

## LIVING IN A HOME WITHOUT EMOTIONS

### **When emotions are not encouraged and not expressed**

Mel saw himself as a good husband and provider for the family. He worked long hours and was not home very much, which added to the already feelings of loneliness that his wife, Jenny, felt from Mel not being emotionally available. As much as Jenny tried to ask Mel to show her more love and attention, he would be too busy or give some excuse. Jenny resigned herself a long time ago to give up trying to get more love from Mel. Since Mel was a good provider, Jenny wondered if she had a right to complain about her situation. To get through the day, Jenny would often put aside those thoughts and focus her energy on trying to be the best mom she could be to the kids.

Mel saw his rules and discipline for the home as a source of love and security because he did not know how to give love through a compassionate, heartfelt relationship. The girls loved their dad and wanted to do what he said, but his stern approach had always made it difficult to talk with him, which put a big strain on their relationships. Because of the emotional distance Mel felt with his girls, he believed the rules would keep the girls safer and bring a closer relationship with his daughters. "I'm only doing this because I love them," he would often say. Over the years, the girls felt dad's rules were too restrictive and his enforcement of the rules came with a heavy price. The girls gave in to dad's demands because there was no talking to him about it, and they knew they would never win.

These rules would be the fuel that ignited the arguments between Mel and Jenny. The girls would often go to Jenny to argue their point whenever Mel lowered the hammer on anyone's request to bend the rules. This usually disappointed and hurt the girls since they felt they could not freely express feelings or share what was on their mind. Jenny could see how the girls were hurt when Mel would tell them to go to their room when they were upset or going to cry. When Mel blamed Jenny for interfering with his discipline, he would make subtle little digs that would be hurtful to Jenny. When Jenny tried to stand up to his unjust comments or extreme discipline, Mel would make stinging comments that were like verbal bullets that penetrated Jenny's heart. As a result, Jenny would back down, shutting off her thoughts and emotions.

Over the years the girls and Jenny tucked their feelings inside, not realizing the devastating toll each cutting word, disappointment, or hurt had on their heart and soul. What you need to understand is that Mel was accustomed to the unemotional, strict life that he forced on everyone else. However, Mel's emotionless living was like a cancerous tumor, hidden inside, internally destroying any resemblance of a loving, compassionate family relationship. The years of emotionless living had shut down Jenny's heart long ago and conditioned the girls' hearts to expect it in future relationships.

Rules and logic vs. relationship and emotion  
**If you live in a situation similar to Mel and his family, there is always this underlying caution or emotional distance with the unemotional person. When a family member is angered by the strict rules or hurt by the lack of tenderness, the unemotional person shows little sensitivity. The comments (or silence) from the unemotional person ultimately makes others feel they are wrong to express feelings or give an opinion. This way of treating people usually becomes the "normal" way of living for the unemotional person, which reinforces the belief he or she is always right. This belief hinders the unemotional person's ability to see how they hurt others, even if someone points it out. This treatment destroys the foundation of a relationship. When emotions are not part of a person's life, similar to Mel, you relate more through rules and logic rather than a relationship. If someone is hurt, showing compassion, tenderness, and empathy rarely happens since he does not have the capacity to use feelings to connect with the other person. Discussions will center on the facts of what and why something happened rather than a sensitive conversation to understand how the person is feeling or dealing with the problem.**

**When you are unemotional, giving out rules and discussing the facts becomes your way to relate, rather than showing affection and compassion as a way to encourage a trusting relationship. The more others follow your rules and talk about facts, the more you believe you have a close relationship.**

### **Forced respect vs. loving respect**

In a home like Mel and Jenny, the family members are *expected* to comply with the rules, through performance and consequences rather than working through issues together with acceptance and compromise. This is the difference between what I call *forced respect* and *loving respect*. *Forced respect* is when the unemotional mate expects (or demands) other family members to comply with rules and verbal commands or else face the consequences. Because there is no emotional connection in the relationship, the unemotional mate believes there is a relationship when the family member complies with the rules or commands. When the daughters complied with his rules, Mel believed he had a good relationship with them. However, the strict rules only created more distance and fear between Mel and the other family members.

On the other hand, *loving respect* is when you first have a loving relationship with the family members and they comply because of the love, acceptance, and respect they receive in the relationship. With loving respect, you are given far more love than you are given rules or discipline. As a result, even if your relationship includes discipline, such as, timeouts, limits, groundings, etc., you do not feel as hurt because you already know deep inside that the discipline is done out of love. You see, forced respect is based on rules which force someone to comply out of fear. Where loving respect is based on loving someone to the point they will be motivated to comply because they feel loved and do not want to disappoint you.

### **Living in a black and white world**

Living in a world of black and white is typically a by-product of a childhood that consists of hurtful, compassionless, restrictive, and/or abusive caregivers and experiences. It can also come from growing up in a home with rigid rules or strict religion with little praise and love. The more you interpret the world in black and white, the more dependent you are on rules and facts to help you relate with others. You will rarely let your guard down and you are determined to be right about everything, lacking humility in the process. You hurt others by either not talking to them or being brutally honest with them. The more you interpret the world in black and white, the less room there is for negotiations or compromise, with no emotion involved in the decision-making process. If someone disagrees with you, your argument will leave little opportunity for discussion. In other words, people cannot win with extreme black-and-white thinkers. Everything is, "right or wrong," "yes or no," or "my way or no way."

This narrow-mindedness is often seen in positions of high responsibility or authority. As a result, the status of your position and/or knowledge allows justification of your hard-line stance since you cannot relate any other way. If you are a religious black-and-white thinker, you may utilize your status and your knowledge of scriptures as a weapon to get a point across. For example, when someone disagrees or has an opposite opinion, the black-and-white thinker would have little discussion except to respond with a scripture to prove you wrong. Even if you had a correct and valid point of concern, you are made to feel you are wrong to express your feelings or opinions, while you leave feeling worse than when you entered the conversation.

As a black-and-white thinker, you are blinded from seeing your own extreme thinking and strongly justify your position because you do not like to be corrected. You need to know where you stand on every issue of life because you do not want to be wrong or caught off guard with any decision. This way of thinking also creates the need to control people and situations because you would never want to be left without knowing what is going on.

Filling emotional emptiness

**If you are like Jenny or the daughters, you may be living in the same type of house, feeling alone and shut out from any sense of meaningful relationship. Because of this, you become frustrated and disappointed from your repeated failures to have any significant interaction with the unemotional person and the chance to fulfill your dream of a loving relationship and close family. In order to survive, you resign yourself to the family struggles and squelch your feelings by consuming yourself with other activities. When there is no satisfaction from your relationships at home, the desire to fill the emotional emptiness is what lures family members to find meaning in other areas of life. When you pursue other activities outside the family, those activities become your substitute for what a meaningful relationship should be accomplishing.**

For example, you may spend more time away from the family or specifically away from the unemotional mate in activities such as: work, religion, reading, other relationships, telephone conversations, sleeping, child care, internet surfing, computer games, shopping, television viewing, and recreational sports. These are the most common, accessible, and justifiable alternatives to relationship fulfillment since these activities are usually already in your life. When these pursuits become excessive, there is a decay of the emotional, physical, and spiritual union with the spouse and family. The warning signs that your pursuits are becoming unhealthy are when you become excessively consumed in other pursuits to the exclusion of spending time with your mate or family. It is often the case when family members are feeling an excessive amount of loneliness, hurt, anger, or fear from the home situation; they feel justified in spending excessive amounts of time in these activities.

Excerpt from the book, *When Your Mate Has Emotionally Checked Out* ©2006  
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