We Need Each Other: So Let's get It Together

Everything we want is dependent on the quality of our relationships with other people. "Whoa", you might say, "I do plenty of things that don't involve other people; I'm a very independent person. I'm not (a snide tone of voice kicking in) co-dependent!" I'm not talking about co-dependence, but healthy interdependence. Our jobs, our food, the very air we breathe, are all dependent on others,

Biological evidence is building showing just how relationally hard-wired we humans are. In the past few years, research in infant studies has shown us that from forty-five seconds after birth, an infant registers and copies the physical movements of his caretakers on a minute scale. If Mom moves her left hand up, up goes the babe's hand. The movements are so subtle that it has taken our modern videotape equipment to discover this phenomenon.

In fact, we are so emotionally relational that (again, a recent finding) when two people are together and one person's brain neurons fire, the other person's neurons fire in the same way. Scientists call these newly discovered neurons "mirror neurons" for obvious reasons: One person's feeling or intention is picked up and mirrored by the other. Being able to sense the intention of another has survival benefits.

As children, if we do not feel emotionally safe and secure in our relationship with our caretakers, we often develop anxiety and depression. If we loved our caretakers, but were also scared of them, we can show disorganized behavior – going both towards and away from things and people at the same time. We learn to avoid our feelings and wants, because no one can help us with those feelings. In fact showing feelings can make things worse, so we learn to shut down, Later we dismiss feelings and wants of other people too. Given that we are both intentionally and non-consciously relational, how do we demonstrate 'relationship'? Relationship shows up in the ways we communicate. We communicate

through many aspects of our behavior. Most people think of communication as being the choice of words. And those word choices are important.

Long ago, we learned the value of communicating uncomfortable things with "I Messages." I didn't learn about "I messages" until the 70's, and wanting to use them to build a better relationship with my father. It sure helped. So I was delighted to learn that today in New York City some Grades K-5's learn "I Messages" and Assertiveness Skills. The listing in one curriculum states: *Teaching students these strategies to deal with problems that come up with friends can help create a more peaceable classroom.*

Another important skill with words can be helpful when we expect that bringing up a subject will cause trouble in a relationship. Learning Deep Listening Skills for stressful conversations can be extremely helpful

What many people don't know is that UCLA communication studies have shown that more than 90% of communication is not through words, but through non-verbal communication. That is, the expression on our faces and in our eyes, the tone of our voice, and our posture and gestures!

We are usually not paying attention to these things when we talk, and don't know our habitual ways of communicating. This can lead to being misunderstood. For example, one of my friends has deep squint lines between her eyes and many people think she is always angry. Another friend sighs each time someone asks her a question, and others often think that they are bothering her. Yet another person may be unable to make eye contact and is mistakenly distrusted as someone who is hiding something.

More and more therapists use video taping with clients (when they like). This way we can learn more about their important, but usually unknown communications. These non-verbal communications can make or break our relationships with those we need in every aspect of our lives. If you would like to learn more about yourself and how you communicate, with or without video feedback, please contact me at 310.838.6363 or www.drjanebolton.com.