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Stories- Identifying and Disarming

As you have worked with me, I am sure I have referred to what are called “our stories”. Stories, from my experience, are what the unconscious creates in order to make sense of something outside of ourselves that does not fit what we would do in a similar scenario. In order to make some sense, we will create a “story”. Of course, when something doesn’t fit in our minds, we will feel some measure of fear and therefore, we know that the limbic system engages from a flight or fight place and we will create the story from that place. Let me give you an example:

“Tom, do you want to go to the Miller’s on Saturday night for dinner?”

“No”. Said in a curt and short manner.

You walk away and your brain immediately starts to create a story about why Tom responded as he did. You say things like, “That was kind a a snotty answer. He never wants to go anywhere with me. All he wants to do is stay home on his stupid computer. That computer is more important to him than me!” You will then decide, “Fine, I will just go without him and see if he likes it or even notices!”

Now, you can see the chain of events as such: 1. Other behavior 2. Our interpretation of “other behavior” 3. Feelings about other’s behavior and then finally 4. Acting on those feelings.. all based on a story that you made up about why Tom said what he said.

I hope this sounds a bit familiar. We make stories up about store clerks, other drivers and of course, those who are most near and dear to us. For one day, try to notice how many stories you make up about why people do what they do. That is the first step: Noticing that you do, indeed, make up stories.

Now, let’s take a look at how to be responsible for our own stories and how to disarm them. If you have tried the exercise above, you can see how crucial it is to be able to identify that you have actually created a story. How can you disarm something you are unaware of creating? Once you can see you have created the story, try to feel some ownership. No matter how justified you feel (e.g., “Tom never wants to go out”), you are still responsible for the story. Once you can take ownership, really take yourself to task (without shaming) about how accurate that story is? (“Okay, so Tom does go places with me.”) Second, watch how you are labeling the other’s behavior. For example, instead of saying to yourself, “Tom was being mean or he is being such a jerk”, can you try, “That felt like a really

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curt response”. When you judge and label, there is no room for curiosity. You are then Judge, Jury and then Punisher. Describe the behavior without labeling it. Third, can you remember that much of how other’s respond is about them and not about us, and to get curious about what is actually happening with them instead of assuming we know. And much of our story is a result of our childhood. So, go check it out, instead of replaying your past, “Mom was always busy with her... and never had time for me”.

This might allow you to return to Tom and ask for a Dialogue.

“I noticed you had what felt like a pretty curt answer in response to my question about the Miller’s, can you tell me what was going on when you responded that way?”

Notice that you don’t have to tell your partner your story, you are just checking it out. **And then remember to Mirror.** Some of why he might not want to go might have to do with you. “Every time we go to the Miller’s, you disappear into the other room with his wife, and I get stuck alone with the husband and we have nothing to talk about.” And then Mirror him....

Remember 80/20; Remember you asked; Remember his world view is as valuable as yours.

You don’t have to agree that you do this, **and** this is his experience. Can you use the Dialogue Process to explore how this dynamic happens: How he contributes, how you contribute, how it might feel familiar to him and how it could be different. Obviously, the ultimate is when you asked Tom to begin with if he was interested in going to the Miller’s and he had an issue, he would have asked for a Dialogue and helped you understand his struggles instead of acting curt and short. (He might have made up a story that you wouldn’t be willing to listen and that he had no choice but to be mean).

I am hoping you can see that we can continue to act out of our feelings or we can choose to disarm them, get curious about them, share them well and not get stuck in them. Only then can we change our patterns.

So, try to identify some stories that you have created over the next week, and practice disarming them and/or sharing them with your partner.

“I have just made up a story about why you said that, can you help me understand why you said it that way?”