

IS IT A MISTAKE OR A PATTERN?

You know so much more about choosing the best partner for you than most people. You know how biology and family programming can lead you the wrong direction, and what to do about it. In the last lesson, you discovered the difference between reacting and responding to a situation.

In this lesson, you'll discover the difference between mistakes and patterns. A mistake is something everyone makes. It happens once, perhaps twice, and you learn from it. A pattern is an ingrained way of behaving which is difficult to change.

EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES

Wouldn't it be grand if people could watch an expert do something perfectly and copy that expert perfectly? And wouldn't it prevent much pain and suffering?

CONSIDER THESE EXAMPLES:

- If you did what the defensive driving expert said about stopping completely at the stop sign, you wouldn't have to pay that ticket.
- If you'd paid attention and put the lid on the blender, you wouldn't have raspberry smoothie decorating your cabinets.
- If you'd put your anniversary in your calendar as suggested, you wouldn't have to make it up to your disappointed and hurt partner.

There are big mistakes and little ones. **The little mistakes have easily managed consequences. The big ones have painful consequences.**

How would you handle things if one of you made a mistake with serious consequences? Dating is the time to discover how you respond to each other's mistakes.

When you first become aware of a mistake, no matter how painful, you will have feelings. They will range from disappointment, anger or rage, to devastation.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS EMOTIONAL PAIN

TRY THIS PROCESS TO DEAL WITH THE HURT OF YOUR PARTNER'S MISTAKE:

1. **Drain as much anger as possible without your partner present.** It's crucial for you and your partner to talk. You don't, however, want to say or do something which could damage your relationship.
 - **Write a letter you will not mail or give to your partner.** You may write another one later which you'll give them, but this letter is for your eyes only. It's purpose is to express, without holding back, everything you feel. Research shows the best way to do this is with pen and paper.
 - **Find an objective person to talk to.** An

objective person would be a therapist, coach, support group, crisis hotline, or religious leader.

- As much as you'd like to tell the gory details to your best friend or family member, remember they will probably take your side. What you tell them will affect their relationship with your partner.

2. **Write what you'd like to say.** This could be in letter format or in bullet points. Some people get flustered and can't remember what they want to express, so writing down notes can help.
3. **Sit down and talk.** Turn off all distractions: phones, television, or anything else that could detract from the conversation.

This process is for the most painful mistakes - the ones which have a serious effect upon your relationship. Each person is their own judge of a "serious effect."

What one considers a mistake, the other might believe is a pattern of behavior demonstrating a lack of respect.

PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR

Patterns of behavior are repetitive ways of acting which are so ingrained that you do them without thinking. Chewing fingernails and sucking your thumb are childhood examples.

A PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR IS DIFFICULT TO CHANGE BECAUSE:

- It's imprinted in your brain.
- It happens without thinking.
- It's stressful when not done.

A positive pattern is a routine which assists you in getting through the day. If something throws you off your routine, you need to refocus. Examples are those routines you need to begin your day, the ones at work, self-care, and similar routines.

A negative pattern harms you or another. Some of these patterns are worse than others. Even the mild ones can build up and cause emotional pain in another.

CONSIDER THESE NEGATIVE PATTERNS:

1. **Emotional abuse.** Belittling, demeaning, excessive or cruel teasing, sarcasm, and eye-rolling are all included in emotional abuse.
 - These behaviors are signs of insecurity in the one doing them and are painful for the one receiving them. They are extreme signs of disrespect. If you engage in, or are the recipient of, these behaviors please examine whether this is the best relationship for you.
2. **Physical or sexual abuse. These are serious issues and need intervention.** People have been able to overcome these behaviors if they commit themselves to working with a trained professional.
 - If you are the victim, you deserve better. Get assistance.
 - If you are the perpetrator, get help. You will discover happiness in ways you never thought possible when you overcome this.

3. **Addictions.** Addictions can include chemical, alcohol, gambling, sex, rage, shopping, internet, food, and more.
- **Addictions are behavioral and physiological.** There are emotional consequences to a challenge in the brain's response to the addictive substance.
 - **Did you know the brain lights up in the same way with sugar as it does with cocaine and heroin?**
 - Interventions are usually needed: support groups, therapy, abstinence, or similar help.

Indications of most negative patterns of behavior are present in the dating stage. The longer you date, the more likely they are to appear.

SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

A mistake is something which happens rarely and can have mild to severe consequences. A mild consequence is having to return to the store to get the eggs. A major consequence is running a red light and hurting or killing someone.

A pattern of behavior occurs on a regular basis. There are positive patterns and negative ones. These are more difficult to change and often require some type of intervention.

Before moving to the next lesson in which you will evaluate your non-negotiable characteristics, take a few moments to reflect on the following.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TODAY

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. List two of your daily routines which make life easier for you.
2. What pattern of behavior do you have which is destructive to you or another?

4. Does your partner have a pattern of behavior which is harmful to them or to you? If so, what are you willing to do about it?