

Not Just Saying, "I Love You"

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Wednesday, 04 September 2013 16:37 - Last Updated Thursday, 05 September 2013 21:08



Do you or someone you love have difficulty expressing or feeling emotion? People often struggle with this, especially within the construct of a romantic relationship. All people too often forget to tell the people we care about how much we love them but imagine how much more difficult it is without even being able to express the emotions. We often assume our loved ones know how we feel but, without expression of our love, do they really know?

Why do some people struggle more than others with expressing their inner most thoughts and feelings? Why can't some people feel love? As Freud would suspect, childhood inevitably reveals an emotionless period devoid of hugs, love and/or happy parents in many of these people.

Although human beings are born with the building blocks of deep emotions, we are not naturally adept at utilizing and processing those emotions. Like virtually any crucial skill in life, we need to learn by example which is impossible if love did not exist during our earliest years.

So where does this leave someone struggling with the inability to feel or express themselves? The first step is acceptance which can be extremely painful itself. Imagine not being able to feel any positive emotion yet the guilt and pain of feeling inadequate are torturously real. Detaching and withdrawing from one's partner offers a reprieve from the suffering. However, this leads the partner to feel inadequate themselves and their self-worth dwindles. The vicious cycle causes more guilt and shame as the relationship crumbles.

So is there hope? Absolutely, but anything worthwhile in life takes hard work. The first step is acceptance and communication within the relationship. The steps that ensue are no different than helping someone overcome other fears or problems. If someone is afraid of heights, you work your way up higher and higher to rid their fear and gain mastery over their disability. If someone is unable to feel or is afraid show love, you force yourself to say loving things and act in loving ways despite being difficult and being devoid of the feeling you are ultimately hoping will come. "You are telling me to fake it?" people ask me. Actually yes, in a way. However, the distinction is in the intent and desire to improve versus faking behavior to appease your partner, which is completely different and unrelated.

With ongoing efforts to hug, kiss, cuddle and speak loving words to our significant other, the associated feelings will start to blossom and the actions become less forced and more natural. Communication and understanding between two people eliminate any guilt or feelings of inadequacy which is necessary for success. Although it is straightforward, navigating our deepest emotions can be taxing and the process goes much more smoothly when you work with a good therapist who will really spend the time necessary to get to know you.

Psychiatrist Michael Yasinski M.D. on the struggle to express or feel emotion.