

What is my Relationships' Negative Cycle?

Section 1

The Negative Cycle

A pattern driven by reactive (usually angry or frustrated) emotions and behaviors (usually critical, blaming, or shutting down) that negatively reinforce each-other and get bigger with each round.

Underneath these reactive emotions and behaviors are more vulnerable, scarier feelings that are largely hidden in the 0-60 response of our automated reactions. This whole scenario is usually not helpful in communicating with our partner.

In other words, the negative pattern adversely effects communication and closeness between partners in a relationship.

Triggers

We get triggered by certain behaviors, even the subtle body language of our partner. A trigger involves a story we are telling ourselves about what our partner means by that behavior.

That story (usually irrational) triggers a strong emotional response (usually fight / flight / freeze) that then spurs our reactive emotions and behaviors. Those feelings and actions then trigger our partner's reactions and the cycle goes on and on, making us feel increasingly alone and disconnected from our partner.

What do We do When we are Triggered?

Usually when we are triggered we are going into a version of 'Fight or Flight'. Other times, we freeze, numb out, or get lost in hopelessness. Our behaviors then reflect these nervous system responses. Before we know it, we are yelling or bringing out the subtle criticism, getting defensive, withdrawing, threatening, crying, or we just shut down and don't say anything. There are a lot of different versions of this as you can see. And we all have our tried and true versions!

Whatever behavior that we tend to enact, even if it's really subtle, will usually trigger our partner and the cycle can thus go on and on.

Sound hopeless? It's not. In fact there's a lot you can do about it. It does take some knowledge about what your relationship pattern/s look like and the hard work of changing deep-seated habits of emotional expression and behavior. To help speed up your progress, you can get in the habit of focusing back on yourself rather than your partner and talking about yourself and not your partner when communicating. No blame lots of gain!