

SHARING HOUSEHOLD TASKS

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One of the common areas of conflict between couples is sharing of household tasks. This issue brings up all of our schemas and unmet childhood needs. We hear comments like “it’s not fair,” or “I have to do everything!” and “my partner doesn’t support me enough”.

When you are arguing about dividing up or sharing household tasks, it is important to look at this from a number of different perspectives.

It is useful to know which of your schemas have been triggered and to acknowledge these to your partner.

You can also get curious about which of your partner’s schemas have been triggered by listening generously.

Once you understand what is really going on, shift your state to one of openness to learning, and wonder. Then, you and your partner are ready to make a clear agreement about dividing up household tasks.

Common schemas that are activated are:

EMOTIONAL DEPRIVATION: My needs will never get met; you’ll never support me enough for me to feel truly loved.

DEPENDENCE / INCOMPETENCE: I am incapable; I need you. I can’t function without you.

ENTITLEMENT: I’m entitled to your help. If you really loved me, you’d do more.

SUBJUGATION: You’re the boss. If I don’t do what you want, you will be upset. I feel trapped, so I do what you want...AND, then I resent you. OR, I don’t do what you want, because I am resisting this schema.

SELF-SACRIFICE: Your needs are more important than mine. I resent you not taking care of me.

APPROVAL-SEEKING: I will do anything so you will like me – and then I resent you for it.

UNRELENTING STANDARDS: There is a right and wrong way to do everything; and I know the right way. I judge the way you do household tasks and point out your shortcomings.

PUNITIVENESS: I can’t forgive you and I will punish you.

Once you have truly heard what is being triggered in each other, you are in a position to be allies with your partner. Then you can follow the steps to making agreements. *An agreement is anything you have said you would do, or anything you have said you would not do.*

1. **Make clear agreements.** Keep tossing your agreement back and forth until it feels right to both of you. Don't assume you have an agreement until you can both verbalize it.
2. **Make agreements only about things that you have control over.**
3. **Speak freely about any facts or feelings that are relevant, as you are** formulating your agreement
4. **Write your agreements down.** Use the following format to formulate your agreement:
 - We agree that _____ (who will do what by when).
 - We agree to mutually make any change in the agreement by direct communication.
 - If failure occurs, we agree to review the reasons and identify our learning edge, doing our best to take 100 percent responsibility and avoid blame. (See "How to Handle Broken Agreements").
5. **Keep agreements you have made,** no matter how seemingly insignificant they are. Often we operate as though breaking an agreement while having a good intention to keep it is the same thing as keeping an agreement. Or that having a good excuse why we didn't keep the agreement is the same as keeping an agreement. Breaking agreements, making excuses, or ignoring them is an energy drain. Keeping or consciously changing agreements saves time, frees up creativity energy, and allows us to be in healthy integrity with ourselves.
6. **Change agreements as soon as you realize they are not working.** The only way to change an agreement is to communicate about it. Tell the other person directly what part isn't working and what you are willing to agree to instead. Go back to step 5 and share any relevant facts and feelings.

Marlene & Bob Neufeld practice body-centered Coaching and Psychotherapy. They are a couple who help couples learn life-changing skills and create closer, more loving relationships with one another. To learn more, see www.marleneandbob.com or call 613-594-9248 to arrange a complimentary 1-hour introductory session. For more information about schemas, childhood wounds, generous listening and agreements see "Articles" on our website (www.marleneandbob.com).