

## Chapter Three

### Forbidden Needs

Your marriage is happening in the present. That sounds obvious, but most of your arguments are caused by the past inserting itself into your present relationship. In the special case we'll be discussing next, it does so by hiding just underneath the surface, and posing as the present.

Since **relationships are all about needs**, what you learned about your needs when you were very young is going to have a major impact on how you currently feel about your own needs, and also about the needs of your partner. In this chapter we'll discuss just how this happened, and what it means for the future of your relationship.

### Why Some Needs Become Forbidden

Universal Human Needs are beautiful, life affirming, and positive in their intention. We are all born with the complete collection of Universal Human Needs. When a baby has a need – to be fed, or held -- and doesn't get a quick response, they communicate their upset by crying and/or screaming, and they don't stop until someone meets their need. Infants expect that as each need arises, it's going to get met. And even though most parents do their best to make sure all of their child's needs are met, that just doesn't happen every single time. Some subset of *everybody's* needs consistently goes unmet.

Some needs go unmet because of mandates from society: boys don't get to express their full range of feelings, girls don't get their need for empowerment met. Perhaps your parents couldn't afford to meet certain needs, or your religious background considered some of your needs to be sinful. Maybe your parents simply didn't know how to meet certain of your needs because *those same needs of their own were never met*.

Whatever the reason, some subset of your needs *consistently* went unmet. At some point, you gave up and stopped asking to get those needs met because you'd already asked in every way you could possibly imagine, and the answer was always the same: "No!"

Once you stop trying to get those needs met, you're likely to develop one of two beliefs: "This is a bad need and I shouldn't get it met," or "There must be something wrong with me, because people don't want to meet this need in *me*. I'm untouchable, I'm unlikable, I'm unlovable." As a result, those needs become lifelong limiting beliefs, roadblocks that keep showing up.



**Coping with Forbidden Needs** – “This need is never going to get met, so I’m going to shape my life to avoid setting it off.”

## **Despair and Forbidden Needs**

In general, people cope by wrapping their particular Forbidden Needs in a candy-coating of despair. You basically say to yourself: “**This need is never going to get met, so I’m going to shape my life to avoid setting it off.**” When a need does get set off, it never goes away until it gets satisfied. Setting off a Forbidden Need would mean a lifetime of feeling unsatisfied, so rather than risk that, **we declare these needs forbidden so we won’t ever experience the suffering that comes from wanting them.**

And those Forbidden Needs stay locked away forever.

Almost.

## **How Forbidden Needs Picked Your Partner**

This standoff with Forbidden Needs works fine, for a while. It limits your life somewhat, but you get used to it. Then you get older and you decide you are ready for a love relationship. But since **relationships are all about needs**, your Forbidden Needs surface again, in spades. You go looking for a partner with your conscious mind listing the things you want. For example, consider Eric. He says to himself, “I’d like her to be tall, blonde, college educated, and Jewish...”.

One day Eric goes to a party and there she is, a tall blonde who seems to match all the items on his list. So he goes over to talk to her and she’s standing next to a little brunette named Tillie, apparently a good friend. Eric’s a good listener and besides, he doesn’t want to be a jerk, so he talks to her too.

Eric had the kind of parents who believed that unnecessary physical contact was sinful or shameful. As a result, one of Eric’s Forbidden Needs is about feeling connected to other people, especially through being touched. While he’s talking to the blonde, who he thinks is his perfect match, her friend Tillie, who is very comfortable with touch, brushes up against him and touches his sleeve to get his attention. At one point she brushes the hair out of his eyes. Eric finds himself really attracted to the brunette. She’s meeting his Forbidden Need for contact, without him having to ask.

Tillie, as it turns out, was never really listened to when she was young. She always felt that she

was not being heard by her parents, so one of her Forbidden Needs is to have someone who listens, and Eric is a good listener. He enjoys hearing what others have to say. So, he is going to consistently meet *her* Forbidden Needs *without her having to ask*.

## We're All of Two Minds Here

Humans have two distinct ways of processing information. We have a logical, linear conscious mind, and an older, unconscious mind that feels, free-associates, and makes decisions based on its own, completely different, set of criteria.

We actually have two *brains*: the one in our heads, which contains the cerebral cortex where our conscious mind seems to live, and another, older brain which is the whole rest of the brain matter in our heads *as well as* the rest of our whole body's nervous system. It's only recently been discovered that we actually have "brain cells" in the heart and stomach, along with neural pathways directly to the unconscious part of the head-brain from those organs. So that "gut feeling" you have, which we often call "intuition," may actually be processed in the gut. And when your heart tells you not to take that new job, that may be the result of processing occurring in the brain cells located in your heart.

## Two Brains Means Two Different Kinds of Thinking

The difference between our two brains isn't limited to location. They process information completely differently as well. The conscious mind processes information linearly, logically, and tries to make "sense" of ideas using right-wrong thinking. It believes in reality, and can easily fall into believing itself and its way of thinking. For instance, it believes in a particular way of thinking about time, that it moves forward and never backward, that it can be divided into pieces called seconds, all of which are exactly the same length, and that 864,000 of these later, it will be exactly the same time tomorrow.

The other brain, the unconscious, has a very different set of assumptions and ways of processing. It's nonlinear, preferring metaphors and stories to facts and figures. The unconscious mind believes time is mutable: that 20 minutes in the dentist's chair is much longer than 20 minutes in a movie theater. That the past can be changed (we call this "healing"). Although the unconscious is largely hidden (from the conscious mind) it not only runs our autonomic system (like breathing and walking) it also drives a lot of our actions and decisions.

And most importantly for our work, **the unconscious is where our feelings and our needs reside**. Again, I don't really know *where* they live, but I notice that when I'm teaching, when I talk about thoughts, I gesture towards my head, when I talk about feelings, I motion towards my chest, and when I talk about needs, I point to my gut. So for the sake of argument, let's say that these are the centers of these three kinds of qualities, which we all share.

Most people, when they say "I," are referring to their conscious self. This makes sense because this *is* the part of us that makes direct contact with the outer world. It then hands off the information it receives to our inner world. Then the unconscious processes that information using its completely different set of criteria. The unconscious adds its new impressions to the now abstract impressionistic painting of your experience, from which comes most of our personal motivations, beliefs, and your unique self.

## How Each Brain Learns and Changes

There are two ways to imprint upon the unconscious: through repetition, and through strong feelings. Experiences that happen repeatedly *and* have high emotions become our deep habits and beliefs, and as a result they are hard to change. Forbidden Needs fit into this category.

**The conscious learns and the unconscious mind gets programmed.** Much of our work will entail changing our minds, especially about deeply held, limiting beliefs like Forbidden Needs. But the unconscious doesn't simply change its mind, it needs to be deprogrammed and reprogrammed. That's why just discovering your or your partner's Forbidden Needs isn't enough to change your behavior, even after you have changed your conscious mind about those needs.

There are multiple implications of this two-mind model for our work together. The conscious mind, beautiful thing that it is, isn't limitlessly capable. It isn't capable of feelings, nor does it have ready access to our needs. However, it *is* the place where we construct strategies to try to get those needs met, which is why we often confuse needs and strategies. The conscious mind isn't aware of its limitations, so if you give it a job such as "figure out what I'm feeling," it will try. When it fails it will try harder and harder, creating anxiety and all kinds of stories, which may or may not have any relationship to reality.

## Feelings and Needs Live in the Unconscious

So since our work is based in meeting needs, and since needs are hidden in the unconscious, we will engage in a skill-building process to teach the conscious mind to get off its high horse and listen to the unconscious's nonlinear, often nonverbal, abstract and layered response to the question: "So what am I needing?"



**The Monster Within** – In an attempt to protect you from pain, your unconscious goes into attack mode: judgments.

The unconscious mind does have direct access to our feelings and needs, but it's almost as though the unconscious mind lives inside a room with no windows or doors, no clock or calendar. So it has no idea that years have passed since you decided some need was forbidden.

The only direct information the unconscious gets is what you are feeling in the moment, and as soon as it realizes you're having that "forbidden" feeling again (this time the need is going unmet

because you haven't asked), it does the only thing at its disposal: hits the panic button: Red Alert! And in an attempt to protect you from the pain, it goes into attack mode: judgments. Marshall Rosenberg called this part of us the "Jackal" because it does seem like a monster. I prefer calling it the "Isolator" because its motivation isn't hurting others, it's getting you safe. And all its strategies take you to the same, safe place, the only place where others can't hurt you: it tries to get you alone.

It doesn't even know that you're now an adult with a whole new set of capacities, or that you're in relationship with someone who delights in meeting your Forbidden Needs. And it doesn't know that the person who just set off some feelings by accidentally missing an opportunity to satisfy that need, because you didn't ask, is your adult loving partner, not your overworked parent.

Strangely, although the conscious mind provides the unconscious with data, and the unconscious motivates our actions, they don't have direct access, or even direct knowledge, about each other unless you choose to turn your attention to these two different aspects of yourself, a process often called "mindfulness." As a result of this disconnect, the conscious and unconscious minds can actually be in *conflict*, and so in need of mediation. We call this "intrapsychic mediation" because we are mediating between two parts of the inner self (psyche), the conscious mind often representing the masculine (animus) and the unconscious the feminine (anima).

Fortunately, like any mediation across differences, these two inner selves are not opposed to reconciliation; they just don't know or understand each other. They need help to see across their differences. People whose two minds are stuck in conflict will manifest that conflict in their relationships with others. Conversely, by *resolving* our inner conflicts, especially between the masculine and feminine, the linear right/wrong thinker and the nonlinear feeler will find the Teamwork method a perfect mirror for dealing with others from their new, integrated internal understanding of themselves.



**Healing Forbidden Needs** – The wounded child sheds the Halloween costume of the monster, and snuggles up into the arms of your grownup self.

Once the two minds are working in concert, the conscious mind can benefit from the sensitivity of the wounded child within the monster, and the child can be healed by the present-time experience of getting the full spectrum of its needs met – all it wanted in the first place. Clients often want to kill off the Isolator, but the psyche doesn't work that way. No part of us is bad or wrong. It, like our grown-up selves, just doesn't always know how to get the benefit of the feelings that differences bring up in us. So I suggest that you learn to thank your Isolator/Judge/Jackal for noticing that you have an important need stimulated by this situation, and then say to it, "Thanks for the warning. I'll take it from here. It's not mom, it's our loving partner, who wants to satisfy us. I'll make sure we get the need met." And the wounded child sheds the Halloween costume of the ogre, and snuggles up into the arms of your grownup self.

## **Your Forbidden Needs Picked Your Partner**

Previously we described the first stage of relationship, infatuation, as a time when you experience the full range of your deepest (often hidden) needs being consistently met by your partner, without having to ask. These needs were hidden because the psyche believes they are forbidden. We choose people who have a natural capacity, ease, and delight in meeting our Forbidden Needs.

*Tillie is a toucher – she finds ease and delight in connecting physically with people. Eric doesn't have to ask her, she's going to meet his needs because it meets her needs to do so. Eric is a listener, he enjoys hearing what other people have to say and will be delighted to pay attention to Tillie. She's easily going to have her needs met by Eric.*

When Eric and Tillie start dating, he'll *consistently* get his need for connection met. Accomplishing this consciously might seem highly improbable, especially since both partners appear to be operating without knowing what they're consciously looking for. But unless out-of-control circumstances intervene (such as getting the wrong person pregnant, or making a conscious decision based on something external like money or religion or parental approval) it's been our experience that what motivates peoples' choice in a mate are in fact *the* qualities your *unconscious* has been looking for your whole life. Of all the people you ever were attracted to, or set up with, or met at a party or a bar, the one you finally choose is uniquely qualified to satisfy your Forbidden Needs. **Your subconscious makes sure of it.** When both partners are getting their Forbidden Needs satisfied simultaneously, that's a love-match.

That's why it's so important to know what your and your partner's Forbidden Needs are. And in fact, finding that out is a major aspect of the Teamwork method.

## **When the Forbidden Need Time Bomb Blows**

*As Eric and Tillie progress in their relationship, their mutual infatuation continues. For some people it lasts six hours, for some six weeks, and for some it goes on for years. Eric and Tillie proceed from dating to moving in together. Everything's great. They're fully in the infatuation stage of their relationship.*

*For months on end, every time Tillie passes Eric in the hall, she touches his sleeve or gives him a hug. Eric becomes accustomed to this, and he loves it. After a while Tillie gets a really great job and becomes increasingly busy, she's so preoccupied she walks right by Eric without even noticing him.*

Now Eric's in a tough situation because he's let his Forbidden Need out of its cage. He's allowed it to come up because it was getting met so consistently, but now that's not happening any more. If he wants to get it met, he's going to have to ask for it. **But he can't ask, because it's still forbidden to ask.** When he was little, he already asked for it every way he could think of, and although it doesn't make conscious sense, his unconscious has never stopped believing that it isn't safe to ask for this need. It's been great having it met so regularly, but remember, *it was getting met without his having to ask, because asking is still forbidden.*

*Eric's going crazy after several weeks of no touching, so when Tillie finally comes to bed one night, he says, "Listen, I have to talk to you about this thing, it's really upsetting to me." And then he says: "You know, when I first met you, you seemed like a really warm person. But you're actually kind of a cold fish, aren't you?"*

**This form of "sharing" is actually a judgment.** Instead of talking about his need, he's telling Tillie what is wrong with her. He chooses this form because he wants to talk about his need for touch, but he can't ask for it outright, because that is forbidden. Obviously, that doesn't make sense in his present adult relationship with Tillie. She would delight in hearing that he loves her touching him. But he can't discuss the need because unconsciously, it still feels forbidden. Internally he still believes he already knows the answer, it's No. So he doesn't believe he can just say, "Hey, I'm missing you and feeling a little touch deprived. Perhaps we can have a cuddle," *which actually would have worked perfectly with this partner.* But to Eric's psyche, working from a framework based on his earliest childhood, that's not even a possibility.

Eric communicates his need as a judgment of Tillie, **because that was easier than unpacking his Forbidden Need.**

## A Question of Judgment

In *Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life*, Marshall Rosenberg says that judgments are a tragic way to express our needs – tragic because it's almost guaranteed that if you express your needs as judgments you won't get them met. Yet, communicating through judgments is how almost everyone expresses their Forbidden Needs to their partners, rather than describing their need and speaking about themselves. Instead of saying, "I need more attention," people make a judgment about the *other* person and say something like, "You're not really a people person, are you?" or, "You're so selfish, all you think about is yourself."

Identifying judgments as *the* relationship busters is a huge step forward in learning what not to do. But it doesn't answer the question, "Why do we express some of our needs angrily and in the form of judgments of our partner while in other instances we simply ask for what we want?" What is the difference between these two cases?

In our work, we've discovered that the needs people communicate as judgments are their Forbidden Needs. Any Forbidden Need that is stimulated and then unsatisfied is going to be hard to talk about, and impossible to ask for directly. Instead, we hide the request inside a judgment of the other person. Amazingly, this *feels* to the speaker like they *did* ask to get their needs met. So when the other person doesn't meet the need, the psyche says internally, "See, another No. I knew this was forbidden."

## How Forbidden Needs Recreate Your Family of Origin

The tragedy is that when Eric delivers his judgment, Tillie doesn't even *bear* a request. If she did, she would be happy to oblige. She loves touching. In fact, she was hand-picked for exactly this difference from Eric's family of origin. (Just like *your* partner was likely picked because they excel at meeting *your* Forbidden Needs.)

But she responds to what she perceives as his unwarranted attack by defending herself. She says, "Well who'd want to touch you anyway?" This is *exactly* the thing Eric was most afraid of hearing because that's the message he internalized when his need for touch became forbidden.

It's a maddeningly tricky aspect of the unconscious: we select just the perfect form of judgment to elicit the exact response we most fear. The unconscious mind does this by having us say *exactly the opposite* of what we want to request. How many times have you heard it said, "I never want to see you again!" by someone who not only wants to be seen again, they are actually expressing a desire for *deeper* connection. But since they can't get what they want, they are feeling frustrated and so they lash out – and say exactly the opposite of what they mean.

For the partner, this is incredibly confusing. We don't hear a request, and if we did, what we'd be hearing is the opposite of what is wanted. It's also really frustrating to be told that you're terrible at the thing you're really good at. This creates lots of unmet needs in the partner: not feeling seen or appreciated or understood. And for the very thing you've been giving your partner freely without them having to ask. But instead of being appreciated, you're now under attack.

So instead of responding to the (unspoken and so unheard) request, we retaliate against the (unconsciously) carefully constructed attack with exactly the judgment that caused the need to go forbidden in the first place.

## Form Matters

People tend to be incredibly unaware of the *form* they choose to communicate their messages, but incredibly sensitive to the form used when they are being spoken to. Our insensitivity when speaking is at least in part due to the mind focusing on the message instead of on its potential impact on the other. In large part, this is due to our internal belief that certain requests are simply not allowed to be spoken directly.

If you ask someone who just made a judgment about how well they did in communicating, they will almost always say that all they did was tell the truth. One wife who came to see us with her husband called him a slob fifteen times during their first five minutes. We suggested that this was kind of a judgment of his character. "No it isn't," she shouted back, "come to our house! You'll see it's true."

And that's what has happened to Eric and Tillie. Eric actually *thought* he'd just asked her to meet his need for touch. He probably thought he also showed her how strongly he felt about it. But because of the *form* he chose, not only didn't Tillie hear a request, she felt attacked for no reason, and so she attacked back. Her Forbidden Need is to be heard and understood, and so now she too is feeling really unsafe. And now like so many couples, they are both walking on eggshells, without a clue as to why.



## Using Judgments to Identify Forbidden Needs

The good news is, this bizzarro approach to communicating Forbidden Needs is so universal that it offers a great way to identify your, or anyone's, Forbidden Needs: listen to their judgments.

If someone keeps finding fault with the way other people don't listen to them, they have a Forbidden Need for being heard. If they find disrespect in lots of people's actions, their Forbidden Need is for respect. The psyche uses a simple algorithm to talk about Forbidden Needs: say them as a judgment of the other person, and make the judgment be the *opposite* of the actual need.

Any of the Universal Human Needs can become "forbidden" if it consistently goes unmet. It will show itself through the judgments the person makes of others, or, equally revealing, of themselves.

## Why Judgments Don't Work

Judgments don't work. They don't work for four main reasons:

**Don't Ask, Don't Get.** A judgment is not a request. You *purposefully* aren't requesting because you believe asking won't work. So judgments don't get you what you want, because your partner never hears what you're wanting.

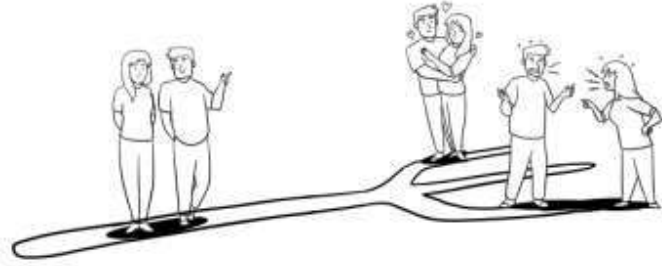
**Biting the Hand that Feeds You.** The language of judgments is felt as an attack by the person being judged -- because it is. So even though this person loves giving the exact thing you're needing, they're going to be focused on defending themselves instead of giving you what you want.

**Creating a Need in Them.** Being attacked will likely set off their needs for safety and understanding. The last thing you want to do, when you want a need of yours to be met, is to set off a new need in the other person. They're going to be far more interested in getting their freshly activated need met than in listening compassionately to you, the person who just attacked them.

**Wrong Time, Wrong Person.** Judgments contain no actual information about the other person. Tillie would love to hug Eric. Judgments come from the past, the people who actually wouldn't meet his need are long gone.

## The Fork in the Road: Conflict, or Understanding

So we have arrived at that moment in your relationship where the bubble of infatuation is burst by the first judgment spoken and responded to defensively. This is an incredibly important moment in any relationship. This moment marks the end of the first stage of the relationship, the Infatuation Stage, when both partners are so open-hearted and open-minded that they both are getting all their Forbidden Needs met without having to ask.



**The Bubble of Infatuation Bursts** – The first judgment spoken and responded to defensively is an incredibly important moment in any relationship.

It is also a fork in the road. This moment sets the scene for which kind of second-stage relationship you'll be having: *conflict*, in which you hurl your Forbidden Needs at your poor, unsuspecting partner as moral judgments of their character, or *understanding*, where you use the strengths of your partner – which you picked – to heal those old wounds and so continue onto stage three, the Mature Relationship. In that third stage, you both are consistently getting your (no longer) Forbidden Needs met simply by *asking for what you need*.

Instead, our hapless hero Eric has taken the low road and accidentally recreated his family of origin *by the form he chose to ask for what he needs*.

When you find yourself judging your partner (or anyone, including yourself), one of your Forbidden Needs has just been activated. It's very likely that although your psyche is telling you that you can't get this need met and, therefore your anger and frustration at your partner are completely justified, actually just the opposite is true. It's extremely likely that you could get your need met from this person. In fact, you hand-picked them precisely because they love meeting exactly these needs.

It was *the form* in which you communicated your need that put your partner on the defensive. Very likely, this is what's causing them to respond in exactly the way your parents or old lover responded, which caused you to believe this need was forbidden in the first place. And now we have gone full circle: you are re-creating your family of origin with the very person you selected to heal those wounds.

### **Forbidden vs. Hidden Needs**

One of the qualities of Forbidden Needs is that we don't try to get them met from just anybody, we reserve them for our primary relationships. They are too important (and too scary) to raise, even in very deep friendships. This can add weight to the idea that it must be your partner's fault, because you don't have this problem with anyone else. Actually, you'll probably notice that you *do* have this problem with some other very special people in your life: your parents, siblings and your children. But we don't try to get them healed in those relationships. I use these relationships as a litmus test to see if there are any Forbidden Needs still lurking in my subconscious.

However, there is a lesser form of this phenomenon that does occur in our other, present-time relationships. We call these Hidden Needs. They are formed in a similar way, some needs consistently going unmet, but these originate in our adult relationships. They don't have quite the psychic power of a Forbidden Need, in part because we can be aware of the circumstances that formed them (e.g. consistently picking partners who love drama when we value serenity, or living inside a 20-year marriage where your strong sex drive is never met).

What they have in common with Forbidden Needs is that they show up as judgments. How they differ is that they don't seem to unconsciously control our selection of partners, quite the opposite: people tend to *consciously* select future partners who don't have the limitations that our previous partners did.

## **The Truth You Now Know about Judgments**

So if your partner is judging you, you now know several things:

**It's not you they are talking about.** The person who didn't meet their needs was long ago, and far away. That's why there's no information about *you* in their judgment. Actually, it's likely that the opposite is true, you are probably exactly the person they *are* wanting.

Their choice of expressing their need as an attack is exactly **the opposite of what they are experiencing internally – which is vulnerability and in need of help and support.** One of their Forbidden Needs has just fired off, so they are feeling scared and stuck. They need something that they don't believe they can ask for. The judgment is just a smoke screen, an attempt to ask without asking, because they believe it's forbidden to ask.

**This is why it's vital that you and your partner learn to identify your Forbidden Needs.** Besides the fact that you have had to bend your lives around avoiding these life-affirming, positive-intentioned needs, if left unhealed they will continue to wreak havoc on the relationship in ways that are nearly impossible to detect or understand. **Ironically, although Forbidden Needs do an excellent job of selecting the right partner, they can also make the relationship seem hopelessly difficult.**

Once you begin accepting the possibility that you can have satisfaction of these needs – that they are not, in fact, forbidden – the places that have always been sticking spots for you in relationships will instead become the source of your greatest satisfaction. This is the gift that is hidden beneath conflict.

## **Healing Forbidden Needs**

Forbidden Needs, even after they've been identified and are successfully and consistently getting met in the present, may always seem to have a special meaning to you. They always remain a little harder to ask for, and always seem a little more special when they are met. I think some part of the psyche is still surprised that it's okay to be loved in that way. Maybe the abstract impressionist painting that the psyche uses to represent them in your inner landscape, slowly builds layer upon layer of gratitude, but the undercoating of the loss of connection when you were young is still faintly visible and may even occasionally show through.

In my relationship with Elise, we've noticed that when what used to be a Forbidden Need gets stimulated (no longer triggered), it's not unusual to find ourselves getting annoyed at our partner, which often shows up as a less-than-inviting *tone of voice*. This is miles better than judging and outright attacking, but it's still something to watch out for. Your partner may not even notice, but you can learn to recognize the difference between a less-than-inviting tone of voice and allowing yourself to deeply connect to your partner. You can learn how to ask clearly and directly for what you need, to accept their true answer with equanimity, and if they choose to meet you in that moment, to fully embrace the pleasure of your connection.

It's an important part of relationship maintenance to keep making sure that you are consistently getting your own needs met, while also meeting the needs of your partner. So when you find yourself in judgment mode, you want not only to stop and look for an *unmet* need, but also to look to see if it is a *Forbidden Need* that has gotten triggered, because those are the ones that are not going away. Forbidden Needs are caused by consistently not getting a need met, and so *consistency* is the key to healing them.

In the end, it's important to emphasize that your anger is not the result of your partner's refusal to meet your need. We've seen this happen again and again with our clients. When they become able to speak about their feelings as directly resulting from their *own* unmet needs (and not about their partner's sin of omission), they find that their partner will delight in hearing about their needs. The partner most often enthusiastically joins in the process of satisfying those unmet needs, because it is almost certainly a strength of theirs. Why wouldn't they? People love meeting the needs of others, especially when it's something they do well. They simply need to know there is a need to be met, rather than having to defend themselves against the judgment that they aren't meeting the needs that they didn't know we had because we never asked outright (judgments don't count!). Effectively communicating your Forbidden Needs makes a world of difference.

And will make the world a different place: peaceful, satisfying and filled to overflowing with love.

## **A Forbidden Needs Example**

This particular client's parents were both alcoholics. As a result, he had to raise himself. Not surprisingly, as an adult he believed that whenever people are under the influence of alcohol, none of his needs were going to get met. His was a classic Forbidden Need situation, learned from childhood.

As predicted by our Forbidden Needs theory, all three of the women he married, drank. We only met his third wife, a professor, who lived almost exclusively in her head. She was a social drinker. Once she had a drink or two, she became more affable, outgoing and even affectionate. But as soon as his wife started to drink, which was actually the time when she started to open up and become more willing to meet his needs, he would start to judge her. This would cause her to turn away from him, which convinced him that he was right – he couldn't get his needs met by a person who was drinking.

He was right, but for the wrong reasons. He couldn't get his needs met from someone who was drinking, but not because they weren't willing or able to do so. He made it impossible by the form in which he communicated: as judgments. His judgments, based on his Forbidden Need, manifested as his conviction that anyone who drank *at all* could not meet his needs. While this may have been true of his parents, it was not true of this woman. She loved him and enjoyed meeting his needs, not despite her drinking, but, ironically, she was actually *more able* to connect with him as the result of a little social drinking. This shows why the form that we use to talk about our needs is *so* important.

We helped him to understand that the despair he felt, which often turned to anger when he saw her drinking, was not about her, but about his own past. When he actually thought about it, the times when they had enjoyed each other the most, and even had the best love-making, were times when they had been drinking socially. Also, unlike his parents who drank to excess, he had never actually seen his wife drunk.

It was still very challenging for him, even after this realization. This is because of the way it feels when a Forbidden Need gets tripped off. It seems that what you are seeing and feeling is your current reality, when actually what you are feeling about is not in the present moment at all. That past perception is so strong and so unwavering (in this case it persisted across multiple wives) it appears to be True with a capital T. Whenever you think you have the Truth about another person's faults, that's probably an area in which *you* have a Forbidden Need.

## Identifying Forbidden Needs

There are several ways to learn what your and your partner's Forbidden Needs are. These needs reside in the unconscious, so even if you are a self-aware person, they may be elusive. Here are some of the ways they surface as behaviors, which can help you identify that a Forbidden Need is present:

**Listening for Judgments.** Judgments, especially repeated judgments whether or not they are spoken aloud, offer a great way to uncover Forbidden Needs. This also makes it fairly transparent what the need is: it's the opposite of the judgment!

So if you keep finding fault with the way other people don't listen to you, then you likely have a Forbidden Need for being heard. If you find disrespect in people's actions, then you likely have a Forbidden Need for respect. Any of the Universal Human Needs can become forbidden if that need goes consistently unmet. And it will show itself through the judgments you make of others -- or of yourself.

**Out-of-Proportion Responses.** The intensity of reaction to situations that trigger Forbidden Needs tends to be out of proportion to the current situation. For example, you explode when someone spills a little milk, when all it would take is a sponge to clean it up. A disproportionately upset reaction points to a Forbidden Need. The current experience triggers a force from the past, when the more intense reaction may have been appropriate and proportional.

**Rigidity.** Any moral judgment that you have, and feel very strongly about, can be the result of a Forbidden Need. For example, if you "know something is true" about the other person, even if they deny it, it's likely stemming from a Forbidden Need of yours. We judge people's behavior all the time, but a belief or opinion that's rigidly held is likely to be a Forbidden Need surfacing. Look for words like "always" and "never," the candy-coating of despair surrounding Forbidden Needs. Our definition of despair is, "sadness plus forever" and that's why people tend to speak about what their partner "always" or "never" does.

**Have You Ever Felt This Way Before?** Ask yourself if this feeling is occurring for the first time or does it remind you of something old. Look for occurrences of this

situation and feeling in yourself *before* you got into this relationship – especially in your family of origin. When people are honest about their feelings, they often acknowledge that their reactions have happened in other relationships. For example, the client with the third wife who was a social drinker said, “Well, now that you mention it, I did feel this way about my last wife. Actually my last two wives.” So we asked, “And what about your parents?” and he said, “Oh yes! Really with my parents.” That answer makes it a lock that this is a Forbidden Need.

**The Rule of Three:** This is a special case of the “Ever Felt This Before.” If you have a beef with someone, even if it’s *really* clear to you what they did wrong, and then you notice that you’re having those exact same feelings about someone else, that might just be a coincidence. But if you notice that you are involved in three or more situations that are exactly the same, and the only thing those three people have in common is their relationship to you, then it’s not a coincidence. It’s the Rule of Three, which says, “No matter how sure you are it’s each of them, it’s not, it’s you.”

I learned this one early on. My dad taught me that all women are hysterical, and so can’t be trusted to meet our needs. I was in a relationship with a woman who was hysterical most of the time. It was clearly *her* because when we argued, I was always calm and logical, and that just made her *more* hysterical. One day, I was walking in the woods, and I had the thought “Here we go again! All the women I’ve ever been in relationship eventually become hysterical once we get close.” Then it occurred to me, none of them knew each other, the only thing they had in common was *me*. So as illogical as it seemed, I decided that it must be about me, not them. I tried it on: “So, *I’m* the hysterical one.” It made no sense, but for some reason, a calm came over me when I said that. I repeated it a few times, and decided to try to live from that place. Sure enough, once I owned the terror, and pushed through the despair, I came out on the other side in relationships with peaceful, passionate women.

**When You’re with Your Family-of-Origin:** The issues that come up repeatedly, or for no apparent reason, when you’re with your siblings and/or your parents are likely to be *your* Forbidden Needs. This is the advanced course in Forbidden Needs. If you can identify the need beneath your upset and ask for what you are actually wanting with your own family, you will be well on the way to living a fulfilling life with rich, satisfying relationships.

**With Your Adult or Teenage Children:** One of the things we see over and over with our clients who have grown children is by around the third session, when they have learned enough to stop having their same old arguments, they come in horrified that their children are now having those same arguments. It’s not that the children picked up where the parents left off. It’s that the parents didn’t notice

that everyone in the family has always argued like that because it was just the way “we do it in our family.”

Forbidden needs are like a virus, they are transferrable from one generation to the next. It is your job, as parents, to instruct your young children as best you know how. There are lots of resources about how to use NVC as a tool for parenting – teaching them not about strategies that you prefer, but about how to identify their own needs and negotiate with other peoples’ needs. And it can bring up strong feelings when your needs (or your need to have their needs met) isn’t happening. But by the time they are teenagers, and certainly once they are grown and have families of their own, it would be wise to notice if your thoughts or communication to or about them fall into the category of judgments. Remember, Forbidden Needs get triggered in our most intimate relationships. One of the traps of the role of “parenting” is that it can seem like *carte blanche* to focus on your job of “molding” your children, which can mask your own self-responsibility not to project or judge on others the needs you mistakenly believe are forbidden to you.

**The Double Turn-Around:** People tend to speak in judgments because it is the safest way to talk about Forbidden Needs without actually having to ask (which is forbidden). So to identify *what* the Forbidden Need is in a judgment, turn the subject “you” into “I” and find the opposite of the verb or adverb (“cold” becomes “warm”). So if my judgment of my partner is, “You are a slob,” the turnaround would be, “I need neatness.” Likewise, “You keep ignoring me” becomes “I need attention.” Figuring out what your needs are can be the hardest part of the Teamwork method. But one easy way to find out is to do the double turn-around.

Needs can be layered, so there may be more, deeper satisfaction hiding underneath the first layer. Once you’ve identified the need behind the judgment, try asking yourself: “Okay, so if I had [name of need] satisfied, what would I feel then?” If it’s satisfaction, then you’re at the root need. If another request comes to mind, try that one on, and keep going until you get the feeling of release and joy. That’s the root need.

## **Living with Forbidden Needs**

Once you know your partner’s Forbidden Needs, and understand that these needs can be very difficult for your partner to talk about, you can try being more proactive. For example, you could say, “I’m wondering if you are in need of a hug [or address whatever their Forbidden Need is] because I know you’ve had a stressful week, and I know touching is important to you, and I love touching you.” This last part is important – it reminds them that in the present they are not with the people who rejected their needs, they are with someone who loves meeting their needs.

Each time you satisfy a Forbidden Need, the charge associated with it diminishes, because it was hidden under a covering of despair. Each instance of satisfaction adds a little more hope, the antidote to despair. Despair is a tough nut to crack, because it can see a problem even where one

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isn't. So a person with a Forbidden Need for respect will see slights and criticisms in the smallest change of tone of voice, or in any statement that isn't worded just so. If left to the vagaries of life, trying to overcome a Forbidden Need is like swimming in quicksand. But once you know what you're dealing with, you and your partner can help each other heal, and strengthen the bonds of trust and love at the same time.

## **Consistency Is Key**

A need becomes forbidden when it goes *consistently* unmet, so it's important to respond and satisfy these needs consistently. While they may never go away completely, over time these needs can shift from a guaranteed (same old) argument to special moments of vulnerability and deep connection. The understanding and willingness of the present-time partner can create a sense of satisfaction and healing that actually is more satisfying than the infatuation stage, because this is real, consistent, and cooperatively created from love.

It's important for both partners to remember that these are the needs that made this love match in the first place. So if you're the one being judged, just keep doing what you love to do: meet your partner's need with vigor and delight, even when (as is likely when they are triggered) your partner resists your every attempt. In the beginning of our relationship, Elise clearly needed a lot of verbal appreciation, but whenever we would exchange appreciations, and it was my turn to appreciate her, she would turn her head away and pooh-pooh my sharing of gratitude for her. So I would wait until she looked back at me, and then I would repeat the appreciation again. If she looked away, I waited and said it again, each time totally meaning it. Eventually her psyche got the message, and although it was uncomfortable, she learned to maintain eye contact and let in the love. Now, when we teach workshops together, she teaches the part on appreciations because she's so good at it.

## **Asking for What You Need**

If you're the one with the Forbidden Need, it's your job to push through the fear, and ask for what you need. In the beginning it seems like the biggest risk a person can take. But you hand-picked this person because they love giving this exact thing, and you can see that your fear is not based on your present-time reality. Over time, you'll find it becomes less and less scary, and more and more fun. Eventually you'll notice that the part of your life you had given up on will come rushing back and become one of the most satisfying parts of your life and relationship.

One of my Forbidden Needs was feeling seen. I have a lot of facets: computer programmer, hypnotist, mediator, artist, handyman, and many more. It wasn't until I found Elise that I felt like every part of me, even the parts *I* had a hard time with, were not only seen, but loved. It still can get my goat when someone out in the world seems to miss some important part of who I am, but it's not the life-threatening experience it used to be. I may feel sad or frustrated, but since I know I have someone at home who holds all of me in high esteem, and as a result have an internal sense of self-validation, I can often get past it without the other person even knowing they tripped off an old, no longer forbidden, need.

## **Flexibility Instead of Rigidity**

Forbidden needs tend to be inflexible. When a Forbidden Need gets activated, it feels like a life-or-death moment. The intensity of the response is out of proportion to the current situation because



the triggered person is not actually responding to the current situation – that was just the stimulus. What they are feeling comes from some long-ago wound that is either going to be relived or healed, depending on the present-time response.

Once Forbidden Needs start to get satisfied consistently, if your partner can't meet your needs immediately, it's no longer a tragedy. If you're feeling disconnected and would like some deep, focused connection, the other person might say, "I can't do that right now, but when I get back from this meeting I'd be glad to snuggle with you." You can now feel more comfortable and you can wait, with the understanding that your Forbidden Needs are no longer forbidden in your relationship. That rigid and frightened part of your life begins to come out of hiding.

### **Forbidden Needs and the Mature Relationship**

This is one of the major goals of the Mature Relationship: to reveal and heal each other's Forbidden Needs.

Once you realize that you've committed to a relationship with someone who is willing to give you the very thing that you thought was forbidden, the commitment becomes the kind of bond that can last a lifetime. As you test this over and over, and come to really understand and believe you are going to consistently get your Forbidden Needs met, it becomes easier to communicate these needs without anger, fear or judgment. Your relationship changes in ways that never seemed possible.

This is the beginning of the third stage of marriage, the Mature Relationship, which looks exactly like that first Infatuation Stage except now it's flexible. Both partners can ask to have their needs met as they arise, all of their needs – even those they mistakenly thought were forbidden.

## Summary: Forbidden Needs

**Your Forbidden Needs were spawned during your childhood.** Try as they might, your parents, society, and even your own strengths and weaknesses focused your skills on some needs, while consistently leaving some unmet.

**Despair and Forbidden Needs:** People cope by wrapping their particular Forbidden Needs in a candy-coating of despair. You basically say to yourself: “This need is never going to get met, so I’m going to shape my life to avoid setting it off.”

**Why We May Feel Hopeless About Fixing Our Relationship:** Needs that have gone unmet for years tend to be covered with a thick layer of hopelessness. When your relationship presents you with the opportunity to finally get these needs met, instead of feeling relief, the despair is the first feeling that needs to be discharged. This is not a present-time feeling. It actually dissipates quickly if you don’t project onto the present situation.

**We’re All of Two Minds Here:** Humans have two distinct ways of processing information. We have a logical, linear conscious mind, and an older, unconscious mind that feels, free-associates, and makes decisions based on its own, completely different, set of criteria. The unconscious is where our feelings and our needs reside.

**How Each Brain Learns and Changes:** The conscious learns and the unconscious mind gets programmed. Much of our work will entail changing our minds, especially about deeply held, limiting beliefs like Forbidden Needs. But the unconscious doesn’t simply change its mind, it needs to be deprogrammed and reprogrammed. That’s why just discovering your or your partner’s Forbidden Needs isn’t enough to change your behavior, even after you have changed your conscious mind about those needs.

**Why We Judge.** Asking for some needs, particularly those we just couldn’t get met in the past, caused us to decide that we are forbidden to ask for these particular needs. But without being allowed to ask, how do you get your needs met? We’re left assuming others should just know without our having to ask. And when they fail, we feel justified in judging them. For not giving us what we didn’t ask for!

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**Your Forbidden Needs Picked Your Partner.** You already meet all of your own needs that you know how to meet, so, what *unconsciously* drives your selection process is finding someone who will meet the needs you've consistently left unmet.

**When the Forbidden Need Bomb Blows:** Inevitably in a primary relationship, circumstances arise in which we need to ask to get our Forbidden Needs met. But since (we mistakenly believe) asking is forbidden, we're likely to judge our partner instead.

**Either Heal, or Recreate Your Family-of-Origin.** If you do judge, the response you get back will be so similar to the original hurtful No that created the Forbidden Need, you will feel as though you have recreated the worst of your past. However, if you use your relationship to heal these old hurts, you'll end up with a Mature Relationship that makes the Infatuation Stage pale in comparison.

#### **How to Identify Forbidden Needs:**

- out-of-proportion responses,
- judgments,
- you've felt this way before (in an older relationship),
- arguments with your family-of-origin.

**How to Find the Need Behind the Judgment:** Do the double turn-around. If you think someone is being cold, you need warmth; if you judge someone as sloppy, you need order.

#### **Judgments Don't Work Because:**

- your partner doesn't hear a request,
- instead they feel attacked,
- so now they have unmet needs too.

These attacks are hurtful to your partner because your accusation isn't true about them, or even really about them at all. The person you're upset with is long gone.

**The Fork in the Road:** Conflict, or Understanding: This moment sets the scene for which kind of second-stage relationship you'll be having: conflict, in which you hurl your Forbidden Needs at your poor, unsuspecting partner as moral judgments of their character, or understanding, where you use the strengths of your partner.

**Forbidden vs. Hidden Needs:** A lesser form of Forbidden Needs we call \ Hidden Needs. They are formed in a similar way, some needs consistently going unmet, but these originate in our adult relationship so they don't have quite the psychic power of a Forbidden Need.

**Healing Forbidden Needs:** It's an important part of relationship maintenance to keep making sure that you are consistently getting your own needs met, while also meeting the needs of your partner. Forbidden Needs are caused by consistently not getting a need met, and so consistency is the key to healing them.

**Identifying Forbidden Needs:** Here are some of the ways they surface as behaviors, which can help you identify that a Forbidden Need is present: listening for judgments; out-of-proportion responses; rigidity; you've felt this way before; upset with family of origin or adult and teenaged children.

**Living with Forbidden Needs:** Once you know your partner's Forbidden Needs, and understand that these needs can be very difficult for your partner to talk about, you can try being more proactive. It is important to remind them that in the present they are not with the people who rejected their needs, they are with someone who loves meeting their needs.

**Asking for What You Need:** If you're the one with the Forbidden Need, it's your job to push through the fear, and ask for what you need.

**Forbidden Needs and the Mature Relationship:** This is one of the major goals of the Mature Relationship: to reveal and heal each other's Forbidden Needs.

## **What's Next?**

The way needs communicate with us is through feelings, but what are feelings? And how do we interpret this message which rides on our feelings, especially when it seems so obvious that it is our partner is making us unhappy?