

## Claire's Tips and Tools for Relationships That Work

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### Love Hurts

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"In the courtroom, I can roll with anything they throw at me," said Eileen, a defense attorney. "In fact, I'm a pretty tough cookie in most parts of my life. But with my husband, I just fall to pieces. Can you explain this to me?"

Actually, I can.

The fact is, **love hurts**. Of course, we all know that we get hurt if our partners are nasty or abusive to us, or even when they're just rude and grouchy, as we all are occasionally.

But too often we assume that's the *only* time we should be feeling any pain. When a relationship turns out to be more complicated than that (and it always does) **we think something is dreadfully wrong**. Usually with our partners, but sometimes with ourselves or even with the whole relationship.

Then we overreact and before you know it, something is wrong. We have a full-fledged "communication problem" on our hands.

**The truth is, even when your partner isn't screwing up, even when he's on his absolute best behavior, you will still have to deal with the everyday hurts of love.** They come with the territory. You've got to take them in stride if you want to keep the communication lines open.

What are the everyday hurts of love? There are a lot of them, but here are the big three.

- 1) Your needs and your partner's needs don't always mesh.
- 2) Sometimes your partner steps on your personal hot buttons.
- 3) While your partner loves you, he's just not going to love every single one of your quirks.

Here are some of Eileen's everyday hurts.

#### **Conflicting Needs**

Eileen and her husband have different needs at the end of the day. Like a lot of women, Eileen likes to review the events of the day in great detail. She wants her husband Alex to tell her what he did and who he talked to. Most of all, she wants to know how he *felt* about everything. But that's not Alex's idea of a relaxing evening at all. He would much prefer to hit the highlights quickly, and then spend their down time doing something completely different.

#### **Hot Buttons**

One of Eileen's hot buttons is being ignored. As a child, she was left to play on her own a lot. She has vivid memories of wandering around the house, wondering where

everybody was. Alex can be a man of few words when he has a lot of work to do. He goes into the classic guy's cave. This can send Eileen back in time 30 years, and she feels completely unimportant to the person she most wants attention from.

### **Warts and All**

Like all of us, Eileen has to grapple with the fact that her husband does not think she is perfect. For one thing, he considers her a workaholic and that makes her feel criticized. When she's feeling open-minded, she has to agree with him. She'd much rather be admired for her healthy work/life balance. But living with someone 365 days a year, he's going to see your weaknesses. Or just qualities he personally doesn't like.

**When Ellen "falls to pieces," it's because she reacts to one of these everyday hurts as though it's a catastrophe.**

"I don't deserve this! How can Alex be so mean? This isn't why I got married!"

Of course it wasn't. She got married because, back in those days, she really did feel like her needs were getting met perfectly. Didn't we all? **In the early romantic stage, love was easy, and it hardly ever hurt.**

That's because you didn't know each other well enough to step on each other's toes, emotionally speaking. But now you do. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with your partner, or that he doesn't love you. It's nothing to get outraged about. It's just part of the natural course of your relationship. It means that, like Eileen, you've survived the infatuation stage, and now you're having a real, living, breathing grown-up relationship. Which actually means you're a very lucky person indeed.

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