
Triggering Each Other

Thoughts of the Month: April 2008

Couples trigger each other all the time. We should expect it since we pick the partner that carries the positive and negative traits of our caretakers. It's the negative or hurtful traits that trigger our old memories and our old reactions.

Sometimes this triggering shows up as just bickering. Some couples seem to bicker at every opportunity. It seems to be the way their energy gets expressed. They don't mean to. They are just unconscious of how they trigger each other. And once we get triggered, our reptilian ("Lizard") brain is in charge and will defend itself as long, and as nastily, as it takes.

Other triggering is more like Donna and I who sort of politely (at first) start polluting the Space. Donna will say, "Didn't you want to turn on that road?" David says, "No, there are other roads we can take." Donna responds, "Which roads?" David answers, "I know how to get there!" Donna says, "But what road exactly are we going to take?"

It gets worse from there! Without knowing it, this common scene is a triggering scene. I am triggering Donna's fear (and childhood story) that things are going to fall apart soon. Donna is triggering my frustration and shame (my childhood story) about not being capable of doing things right. We are not addressing the REAL stories.

Triggering takes many forms. The antidote, of course, is to step into your partner's world to find out (mirror and validate) what is really going on with them. It is completely counter-instinctual and unnatural to do this. It's more natural to react just like it's more natural to step on the brakes when we hit a snow or ice patch.

I think it takes time to learn how we get triggered and to actually step away from reactive behaviors into generous, connective behaviors.

It only takes one to begin!

Wishing you joy during this growth season of spring!

With great encouragement and hope,
David and Donna

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