

Dr. Bruce Chalmer

Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter - Issue #9

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 Issue #9!

If you want to catch up on earlier issues, you can find the archive [here](#).

Well, I've decided to cut the cord. After 28 years of dealing with insurance companies, I'll be leaving all the insurance panels as of July 1. It's a little like a bunch of divorces, as I inform each of the insurance companies that I've decided to part ways with them.

For me, it means I'll get to continue to do the work I love doing--working with couples--without having to deal with all the administrative annoyances of trying to get paid by insurance companies. I do realize it means that my services will be a lot more expensive for people who have been using insurance, and I'm offering special rates for the people I've been working with to make it more affordable.

You can find more information about the changes at my website, brucechalmer.com.



Today's Relationship Tip

If You Think Your Partner Doesn't Care, You're Probably Wrong

I hear it in the office a lot:

"It's obvious he doesn't care about my feelings."

"She just wants what she wants, and won't listen to me. She doesn't care what I think at all."

Look, you could be right. Maybe your partner really doesn't care about you at all. Maybe your whole relationship is a sham, and all the lovely things your partner said to you and did for you when your relationship felt good were just ploys to rope you in. That happens sometimes.

But there are other possibilities that are much more likely. And if you haven't totally given up on the relationship, you'll do well to consider those other possibilities.

Because most of the time, when your partner seems uncaring, it's not actually that they don't care. In fact, it's the opposite. They care so much about what you think or feel about them that when they sense your disapproval or distress, they freak out.

There's a common pattern that maybe you're familiar with. Partner A-- say, a husband-- approaches Partner B--say, a wife--for some kind of connection. Maybe it's some kind of intimacy, be it emotional, sexual, or both. Partner B is put off by some aspect of the approach, and rejects it. This happens repeatedly. and Partner A gives up trying. When I hear from Partner A in couples therapy, they're saying, "I got the message--she doesn't want me. She just wants to be left alone. So I stopped trying."

And what does Partner B say when we talk about this in a session? "It's not that I don't want him. It's that I need him to approach me in a way that works for me. And he won't hear me. I try to tell him I actually do want to connect, but he doesn't want me anymore."

By the time they're in couples therapy, this pattern has often solidified to the point that they're both frustrated and miserable.

When the couple can step back and look at this without panic, they can find they have more room to maneuver than they thought. But to realize they have that power, they need to question their assumption that the other doesn't care about them.

And questioning that assumption can be scary--because assuming my partner doesn't care about me is actually a way to protect myself from the pain of rejection. If I consider the possibility that my partner actually does care about me, I'll have to recognize that my own reactions have been contributing to the frustrating pattern we've been enacting.

Today's tip, then, is to risk questioning your assumption. If you think your partner's actions toward you mean they don't care, you're probably wrong. And when you start to understand what's happening with the assumption that you both actually care, you'll discover possibilities you hadn't considered.

See today's Big Idea for a more general take on this.



What's the Big Idea?

In this section, I 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:

Don't Believe Everything You Think!

I don't recall where I first saw that statement. When I just Googled it I found two different books with that title--it seems it's become something of a meme. There's also a close relative: "Don't believe everything you feel."

Wherever it came from, I like it!

This idea fits well with the concept that we're each actually multiple people, which I wrote about way back in [Issue #2](#).

I'm not trying to say that everything I think is wrong. That would be rather paradoxical, wouldn't it? ([Epimenides the Cretan](#) said, "All Cretans are liars." Was he telling the truth?)

Of course, I *did* subtitle [one of my books](#) "Why Everything You Know About Couples Therapy is Wrong," and then went on to point out that everything I know about couples therapy is wrong too!

So what do I mean by saying "Don't believe everything you think"?

Well, the problem isn't the thinking. It's the believing--which is to say, treating what I *think* as what I *know*. When I note that everything you or I "know" about something is wrong, I'm

just saying we need to be humble about our own knowledge.

Because when I start to believe my own hype, my ideas morph into ideologies. And when that happens, I can't hear you anymore.

Sound familiar? It happens in politics, religion, and other large-scale settings, but it also happens between a couple. A lot of the work of couples therapy is to invite us all to open up our certainties to question.

Oddly enough, being willing to question your cherished assumptions doesn't make you weaker in your convictions. It means you're open to learning. I suppose it makes someone less accomplished as a demagogue, but I don't consider that a weakness!

Have you had occasion to question some of your own assumptions?

Send me a message!



News & Schmooze

Book news: My latest booklet, [*My Husband Complains About My Cleaning! What Should I Do?*](#) is now available as a paperback as well as on Kindle. And the Audiobook version is finished and should be available within a few days of this writing. So check it out!

My Husband Complains About My Cleaning! What Do I Do?

Hint: It's Not About the Cleaning

DR. BRUCE CHALMER



Of course, reviews of the new book, as well as any of my other books, are much appreciated. Just go to the page (you can find links to my other books toward the end of this email), scroll down to the "Write a customer review" button, and give a rating. Thanks!

Podcast news: Judy and I had a fascinating [interview with Hannah Spanke](#), whose journey from sex worker to relationship coach we found inspiring. Check it out!

You might recall that we've gone back and forth between video and audio-only formats for the podcast. The problem was that some of the major platforms, including Spotify, weren't listing our video podcasts. So we went audio-only for a while. But we heard from a number of people that they really like seeing us too.

So we've found a nice workaround. We're posting the audio-only version on the podcast platforms, so they'll all carry it. And we're posting the video on my YouTube channel, with a link to it on [my blog](#).

As always, if you have ideas for guests (including yourself) or topics you'd like us to include, [drop me a line](#).

That's all for now—bye!

--Bruce

Send me a message!

P.S. If someone forwarded you this message, and you'd like to subscribe yourself, [go to my website](#) and watch the magic box appear that says "Click here to sign up for Dr. Chalmer's Newsletter!" And if I don't already have your email, 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!

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!

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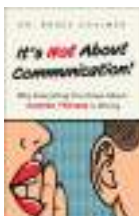
Podcast

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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