STAGES OF PHYSICAL BONDING*

When a serious relationship breaks up, there is always pain, and pain is always most intense when physical sexual expression has been part of the relationship. This is because we were designed to "bond" with one person – a marriage partner – slowly, over time. Multiple bonding and breaking up was never part of the original plan. When bonding occurs between two people, they become "attached" to each other. When this bond is formed correctly, it develops wonderful "gluing" properties for marriage, which always needs extra help during times of stress.

Research shows that one reason some relationships don't last is because the foundation for true intimacy – a natural result of the process of physical and emotional bonding – was not developed. A couple may have skipped important first stages of bonding, or simply advanced through the entire process too quickly, not spending enough time in each stage. If a couple advances too quickly to the physical stages meant only for marriage – stages 10 through 14 – they will not have developed foundational bonding, thereby setting themselves up for a break up and its associated pain. It is interesting to observe that people who progress through the stages too quickly and then break up, tend to skip stages more readily in subsequent relationships, further damaging their ability to bond. In a very real sense, they sabotage their own chances for success. The progression that follows details the stages of physical intimacy, or the natural sequence for building healthy relationships. Along with physical bonding, emotional bonding is taking place. If physical touch and experimentation become the focus of the relationship, the emotional bonding will suffer. In fact, emotional bonding will stop developing – or slow dramatically – and put the "real" relationship at risk. Therefore, it is important to develop emotional intimacy before physical intimacy.

14. Intercourse

13. Touch below waist

12. Mouth to body

11. Body to body

10. Hand to body

9. Mouth to mouth

8. Hand to head

7. Face to face

6. Hand to waist

5. Hand to shoulder

4. Hand to hand

3. Voice to voice

2. Eye to eye

1. Eye to body

* (Based on the work of Dr. Donald M. Joy)