

THE MOORE THERAPY MOVEMENT!: The elephant in the room

Written by Darren D. Moore, Ph.D., LMFT
Wednesday, 26 March 2014 15:17



The Elephant in the Room.

Why do we have such a huge problem with talking about whatever it is that needs to be talked about in our relationships with our friends, family, church organizations, etc.? I see time and time again people who would rather avoid addressing issues, avoid facing the truth, and avoid being their most genuine selves, instead of being open and honest about how they are feeling.

One thing I know as a mental health professional is that our thoughts guide our behaviors. Even if a person does not say a word, how they are feeling will manifest in their lives, and it will be expressed through their behaviors and interaction with others. Our thoughts may in fact come out in the way we engage with other people through our emotions and our non-verbal communication. Perhaps there's something you really should tell your spouse or child that is bothering you.

Instead of telling them, you'd rather ignore the elephant in the room.

It has been my experience that many people would rather live by the mantra of, "if it ain't broke don't fix it." While I understand this perspective and can agree with its use in some situations, when it comes to addressing the elephant in the room, it should not be applied. The fact of the matter is, "it is broke." There is a problem and we do have an issue, but for one reason or another we pretend that it does not exist.

I recognize that addressing areas of conflict can be scary for people, especially if they have had some type of trauma in the past that has made them feel uncomfortable with addressing the "elephant." Perhaps you have tried to address the elephant in the room, but have failed in the past. Perhaps you have tried to address the elephant, but simply do not know how. Perhaps, the last time you tried to bring up the elephant in the room, your spouse communicated to you that they were reluctant to address the issue.

As an example, my question to you is how is it possible that you know that your husband is

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cheating on you? He knows that you know, but you fail to have a conversation about it. How exactly does that work for you? So, in your opinion, not talking about it, makes it go away? How do we resolve issues, if we are afraid to address them? What prevents us from having that family meeting – the one that everyone wants to avoid like the plague? Why would we rather engage with people at the surface level, instead of at a deeper level where everyone could gain a better understanding?

Sure, there are many different types of elephants in the room, I am sure you can think of a few. How do you prevent another child from being abused, if you do not address the abuse that occurred in your church? How do you tell your spouse, "I think you are getting fat?" How do you tell your child, that the person they thought was their biological father, is actually not their "real" father? How do you address the substance abuse in your family, if everyone is afraid to talk about it? How do you decide who's going to care for your parents during their elderly years, if no one wants to talk about it?"

Addressing the elephant in the room may not be as scary as you think. It just takes a little training. As a marriage and family therapist, I help people facilitate these discussions. I often find out that it is not so much that people do not know how to have these discussions, but that they would rather avoid them. I find it interesting, as I think about how we pass on traditions within our community. So the reason mom never addressed dad's infidelity, is because she saw her mother excuse her husband's infidelity as a child.

Part of what I am saying is that we have what we call, "unspoken rules" in our relationships. One rule I often see at play is the unspoken rule of not talking about the real problem. What is that about? I guess this is part of the reason I went into my field, because I have always felt that it was important to help people learn how to address these problems. So what's in it for you? How about getting to the root of the problem, reaching a real understanding, and not having to pretend anymore?

Sometimes having these "real" discussions can actually bring people together. Now, I acknowledge that some people avoid these conversations due to the inherent risk involved. It is true, you might hear something that makes you upset, you might risk the current status of your friendship or intimate relationship, you may have someone become angry at you; but this is all part of the process. The road of healing begins with one step. The first step is being honest with yourself, and then with others.

I believe that if you do not deal with your problems, guess what, they will *deal* with you. Problems have a way of surfacing, even when we may not be aware. I also believe in what we call the bio-psycho-social model – that what you are feeling emotionally can manifest through biological issues such as the migraines you keep getting, the fatigue you feel during the day, the ulcers you continue to have, could all be directly linked to how you feel.

If you feel that there is an elephant in your room I hope you consider having a discussion about it and bringing it to light. If you feel that the stakes are too high to do it alone or feel unsafe, contact one of your local mental health professionals to assist with having this conversation. I urge you to free yourself, address the issues you may have, and get rid of the psychological

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stress, so that you can make room for happiness and more positive relationships.

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Please note: this column is for educational purposes only. It is not to diagnose or treat any mental health issues.