

## Chapter 12

# Conflict with Your Spouse: Is It Possible You are Wrong?



*It has been said that the greatest fault of all is to be conscious of none.* Why? Because if you are not conscious of your own faults, you cannot correct them.

Consider this fascinating and true story about how the human mind can become convinced that what it believes is true when, in reality, it is false. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss its relevance to marriage.

### **Facilitated Communication**

#### **Introduction**

The authorities issued a warrant for his arrest. Authorities alleged he had sexually abused his son, now 17. The father protested his innocence. The authorities forced Robert out of his home for the next six months. They

prohibited him from having any contact with his son.

What makes this case so extraordinary is that the graphic accusations originated with a boy who was autistic from birth—that is, one with whom meaningful communication was minimal to non-existent. How could this be?

## **The Belief**

Let's go back to January 1992 and the television program *Prime Time with Diane Sawyer*. She began, "And now a story about hope. For decades, autism has been a dark mystery, a disorder that seems to turn children in on themselves.... Tonight, however, you are going to see something that has changed that. Call it a miracle. Call it an awakening." Call it, "facilitated communication."

For the first time, autistic children diagnosed with a brain development disorder were showing the world that it was wrong. Many such children were now doing algebra, diagramming sentences, writing poetry, and expressing feelings. Not that they conversed with spoken words. Rather, they did this through the help of "facilitators" who held up and supported their arms. The autistic children would then touch letters or numbers on a keyboard to spell out their thoughts.



Interest in this new discovery spread like wildfire. By 1994, thousands of people were being trained as facilitators, and millions of dollars were being spent to help autistic children communicate in ways never dreamed of before. When one mother saw the first words her daughter spelled out, she exclaimed, “I just felt like I was looking down into a well and my daughter was there, down at the bottom of the well, and I was seeing her for the first time.”

The exceptional work of these youngsters amazed people, making them wonder if it was really the child or the facilitator doing the typing.

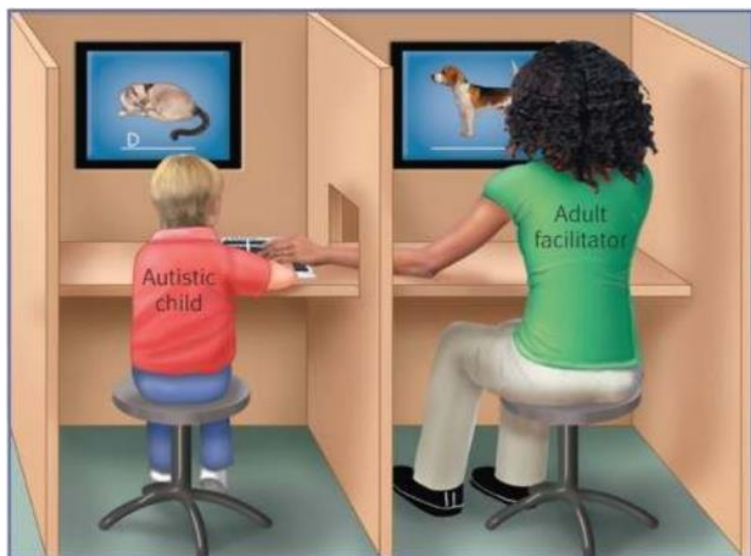
### **The Problem**

Unfortunately, as this new communication technique spread throughout the country, so did allegations of sexual abuse. Children, through their facilitators, alleged that a parent or a teacher was sexually abusing them. Some parents had to leave their homes without being

permitted to have contact with their children. Authorities jailed others. Still, other parents had their children taken from them. Families were being ripped apart as the state stepped in to ensure the safety of these children. Yet parents were tearfully insisting upon their innocence. They needed definitive answers about the validity of this form of communication.

They set up the tests. For example, the facilitator and child would sit side by side at one end of a long, rectangular table, facing the other. Running down the middle of the table was a partition so that the facilitator could not see what the child saw, and the child could not see what the facilitator saw.

Initially, both facilitator and child were shown the same pictures, and the child, with the facilitator's help, correctly typed out what was revealed to both. Then, the child was



shown one picture, and the facilitator was simultaneously shown another. The child, with the facilitator's help, correctly typed out the name of the item that the facilitator saw, not the item that only the child saw.

## **The Reality**

By the end of 1993, not one of over a dozen studies showed that facilitated communication ever originated with the child. Instead of unlocking the hidden thoughts of autistic children, the technique uncovered the unconscious thoughts of the facilitators.

Morley Safer's *60 Minutes* report examined claims that facilitated communication worked brilliantly. The program concluded, "So far, there is no convincing objective evidence to support those claims." Hugh Downs on ABC's *20/20* came to a similar conclusion. An eye-opening PBS documentary described an institute at Syracuse University dedicated to facilitated communication as "researching, teaching, and promoting a technique that all the scientific evidence says is not real."

In 1994, the Council for the American Psychological Association (APA) passed the following motion: "Be It Resolved that APA adopts the position that facilitated communication is a controversial and unproved communicative procedure with no scientifically showed support for its efficacy."

The association reaffirmed its position in 2003, stating, “Study after study showed that facilitated communication didn’t really work.” In June 2008, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry said that facilitated communication was “not scientifically valid” and “should not be used to confirm or deny allegations of abuse or to make diagnostic or treatment decisions.”

At the O. D. The O. D. Heck Center for the Developmentally Disabled in New York, where they had enthusiastically practiced facilitated communication, did not achieve a single valid communication after 180 such trials. Ray Paglieri, director of the autism program at the center, had to tell well-meaning facilitators that



the children were not typing the words. They were. The relationships the facilitators thought they had with the children were conversations they had only with themselves.

## **The Reaction**

The reaction? Mr. Jim Maruska, a facilitator, admitted that he cried and likened the discovery to the death of a close friend. Suddenly, what was so real no longer existed.

“I centered a lot of things around this and now, all of a sudden, ‘No, it’s not.’” Marian

Pitsas, a speech pathologist and facilitator, was distraught. She had to tell parents that facilitated communication “wasn’t real.” She had to acknowledge that she was “dead wrong” about the whole thing. For months, she could not breach the subject without dissolving into tears.

The experience of psychologist Doug Wheeler was much the same. He remarked, “It was amazing to me to see how willing people are to abandon their beliefs and adopt a new belief without verification and do... virtually overnight, because it happened to myself.... I was so caught up in the emotionality of it.”



### **Insight Into the Human Mind**

This story is fascinating because there is no indication that the hundreds of educated and dedicated facilitators succumbed to delusions. What is striking is how one’s belief and emotionality can create an error of major proportions. The facilitators were not only wrong about facilitated communication,

***but they were wrong about  
the thought process going on  
inside their own heads!***



Didn't anyone tell him?

The train comes from the other direction!

### **A Lesson for Marriage**

We will have never-ending discord if we only look at our partner as being at fault for our relationship problems and fail to look within. Our spouse may be wrong in various ways, but is that the complete story? What about our contributions? To what degree are we holding onto error? To what extent do our spouse's responses correspond to our own less-than-stellar off-putting beliefs and behaviors?

We should be open to looking within when considering why our relationship is so strained. To the extent we can acknowledge that our thinking may be wrong is the extent to which we are more likely to have peace in our home. The truth may hurt, but it is better to accept the truth than to live a lie.





## Discuss

- A. There are two pertinent questions you should each ask yourselves.
1. What is the evidence that supports my thought or opinion?
  2. Even more importantly, what is the evidence that does not support my thought or opinion? To answer this question honestly takes courage. It can also lead to peace.
- B. When discussing the question, “Why is admitting you’re wrong so hard?” one man said:

*Ok so I have this problem. Maybe I can explain. So one I am SUPER aware when I do it. And I hate it so much. So every time I tell myself next time, I will admit, “I am wrong.” But then when the time comes it’s just so hard you have no idea. It literally feels like at that point I should go ahead and say, “Hey guys I’m an idiot, make fun of me” or something like that. It’s just such a horrible feeling. And the worst part is that I know that none of this is true. I KNOW that admitting your wrong is like the opposite of being dumb. But again it just feels so hard to admit it and I hate myself for that. Maybe it has to do with the way I was raised. I don’t know. But I promise I’m trying to better myself.*

This person didn't acknowledge the error of his ways because he didn't know the difference between right and wrong. He did, but emotionally he couldn't handle it.

If this man's experience is like yours, is there anything your spouse can do to make it easier for you to open up, be true to yourself, and acknowledge reality?

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