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Five Day Intensive Training in the Pragmatic/ Experiential Method for Improving Relationships

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Most people who are in distressed relationships believe that their partners are more to blame than they are, but studies suggest that partners tend to engage in unhealthy relationship behaviors at approximately the same rates. Studies further suggest that mistaken beliefs about overall blame are no small matter. They fuel contempt – the single most powerful predictor of relationship dissolution that has been found by researchers to date. In the first segment of this training, Dr. Atkinson will demonstrate how you can go straight to the heart of the matter, helping clients realize that they can't have it both ways (i.e., they can't hold on to the belief that their partners are more to blame and also expect that their partners will be able to give them heartfelt understanding and caring responses). You will learn methods for validating each client's need for his/her partner to understand and care about the hurts that s/he has caused, while emphasizing that it's almost impossible for this to happen as long as the client believes that his/her partner is the more culpable party in the story of their relationship. Dr. Atkinson will show how to set the stage for healing by helping each partner:

- become aware of studies suggesting that people who believe their partners are “the main problem” are usually mistaken,
- consider evidence suggesting that this mistake is of no small consequence to relationships, 3) become receptive to the therapist's opinion that the client's habits have been as damaging to the relationship as have his/her partner's,
- listen with an open mind as the therapist paints a clear picture and gives examples of his/her problematic habits,
- understand why it is in his/her own best interest to explicitly acknowledge and accept responsibility for his/her role in the deterioration of the relationship, and
- become determined to develop the full set of habits that are characteristic of people who know how to get their partners to treat them well.

Throughout the training, Dr. Atkinson will demonstrate how to talk to clients about their personal habits in ways that diffuse shame and defensiveness and generate excitement about the prospect of learning more effective ways of eliciting respectfulness and caring from their partners.

Knowledge of the habits that make or break relationships is essential for anyone who hopes to sustain a satisfying relationship over time – but often, it isn't enough. Knowing is one thing; doing is another – especially when new habits must be applied in emotionally-charged situations. To navigate a relationship skillfully, one's brain must be wired in ways that enable mood-regulation, self-soothing, response-flexibility, empathy and attentiveness. The neural mechanisms that enable such aptitudes cannot be willed at a moment's notice any more than musicians or athletes can perform skillful maneuvers without many hours of practice.

Thankfully, hundreds of studies suggest that the neural mechanisms that enable self-regulation and attunement can be strengthened through practice just as surely as the mechanisms that enable complex musical or athletic movements. In this workshop, you'll learn how to engage clients in daily exercises that give them the nervous system capacities needed to support these skills needed for relationship success. You'll then learn how to help clients use these new capabilities to forge more effective ways of reacting during emotionally-charged situations.

In the final segment of the training, you will learn methods for helping partners develop more enjoyable ways of connecting. Studies suggest that partners who demonstrate more interest in each other, engage in more acts of caring, notice more positive things about each other and express more appreciation have relationships that are more satisfying than do couples who do less of these things. However, recent brain studies suggest that intimacy-building behaviors like these are likely to impact relationships differently *depending on the areas of the brain that drive them*. The secret to cultivating intimacy has to do with figuring out how to "turn on" the brain's intrinsic motivational states that automatically make us actually *feel* more interested in our partners, invested in our relationships, and desirous of satisfying forms of attention from our partners. In this training you will learn how to help each partner act in ways that 1) spark genuine feelings of love and desire in the other, and 2) increase his/her own capacity to get into the mood for connection. Dr. Atkinson will share a variety of methods for helping partners establish routines and practices that enable them to consciously open their hearts to each other, allowing feelings of warmth, tenderness, affection, playfulness, sexual interest and the desire for loving connection to emerge.

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