

Relationships and Trauma

Links Between Trauma, Relationships and the Blame-Game

In healthy loving relationships each partner takes responsibility for regulating their emotions, especially anger, resentment and the confusion that regularly surfaces in the normal push and pull of intimacy. Blaming each other is not an option. This is especially so in relationships where either one or both partners suffers from past trauma. There is no easier way to destroy trust and create loathing than blaming another for problems that are not theirs to solve. Mutually supporting each other with loving kindness, as each partner strives to understand and work-through their trauma, is the key to healing and healthy relationship.

Traumatized people very often partner with those who mesh with their own relational patterns. If they have not acknowledged and worked through their trauma they will continue to re-enact traumatic patterns by entering into an unconscious pact with a partner. The couple engage in mutual denial of their problems, in which both avoid taking personal responsibility for their trauma by blaming the other. These unconscious pacts are often at the heart of unhealthy relationships.

Problems begin when unconscious pacts inevitably fail, and each partner blames the other for the failure. Blame temporarily relieves unresolved inner conflicts by making the other responsible for them: you are the problem; it's not my fault! Together, they co-create an environment in which their internal conflicts are projected at each other, and these flare ups cannot be resolved. This leaves each partner with resentments, and an unhealthy relationship flourishes in this toxic environment. All this feels familiar to both parties. If you grow up next to an airport, you get used to the noise.

The partners unconsciously act out their traumatic patterns, as each re-traumatizes the other in an endless cycle where rage, hatred and abuse may be unleashed on each other. This cycle of conflict can become normalised, predictable and, paradoxically, a stable system of dysfunctional habits. Traumatized partners can become enmeshed in an endless war of blame and anger, from which there appears no escape. Periods of peace are soon broken by outbreaks of habitual problems.

Everyday conflicts, inevitable in close relationships, feed into this dysfunctional dance. In many cases one partner withdraws into an isolated world of addictions

and obsessions, while the other pursues them with criticism and desperation to stay connected. The isolated person takes on the blame to maintain homeostasis: yes, I'm guilty, bad and no good; I've always known it; that's the way it is; it's how I am.

There is no greater opportunity for growth and development than a loving relationship in need of healing. Ironically, though, when one partner starts to grow and take personal responsibility for their problems, the other often becomes hypercritical, anxious or angry. Healthy growth disrupts the system stabilised by mutually assured and normalised suffering. This means that healthy change is felt as a threat to the status quo. It will be experienced as unfamiliar and dangerous, and so will be resisted. To escape from unhealthy relationship the partners must each tackle their own problems and stop blaming each other. They must develop the necessary skills to take responsibility for healing their own wounds.