

A ONE-PAGE THEORY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Crossroads moment: When concerned about something happening in the relationship, you can relate to your partner about it in one of several ways. You can take:

Path 1. ATTACK, defend, blame, accuse
You express some element of this concern, but in the form of a complaint that has the primary purpose of coercing, criticizing, or punishing **rather than of illuminating.**

"How come you always have so much to say to your friends and so little to say to me?"

Induces an **adversarial cycle**. Attack-attack or attack-defend.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner responds to the sting of the other's last comment by stinging back. Each turns the other into someone who can't listen.

FIX: you try to deal with your concern not by confiding what you feel but by means of action
I spend a long time on the phone with my friends to try to make Joanne jealous.

Path 2. AVOID, disengage, minimize: You *don't* express this concern. You fog out, numb yourself, smooth things over, change the subject to something less controversial.

I disregard my feeling of jealousy and say:
"Anything good on TV tonight?"

Induces a **withdrawn cycle**.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner's carefulness, politeness, avoidance, or walking on eggs stimulates the same in the other much as whispering stimulates whispering.

Path 3. CONFIDE, self-disclose, acknowledge: You express this concern; you bring your partner in on what you're feeling and thinking. (Or you take in, build upon, or confide your feelings in response to what your partner has just said.)

"I'm embarrassed to tell you this, but I'm **jealous** of how much fun you were having talking to Jane just now."

Induces an **empathic (collaborative) cycle**.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner's confiding, admitting, reaching out, comforting, looking at things from the other's viewpoint, and building on what the other just said makes the other automatically feel like doing the same.