

SOURCE LINES

HOLD ME TIGHT—PART FOUR



Source Line Wellness Letter

Finding the Courage to Ask for the Love You Need

In every Hollywood romantic movie, there is that one critical scene in which we can tell the couple is falling in love. At these moments the characters may make some romantic gesture, a smile, a look, or a dreamy gaze into each other's eyes. We know instantly what has just happened. We can identify with the experience so well that no words are needed. Do you remember the beginning of your relationship, when you were romantically and hopelessly "in love"? Do you remember how naturally and almost spontaneously you paid attention to your partner's every action and word, every expression of feeling? Over time, however, you may have become more complacent, less attentive and maybe even jaded with your partner. Do you long for that romantic time, when things were simpler and you felt loving and tender?

Mature love requires us to build and sustain a secure bond. We need to be able to tune in to our partner as strongly as we did when

we fell in love. How do we do this? It is not simple. But it is possible. Sue Johnson, in her book Hold Me Tight, outlines how to deliberately create moments of emotional engagement with our partner. Before you can create and sustain these moments of connection you need to figure out what you are most afraid of and then what you need most from your partner.

In previous articles I have written about how to stop destructive conversations, identify your raw spots, and how to de-escalate conflict. You must be successful at those ways of improving your relationship in order to be ready to create and sustain these moments of connection. Those three skills are a prerequisite to acquiring the ability to become courageous enough to ask for the love you need.

What Are You Most Afraid Of?

The world of feelings is a foreign place for some people. It can be unfamiliar and frightening. Many people avoid or dismiss their feelings. It is important to learn to identify, become familiar and ex-

press them in order to accomplish this first step of getting ready for moments of connection.

Try this exercise with your partner.

1. With your partner, think about a recent difficult time in the past two weeks. It could be a quarrel or perhaps a discussion that you did not finish because it was difficult to resolve.

2. On a piece of paper write down what you think blocks you from being able to focus on your feelings. What is it that gets in the way of going deeper into knowing how you truly feel? Perhaps, you go into your head and start thinking rather than feeling. You may do this in order to stay in control of your emotions. Write down what blocks you from your feelings and ask your partner to do the same.

3. Can you now identify some of the words and phrases that represent your fears, your embarrassments, sadness, or hurt? Most of us have some powerful descriptive images, words, or phrases. For example like "overwhelmed" "petrified" "under siege" "sabotaged" "shattered" "devastated"

"in a fog" "like little kid being scolded". Write these down.

4. Of the two of you, identify who is the most reserved or withdrawn. This person goes first and shares their answers to steps #1, and # 2 above. The listening partner responds with what it feels like to hear these disclosures. Is it easy or difficult to hear the answers of your partner? What feelings came up for you? Examine these feelings together.

5. Repeat step #4 with the listening partner sharing their answers to the reserved one.

What Do You Most Need From Your Partner?

Now that you have the experience of declaring what you are most afraid of from the exercise above, it naturally follows for you to ask for what you need. Fear and longing are two sides the same coin. What do you long for from your partner?

Try this exercise on your own.

1. Think about what you need most from your partner to feel secure and loved. Write it down.

If you need some help here are some examples of what others have said:

I am special to you and you really value our relationship. I need reassurance that I am number one with you and nothing is more important to you than

us.

I am wanted by you, as a partner and a lover - that making me happy is important to you.

I am loved and accepted with my failings and imperfections. I cannot be perfect for you.

I am needed. You want me close.

I am safe because you care about my feelings, what hurts me and my needs.

I can count on you to be there and not to leave me alone when I need you the most.

I ask that you hold me and you understand how just asking for that is very hard for me.

2. Share what you need most with your partner. Because this conversation contains the most emotional and vulnerable aspect of our being, you may need to edge up to it slowly and carefully. Have the conversation when each of you is ready.

Engaging in a conversation with your partner that creates and sustain moments of connection is a positive bonding event. It promotes the connection for you and your partner to face struggles in world as a team. The more of these deeper conversations you

have, the stronger the bond between you will grow, allowing mature love to flourish.

"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." Anais Nin

Courage is a word often used to describe men and women who make the ultimate sacrifice by risking their lives for patriotic duty in war. Another kind of courage, with much less risk, is one that if exercised more frequently, could prevent many unhappy marriages and divorces. It is the courage to learn how to ask for the love you need, get it and give it in return.

This month's newsletter outlines some ideas and exercises which are very difficult for many couples to do. Congratulations to those of you who tried them. If you found them far too difficult, perhaps you could use some help. These questions and exercises come very close to what it may feel like to be in couples counselling.

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