

What are Emotional Needs?

An emotional need is a craving that, when satisfied, leaves you with a feeling of happiness and contentment and when unsatisfied, leaves you with a feeling of unhappiness and frustration. There are probably thousands of emotional needs---a need for parties, chocolate, football on TV, shopping---I could go on and on. Each of us has some of these needs and not others. But there are only a very few emotional needs that, when met by someone of the opposite sex, make us so happy that we risk having an affair with that person. I call those our *most important emotional needs*. Those are the ones that make us feel the happiest and most satisfied whenever they are met.

When a husband and wife come to me for help, I first identify their most important emotional needs---what makes each of them feel the best? Then I help them learn to meet those emotional needs for each other. If they learn to do it, they create a fulfilling marriage.

By privately discussing emotional needs with hundreds of men and women, I have discovered that there are ten emotional needs that are usually near the top of the list for most people: the need for admiration, affection, conversation, domestic support, family commitment, financial support, honesty and openness, physical attractiveness, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment.

I have also made a revolutionary discovery that has helped me understand why it is so difficult for men and women to meet each other's needs. Whenever I ask couples to list these ten needs according to their priority, men list them one way and women the opposite way. The five emotional needs that men usually place at the top of their list are usually at the bottom of the list for women, and vice versa---the five *most important* emotional needs of women are usually the *least important* of men.

What an insight! No wonder men and women have so much difficulty meeting each other's needs! They are unable to empathize with each other. They feel like doing for each other what *they* would appreciate the most, but it turns out that their efforts are misdirected. What one spouse appreciates the most, the other usually appreciates the least!

Of course, everyone is somewhat unique. While men on average pick a particular five emotional needs and women on average pick the other five, any specific man or woman may pick other combinations. Therefore, I always encourage each spouse to decide what he or she appreciates the most. I never tell people what their emotional needs are. They always tell me. And when those particular needs are met, they will be in love with the one who meets them.

When our most important emotional needs go unmet, we tend to feel somewhat empty and depressed. When those needs are met, we feel alive again---fulfilled. While we all may go through life with unmet emotional needs, none of us is very happy with that kind of life. People who feel depressed because of unmet emotional needs may see therapist after therapist in an effort to relieve their feeling of hopelessness, but they find no relief. They take medication to treat their depression, but that only helps relieve the suffering as long as the medication is used.

These people often conclude that there's something wrong with them, that their brain is out of whack, that they are psychologically unstable.

But then they meet someone who makes them feel wonderful. It's as if the clouds have lifted and the sun is shining again. This person usually satisfied the unmet emotional needs quite innocently. It may be that the person is genuinely interested in conversation, expresses admiration that is sincere, or provides exciting companionship. When the unmet emotional needs are fulfilled, the results are incredible. The depressed person is instantly cured---as long as he or she continues to have emotional needs met. When those needs are not longer met, the depression returns.

Some people believe that the lifting of their depression during an affair is a sign from God that they should abandon past relationships and cling to this new relationship. But it's no sign from God. Instead, it's the way our emotions blindly encourage us to spend more time with those who do the best job meeting our emotional needs. If we were to give in to our emotions and chase after anyone who happens to meet our emotional needs at the moment, our lives and the lives of our families would be chaotic in no time. It's very foolish to let our emotions dictate the course of our lives. But unmet needs have a powerful effect---so powerful that people are willing to give up their spouse as well as their children, career, and beliefs to have their emotional needs met.

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