

Announcer: Enhancing The Love. This is Stay Happily Married episode number 256.

Anna: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage. I'm Anna Reilly and I'm your host today welcome to the show. Have you found yourself stuck in a love rut in your relationship? Are you and your partner feeling unfulfilled? Sometimes in a long term committed relationship partners begin to feel that, despite their hopes about each other, they aren't being truly fulfilled the way they expected to be at the start of the relationship. As patterns of low expectations begin to form, many couples don't know how to reach out to each other, confide their wants and needs, and find solutions to problems. When there is a prolonged power struggle people start to feel frustrated, anxious and insecure among other things. Sometimes couples have been stuck in a trouble spot for too long and they don't have the skills to work their way out. Our guest today is Doctor Rebecca Matthews as psychologist with 3-C Family Services who's had extensive research and clinical work. Rebecca is here to discuss how partners can get out of their love rut and back to a place of happiness in their relationship. Welcome to the show Rebecca, I'm so glad you could join me today.

Rebecca: Thank you, I'm glad to talk to you.

Anna: So, about this power struggle, where do you think that this comes from between partners, where does it start?

Rebecca: Michelle Weiner Davis talks about the five stages of a relationship, hopefully we all start out with a really passionate stage where any time we're separated or apart, right when we get back together there's this chemical cocktail that helps us bond to this person, heightens our emotional openness, physical closeness, our desires and it's really a craving for everybody.

Anna: The spark.

Rebecca: That's right, the spark. Then after that, what some people call the honeymoon period, a lot of people feel like that lasts five sometimes even ten years after couples are married, but after that partners start to find that a lot of the things they were hoping to get out of the relationship or hoping to avoid in the relationship, some of those things start to come up and they feel shocked and disappointment. But, a lot of times those things will sort of be pushed back under the rug, rationalized in some way, like I'm just being too sensitive or that's not really fair of me to ask of my partner, or denial that it exists, I'm sure he didn't mean to do it that way or she's just saying that but I know that's not what she means, that sort of thing.

Anna: Do you think that maybe people in a relationship, once they've been in the relationship for a while, a long time, do you think they start to feel like maybe they've lost some of the good things they had in their single life?

Rebecca: Definitely. I think you start to realize things from your single life or past relationships or even just that people imagine that they will get from their marriage, even when they're

younger, people might always think after watching sitcoms, when your partner comes home they greet you with a kiss at the door and that's just the way it happens. They might have these expectations but further into the relationship they start to realize, wait a minute, this is not what I signed up for, and I'm not getting what I wanted.

Anna: Right. Then how important is it to make sure that they create a balance between those types of things? You know, like the stuff they had before and then the new things that you have to do in the relationship, single life versus in a committed relationship life.

Rebecca: Balance is incredibly important and even more so balance is simply the ability to confide this information to your partner and I'll give you an example from my own life. The other day I decided to tell my partner, who usually buys the groceries that I didn't like the exact type of cookie that he usually buys. I used the confiding skill that I teach to couples and that my partner is familiar with as well, and he later told me that he was a bit upset that I didn't tell him sooner. He likes being successful at buying groceries and pleasing me, and I didn't even give him the chance to succeed until down the road because he didn't have all the information. He was appreciative that I confided this information but I think he was a little bit irked that he didn't have it sooner and that he wasn't doing as well as he could be doing.

Anna: He's like; all this time I've been buying the wrong cookies, you should have told me earlier.

Rebecca: Right. And another example might include simple preferences, who does household chores or intimacy or annoying habits and this is especially important for big red button issues like when somebody's behavior is triggering their partner to feel some sort of pain. That's a big part of where those expectations for the relationship come into play, perhaps if you came from a home where anger was very scary or loud or dangerous, and you hoped that in your marriage you would never have to see anger like that again and maybe when you do in the marriage you fall back into those patterns or you feel the same way it felt when you were younger and in that family and a child probably when you don't have nearly as much control as you do when you're older. You begin to respond to your partner in ways that don't exactly fit that current situation. Another example might be that you had a previous serious relationship before your current partner, in which you were given most of the control and the decision making, and in the current relationship maybe your partner is pushing to have more say in things. The freedom to make decisions on your own is something maybe that you wanted to keep in your life and in your current marriage, but feel that slipping away. That is when couples find themselves in trouble spots and need to find a way out of it.

Anna: Right. So, that brings me to, what 3-C Family Services can do for these people that are having these kinds of issues? What kind of support do you and the other clinicians offer to couples who are struggling with this kind of thing?

Rebecca: We have several different services and a lot of them can be aimed at the same thing. Many times couples have created these patterns of communicating, with the goal of

winning an argument or at least to not walk away being the one in the wrong, or taking all the blame. So couples have to learn to confide or complain this information in a way that doesn't make their partner feel defensive or act defensive, and that sends the message clearly. Both partners are responsible for speaking and listening to each other with positive intent and with the idea that whatever their partner is saying is vitally important and they need to know it for the sake of the relationship. This can be done at 3-C and other places, in couples therapy. So the couple goes in to see a counselor and they talk through some of these things, sometimes it can be helped if one person goes to an individual session. Oftentimes couples therapists, if they start to see a pattern that one of the partners is bringing up, it might be useful for them to think about individual therapy to work on that specific thing. A lot of times couples therapists are pretty good at picking those things out and helping that partner find somebody to work on that thing one on one. Another thing that we offer here at 3-C are one day workshops and I facilitate those with Doctor Don Adams. We do those about four times a year and that's called A New Beginning.

Anna: What kind of stuff do you guys go over with couples in the workshop? And I'm under the impression that you guys have one coming up too.

Rebecca: Yes. The next one that we're doing is on July 27th, it's a Saturday and that will run from 8:30 to 3:30, with an hour lunch break and in that workshop we will go through what bonding is, how anybody bonds to another person, what bonding provides for each person. We talk through the stages of the relationship and couples are able to pick out where they are, what stage they're in. They learn to recognize the trouble spots, where they are, whether they are looking to win an argument and then they will learn a lot about the ideas and the values that they need to have in order to use some of these skills and put as much effort as they can into bonding with their partner. They'll learn where they are, what the trouble spots are, they'll leave with a confiding tool that they can practice every day that will help them become closer to their partner and feel far more connected with them. They will also leave with two different skills to confide complaints to their partner in a way that we feel diminishes defensiveness. Complaint a lot of times sounds like a negative word, but the way we see it is that it is a vital part of any healthy relationship to be able to communicate things that aren't going well.

Anna: Yeah, definitely. It's all about the right way to do it and the best way to do it with your partner. Basically, things change between partner to partner, couple to couple; but in general there's this idea of being able to make it work between each other. However you guys can make it work with each other is really what's most important.

Rebecca: Like you said, people change, and if a couple can change together they are likely to be more successful and just happier in general.

Anna: Right, yeah. Is it mostly in the workshop you go through these things and talking to the couples? Is there any kind of interaction, do you have scenarios or strengthening exercises? Or how does that play out?

Rebecca: The group is set up, we try to make it as inviting and comfortable for everyone as possible, and it's created to be a skill based program. You're here to learn skills and information that you can take home and use. Doctor Adams and I, we present the skills and we will show a model for them and there's two of us to do it so the other couples can see it and then they practice the skills in the group in separate areas, in the big room that we have, so that any personal information that is being shared between the couple is not for other couples to hear unless people are choosing to share. A lot of people are a little bit intimidated by coming to a group, and it is not what you think of as group therapy; where people are sharing the intimate details of their relationship. It's very structured and it's a lot about learning skills and practicing them with your partner. There are occasions too, where people will come in, a single person will come in because maybe they have had too many relationships that have gone poorly and they've decided they're not going to hop into another one until they know what the heck has gone wrong and what to do about it. So often we have a single person or two and they will talk and practice the skills, maybe they'll bring in a friend sometimes we have a mother and daughter that would like to come in so the group is usually mostly couples but those singles are welcome.

Anna: Is there a link on your website that the listeners can go in and see if people want to sign up for that?

Rebecca: Absolutely, you can go to our website and look for groups, and New Beginning is the one that is coming up soon. We often have a more in depth group, that is once a week for twelve weeks, that is called The Emotionally Literate Couple and that teaches some of the same skills we teach in the shorter group, the one day group, but it's far more in depth and there's some skills in there to really heal some old wounds if that is necessary for some couples to really enhance the intimacy in the relationship.

Anna: That's great. Well, Rebecca is there anything else that we should know?

Rebecca: I don't think so. I think we got it.

Anna: Okay, that's good. Rebecca, thank you so much for talking with me and being on the show today. I really appreciate it.

Rebecca: No problem, any time. I enjoyed it.

Anna: To find out more about Rebecca and her practice 3-C Family Services in Cary, visit their website at www.3CFamilyServices.com or you can call 919-677-0101 for an appointment. Be sure to check out their website and see if you would like to sign up for that workshop there's links for that and I'll put that in the show notes as well. Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and future episodes, visit us at StayHappilyMarried.com

I'm Anna Reilly, until next time, stay happily married.

