



7 Tips For Using The Golden Rule To Reduce Challenging Behaviors!

We have all heard, 'I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine.' This is often the case in a variety of social interactions and is a great example of the Golden Rule or social reciprocity in action.

Let me quickly synthesize the research on social reciprocity in marital therapy for you because I believe that the application of social reciprocity with couples who are struggling **has direct application to your relationship between you and your care-receiver!** Here it is:

Non-distressed couples have many more positive social exchanges throughout the course of a day. When positive exchanges happen between the spouses, research shows that the other spouse is more likely to respond positively toward their spouse with positive words and/or actions. The ratio of positive to negative exchanges with non-distressed couples, according to research, is usually **5:1** (5 positive changes for every 1 negative exchange).

Distressed couples have many more negative exchanges and punishing behaviors throughout the course of the day. Research shows that they exchange higher rates of negative behaviors over shorter periods of time. When one spouse directs negative behavior towards the other, the targeted partner usually reciprocates very quickly with equally negative behavior. The rate of positive to negative exchanges is usually **1:2** (only 1 positive exchange for every 2 negative exchanges).

Does this information have any application to the caregiver/care-receiver relationship?

YES, it most certainly does! The Golden Rule or law of social reciprocity is at work as much in the caregiver/care-receiver relationship as it is the marital relationship. And for some of you your care-receiver is your spouse!

How do we intentionally use the Golden Rule (the law of social reciprocity) to prevent crisis behaviors, reduce stress, and strengthen relationships with our care-receivers?

Here are 7 tips for using the Golden Rule that are within your ability to do:

- **Remember** that reversing the downward spiral starts with you! You cannot control your care-receiver's behaviors but you can influence them by what YOU say and do!
- **Resist** the temptation to respond to your care-receiver in the same manner in which s/he is acting towards you. The "buck has to stop" somewhere...let that somewhere be with you.
- **Avoid:** contradicting, ordering, threatening, name calling, criticizing, or blaming.

- **Maintain** a clear sense of you are. A strong sense of self, acceptance of one's weaknesses, mistakes, and strengths serve as guardians of the gate.
- **Keep** anxiety, fears and thoughts of limitations in balance. Never let the pendulum swing too far to the left or to the right. Otherwise, negative emotions will drive one's thoughts. This only serves as a catalyst to self defeating behaviors and actions.
- **Assess** yourself regularly. Observe your behavior throughout the day.
- **Acknowledge** mistakes but avoid assigning blame and internalizing guilt. The purpose of this tip is not to dwell on past errors, but rather to resolve to react differently to affect a more positive outcome in the future.

If you do all of these things will you be guaranteed that your care-receiver will respond in kind? No, not 100%. But what if there were a 50%-75% improvement? Would that be worth it? You bet!

What if your care-receiver is on the moderate-severe end of the autism spectrum or in the latter stages of Alzheimer's? Will applying the Golden Rule work then? There is a less likelihood that it will because for some of our care-receiver's responding appropriately is not simply a matter of choice it is linked to brain-related functions which in turn influence behavior.

However, by applying the Golden Rule towards your care-receiver you will be treating him/her with the dignity and respect that they deserve. And that's always the right thing to do!

I'll be sending you more relational-related ideas and strategies in the future. ***Maintaining and strengthening relationships is a foundational feature of the Relational Crisis Prevention Road Map!*** I'm firmly committed to a person-centered, relationship-focused approach towards decreasing challenging behaviors. If you know of anyone else who could benefit from this article please feel free to forward it to them!