
Therapist's Thoughts E-Zine For May 2006

COLORS OF AN ARGUMENT

I've been seeing a lot of high-conflict couples lately. They get too emotionally intense when in conflict. They don't know when to back down or take a break from the arguments. Damage is done. Things are said that leave permanent scars. They are trying to win or be right and they aren't being heard and they stop listening – well you get the idea....

One method I suggest is based on the analogy of a tachometer. For those of you that don't know, it's the needle on a manual shift vehicle that shows the revolutions per minute (RPM) of the engine. If you rev the engine too high, you can damage it. On a motorcycle, it actually has a yellow-zone and red-zone. If the needle spends too much time in the red zone, the engine will get too hot and either blow the gasket or seize up the engine. Then it's going to cost you a lot of money. Do you see where I'm going? There are consequences to going into the red-zone. If you ignore the yellow warning in relationships and fight until you see red you may say things you regret...

My suggestion is to know your yellow-zone. If you could say to your partner, "I'm in the yellow-zone and I need a break," you will save yourself a lot of grief. Take a break. When you reach the red zone in a conversation, your intellect shuts down anyway. When you are seeing red, you don't make logical sense. You are almost pure emotion. It's at this point that you never get a decent result because it isn't a conversation, but a battle.

Some couples like to just raise their fingers on a one to ten scale to their partner. This allows them to show that they are reaching a seven of ten and are about to need a break. At that point a change is needed. Try a smile. Try a deep breath (and remember to empty your lungs first so you get a full one). Try hugging. Try anything... Just stop the string of thought that will send you into the red-zone.

Once again, many thanks to my clients that allow me to let this material bubble up while in their presence.

Sincerely,

Russell