

# Marriage Counseling Skill:

## Describe Rather Than Judge

It is common for couples to judge each other for differences that they don't like, not necessarily because their partner is doing something good or bad, right or wrong. Yet often, differences are a matter of taste and personal preference, and instead of just talking about their preferences, couples begin to criticize one another. This communication skill will help your clients describe their experiences and emotions and remain curious, instead of being quick to judge.

### **1. Act like a reporter and describe what you have observed your spouse do and say. Be specific and describe his or her behavior and facial expressions. "I noticed that..."**

- Ex. A: I noticed that at the party last night, you spoke to many people, but not to me.
- Ex. B: I noticed that you have seemed distant and serious lately, and we haven't talked much together.
- Ex. C: I noticed that yesterday and today when I corrected Jimmy, you just kept watching TV.

### **2. Describe what you are feeling inside about what you are observing. "I feel..."**

- Ex. A: And I felt sad, and I am wondering if you might be upset with me about something.
- Ex. B: And I am feeling bad and lonely.
- Ex. C: And I felt very alone and unsupported as a parent.

### **3. Be curious. Ask for more information about what you have observed. "Can you help me understand what was going on for you? Tell me about it."**

- Ex. A: Can you help me understand what happened and what you were thinking? I don't want to assume something that might not be true.
- Ex. B: I'm puzzled. Can you share your thoughts with me?
- Ex. C: I'm confused. Can we talk about this?

Observing and describing can lead to more information, better understanding, ongoing dialogue, and loving negotiation.