



WHEN COPING IS KILLING YOU – BY DR. DAVID HAWKINS

Coping is always a good thing, right? No, not necessarily. We've always been taught that coping with difficulty is a sign of strength. But what if coping with a temporary stressor turns into a way of accommodating and adapting to longer term stress?

Sandra and Tom came to The Marriage Recovery Center after years of trying short stints of marriage counseling. They had done what many couples do: reach a crisis point in their marriage, seek short term help, drop out of counseling and then only to repeat the pattern a few years later.

"I always thought that coping with my marriage problems was a sign of strength," the weary, 43 old mother of three told me. "I could always find the strength to keep plowing forward, even though my marriage problems remained unchanged."

"You went to counseling at times, right?" I asked.

"Yes, but each time we only went for a few sessions. Our schedules got in the way and I think Tom became uncomfortable when he was confronted. So, I adapted to our situation, telling myself it wasn't all that bad."

"Was that really the truth?" I said, looking firmly at Sandra.

She paused, letting the magnitude of the problem sink in.

“Yes and no,” she said.

Again she paused and looked at her husband, who was sitting and listening to her patiently.

“I think I found ways to explain our problems away. I told myself that all couples go through tough times. I told myself that things were not as bad as they were. I told myself that if I pushed Tom he would leave me, and I really didn’t want that.”

“Yes,” I said. “Many couples endure really bad times and tell themselves it is not so bad. That’s called denial: *Don’t Even Notice I Am Lying to myself*. We all endure lots of pain to keep things going just the way they are. We cope, adapt and accommodate, all the while killing ourselves and our marriages, and tell ourselves we are doing something good. This all prevents really change.”

Scripture tells us that the truth will set us free. (John 8:32) It is actually *facing the truth and applying it to our lives that will set us free*.

I then asked Sandra and Tom to do something that is often quite painful. I asked them to write out all the ways they adapted to their painful marriage. I asked them to write all the ways they told themselves things were not as bad as they are. What forms of denial did they use to keep things stable in their marriage? Asking these questions can help to determine if you are being truthful with yourself and subsequently, what can be done to honestly face your challenges and overcome them.

Here are some additional steps to take:

First, *be completely honest with yourself about your situation.* As you consider your situation, are you fiercely candid with yourself? You cannot change what you do not own. You cannot change something if you don't see the situation realistically. Write down the way things are. Talk to a friend about the facts of your situation.

Second, *determine if you have been coping, adapting or accommodating.* Write down the ways you have been coping and note the impact this coping has had on you. Explore why you have been coping instead of facing issues candidly. Again, honesty is critical.

Third, *face your fears of telling yourself the truth.* If you have been accommodating out of fear, acknowledge this to yourself, and perhaps a trusted friend or counselor. Take inventory on the impact this is having on you and your relationships. Acknowledge that accommodating out of fear keeps you trapped and reinforces a weakness in another.

Fourth, *choose to act with integrity and honesty.* Set out to interact in a healthier, clear and more honest manner. From your Clear, Calm, Compassionate Self, *let your feelings inform you, not control you.* As you listen to your feelings and discern a better course of action, you can address the problems with honesty. Every time you do this you will strengthen your inner Self, and will stop enabling a destructive process. Denial falls away and truth emerges.

Finally, *stay the course.* Perfect practice makes perfect. As you set out on this journey you will rediscover lost parts of yourself. As you stop adapting and accommodating others, you will come to know yourself better and have healthier, more honest relationships. You will find your relationships becoming more vibrant, alive and filled with respect and integrity. From this new position, you will have more self-respecting and will be better able to respect others.

Do you really want to be healed?

Are you ready to give up harmful actions?

If you would like our professional support, please go to our website, www.marriagerecoverycenter.com or call us at 206.219.0145 to find out more about our services.

marriagerecoverycenter.com | 206.219.0145