



The Emotional Needs Defined

Admiration

If you have the need for admiration, you may have fallen in love with your spouse partly because of his or her compliments to you. Some people just love to be told that they are appreciated. Your spouse may also have been careful not to criticize you because criticism may hurt you deeply if you have this need.

Many of us have a deep desire to be respected, valued and appreciated by our spouse. We need to be affirmed clearly and often. There's nothing wrong with feeling that way.

Admiration is one of the easiest needs to meet. Just a word of appreciation, and presto, you've made someone's day. On the other hand, it's also easy to be critical. A trivial word of rebuke can set some people on their heels, ruining their day and withdrawing love units at an alarming rate.

Your spouse may have the power to build up or deplete his or her account in your Love Bank with just a few words of admiration or criticism. If you are affected that easily, be sure to add admiration to your list of important emotional needs.

Family Commitment

In addition to a greater need for income and domestic responsibilities, the arrival of children may create in you the need for your spouse to become active in the moral and educational development of the children. I call that need family commitment. As is true for the need for financial and domestic support, if you do not have any children just yet, you may not sense this need. But upon their arrival, a change may take place that you didn't anticipate.

Evidence of this need is a craving for your spouse's involvement in the training of your children. When he or she is helping to care for them, you feel very fulfilled, and when they are neglected you feel very frustrated.

This is not just child care -- feeding, clothing or watching over children to keep them safe. Child care falls under the category of domestic support. Family commitment, on the other hand, is taking a responsibility for how the children will turn out, teaching them the values of cooperation and care for each other. It is spending quality time with your children to help insure happiness and success for them as adults.

But the need for family commitment is not met by just any form of training. It is only met when the training is enthusiastically approved by you. It can all be ruined if your spouse uses training methods and objectives that violate your standards. Your participation and agreement regarding training methods and objectives are essential before this need can be met.

We all want our children to be successful, but if you have the need for family commitment, your spouse's participation in family activities that guarantee that outcome will deposit so many love units that it will trigger your feeling of love for him or her. And your spouse's neglect of your children will threaten that love.

Affection

Affection is the expression of care. It symbolizes security, protection, comfort and approval -- vital ingredients in any relationship. When one spouse is affectionate toward the other, the following messages are sent:

1. You are important to me. I will care for you and protect you.
2. I'm concerned about the problems you face and will be there for you when you need me.

A simple hug can say those things. And there are many other ways to show our affection: A greeting card or an "I love you" note; a bouquet of flowers; holding hands; walks after dinner; back rubs; phone calls; and conversations with thoughtful and loving expressions. All of these can effectively communicate affection.

Affection is, for many, the essential cement of a relationship. Without it, many feel totally alienated. With it, they become emotionally bonded. If you feel terrific when your spouse is affectionate, and you feel terrible when there is not enough of it, you have the emotional need for affection.

Sexual Fulfillment

When you married, you and your spouse promised to be faithful to each other for life. You agreed to be each other's only sexual partner. You made this commitment because you trusted each other to meet your sexual needs, to be sexually available and responsive to each other. The emotional need for sex, then, is a very exclusive emotional need. If you have this need, you will be very dependent on your spouse to meet it. You have no other ethical choices.

But in most marriages, one spouse, usually the husband, has a much greater need for sex than the other. This tends to create a significant conflict if his need is not being met as often as he would like or the way he would like it to be met. That's why it is very important for you and your spouse to understand which one of you has the greatest need for sex, and how you can meet that need frequently and effectively for each other. Without that understanding and skill, you are likely to join the majority of marriages where the need for sex is not being adequately met.

Most people know whether or not they have a need for sex, but in case there is any uncertainty, I will point out some of the most obvious symptoms.

A sexual need usually pre-dates your relationship with each other, and is somewhat independent of your relationship. While you may have discovered a deep desire to make love to your spouse since you've been in love, it isn't quite the same thing as a sexual

need. Wanting to make love when you are in love is sometimes merely a reflection of wanting to be emotionally and physically close.

However, one dead give-away for having a sexual need is sexual fantasies. If you have imagined what it would be like having your sexual need met in the most fulfilling ways, you probably have a sexual need. The more the fantasy is employed, the greater your need. And the way your sexual need is met in your fantasy is usually a good indicator of your sexual predispositions and orientation.

The need for sex and the need for affection are often confused with one another. To help you sort them out, think of it this way: affection is an act of love (hugging, kissing, hand-holding, etc.) that is non-sexual and can be shared with friends, relatives, children and even pets with absolutely no sexual intent. However, if your affection tends to have a sexual motive, it is a symptom of your need for sex, not your need for affection.

If you tend to feel happy and contented when you make love, and you feel frustrated when you don't make love often enough or the way you want to make love, you have a need for sexual fulfillment.

Conversation

Unlike the need for sex, conversation is not an emotional need that can or should be met exclusively in marriage. Our need for conversation can ethically be met by almost anyone. But if it is one of your most important emotional needs, whoever meets it best will deposit so many love units, you may fall in love with that person. So if it's your need, it's crucial to your marital happiness that your spouse is the one who meets it the best and most often.

The need for conversation is not met by simply talking to someone. It is met when the conversation is enjoyable for both persons involved. Good conversation is characterized by the following:

- (1) using it to inform and investigate each other,
- (2) focusing attention on topics of mutual interest,
- (3) balancing the conversation so both have an equal opportunity to talk, and
- (4) giving each other undivided attention while talking to each other.

Conversation fails to meet this need when

- (1) demands are made,
- (2) disrespect is shown,
- (3) one or both become angry, or
- (4) when it is used to dwell on mistakes of the past or present.

Unless conversation is mutually enjoyable, a couple is better off not talking to each other at all. An unpleasant conversation not only fails to meet the emotional need, but it also makes it less likely that there will be an opportunity to meet the need in the future. That's because we tend to prevent our spouse from meeting our needs if earlier attempts were painful to us.

Men and women don't have too much difficulty talking to each other during courtship. That's a time of information-gathering for both partners. Both are highly motivated to discover each other's likes and dislikes, personal background, current

interests and plans for the future. But after marriage, many women find that the man who would spend hours talking to her on the telephone, now seems to have lost all interest in talking to her, and spends his spare time watching television or reading.

If your need for conversation was fulfilled during courtship, you also expect it to be met after marriage. And if you fell in love because your need for conversation was met by your spouse during courtship, you risk falling out of love if that need is not met during marriage.

Do you have a craving just to talk to someone? Do you pick up the telephone just because you feel like talking? If you see conversation as a practical necessity, primarily as a means to an end, you probably don't have much of a need for it. But if you use conversation "just to talk," and enjoy conversation in its own right, and are frustrated when you haven't been able to talk to someone for a while, consider it to be one of your most important emotional needs.

Recreational Companionship

Before you were married, chances are pretty good that you planned your dates around your favorite recreational activities. That's because when it's an important emotional need, recreational companionship can often deposit enough love units to trigger romantic love. And since you wanted your relationship to flourish, you probably chose activities that you both enjoyed.

But you may have made the mistake of doing whatever the one with the greatest need for recreational companionship wanted to do. That's what happened to my wife, Joyce, and me. She was willing to join me in all of the recreational activities I liked most -- right up to the day we were married. But after marriage, she announced that she would only be joining me in activities that she also enjoyed. And it turned out that she shared very few of my recreational interests.

Most couples whose marriages begin the way mine did make a crucial mistake -- they go their separate ways. He joins his friends in recreational activities he enjoys most and leaves his wife to find her own recreational companions for activities that interest her. That's a formula for marital disaster. If someone else of the opposite sex joins either of you in your favorite recreational activities, you are at risk to fall in love with that person. Besides, if you are not together when you are enjoying yourselves the most, you are squandering an opportunity to deposit love units.

Think about it for a moment in terms of the Love Bank. How much do you enjoy these activities, and how many love units would your spouse be depositing whenever you enjoyed them together?

What a waste it would be if someone else got credit for all those love units. And if it were someone of the opposite sex, it would be downright dangerous.

Who should get credit for all those love units? The one you should love the most, your spouse. That's precisely why I encourage couples to be each other's favorite recreational companions. It's one of the simplest ways to deposit love units.

The need for recreational companionship combines two needs into one. First, there is the need to be engaged in recreational activities and second, the need to have a companion. To determine if you have this need, first ask yourself if you have a craving for certain recreational activities. Then ask yourself if the activities require a companion for fulfillment. If the answer is yes to both questions, include recreational companionship on your list of emotional needs.

Honesty and Openness

Most of us want an honest relationship with our spouse. But some people have a need for honesty and openness -- it gives them a sense of security and helps them become emotionally bonded to the one who meets that need.

Those with a need for honesty and openness want accurate information about their spouses' thoughts, feelings, habits, likes, dislikes, personal history, daily activities and plans for the future. If their spouse does not provide honest and open communication, trust is undermined and the feelings of security can eventually be destroyed. They cannot trust the signals that are being sent and feel they have no foundation on which to build a solid relationship. Instead of adjusting, they feel off balance; instead of growing together, they feel as if they are growing apart.

Honesty and openness helps build compatibility in marriage. When you and your spouse openly reveal the facts of your past, your present activities, and your plans for the future, you are able to make intelligent decisions that take each other's feelings into account. And that's how you create compatibility -- by making decisions that work well for both of you simultaneously.

But aside from the practical considerations of honesty and openness, those with this need feel happy and fulfilled when their spouses reveal their most private thoughts to them, and feel very frustrated when they are hidden. That reaction is evidence of an emotional need, and if that is the way you feel, include honesty and openness as one of your most important emotional needs.

Physical Attractiveness

For many, physical attractiveness can be one of the greatest sources of love units. If you have this need, an attractive person will not only get your attention, but may distract you from whatever it was you were doing. In fact, that's what may have first drawn you to your spouse -- his or her physical attractiveness.

There are some who consider this need to be temporary and important only in the beginning of a relationship. Some feel that after a couple get to know each other better, physical attractiveness should take a back seat to deeper and more intimate needs. And I've even heard some suggest that those with a need for physical attractiveness are immature or spiritually weak -- even subhuman!

But I don't judge important emotional needs, and I don't think you should either. The question you should ask is, what need when met deposits the most love units? If it's physical attractiveness, it should not be ignored. For many, the need for physical attractiveness not only helps create a relationship, but it continues on throughout marriage, and love units are deposited whenever the spouse is seen -- if he or she is physically attractive.

Among the various aspects of physical attractiveness, weight generally gets the most attention. Almost all of the complaints I hear regarding a spouse's loss of physical attractiveness are about being overweight. And when diet and exercise bring the spouse back to a healthy size, physical attractiveness almost always returns. However, choice of clothing, hair style, makeup, and personal hygiene also come together to make a person attractive. Since attractiveness is usually in the eyes of the beholder, you are the ultimate judge of what is attractive to you.

If the attractiveness of your spouse makes you feel great, and loss of that attractiveness would make you feel very frustrated, you should probably include this category on your list of important emotional needs.

Financial Support

People often marry for the financial security that they expect their spouse to provide them. In other words, part of the reason they marry is for money.

But there are others who marry before financial security becomes much of a consideration. Yet, as years go by, if a spouse is unemployed, underemployed, the other spouse can become very frustrated and unhappy. The need for financial support seems to develop after they have been married for a while, especially after children arrive.

It may be difficult for you to know how much you need financial support, especially if you were recently married or if your spouse has always been gainfully employed. But what if, before marriage, your spouse had told you not to expect any income from him or her. Would it have affected your decision to marry? Or, what if your spouse could not find work,

and you had to financially support him or her throughout life? Would that withdraw love units?

You may have a need for financial support if you expect your spouse to earn a living. But you definitely have that need if you do not expect to be earning a living yourself, at least during part of your marriage.

What constitutes financial support? Earning enough to buy everything you could possibly desire, or earning just enough to get by? Different couples would answer this differently, and the same couples might answer differently in different stages of life. That's why this need can be difficult to meet -- it can change over time.

Like many of these emotional needs, financial support is sometimes hard to talk about. As a result, many couples have hidden expectations, assumptions and resentments. How much money does your spouse have to earn before you feel frustrated about his or her paycheck? Your analysis will help you determine if you have a need for financial support, and if so, whether or not this need is being met.

Another point to remember is that when an important emotional need is met, love units are deposited in very large numbers. In other words, if someone were to meet this need for you, might you fall in love with that person? Does a person's income or wealth make him or her more attractive to you? And are those without money unattractive? If so, you probably have a need for financial support.

Domestic Support

The need for domestic support is a time bomb. At first it seems irrelevant, a throwback to more primitive times. But for many couples, the need explodes after a few years of marriage, surprising both spouses.

Domestic support involves the creation of a peaceful and well-managed home environment. It includes cooking meals, washing dishes, washing and ironing clothes, house cleaning and child care. If you have the need for domestic support, when your spouse does some of these things, you feel very fulfilled, and when it is not done you feel very annoyed.

In earlier generations, it was assumed that all husbands had this need and all wives would naturally meet it. Times have changed, and needs have changed along with them. Now, many of the men I counsel would rather have their wives meet their needs for affection or conversation, needs which have traditionally been more characteristic of women. And many women, especially career women, gain a great deal of pleasure having their husbands create a peaceful and well-managed home environment for them. But on average, men still express this need more often than women.

Marriage usually begins with a willingness of both spouses to share domestic responsibilities. Newlyweds commonly wash dishes together, make the bed together, and divide many household tasks. The groom welcomes the help he gets from his wife, helping him do what he's been doing alone as a bachelor. At this point in marriage, neither of them

would identify domestic support as an important emotional need. But the time bomb is ticking.

When does the need for domestic support explode? When the children arrive! Children create huge needs -- both a greater need for income and greater domestic responsibilities. The previous division of labor is now obsolete. Both spouses must take on new responsibilities -- and which ones will they take?

At this point in your marriage, especially if you do not have children, you may find no need for domestic support at all. But if you find yourself very appreciative of your spouse's cooking, cleaning, washing and childcare, and are very frustrated when they are not forthcoming, make sure that domestic support is on your list of important emotional needs.