

Tina's Musings

DIFFICULT SITUATIONS-

There are certain kinds of situations that are going to be hard for any one or any couple. Life's stresses and circumstances often put extreme pressures on us, our families and our relationships. Yet we tend to underestimate the strong influences of the situations we are in or the environments we inhabit. When we recognize that we are in a Difficult Situation, we can focus more on problem-solving the situation than on merely blaming ourselves or the other.

When couples and families are under pressure, we tend to focus on what we or the other has done wrong. It is certainly easier to blame than to problem-solve. Anger allows us to discharge the frustrations that build up around a stressful situation. When under stress, there's nothing as quickly satisfying as knowing what your partner should do - certainly what you would do under the same circumstances. And, of course, to tell him or her.

Paying attention to the situation does not absolve anyone of responsibility. What it does is to offer more avenues for improving the circumstances. When folks get into blaming, options for bettering the situation are reduced - often to nothing. Letting others know it is their fault and, thus, they cannot be trusted, allows them no options but to back down in shame, iniquity and ineptitude.

Instead, we would do better to acknowledge the power of the situation itself. To recognize that it makes more sense to problem-solve the circumstances if only because the environment is usually more modifiable. And problem-solving allows us to work as a team rather than as the adversaries that blame produces.

Certain situational patterns are inherently difficult. In the **High-Need High-Need Situation/ Overwhelmed Family Situation**, there may not be enough resources to meet the demands of the situation or the needs each of us might have under the circumstances. In **The Exquisite Dilemma**, the needs of one partner are diametrically opposed to those of the other. This easily leads us to build resentments and to turn away from cooperation and empathy for others. Even more difficult is when you are **On A Different Page** from your partner. Holding different views on intensely emotional topics - values, beliefs and perspectives on life - makes for disconnections. The danger is that detachment can occur before the magnitude and depth of the situation are recognized.

We don't realize how much Difficult Situations shake up our lives. We tend to minimize their impact. We may not recognize that current feelings of fatigue, dysfunction or discomfort with each other may have roots in the previous bunch of intense stressors that you'd just as soon forget now that they've passed.

"It's all in how we perceive these situations", said my client, a professional in the mental health field, having recently recognized how much she and her husband had been through with fertility treatments, life threatening birthing difficulties and baby health problems. I agreed with her comment but felt pressed to point out that certain situations are really difficult and have tremendous impact - sometimes life-altering - yet we misperceive them as having less effect on our lives and our relationships than they have had. Instead we attribute the source of problems to ourselves, our partners, or our relationship itself.

Difficult Situations can bring out the worst in us - as we freak out, lose control or try to escape. They can also bring out the best when we do make it through. As we man age to cope, come up with creative problem-solving strategies or just soldier on, we develop strengths, confidence and maturity. The Difficult Situations are often the most memorable ones. They provide the makings of stories and the opportunities for heroism.

