

# Every Couple's Dilemma

The Number 1 cause of poor communication: To be truthful?  
Or to be protective?

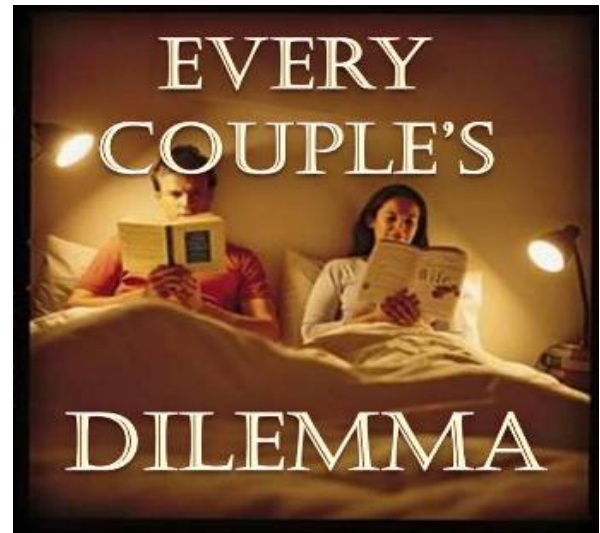
**There are only two ways couples can communicate - truthfully or protectively.** You cannot do both at the same moment in time. These are a dilemma in the same way that it cannot be both night and day at the same time. We have no choice but to give up one in order to have the other. You cannot protect your partner from what s/he doesn't want to hear, and also be truthful about what's really going on inside you.

**When you first got married, you started out aiming to be truthful.** You told each other how you really felt, what you really thought and what you really wanted. You felt safe and love blossomed. Your trust felt deep and unshakeable.

**However, you didn't really know each other.** The first years were the big wake-up call. It was different living under the same roof, sharing the same finances, families and daily habits that grate on nerves. Conflicts occurred and truths emerged. How they got resolved determined whether you grew more truthful or more protective.

**You stopped being entirely truthful about core issues.** There was a simple reason - it hurt too much. You argued. It went nowhere. It wasn't worth it anymore. You began to distrust how your partner would react. You didn't want to upset him or her. Frankly, you didn't want to deal with the emotional pain yourself. It simply took too much time and felt too intense. Issues drifted and real communication stopped.

**Telltale symptoms begin to appear.** Physical symptoms arise in the form of health problems for one or both partners. Unexplained illnesses appear that seem to be stress-related. Suppressing your feelings has that effect. Emotional symptoms also appear such as subtle digs and cold shoulders. Like a cat baring its



claws, couples learn to stay away from each other in case "truth" comes out! Partners avoid communicating by working long hours, hanging out with friends, or being super-involved in sports or children's activities. Often, they tragically give up their closest moment together - making love. A 'roommate' arrangement settles in that one partner seems to handle better than the other. Often, the other partner will feel resentful as suppressed feelings eat away at the very core of who they are.

**Truth aches to emerge.** Jesus said, *"The truth will set you free."* (Jn 8:32) Communicating in a protective way can have prison-like qualities. You feel safe behind a wall where your partner can't hurt you, but you can't get out either. At some point, at least one partner wants to break free and be truthful about how they really feel and what they really need and want. When he or she does, there can be great danger. Five to twenty-five years of resentments and hidden truths may explode out. Fear of this explosion of truth is the number one fear that keeps many couples anchored in protective mode.

**Protective couples are advised to get help even if only one partner reaches out.** Each must grapple with their fear that being truthful could mean the end of their marriage. The fear of this consequence is understandable, with children, family, friends, financial security and a feeling of failure and public shame all on the line. Yet to *not* be truthful leads to loneliness, despair and even depression. Truth must emerge or the health consequences will be severe. A therapist helps heal past wounds that hurt.

**Each partner needs to communicate truthfully in a more respectful way** if they want to feel more loved and joyful with each other. To do that, it helps to understand what caused truth to die in the first place. "DDD" caused it. DDD is an anti-communication syndrome which in mild cases, couples can live with. In acute cases, however, the couple's relationship will be in serious jeopardy.

**What is DDD? It is Deny-Defend-Deflect syndrome.** The DDD virus is wired into all of us from birth and its source is the ego. Common examples of DDD can be seen in everyday life at work and at home, with friends and with family. Nowhere are its effects greater than in how it blocks couples from communicating safely.

**Deny-Defend-Deflect is caused by "truthful" criticisms and judgments that tear down mutual respect.** They are our partner's implicit and explicit messages that we messed up and are not good enough. These hurt.

*"I did not say you are stupid!"* Deny.

*"Do you know where my shirt is?"*

*"I never touched your shirt!"* Defend.

*"Yeah, well I may be messy but you never do the shopping. I always get the groceries!"* Deflect.

**DDD is central to being protective by blocking out painful truths.** With years of repetition, DDD causes the ears to close, the heart to harden and love to die. Jesus described when his followers asked why Moses allowed divorce (*Deut 24:1*) but not he. Jesus said, *"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law."* (*Mk 10:5*)

**Furthermore, Jesus warned us of a major cause of DDD.** He said, *"Do not judge or you will be judged. And the way you judge you will be judged and the measure you use will be measured to you."* (*Mt 7:1*) Judgments trigger more judgments. They feed on each other like cancer cells that grow exponentially. Blame and finding fault become the main words spoken.

**We protect ourselves by denying our share of the responsibility for what's happened.** Dr. Scott Peck, Christian psychiatrist and author of bestseller *The Road Less Traveled*, wrote, *"Most people who come to see a psychiatrist are suffering from...disorders of responsibility."*<sup>1</sup> DDD is proof of this disorder. We deny in order to hide behind technicalities and assumptions. We defend to justify ourselves and we deflect so that the real issue never gets addressed. DDD is like a protective shield that bounces all responsibility back to the "enemy" – our spouse!

**DDD blocks communication and ensures issues don't get resolved.** The message never penetrates the other person's ears...or heart. Instead, issues get buried in counter-attacks or silent avoidance.

**Once a couple decides to be more truthful,** they need a safer way to communicate with each other. They need to overcome DDD so that real issues get addressed. What is their truth about money? About sex? About the household workload? About the kids? About core issues central to a happy life. Couples need to get to know each other on a deeper level. They also need to be honest with themselves first and foremost.

**Being truthful reveals the harmful ways that couples use to communicate.** This is the spiritual part of the journey. Each of us must take responsibility for our own role in any issue. This is behind every couple's communication struggle. It is like driving a car. One spouse may be behind the wheel but either partner can try to control how the driver drives the car on that occasion. Getting what we want from each other can lead to harmful communication habits. In order to

1. *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck, 1978, p35

break out of the dilemma of truthful vs protective, we must communicate with our partner in a way that feels safe, supportive and respectful.

**A solution offered by The Institute for Present Living & Learning is a communication tool called *Who's The Driver?*<sup>™</sup>** It is for couples who want to communicate in a safe, positive and truthful way and enjoy each other more. Developed by couples coach and business leadership expert John Kuypers, it borrows a simple and effective leadership idea from the business world: Who has the 'right to decide'?



## Couples Communication Tool

***Who's The Driver?* teaches communication as being like two people driving a car.** The driver is the one who 'owns' the issue and the passenger is the one affected. Therefore, both have justifiable reasons to want to control where the "marriage-mobile" is going. But both cannot control the steering wheel or the car will crash. This is every couple's dilemma...who gets to decide on issues that affect both of you. *Who's The Driver?*<sup>™</sup> is a communication tool that provides a common language to decide each partner's role and responsibility for any issue worth talking about!

**There is no need to Deny-Defend-Deflect when a couple agrees on who gets to decide.** That's because each person's role is clear. Couples examine any issue in their marriage and make clear decisions about who's the driver and who is in control of the driver. The tool overcomes the blurriness that causes couples to blame and hurt each other – exactly what causes the DDD

syndrome to become inflamed and communication to break down in the first place.

***Who's The Driver?*<sup>™</sup> is non-judgmental.** The tool dramatically reduces the feeling of being personally attacked. With time and consistency, the couple embraces each other's truth, accepting that which they cannot control and taking responsibility for that which they can control. Truth, when blended with tolerance, leads to a deeper trust. Love becomes much more vulnerable, growing along the way.

### Couples are enthusiastic about *Who's the Driver!*

*"John, thank you for the workshop. We have been using many of your examples as we begin to engage (or) when we are in the middle of arguments or as I like to call them "intense" conversations. Your strategies have helped us regroup and regain ourselves."*

*"Learning the Near-Far spectrum was very helpful. It is so true once you see it!"*

*"Attend! It is a real eye-opener!"*

*"It's a common sense approach to interpersonal communication."*

**For couples who want a more truthful marriage** where they can safely communicate about any issue, we encourage them to learn this positive, practical yet spiritually-anchored communication tool. It is offered in dinner theatre-type workshops, conference events and internet training programs. For more information about the *Who's The Driver?*<sup>™</sup> couples communication tool, go to [www.whosthedriver.com](http://www.whosthedriver.com).

*John Kuypers is a leadership expert and couples coach. He is founder and director of The Institute for Present Living & Learning, a Christian-based organization dedicated to improving the quality of relationships at home and at work. John teaches the *Who's The Driver?* communication tool to couples or married individuals who want to enjoy being married for life and have a life being married. Go to [www.presentliving.com](http://www.presentliving.com) to learn more about programs and tools available for couples communication and leadership.*