

“Why Nobody Makes You as Crazy as the People You Love”

Thanks for taking a break out of your busy day to get an inside look at the work I do as a psychologist, a parenting expert and a marriage counselor. I am going to share a few secrets to the most important relationships in your life.

- I'm going to give you some ideas about why the people we love make us crazy as well as why we seem to make the people we love crazy as well.
- Why this intensity is one of the most powerful and healthy instincts that humans possess
- And a few hints about how to move past crazy towards a more passionate, powerful connection

Since this is only a short introduction to the work that I do, at the end I'll give you some information on the other classes and workshops I offer to support amazing relationships. There is no way I can cover everything in one short video, so I am going to take on the larger global issues. My classes offer a much more specific focus marriage or parenting strategies.

First of all, I assume you are a pretty normal, healthy person who cares deeply, wants to be loving and available and hates losing your cool, right?

Your friends think you're wonderful, work sees you as highly reliable and solid, you pride yourself on your communication skills and your ability to manage tough situations?

And yet, there are moments... the people that you love the most have seen those moments you are not so proud of, moments of snarkiness, defensiveness, panic, anger, cruelty, attack, tears, hateful fantasies, sullenness, keeping secrets, withholding affection, withdrawal... times you know you could star in your own reality series. Not your best stuff! For most, healthy responsible grown ups... these moments occur primarily with our parents, our partners and our kids..the people we call family... The people who we hold most dear, the people we value the most. And if you are honest with yourself, you can also see that you somehow seem to trigger that some craziness in the people that you love.

So why does love make us act like lunatics? What is different about those relationships?

Our parents, our partners and our kids make us crazy because those relationships are what we consider primary attachment relationships. Humans are wired to build family, to form bonds of attachment that protect us.

Even before a newborn is placed in its parents arms, attachment has begun. In utero- babies hear their parent's voices, and feel the emotions around them. Parents know that the first years of life are about building a

trusting safe relationship for their children so that their kids grow up to be great people. We build healthy attachments by responding to their cries, looking into their eyes, holding them and meeting their needs. And that connection goes with us, it sets us up for all the relationships in our future.

You might remember learning about attachment in school- the studies that showed that babies who were given food but not held suffered and often died, the studies of monkey babies who choose the soft, warm “fake” mommy over the one that just gave them food. We need love to survive.

Attachment has babies cling tightly to parents and make us love them so that we will not throw them to the wolves. They need us. Humans cannot survive alone in the world. We need community and family. Human children need parents for longer than any other species. We hang on for dear life.

And here’s the thing that completely changed the way I do marriage work- marriage creates the same kind of powerful attachment. When we touch and smile and respond, when sleep with someone, have sex with them, love them and begin to build a future together, we form a bond. We start to need them. We find comfort and security with them.

So this sounds wonderful. Safety, comfort, security. This is the magic of forming family with people. So how is it that forming attachment has us so often act like idiots?

And here's the thing... if you need something, you will fight like crazy to keep it. If you hold your breath, the will to live kicks in pretty fast. If you try to diet, your brain becomes obsessed with food. This is instinct. It guarantees the survival of our species. If you need the people that you love, then there are going to be moments when you fear the loss of that relationship.

The craziness has a few basic flavors-

- Abandonment- Sometimes we feel like the person we love isn't there for us. We feel abandoned, ignored, left to handle things by ourselves.

If you look at humans in our primitive history- pregnant and nursing mothers needed the protection of their tribe, they were very vulnerable. Being abandoned as a new mother puts the mother and the children at risk. Women often respond very strongly to a sense of abandonment, especially as mothers.

- Criticism- Sometimes we feel like the people that we need don't adore us, don't see who we are, don't believe in us. We fear losing their acceptance and positive regard.

Again, in primitive human history, men were valued as our warriors and protectors. They needed to be strong and powerful. Vulnerability was a sign of weakness and in our tribe of warriors, the weak men had low status and might lose his claim to his family or his community.

- Loss of self- As much as we want to be loved and part of a family and connected, we also don't want to lose our self, our individuality. We want to be us. Sometimes loving, being loved, being family can feel like it costs us our soul, our humanity.

I don't know but I think this loss of self is a fairly modern, very western concern. I think most of us are raised with high value placed on independence with fears of needing someone.

So those are the main three- Abandonment- I need you and you aren't here for me. Criticism- You mean the world to me and you don't see how wonderful I am. And loss of self- I want to be with you but not if it means I don't get to be who I really am.

Lets look at what these crazies look like for our kids-

Abandonment can get triggered every time the phone rings. Do you love me, will you respond to me? Mom! Mom! Mom!...I swear my kids can tell if I am having an independent thought and especially when they were little this would trigger a huge need to reconnect to me, to make sure I was really there.

Criticism with kids looks a lot like "YOU HATE ME" when you remind them to put their boot away. When we learn to parent our kids we need to figure out how to scold them just the right amount... we don't want them to fall off the cliff into shame and rejection but we need them to know that

whatever they have just done isn't acceptable behavior.

Our need for self expression is that beautiful thing that shows up first when kids hit what we call the terrible twos and they voice their first dissenting opinion and then rears its ugly head loud and clear when our children fight for teenage self expression through clothes and friends and hair color and piercings and tattoos... our children want to know that we love them when their opinion contradicts our own.

And somehow those reactions continue with us even into adulthood. We continue to want their attention long beyond our need for it... losing a parent in adulthood still feels like abandonment. Our feelings about the availability and acceptance strongly effect our relationships with our siblings who we cannot help but compete with. And however it went with our parents, we take those triggers and fears and needs into marriage. This is our "baggage".

If you had a perfect childhood and your parents did it all wonderfully - you go into adult relationships knowing how to ask for what you need, how to allow others to comfort you and how to respond with love and patience. But instead most of us go into adulthood with some pieces missing, some wounds. Our parents let us down at times, our parents with their own history and wounds parented less than perfectly.

And of course we end up marrying just the right person, with their own baggage that triggers ours, the person who makes us just the right kind of crazy and you marry the person who somehow asks you to help them

work through their own baggage, heal their childhood wounds. Perhaps that is the vow that should be made on our wedding day- I promise to love, honor and cherish you even when my criticisms remind you of your mother's harshness, even when my distance reminds you of your father's coldness and even when my needing you has you act like I am asking for your soul.

Does this make some sense to you? Does it fit? Take a look at your own reactions, with your parents- are you most often feeling neglected or attacked or controlled? Do you hunger most for nurturance or acceptance or freedom? What did you bring into your teenage years? What were you most afraid of when giving away your heart? Now take a look at the people you love the most, what flavor of crazy do they seem to have?

If your partner keeps backing away from conflict they may feel attacked. Things you say may hurt them in ways you can't see. If they seem to be chasing you, pursuing, needing a lot from you, they may feel neglected and abandoned. They may need reassurance and connection to feel safe in this relationship. If they seem fiercely independent, hold onto their single identity, resist acting in partnership they may feel smothered and lost inside of connection.

Once you can see the core attachment needs that trigger our relationship craziness, it also gives you access to some great new responses. It gives you a new language of connection and love that provides for our human needs. We chose marriage in a time when marriage isn't required. We made promises because we believed that marriage served us well.

We want the relationships we have with our kids and our parents to be healthy and supportive. Most of us struggle with a huge amount of ambivalence in our love lives. We want and we fear, we need connection and freedom, we want to be challenged to grow and accepted for who we are, we want mystery and romance and we want comfort and security. And speaking of this ambiguity can be painful. I want space. I'm not sure this relationship is good for me. This isn't how I thought it would be. I hate sharing my whole life with someone. I hate needing you. I want more. This is hard.

We can try things differently- we can step into things we have resisted. If your version of crazy is mostly about fear of abandonment and feeling neglected, it helps a ton to simply ask for reassurance. Even in conflict, even when things are hard... take a deep breath and try "I just need you to tell me we're ok." It sounds silly but honestly it really works. If you know that the relationship is solid it gives you enormous courage to have tough conversations and find creative solutions.

If you are feeling attacked and criticised the same kind of request can help you get out of defense mode. First it helps to notice that you are defensive, that you feel attacked. Then rather than withdrawing, stepping into that feeling and naming it. "Hold on, I'm getting really defensive." Just owning the feeling can tame the mood. Maybe a little "It feels like you're saying...." whatever attack you just heard. Hopefully this offers your partner or your mom or who ever is making you nuts to say something more supportive. It also gets your experience out of your head where the attack is happening.

Find the balance between us and me is a constant dance. Often when one of us asks for more connection, the other responds with a need for space. We need to have a model of relationship that allows us to be who we are inside of a relationship that we choose, that we believe in. If the relationship is something we value then we know that being selfish serves the relationship and taking care of the relationship serves us.

I suggest you share this video with the two people who YOU make craziest and have the courage to ask them what you could do differently. If you start with that, they just might be willing to take some suggestions on what you need from them when you are feeling crazy.

Remember and watch for the three specific flavors of crazy- Abandonment, Criticism and Loss of Self. Watch for your flavor and watch how fear of losing an attachment has those around you feel crazy. You can even find these three themes in most movies and in music. This is our humanity and it is a good thing. It has gotten us this far.

If you found this stuff helpful and interesting, then watch for my weekly newsletter in your email inbox. I send them out every week- just a few ideas based on what I am seeing either in the relationship research or in my own counseling office. Then if you want to delve deeper, check the information below this video for my classes and workshops. I have a great list of classes I offer in person in the Twin Cities area and am committed to making all of them available online as well.

Thanks again for your time- I do love this stuff and can't wait to share more with you.