

Names are changed to honor client confidentiality.

Discounted

“Just because someone says, ‘Get over it,’ doesn’t mean it stops hurting.”

Ross said that to his wife, Sara, after she discounted his feelings in our counseling session. He was sharing a painful incident, and instead of taking his pain seriously, she trivialized it.

Statements like “Get over it,” “Why let that bother you?” and “You’re too sensitive” fail to relieve the hurting heart. In fact, they compound the suffering. Mindy is a good example. Her husband, Sam, is far from being a comforting presence when she tears up. Quite the contrary, he becomes critical.

“She cries over anything,” he said in a marital counseling session. “She’s incapable of controlling her emotions.”

On that particular day, Mindy’s tears stemmed from an unresolved problem. They live in an old farmhouse, and their water comes from a well. One day she noticed that the water was appearing rusty, but when she told Sam about it, he downplayed the seriousness of it. To him, it wasn’t a problem; he accused Mindy of overreacting. As days rolled on, the rust problem worsened, but Sam continued to make light of it.

They have a small child, with another on the way. So, understandably, clear water ranks high on Mindy’s list of concerns. While discussing the matter in our counseling session, Sam was noticeably agitated when he told Mindy, “It’s not a big deal!”

I replied saying, “It is a big deal to Mindy, Sam, and she needs for you to make her important enough to take the matter seriously.”

According to the late theologian Paul Tillich, “The first duty of love is to listen.”

Mindy doesn’t feel listened to. That’s the root of her anguish and often the source of her tears. His temper is another source.

“He gets upset easily,” she said.

I challenged a key assumption of Sam’s: “You accuse Mindy of being too emotional and incapable of controlling her emotions. Isn’t anger an emotion?”

His stunned expression told me he got the parallel. Enough said. To be discounted is to experience humiliation. Our emotions, concerns and wishes are ignored, dismissed or

minimized. The underlying message is, "If it's not important to me, then it shouldn't be important to you." Not only is Sam discounting his wife's frustration, he's discounting the existence of a problem.

"Discounting is making something more, less, or different than it really is," write Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson in their book, [*Growing Up Again*](#). We use discounting, they say, "to protect a denial and to keep from solving a problem."

To illustrate: We protect a denial when we downplay the seriousness of a physical ailment or disregard lingering symptoms. We discount ourselves when we excuse or overlook offensive treatment, or when we fail to ask for what we need. For instance, a mother who has too much on her plate is discounting herself if she refrains from asking her family to pitch in.

Children are frequently objects of discounting.

For example, 12-year-old Tyson became upset after discovering that his parents had moved his bedroom from one room to another. Both parents discounted the situation and his feelings. Instead of understanding his plight, they became irritated with him for not letting it go.

Children experience discounting when told: "You're not hurt." "It's not cold." "What do you mean you don't like Uncle Tim or purple cabbage? Yes, you do."

Employees feel discounted when their grievances meet deaf ears. Nursing home residents feel discounted when staff members barge into their rooms without knocking or when they're talked to like children.

Chris, another client, feels discounted when his wife, Gerri, continually sets his agenda. "She'll make plans for me even though I ask her to consult with me first," he said. For example, it's not unusual for him to awake on a Saturday morning and discover that he's scheduled to help one of her family members with a weekend project.

Likewise, Gerri feels discounted when he ignores her pleas to help around the house.

Justifying our actions instead of expressing remorse is another form of discounting.

The opposite of discounting is a willingness to acknowledge things we would rather deny. It's the willingness to negotiate and make changes with another person whether it be a partner, a child, an elderly person or an employee. And finally, it's the willingness to listen—to be there with an open mind and an open heart. To do so is an act of love.