



Building Stepfamilies That Work[©]

Ghosts of the Past

© Dr Bill Nodrick 2001

A hurt needs to be heard before it will be healed.

Family breakdown typically occurs after a long list of very hurtful experiences. These experiences often leave sensitivities that can influence the way we act and react in a subsequent relationship; and can be very damaging to the new relationship.

Your assignment:

- 1) In private, you both need to prepare a list of the most distressing, vexing, and/or hurtful experiences that occurred in your previous relationship(s).
- 2) Reserve uninterrupted, private, couple time (or times) to complete the following exercise.
- 3) Decide who will begin, and then take turns as you work your way through your lists, item by item.
- 4) For each item on your list:
 - Describe the hurtful experience to your partner
 - Do your best to help your partner to understand why the experience was so hurtful to you; and the enduring impact it has had upon you as a person
 - Give an example of the way in which this hurt has surfaced in your present relationship and/or family life, and then
 - Let your partner know what they could do to soothe or heal the wound.
- 5) Listen carefully while your partner presents the above information. When your partner indicates that they are through, say: "This is what I heard:" ... then provide them with a summary of what they have just said which includes:
 - The experience
 - Why it was so hurtful
 - The impact it had upon them
 - An example of how it has materialized in your present relationship or family, and
 - Actions you could take to soothe or heal the wound.
- 6) When your summary is finished, say to your partner: "Did I hear you correctly?"
 - If your summary was in error in any way, the partner should provide the necessary corrections.
 - If your summary was accurate, move to the next item (where the "speaker" now assumes the 'listener's" role, and vice versa).

An example:

The hurt: The ring incident. I awoke to find John's wedding band on the night table with a short note saying that he had decided to leave the relationship and that he would be gone, for good, by the time I awoke. I was devastated—no explanation; no farewell; no nothing. I felt so abandoned—just like when my dad left home. Each time we argue, and you stomp off, I'm worried sick that you've left me for good too. (Maybe that's why I've been so clingy lately.) During times like that I'd feel so much better if you were to touch me and say: "I still love you. I've got to cool down. I'll be back in a while."

Ghosts of the Past.rtf Feb 2008

All rights reserved. The reproduction, use, distribution or storage or of this work, in whole or in part, by any and all means, without the express written permission of the author, is strictly prohibited.