceptance contract*.

In a commitment contract there is a commitment to "a relationship" in which problems are brought up and solved to promote an even deeper relationship. In an acceptance contract, the friends, lovers, or partners enjoy each other as they are, with no one asking anyone to change or do anything they don't want to do. The contract can be unspoken as between friends or partners, or spelled out as between lovers.

Problems arise in an acceptance contract when commitment talk intrudes. Problems arise during straight talk of a commitment contract when script issues intrude.

As an example, the script position of an oral character type of "I can never get all I need" or "I always give more than I get" can manifest itself by assuming one is the Victim and initiating discussions from the Victim position the *drama triangle*. This invites a game and preempts straight talk.

In a first-degree game, the Victim tells the Persecutor about the *hurts*, and tells the Rescuer about the *needs* (Fig. 1). The partner may overlook the hooks and respond straight, or get hooked.

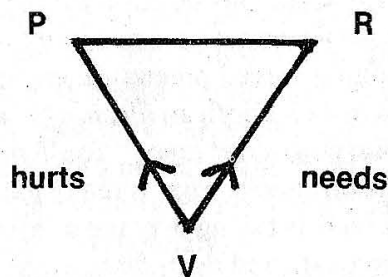
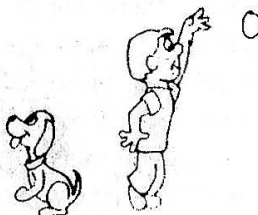


Fig. 1

In a second-degree game (soft), the Victim gets *accusing* of the Persecutor and *demanding* of the Rescuer, and gets excited and attracted to the battle. The partner may sense defeat and retreat as a Victim with the accuser/demander in hot pursuit as the new Persecutor.



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In a second-degree game (hard), the unfulfilled Victim has “trained” (behavioral conditioning) the partner *not* to give support, listening, and talking, and then turns around and accuses him/her of not giving support, listening, or talking. The training goes like this: 1) When the partner occasionally does give *support*, instead of getting appreciation, he/she will get a negative conditioning reply such as “Yes, but, where were you when I needed you?”, or “It’s too little too late,” or “You don’t really mean it!” which discourages further attempts at support; 2) When the partner does *listen*, he/she finds that this opens the floodgates to ten additional complaints which all seem inaccurate, unreasonable, or repetitive. This consistent negative payoff “trains” the person to not stay and listen, but to flee; 3) When the partner does *talk*, it will be automatically discounted, argued with, or proven wrong. They may explain “I don’t bring up anything because I’ll be beaten back on it” (and not mention the reasons for non-talk again). The games continue as long as both partners get complimentary script issues reenacted and get some payoff out of the transactional exchange.

Other self-defeating ways to introducing needs and hurts talk can be analyzed with T.A. Bringing up issues from the *miniscript drivers* can invite others into the their drivers and decrease likelihood of effective listening. The person with the “Hurry up” driver may try to force premature commitment at the early stages of a new relationship. The person with a “Try hard” may be drawn into the *Intimacy Invasive Loser’s Loop* of Eager-Relentless-and Annoying (or Speedy-Needy-and Feedy; Heavy-Hasty-and Haranguing; etc.) by the other person in *Intimacy Evasive Loser’s Loop* of Condescending-Abrupt-Secretive-and Evasive behavior. In the *time structuring* list, one partner may want too much “action” at the game-intimacy end of the scale, and the other partner may want too much “private time” at the ritual-withdrawal end of the scale. The complainer’s Woeful Righteous position on the *Redefining Hexagon* invites competitive behavior around whose needs are more important.

The script issues behind a forced premature ending of an acceptance contract can be similar, and includes both an *illusion* (who’s giving, who isn’t, and what is enough) and a nagging *script tape* (“You’ll never get enough”). These create perceptual distortions about what is really happening. The subsequent anxieties lead to feeling rackets taking over the needs and hurts talk, and making it less possible to have safe and open discussions that would clear up hurt issues or discover ways of getting needs met.

It is helpful to bring up needs and hurts, preferably in a straight way, Adult to Adult under Nurturing Parent guidance. An aid to this is the agreement to form the *five trust contracts* (Karpman, B.E.B.S. 1:3 Sept. 1979), particularly the Openness Contract with its *three rules of openness* 1) Bring it up 2) Talk it up 3) Wrap it up. Each requires separate skills that can be developed. Avoiding getting sidetracked by the *Six Fightmakers* (Karpman, B.E.B.S. 1:4 Dec. 1979) also helps to insure success in the sharing of feelings.



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