



## Intimacy: Heeding that inner voice proves therapeutic

WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2004 / 529-4774 / FEAT. *Continued From D1*

### *Jettisoning baggage from childhood helps prevent relationship sabotage*

**Stories by Pat Gee**

pgee@starbulletin.com

**Y**OU hear that haranguing voice in your head again, scolding: "You idiot! How many times do you have to make the same mistake? Don't you learn anything? What's wrong with you?! I'm going to ring your neck!"

But it's not your mom or dad's voice anymore; it's your own.

As belittling as it is, psychologist and author Joyce Catlett says using this critical voice can help men and women who have problems with intimate relationships.

Catlett and her colleagues from the Glendon Association in Santa Barbara, Calif., will be speaking tomorrow on "Overcoming Barriers to Intimacy," helping those in the psychotherapy industry to teach their clients how to keep their love alive. The all-day professional symposium is for American Psychological Association members attending the organization's convention at the Hawai'i Convention Center.

Catlett has co-written 10 books with Dr. Robert Firestone, who is responsible for formulating "voice therapy" after 20 years of research and following couples'

case histories. Firestone's therapy helps people to rid themselves of the pervasive influence of the distorted, even "absurd" self-talk that ruins their lives and romantic relationships.

"If kids grow up with a secure attachment to their parents," Catlett said, they don't have this nagging voice distorting everything they experience. But she said many people don't grow up with healthy relationship with their parents, and they end up driving a husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend away because intimacy is too uncomfortable, even if it's what they want most, she said.

There's a tendency for people to become like the person who most persecuted us, or to subconsciously fall in love with someone who has the same character traits as our tormentor. In a perverse streak of human nature, not only are we our own worst enemies, sometimes we become like our worst enemies, according to "Fear of Intimacy," the 1999 book that explains voice therapy.

One of the most popular birthday greeting cards or logo-type T-shirts shows a woman exclaiming: "E-e-ek!! I have become my mother!"

*Please see Intimacy, D3*

The voice doesn't have to originate from one's parents; it can be a teacher who humiliated you or an older brother who could always manage to set you off. The point is not to listen or give credence to destructive talk.

Voice therapy essentially involves writing down what this critical voice says to you in the second person, as if someone else is scolding you. For example, you would write on the left half of a page, "You'd better not blow this relationship like you've done in the past" instead of starting with "I'd."

Then on the right side of the page (or following the critical comments), write a "more realistic, congenial answer" that points out your good qualities, Catlett said.

"You'll be surprised at some of the feelings that are revealed as you are writing them down. Most people can make long lists of the horrible things about themselves but find it hard to write good things about themselves," she said.

Even more important than identifying these thoughts, say them out loud in the second person. When people say things out loud, it reveals the anger they have at themselves, and the sadness for such distortions, which are not based on reality. Then they feel compassion for themselves and for their partner, which gives them the strength to do the behav-



**"You'll be surprised at some of the feelings that are revealed as you are writing them down. Most people can make long lists of the horrible things about themselves, but find it hard to write good things about themselves."**

**Joyce Catlett**  
Author

iors to save the relationship," she said.

"Do this about the guy (or wife/girlfriend), too," she added, because people tend to

blame their partners instead of working on themselves and growing up.

"Gather some self-knowledge. You don't have to be victimized and keep making the same mistakes over and over again, or give up (relationships)."

Identifying self-critical thoughts also helps people recognize "degrading stereotypical thoughts (i.e., man-bashing) about the opposite sex that are not necessarily correct."

The fear of intimacy is based on one's fear of death, either losing the other person through death or one's own death. People fear losing someone they love or the sadness and pain they felt when they were not treated with respect as children, Catlett said, adding, "Everybody does this." So they withdraw or pull away, rationalizing to themselves that "it's not going to last anyway."

She advised, "Take a chance on getting rejected. It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

*Catlett will be speaking with relationship experts Lisa Firestone and Ayala Malach-Pines, and Jon Carlson. More information on the convention is available at [apa.org](http://apa.org). The Glendon Association is a nonprofit organization that holds nationwide workshops and provides education on solving relationship problems. Its toll-free number is 800-663-5281 and Web address is [www.glendon.org](http://www.glendon.org)*