

Marriage

Loving communication essential in couple's life

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Imagine going to an optometrist and relating complaints about how fuzzy your vision has become.

"Here," the optometrist says. "Try on my glasses."

But the glasses only seem to make your vision worse than ever.

"That's funny," the optometrist says. "Those glasses work just fine for me."

It may appear obvious that this optometrist needs retraining, but his belief that everyone should see the world through his eyes may be more common than suspected, according to marriage experts.

Couples sometimes fail to understand that each partner sees the world through his or her own eyes, noted experts that work with Worldwide Marriage Encounter. And communication starts with the recognition that everyone comes into a marriage with their own pair of emotional eyes, and not that of their spouse's, they added.

Bill and Kathie Lenhart coordinate Worldwide Marriage Encounter for the Rochester diocese, while Dee and Denie Stemmler train couples to present Encounter weekends.

According to both couples, Marriage Encounter is for those people who wish to strengthen their marriages through an intensive weekend away from home. Three couples and a priest speak on various marital topics to participating couples, who then discuss the topics in the privacy of their own room throughout the weekend.

Such weekends are designed to strengthen a couple's capacity to communicate beyond the level of superficial conversation and opinionated argument, the couples said.

"Communication is the ability to share with your spouse who you are, not what you want to project," Bill Lenhart commented.

Kathie Lenhart added that for couples to drop their emotional guards and talk freely, spouses must accept each other unconditionally — flaws, disagreements and all.

"You don't have to be perfect to be loved," she said.

Both couples pointed out that many disagreements between husbands and wives are rooted in the attitudes fostered by their respective upbringings. Each partner is raised very differently and comes into the marriage often unconsciously believing that his or her view on many issues is superior to that of their mate, they explained.

For example, the Stemmlers related, Dee was raised in a home where self-expression was valued, whereas Denie was raised in a house where self-discipline was paramount. Such differences surfaced when Dee wanted to remain at the dinner table and talk with her children after supper at the same time that Denie urged everyone to get up and do the dishes.

The couple's different upbringings had led to this argu-



ment over how to raise their own children, the Stemmlers said. Yet, the issue ultimately "went away" when they both realized that what they shared was an equal concern for their children's welfare, which was more important than their opposite styles of raising children.

Denie added that he also realized he liked his wife's emphasis on self-expression, and that it was one of the reasons he married her.

"In practical terms, we listened to each other more, and I learned to hear her out," he said.

Couples can learn to more smoothly navigate through such conflicts if they slate some time every day to discuss such issues as how they feel about one another, their children and their finances, the Lenharts advised.

On the other hand, both couples stressed that setting aside

time for serious discussions will be useless if each partner plans on jumping to conclusions about what the other person is saying or feeling.

Denie Stemmler recommended responding to a spouse's concerns by telling him or her what you think he or she said or meant to say in order to clear up any potential misunderstandings — even if that means paraphrasing your spouse's words three or four

times.

"It's very difficult to articulate exactly what you mean the first time," he said. "Usually when I play something back, it's wrong."

The couples also stressed the need for each partner to take responsibility for — or "own" — his or her emotions. You can choose to respond to any given situation in an abusive or constructive manner, but you can not credit or blame the other partner for causing whatever reaction you choose, the couples asserted.

On the other hand, spouses must also resist the notion that they can "change" one another or "fix" one another, the couples stressed.

"The only person you can change is yourself," Bill Lenhart concluded.

He and the other three observers acknowledged that accepting this notion is one of the most difficult tasks in anyone's life, but putting it into practice forms the basis of adult behavior.

"If I'm forever blaming you or Denie or anyone else for how I feel, I'll never take responsibility for my own emotions," Dee Stemmler remarked.

This does not mean a husband or wife can no longer grow irritated or angry at their partner for what they consider a legitimate reason, only that each partner must find responsible ways of expressing those feelings, the couples said.

Echoing Kathie Lenhart's belief that every day in a marriage should be a "mini-honeymoon," the other three added that successful communication between spouses should be marked by verbal politeness — a courtesy that many couples begin to ignore about the same time they decide to take each other for granted.

"Marriages get into trouble when two spouses stop courting each other," Denie Stemmler concluded.

Complement
your wedding
with the perfect reception

Enjoy a small wedding or rehearsal dinner
in the elegant parkview room or grand
reception in our garden atrium.

**THE
BRASSERIE**

At Eastman Place • 387 East Main Street
232-3350

ANNJER
*Ann
Joy*

**Cake
Decorating
& Candy
Supplies**

Genesee Valley
Regional Market
900 Jefferson Road
Rochester
272-8608

**Classes
Available in Cake
Decorating &
Candy Making**

Ol' Smoothe
Specializing in Cheesecakes
Cheesecakes for All Occasions
"Experience the taste"
Uniquely Designed
and
Decorated Wedding Cakes.



You Won't Know its
Cheesecake 'til
You Cut

900 Jefferson Rd Building #1
Rochester, NY 14623
(716) 272-0800