

Free program helps couples identify emotional 'hot buttons'

August 3 2015

QUT psychology researcher Katherine De Maria is looking for volunteer couples to help her investigate ways in which people's emotional intelligence can be enhanced to improve their ability to communicate with their intimate partner.

Poor communication can be at the heart of relationship breakdowns because people have not learnt to identify their emotions and communicate them with their partner.

Ms De Maria said she would like everyday couples to take part in her study by participating in a couple therapy program aimed at increasing the way you understand and communicate emotions in relationships.

"I want to investigate the effectiveness of a program aimed at improving couples' understanding and communication of emotions in their relationship.

"Often people are not identifying their emotional hot buttons because they don't spend much time reflecting on them.

"People in [intimate relationships](#) often struggle to understand why their partner is feeling a certain way because they are interpreting them based on their own emotions.

"Thus we can get: 'I don't understand why you're angry, get over it, just move on'.

"The other person, in turn, becomes defensive about their situation when receiving negative or unsupportive feedback.

"This leads to conflict and unhappiness. Partners can distance themselves from each other.

Ms De Maria said the possibility of increasing emotional intelligence had been investigated in the field of management and education with promising results.

"We are interested to investigate if these principles can be applied in intimate relationships," she said.

"The first step is to be able to identify your own feelings. Our emotional vocabulary is often limited and does not allow us to adequately express how we feel.

"For example, we might say that we are angry when we are just mildly agitated.

But by accurately identifying our emotions, we are better able to understand and manage them, and can learn to use them effectively for their true purpose - to tell us important data about our internal self and our external world."

"But if we can equip couples to communicate their feelings authentically they could have lower levels of disagreement and higher relationship satisfaction.

"The ultimate aim of my research is to investigate ways in which couple therapy can be used to enhance people's [emotional intelligence](#) within an intimate partnership."

Ms De Maria said the couple therapy program incorporated techniques aimed at developing [emotional](#) flexibility in addressing situations relevant to their relationship.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

Citation: Free program helps couples identify emotional 'hot buttons' (2015, August 3) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

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