**What does sarcasm say about you?**

SALT LAKE CITY — In this edition of LIFEadvice Coach Kim explains why we use sarcasm and how our fears of failure and loss affect our communication. She explains how to stop sarcasm and how to handle it on the receiving end.

**Question:**

My husband is very sarcastic and I have struggled to know how to cope with his sarcastic remarks. Some of my hurt comes from fear that he is actually feeling what he says and that sarcasm is his passive-aggressive way to convey what he really feels. I have a hard time deciphering what is joking versus what is real when he talks. I have tried to talk to him about it, but he says I need to lighten up. I'm trying to combat it from within but need a little bit more of a boost. Can you help with this?

**Answer:**

You may want to ask your spouse to read this article because once he understands why he is sarcastic, he may be more motivated to change it. Oscar Wilde said “Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit.” This is because sarcastic comments, though humorous, are usually passive-aggressive, mean and uncomfortable for the people receiving them. The dictionary defines sarcasm as “the use of irony to mock or convey contempt; a sharply ironical taunt; sneering or cutting remark.” None of these sound like validating communication to me.

If you use sarcasm you must ask yourself, what are you trying to accomplish with your communication? What kind of relationship do you want? Are you striving to be funny at the expense of others? Or do you want to build relationships of trust and love? Do you care how other people feel? Or are you only interested in entertaining yourself?

Sarcastic people often see teasing as tough love and believe people should be able to handle it. They also think saying “just kidding” after a sarcastic remark makes it OK, even if it hurts. They usually see themselves as funny people, even if they are the only ones laughing. In reality, sarcastic people usually have a fear problem. (I know some of you aren’t convinced yet, that every problem is a fear problem, but keep looking at it because it’s true.) They are usually battling either a fear of not being good enough (the fear of failure) or the fear of being taken from (the fear of loss). They need to step back and figure out why they need to be sarcastic.

**Ask Coach Kim**



Do you have a question for Coach Kim, or maybe a topic you'd like her to address?
Email her at kim@lifea dviceradio.com.

Here are some common reasons you might be sarcastic:

**1**. **You fear you aren’t good enough, so you subconsciously put others down so you can feel superior.** The worse you feel about yourself the more biting your remarks toward others could be. Insecure people have to put others down or tease them, in order to feel important and of value themselves. If this is your issue you may need some professional help to improve your self- worth.

**2.** **Sarcasm is also a way of asking for what you want when you are scared to ask for it directly.** You might crack a joke about your wife’s crazy shoes because you don’t know how to just say you don’t like them. But your sarcastic remark leaves your wife unsure about what you really think. Were you joking or serious? If you don’t know how to say things in a way that won’t hurt, you make a joke, which usually still hurts, but creates a space where if she takes offense, it’s her problem. If this is your issue, you need to improve your communication skills.

**3. Sarcasm may be passive-aggressive anger.** This happens because you feel taken from, insulted or annoyed by this person and you really want to take a jab at them. Sarcasm is a way to take a jab without being seen as mean. A joke absolves you of responsibility for their feelings. If this is your issue, you need to learn how to resolve the issue you are angry about.

**4.** **You may feel angry at life for the disappointments or abuse you have suffered**. Sarcasm can be a way to take out your anger toward life or vent your frustration. The more life does you wrong, the more biting your remarks toward others could be. If this is your issue you need to learn how to use your life experiences to make you better not bitter.

**5.** **If you were teased in a cruel way, put down or made to feel inferior as a child, you may be subconsciously trying to get the upper hand now.** You may look down on others and jokingly strike at them as a way to feel superior and powerful. Again, you may need some help to improve your self-esteem so you can show up with love.

**6.** **You like to get attention by entertaining those around you with humor.** You probably need this attention to validate your worth. You need this attention so badly you will do it at the expense of other people. Fear creates subconsciously selfish behavior, but this can be fixed. There are lots of way to be funny without hurting other people.

Just take a minute, if you are the sarcastic person, and honestly ask yourself if any of these issues could be behind your sarcastic comments.

John Haiman, a linguist at Malcalester College says “People who use sarcasm are rarely kidding. The words come from an authentic place, but it’s wrapped up as a joke for protection. Essentially, sarcasm is a survival technique for the insecure. It’s used to make yourself appear stronger and better, but it’s not said with enough seriousness for anyone to accuse you of being a jerk.”

**You may need to practice "think before you speak." This means checking yourself before you make a comment. Is it... true, helpful, inspiring, necessary and kind? You can be funny all you want, but if you do it at the expense of other people there will be consequences. People will not feel safe with you or like you. If the people on the receiving end of your sarcasm are your friends and family this cost will be high.**

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If you are living with a sarcastic person here are a couple suggestions for dealing with it:

1. **Get a rock-solid self-esteem yourself.** Remember your value is absolute and no comment can diminish your value. You have the ability to let all hurtful comments bounce off. You can choose to be bulletproof. Remember, negative comments are just words. They have no power and don’t mean anything unless you give them power.
2. **Ignore their comments**. This means denying them any attention. Pretend you didn’t even hear it. Go about your business with peace, love and confidence.
3. **Treat every sarcastic remark as literal.** Not seeing the joke will take the fun out of it and without humor their comment will just look mean. Ask if their comment was meant to make you feel small? To make them look clever, funny, humble? You just want to understand what they really meant.
4. **Talk about it.** Have a mutually validating conversation (I explain exactly how to do this in my book “Choosing Clarity: The Path to Fearlessness”). You must first see them as the same as you (not as a bad mean person) and ask a lot of questions about how they feel. Ask if they care about the quality of the relationship? Do they want you to have loving feelings toward them? What kind of relationship do they want to have? Is there anything you could do better to show up for them? To make them feel loved? Are they open to hearing how their sarcastic comments make you feel? Would they be willing to cut the sarcasm in favor of a better relationship?

In the end, your husband must decide for himself what kind of marriage he wants and how he is going to communicate with you. You must decide if you can live with someone who is struggling with fear. You both would benefit from reading my book and repairing your underlying self-esteem and fear issues.

You must also continue to work on feeling bulletproof, no matter what anyone does or says. As you become stronger your husband will be forced to see his own insecurities for what they are. I hope he will be open to changing, but either way you can be happy and feel good about yourself. Just keep reminding yourself that his comments can't diminish you. Your value is absolute.

You can do this.