



Maryville Daily Times, April 4, 2010
Dirty Dancing Steps That Can Undo Relationships

Dr. Joy Carroll, LifeLine Counseling Center

The pursuit of love is sometimes a bumpy road. With the current “Dancing with the Stars” craze, one is reminded of the “dances” that reflect the patterned styles of relationships. There are loving dances that enhance the balance and depth of intimacy necessary for relationships to thrive. On the other hand, a theme of unhealthy dances can make for a difficult and painful experience. It’s always important to dance more than one dance to determine if a partner is right for you or if married, that you are in sync with the music.

The following is an overview of common relationship dances that can lead to disappointment and heartbreak. Of course it is possible to find oneself dancing steps from more than one of the routines listed below.

The Catch Me If You Can Quickstep

The Dancers: An Avoidant and a partner who can dance backwards

The Dance Steps: The Avoidant starts the relationship being the pursuer, but when the partner reciprocates and begins to become invested, the relationship dynamics change and the Avoidant becomes distant and detached. If the other partner then begins to distance, the Avoidant begins to actively pursue again. These dizzying roller coaster dance steps repeat over and over again establishing a frustrating cycle. If pressed to commit to the relationship, the Avoidant becomes panicky and retreats, leaving behind a confused, heartbroken partner.

Impact of the Dance on Relationships: The relationship becomes an ongoing pattern of pursuit and distancing. A truly intimate relationship is impossible without a stable, consistent emotional presence. This dance is particularly unhealthy when the Avoidant is paired with an emotionally needy partner who frantically pursues when the Avoidant runs.

The Please Don’t Leave Me Fandango

The Dancers: The Pleaser and a partner who needs to be taken care of or rescued

The Dance Steps: The Pleaser often has poor self image and believes he or she is incomplete without a relationship. This dancer is very uncomfortable with conflict and avoids it at all cost. Feeling responsible for the partner, the Pleaser tries to fix everything when something goes

wrong. Some partners may feel smothered by this behavior; others encourage it to avoid responsibility. Tolerance for pain and abuse is typically high and the Pleaser is often coupled with a person whose history includes addiction and/or irresponsible behavior.

Impact of the Dance on Relationships: The Pleaser may consider himself or herself an extension of the partner--merging personal identity by overfocusing and acquiescing to the needs of the other party. As the Pleaser struggles to establish and clarify his or her own needs, few are met. Pleasers often feel depressed, angry and hurt due to a sense of powerlessness.

The I'm in Control Tango

The Dancers: The Director and someone who can "second position" and bunny hop

The Dance Steps: The Director leads the dance and calls the shots. He or she becomes upset if resistance is encountered from the dance partner. Typically, the Director rarely accepts responsibility for inappropriate behavior or poor choices; he or she displaces blame and believes others are the source of problems. The opinions and feelings of others are discounted and the Director considers himself or herself to be more astute and rational than others.

Impact of the Dance on Relationships: This particular dance is fertile ground for emotional, physical or sexual abuse. The Director uses power as a means of controlling and manipulating the partner. Emotional closeness is impossible because the relationship is one-sided with little or no reciprocity.

The Casual Lover Hustle

The Dancers: The Charmer and any number of dancers

The Dance Steps: The Charmer can act very confident, smooth and charismatic. He or she fears emotional closeness and prefers to have superficial, short-term relationships rather than committing to one partner. Sex can become a priority and be used as a means of medicating and avoiding personal and relationship issues.

Impact of the Dance on Relationships: Because the Charmer is initially so charming and approachable, it is easy for partners to become emotionally invested. This leads to heartbreak when it is discovered that he or she takes the relationship much less seriously. Sex addiction is common among Charmers. Partners may believe they are the only ones on the dance card when in fact there are many others.

The Used and Abused Twist

The Dancers: The Victim and a dancer that can pirouette and jump hoops

The Dance Steps: The Victim tends to view the world in a negative light and feels used and abused, particularly by those in personal and work relationships. Any confrontation of the Victim can result in a rageful counter attack or withdrawal. This dancer is emotionally needy and keeps the other hooper hooked into the relationship through guilt and pity. Suicide threats and other types of manipulation are sometimes used in order to keep the partner from leaving the relationship.

Impact of the Dance on Relationships: The Victim seeks excessive amounts of attention and leaves the other dancer feeling exhausted and emotionally spent. The partner discovers that no matter what he or she does, it is never enough. The Victim assumes a posture of victimization as a means of gaining attention and love.

Most relationships have seasons in which the coupleship is in harmony, making its own beautiful music. And there are always times when the dance floor seems a little unsteady, causing missteps and stumbles. But when you have the right partner, anyone can dance like the stars.