

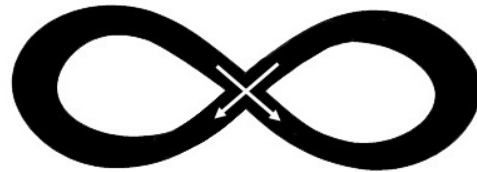
THE NEGATIVE CYCLE – YOUR COMMON ENEMY - THE PROBLEM YOU CAN BOTH WORK ON TOGETHER

PROTECTIVE BEHAVIORS

(Fight/Flight; Protests at disconnection & attempts to get connection/understanding
OR attempts to seek safety and comfort elsewhere or alone; withdraw, pull away)

SECONDARY/SURFACE EMOTIONS USED TO HIDE VULNERABILITY

Filtered through perceptions, thoughts, memories,
expectations, interpretations based
on this and past relationships



ALARM BELL
UH-OH!!!

Raw spots hit, unmet needs and longings
for a safe, secure, close relationship

Stirs deep, primary panic, anxiety, fears and feelings
About the Self, the Partner, and the Relationship

But not safe to express these vulnerable feelings and needs

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We all have needs to feel loved, cared for, treasured; to feel our bond is safe and secure (attachment needs and longings) from cradle to grave. When the needs aren't met by the person whose love we need, some try again gently, some fight to get them met (complaint, criticism, demands, pleading, control), and some inhibit or try to turn off the need (avoid conflict, withdraw, pull away, addictions, or turn to others for understanding and comfort). We may have begun to develop these ways of coping early in life. The brain has built neural pathways, reinforced over time, that lead us to cope in these ways automatically.

If it feels like our partner's behavior is threatening the safety or security of our bond → Our brain sounds an alarm bell based on our perceptions, thoughts, memories, and expectations from this relationship and relationships with parents and others → Our rapid filter leads us to feel fear about our current relationship, ourselves in this relationship. We experience a loss of safety and/or security of this bond, and if we can't vulnerably and with trust tell our partner about our deep, primary emotions (fear of being unlovable or rejected, seen as inadequate; fear of losing the relationship, being abandoned; etc.) and ask for what we need (soothing, reassurance of being loved, comfort, validation, understanding, safety and security in the relationship), and we can't get what we need → Our hearts will beat faster, adrenaline will flood our system, we'll lose blood from our pre-frontal cortex and we will move into self-preservation, not couple-preservation, and into fight or flight (maybe freeze some first), reacting from our secondary emotions (anger, frustration, irritation, disdain, contempt, disappointment, etc.) and with protective behaviors (numbing, fighting, blaming/criticizing, defending, withdrawing, avoiding conflict, addictions, etc.) to avoid vulnerability and longings → That will sound a similar alarm bell in our partner, → Who will then use his/her rapid filter, bypass primary emotions and needs, fill with adrenaline, lose blood from the pre-frontal cortex, and → React from his/her secondary emotions and with his/her protective behaviors → That again ring our alarm bell → And on and on.

Over time, the pattern becomes more and more rigid and happens more and more quickly, and as a couple, we feel stuck in these repeating cycles of isolation, disconnection, and pain. It is important to work together to stop these cycles, learn how each person affects the other (often unwittingly) and help the brain build new pathways that will lead to behaviors and reactions that will bring the other close, rather than push them to protect themselves. These positive cycles will lead to mutual connection, safety, security, trust and comfort.