

WHAT RULES ARE YOU MAKING UP?

by Marlene and Bob Neufeld

Recently, at a playshop facilitated by Dr. Kathlyn Hendricks, we were given a set of instructions for an activity. After a few minutes, Dr. Hendricks asked “what rules have you made up so far?” We were astonished to hear the multiple rules that people had made up, like “only one person at a time,” “keep your voice down,” “don’t go into anyone else’s space”.

We are enjoying asking ourselves this question about any situation, “What rules have I made up about this?” The rules we are uncovering vary from “I have to finish this project before I can do something else!” to “I can’t say that!”

It has become extremely helpful to us to realize that in any situation we have a number of unspoken and unwritten rules...and that the people around us also have their own set of rules, which may be the same rules as ours or they may be different rules than ours.

In our couples therapy we frequently find people in conflict over a set of rules that they have made up. One couple we saw recently, one partner had a rule that her partner had to be home before she could go to sleep. This was causing problems because her partner’s profession led to late nights out.

Whenever there is a “rule-maker” or “rule-keeper” persona active, then there is likely to be a rebel persona whose tendency is to break the rules. These two personas get into an interlock, sometimes within an individual, often between two partners. Notice if you are the kind of person who believes that rules have to be kept at all costs, or that rules are made to be broken.

Next time you find yourself in a situation where you aren’t having as much fun as you could be having, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What rules have I made up about this?
2. Is this rule agreed to by everyone else in the situation?
3. What impact does this rule have on me? On my flexibility? On my aliveness?
4. Can I think of one stress-free reason to keep this rule?
5. What new rule could I make up instead?

Marlene & Bob Neufeld practice body-centered Coaching and Psychotherapy. They are a couple who help couples learn life-changing skills and create closer, more loving relationships with one another. For more information call 613-594-9248 or see www.marleneandbob.com.