

The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter

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“I’m Sorry” and “I Forgive You”

May of 2008 marks the 1st anniversary of *The North Fulton Marriage Newsletter*! It is hard to believe that it has already been a year. Writing this newsletter has been a rewarding process for me and has helped me organize my thoughts related to marriage and marriage counseling. Thanks to all of you who are regular readers. I hope that you continue to find the newsletter to be a valuable resource.

I often say that if I only had a few seconds to work with a couple, I would tell them two things: “Learn to say I’m sorry and learn to say I forgive you.” Saying and genuinely expressing these two sentiments can work wonders for any human relationship but especially for a marital relationship. Too often couples feel the need to be right and avoid accepting blame. If you say the wrong thing, or act like a nitwit, fine. Everyone makes mistakes. Please just learn to say at some later point, “I should not have said that, I’m sorry” or, “I was a nitwit, I’m sorry.” To borrow a phrase from a previous newsletter, this is a quick way to “defuse an argument.” Marriage, in many ways, is simply about conflict management and resolution. Some people may say “Oh, that sounds so harsh and depressing, marriage should not be that way.” Well, as one of my former supervisors used to say “the reality is” managing conflict and resolving problems is an integral part of life. And, being effective at managing conflict and resolving problems allows us to enjoy marriage and ultimately find joy in our relationships. If you genuinely say “I’m sorry,” then you are accepting blame. This is a good thing. If you genuinely say “I forgive you,” then you are moving on and letting go. This is a good thing. It is also important to note that the delivery of these statements is just as important, or more important, than the words themselves. This is where the “genuine” part comes into play. For example, if you say, “I’m sorry for how I acted but you really made me angry,” not good. If you say, “I’m sorry for how I acted but I was really irritated,” not bad but not great. If you say, “I’m sorry for how I acted, I was irritated and I let my emotions get out of control,” much better. Notice that the “but” in the first two examples takes away from the “I’m sorry” because it makes the statement conditional and not truly remorseful. The first statement also includes a “you,” which externalizes the blame onto the other person. The last statement does not include a “but” or a “you.” Tone of voice is also important. For example, if you made the last statement to your spouse but used a hateful tone or hateful body language, the statement would no longer be genuine nor would it be effective. Your spouse will be smart enough to read your tone of voice and body language to determine if you are being authentic. So, be ready, an unauthentic “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you” could do more harm than good. You must be genuine to be effective!

Below are a few tips to remember when attempting to resolve a conflict with your spouse:

- Learning to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you” will help you defuse arguments with your spouse.
- We all make mistakes, be willing to admit when you are wrong.
- Conversely, be willing to forgive your spouse when they admit they were wrong
- The delivery, that is your tone of voice and body language, are just as important as the actual words.

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