

# talking truly

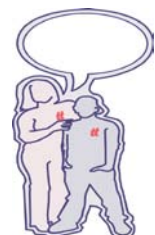
from conflict  
to connection

The #1 way to make yourself really miserable – and what you can do instead

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Making comparisons with other people – whether this involves your partner, your children, your friends or your colleagues – can be the road to misery.

But there is a way out of it!





## A universal skill

When I left school, I spent four years studying music and honing my skills on the clarinet and piano. In terms of commitment and dedication, I excelled. I was there when the practice studios opened at 07.45. I was there when they closed at 20.00. And at weekends, I found somewhere else to practise.

My teachers were impressed and my performance improved. Yet compared with the elite groups of future solo performers, orchestral players and would-be Beethovens, I remained 'ordinary'. No flying finger work, spine tingling tone production or arresting compositions flowed from my efforts.

At the same time, I and my fellow 'ordinary' students were second to none in comparing ourselves with those deemed to be 'better' than us – and diminishing ourselves in the process. (Most probably, those musical gods that we so admired had the same skill and were comparing themselves with even higher deities in the performing world.)

And I guess you are equally skilled, too. It seems to be universal.

As children, we long to be as attractive, clever or popular as some of our classmates. As adults, we make the same comparisons – and add a few new ones. 'Why am I earning less than she is?' 'His children are much better behaved than mine.' 'I wish I had her figure!' 'If only I had his enthusiasm.'

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*Comparing yourself to others –  
and finding yourself wanting –  
is the road to misery.*

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When our mindset is dominated by comparisons like these, we beat ourselves up for our perceived shortcomings. We feel guilty about the things we haven't done. We tell ourselves that somehow, we should be 'better'.

Where's the joy in that?

With scripts like those running our lives, we are in danger of sliding down a slippery slope that ends in despair, guilt and depression. And who wants to be around us when we're giving off such negativity?

Can we get out of this by comparing ourselves favourably with other people? For example:

- 'I got a bigger bonus than she did.'
- 'I'm ageing better than he is.'
- 'I've got so much more energy than they have these days.'



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*Instead of comparing yourself with other people, identify your feelings and needs. This will keep your attention on what is alive in you in the moment.*

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Well, no. This doesn't work well, either. It separates us from other people and puts us into a bubble of false pride. Any sort of comparison takes you away from being aware of what's really going on in you.

### **What you can do instead**

The alternative is to identify what you are feeling and needing/valuing/longing for. Then you can mourn when your needs are not met or celebrate when they are.

Either way, you are in tune with what's alive in you in the moment.

Let's look at some examples.

***'His children are better behaved than mine'***

*You might be feeling annoyed because you value peace and quiet.*

*Maybe you're feeling regret and yearning for a different quality of relationship with your kids.*

***'I got a bigger bonus than other people in my group.'***

*Perhaps you're feeling jubilant about your bonus because you value recognition for hard work and good results.*

***'She's so much more at ease with young people than I am'***

*Are you feeling sad and longing to find a way to connect with young people?*

Note how the comparisons translate into statements about YOU. They show how you can evaluate yourself by:

- being aware of what is going on for YOU
- avoiding comparisons with others.

That way, you will be taking responsibility for yourself. It gets you out of the downward spiral.

Any action you then decide to take will be based on your own authentic feelings and needs.