

# 4 Common Mistakes Couples Therapists Make & How You Can Avoid Them

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# Today's Panel

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## 4 Common Mistakes Couples Therapists Make



These are mistakes that are easy to make!



Everyone makes them!

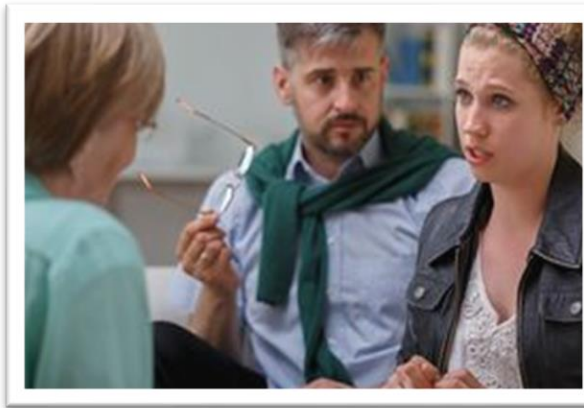


They create unnecessary difficulty for you!

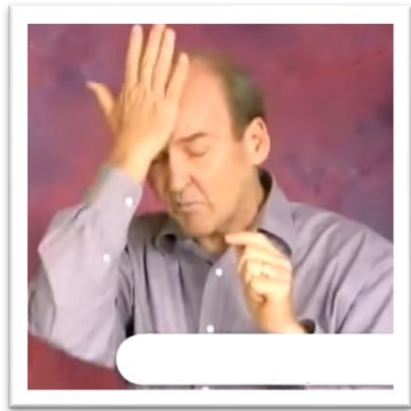
# Why Do I Know These Mistakes



I've made them



I've watched therapists all over the world make these same mistakes



Pete has made them



I see their excitement when they learn new ways!

# How We Discovered a Better Way

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We learned the  
**hard way!**



We were the  
**pioneers!**



We began  
specializing in  
**couples therapy** in  
1984



Pete and I averaged 50  
hours of couples a  
week for 30 years

# The Hard Truth!

These are 4 common and easy to make mistakes which can:



Slow you down



Undo what you just accomplished



Or invite hostility and regression that are not productive.

# Common Mistake #1



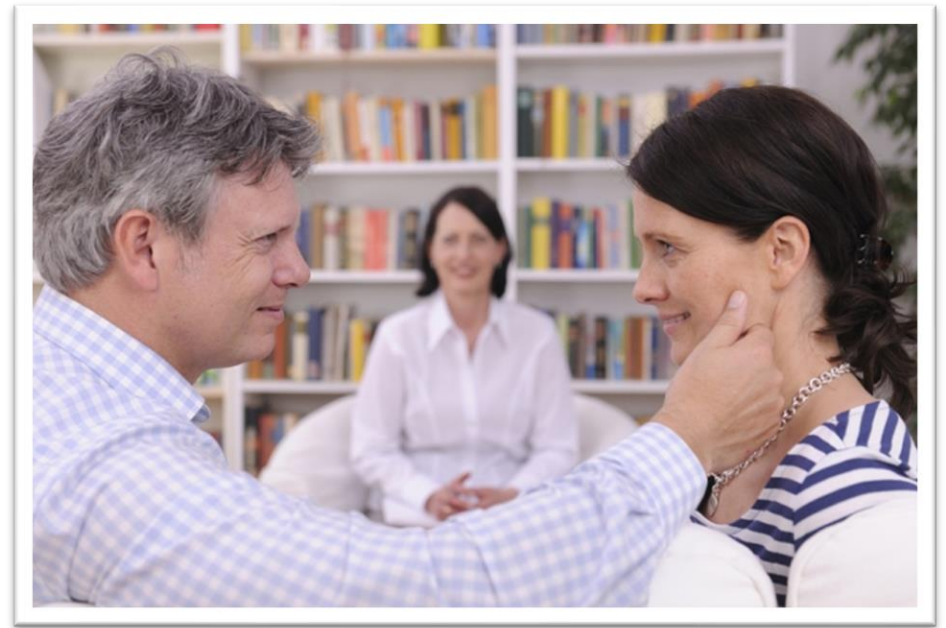
*What are you feeling?*

# #1 This is one of the most common therapeutic questions asked!

Have you considered the *good times and bad times* to ask

Some **good times**:

- ✓ When teaching a client to identify emotions
- ✓ When a usually defended partner opens up and shows vulnerability
- ✓ Helping intellectually oriented partners connect more deeply



# #1 One of the most common therapeutic questions ever!

There are *good times and bad times* to ask this question

Some **unproductive times**:

- ✓ A reflexive response to nonverbal cues
- ✓ After a sneak attack
- ✓ When a client is regressed and complaining about their partner
- ✓ At the end of a very volatile session





# Common Mistake #2



*Allowing couples to  
rehash the "Same Old Fight"  
without Clear Intent*

## #2 Without Enough Structure, Fighting Couples Won't Make Progress

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Challenge with tough questions

Can you start the conversation by describing the problem in a way that does not make your partner look bad or feel bad?



## #2 Challenge with Tough Questions - 3 Good Questions to ask



What are you  
fighting for?

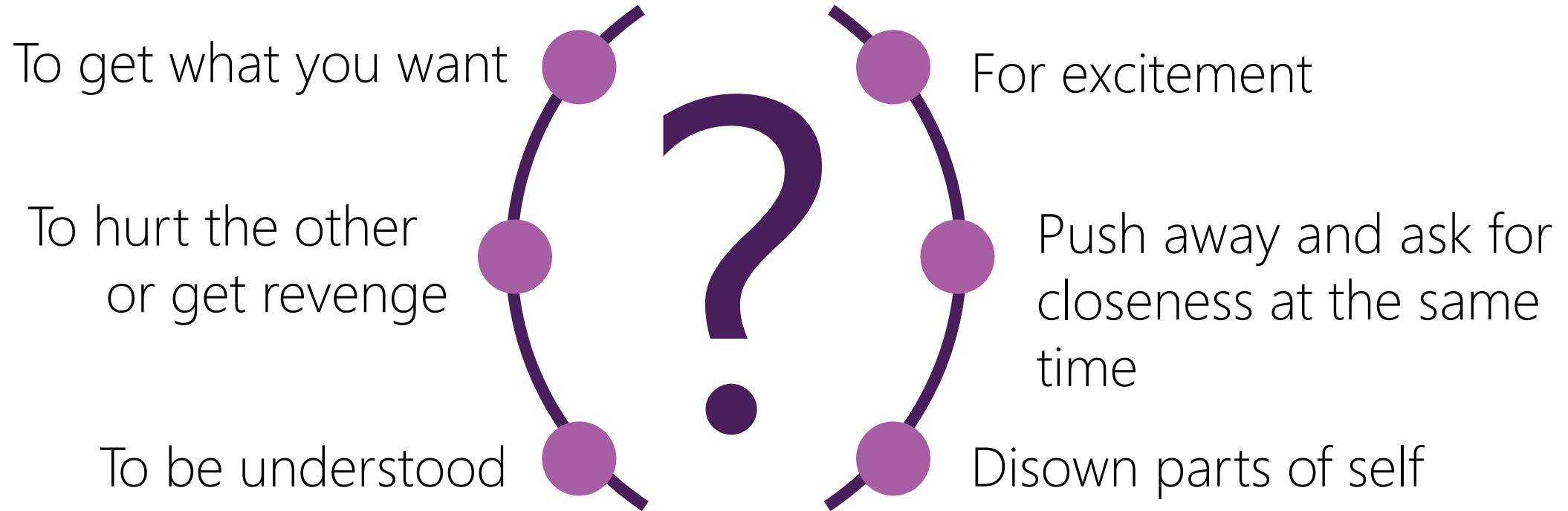


What is the  
outcome you  
desire?

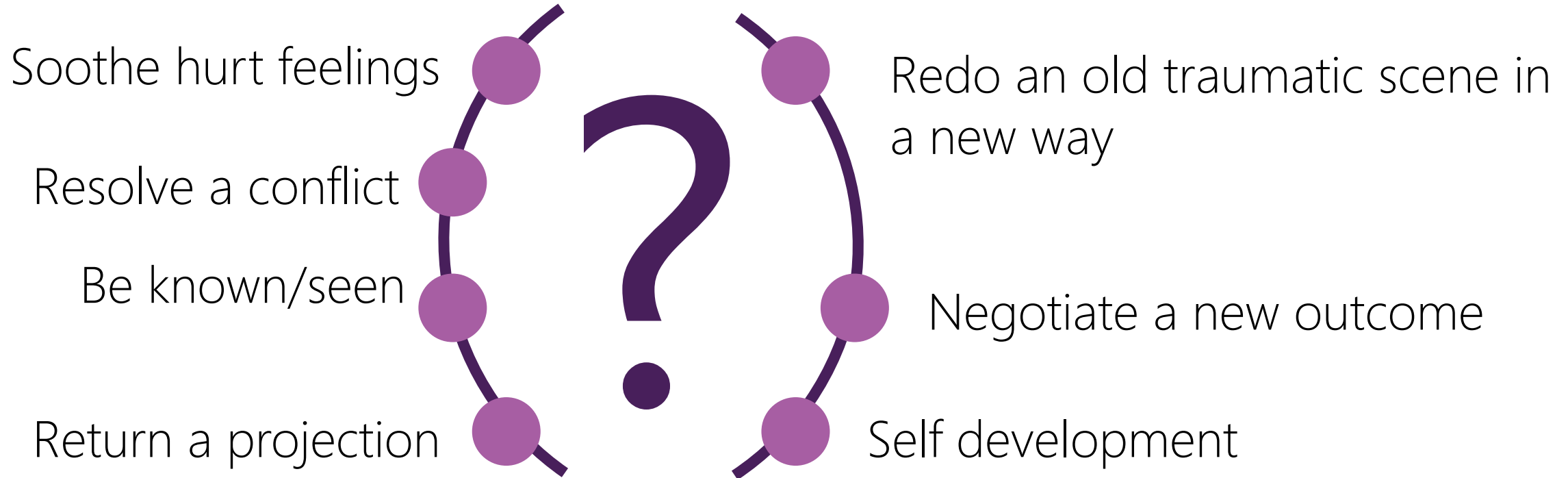


How is what you are  
doing going to lead to  
that outcome?

## #2 What are you fighting for?



## #2 What is the Outcome You Desire



# Common Mistake #3



*Tell your partner what you need from him/her*

# #3 Implies a Required Outcome

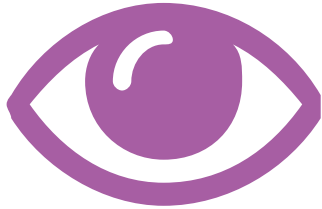
NEED =

Necessity or Obligation

An Urgent Requirement

A Deficiency Requiring Relief

# #3 Lethal Statement that Creates Regression



It may be obvious

OR



It may be hidden

**BUT** it is there!



# Common Mistake #4



*Talking about problems  
instead of focusing on  
dilemmas*

## #4 Internal Dilemma



A dilemma is an internal struggle between two competing perspectives in one partner



Ask each partner to identify and describe their own individual dilemma in the struggle

# #4

You are **being incisive** when you encapsulate each partner's individual dilemma



# #4

When Couples Can Describe Their Problem as an Internal Dilemma **the Conversation Opens to New Perspectives** and It Becomes Clear the First Effort Must Come from Them.





Avoiding these mistakes will  
save you many horrible  
sessions where couples  
leave angry and you go  
home with a headache