

CASE EXAMPLE

After 10 years of marriage, husband, Greg, moves out of the marital residence “to find himself,” leaving mother, Pat, to assume full-time care of the couple’s 2 young children.

Greg to Minuchin: I feel less depressed having gone— left the home.

Minuchin to Greg: Are you saying Pat depresses you?

Greg to Minuchin: I don’t put that on her. I felt depressed, and I really felt depressed for very long time in the situation.

Minuchin to Greg: Hold it, you said you were depressed at home, you left the home and felt less depressed. You’re saying Pat depresses you.

Greg to Minuchin: No, I take responsibility for being depressed. I can’t put that on Pat.

Minuchin to Greg: Follow me. You were depressed, and Pat did not help with your depression.

Greg: Right.

Minuchin to Greg: Why doesn’t Pat help you?

Greg to Minuchin: I guess I feel that a lot of my needs weren’t being met. I felt very frustrated. I felt very deprived.

Minuchin to Greg: Can you be more concrete? I don’t know in what way Pat isn’t helping you.

Greg to Minuchin: We had planned a vacation. And we had lots of problems dealing with getting away arranging for babysitters.

Minuchin to Greg: You wanted to have a vacation with Pat alone, without the children and that couldn't be arranged?

Greg to Minuchin: Yes

Minuchin to Pat: How did you see than enterprise?

Pat to Minuchin: It's very painful for me to leave the kids at this age.

Minuchin to Pat: So you are depressed also?

Pat to Minuchin: I'm very depressed. I've been very depressed since he left.

Minuchin to Pat: What does Greg due to depress you?

Pat to Minuchin: He talks about leaving frequently. And I feel that he doesn't want me for me. He says he wants to expand and enjoy himself and take care of himself and do exciting things and have a good time.

Minuchin to Pat: So he makes you feel like you want to kick him?

Pat to Minuchin: Yes

Minuchin to Greg: What does she do that makes you feel like you want to leave? Talk with each other about that.

(Pat tells Greg that he shows no interest in her and talks down to her and wants to escape. Greg tells Pat she is too focused on the kids to the exclusion of him)

Minuchin to Greg: So, you must be doing something that is not exciting for Pat that she needs to take the kids with her when she's with you. She finds being with you was boring, and she prefers the kids to you. Are you a boring person?

Greg: (Laughing): I think that's great. I really never thought of it in those terms. You know I find it funny.

Minuchin to Pat: Is he a very boring person?

Pat to Minuchin: I wouldn't use the term boring. But he's not there for me. He's not there emotionally for me.

Minuchin to Pat: Then you want to kick him back. You chronically want to kick him?

Pat: yes.

Minuchin to Greg: How does she kick you?

Greg to Minuchin: I feel her anger often, being irritable. Kind of stern. And also not being sexually available. Just not affectionate, not making contact with me.

Pat: Neither are you affectionate. You don't make contact with me except for sex.

(the blame game continues back and forth like this a few times more)

Minuchin to both: I have been keeping a scorecard, and I would give to each of you three points: you are pretty good; you kicked him three times, and he kicked you three times. Since you both are tied, continue

and try to get out of it. Talk with each other in such a way that the other person doesn't feel like kicking you back.

Greg: I feel confused. I feel very hot right now and anxious and pressured.

The couple, having reached their usual threshold of nonresolution, attempt to change the subject, but Minuchin keeps them focused on problem resolution by directing them to find an alternative way to talk with each other so the other does not feel like kicking back.

Greg to Pat: I feel like I'm wanting to be accepted by you right now. I'm wanting you to remember my softness, my vulnerability, and my loving you for you and my loving for the kids. I'm aware of hurting you and I don't like that feeling, and I'm aware of keeping my distance, and I don't want to hurt you, and I want you to know that.

Pat to Greg: I am very afraid of you leaving me. I want you to be the man I fell in love with.

(Couple kisses and makes up)