

Scott: Peacekeeping in the marriage. This is Stay Happily Married: Episode number 299.

Recording: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Scott: I'm Scott Blair, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Do you and your spouse know how to effectively keep the peace in your relationship? In our society, we tend to try to keep the peace in many different settings in life. At work, we attempt to keep the peace with bothersome coworkers and demanding bosses. At home, we seek to keep the peace with our vexing children, aggravating siblings, and meddling parents.

When it comes to marriage, we try to keep the peace when our spouse asks questions that we may not want to answer truthfully, ask questions about money spending and ask questions about our needs and wants. Sometimes to keep the peace, we may tell a little white lie as to not hurt our loved ones feelings. However, sometimes it is best to tell the truth so that our spouses are not hurt later down the road. Is it okay to tell a little white lie in a certain situation? In what ways can we learn to keep the peace between ourselves and our spouses?

Earning his master's degree in counseling from Humboldt State University and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Mental Health Counselor, Mr. Noah Rubinstein strives to expand the visibility and reach of GoodTherapy.org in an effort to counter the tendency within the mental health field to view people as deficient and fundamentally flawed. The mission and vision of GoodTherapy.org and Noah's efforts have been featured extensively in the media, including numerous radio and television interviews and print articles as well.

Mr. Rubinstein is one of the strongest voices advocating for ethical mental health treatment and challenging the application of medical and pathology based models within mental health. He has worked with individuals, couples, and families for over 25 years in various social service, counseling, and consultation roles within different communities including mental health clinics, residential treatment centers, emergency shelters, hospice organizations, home-based therapy programs, summer camps, and in private practice.

Welcome to the show Noah, I'm so glad that you could join us today.

Noah: Thank you, Scott. I'm happy to be here. Thanks for having me on the show.

Scott: Well, Noah, you're here to talk to us today about peacekeeping in marriage, both false and authentic. Now can you elaborate a little bit about what these two types of peacekeeping are and how they differ?

Noah: Sure, yeah, so most of us know what peacekeeping is. It has a negative connotation because the kind of peacekeeping that people think of when the term is mentioned is really what I call false peacekeeping. And false peacekeeping is really about avoiding conflict and I would say exiling or hiding parts of you from the marriage. And conflict avoidance doesn't necessarily mean the tendency to avoid fighting; it's the tendency to hide one's true feelings, one's deepest needs and desires, and it affects nearly every couple that I've worked with in marriage counseling. It means agreeing to something that you don't want to agree to or going without something that you want that your partner doesn't. It's really keeping one's true feelings camouflaged and hidden.

So just to give you some more examples of false keeping, it allows you to beat around the bush when your partner asks how their butt looks in their new pair of jeans, maybe to hide how much money you actually spent at the bar, or to even save face about the fact that you were blatantly wrong about taking the last left turn. But those are really small trivial things. False peacekeeping can mean hiding very big, important needs. So false keeping is really about keeping your partner from being upset with you in the short term.

Now, authentic peacekeeping is the opposite. It involved being completely and utterly honest about your needs, your preferences and your opinions. And just to give you some examples, it might mean not wanting to avert your eyes when you see another attractive person. It might mean being completely honest that you lost \$100 at poker night. Might mean letting your partner know that you really want her or him to wear some sexy underwear.

And those are trivial things, but it also can be really important things like, no, I'm not happy living here. I want to move back to where I grew up or I know you love this house, but I really don't want to purchase this house, or it could mean being really authentic about some sort of need that is not being met in your marriage.

The problem is that authentic peacekeeping can potentially shatter the myth that their partner will meet all of their needs, never be attracted to others, and only love them unconditionally, which are all myths by the way. So to show this kind of imperfection and not be afraid of your partner falling into depression or leaving you takes the kind of courage that most people don't—I don't want to say don't have—maybe haven't found yet inside of themselves. And people hide their true feelings. This is

an important point to mention is that people hide their true feelings and their needs, and their desires for really one of two reasons.

The first is the fear of being vulnerable and being rejected. So if I tell my spouse or my partner, or my wife, or my husband what I really want, what I really feel, what I really need, she might reject me or he might reject me. The other reason for hiding one's true feelings is the fear of hurting the other person. This sometimes hurt can manifest as anger and some people go to anger quickly, but there's always pain or fear underneath anger. So it can be about not rocking the boat for the other person, not wanting that other person to be upset or broken hearted. So I hope that explains the difference between authentic and false peacekeeping.

Scott: Sure does, and what problems exactly do you see couples experiencing in the relationship when it comes to peacekeeping? I know you kind of touched on that a little bit, but could we drill down on that point a little deeper?

Noah: Sure, yeah, well, couples have all kinds of problems. There are common stressors that affect most marriages like finances, having children, big life adjustments, cultural changes with traditional roles, sexuality, these are very common issues that couples struggle through. But then there are other ones that are less talked about that really affect marriages and many of them have to do with myths or where I would say false expectations about what marriage is.

So many people, especially women, tend to expect their husbands or their partners to be their prince charming. There's this prince charming myth that their husband will only have eyes and only ever be attracted to them. Men tend to have an expectation around this Madonna/whore complex where they expect that they falsely, wrongly, inaccurately expect that their wife will always want to have sex with them or on the other side expect that their wife is going to be this pure, innocent Madonna-like figure.

So people have these expectations about who their partner is and it's only after we're in the marriage for a while we're past that honeymoon period that we really discover who our partner is and it always doesn't often match. So there are a lot of false expectations in marriage that people have. False expectations like one I already mentioned that my partner would only have eyes for me.

Another big one is that my partner will fulfill every need of mine. Another one is that my partner is going to love me always unconditionally. And if you've been married long enough, you understand that marriage includes unconditional love as well as conditional love because there are some things we're just not going to put up with. We're not going to put up with

addiction or abuse, emotional abuse, so there are a lot of common stressors and a lot of these sort of common expectations that really affect marriage.

And how it relates to peacekeeping is that, yeah, the content of these problems matter, but it's really the process by which people deal with them, the process by which they communicate about them or don't communicate about them which is just as important because the biggest myth about marriage is that a happy marriage is one without problems. And that's simply not true.

I see sometimes very young couples going into a marriage without expectation and I'm feeling for them because that's going to be shattered. Marriages are going to have problems, and that's okay. It's what we do with those problems. How do we communicate about those problems? And if we are peacekeeping authentically, we're more likely to get through those problems in a... I kind of want to say a happy way. We're more likely to get through those problems.

If we false peacekeep, we're not going to solve the problems. We're just going to put up with it. We're going to throw our hands into the air, we're going to hope it gets better, and just stick around out of loyalty or out of duty, or for the kids, and that just leads to unhappiness.

Scott: Will you say that can really affect the marriage? So what are some of the short and long-term negative affects that you're talking about that this type of behavior can actually have on a relationship?

Noah: Yeah, so when couples use false peacekeeping, their partner might not be upset in the short-term because you're avoiding the conflict, you're not rocking the boat, but over the long-term that practice of not rocking the boat will lead to unhappiness for both partners. The partner keeping the false peace is going to suffer from unmet needs and the other partner receiving the white lies or not getting the feedback that's really there inside the other person will eventually face the false reality, being shattered by the truth that their partner actually desperately wishes they would—and you could just fill in the blank here—or that their partner is not the mythical perfect creature who exists to meet all their needs. So eventually that fantasy will shatter.

So when people in a relationship or a marriage do what I call exiling parts of themselves, when they exile parts of themselves, cut parts off, don't speak for their needs, don't speak for their feelings, it leads to growing apart, it leads to resentment, it leads to unmet needs, lack of fulfillment, can lead to unhappiness, depression, and it can lead to going outside the marriage, affairs and infidelity, and eventually divorce. So unfortunately, I

believe that the high divorce rate in our country is influenced heavily by this tendency to use false peacekeeping.

Scott: Can you go too far the other direction in your opinion? With the authentic peacekeeping, is there something that is way too brutally honest or radically honest, or you advocate that 100%?

Noah: Well, if you are coming from a place of compassion and you have a good heart and you're sensitive, there's a way to communicate that as non-violent. That might still be hard for the partner to hear, but doesn't come from a bad place. If you're sarcastic or cruel, or you're somehow sadistic, you enjoy hurting your partner, yeah, it can go too far. So those are difficult conversations that are better to happen than not happen because then the other person can decide whether or not they're willing and able to meet their partner's needs. But beating around the bush, avoiding it, pretending like it doesn't affect you is not going to get you anywhere in the long-term.

Scott: Do you think there is a tendency? I'm kind of hearing this from one side that we hold things back. Do you ever see in relationships a tendency where the other partner doesn't want to know certain things?

Noah: Yeah.

Scott: Is that another same type of false expectation or false peacekeeping?

Noah: Yeah, absolutely and so the partner knows that, and so they're afraid of rocking the boat because their partner either gets really sad, really depressed, really angry, really upset, and so you begin tiptoeing around the other partner's needs. And that's very common to sort of be walking on eggshells and tiptoeing because the other person is very sensitive.

Scott: Well, at what point in time then do you see that couples are becoming aware that this false peacekeeping is hurting the relationship?

Noah: Well, that's the problem. Most couples whose marriages or relationships are struggling don't realize when there is peacekeeping going on, that it is going on. And most couples have no idea that their attempts to save their marriage by avoiding conflict will actually lead toward the failure of the marriage. And when I say failure of the marriage, I mean either divorce or years of unhappiness. So the problem is couples don't become aware of this generally until either they get into counseling or it's too late.

Scott: How common would you say this is? Have you observed any trends among couples that are having this issue?

Noah: Well, I don't have any quantitative research that I can cite. I haven't done research myself, but I can tell you that peacekeeping has been a part of...I've seen peacekeeping in nearly every couple that I've seen in my practice. So some more than others, but it's not a black or a white thing. It exists in most marriages on a continuum. So some do it a little, some do it a lot.

Scott: Well, if I'm going to be honest, I'm guilty.

Noah: Most of us are.

Scott: So I definitely want to ask the next question then. What do you suggest that couples do to correct their ways of peacekeeping inside the relationship?

Noah: Yeah, well, oftentimes people just need information. This show itself could be really helpful for people changing their lives and changing their marriage with just a little what we call cycle education. It's easy for people to see how their pattern of false keeping can lead to unhappiness and many can then make the effort. Difficult as it might be, they can make that effort to have authentic conversations with their partner about their needs or their desires, or their hopes, or their fears.

So many people at this point, once they get it, once they see it, and they understand it, benefit from learning some basic communication skills that can assist them in having those authentic and what I would say tender conversations, because when we're going to use authentic peacekeeping, it's really important that we do it from a compassionate place where we're speaking calmly and compassionately about our own needs rather than blaming the partner, rather than focusing on what they're doing wrong, or focusing on the past. We need to talk about our needs, we need to talk about it in present or future tense, and not focus on what the other partner is doing wrong.

So those folks that understand the benefit of practicing authentic peacekeeping but still have difficulty putting it into action can oftentimes benefit from psychotherapy. And psychotherapy can help to identify what the fears are that are preventing them from practicing authentic peacekeeping and help them to work through them.

So for example, those who are afraid their partner will reject them for their needs, individual therapy will often focus on helping that person to heal past experiences that have burdened them with old feelings of rejection or worthlessness because that's what's holding us back. We've been rejected in the past and we're afraid that if we say how we really feel or if we really show our most vulnerable parts that we're going to be rejected. So we need

to work on that rejection and it's there because of old rejection. And if we heal up the old rejection, what happens is we have more self-compassion, more self-acceptance, more self-esteem, more confidence and with that comes the courage to be vulnerable, and to be authentic to have that radical authenticity.

On the other side, for those who are afraid their partner will feel hurt or wounded, or rejected, or angry if we're authentic with them, if we use authentic peacekeeping, individual therapy can focus on identifying what their partner's hurt or their partner's pain will trigger internally. And working through those triggers in such a way that the person is less triggered by their partner's reaction because that's what happens is if I'm tiptoeing, walking on eggshells around my partner because if I tell her how I really feel, she's going to fall apart or I'm afraid she's going to fall apart, I'm not really afraid of her falling apart. I'm afraid of how I'm going to feel when she falls apart.

It's sort of how a lot of men are afraid to hold babies or don't know what to do with a crying baby. It's that same thing. Well, what do I do with this? And it can increase our anxiety. We can feel helpless and powerless. We can feel bad. We can feel guilty. We can feel ashamed for causing it. And so individual therapy can focus on identifying what one's reactions are to their partner when their partner is falling apart.

But the beautiful thing is that if you do this in couples therapy, both partners can be assisted in staying in that calm, compassionate place where they're less likely to have an intense reaction. And if they do have an intense reaction, there are therapists there and there is an expert in helping people to stay centered and grounded, and to work through it.

So I guess what I would say is that marriage counseling can be useful for both learning those communication skills and doing the internal work to identify what's interfering with the authentic peacekeeping and practicing that authentic peacekeeping with the help of a therapist.

Scott: Well, with couples approaching peacekeeping authentically and starting to put that into practice, and starting to learn some better communication skills, what are some of the changes that you're seeing in the relationships?

Noah: Well, if authentic peacekeeping is carried out in a healthy way using non-violent communication skills, it leads to curiosity and compassion for each other. When two people can sit with each other, and hold and embody that state of being curious for each other, and being compassionate for each other, and moving aside their defenses, and their protections, people will begin to have compassion for each other's needs because when someone can speak for why they really need their husband to stop drinking or their

spouse to stop being critical, and that can be explored in great depth, what happens is that we start to really get it. We start to really understand why that's important for the other person.

And even though we might not agree with them or maybe we can't meet their needs, or maybe we're scared of it, maybe we don't know how we're going to meet their needs, we can still begin to understand, have compassion, and truly get why that's important for the other person. So that's one of the beautiful things that can happen about it.

The other thing that happens is there is great relief in getting feelings off one's chest. If you've been holding stuff in for a long time and feeling like you're just not satisfied and just not happy getting your needs met in your marriage, and you have been withdrawing, and being distant as a result, and starting to kind of lose your attraction to the other person, these are all the things, the negative things that can happen when you hold stuff in.

There is so much relief in getting those feelings off your chest. So once those feelings are off your chest and your partner has heard them compassionately, and begins to understand them, there is so much hope for happiness, so much hope.

Now, it's true that just because we get something off of our chest that our partner may not necessarily get it. Some people will be stuck in that situation. Some people will have partners that maybe won't have compassion for it. It might be a deal breaker, but once the problem is out in the open and you've made your need known, it's really the ball is in the other person's court. The other partner has an option. They can decide if they're able to meet that need or to compromise, or to collaborate on a solution.

Absolutely, some relationships won't last. It could be a deal breaker, but that's better than living a life of pretending to be happy and keeping an emotionally distant marriage. And unfortunately, this is where many people are stuck. People are oftentimes afraid to put their need out there because they're pretty certain it could be a deal breaker for their spouse and they're so afraid of being alone, so afraid of going through a divorce, and rightly so.

It's probably the most stressful thing that you could through is a divorce in terms of the stress, the financial stress, the heartache. It takes a lot of courage to live your life authentically and to be transparent, and authentic about who you are, and what your deepest needs and desires are. And some people spend the rest of their life holding those inside.



I don't recommend it. I would choose the risk of a separation over hiding who I am, and I would want the same for my partner. And let me tell you that I would hope that everybody would want their partner to be authentic because to wake up someday and realize that your partner has been pretending, that who your partner is, who you think they are, is not really who they are, but they've been holding stuff in, that they have this secret life of needs and desires that they're not sharing with you. It doesn't matter whether they're getting those needs met elsewhere, having an affair. It still is a betrayal in a lot of ways to not know who your partner is.

So in the same way that all of us probably want our partners to be themselves with us, they want us to be ourselves with them even if it means not being able to work it out, even if it means the end of the marriage.

Scott: Wow, what a fascinating discussion. This could go on for quite a long time I could imagine, but kind of in a way of parting, do you think there is anything else that our listeners should know about this topic?

Noah: Well, I would just say if you're stuck, seek help. There is nothing wrong with reaching out for help. In our culture, we're taught to suck it up, don't show any weakness, don't show vulnerability. And many people, because of that feel like it means that somehow they're weak or they're not good enough, or incapable if they go to get some coaching from a therapist, or to get some help from a therapist. You're not. We all need help at times.

If you're stuck, I really encourage you to reach out and I'm going to put in a shameless plug, I am the founder of GoodTherapy.org. We have over 7,000 therapists worldwide in 30 countries, and probably someone in your area who can help you with this. So check out GoodTherapy.org if you want more information about how marriage counseling works, how therapy works, or to find a therapist.

Scott: Absolutely. Noah, thank you so much for talking with us and being on the show today.

Noah: You are so welcome, Scott. It was a pleasure. Thank you.

Scott: To find out more about Mr. Noah Rubinstein and his practice, GoodTherapy.org, you can visit their website at [www.GoodTherapy.org](http://www.GoodTherapy.org). 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 previous episodes, visit us at [StayHappilyMarried.com](http://StayHappilyMarried.com). I'm Scott Blair. Until next time, stay happily married.

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