



Caring about the quality of your relationships.
Brenda Montani, MSC. RCC

The Blame Game

Often couples get caught in a cycle where they each person only sees the faults of their partner. One blames while the other counterattacks.

Often in therapy the partners will try to convince the therapist that:

- 1) they know better what's right for the relationship
- 2) they are more hurt by the interactions in the relationship
- 3) they give more to the relationship

If you look below the surface of the blaming what you would likely see is two people who are feeling hurt and vulnerable and by blaming they don't have to face or share these deep, negative feelings. It's a form of self-defense that distances the couple. The irony is that blaming creates a momentary sense of superiority, which is a positive feeling but destroys the intimacy, which is really the longer lasting desire of both couples.

Many of you know a better example of this process. You might have a friend who often speaks unkindly of his/her partner. What he/she is really saying is that something that he/she needs is missing and it's easier to voice anger than to delve into the deeper issue of feeling insecure or unloved.

The problem is, of course that blaming allows the couple to avoid any self-examination and perpetuates the cycle. Imagine how much safety there is for either partner to share their real self if they know that their partner can't see the good in them. In our own pain we forget that our partner is both strong and weak, kind and unkind, powerful and powerless, selfish and generous. We are all things good and bad.

When there is mutual respect for your sameness as humans there is an intimate bond that can't be there otherwise. Imagine if you each could see that:



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- 1) you both are trying to do what's right for the relationship
- 2) both of you are hurt by negative interactions
- 3) each of you gives what you can to the relationship

If intimacy is what you desire, recognize and acknowledge the equality of your partner. Get out of the blaming trap and stop looking for faults (we all have many). Name the positives and the desire to heal the hurts that the blaming has caused. Apologize for your role in it and forgive your partner's role. Neither of you was aware that there were other choices. By doing this you and your partner can feel safe in sharing your needs and desires for the relationship. The result will be a deeper intimacy and growing mutual respect
Which is what we really desired in the first place.

TIP

Check to see how often you are using the word you in a finger pointing way. Identify what primary emotion is underneath your anger. Anger is a secondary emotion. Try to use a sentence that begins with I that identifies your feelings without blaming. "I feel unappreciated when I'm not contacted about a late arrival home for supper. "This gives your partner a chance to hear you in a non-threatening way and it gives more opportunity for a solution.