

Get Your Relationship Out of the Rut

by John Lampert, LMFT

There are relationship skills that are easy to learn and practice. Whether at home, in a restaurant, or on walks around the lake, many couples report an improvement in communication, by learning to make, *statements of empathy*.

A *statement of empathy*, is an essential ingredient, in the recipe for improved communication. Relationships are complicated, yet many couples find that they can get back on-track, and begin feeling more hopeful, through being more *empathic* with their partner. And, the good news is, improvement can occur after just a little practice.

Learning to deliver a *statement of empathy*, will not alone solve significant concerns, such as infidelity, trauma, financial crisis, or family dysfunction. But use of *empathic statements*, can get a couple out of the rut of unproductive arguments, that often seems to go nowhere. This technique gives the couple a starting point, to discuss the greater difficulties in their relationship.

Here's how it's done: A *statement of empathy* is one partner saying to the other, what they imagine the other is feeling – ie. "I can imagine right now you are, (fill-in the blank with a feeling, such as): disappointed or frustrated or irate." What makes this technique productive, is the demonstration of concern for, and attention to, the other person's feelings. This technique replaces the more typical escalating style of conflict, where each partner is accusing and attempting to out-debate the other.

Additional Tips for a more fulfilling relationship:

- Provide empathy
- Listen deeply
- Be interested
- Pause when angry
- Risk being honest
- Risk being vulnerable
- Use a supportive tone
- Choose strength-based language
- Resist casting judgment
- Invite fun and humor

