



## Getting Love Right: Learning the Choices of Healthy Intimacy (Fireside Parkside Books)

By Terence T. Gorski

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#### IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN HOW TO LOVE

When you fall in love you may be repeating bad relationship habits that you learned growing up or in a previous unhealthy relationship. No matter what your history, *Getting Love Right* can explain how to build and maintain healthy intimacy, including:

- \* How to recognize if you are in a compulsive, apathetic, or healthy relationship
- \* How to become a person who is capable of healthy intimacy
- \* How to choose a healthy partner

If you are in a relationship or want to be in one, Terence T. Gorski will teach you that love isn't just something that happens -- love is something you can learn.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse author of *Coupleship: How to Build a Relationship* Terry has taken the overwhelming mystery out of relationships and offered the reader a way to understand the choices that are made to enhance or destroy the intimacy between two people.

John Lee author of *The Flying Boy* If I had read this book 20 years ago then my relationship history would be very different and not nearly as painful. It has helped me in my current relationship.

Claudia Black, Ph.D. author of *It Will Never Happen to Me* and *Double Duty* [An] exciting new approach to relationship therapy...

### About the Author

**Terence T. Gorski, M.A., N.C.A.C. II**, is the president of CENAPS® Corporation, a consultation and training firm that specializes in alcoholism, drug dependence, and mental-health services. He lives in Flossmoor, Illinois.

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### Chapter 1

## GETTING LOVE RIGHT

According to ancient Greek mythology, human beings were originally created with both sexes, male and female, combined in one person. They were whole and complete within themselves and lived in a fulfilled state of perfect union.

Then, as human beings have a tendency to do, they angered the gods. The gods punished humanity by cutting each person in half. One half became male and the other half became female. Then the gods cursed human beings for the rest of their existence to try and become whole again by reassembling themselves.

On a fundamental level, relationships represent a search for that wholeness, a search for completeness and the ability to feel as one with another human being. In many ways, this striving for unity with another person is a fool's game. Ultimately, it is impossible to merge and stay merged with another human being. At best, we can find moments of completion, moments of closeness and oneness. But then what happens? We always come back to the reality that we are two separate individuals.

Yet, like all myths, there is a measure of truth to this one, too. When we get love right, two individuals become *us*, an entity that makes the two of us together stronger than we ever could be alone. The *me* and the *you* still remain as separate entities, however, in conjunction with *us*.

So the question becomes, How can we come together and build a relationship that creates this better us? How do we go about developing relationships that can meet our needs for wholeness and fulfillment? It is not simple, but it can be done. We can learn to share our life with another person in a way that enhances rather than diminishes who we are.

This book will demonstrate the step-by-step process involved in building and maintaining a healthy relationship. It will enable you to understand the origins of your relationship patterns, show you how to analyze them, and identify alternative behaviors so you can replace dysfunctional patterns with healthy patterns.

If you are single, *Getting Love Right* will help you learn how to develop into the kind of person who is capable of a healthy relationship; how to select an appropriate partner who can meet your needs; and how to guide your relationship through different levels and stages.

If you are currently in a relationship, *Getting Love Right* will teach you how to transform that relationship. It will provide information and assessment tools that will enable you to evaluate your present relationship and identify areas for growth. It will give you the techniques to problem-solve in a productive way and undertake a fundamental relationship renegotiation with your partner.

## **DECIDING ON HEALTHY LOVE**

Many people experience problems in relationships because they hold mistaken beliefs about the fundamental nature of love. We have been taught since childhood to believe that love is a mysterious phenomenon beyond our control. Just look at the way we talk about it. We "fall" in love, sometimes "head over heels." We say she "stole his heart," or "she lost her heart" to him. Cupid shoots his arrow and we are powerless to resist. These myths tell us that love comes into our lives suddenly through little or no choice of our own. No wonder we are confused about how to achieve a lasting, fulfilling relationship.

Healthy love is not an accident. Nor is it a temporary feeling that comes and goes. Love is a decision we make based on essential choices about ourselves, our partner, and our relationship. While healthy love is often profound and passionate, we can build it into our lives step by step, one choice at a time.

To get love right, therefore, we need to revise our concept of love as some romanticized ideal and understand a relationship for what it is: an agreement between two people to meet each other's needs and to have their own needs met in return.

### **There are three common relationship errors:**

1. Expecting too much from a relationship
2. Expecting too little from a relationship
3. Expecting a relationship to remain unchanged

Some people expect too much from a relationship. They hold onto the belief that the right partner or the right relationship can magically fix them and free them from taking responsibility for their lives. They expect a partner to have the ability to make them feel better on demand. As a result, they are constantly disappointed. They experience cycles of intense highs, when the relationship seems to be going well, and intense lows, when it fails to meet their unrealistic expectations.

Other people expect too little from a relationship. They are so sure they can never feel whole and complete with another human being that they never give themselves the chance to have their needs for love and intimacy met. They equate intimacy with pain and do everything they can to insulate and protect themselves from it. They do not know that there are two kinds of pain: pathological pain that comes from dysfunctional,

unsafe relationships and the healthy pain of growth in normal intimate relationships.

Still others may have found a satisfying relationship, but then make the mistake of expecting it to stay the same year after year. They don't realize that relationships are not a one-time event but an ongoing process. As time goes on, both partners need to continue to talk and problem-solve together, and, when necessary, renegotiate the terms of the relationship so that it stays current with their needs.

## **HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS: PASSION AND SAFETY**

Healthy relationships meet our needs for both passion and safety. Dysfunctional relationships, by contrast, represent extremes in which only one or the other exists. People who expect too much from relationships seek passion. Unfortunately, they almost always give up safety in the process and end up being hurt. People who expect too little from relationships choose safety over passion. They often lose the chance to have their needs for intimacy and passion met.

Healthy partners know that passion and safety can coexist in healthy relationships because these relationships are rational, flexible, and safe.

Healthy relationships are *rational* because you choose them. You choose the type of relationship you're ready for. Then you choose to become a person capable of being in a healthy relationship. You select your partner on the basis of a variety of characteristics and choose the rate at which the relationship develops. Ultimately, you and your partner choose whether to continue the relationship or to end it.

Built in this way, a relationship becomes a series of choices, all of which have logical consequences. If you choose as a partner someone who is incapable of meeting your needs, the logical consequence is that your partner and the relationship will not give you what you want. If you choose a dangerous partner, you can expect to have a dangerous relationship. If you choose a healthy, compatible partner who is capable and willing to meet your needs, it is logical to expect that you will have a compatible relationship in which your needs are met.

Healthy relationships are also *flexible*. They operate on a variety of levels, depending upon the needs of the partners. Sometimes they may be very exciting and intense. Other times they will be very relaxed and comfortable, even boring. Such relationships allow each partner to be flexible: You can be together as a couple or alone as individuals, according to the situation and your preference. You are not forced to be strong all the time; you are not forbidden to be strong. The flow of give and take enables you to be both strong and weak, to be yourself. This flexibility means you can be accepted as a fallible person who will make mistakes and who, in turn, is willing to accept the mistakes of your partner.

Finally, healthy relationships are *safe*. No matter how committed you are to the relationship, no matter how much you love your partner, you do not abandon who you are and your partner does not abandon who he/she is. You don't lose yourself in your partner or in the relationship. To stay in the relationship, you may make compromises if necessary, but not at the expense of your own safety or well-being. Healthy partners do not tolerate abuse and will do whatever is necessary for their own safety, even at the expense of the relationship.

Many people prize spontaneity in their relationships. They fear that by becoming conscious of the choices they make, going through a rational decision-making process, they will lose the spontaneity and passion that make love exciting. Fortunately, that is not true. Choosing safety and making sound choices allow you even greater freedom in your relationships. Once you know your partner is safe, you are free to give in to your passion and spontaneous desires. When you are able to communicate openly and honestly about who you are

without fear of guilt or retribution, you don't have to hide from your partner or pretend to be something you are not. You are free to be yourself and know deep down that your partner will love and accept you.

## BECOMING A CHOICE MAKER

Once you understand what healthy relationships are, you can work to create them in your life by becoming a choice maker. If you come from a dysfunctional family, you may have been taught that choices are all or nothing, yes or no, black or white. As a result, you may not have learned basic decision-making skills, which include thinking through a number of options and selecting the best one on the basis of what you want. You may find it useful to think of decision making as a three-step process, outlined by the following questions.

**1. What choices do I have?** First, you need to identify your options and the likely consequences of each choice. This will help you see that, in most cases, your choices are not black and white but include a range of options. In examining the likely consequences of a particular option, you may discover that what feels good now may not, in the long run, be in your best interest.

**2. What do I need/want?** You need to know yourself well enough to assess your particular needs and wants. This includes knowing what you're thinking, what you're feeling, and what is motivating you to think, feel, and act that way.

**3. Which option is best for me right now?** On the basis of your answers to the first two questions, you can select the option that promises to best meet your unique needs and wants at the present time, with the realization that these needs and wants may change over time.

The more you practice this three-step process, the more experience you will gain as a choice maker. The more you apply it to your relationship choices, the better your chances to get love right.

As you consider the options available to you, keep in mind the following:

**Most choices are not perfect.** We can rarely get 100 percent of what we want. Many times we are afraid to make a decision because we fear making the wrong choice or having to give up one thing for another. It is important to remember that choices typically involve a trade-off. All we can do is strive to make the best choice among the options we have, based on what we know or believe to be true.

**Mistakes are unavoidable.** As fallible human beings, we can't always choose the best option. Once you accept the fact that you will make mistakes, you can choose to learn from them to make better and better decisions in the future.

**Choices are not forever.** Choice making is an ongoing process. The best option one day may be very different the next. We change, and our needs and wants change, too. We need to be prepared to reevaluate and, when necessary, renegotiate and alter our decisions.

If you have had relationship problems in the past, healthy change is possible. It may be, however, that before you can begin to make healthy choices, you need to alter some fundamental aspects of the way in which you go about your relationships. Change is not easy, especially when it requires us to alter deeply ingrained patterns learned in childhood from our parents.

This book is designed to help you make those changes by giving you the tools you need to alter the way you conduct your relationships and to become a person capable of healthy love. The chapters in this book are

designed to give you the concepts and models you need to answer the question, "What are my choices?"

In understanding what this book can do to help you get love right, it is important to discuss what it will not do. This book will not teach you how to have a perfect relationship. It will not teach you how to find Mr. or Ms. Right who is going to magically fix you and make all your pain and problems go away. It is not going to teach you how to transform your present relationship into some romanticized soap-opera ideal of love -- because ideal love does not exist. This book is not going to give you an effective relationship overnight -- because healthy love is achieved by slow stages.

Another thing this book will not do is to save you from the responsibility of thinking for yourself or making up your own mind. You need to decide what kind of relationship you should have to be happy. There are many choices available. All this book can do is to show you the skills involved in becoming a healthy choice maker and point out some of the options available, along with the logical consequences that some of those options may have.

This book will not teach you how to have a problem-free relationship, because relationships have problems. Partners are fallible human beings, and, no matter how much they love one another, they will encounter problems. What this book can do is to demonstrate concrete skills so that you can effectively practice problem solving with your partner.

Finally, this book will not save you from the pain of loving another human being. Being in love means you're going to be hurt. If you don't want to get bruised, you don't want to play football; if you don't want to fall down, you don't want to ski. The same is true for relationships: If you don't want to get emotionally hurt, you don't want to be in love. Why? Because you're going to love another fallible human being who is going to make mistakes, who is going to have faults, and who is going to inadvertently hurt you. You, too, are a fallible human being and you're going to make mistakes. You are going to do things that hurt your partner, even if you don't want or mean to.

What this book can do is to show you how to build a relationship in which pain and disappointment are the exception, not the rule. It can show you how you can build relationships in which support, love, and mutual respect are the everyday reality, not just the dream.

Healthy relationships are possible. Through knowing the processes and steps involved in relationship building, learning to make choices, solving problems with your partner, you can replace painful, dysfunctional relationships with healthy relationships in which both passion and safety coexist. You can learn how to get love right.

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