

Ghost Stories are Hazardous to Your Relationship

When my stepdaughter Kristina was in the first grade, she was invited to her first slumber party. Her friend Diane, the social butterfly, invited practically all the girls in the class. For two weeks the hot topic at Singing River Elementary School was, What would it be like to sleep away from home. Who could handle it? And might crack under the pressure?

When my husband and I picked up Kristina up the morning after, we asked, “Well? Was it fun? Did anyone get scared? Anyone call their parents?”

“The only one who got scared was Diane.”

“At her own party? Why?”

“She told us ghost stories. And then SHE was awake all night.” Kristina rolled her eyes. She thinks ghosts are real.”

Kids aren't the only ones who tell themselves scary stories—and believe them. When you have a partner, a child, a colleague, or a boss who's driving you crazy, chances are that it's not what they are actually doing that's getting under your skin. It's your story.

One kind of story that can cause a lot of havoc in a relationship is an all or nothing story.

Have you ever felt restless and bored as you looked at your calendar and realized you have no social events planned? And then sighed to yourself, “We live such a boring life. We never do anything fun.” Well, it's possible that you are the only couple on the planet who absolutely NEVER does anything fun. But chances are that you are completely forgetting about that movie you went to two weeks ago. It's probably more realistic to say that you're not getting out as much as you would like to. But if you convince yourself that your whole life is boring, you (and your partner) could end up feeling too demoralized to take action to pep up your social life!

Or, say your husband is mad because while you were tidying up the kitchen, you accidentally buried that important report from work that he's been looking for.

You think, “I'm always causing trouble for him. I must be a real drag to live with. I don't even know why he wants to be with me.”

Now you're prepped to see any complaint by your husband as a sign that he doesn't want to be with you. You'll probably react with anger that's out of proportion to the situation. And things will go downhill pretty quickly from there.

In reality, your husband can be absolutely furious with you at this moment and still love you to pieces. In fact, it's the most natural thing in the world. Life isn't black or white; it comes in all shades of grey. And all or nothing stories are every bit as imaginary as children's ghost stories.

The next time you're upset with your partner, stop and look for those words ALWAYS and NEVER. As in: *I'm always the one who does the dishes* or *She's never on time*. That's the tip off that you're telling an all or nothing story. You may have a problem to solve, but it'll be a lot easier if you get the facts first. And leave the ghost stories to the kids.

P.S. To learn more about how understanding ghost stories can improve all the relationships in your life, check out the seminar below.

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