

CONFIDENTIALLY SPEAKING...

Every woman has her secrets, *bien sûr*. But, there are times when spilling the beans is the right thing to do given that your very health and happiness could depend on it. So, when should you 'fess up rather than shut up?

Diana Ballon dishes on six key scenarios.

WITH YOUR PARTNER

PEOPLE OFTEN KEEP SECRETS TO PROTECT THE other person — and themselves — but sometimes that can backfire, damaging the relationship in the process, says Rosemary Carlton, a social work lecturer at the Université de Montréal.

She recalls working with families where a gambling problem came out only after they'd lost everything — their car, their home — and were in a complete state of crisis.

When you make a decision to keep your habits, like an addiction, a secret from your partner, you take away their power to protect themselves, or, conversely, to help and support you through your crisis, Carlton says.

The same holds true when discussing other issues, like a mental health problem or addiction that you may have had to cope with in the past. When you share this information, your partner can then be there to support you and let you know of warning signs that you may be slipping, or that the problem is resurfacing.

But the decision to disclose can also be quite nuanced, and depends on how the past problem influences the present, says Eugenia Messner, a registered psychotherapist who works in a community health setting and private practice in Toronto.

For example, a single incident of self-harming in middle school may not necessarily be something you need to reveal. And divulging in a new relationship that you are taking antidepressants might be something you decide to share when you've been together a while, and when more trust has been established.

"What you bring to the relationship is important and it requires sensitivity, says Messner. "Part of disclosing something about ourselves includes considering how the other person may respond, questions they may have and support that might be needed by either person due to the disclosure."

WITH YOUR MOTHER

WE ALL KNOW THE PLATITUDE "LIFE IS short." It's one that takes on new meaning as our parents age. We can't predict when we won't have them. And we can never know for sure if this could be our last conversation.

Things not to keep to yourself? That you love them and appreciate certain things that they've done for you or memories they created for you.

Things to keep zipped? Well, that is not as black and white, but if there are times from your past when your parent has disappointed or upset you, says Carlton, you need to ask yourself two questions before you spew. One, will it make a difference, and two, what will the impact be on them? Of the latter, you need to be careful when revealing a secret that it's not a selfish move. "Are you giving pain to someone else to carry and creating more distance between the two of you, or have you opened up a place to talk?"

Messner recommends that, in certain situations, a healthier way to deal with past hurts may be to "process some of those emotions without involving the other person," like with your therapist. It's one thing if you feel you need to tell her things for your own self-respect, but another if you're expecting things to change when you open up about something, but are in a situation where that is unlikely to happen.

"Sometimes being open and direct about past hurt feelings can be helpful to the relationship, and other times it can be further invalidating [to you] and damaging to the relationship," says Messner.

PART OF THE PLEASURE OF HAVING A BFF IS KNOWING YOU CAN TALK ABOUT

anything and they'll understand. But what if your friend is in a relationship that you don't think is healthy? Do you say something, or does that risk your own relationship?

And if you do decide to tell your friend something difficult, how do you tell them? For instance, suppose you see her husband with another woman?

Carlton suggests beginning with this: "I'm going to bring up a difficult topic. I love you. I respect you. I am here for you no matter what."

Then, make it clear that regardless of what she decides to do — or not do — it will not interfere with your feelings for her.

"Telling the person and thinking they should accept your perspective isn't giving the person credit," Carlton says. They may have their own rationale for why they would stay with a boyfriend who is cheating on them, for example, or who you see is otherwise not good for them.

"People's choices are tied up with all kinds of things," says Carlton.

Let your friend know that you trust that the choice she makes is what is best for her and that you're happy to talk it out with her.

WITH YOUR BEST FRIEND



HOW THINGS PLAY OUT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR THERAPIST OFTEN REFLECTS HOW YOU MANAGE OTHER RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE.



TOPICS LIKE VAGINAL DRYNESS, PAIN DURING INTERCOURSE, inability to have an orgasm or lack of interest in sex aren't things many women are always comfortable speaking about with their family doctor — much less their intimate partner.

But they are all important issues, says Dr. Sara Taylor, a family doctor who used to specialize in sexual health issues.

Dr. Taylor understands your reticence, but stresses that it's important to be able to talk about them. Your doctor will need to rule out possible medical problems, such as hormonal issues connected to menopause, or the side effect of an antidepressant, that might be affecting functioning or interest in sex. Happily, there are often answers to these challenges, which is why it's good to be up-front.

Or maybe the problem isn't so much physical, but a response to stress, exhaustion or relationship issues. Depending on the problem, your doctor may recommend that you cut back on work hours or offer a referral to couple's counselling.

Hopefully, your doctor will be able to normalize these problems, and with less of a sense of shame or stigma, you will be empowered to speak more openly with your partner, too.

WITH YOUR PERSONAL TRAINER

WHEN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT CONFIDING IN A professional, a personal trainer isn't usually top of mind.

Of course, talking to a personal trainer doesn't mean having to give them the nitty gritty of what's going on in your life. But it is helpful to let your trainer know when you're not feeling 100 percent — when you're tired, have problems at home or work, when you have a headache or are physically stressed, says Toronto personal trainer Alvaro Membreño.

Being a trainer is about “physically getting people better, but you can't push people if they aren't mentally prepared,” says Membreño. If you're not feeling 100 percent, you may need to back down on the intensity and instead focus on something less aerobically intense so you don't injure yourself, he says.

Alternatively, a good workout sesh can actually help relieve stress. Membreño finds that a lot of women carry tension in their hips, so if you've shared that you're stressed to the max, he can focus on increasing movement in the hip joints to help you release that pressure.

WITH YOUR SHRINK

IT'S NORMAL TO SOMETIMES FEEL ANGRY, DIS-appointed or judged by your therapist. But if you don't tell your therapist how you are feeling, you risk not getting everything you can from that relationship.

“If you avoid that conversation, how can the therapist help you?” asks Carlton.

How things play out in your relationship with your therapist often reflects how you manage other relationships in your life. With a therapist, you can get angry or disagree and know they won't disappear — that they will stay and work through your feelings with you, says Carlton. Discussing these feelings with a therapist also gives you an opportunity to safely practice opening up and being vulnerable with someone who is separate from your day-to-day life.

Carlton recalls a time in her life when she ended a relationship with a therapist because she didn't like the therapist's style: she was too “solution focused.” But Carlton recognizes now that if she had been open with her therapist about how she was feeling, they may have been able to find another way to work together. *MT*

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