

## **Dr. Chatelain's #2 Relationship Rule: "Turtles Make Dumb Pets!"**

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If you are a "Turtle" person, your number one strategy of survival is to withdraw and to put a shell around you. Learning to withdraw can be a very natural process in the "jungle". As a child, withdraw protected you from bigger people who could hurt you, especially if there was no escaping the situation. Withdrawal could keep you "out of the line of fire". You may have even learned to become "invisible", to avoid punishment. Even in school, you may have learned that the "invisible" person got in trouble, far less often.

As I work with couples, I often deal with a "Turtle" partner, sometimes even with two "Turtle" partners. Again, withdrawal can seem so natural, especially if you learned it as a child. A partner may feel that withdrawal is better than fighting, perhaps even more "noble".

Withdrawal can be very dangerous to a relationship. There are two ways to "kill a relationship -- shoot it or starve it". They both end up "dead". Withdrawal is a powerful way to "starve" a relationship. Thus, "Turtles Make Dumb Pets." When you'd like to play with them, they withdraw. When you'd like to "talk" with them, they withdraw. When you'd like to "snuggle" with them, they withdraw. Even when you'd like to "make-up", they withdraw. Soon the positive interaction that vitalizes a relationship becomes so lacking, that the relationship becomes "starved", although to the withdrawing person, it seems so justified.

When people withdraw, they usually "think" a lot. This thinking is usually negative thinking, which can quickly erode the feelings toward their partner and the relationship. It is easy to be critical of your partner and even begin to feel like a "victim". This negative thinking can also turn on yourself and erode your own sense of worth. Overtime, the withdrawn partner can wonder why they even stay in the relationship and may begin to construct an exit.

Withdrawal can also be very punishing. There are two ways to punish someone, you can give them what they don't want or withhold what they do want. Withdrawal can be experienced as a powerful punishment, even if punishing wasn't the original intent.

Bottom line, you can't withdraw from a relationship and make it work. When you add positive thinking and positive interaction, you can begin to turn the relationship around. Reach out, communicate, nurture and invest. And, remember, "Turtles make dumb pets."