

UNMET CHILDHOOD NEEDS AND NEGATIVE INTENT

by Marlene and Bob Neufeld

Early in life (for some of us as early as conception, prenatal or birth) we all experienced emotional states we could not tolerate. When we did not receive the support from others that we needed, we came to believe that there was something wrong with us that caused the problem. We talk about these as our unmet childhood needs, those needs or desires that did not get met in our childhood.

The first step in the critical process of healing our unmet childhood needs is to understand how they affect our experience of ourselves and our ability to relate intimately with others.

We are not usually conscious of the ways we place expectations on our partners to make up for some deficiency from childhood. We either deny or justify these needs. They are often related to being accepted, or loved. When we are in relationship, we unconsciously require our partners to meet these needs in order to make our lives easier. However, these unmet childhood needs actually reflect a distorted image of what love truly means. Out of these childhood needs we make demands or act in destructive or negative ways.

There is often an "or else" behind our demands. It is important to own our destructive impulses, such as our desire to destroy, punish, hurt, or demean our partners. This is difficult for most of us because it goes against all of our childhood conditioning and our idealized self image. We bury our lower self behind our ability to reason away the negative impulses. But as long as they stay buried they will unconsciously affect us and our relationships. We cannot reason ourselves out of our childhood needs and destructive impulses/negative intents. We need to own them and access the vulnerable hurt feelings underneath.

Self-flagellation (beating ourselves up for having these childhood needs and destructive impulses/negative intents) is optional; in fact we believe it is a detour which takes us away from movement. We need to own them to our partner as our partner is experiencing them anyway. Our partner usually has his/her own version of unmet needs and destructive impulses which they are experiencing.

Recently, we experienced a conflict where Marlene noticed her negative intent. In the past she would have left the room rather than express it. However, that would result in anger being turned inward which would eventually erupt outward. We have learned to play with our negative intent rather than trying to resist it.

Marlene says, "I became aware of my negative intent to hurt Bob. I chose to exaggerate it rather than to try to minimize it. I said that I wanted him to go to jail for 100 years and that I would never visit him. At first, part of me believed that I meant it. But another part of me got how ludicrous it was to punish him so hugely for what he had done. I realized that I just wanted him to admit that I was right. We were on the way to a German carol singing event and I started singing "I am right" to the tune of "Silent

Night”. As a child I had been forced to forgive when I was still angry. By playing with my negative intent, I allowed myself to fully own my vulnerable feelings of hurt and not override them. Over the evening I felt myself thaw until I genuinely felt forgiveness.”

Bob says, “When Marlene got into her negative intent, I recognized it as negative intent. I allowed it and didn’t try to defend myself. I recognized that there was an unmet childhood need speaking, and that Marlene was likely making it bigger. I recognized my choice to be reactive or collaborative. After a while I started collaborating with Marlene’s exaggeration by saying that I would kiss the wart on her foot and imagining myself in black-and-white-striped convicts’ clothes for 100 years (in a playful sort of way). I laughed when she was singing “I am right”. The emotional charge wasn’t there any more. I didn’t take Marlene’s unwillingness to forgive me personally. I trusted that her playfulness was already going in the direction of bringing us back into connection.”

We believe that our primary relationships are the perfect place to heal our childhood needs, in fact that is one of the purposes of close relationships. We can choose to live in a bubble to try to protect our unmet needs being triggered, or we can choose to be in intimate relationships. It is inevitable that our unmet needs will be triggered and we will feel negative intent. When we acknowledge these to ourselves and our partners, the payoff is closeness and intimacy.

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. For more information call 613-594-9248 or see www.marleneandbob.com.