

## PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACHES

In this session we are looking at procedures that are designed to help couples deal with tensions, differences and conflicts.

GOAL I. To learn the informal use of SCS (Structured Communication Sequence)

- A. Regarding giving understanding, the structure is dropped and restatement is used only when the situation requires it:
  - 1. To test comprehension when you are unsure of what your spouse is saying.
  - 2. When the listener notices that his partner is repeating himself two or three times.
  - 3. When the listener is in some way conveying the message "I don't feel understood."
  - 4. Whenever understanding is requested.
- B. Regarding giving agreement, the structure is dropped and giving agreement or affirmation occurs when the situation requires it.
  - 1. Agreement is to be given whenever it is asked for.
  - 2. When the speaker seems frustrated or unduly defensive.
  - 3. When understanding does not seem to be enough.
  - 4. When the listener wishes to share feelings of agreement or affirmation.

Another way of using SCS informally is to switch to the formal use of SCS only when communication seems to be getting nowhere.

GOAL II. To understand some basic "rules" regarding marital fighting.

"Rules" are not intended as "must" or "shoulds." Rather "rules" as used here need to be viewed as an invitation to couples to enter into a particular attitude of working with each other and to engage in an experiment that may be growth inducing.

- A. Choose the time and place for "fighting" by mutual consent.
- B. Focus on issues rather than personalities.
- C. Be as candid as you can.
- D. Don't ever try to win.
- E. Focus on specific rather than global issues.

GOAL III. To learn to use the creative problem solving technique

- A. Step I - Agree on the problem.
- B. Step II - Abandon the temptation to defeat the other person.

- C. Step III - Attack the problem to see where the differences are. Here the technique of role taking is used. Role taking is essentially the same as SCS.
- D. Step IV - Examine the areas of disagreement to see whether such differences may be resolved by compromise, negotiation or a new yet undiscovered option.

The goal is to work out a solution that is satisfactory to both partners, so that both win, and the problem, not the partner, is defeated.

Ways of dealing with real differences.

- A. Sometimes it is clearly the prerogative of one of the spouses to make the decision on his own.
  - 1. When requests are made, the one receiving the request will ultimately decide.
  - 2. When the issue is clearly in one spouse's domain.
- B. By using compromise:
  - 1. The solution should meet both partner's need.
  - 2. beware of "compromises" no one likes.
  - 3. A failure to see additional options is a chief cause of many "unsolvable" problems.

GOAL IV. To introduce the concept of marital contracts as a problem solving procedure.

Marital negotiation or contracting provides a format wherein each spouse agrees to give something to his or her mate in exchange for something he or she wants or enjoys. See "Guidelines for Marital Negotiating."

Goal V. To discuss "After the Fight."

- A. Practical planning in terms of the resolution.
- B. Emotional reconciliation (a cooling off period.)
- C. Reaffirmation of the relationship.
- D. Return to the conflict, but in a general sense - working out suggestions for future coping with interpersonal issues.