
Claire Hatch Counseling Newsletter

Claire's Tips and Tools for Relationships That Work

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Ghost Stories Can Be 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? Who 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.

My Two Cents

Two weeks ago, the Iowa state Senate passed a bill that would cut the waiting period for a marriage license from 20 days to 3 days for couples who go to pre-marital counseling. The bill is right in step with a current trend-state initiatives to reduce divorce through pre-marital education and counseling.

Florida and Minnesota have reduced marriage license fees for those who take a pre-marital education course. Arizona created a "marriage handbook," and funds marriage-skills courses for low-income couples. Forty states now fund some kind of marriage-related services.

As a provider of pre-marital counseling, you might expect that I'd be in favor of these measures. After all, recent research evidence shows that pre-marital counseling can strengthen a relationship by 30%. And no doubt many of these programs will do a lot of good. Couples who wouldn't otherwise think about counseling or who couldn't afford it will get some much-needed skills. And they very well could save their marriage.

In spite of these possible benefits, I believe the government should stay out of the pre-marital counseling business. Offering incentives is a slippery slope. The next step could be establishing requirements. And guess what? The government makes mistakes when it makes lifestyle recommendations. It could easily throw its weight behind programs that are a waste of money. Or have unforeseen consequences.

I applaud the renewed value we are giving to marriage and the increased concern about preventing divorces. And I applaud the growing trend of couples choosing to go to counseling. But I vote that pre-marital counseling remain just that-a completely free choice.

How to Get Along With Anyone

If you have a partner, child, colleague, or boss who is driving you crazy, this class is for you. You'll learn how to catch yourself telling stories that sabotage relationships. You'll also get a template for problem-solving, a script for 'hard talks,' and tips for making

yourself understood. Getting a grip on your stories is truly the way to get along with anyone and everyone in your life.

Thursday, May 13, 7:00-9:00pm
Evergreen Hospital
Kirkland

To register, call the Evergreen Hospital Community Class program at: 425 899-3000.

Questions? Call me: 425 823-2273.

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Claire Hatch, LICSW, is a licensed counselor who helps people raise their self-esteem and turn their relationships around. She works with clients in her Seattle area office and by phone around the world. Claire gives seminars on how to turn conflict to connection, build a strong marriage, and balance family and work. For more information, visit www.clairehatch.com or contact Claire via [email](mailto:claire@clairehatch.com) or by phone: 425 823-2273.

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