



**“SOME EXPECTATIONS ARE
VERBALIZED, HOWEVER, MOST ARE
SIMPLY ASSUMED.”**

-DEB SMITH

RELATIONSHIP SERIES: EXPECTATIONS

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations. We all deny them as if they are somehow selfish or self-serving, somehow indicative of a high maintenance relationship. Yet they are both the foundation and the destruction of all relationships.

Some expectations are verbalized, however, most are simply assumed. Just think about the relationship you have with your bank teller. You have an expectation that the deposit you handed him/her will actually land in your account, that they will not share with your butcher the three bounced checks from last month and that they will not allow anyone other than you to withdraw funds from your account.

All reasonable expectations. All non-verbal.

So how and why does it get so complicated when we are emotionally invested in the relationship?

The relationship we have with the teller is clearly defined with clear and concise consequences. It isn't necessary to have a conversation regarding expectations prior to handing over your deposit. Yet our personal relationships do not have these same guidelines and they too are rarely verbalized.

This dynamic starts right at the very beginning.



Is a child born with a checklist of expectations?

- *You will feed me when I am hungry*
- *You will change me when I need changing*
- *You will get up with me throughout the night when I cry*
- *You will comfort me when I am hurting*
- *As I grow you will protect me from danger and threat*
- *You will never be that danger or threat*
- *You will support my endeavors and provide an optimal environment for my development and growth*

No, there is no such checklist presented in the delivery room but it does exist.

It is an unspoken arrangement dependent upon non-verbal cues. With such limitations it is inevitable there will be misinterpreted cues, missed opportunities, and unmet expectations and needs.

In life coaching one of the first areas we explore are these unmet expectations of childhood ...



- *Were your physical needs met?*
- *Were your emotional needs met?*
- *Were you protected or were you abused?*
- *Were you supported or were you dismissed?*
- *Were you there to meet the needs of the adults caring for you?*
- *Was their love conditional?*
- *Did they rage?*
- *Did they struggle with addiction?*
- *Did you feel loved?*

These unmet expectations follow us into adulthood and seem to reoccur in the relationships we choose for ourselves as if in an attempt to “do-over” our childhoods. Unfortunately, we usually repeat those early relationships leaving our expectations unmet and unresolved.

And what happens to that checklist we handed to our mothers in the delivery room? We keep it tucked in our breast pocket close to our hearts. We take it out from time to time to see where we stand in our relationships – typically off the mark and disappointed.

Is there a better place for that list?

In my coaching practice, I have found those individuals with healthy relationships have taken out that list and have first met those expectations in the relationship they have with

themselves. They do this before getting into an intimate relationship.

Yes you heard me...they do this before getting into an intimate relationship.

They go down the list line by line and give to themselves what their parents were unable to. Of course this is not a simple process and I am in no way minimizing the effort and investment necessary to complete this task. We must first be aware there exists an unmet need(s), which requires the ability to be aware of what you are aware of – aka mindfulness.

This is not a typo.... You need to be aware of what you are aware of.



Mindfulness is a trendy topic of late yet few of us actually engage in the process. Sitting in the painful silence of our unmet childhood needs and experiences can be overwhelming. We can get tangled in anger and resentment finding it difficult to extend compassion, understanding and forgiveness to our caretakers.

The anger and resentment are part of the process.

Allow yourself to feel this pain, to identify it and to make sense of it. In my Relationship Series segment **THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM**, I talked about blaming our caretakers. It is a useless endeavor that only serves to keep us

from healing. Accountability on the other hand, is not useless and is in the service of healing. We can hold our parents/caretakers accountable for their behavior but here is the truth that heals – they were doing the best they could with the tools and skills they possessed at the time.



I know that it is hard to take in but it is the truth. If they had been taught something different, if they had experienced something different as children themselves, if they had a different set of coping strategies and skills it would have been a different experience for you.

But they didn't; they therefore couldn't meet your needs.

It's not fair, it's not right, it has caused you pain and it has caused you suffering. But now you have a choice to make – stay in that pain or you meet those needs yourself freeing yourself from pain, resentment and suffering.

Assuming you have made the decision to become aware of your unmet needs and heal them – let's get started!

As I previously stated, awareness is key in this process. Taking an honest look at the limitations and failures of our parents can be difficult and downright overwhelming.

Remember to breathe during this process, to engage in self-care making sure you are eating

well, hydrating properly, maintaining a good sleep routine and getting support from someone who truly cares. Allow yourself to see your parents as they were when you were a child feeling the pain of your experience as you start to identify the feelings that emerge. It could be angered, disappointed, abandoned, neglected, dismissed, rejected – or any number of negative feelings. Allow these feelings to emerge sitting in the pain they bring with them. Remember these are only feelings, not experiences. You have survived the experiences and now it is time to release the feelings.

Allow yourself to cry, knowing these experiences have lead you down a path you are about to leave.

Acknowledge and validate your experience.

It happened; now it's over and you have the power to determine how you will be treated and how your emotionally mature expectations will now be met.

Now here it is – ***Your parents were doing the best they could with the limited tool and skill set they possessed!***

Yes, this is the truth. As parents we try very hard to create an optimal environment to enhance and support development of our children. To greater or lesser degrees, we all fall short. Have compassion for their experience, forgive them, they had unmet needs of their own that influenced their parenting. Not fair but this is reality. And the reality is you as a parent will most likely have a similar experience muddling through with your own unmet needs. Resolving this experience with your parents will serve to help you resolve your own parenting issues.

What an amazing gift we can offer the next generation!

Just to clarify, when I say forgive them, this does not imply having, maintaining or rekindling a relationship. Some childhood experiences require a severing, a termination, a permanent crevasse be established. Only you can determine the necessity of such a boundary. Give yourself permission to do so.

Distance can be healing and restorative.

When I say see your parents as they were, parents often mature and evolve becoming the parents we longed for and deserved much later in our lives. This does not negate the pain of our earlier childhood experiences; this pain needs to be released regardless of your present relationship with your childhood caretakers.

Once you can make sense of and start releasing these painful experiences you will be ready to start being fully present for yourself. It is from this place of presence and awareness where we take the first step on a new path. This first step requires looking at the unrealistic expectations we have held and imposed in all areas of our lives and in all of our relationships. Emerging from an unhealthy parenting experience is a common faulty belief I witnessed repeatedly in my coaching practice ...

"You (Fill in the name of the person in the moment!) are responsible for meeting my every need."

This single belief leaches itself into every relationship.

Let's go back to the bank teller. Imagine you go to the bank to make a withdrawal and your account has been emptied. Do you yell and scream at the teller for not protecting your account, having a better notification and monitoring system, somehow allowing this to happen to you? Or do you ask to speak to the

manager and start the recovery process? Well, if you believe others are responsible for meeting your needs you yell and scream at the teller. It is as if the hungry infant is still screaming from its crib. If that is the reaction to the bank teller, imagine the response when there is an emotional connection.

So let's go back to our parents.



Before we are even born, our parents have preconceived expectations about us ...

- *He will play football like me*
- *She will be a mother like me*
- *He will be straight like me*
- *She will take care of me when I am old just as I did for my mother*

The list of expectations is endless.

What happens when those expectations aren't met?

A healthy parent will accept their child's individuality and chosen life path. A parent with their own unmet needs will most likely shame, guilt or even torment that child in a desperate attempt to have their own needs met not the needs of the child. What happens when that child goes out into the world? The cycle generally repeats. As stated earlier, that child will most likely become the parent who tries to provide an optimal environment for their own children only to fall short lacking the necessary

tools and skills to do so – just as their parents did. Along the way that child, now an adult, will place unrealistic expectations on those closest to them in an attempt to soothe the inner infant/child.

To this point I have been talking about the unhealthy aspects of expectations, yet that's only half the story.

I started out by saying expectations are the foundation as well as the destruction of all relationships. So let's take a look at expectations as the foundation of relationships – specifically intimate relationships.

Typically the first response to what is expected in relationship is honesty. Among those to follow include loyalty, fidelity, support and equality. Yes, you have the right to not only expect these qualities in your intimate relationship but also to demand them. What I have observed in healthy relationships is the ability to communicate these expectations clearly verbalizing what each believes will be necessary for a successful and long-lasting relationship. These individuals have done their work – they have healed the parent/child relationship, resolved their unmet childhood needs and are ready to engage in a mature, loving and healthy relationship. Their needs and expectations are realistic and they can communicate these needs and expectations in a mature, non-threatening manner.

I am not referring to what I call superficial needs and expectations –

- *You will throw out the trash every Tuesday and Saturday evening.*
- *You will accompany me to my mother's every Mother's Day.*
- *You will put the seat down*
- *I will be the perfect spouse*
- *I will throw splendid parties*
- *I will maintain a balanced check book*

I am talking about expected and necessary qualities...

- *We will be loyal*
- *We will be faithful*
- *We will be respectful*
- *We will hold each other in the highest regard*
- *We will be supportive of each other*

Qualities, qualities that guide behavior not coerced behavior with no substance to support it. **Take that in for a minute.** It is the character of a person, the qualities they possess that guide behavior in a genuine manner. When a person is genuinely loving and secure their behavior will reflect those qualities. But if the character of a person has been flawed by an unhealthy relationship with their parent/caregiver, their behavior is generally guided by self-serving motives.

When thoughts of selfishness, self-serving demands and high maintenance emerge making us feel badly for wanting to build a healthy and strong foundation, we need to look at our partner's character. Often they project these feelings on to us in an attempt to manipulate us into soothing their unmet needs and expectations.

This is not your job!

Each of us is responsible for meeting our own needs before entering an intimate relationship coming into the relationship healthy and whole not unhealthy and needy. Recognize these flaws and run! You are not responsible to repair your partner, you are not responsible to heal your partner. **You are not their therapist.** They are responsible to complete this journey on their own as are you.

So how do you do this?

As I stated earlier mindfulness is key in this healing process. We need to be aware of the pain our childhoods, how that pain has impacted us and how that impact influences our expectation of others. Ultimately we need to parent ourselves pulling ourselves out of that non-verbal infant relationship. From that perspective we live our lives screaming from our cribs waiting for someone to rescue us - not realizing we have the power to rescue ourselves. Allowing our inner parent to emerge starts the process of healing.

First – stop screaming.



Those screams can be either loud or silent regardless they are deafening. Once you stop screaming identify what you have been screaming about. Just as the infant is screaming to be taken care of, so too is the emotionally immature adult. Dig deep and you will find your inner

parent – the voice that tells you to put down that fourth slice of pizza, don't put one more pair of shoes on your charge card, start looking for a better job, it's time to wash those jeans ... *that voice is there!* Take time to listen to that voice, slow down and stop if you need to.

Listen.

Allow that inner parent to parent you. Have conversations with your inner parent. Ask your inner parent for guidance, for support – just as you would a parent.

- Be a good parent – don't let yourself run wild.

- Be a disciplinarian – don't let yourself engage in high risk behavior.
- Be a loving parent – engage in self-care.
- Allow your parent to choose your friends – your inner parent is your intuition.

Follow it!

This process takes patience and practice. Simply be aware of the process and the response your body is experiencing. The screams may get louder. Be the parent and soothe those screams just as a parent soothes a screaming baby. Reassure yourself with positive self-talk, affirmations and gratitude. Initially you may not believe your inner parent, you may doubt the power, authority and strength.

Trust the process.

Challenge the negative, self-defeating beliefs that enter your thoughts. Ask yourself if these thoughts are true. If they aren't they correct them. Once they are corrected and more accurately reflect your true thoughts your feelings will shift to a more positive approach. Behavior then shifts – the screaming quiets.

As you develop a deeper understanding of your parent's actions and intentions, as you begin to parent yourself meeting your own needs instead of expecting others to do so.

There will be a shift.

This shift will open the door to more emotionally mature relationships, more fulfilling relationships and longer-lasting relationships. You will shift your expectations from seeking fulfillment of your needs to seeking character qualities. You will no longer settle nor submit in relationships to avoid the inner infant's screams. You and your inner parent will merge.

Take the time to do this work.

- Journal your experience.
- Get support.
- Be kind and gentle with yourself during the process.

You are worth the effort and you deserve the loving relationship you are seeking!

If you found this series helpful and would like to dive deeper into healing yourself and your relationships, be sure to continually return to my website, www.debsmithlifecoach.com to download additional segments of this and other series.

I wish you the best of luck on your healing journey.

You are worth the time and effort needed to give yourself the tools to live a happy and fulfilling life!

Love and Laughter,

Deb