



Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter - Issue #1

Everything about relationships! Be kind, don't panic, and have faith.



Please tell your email app to display images--if you're not seeing my smiling face, your email isn't cooperating!

Welcome to the first issue!

I started this newsletter because (1) it's fun for me, and (2) I hope it's fun, and informative, for you too.

So please let me know what you'd like to see covered in future issues—particular relationship problems, theoretical ideas, controversies, cat videos (well, no—not cat videos, even though the newsletter gurus say that everyone loves cat videos), whatever. Don't let me sit and wonder what you like or don't like—[talk to me!](#)

[Send me a message!](#)

About confidentiality: I'd like this newsletter to be a two-way street—I want to hear from you, and I want to be able to share your comments as appropriate in future issues. Since this newsletter is open to anyone, including people I've worked with as their therapist, I'll be doing the same thing I've done in my books and videos when I share stories from my work: I change names and identifying details so that no one could be identified. If you have any concerns, feel free to let me know. I won't assume I can use your real name

unless you tell me so explicitly—and even then, if you're a current or former client, I won't use your real name or identifying details.

For now, I'm organizing the newsletter as three sections: Relationship Tips, What's the Big Idea?, and News & Schmooze.



Relationship Tips

This is the section of the newsletter where I get to say stuff I don't say in sessions.

When I'm working with you in a session, I'm determined not to tell you what to do about your problems, for two reasons.

First, as soon as I tell you what to do, you'll probably conclude that I obviously don't understand what you're up against. So I'll just be strengthening the problem, rather than helping you clarify your own understanding so you can come up with ideas that will actually work for you.

And second, you'll be right in that assessment! I *don't* know better than you do how to live your life. And therapists who think they do know better than you don't help you—they either undermine your confidence, or simply piss you off with no benefit. (I'm okay with pissing you off if it might actually help you, but it usually doesn't. And if I'm pissing you off, it might just be because I'm being an asshole, not because I'm employing a brilliant therapeutic maneuver.)

So I'm not going to tell you in a session what to do about your problems. It invites you to defend your problems, and my ideas are probably useless anyway.

But, darn it, there *are* some good general ideas out there that are worth sharing. I've got my favorites, and I bet you do too.

So this is the part of the newsletter where we get to exchange our nuggets of wisdom.

Here goes:

Today's Relationship Tip:

Honor your partner, in public and in private.

Ever see a couple where one of them puts the other down to other people? They're screwed. Check out [John Gottman's](#) research—one of his "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" is contempt. Couples that show contempt for each other are doomed.

There's the obvious kind of putting down, where someone is flat-out dissing their partner. Then there's the kind where someone is just "poking fun." Pro tip, especially for guys in a relationship with a woman: If you want to tell a funny story about one of you being the dingbat, *always make yourself the dingbat, not her!* In my own relationship with Judy,* I find that particular rule easy—I *am* the dingbat if there is one. (See what I did there?)

You want your partner to be glad to have you in their life. Which means you want them to feel uplifted in your presence—never demeaned. That's true when you're with other people, and it's true when it's just the two of you.

And, of course, you want to feel honored by your partner too. If you're feeling put down, don't ignore it. If you can't bring it up with your partner without getting into a nasty fight, you've got a serious problem.

And if your partner is telling you they don't like how you talk about them, listen!

Send me your own tips! Or argue with mine. Or comment. What do you think?

Send me a message!



What's the Big Idea?

In this section, I'll tell you about one of my favorite Big Ideas—at least, *I* think they're Big Ideas. These are the ideas that guide me in my work, and get me all excited. Of course, I'm a recovering nerd with frequent relapses, so what I find exciting might be, well, less so for you. But I know a lot of the folks I've worked with have found these ideas helpful, so maybe you will too.

These Big Ideas are pretty much what I write about in my books and talk about in my videos, so check them out if you want to explore these in more depth.

Today's Big Idea:

Relationships need both stability and intimacy. The skills you need for stability are different from the skills you need for intimacy. But you need them both.

Stability is about not rocking the boat. If you want to your relationship to be stable—in the sense that you're not worried about it—then you need to avoid freaking out your partner, and you want your partner to avoid freaking you out too.

So the chief skills of stability are about avoiding anxiety. You act more or less predictably, and try not to push your partner's buttons. (Hmmm...mixed metaphor there. If you push buttons, does that make the boat rock? [*Inner critic: Get back to the point!*])

Intimacy means you're emotionally and spiritually present and honest with yourself and each other. When you're having moments of intimacy (and I don't just mean sex, though sex can certainly be a form of intimacy), you're thinking thoughts and feeling feelings you wouldn't have had by yourself. It's like you become a joint mind, more than just the sum of the two of you.

That can be ecstatic—and it can also be terrifying, because intimacy isn't just about feeling good together. What about when you want to tell your partner something important that's been bothering you, or that you want to try, or that you're just uncertain about, and you're pretty sure their reaction won't be positive? So the chief skill of intimacy is to tolerate anxiety, not to avoid it.

What stable couples tend to do is to avoid the anxiety of rocking the boat—which means they often end up avoiding intimacy. And the Big Idea is that you need both stability and intimacy. Sacrifice intimacy for the sake of preserving stability, and you end up sacrificing both, because lack of intimacy itself becomes destabilizing. The symptoms of a relationship deprived of intimacy vary, but they aren't fun: arguments about anything and everything (except what's really scaring them), sudden departures, affairs, depression, and general malaise.

Speaking of metaphors, here's my favorite one about stability and intimacy. Think about a living plant. Stability is the roots that hold it steady during strong winds. But intimacy is the energy for growth. If germinated seeds are paved over, they'll try to crack the pavement, and some of them will succeed. Those symptoms of a relationship deprived of intimacy are basically efforts to crack the sidewalk.

So that's my Big Idea for today. Let me know what you think, and tell me your own Big (or even Medium or Small) Ideas.

[Send me a message!](#)



News & Schmooze

Podcast news: Judy and I have lined up some really cool interviews (well, at least we think they'll be really cool—we haven't done them yet) for our Couples Therapy in Seven Words podcast. The topics include surviving divorce, how fundamentalist religion can mess with attitudes about sex, and sex and disability. Check out our podcast [here](#), and while you're at it, please rate and review us.

Book news: My most recent book, *It's Not About Communication!*, is already available in paperback [here](#) or anywhere you buy books, and as an audiobook [here](#).

The eBook on Kindle will be released on January 15, 2023, which might be pretty soon after you're reading this—it's available for pre-order [here](#) for \$2.99. Soon after that (not sure the exact date yet), we'll be doing a 99-cent promotion for the eBook, and I'm hoping to get a bunch of people to order it when it comes out, so it becomes a best-seller in its category. I'll let you know when that happens.

Video Vignettes: In your Welcome to the Newsletter email (available [here](#) if you somehow didn't memorize it), I told you about our Video Vignettes, a new project Judy and I have been working on. And I offered a free copy of the audiobook or eBook to the first five people who checked out the first Video Vignette and replied with substantive comments. Astonishingly, there are still some of those freebies available! So if you're interested, please check it out. The link is in that same [Welcome email](#).

And finally: Do you have ideas for topics for the newsletter? Or questions for Judy and me to use on our podcast? Let me know!

Bye for now!

--Bruce

[Send me a message!](#)

P.S. If someone forwarded you this message (feel free, by the way), and you'd like to subscribe yourself, [go to my website](#) and watch the magic box appear that says "Click here to subscribe to Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter!" And don't forget to look for the confirmation email--that's an anti-spam thing, which is why I do it. I'd love to welcome you on board!

*That's my wife and podcast co-host, Judy Alexander. If you haven't checked out our "[Couples Therapy in Seven Words](#)" [podcast](#), you don't know what you're missing!



Oh yes--before I forget, please take a moment to make sure these emails actually make it into your inbox! The easiest way (at least for those of us in Google-land) is just to add me to your contacts.

[Here's a link](#) that tells you how to do it for various email services. Please let me in--it's lonely in the Spam or Promotions folder!

Helpful Links



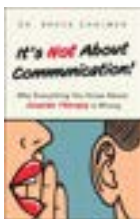
Podcast

Couples Therapy in Seven Words



Website

Dr. Chalmer's website: Books, couples therapy practice, blog



It's Not About Communication!

Why Everything You Know About Couples Therapy is Wrong



Reigniting the Spark

Why Stable Relationships Lose Intimacy, and How to Get It Back

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