



# **We're Distant and Disconnected**

## **Are You and Your Partner Hurting Each Other?**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Are you aware of how you may be hurting your partner?

Are you aware of how your partner may be hurting you?

Are you aware of the painful feelings of loneliness, heartache and heartbreak you likely feel when you are disconnected from your loved one and unable to share love?

The sharing of love is the most wonderful experience in life. You connect and share love when you are open hearted with your partner - kind, caring, gentle, tender, understanding and compassionate. You connect and share love when you are open to learning - listening well and caring about your own and your partner's feelings, even if your partner is upset about how you might have hurt him or her.

### **Do you care about hurting your partner? Does your partner care about hurting you?**

In close relationships, we are very sensitive to each other's energy. Closed, protective, controlling energy - energy that is harsh, dismissive, defensive, resistant, shut down, judgmental, blaming or angry - creates a disconnection between partners. So does complaining and being a victim. While you might cover up the pain of the loneliness and heartache of this disconnection with your own closed, protective, controlling energy, inside you are hurting and not attending to your pain.

When you haven't learned to compassionately connect with your own painful feelings relative to your partner's disconnected energy, and attend to your loneliness and heartache with deep kindness and tenderness, you will have a hard time caring about your partner's hurt. You want your partner to care about how he or she is hurting you, and your partner wants the same thing, but if neither of you are caring about yourselves, then it is likely that you are not caring about each other either. When you disconnect from yourself by closing down from feeling your loneliness and heartache, and your partner does the same, there is no way of connecting with each other. You have created a disconnected protective circle where both of you are hurting.

## **Healing the Disconnection**

The beginning of healing this disconnection is to be willing to feel your loneliness and heartache with compassion toward yourself. This awareness about your own feelings will enable you to gently speak up to your partner, saying something like, "What you are saying right now is hurting me," or "Your judgmental tone is hurtful to me." When you can gently tell your partner what he or she is doing that is hurtful to you, and your partner can do the same, you can each learn much about yourselves and each other.

When you react with anger, judgment or withdrawal, your partner may not know what he or she did or said that was hurtful to you. Most of us are not very aware of our own protective controlling behavior, but when you are open to learning about it with your partner, you can learn much that will bring you closer to each other.

Relationships are fertile ground for learning about ourselves - about our unloving behavior that creates the very disconnection we don't want, and about the loving behavior that brings aliveness, joy and passion to our relationship. The key here is to stay open to learning with yourself and your partner about your feelings and behavior. By staying open to learning about your painful feelings and your partner's feelings, you can both learn to be kinder, gentler, more connected and more loving with each other.

Isn't this what we all want - the sweet tender moments and the alive passionate moments that occur when we are loving and connected with each other? You will be able to have more and more of these moments as you learn how to take loving care of your own feelings so that you don't disconnect from your partner with your protective, controlling behavior.

## **Control as a Cry for Connection**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

How do you respond when you feel that your partner is trying to control you? Do you give yourself up, resist, get angry, blame or withdraw?

How does your partner respond to your response? Does he or she become indifferent, resistant, defensive, angry, blaming or compliant?

Do you end up feeling connected with each other?

Take a moment right now to tune inside and see what is really happening when you protect yourself with your controlling behavior.

- Are you feeling alone and lonely?
- Do you feel empty inside, desperate to feel some love within?
- Do you long to connect with your partner, but you become protected and controlling when fearing or experiencing disconnection with him or her?

What if you saw your own controlling behavior and the controlling behavior of your partner as a cry for connection? Would this make it easier for you to have compassion for yourself and your partner?

We all yearn for connection with others, especially when we didn't get the connection we needed as babies and young children. This is generally what infatuation is about: we feel connected with the other person and it takes away our loneliness. And the feeling of connection is deliciously wonderful! But if you have not done the inner work of learning to connect with yourself and your Guidance, then you may become afraid of losing the connection with the other, and you might quickly resort to your learned protective, controlling behavior, either in response to your own fear, or in response to your partner's protected, controlling behavior. Then, of course, you lose the connection and end up feeling lonely and alone. You might even conclude that you picked the wrong partner.

But what if you stayed connected with yourself and compassionately felt the deeper feelings of loneliness, heartache, heartbreak, and grief

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if your partner disconnects from you with protective, controlling behavior? What if you were connected with yourself enough so that you did not scare yourself with losing your partner to the point of becoming protected and controlling in response to your own fears? What if you recognized how much we all love to feel connected with each other, and stayed connected with yourself so that you could keep your heart open to your own feelings and the feelings of your partner? What do you think would happen with the relationship?

In some relationships, you would quickly discover that your partner is completely unwilling to feel his or her own core feelings and learn to take responsibility for them, and that there is not much hope of sustaining connection. In other relationships, you would discover that the more open and loving you are, the more open and loving your partner is - that your partner wants to connect as much as you do and is willing to learn what they need to do to support a connected relationship.

I encourage you to see your own and your partner's controlling behavior as a cry for connection. And I encourage you to learn and practice Inner Bonding, as the intent to learn with yourself and others is the most profound path to connection with yourself and your partner.

## **What Really Creates Emotional Intimacy**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Think back to a time when you felt really close and connected with your partner - a time when you felt emotionally intimate with him or her. Think about a time when you felt light and playful with your partner, or a time when laughter flowed easily, or a time when you felt you could tell your partner your deepest secret and it would be accepted.

We all yearn for that deep connection with someone, yet few people seem to be able to maintain emotional intimacy for very long. We often have it at the very beginning of relationships, before the conflicts start. How can we maintain that wonderful intimacy in a long-term relationship?

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The deep and wonderful feeling of intimacy flourishes in an atmosphere of safety. We open up when we feel safe. We take risks when we feel safe. The challenge is - how do we create this safety?

Most of the time people feel safe when they are with someone who is very accepting, caring and compassionate. The problem is that no one is completely reliable when it comes to these qualities. Most people have bad days when they may be irritable or grumpy. What happens to safety when the other person's acceptance and caring goes away?

Our sense of safety needs to come from within as well as without. We need to become the person, especially with ourselves, who is consistently accepting, caring and compassionate. We need to become strong enough within to not take another's bad day personally. We need to become centered enough within to stand up for ourselves when another gets angry or blaming. We need to become powerful enough within to stay openhearted in the face of fear and conflict.

Creating a safe enough environment for intimacy to flourish means that each person needs to take 100% responsibility for creating safety within themselves as well as safety within the relationship. We do this by practicing acceptance and compassion for ourselves, which will then naturally extend to others.

However, the moment we are triggered into fear - fear of rejection, of domination, of abandonment, of losing ourselves or losing the other - we do anything but behave in a way that creates inner and relationship safety. We abandon ourselves and become reactive - getting angry, complying, withdrawing, resisting, blaming, defending, explaining, attacking and so on. None of these behaviors create inner safety, nor do they contribute to relationship safety.

How do we learn to stay connected, openhearted and non-reactive in the face of fear and conflict? The key is to practice staying connected with a source of spiritual guidance (whatever that is for you) during peaceful times, so that when the fear and conflicts arise, you have that source available to you. None of us can stay open by ourselves. David Hawkins, M.D., Ph.D., in his book entitled simply "I", states that "The strength of the ego is such that it can be overcome only by spiritual power." When our ego - our wounded self - is activated by fear and conflict, we must be able to turn to a source of spiritual power for the strength to not react with our learned defenses.

The more we practice staying connected with our spiritual guidance, the more we create inner and relationship safety. The safer we feel within ourselves and with our partner, the freer we feel to share our joy and pain with each other, which is what leads to connection and intimacy.

## **Rediscovering Love and Intimacy**

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Wendy started counseling with me because Terence, her husband of 14 years, had just expressed to her that he wanted to end their relationship. Wendy, terrified of being alone, was panicked. Within a few minutes of speaking with her in a phone session, I understood exactly the underlying cause of their relationship problems.

Wendy, coming from a family where she experienced much neglect, had a deep abandonment fear. In her family, Wendy had learned to be a caretaker, giving herself up and taking care of everyone else's feelings and needs. Wendy had learned to put her own feelings in a closet, hoping that if she took care of everyone else, someone would care about her. As an adult, she continued in this pattern, taking care of her husband and children but completely neglecting to take care of herself. As a result, she was often very angry at Terence and her children when they didn't listen to her or approve of her.

People often end up treating us the way we treat ourselves. Because Wendy was treating herself as if she was unimportant, Terence and her children also treated her as if she was unimportant. Because Wendy didn't listen to herself, Terence and her children didn't listen to her. Her fury at Terence and her children for not seeing her or listening to her further alienated them from her. Terence had reached the point where he was no longer willing to be at the other end of Wendy's anger.

Rather than take emotional responsibility for her own well being, Wendy was making Terence and her children emotionally responsible for her. She was abandoning herself, just as her parents had abandoned her, and was expecting Terence to give her what she never received from her parents.

Terence was also not taking emotional responsibility. He had spent much of their marriage trying to make Wendy happy while ignoring his own feelings and needs. He vacillated between compliance and resistance. When he complied, Wendy felt better but he felt terrible from the sense of loss of himself. When he resisted, Wendy felt rejected and became enraged. Terence ended up feeling like he was a victim of Wendy. He blamed her for his misery and felt he had no alternative but to leave.

I ended up working with both Wendy and Terence. Through working with the Inner Bonding process, Wendy learned to attend to her abandonment feelings herself, rather than go after Terence or her children when these feelings came up. She learned that she was being self-responsible rather than selfish when she took responsibility for her own feelings of safety, worth, lovability, happiness and joy, rather than making Terence responsible for making her feel safe and worthy. She learned that when she embraced the responsibility of listening to and taking responsibility for her own feelings, she no longer felt abandoned or angry.

Terence learned that he had another option besides compliance or resistance. He learned to take responsibility for his own feelings by telling Wendy his truth when she yelled at him or blamed him. Instead of being a victim, he learned to stand up for himself and disengage when Wendy was angry. He learned to say, "I don't like being yelled at, and I don't like being with you when you are angry at me. Let me know when you are ready to be kind," and then go do his own Inner Bonding process, or do something fun for himself.

At first, Terence was reluctant to say this to Wendy. He didn't want to hurt her feelings by telling her his truth. He felt his truth was harsh and that he would be unloving if he said these things. However, when he was willing to take the risk of speaking his truth, he found that Wendy was actually grateful to receive the truth. Rather than getting angry and hurt, she appreciated his honesty, and told him that he was helping her to learn and grow by telling her his truth.

Terence ended up not leaving. Over a period of a year of practicing Inner Bonding, their relationship completely changed. In fact, he and Wendy have achieved a new level of love and intimacy in their relationship, beyond what they had when they first fell in love.