

First, Stop All Grouching¹ !

By Timothy D. Evans and Raymond J. Corsini

Grouching is a common behavior that is highly destructive to relationships. It increases interpersonal conflict and provokes revenge while generating attitudes of resentment and no cooperation. Parents grouse at their children because they believe it will make them more responsible. One or both members of a couple may grouse at each other, convinced they know what is best for their partner. Despite its prevalence, grouching is a discouraging way of interacting. It destroys the potential for developing an encouraging and intimate relationship.

What is grouching? Webster defines grouse as "to grumble or complain." It is related to the word "grouch." Roget equates the term with "fret, chafe, frown, crab, or pout." The usual synonym for grouching is nagging. The phrase, "Get off my back" means to stop grouching.

The initial step in encouragement training is to teach couples, parents, and teachers how their seemingly innocuous behavior irritates and discourages others. Nothing will improve in marriage until one starts working on him- or herself without trying to change the other person (Evans, 1989; Meredith & Evans, 1990). Marriage reconstruction requires the grouser to stop nagging, complaining, arguing, judging,

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criticizing, punishing, or rewarding (anything that irritates the other person). In short, the grouser needs to shut up and be pleasant.

GROUSING EXERCISE: An especially effective exercise for improving relationships entails the elimination of grouching for 4 consecutive days. After the therapist explains what it means to grouse, the following directions are given to couples or individuals: If you are guilty of grouching, are you willing to stop it for four consecutive days? If so, here is the assignment: You must stop grouching immediately and completely for four consecutive days. If you've been attacking, criticizing, yelling, reminding, nagging, threatening, bringing up the past, comparing, or pointing out mistakes, stop it now. This includes all negative behavior, no matter how "nicely" presented or well-intentioned.

Instead of grouching, act "as if" you are a sensible and self-controlled person who has decided to get off your spouse's back and enjoy their company in spite of their shortcomings. You are not to do anything else other than to avoid grouching at your partner, child, or the person closes to you. After four consecutive days you have the choice of reverting to your old behavior.

You are only to participate in this exercise if you agree to do it for four consecutive days. This means that if you go for three days and grouse, you need to start over. You are not to perform this exercise with the intention of shaping-up the other person. You are changing your behavior because it is the decent and reasonable thing to do.

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Assuming you follow through with this experiment, what might happen! There are several possibilities:

1. You will feel better about yourself. After all, who likes to be a prison guard monitoring someone's behavior?
2. You will look better. Nags look like nags.
3. You will show/generate goodwill. Your mate will have evidence of your intention to improve the marriage.
4. You will become a more encouraging person.
5. You will reduce tension.

Your family will develop a friendly, supportive atmosphere. The Grouching Exercise is one that benefits everyone as both therapists and their clients can encourage themselves and their families. Practicing encouragement via the elimination of grouching is a win-win quality relationship proposal. '

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