

### **Have the problems you are having**

Life, family, marriage, and parenting presents you with a set of problems that are not meant to be solved, fixed, or erased. When you set yourself against this you resist one of the essential truths about family life and living.

The simple truth is that every single person comes with a set of problems. When we want to be in close relationship with people who do not cause us some difficulties then we are avoiding reality. Simply put, not wanting to have problems is what causes them.

Our reluctance to accept that people in families and marriages come with a set of problems causes the biggest problem of all - rejection. This reluctance rears its head regularly in everyday life. We can escape situations but we cannot escape people's essentially frail humanity.

People operate on the assumption that, if a relationship is healthy and fully functioning, they should not be experiencing problems. *People also believe that if one has problems then it must be a sign that something is wrong. Not true.*

Problems in relationships are inevitable. The degree to which people can inhabit the inevitable problems of relationships will determine its success. Research shows that elderly couples that are happy have as many problems as unhappy couples. The difference is that the happy couples accept their partner's foibles with good humour and tolerant acceptance. Unhappy couples are always trying to make their problems go away!

For this reason one can say that many problems are blessings in disguise if the people involved can develop curiosity about why the problems exists rather than a compulsion to eliminate them.

An associated myth is the belief that we are able to pick the right person to be with – that is a person who won't cause us some serious problems. The truth is that we all pick the wrong person but some of us are able to deal with the effects of this better than others. Love is about being the right person when with the wrong person. This is what makes relationships work.

So what must you do? Well, you must *have the problems you are having!*

For parents of toddlers it means realizing that parenting skills do not all come naturally, that little children are supposed to be defiant, that parenting is exhausting, that it seems like other parents find it easy, that one's mother or mother-in-law is not supposed to agree with your parenting strategies, that you cannot change the temperament of a child, that you will never feel like a good-enough parent, etc. In other words, a lot of the distress experienced by parents is caused by beliefs that there should not be problems.

For parents of teenagers it means realizing that adolescents have not developed the emotional intelligence, yet, to be understanding of their parents, that how they treat you is *not* how they will treat others, that teenagers have to practice bad behaviour on

their parents, that you cannot ever fully control your teens, that parenting is supposed to be difficult, etc.

For spouses and people in emotionally committed relationships it means accepting that you and your partner are not supposed to agree on everything, that you need to have a good fight once a month, that you will never change each others personality, that its okay if he or she hurts your feelings from time to time, that some problems will never be solved and that's okay, etc.

Some marital or family difficulties are not problems at all! They are just a natural and inevitable part of life that we don't really want to accept!

Coming to terms with the inevitability of problems is what improves relationships. Couples become close not in spite of their problems but because of them!

The experiences that bring couples and families close together are always to do with overcoming some adversity or coming to terms with some problem. Every single couple that I ask, "what experiences in your relationship have brought you closer together?" usually have to do with how a problem was accepted and therefore transformed.

Being able to "rise above" a conflict is what enables people to remould themselves not against their problem but around it.

There are no perfect human beings! Persons can be found who are good, very good indeed, in fact, great. There do in fact exist many intelligent, brilliant, charming, rich, unflustered, ebullient, and highly successful people and yet these very same people can at times be boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed.

To avoid disillusionment with human nature, we must first give up our illusions about it.