Blaming other people or circumstances seems to be the way some people deal with conflict or unpleasant situations. When I think about a climate of blame in a marital relationship, I think of the negative effect it has on a marriage. Effects such as:

- Fear of taking a risk.
- Fear of taking responsibility.
- Fear of making a decision.
- Feelings of powerlessness and unhappiness for the spouse on the receiving end of all that blame.

Blame Protects One Spouse and Damages The Other:
Blame allows a spouse to put responsibility on their mate and everything other than himself/herself. It means your spouse doesn't have to experience the discomfort of looking at their own faults or take responsibility for the situation. If a spouse doesn't have to look at their own faults or take responsibility that means they don't have to change. It is the other person who needs to change…with the problems and the blaming spouse can stay in their comfort zone.

Abraham Maslow said, "One can spend a lifetime assigning blame, find the cause 'out there' for all the troubles that exist. Contrast this with the 'responsible attitude' of confronting the situation, bad or good, and instead of asking, 'What caused the trouble? Who was to blame?' asking 'How can I handle this present situation to make the most of it? What can I salvage here?""

If a spouse blames another spouse, encourage the blaming spouse to take responsibility and point that they are failing to have a responsible attitude. And, in doing so, are failing to get the most they can out of the situation.

Avoiding the Blame Game with Your Spouse
If there's one thing that can harm, or even destroy a relationship it's playing the blame game with your spouse. When something goes wrong, sometimes the natural tendency is to blame someone else.

As humans, we seem to instinctively search for someone to point the finger at, rather than taking responsibility for our own actions and feelings. When we feel slighted, we want someone to blame. When our needs aren’t being met, we want someone to blame. When things don't go the way we want them to, we want someone to blame. It's always easiest to blame those we most love. In this case, our spouse becomes the prime target.

Guidelines to help you face this struggle:
1. When something goes wrong, ask yourself what YOU could have said or done differently to avoid the situation in the first place.
2. Retrace your words, your actions, and your choices instead of pointing the finger at your
spouse.
3. Take full responsibility for your part in any situation that may arise.
4. Be ready to say I'm sorry. Apologizing is a great way to diffuse anger in another person. Even if it's not your fault, apologize for misunderstanding or anything that might have led you to believe things were going to be different.
5. If your spouse gets defensive and starts blaming you, try to diffuse your own anger by admitting if something was your fault, and then proceed logically by expressing the facts so that he or she sees where they might have gone wrong.
6. Count to ten before speaking when angry. That little saying our parents taught us is good to put into practice to avoid blaming your spouse, and saying mean words you might regret later.
7. Express words of thanks to your spouse when an argument is averted. A simple "Thanks for understanding and not blaming me," can go a long way.

Behavioral Terms for Couples with Blaming Problems

1. One spouse or spouse or partner repeatedly blames the other for the relationship difficulties and the relationship displeasure (If you weren't so crazy our marriage would be ok,- or -Our difficulty is you and your ideas,- or -If you would stop being so critical I'd be happy- etc.).

2. Both spouse or spouse or partners express displeasure with the relationship.

3. The blaming spouse or spouse or partner is very resistant to examining his or her role in the conflict.

4. The blaming spouse or spouse or partner projects responsibility for his or her behavior, ideas, and feelings onto the other spouse or spouse or partner.

5. Virtually all arguments result in being caught up in blaming instead of honest, open self-examination.

6. The blamed spouse or spouse or partner lacks reliable assertiveness and tends to terminate communication in a show of helplessness and frustration.

7. The blamed spouse or spouse or partner voices out feelings of low self-esteem and of not being valued by the other spouse or spouse or partner.

Long Term Goals for Couples with Blaming Problems

1. Remove or lower the incidence of spouse or spouse or partner blame.

2. Lower the anger that is often associated with blaming.

3. Lower the incidence of critical comments often associated with blaming.

4. Aid the blaming spouse or spouse or partner develop a less-unidirectional view of the causes of relationship difficulties.

Short Term Goals for Couples with Blaming Problems

1. Explain difficulties in the relationship in a respectful, calm way.
2. Each spouse or spouse or partner explain own actions that add to the identified difficulties (such as, avoid projecting all blame on the other spouse or spouse or partner).

3. Verbalize difficulties in the present tense instead of focusing on problems of the past.

4. Verbalize apprehensions about the other spouse or spouse or partner's behavior by using -I- messages, instead of disparaging the other spouse or spouse or partner.

5. Couple will keep a report an increase in respectful communication at home (such as, arguments are open and free from hostility).

6. Each spouse or spouse or partner will identify two new behaviors to engage in that will please the other partner.

7. Couple will keep a report of an increase in positive, complementary, appreciative comments made to other spouse or spouse or partner.

8. Assume responsibility for own behavior, ideas, and feelings.

9. Blaming spouse or spouse or partner keeps a list positive behaviors desired by other spouse or spouse or partner (instead than pointing out negative behaviors that trigger criticism).

10. Blamed spouse or spouse or partner settles to make efforts at engaging in positive behaviors that will please the other spouse or spouse or partner.

11. Blaming spouse or spouse or partner list times blamed spouse or spouse or partner has been commended for positive changes in behavior.

12. List rules of the relationship that cause hurt, anger, and blaming when they are broken.

13. Settle to a renegotiated set of basic rules that will increase satisfaction with the relationship if adhered to.

14. List outside stressors that put pressure on the relationship and lead to blaming.

15. Engage in difficulty-solving arguments with other spouse or spouse or partner and then voice out settlement on how to constructively cope with outside stressors (instead of reacting with anger and blaming).

**Interventions for Couples with Blaming Problems**

1. In individual therapy sessions, have each spouse or spouse or partner explain the difficulties in the relationship.

2. Discourage blaming and emphasize respectful definitions of difficulties that have their reasons in both spouse or spouse or partners' behavior.

3. Evaluate whether chemical dependence, physical or sexual abuse, or an extramarital affair is the reasons for most of the blaming in the relationship.

4. In conjoint therapy sessions, use modeling and reframing to encourage each spouse or spouse or partner to state difficulties in a respectful, non-degrading way.
5. Encourage and emphasize each spouse or spouse or partner's taking responsibility for how he or she adds to the difficulties instead of projecting all blame on the other spouse or spouse or partner.

6. Have each spouse or spouse or partner sign a therapeutic agreement indicating that he or she is partly responsible for the satisfaction or unhappiness in the relationship.

7. Have each of the spouse or spouse or partners separately present some difficulties, however minor, for which they feel they can admit partial responsibility and can settle to make positive changes.

8. Using modeling and praise, encourage and emphasize both spouse or spouse or partners' efforts at focusing on current difficulties instead than focusing on the distant past.

9. Encourage the blaming spouse or spouse or partner to give up anger about a hurt from the distant past and to practice healing forgiveness, instead than bitterness that only divides the couple.

10. Using role-playing and modeling, emphasize the use of -I- messages (such as, stating first what ideas and feelings were experienced, before stating the spouse or spouse or partner's behavior that started those ideas and feelings).

11. Using role-playing and modeling, to encourage assertiveness versus passiveness or aggressiveness as an effective method of voicing ideas and feelings.

12. Have each spouse or spouse or partner describe and then engage in two behaviors that he or she feels would be appreciated by the other spouse or spouse or partner, in order to provide examples of how each spouse or partner can take responsibility for increasing positive feelings in the relationship.

13. Have each spouse or spouse or partner report on a positive interchange that shows change and improvement in the relationship. Emphasize each instance of positive interaction, pointing what adds to its being positive.

14. Assign each spouse or spouse or partner to describe appreciation for two things each day that are positive to him or her about the other spouse or spouse or partner's behavior.

15. Teach the spouse or spouse or partners that each is responsible for his or her own behavior, ideas, and feelings, as each has a number of choices as a reaction to the other's behavior.

16. Assign the blaming spouse or spouse or partner to list positive behaviors that the blamed spouse or spouse or partner could begin to please the blaming spouse or spouse or partner (such as, focus on the position that is desired instead than the negative that is criticized).

17. Asked from the blamed spouse or spouse or partner an accord to make a reasonable, sincere effort to please the other spouse or spouse or partner.

18. Have the blaming spouse or spouse or partner review situations when he or she has complimented behavior in the other spouse or partner or spouse. Encourage and reinforce the blaming spouse or spouse or partner for changing to a position of praise from one of criticism.
19. Assist each spouse or spouse or partner in voicing out the basic rules of the couple's relationship (for example, that the husband should help with house cleaning, put the children to bed, and the wife in the other hand should assist in yard work).

20. Clarify how rules are being broken and how those violations evoke negative feelings.

21. Assist both spouse or spouse or partners in renegotiating rules and roles that are reachable to each, as a means of reducing blaming behavior.

22. Have each spouse or spouse or partner list the outside stressors that are putting pressure on the couple's relationship.

23. Teach spouse or spouse or partners in using difficulty-solving techniques as a means of coping with outside pressures as a team, instead than shifting all the responsibility to one spouse or spouse or partner.

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