

## RELATIONSHIPS

## SCARED OF BEING SELFISH

Relationship coach **Vicky van Praag** looks at how the fear of being selfish can cause you to give too much

**C**an you remember the last time you gave someone something with all your heart? It could have been breakfast in bed or a beautiful birthday gift, something you'd thought about with the intention of making the receiver especially happy. When you give with an open heart, you get joy in return. To watch the face of someone you love light up, and know that you are responsible for their happiness, feels amazing.

So why is it that giving doesn't always feel this good? When you are overwhelmed by the needs of others, when you feel like all you do is give, give, give all day long, when it seems as though you live every moment of your life for other people and do nothing for yourself, the thought of giving one more little thing can make you want to scream. Balancing other people's needs with our own is not always simple.

**"When you aren't motivated to give from the secret fear that you're selfish, you'll be able to give only when it feels right to do so"**

Many of us grow up feeling that we are somehow not quite good enough and that our needs are not as important as the needs of others. In order to compensate for this feeling, we give to everyone around us, but



at our own expense, feeling that anything else would be selfish. No matter how sad and neglected we feel from our giving, the fear of being selfish, of being a bad, unlovable person, urges us on to keep going. And when we finally snap, we feel even worse about ourselves. We have become someone who gives too much.

In order to get joy from giving, you have to drop the guilt, and the drive to get approval. When you aren't motivated to give from the secret fear that you're selfish, you'll be able to give only when it feels right to do so. You won't overwhelm yourself with commitments. And, above all, you'll make sure you're happy before rushing to meet others' needs.

Giving can feel wonderful; but to be able to keep it up, you need to start giving to yourself first. If you give to everyone without taking care of yourself you'll soon feel exhausted, frustrated, abandoned and completely and utterly empty. And when you give from a place of emptiness, the giving is hollow and love-less, and there is no point to it anymore. The people in your life might want things from you, but what they want most of all is your love. To give them that you have to love yourself first. You may fear that taking care of yourself is selfish, but if you want to bring joy to those you love, it's actually the least selfish thing you can do.

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Counsellor **Ian Woodroffe** answers your questions



I am aware of some research that has been published recently that says that many relationships break up when people go away on holiday. There is a great sadness about spending money to go away, only to discover that you want to go away from each other permanently.

It may, of course, be true that the relationship would have broken down even if there was no holiday, but I think that the findings raise questions.

I am thoughtful about the way in which people work and, in some cases, are required to work. The financial pressures that surround us can drive us to a place where our life is completely out of balance.

If you were to list what you do with your time, how much time would there be for your partner, family and indeed yourself?

If there is an imbalance then it will probably mean that there is not a lot of time that is given to relationships and looking after yourself.

Try a test:

- List the amount of good quality time, in the last week, that you have spent with your partner or friends.
- List the amount of time that you have spent doing something that helps you unwind and relax. This could be as simple as lying in a warm bath with a glass of wine or it may be walking slowly and seeing the colours. Whatever it is (and I hope you know what helps you relax) when did you last do it?

It will come as no surprise that if couples do not spend much time with each other most of the year, the pressure to be together during the holiday can be unbearable.

Maybe the touch-stone in all this is to ask, "what is the most important thing in life for me?" When you have identified that, then see what priority you have given it in your life. I hope the most important thing in your life is something that gives you peace and comfort.

Consultations on life balance are available if you give me a ring.

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