

# Wishes and Fears - in Couples Therapy: Dan Wile and Dorothy

## Kaufmann

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*Dorothy Kaufmann and David Puder have no conflicts of interest to disclose.*

## Introduction

In this episode of the podcast, I speak with Dorothy Kaufman, a marriage and family therapist who was married to the late Daniel Wile. We discuss the book that they both co-authored together called, *Solving the Moment: A Collaborative Couple Therapy Manual*. Dan is a well-known marriage and family therapist, the creator of Collaborative Couple Therapy, and spoken very highly of by Dr. Gottman.

We discuss a popular method used by Daniel Wile in therapy known as doubling, as well as their experience counseling couples together, and her marriage to Dan.

## Doubling: Restating things as wishes or fears

Doubling was Dan's signature method of talking for each partner in the couple as if he were that person, translating their attack or withdrawal to words of intimacy. Doubling a person is to become that person in that moment by restating their negative emotion or comment as a wish or fear.

The key to this method is to replace "You" statements with "I" statements. This allows the conversation to be less accusatory and allows for intimacy between the two partners where they can express their inner fears and desires. The goal is to get the partner to reach that sigh of relief, phrasing what they are feeling deep down. It's easy to see the person's anger, but it can be difficult to see the underlying feelings the anger is protecting. One of Dan's main reasons for this method was to help the client reconnect with their vulnerable feelings. It is very often seen in therapy that there is some wish, fear, shame, disappointment or insecurity behind a partner's anger. Doubling helps the partner gain access to those feelings and reach a sense of relief by being understood.

The most fundamental part of this method is to let the partner know, after reframing their statement, that your recasting of their statement as an "I wish" or "I fear" is just speculation. The partner can then agree or disagree. By allowing the patient to have the last word the therapist assures equality with the client.

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### Examples of reframing “You” statements to “I” statements

1. “You never text me when you’re at work.” → “I wish you’d text me when you’re at work.”; “I fear you’re losing interest in me.”
2. “It would be nice if for once you’d make it in time for dinner.” → “I wish we could sit down as a family and have dinner.”; “I fear that I am not that important to you.”
3. “You don’t love me.” → “I am feeling fear that you don’t love me.”

There are a number of underlying vulnerable feelings. The therapist works to translate those feelings so that the blame of the issues isn’t being placed on one partner. When Dan wasn’t able to pinpoint the underlying vulnerable feeling, the client voicing that that was not their feeling is just as helpful because now they are able to better verbalize their inner feelings.

## Importance of Tone

One of Dan’s essential principles, to help reframe a partner’s statements, is changing the tone. A partner’s tone of voice can make the same words sound loving or angry, depending on the way the partner speaks. “I love you” can be said in a heartfelt way, but it can also be said in a flat, not-so-loving way. Doubling can be used by replacing a partner’s harsh tone with a gentle tone. Tone can also be expressed through body language and facial expressions.

## Importance of Acknowledgement

Dorothy discusses how Dan started to add a layer to his method by implementing the importance of acknowledgement. The idea is that a partner owns some responsibility for an argument that occurs between the couple. By sharing a responsibility in the argument, the partner affirms an understanding of their partner’s complaints. This can be done just by actively listening to the partner and assuring that they have been heard. “Intimacy comes from one partner voicing their truest inner experience and their partner hearing and acknowledging them.”

## The “Unsolvable” Problem

Research has found that close to 69% of relationship problems are perpetual problems. Examples of perpetual problems include not being on the same page about whether to have

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kids, having different ideas about where to raise a family, having different personalities, or having different parenting approaches. When you are attracted to someone for their energy, there is often a shadow side where they have an underlying personality of being the more dominant type. Similarly, if you are attracted to someone for how calm and quiet they are, there is often a shadow side of how they have a more passive personality. The unsolvable problem is who we are as a person. In therapy, we help the partners reconnect the initial attraction that drew them to each other in the first place.

## The Pursuer-Distancer Dynamic

A common dance in any relationship is one person pursuing and the other distancing. One aspect of pursuit might be to become angry and critical, causing the other partner to become more distant or to shut-down. In this dynamic, when the pursuer pursues, the distancer distances. Perhaps the pursuer has an anxious attachment style and the distancer has an avoidant attachment style. Eventually, the distancer will begin to express avoidance, or stonewalling, by making it harder for the partner to get through to them. In situations like these, you hope to have the couple take a step back and notice the ongoing dance. The therapist can use doubling in this circumstance by using statements such as “I fear when you disengage from me that you don’t love me.” The partner is then more aware of how they really feel, helping the couple reconnect. The “I” statement can be very powerful in these situations.

Articles to read:

[Recasting Complaints as Wishes and Fears](#)

You Tube of Dan Wile worth watching:

[63: Dan Wile - How Collaboration Creates Intimacy](#)

Book to read:

[Solving the Moment](#)

Connect Further With Dorothy Kaufmann: [here](#)

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