

BEWARE the 4 Commonest Communication Blocks

One "problem" teenager told me "Have they (his parents) told you they are sleeping in separate rooms for years now?" The significance is that the son is aware that his parent's marriage has fallen apart and so finds that whatever they say is incongruent with what they do.

Earlier the father had told me that his kids are "OK" and his problem son is just being "you know, a boy". Now you may ask, "Isn't that ridiculous? Family wants to be close. Who would want to keep themselves apart from their own family members?" Well this is part of the denial. While we may say we believe that blood is thicker than water and there's no place like home, the truth is that many a home is more like hell.

According to Sinclair Ferguson, the founding trainer of Man Alive International, men tend to use 4 types of excuses to divert themselves from facing problematic relationships. They are: a) Denial; b) Minimization; c) Blame; and d) Collusion. Let's examine each excuse in greater detail below.

- a) Denial is the refusal to admit having a problem e.g., "We are OK" said an incarcerated father who had been in and out of prison so often that his son grew up without him and the wife had just told me what a struggle it has been to be a single mom and now wrestling with a rebellious teenager. I asked, "What made you think so?" "Oh he comes and visits me once in a while in jail and it's OK."
- b) Minimization is to understate the impact of one's actions, e.g., "Less said the better or else more quarrel", said a husband about interacting with his wife of twenty years. Here is someone who has minimized the alienated relationship as something positive.
- c) Blame is to shift the cause and responsibility of one's problem to someone or something other than ourselves. For example, "He is so lazy, if only his mother hadn't spoiled him" said a father about his son whose school bag was packed by the maid since kindergarten.
- d) Collusion is to intentionally shift from personal responsibility to a normalized experience or secret pact. For example, "You know how women are!" (wink, wink). It is a way to save face when men feel they are cornered and use this as the ultimate excuse.

These excuses are so common that we can easily miss them. In your conversations, just try and see how often men use any of these and you may be surprised how often we avoid being real in our daily interactions with others. Once you notice this you will see why family ties are often skin deep. The next time your son or daughter or wife says: "I'm OK". Stop and ask "Tell me how did that feel?"