

Normal

Understanding One Cause of Relational Conflict

Why is 'normal' so destructive?

'Normal' describes things in our lives we don't have to think about. In other words, we take them as granted.

- 👉 We simply assume that 'normal' is the way things 'are suppose to be'.
- 👉 We assume everyone 'should' know that these things are 'normal'.
- 👉 We also assume that everyone 'should' respect our 'norm'.
- 👉 If we hold strong opinions about certain 'normals' we tend to become annoyed when they are violated.
- 👉 If your friend has a different 'normal' than you do, and if you hold strong opinions about your 'normal', you tend to view his 'normal' as 'abnormal' (odd, weird, strange, etc).

We tend to avoid or fix 'abnormal' people. One version of this is when you simply try to solve the problem by ignoring it. In this study we will call avoiding, 'dodging'. If things don't change as you had hoped they would (and frequently they don't) you may find yourself increasingly annoyed by the 'abnormality'. One way of dealing with the annoyance is by giving the silent treatment which we will refer to as 'stonewalling'. Fixing is what we do when we try to change the other person so they don't annoy us. We will refer to this as 'shoulding'. These pattern are destructive if you are trying to build a lasting, mutually enriching relationship.

Where do 'normals' come from?

1. The primary source of your 'normals' is your family of origin. You'll find yourself saying things such as, "my momma always..." or "my family used to..."
2. Your regional, ethnic, cultural 'norms' factor in. "Where I'm from everybody..."
3. Your personality bent also influences your 'normals'. Your personality may not give you 'normals' but it certainly biases how you manage them. Your personality also factors in to the way you respond to people who have different 'normals' than you do.
 - 👉 Do you do things predictability or spontaneously?
 - 👉 Do you prefer quiet or noise?
 - 👉 Do you insist on order or can you relax with disorder?
 - 👉 Are you more comfortable with routine or randomness?
 - 👉 Do you focus on tasks or relationships?
 - 👉 Are you refreshed by completing a task or starting a task?
 - 👉 Do you dwell on details or the big picture?
 - 👉 Do you relax with solitude or with social interaction?
 - 👉 Do you want all the facts or just the basic principle?
 - 👉 Do you do things perfectly or 'good enough' to get by?
 - 👉 Are you usually early or late?
 - 👉 Do you hold on to grudges or lay them aside so you can get on with life?
 - 👉 Do you tend to save things or lose things?
 - 👉 Are you cautious or are you a risk-taker?
 - 👉 Do you describe things exactly or generally?
 - 👉 Do you restrain yourself or express yourself?
 - 👉 Are rules meant to be kept or to be used as guidelines?
 - 👉 Do you read directions or do you try to figure things out for yourself?
4. If you have ever thought about what is 'normal' for you, you probably have reasons which justify it. Your logical conclusions about how things 'should be' convince you that this should be 'normal' for everyone. You might say, "this makes lots of sense to me. Isn't this obvious to you?"
5. Your pride is the concrete that hardens a 'normal' into an expectation. "It's obvious to me that I'm right about this matter. I just assume that everybody agrees with me and that 'normal' is what I deserve."

How do 'normals' turn it into 'expectations'?

1. Expectations are 'normals' which you feel you have a right to.

The difference between an expectation and a preference is the emotional attachment and logical assumption you place on something. When 'normal' is associated with strong opinion and emotion it can become the source of relational problems.

2. Unmet expectations result in disappointment.
3. Enough disappointment tends to metastasize, diseasing your attitude toward your friend. In time your attitudes become 'tumorous'. You allow hurts and violations to accumulate. The Bible calls this a 'root of bitterness'.

Heb 12:15 *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;* (NASB)

4. In time resentment swells, conflict occurs and the relationship is damaged.

How do you relax your emotional grip on 'normal'?

1. Do an objective evaluation of your 'normal'.

- ☞ How much of my 'normal' is Biblical and how much is bias?
- ☞ How much of my 'normal' is my family or background 'norm'?
- ☞ How much of my 'normal' is motivated by pride and selfishness?
- ☞ How much of my reaction is reasonable and how much is the emotional baggage I have attached to my 'normal'.
- ☞ How much of my 'normal' is practical and logical, and how much is my own exaggerated means of having things 'my way'.
- ☞ Does this really matter? Am I making an issue out of nothing?
- ☞ Am I making my 'normal' more important than this relationship?

2. Check your attitude

- a. Am I being selfish?

Phil 2:3 *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;* (NASB)

- b. Am I being critical?

- c. Am I viewing my 'norm' as a personal right or as a privilege?

Phil 2:5-7 *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* (NASB)

- d. Am I being grateful and joyful, looking to God to meet my needs rather than expecting people to give me what I want?

1 Thess 5:18 *in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (NASB)

1 Thess 5:16 *Rejoice always;* (NASB)

Prov 17:22 *A joyful heart is good medicine, But a broken spirit dries up the bones.* (NASB)

- e. Am I looking for what is right and good about this person or only at what is wrong about him/her?

- f. Do I trust their motives to be basically good or do I assume that they are intentionally doing and saying things to frustrate me?

Col 3:13 bearing with one another...(NASB)

Col 3:13 be most patient and tolerant with one another (Phillips)

Col 3:13 You must make allowance for each other's faults (NLT)

- g. Am I willing to forgive...again?

Matt 18:21-22 *Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. (NASB)*

Colossians 3:8 *But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. (NASB)*

- h. Am I willing to allow God to use this annoyance to build Christ's character in my life?

Rom 8:28 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (NASB)*

2 Cor 3:18 *But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (NASB)*

Rom 5:3-4 *And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; (NASB)*

3. Have I allowed this matter to involve people who are not directly involved in this situation?

Heb 12:15 *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (NASB)*

How can two (or more) people reduce the spontaneous conflict that occurs when they violate each another's 'normals'.

1. Talk

- Visit with each other about why each of you see something as 'normal' or 'abnormal'. This may be awkward but one of you will need to initiate it.
- Make sure both of you have some emotional distance from the annoyance. Never try to resolve 'normal' violations when you are mad, tired, under pressure or in a hurry.
- Make sure both of you understand why this 'normal' is such an important issue to one or both of you.
- Be able to clearly and accurately state the other person's point of view.

Healthy communication requires talking and active listening. Once you think you understand the other person's 'normal' say, "let me see if I can explain your perspective". You'll know you've understood them when they agree with what you have shared.

If they respond with, "no, that's not what I'm trying to say" ask them to try to explain their point again, and assure them that you will do your best to understand them.

- Clarify if there is a biblical 'normal' that both of you should agree on and live by.

2. Truce

- a. Work toward an agreement on what *'our normal'* will be.
- b. Find a solution which both of you can be enthusiastic about? By *'enthusiastic'* we do not mean that you are ecstatic. Rather, that both of you can put your hearts into your solution. If you can't put your hearts into it, it is simply a matter of time and your solution will fizzle out.
- c. Agree on a mutually safe way to discuss *'normal'* violations, should they occur again.
- d. Generally it is best to limit yourself to discussion one *'normal'* at a time.

3. Build toward a strong relationship.

- a. Look past *'normal'* violations and look to the dignity of the person who violated it.

Prov 19:11 *A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.* (NASB)

- b. Concentrate on expressing love toward your friend rather dwelling on his/her failure to love you.

Gal 6:4 *But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.* (NASB)

- c. Stop *'shoulding'* on your friend.

☞ *'Shoulding'* is obligating another person to behave according to your preferences.

☞ *'Shoulding'* generally involves laying guilt on someone in an effort to manipulate them to live by your *'normal'*.

☞ *'Shoulding'* may get your friend to change but he may hold a subtle resentment toward you.

- d. Stop *'dodging'* (avoiding) and *'stonewalling'* (silent treatment) your friend.

☞ Lovingly move toward the relationship instead of away from it.

☞ Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how to demonstrate acts of kindness and sincere service toward your friend.

1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.* (NASB)

Talking About 'Normal'

This list gives a group of roommates topics to discuss to allow them to identify expectations before they become annoyances. As you discuss these topics consider to what extent you claim personal rights to them. If you discover a right you are claiming, consider transferring it to God and allowing Him to give it to you in the form of a privilege. Purpose to thank God, regardless of the outcome.

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| 1. Management of the apartment bills | in the apartment | 21. Using the apartment for ministry |
| 2. Delinquent payment of financial obligations | 11. Family involvement in the apartment | 22. Entertainment standards in the apartment |
| 3. Maintaining apartment cleanliness | 12. Spiritual leadership with the apartment relationships | 23. Weekends |
| 4. Meals | 13. Respect of privacy and personal space | 24. Traditions (how to handle holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations) |
| 5. Thermostat setting | 14. Modesty | 25. Resolving conflict |
| 6. The refrigerator and the cabinets | 15. Schedules | 26. Work and Career |
| 7. Personal food versus public food | 16. Bedtime/Waking up | 27. Vacations |
| 8. Parking | 17. Including each other in your activities | 28. Priorities (schedule) |
| 9. Leaving light on | 18. Communication styles | 29. Selfishness and immature patterns of relating |
| 10. Relating to the opposite sex | 19. Values and lifestyle choices | |
| | 20. Trials and suffering | |

This list of topics is useful for couples who are seriously dating. It will help you begin discussing what you deem as 'normal'. As you discuss these topics consider to what extent you claim personal rights to them. If you discover a right you are claiming, consider transferring it to God and allowing Him to give it to you in the form of a privilege. Purpose to thank God, regardless of the outcome.

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| 1. The husband's role | personal space | 28. Children |
| 2. The wife's role | 16. Romance and affection | 29. Entertainment |
| 3. Family meals | 17. Spiritual growth together | 30. Weekends |
| 4. Eating out | 18. Roles of husband and wife | 31. Evenings |
| 5. Kitchen cleanliness | 19. Communication | 32. Recreation |
| 6. Leaving light on | 20. Bedtime/Waking up | 33. Traditions (how to handle holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations) |
| 7. Thermostat setting | 21. Values and lifestyle choices | 34. Arguments |
| 8. Finances | 22. Modesty | 35. Resolving conflict |
| 9. Laundry | 23. Trials and suffering | 36. Work and Career |
| 10. Personal cleanliness | 24. Where to attend church | 37. Vacations |
| 11. Picking up rooms | 25. Differences (including male/female, backgrounds, religious training, regional) | 38. Priorities (schedule) |
| 12. Relating to the opposite sex | 26. Travel | 39. Roles of mother and father |
| 13. Loneliness | 27. Debt | 40. Selfishness |
| 14. In-laws | | |
| 15. Respect of privacy and | | |