The Instructor’s Manual accompanies the DVD Empowerment Family Therapy, with Frank Pittman, MD (Institutional/Instructor’s Version). Video available at www.psychotherapy.net.

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Instructor’s Manual for Empowerment Family Therapy, with Frank Pittman, MD

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Instructor’s Manual for

EMPOWERMENT FAMILY THERAPY
WITH FRANK PITTMAN, MD

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Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during and after the video. Take advantage of the commentary in the transcript.

2. FACILITATE DISCUSSION
Pause the video at different points to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions to the concepts presented. The Discussion Questions section provides ideas about key points that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. ENCOURAGE SHARING OF OPINIONS
Encourage viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What are viewers’ impressions of what works and does not work in the sessions? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes; it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

4. CONDUCT A ROLE-PLAY
The Role-Plays section guides you through exercises you can assign to your students in the classroom or training session.

5. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings from Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading prior to or after viewing.

6. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER
See suggestions in the Reaction Paper section.

7. WATCH THE FAMILY THERAPY WITH THE EXPERTS SERIES
This video is one in a series portraying leading theories of psychotherapy and their application in work with families. Each video presents a master family therapist working with a real family who have real problems. By showing several of the videos in this Family Therapy with the Experts series, you can expose viewers to a variety of styles and approaches, allowing them an opportunity to see what fits best for them.
PERSPECTIVE ON VIDEOS AND THE PERSONALITY OF THE THERAPIST

Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists may feel put on the spot to offer a good demonstration, and clients can be self-conscious in front of a camera. Therapists often move more quickly than they would in everyday practice to demonstrate a particular technique. Despite these factors, therapists and clients on video can engage in a realistic session that conveys a wealth of information not contained in books or therapy transcripts: body language, tone of voice, facial expression, rhythm of the interaction, quality of the alliance—all aspects of the therapeutic relationship that are unique to an interpersonal encounter.

Psychotherapy is an intensely private matter. Unlike the training in other professions, students and practitioners rarely have an opportunity to see their mentors at work. But watching therapy on video is the next best thing.

One more note: The personal style of therapists is often as important as their techniques and theories. Therapists are usually drawn to approaches that mesh well with their own personality. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, students and trainees must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fits their own personal style and the needs of their clients.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Because this video contains actual therapy sessions, please take care to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the clients who have courageously shared their personal life with us.
Empowerment Family Therapy
BY TINA PITTMAN WAGERS, PSYD

Empowerment Family Therapy emphasizes engagement in behaviors that are important, meaningful, and mature, with an emphasis on “the right thing to do,” especially in the service of family relationships. Empowerment Therapy encourages such changes in behavior even when the circumstances one faces are imperfect, such as when there is a limited range of choices.

Emotions are not disregarded here. Rather, they are elicited by the therapist, and validated by the therapist as well as other family members, but emotions are not allowed to hijack the individual or family and they do not rule the day. Instead, the message is that family members are empowered to behave in ways that are honorable, respectful of family relationships, collaborative, and that help family members achieve meaningful interpersonal goals.

Empowerment Therapy with parents and families places a lot of emphasis on how parental decision making (and the therapist’s influence on those decisions) can affect children. Coupled with that is hopefulness about how the family can change and remain committed to one another, even when the family has endured distress and conflict.

The therapist offers a “diagnosis” as well as remedies that are behaviorally and interpersonally based. He talks about the idea of “teaching people manners” which could also be phrased as teaching interpersonal skillfulness – how to get along with their family members even in times of distress and upset.

One of Pittman’s inspirations was Nathan Ackerman, whom he admired for Ackerman’s ability to tolerate emotions without having to act on them. Pittman’s notion that emotions make life interesting, but won’t necessarily help families solve problems, is consistent with Ackerman’s views. In addition, Pittman forwards the notion that it is crucial that the therapist remain calm in order to be effective. When patients and their families are freed from responding emotionally (not to say that they don’t have emotional experiences!), they can engage in behaviors

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that increase happiness, satisfaction, a sense of integrity, and above all, a commitment to family relationships. When people take sensible action, even from a place of distress or disadvantage, they can increase their own sense of effectiveness.

Alternatively, the therapist disempowers the client when he or she defines them as not having responsibility for their own lives. Even when clients exist in social conditions which are disadvantaged, discriminatory, or characterized by a history of abuse (like the history Tom reports in this DVD), Pittman helps them move forward, take responsibility for what comes next, and make decisions within their actual circumstances, as opposed to the circumstances they might have hoped for.

Pittman has written extensively about men's issues and one of the elements to be noted in his Empowerment Family Therapy model is his emphasis on empowering men to be effective, involved parents and partners, even if they have only been exposed to more limited models of fathering and marriage.
Reaction Paper for Classes and Training

Video: Empowerment Family Therapy with Frank Pittman, MD

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the facilitator.
- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards. Respond to each question below.
- **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video—we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about Pittman’s Empowerment Family Therapy approach? What stands out to you about how Pittman works?

2. **What I found most helpful:** As a therapist, what was most beneficial to you about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work? What challenged you to think about something in a new way?

3. **What does not make sense:** What principles/techniques/interventions did not make sense to you? Did anything push your buttons or bring about a sense of resistance in you, or just not fit with your own style of working?

4. **How I would do it differently:** What might you have done differently from Pittman in the session in the video? Be specific about what different approaches, interventions and techniques you might have applied.

5. **Other questions/reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the therapy session with Pittman? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?
Related Websites, Videos and Further Reading

WEB RESOURCES
Link to articles by Frank Pittman on Psychology Today
http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/authors/frank-pittman
Frank Pittman’s blog on Psychology Today: Reel Life: A shrink looks at men, women, marriage, movies, and more.
http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/reel-life

RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET
Behavioral Couples Therapy, with Richard Stuart
Strategic Couples Therapy, with James Coyne
Value-Sensitive Therapy, with Bill Doherty
Structural Family Therapy, with Harry Aponte

RECOMMENDED READINGS


Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors and facilitators may use some or all of these discussion questions, depending on what aspects of the video are most relevant to the audience.

INTRODUCTION

1. **Instilling hope:** Jon Carlson stated that research shows that instilling hope in clients is perhaps the most important thing that a therapist can do. Do you agree or disagree with this? Is “instilling hope” something you consider to be one of your tasks as a therapist? Why or why not? Is it something that comes easily for you most of the time? What are some of the ways you instill hope in your clients? Can you think of any cases in which it was challenging for you to instill hope in any of your clients?

2. **Emotions:** What reactions did you have as Pittman talked about emotions and how solving problems requires not getting caught up in how people are feeling? What do you think of approaching therapy as if it is “an exercise in pragmatism”? What do you think the advantages and disadvantages are of focusing on emotions in therapy? In your work with clients, do you tend to focus on emotions more or less than Pittman did in this session?

3. **Medical model:** Pittman’s approach is based on the belief that when someone comes to therapy “there’s something that can be done and it’s up to the physician to point out what the problem is and point out what can be done.” How is this belief congruent or incongruent with how you approach therapy? Do you agree with Pittman that there are often simple solutions to problems that bring families into therapy? Why or why not?

4. **Therapy is fun:** Pittman made it clear that he loves what he does because he does it in such a way that it makes it fun for him and for his clients. He went on to say, “If it’s not fun, you’re not doing it right.” What was your response to this? Do you agree that therapy is fun? Why or why not? What did you learn from Pittman that could make therapy more fun for you? How might you approach your work differently so that you could enjoy it more?
5. **Taking responsibility:** What were your reactions when Pittman talked about how best to empower clients, and how defining people as victims of their circumstances is the most disempowering thing you can do? Do you agree with Pittman that therapy should be a character-building experience and that the therapist should encourage self-responsibility rather than protecting clients from the reality of their lives? What do you think the benefits and risks of encouraging self-responsibility could be?

**THERAPY SESSION**

6. **Starting the session:** What did you think of how Pittman began the session with a smile and an optimistic attitude when he said, “So, great -- this is your chance. You get to talk about yourselves for a whole hour. You’ll love it”? How do you tend to begin family therapy sessions? Do you think in advance about how you will start a session, or do you do this more intuitively?

7. **Laughter:** What kinds of reactions did you have to Pittman’s laughter and smiles in the session? Were there any moments when you wished he had been more serious? If so, when and why? Compared with Pittman, how serious or light-hearted do you tend to be when you’re working with clients?

8. **Self-disclosure:** How did you react when Pittman revealed that he’s been married for forty years, has three children, and “knows a shitload about child-raising first hand”? Do you think his self-disclosure about his own family was helpful? Why or why not? What factors do you take into account when deciding whether and how much to self-disclose?

9. **Pulling for empathy:** What did you think of Pittman’s question to Susan that he repeated: “What does it feel like for Tom?” Do you think this intervention was helpful? Why or why not? What are some of your favorite ways of helping partners empathize with each other?

10. **Alliance with Tom:** How would you describe the therapeutic alliance between Pittman and Tom? Do you think he was successful in “making contact with Tom’s pain”? What did you
think of Pittman’s focus on Tom being a “fatherless father”? What interventions do you think contributed to Tom’s empowerment? If you were the therapist, how do you think you might have related to Tom differently?

11. **Alliance with Susan:** How would you describe the therapeutic alliance between Pittman and Susan? Did you like how he was playful with her? Do you think his interventions with her contributed to her sense of empowerment? If so, how? If you were the therapist, how might you have related to Susan differently? Is there something you would have focused on more with her—for example, her comment that she lets Tom bully her or her frustration that Tom doesn’t listen to her?

12. **Voice:** In this session, Pittman focused on “getting Tom a voice,” and suggested Tom talk to Susan’s father and possibly his own father. If you were the therapist, is “getting Tom a voice” what you would have also focused on? Why or why not? If not, how would you have defined the problem and how would you have gone about helping this couple? Did you agree with Pittman’s assessment that Tom was afraid of women?

13. **Involved parents and partners:** Pittman specializes in empowering men to be effective, involved parents and partners, even if they have only been exposed to more limited models of fathering and marriage. How successful do you think Pittman was in achieving this goal with Tom? Is there anything you would have done differently with Tom and Susan to get Tom more involved in his family?

**DISCUSSION**

14. **Countertransference:** Pittman spoke to Carlson and Kjos about his desire to father Tom, and how he felt a lot of care for him. Do you consider this a healthy, empathic reaction that Pittman was able to use effectively, or do you think of it as countertransference that he should have processed internally instead of acting upon? Did you have a similar or different reaction towards Tom? Do you consider any emotional reaction to your clients to be countertransference, or do you make a distinction between different
types of reactions?

15. **Don’t protect them!**: Pittman made the point several times that the therapist does the client a disservice by trying to protect them from reality. What reactions did you have when he made this point? Do you agree with him that you cannot be useful if you’re trying so hard to be careful? Why or why not? Can you talk about a case in which you felt a strong desire to protect one of your clients? How did you handle this?

16. **Single mothers**: What came up for you as you listened to Pittman talk about his belief that a single mother cannot successfully raise a son without a male role model around? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Have you worked with families in which there is a single mother and a son? What sorts of challenges have you faced in working with these families?

17. **Don’t demonize**: What was your reaction when Pittman said, “Once you start demonizing the father, you have destroyed the family.” Do you agree that it’s important to cut everyone some slack? Have you had any clients who were particularly difficult for you to embrace? How did you handle this?

18. **The model**: What are your overall thoughts about Pittman’s approach to therapy? What aspects of his approach can you see yourself incorporating into your work? Are there some components of this approach that seem incompatible with how you work? What in particular do you tend to do differently from Pittman?

19. **Personal Reaction**: How would you feel about having Pittman as your therapist? Do you think he could build a solid therapeutic alliance with you? Would he be effective with you? Why or why not?
Role-Plays

After watching the video and reviewing Empowerment Family Therapy in this manual, assign groups to role-play a family therapy session following Pittman’s Empowerment Family Therapy model. Organize participants into groups of three, consisting of one psychotherapist and one couple. If time permits, rotate so each person has a chance to play the role of therapist. The point here is not to try to resolve the family’s issues, but to use this role-play as an exercise in viewing the family through an Empowerment Therapy lens, with an emphasis on empowering the men in the couple to be effective, involved parents and partners.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROLE PLAYERS:

One person will start out as the therapist and the other two participants will role-play a married couple with children. One option is to base the role-play on the family in this video. If you do this, do not attempt to follow the sequence of interactions in Pittman’s demonstration session, but rather use the clients and situation in the video as a jumping-off point, and allow the role-play to develop spontaneously. Alternatively, come up with your own scenario, based on a family in which the father has not had exposure to a role-model for being an effective and involved husband and father. It can be a family with whom you have worked, a family you know well, or a completely fictional family.

After hearing the couple’s concerns, therapists should begin by saying something like, “I’ll be happy to see what I can come up with that you could do to help with the situation, to make things better.” This sets the stage for a therapeutic relationship that is based on equality rather than dependency, and also sets the expectation that their problems are solvable.

Therapists can then help define the current problem and offer suggestions. Couples should offer up some resistance to the suggestions, so that therapists can practice negotiating the resistance to change. The therapist can ask the clients what they have learned
throughout their lives that keeps them from solving their current problem. Exploring this question will likely be the bulk of the session, as it was in the video. The final task of the therapist is to offer “remedies” that are behaviorally and interpersonally based, encouraging clients to move forward, take responsibility for what comes next, and make decisions within their actual circumstances, as opposed to the circumstances they might have hoped for. The therapist’s attitude throughout the session should be one of hopefulness about the family’s possibility for change.

After the role-plays, have the groups come together to discuss their experiences. Invite the clients to talk about what it was like to role-play this couple and how they felt about the therapist’s interventions: Did clients feel more empowered to make changes in their lives? What did they like and/or dislike about how the therapist was not trying to protect them from reality? How did clients feel about the way the therapist negotiated their resistance to change? How likely do the clients think they are to now make the changes the therapist recommended? Do the fathers feel optimistic about being more involved partners and parents? Then, invite the therapists to talk about their experiences: How did it feel to conduct a therapy session using an Empowerment approach? What were their impressions of this family? What did they like and dislike about encouraging the clients to take responsibility for their lives? What was it like to offer recommendations? How do they feel about how they negotiated the couple’s resistance to change? Finally, open up a general discussion of the strengths and the challenges in applying an Empowerment approach to working with couples and families.

An alternative is to do this role-play in front of the whole group with one therapist and one couple; the rest of the group can observe, acting as the advising team to the therapist. Before the end of the session, have the therapist take a break, get feedback from the observation team, and bring it back into the session with the couple. Other observers might jump in if the therapist gets stuck. Follow up with a discussion on what participants learned about using Pittman’s Empowerment approach to working with couples and families.
Complete Transcript of
Empowerment Family Therapy
with Frank Pittman, MD

Commentary by Tina Pittman Wagers, PsyD

**Pittman:** Okay. So, great -- this is your chance. You get to talk about yourselves for a whole hour.

**Tom:** Okay.

**Pittman:** Great. You’ll love it. You’re not sure of that?

**Tom:** Well, I’m going to add to it when I can, but I don’t know if I can speak about a whole lot or about myself, but I’ll certainly try.

Commentary: As Pittman introduces the session in a fairly non-threatening way, he finds that Tom may view himself as less capable of communicating about his experiences. Pittman will attend to Tom throughout the session, putting extra effort into encouraging him to speak.

**Pittman:** Can Susan?

**Tom:** With no problem.

**Pittman:** With no problem -- okay. So, what do you do when Susan’s talking about herself?

**Tom:** Listen. I have no choice.

00:28:00

**Susan:** Did he mention he’s half-deaf in one ear?

**Pittman:** You’ll notice my hearing aid.

Commentary: Pittman joins with husband here.

**Susan:** That’s the ear he listens to me with.

**Pittman:** I didn’t suggest I would listen. I merely suggest that this is a chance for you all to talk.

**Susan:** Mm-hmm.
Pittman: So, you talk and he listens.

Susan: If he says so.

Pittman: How do you know he’s listening?

Susan: I don’t think he is listening.

Tom: Well, I just -- every once in awhile, I dive in with mm-hmm -- one of those and I’m good for a little while until she starts hollering about something else.

Pittman: Do you think the occasional mm-hmm is what she’s hoping for -- or is she trying to get some other response?

Tom: No, I try to give her what she wants to hear so I –

Commentary: Pittman is assessing here what the typical patterns of interaction are, from each partner’s perspective. He is also trying to get a feel for whether each partner understands the other’s wants/needs.

Pittman: What she wants to hear is an occasional mm-hmm.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: Why is she talking at you?

Tom: I’m sorry?

Pittman: Why is she talking at you?

Commentary: Notice that the emphasis is on behaviors and interactions.

Tom: Well, she usually complains about something or other. There’s always a problem with something somewhere, with three kids, two dogs, a cat and a house that constantly needs repair.

Pittman: Right, right. Sounds like my life, everybody else’s. She keeps talking about what she wants you to do?

Commentary: Pittman is normalizing and joining at the same time.

Tom: Yes -- what I haven’t done, what I am doing, what I need to do in the immediate future.

Pittman: Mm-hmm. And you are trying to figure out what sort of response she wants?

Tom: Right. Also, some of the things that we talk about, well argue
about as far as the kids are concerned -- who should be doing what at what age. Cuz we have a 10 year old, a two year old and a one year old.

00:30:13

Pittman: How long have you all been together?

Tom: Her and I have been seeing each for about six years. We’ve been married for about three.

Pittman: Okay, okay. So, you’re trying to figure out what should be -- I don’t know how you’d decide those things unless you talk.

Tom: Well, yeah, but a lot of times, it’s -- her and I both got married when we were in our early 30s. We were pretty much set in our ways. So a lot of times there’s differences of opinions about how things should be done, how things should be said. A lot of times, there’s more than a few words said about what child should be doing what at what age and stuff like that.

Pittman: So, do you have opinions about these things?

Tom: Absolutely.

Pittman: Okay. So, she has an opinion, you have an opinion. What happens?

Commentary: Pittman levels the playing field here about each partner’s opinions, even though it is becoming evident that the way those opinions are expressed might be uneven.

Tom: Well, --

Pittman: Give me an example.

Tom: Well, my 10 year old is from my first marriage and she says that -- I keep my days off during the week, which are Tuesday and Wednesday, so that the 10 year old -- when I pick her up -- I get her every week. I keep my days off during the week so that I can make sure that she comes over so I don’t have to share with my ex-wife on the weekends.

So, she suggested to me that Melissa -- which is the 10 year old -- should clean the whole bathroom and stuff when she gets home from school. So, I pick her up, we get home at four o’clock, she spends an
hour in the bathroom and then by that time, it’s dinnertime.

00:32:04
I don’t see where the quality time is there. And then after dinner, it’s homework. So, I don’t -- she was pretty set on that so I didn’t think that that was -- I thought that -- well, after a while -- see, I just wanted Melissa to come over and just relax.

Pittman: Is Susan asking for obedience or is she asking for conversation?

Commentary: This question raises the possibility that Susan is actually asking for a conversation in which Tom could be empowered to participate, rather than regarding her opinions as orders to be obeyed.

Tom: From me or from the 10 year old?

Pittman: From you. Susan is saying, hey, honey, I got a great idea. When Melissa comes over, let’s get her to clean up the bathroom.

Tom: No, that’s not the way she puts it.

Pittman: Okay. That’s not the way you put it?

Susan: And it wasn’t the whole bathroom. All I wanted was -- all I feel is that kids should help with the chores around the house. That way there’s more family time. If more things get done by everybody involved, then everybody can be together.

Pittman: Okay. So, when you say, I got an idea. Let’s have Melissa clean up the bathroom --

Susan: Right -- which was only the tub and the sink.

Pittman: But what is Tom supposed to say? What sort of response are you trying to get?

Susan: I’m not even sure of the response I’m trying to get. I’m just trying to get the whole family involved -- including himself, which he’s been doing more, but before it was, Melissa would just come over --

Pittman: But do you want him to say, yes dear -- and do it -- or do you want him to say, I got another idea?

Commentary: Here again, Pittman is trying to assess whether there’s
actually room for collaboration in these conversations Tom and Susan have.

**Susan:** If he had an idea, it would work, but I kind of want him to see that it’s a good idea to involve everybody in the house.

**Tom:** Which I decided that instead of her -- the 10 year old coming over and spending an hour in the bathroom every Tuesday and Wednesday, that the little bit of dinner dishes that were done after we got through eating -- she could wash those.

**00:34:02**

**Pittman:** Okay. So, you accept the basic principle, but you wanted to discuss it. So, I’m trying to understand what happens when you’ve got a different idea from Susan’s idea.

**Tom:** Well, --

**Pittman:** Do you actually talk about it?

**Tom:** Well, I imagine it probably starts out in conversation, but as soon as she realizes that I’m not going to go along with what she wants to do, then no longer conversation -- it goes into arguments and sometimes outright loud hollering back and forth, where we got the two year old coming back and forth -- mommy, calm down -- daddy, calm down -- the two year old telling us

**Commentary:** This conflictual pattern is important, and becomes a main focus of the session.

**Pittman:** Who’s doing the hollering?

**Tom:** Her and I.

**Pittman:** So, the two year old is the mature person in the midst of the two of you hollering.

**Commentary:** What Pittman is pointing out here is that hollering is an immature response to having a disagreement. That the couple has a disagreement is not at issue, but what Pittman is doing is calling into question the way that they are handling that circumstance.

**Tom:** Believe it or not.

**Pittman:** What is the hollering about?
Susan: Excuse me? You’re the mature person?

Tom: No, that’s not --

Pittman: The two year old. The two year old is the one that says, you’re being childish to carry on like this. Why can’t you behave properly? You’re old enough to.

What is the hollering for?

Tom: Well, because she’s very, very set in the way she thinks about things. There is very little -- it’s like when we first met, she decided -- she went along with everything I wanted to do up to a certain point. Now that we got married and have a couple extra children along with the first one, now all of a sudden -- okay, well, that was nice. That was then. This is now and this is the way it’s going to be -- just like her mother.

So, now all of a sudden, her mother runs -- so her mother had seven children and she was --

Susan: She had to run the house.

Pittman: So, when you were growing up with that, did you like the way she was doing things?

Commentary: The point of this question is to help Susan notice that she doesn’t have to do things exactly the way that her mother did them, especially if she didn’t like her mother’s behaviors. Susan has choices.

Susan: We all had our chores to do. We all had things to do and we all were --

Pittman: Nobody’s arguing about chores.

Commentary: Pittman clarifies here that it’s not the content of the disagreement that is an issue, but the choices both she and Tom have made about how they interact around that topic.

Susan: Right, no.

Pittman: What we’re arguing about is -- what are we talking about? I guess we’re arguing because I can’t get anybody to address the problem. What’s the screaming about? Did your mothers do all that screaming?
Susan: Never. I don’t remember my parents hollering, but he comes from -- when we first met, he had his daughter, okay. And I had, that’s not my business, what he does with them. You know, I can only sit there and watch as much as I could, but now it’s in my house and in my family and it’s affecting the little ones. I don’t want the little ones raised like he was raising the older one.

Pittman: What’s affecting the little ones is you all’s hollering. What’s the hollering for? Look, I been married 40 years. We got three children. We had seven nieces and nephews that lived with -- I know a hell of a lot. I know a shitload about child raising -- first hand. I never did do it right. I don’t know that there’s a right way, but I do know that when everybody starts yelling at everybody, that’s the wrong way to do it.

Commentary: Pittman is self-disclosing here about his family, but he is doing so humbly, and acknowledges that even though he might not have all the right answers, he is sure that hollering is ineffective.

Susan: Right -- nobody’s listening. We have a power struggle. We have since day one. He’s always got to be right in everything and if I don’t like it, then it’s just too bad. Deal with it.

Pittman: He thinks the same thing about you.

Tom: I usually come up with some pretty good answers though.

Susan: Yeah, but how many -- I don’t even know where to start.

Pittman: Is this a contest in which there’s a winner and a loser? I don’t understand.

Commentary: This is reminiscent of one of Pittman’s quotes: “You can’t be married and be right at the same time.” This is not about who is more right; this is about finding a way to engage in conflict in a more productive manner, and to empower the partners here to move away from old, ineffective ways of communicating.

Susan: Yeah. I’m always the loser.

Tom: I don’t see it like that. I just see it as though she -- there isn’t
anything that has happened as a decision that I have made within the family -- well, I’m not really good with finances, but other than that -- as far as raising the children and stuff like that, she hasn’t -- there’s been very little problems amongst the kids so I don’t see why she has to be -- I can just see it.

Her mother was over today, having dinner with us. She’s watching the kids now. I can see that her father listens to what her mother says and does what he’s told. I don’t agree with that. I’ve told them that.

**Pittman:** So, you don’t want to lose your voice in your family.

**Tom:** Right.

**Pittman:** You think that you’ve got good sense, that you’re a competent parent, that you should get a voice too.

**Commentary:** Pittman is underscoring for Tom the idea that this isn’t an all-or-nothing struggle between shutting up or yelling. This is about finding an acceptable way for him to have a voice.

**Susan:** No, he wants the only voice. I’m supposed to be the child and listen and do what he says, and the 10 year old who was at that age seven was supposed to be the adult in my house. I had a big problem with that. You have to understand that his -- I mean, things are alright right now.

They’re not good, but they’re better than they were, but his ex-wife and his daughter have been running my house since we bought my house. I was eight months pregnant. I’d get up for work at 4:30 in the morning and he allows the seven year old to pick 11:30 for a bedtime and tells me to deal with it. Cuz I’m being kept awake by the TV.

**Commentary:** What Pittman notices here is that Susan is engaged and articulate about her concerns, and states her concerns throughout the session, and particularly here, in a very skillful way. She isn’t going to need the same scaffolding as Tom in terms of communication skills.

**Pittman:** That sort of thing in most people’s houses would lead to a conversation.

**Commentary:** Pittman concurs here with Susan’s sense that this issue is important and warrants a conversation.
Susan: Right.

Pittman: I’m trying to understand why you don’t have -- the only way that you can come together as parents and have the same idea about how things ought to be is to be brother and sister.

Susan: That’s true.

Pittman: I mean, if you were raised in the same family, you might very well have the same idea about how things ought to be. If you’ve been raised in different families, you’re going to have very different ideas about how things are supposed to be.

Now you’re not too unhappy about the way in which your mother ran seven children and your father in the household.

Commentary: Pittman is saying: “It makes utter sense that you have different opinions.” He is also pointing out here that the model of parental communication Susan came from is pretty workable.

Susan: Right.

Pittman: That all looks okay to us.

Susan: You don’t always like it. You don’t as growing up, but --

Pittman: But they got along okay.

Susan: Yes.

Pittman: He didn’t like that.

Susan: No.

Pittman: Tom doesn’t think that your father got used -- that his opinion really mattered, right?

00:40:07

Susan: That’s what he thinks, but my mother didn’t have any “control” over my father until two or three years ago -- and they’re in their 70s. So, she took it all growing up and he --

Pittman: Okay. Tom looks at your daddy and he doesn’t like what he sees.

Susan: No, he don’t.
Pittman: Okay.

Tom: I mean, I like him as a person. He’s a nice guy and a gentleman.

Pittman: But that’s not the life you want.

Tom: No.

Commentary: It is important for the therapist to identify the scripts that are playing out here from each partner’s family of origin, but even more important for the therapist to convey at this moment that, once the partners become aware of the scripts that are being enacted, they can make choices to do something different. Knowledge is power, assuming that one also harnesses some good decision-making skills.

Susan: Do you want the life of your parents?

Tom: No. My parents are another story, but on the other hand --

Pittman: What’s the story on your parents?

Tom: My father controlled the family, usually from the couch. My mother --

Susan: With a beer in hand.

Tom: Yeah.

Susan: Lots of them.

Tom: He’s an alcoholic, but I’m not. Very seldom do I ever drink. So, I don’t see why -- as long as -- I don’t consider it -- that I have to be totally in charge. I like suggestions.

Commentary: What Pittman has established here is that Tom doesn’t really have a workable model of parenting from his own background, but seems to be trying to establish some different habits. What Pittman is now going to be engaged with is empowering him to develop a more effective way of parenting and being a partner.

Pittman: Okay. She’s not convinced of that and that’s what we’re talking about.

Tom: Okay.

Pittman: Okay. You don’t like the way her father functions in the family.
Tom: Right.

Pittman: She doesn’t like the way your father functions in the family.

Tom: Right.

Pittman: That’s what we’re talking about.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: So, in order to make sure that you all don’t go to those extremes, you have to have a voice. What you’re telling me from the beginning is that you don’t really have a voice, that you think that all you can do is either say ‘mm-hmm’ or scream and yell.

Tom: Right.

Pittman: Right, okay. Got it?

Susan: Mm-hmm.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: What happened in your first marriage?

Tom: I was completely in charge and it just fell apart -- didn’t work.

Tom: Five years.

Pittman: How long did it take before she left?

Tom: Five years.

Pittman: So, she stuck with you for five years of your being in charge and then she got out of there.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: She lasted pretty long.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: How long did your mother last with your father?

Tom: My mom and dad are still married.

Susan: They were separated a couple of times and she moved out a couple of times.

Tom: He was drinking very excessively, but stopped.
Pittman: Okay, but you can be sober and still feel the need to be in charge.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: Whether you’re male or female.

Susan: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: And the other person is not considered a competent adult. It’s just mommy’s little helper or daddy’s little servant.

Commentary: Susan, thankfully, is able to articulate how this pattern of communication with Tom is disempowering for her. Pittman speaks for Tom here, but still accomplishes the goal of putting them on equal footing.

Susan: That’s what I feel like.

Pittman: But see, that’s what he’s afraid of being too.

Susan: Mm-hmm -- but that’s what I’ve been for the whole time.

Pittman: Okay, but like everybody else -- you don’t like the model that you got from your parents. I mean, that’s what parents are for -- to be Brand X -- to somehow be the model of what doesn’t work.

Susan: Right.

Pittman: That’s the starting point for you.

Tom: What I think is wrong -- so I don’t do 99% of the things my father did as I was growing up.

Pittman: What you finally learned that you can’t be in total control.

Tom: Right.

Pittman: Okay. You had to go through some rough times to come up with that.

Commentary: At this point the emphasis is on empowering Tom to move away from old, ineffective models, and to move towards something more workable. There is optimism here in Tom’s ability to do something different than what he’s been doing.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: Okay. You caught onto that. Have you caught onto that yet?
Susan: About me not being in control?

Pittman: Yeah.

Susan: I don’t even want to be in control. I just want to be organized. But since he’s been fighting me for so long, now we have a power struggle.

Pittman: You’re a good talker. What are we talking about? What does being organized mean?

Commentary: Pittman compliments Susan on being articulate and asks her to describe more about what she wants.

Susan: Come to my house. Okay -- no, it’s just everything --

Pittman: I’m sorry we don’t have time. I want to find out what makes the screaming..

Susan: I don’t have control of my own life. I don’t have control of anything around me.

00:44:00

Tom: She has a list of all the lists that she has.

Susan: Of the things that need to be done, I have --

Tom: She tries to be, but it’s --

Susan: He wants to be in control, but I’m the one who’s in control of everything. He puts it in my lap. I’m in control of the finances. I’m in control of the kids. I’m in control of the babysitting. I’m in control of everything -- but if I try to bring something to him, then he’s all of a sudden in control. And runs…

Pittman: But he was raised with all or nothing.

Susan: Right. It’s -- exactly.

Commentary: It is very helpful that Susan can see how difficult it is for Tom to function in the middle between all or nothing. As a therapist presents a formulation or diagnosis to a couple or family, this is an effective way to get endorsement and understanding from everyone.

Pittman: Somebody is in control completely. He doesn’t know any other way to do it.
Susan: Exactly.

Pittman: Either he’s in total control or you’re in total control. His opinion is useless. He didn’t learn how to be married.

Susan: Right. He didn’t learn to be a part of the family, is what I get.

Pittman: I was sitting here -- the first thing you said was, the 10 year old doesn’t want to go clean up the bathroom. Well, holy shit -- of course she doesn’t…I mean…

Tom: I don’t either.

Pittman: The 10 year old son doesn’t want to go out and pick up sticks. I mean --

Susan: Yeah, but that’s too bad.

Pittman: Woah. If they don’t see their daddy doing it-

Susan: True.

Pittman: - they sure as hell aren’t going to want to do it themselves. I mean, if you want the kid to take on a certain chore, you do it with them, demonstrate how much fun it is and they’ll get in the pattern of it. You know that.

Commentary: Pittman empathizes with the child, but doesn’t disregard Susan’s preferences, and then makes a suggestion to Tom which is designed to empower him to handle this parenting task more effectively.

Susan: She didn’t have any problem with me asking her to do that.

Pittman: Or do you know that? Do you know that? That’s different from the way your father did it.

Tom: Yeah. I mean, I don’t remember being explained how to do things like that. I just went ahead and did what I had to do. The majority of the problem with her cleaning the bathroom was my ex-wife heard about it. Melissa went home and told her mother about what Susan came up with and next thing you know, my phone’s ringing off the wall and I’m getting cussed out. I’m bringing you back to the child support and the judge --
Pittman: Your ex-wife had five years of you trying to control her. Now she’s got both of you trying to control her. She’s got two of you to be up against. I’m sure she’s going to protest.

Susan: That’s a little backwards though. He isn’t telling you the whole story about her.

Pittman: What’s the whole story?

Tom: Well, she has been -- it’s like, during the time between my divorce and me meeting Susan -- all that time, she was always constantly threatening me to bring me back to court, to increase the child support and all this other stuff. I’m going to be broke and all this other -- so she was constantly holding that over my head. I didn’t know what to think. I was already paying a lot of money a month. So, I always went along with basically what she wanted to do once we got divorced, as far as Melissa was concerned.

Pittman: Once again, it’s that all or nothing thing for you.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: You’re either in total control or you go limp and passive.

Susan: See, he goes limp and passive to her so he wants to control me [crosstalk].

Commentary: Both partners clearly endorse Pittman’s formulation.

Pittman: Am I understanding that?

Tom: Yes. That’s usually -- the only time -- yeah, she’s in control of the finances and all the major aspects of the house. I controlled all of my bills and everything until we got married. Then once -- I did everything I needed to do in my household. Once I met her, we both moved in --

Susan: Then he threw it all in my lap and ran.

Pittman: Susan, what does all of this feel like to Tom?

Susan: All of what? What exactly is this?

Pittman: He’s in a life in which he feels he has no control. He feels his
-- there’s no point in saying anything. Nobody cares what he thinks. He’s busy trying to keep his ex-wife from beating up on him. He’s trying to please and satisfy you when he sees those lists as endless and he doesn’t really believe that you want to hear what he thinks about much of anything because he believes that you’ve got to have it your way.

00:48:13

Now somebody in the midst of all of that starts screaming.

Susan: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: Who? Do you think it’s Tom that starts screaming -- and you scream back?

Susan: Mm-hmm. Now I do. I used to not fight back, but I can’t take it anymore. I used to just leave. I can’t leave now. We’re married.


Commentary: Pittman supports her sense of her own maturity.

Susan: Exactly. I can’t go run home anymore, where I used to live.

Pittman: Ok, you’re grown-ups. What is all this screaming about? Your two old year knows better than that.

Susan: But he won’t talk. He won’t have a conversation. If I want to have a conversation, he either won’t listen -- he watches TV, he doesn’t pay attention -- or if he is listening, no matter what I say, he gets defensive. He’s very defensive and he won’t listen. He won’t take anything in.

Pittman: What does it feel like to him? What does his life feel like to him?

Commentary: One way to help couples who seem stuck in a pattern, and stuck in their view of each other, is to ask questions like this, which get the partners to have some compassion for each other, rather than just staying annoyed with a polarized pattern of behaviors. Notice in Susan’s responses below how quickly she is able to convey a pretty lucid understanding of Tom’s struggles.

Susan: He’s got to be totally in a bubble, just bouncing all over. To me,
he didn’t learn how to be a father from his father. He didn’t learn how to be part of a family. Him and his ex-wife -- there’s a whole lot more behind there too, but that’s up to him to say. She’s not a nice little person. Let me just put it that way. They’ve had police. They’ve had fights. They’ve had her cheating. It’s not a pretty picture.

**Pittman:** No, I gathered that.

**Susan:** She’s not nice to the little girl. She has never been nice to the little girl. She’s been -- so he doesn’t want to do anything to lose Melissa so he lets Cindy control everything.

**Pittman:** What does it feel like to him?

**Susan:** He’s got to be lost. So, what is he doing? He’s throwing it all on me. He can’t handle what he’s got so he puts it on my lap. I can’t have anymore of that.

**00:50:00**

**Pittman:** Okay. So, we’ve got this guy here -- big, good looking guy who cannot satisfy a woman. He cannot make any woman happy with him. He cannot figure out how to run his life in a way that satisfies anybody.

**Susan:** Including himself.

**Pittman:** Including himself. He doesn’t feel that he has a voice.

**Susan:** Mm-hmm -- though he voices that all the time, his opinion.

**Pittman:** It may be that he shouts something or other, but he’s not --

**Susan:** He’s shouting for help—

**Pittman:** Right.

**Susan:** —but I can’t give him the help.

**Pittman:** Can you give him a voice?

**Susan:** I’ve been trying.

**Pittman:** How?

**Susan:** Sometimes, something will be going on and something will click in my head. He’ll go and he’ll get angry at my father or my
parents because of somehow relationship is in our family. Now I grew up with five brothers and my father was involved with all of them --

**Pittman:** You know, I could’ve guessed that.

**Susan:** Did you? So, I mean, my father was involved with them all throughout and I realized that he’s jealous of my father’s relationship with my brothers and he’s also jealous of our all -- because we’re all close.

**Pittman:** I assume he’s jealous of anybody who is liked by anybody.

**Susan:** Yeah.

**Tom:** I’m not really jealous, but I didn’t grow up in Mayberry.

**Susan:** I didn’t grow up in Mayberry either. It wasn’t all hunky dory, but they were always there for us. We always did things.

**Tom:** I try to do a lot of things. She tells me, my father did this. He was in the Boy Scouts.

**Pittman:** When you do what her father did -- does that work?

**Tom:** Well, I feel better about myself once I get more involved with the kids and I try to do things.

**00:52:00**

When I first met her, Melissa was real small -- she was three or four.

**Susan:** She was four and a half.

**Tom:** She had her own TV and VCR and everything. I’d go in there and put a movie on for her when she was over and stuff. She started telling me, why you sending her in there? We should do this, that and the other. I started really looking at it and I decided, yeah, there’s more things to being a parent than just sitting there watching TV.

So, I try to do much more than -- really than I’m used to I should say, as a parent.

**Susan:** Or been taught.

**Tom:** Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Pittman:** So, you know you don’t know how to be a father.
Tom: No, but I am trying to be a better parent.

Pittman: When she’s telling you what she thinks you could do to be a father, can you trust that? Can you believe what she tells you?

Commentary: Pittman is trying to figure out how helpful Susan can be in empowering Tom in his struggle to fulfill his role of parent in a different way.

Tom: All of it? No. No, not all of it.

Susan: He thinks I’m telling him what to do.

Pittman: Do you talk to her father about it?

Tom: About being a father? No, I don’t. We talk about general topics. When we converse, it’s never, how’d you do this and how’d you do that?

When it comes to fixing a house, I can ask him, how do you do this?

Pittman: Do you think he could talk to you about how to be a father?

Tom: Yeah, I guess he could -- but I’ve never actually sat down with him yet and actually talked to him about how he did this and how he did that.

Pittman: But you know you don’t know how to be a father. You know you’re extremely conscientious, that you’re trying your damnedest to do the best you can

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: -- and you don’t know how to do it.

Tom: Not really, no.

Pittman: No. That’s right. You’re a fatherless father.

00:54:00

You’re somebody who’s trying to be a father without really having had one. Drunks don’t count.

Tom: Right. No.

Pittman: You grew up with a father who just barked orders and you know that doesn’t work.
Tom: Right, it doesn’t.

Pittman: But it doesn’t feel right to you to just let her bark orders and give you lists.

Commentary: Pittman is saying this to Tom, certainly, but he’s also saying it to Susan, indirectly, to let her know why Tom isn’t accepting her input.

Tom: Exactly.

Susan: But I wasn’t barking orders until like the last year.

Tom: When she barks, let me tell you, she knows how to bark.

Pittman: She grew up with five brothers. I’m sure she learned how. I got no -- sounds good to me -- and she’s probably right -- but she may not be. I mean, what does she know?

You got to figure out how to be a father.

Commentary: Having already established with Susan that indeed she DOES know what she is talking about, Pittman spends some of that goodwill on supporting Tom in his effort to come up with a workable vision of how to be an effective father, and how to handle conflict effectively, according to his own standards and values, not his wife’s or his father’s.

Tom: Well, basically I take day by day and don’t always do exactly what I think I should do, but you know I --

Pittman: None of us does exactly what we should do all the time. This is important to you. It’s important enough to you to do things with Melissa, for you to really change your work schedule, for you to give up your weekends. It’s that important to you.

Commentary: Pittman here is making many suggestions to Tom in a way which emphasizes the idea of making meaningful decisions and enacting behaviors accordingly.

Tom: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: I’m impressed with that.

Tom: Thank you.
Pittman: You’re trying, but if you become mommy’s little helper -- if you’re just there letting her make the lists and tell you what to do and you’re following her directives, you’ll never learn how to do it because you’re not thinking it through.

Tom: Okay. So, you think I should --

00:56:00

Pittman: Now I know how to deal with the problem of Melissa and the bathroom. Just -- hey, great, we get to clean up the bathroom -- fun. Go do it with her. That’s how you do it.

Susan: He did do it once with her.

Pittman: Right, right. So, great minds work alike. You came up with that idea too. That works. But just doing it Susan’s way is going to make you resent Susan. It’s going to make you feel like you’re not really a full-fledged parent here.

Commentary: This is meant to empower Tom, to give him the idea that he is capable of generating great parenting strategies.

Tom: Yeah. A lot of times I do resent her telling me about I should be doing this and Melissa should be doing this at this age. You know, it’s a different circumstance between my child Melissa and the two younger ones because, I keep telling her, Melissa’s not your daughter. She’s mine. I accept most of the responsibility for her when she’s here and around. You know so --

Pittman: Okay. You’re not going to let Susan be your supervisor on raising Melissa. Got it. I understand that. There’s nothing in life that makes you feel better about yourself than parenting. There’s nothing that you can go through that corrects all of the screwed up mess that you grew up in, quite like parenting.

Commentary: This comment is a hopeful one, and conveys the idea that even though Tom’s own childhood was sorely lacking, his is powerful enough to make his life and his daughter’s life different.

Pittman: But see, you’ve got to be a party to it rather than just being her helper. And the only way you’re going to do that is if you’re talking with her, if you all are discussing it. If you have a voice too, if you’re
reading the books, if you’re thinking it through, if you’re talking with her.

**Commentary:** So now Pittman tackles the issue of how Tom and Susan can have more productive conversations.

**Susan:** I’ve noticed that sometimes like I’ll suggest something and then we’ll fight about it because he won’t take it in.

**00:58:02**

But then a week later he’ll say exactly the same thing and now it’s a good idea. So, I’m like, yeah, you’re right. It is a good idea. But he won’t take in and hear it or feel it to try and process it.

**Tom:** It takes me awhile to decide whether or not what she said to me I think is a good idea or not.

**Pittman:** Right.

**Susan:** But we could do without the fighting in between.

**Commentary:** Susan comes through again as Pittman’s co-therapist.

**Pittman:** The fighting is awful. It serves no useful purpose. It interferes with you all being able to have the conversation. Marriage is a conversation. Marriage is two people who are facing whatever they’re facing and are explaining to one another how it makes them feel and how it makes one of them feel different from the other one -- all because you grew up in different families. I mean, ya’ll are even of different genders. I mean, I can tell that. So, you’re not going to see everything the same way.

**Tom:** That’s what I try telling her and she says to me, well, what are you going to do? I say, well, I haven’t figured that out yet. We’ll just have to take one day at a time.

**Pittman:** Tom, you don’t have to be right. Do you know that? That was your father. He was a drunk. You don’t want to be like him. You don’t have to be right.

**Tom:** As close to right as I can get.

**Pittman:** You don’t need to be right. You don’t have to be right. Nobody ever learns how to be a parent, really, except by doing it. You
EMPOWERMENT FAMILY THERAPY WITH FRANK PITTMAN, MD

don’t have to do it right.

**Commentary:** Part of empowerment therapy is empowering people to try new things and make mistakes, and not assume that they always have to be right, which can be paralyzing.

**Tom:** Try telling that to her.

**Susan:** We just have to do it.

**Pittman:** You have to talk about it. You can talk with her father about how to repair the house, probably talk to him about sports or politics or various other things

**Tom:** Right.

**Pittman:** -- you got to talk to him about fathering. Can you talk with your father?

**01:00:26**

**Tom:** About cars.

**Pittman:** That’s a big help.

**Tom:** That’s what we talk about -- just cars.

**Pittman:** Do you try talking to him?

**Tom:** No, because I think that as far as him giving me advice -- I think is absurd. So, I wouldn’t even --

**Pittman:** I’m not concerned with his advice. We know better than to believe his advice -- but do you know what it felt like to him to try to pursue his careers as an alcoholic and as a father at the same time?

**Tom:** No.

**Pittman:** Do you know what it felt like to him to raise you?

**Tom:** I don’t even know if he remembers most of it. So, no, I’ve never actually sat down and talked to him. Him and I just don’t go -- we just don’t talk about that. You know, we talk about cars.

**Susan:** His father was also abusive to him and the daughter -- not to the middle child, but he got it all -- most of it.

**Pittman:** You were the oldest?
Tom: Mm-hmm. I’ve got a brother, a younger sister.

Pittman: What did he do?

Tom: I’m sorry?

Pittman: What did your father do?

Tom: As far as physically? I mean, when you crossed him, you got knocked down or knocked out or hit you with whatever was closest -- that type of thing.

01:02:04

What he did then would definitely -- if I did as a parent, would definitely get me locked up for. It was wrong.

Pittman: Who told him he was wrong?

Tom: Nobody. To this day, nobody’s told him he was wrong. He just goes about his business. He’s retired now.

Pittman: Do you think he knows now that he hurt you?

Tom: Nope. I don’t think he has a clue.

Pittman: And the reason you don’t believe that he knows he did wrong -- the reason you don’t believe that he knows he’s hurt you is because he doesn’t say so?

Tom: Right, we don’t talk about it.

Pittman: So, you don’t talk about it either.

Tom: No. That was just something that -- I’m just not crazy about, growing up as a kid. His father was an alcoholic too. Now I made sure that I didn’t get too used to drinking that often. My brother doesn’t either.

Commentary: This is an emotional conversation for Tom, and he articulates to Pittman this example where he has moved beyond his father’s model of, in this case, drinking.

Pittman: At what age did you decide you didn’t want to grow up to be like your dad?

Tom: I would say probably my mid-20s I realized that there’s more to life than just obsessive drinking.
Susan: I’m missing that

Pittman: Why do you suppose she was willing to marry you?

01:04:00

Tom: Well, because I think she loved me, loves me.

Pittman: Why? What is there about you?

Tom: I don’t know. I’m pretty open-minded, believe it or not, most of the time. I have no idea. I don’t know.

Pittman: Your first wife had screwed you over and run out on you.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: Right, okay. This one took a chance on you.

Tom: Yeah.

Pittman: What did she see there?

Tom: I’d have to ask her.

Pittman: Does she tell you? That’s what I’m asking. Does she tell you what’s wonderful about you?

Tom: Not that I can remember.

Susan: Not lately.

Pittman: When she tries to talk to you, you say, ‘uh-huh’ from time to time.

Tom: Yes, I do.

Susan: He doesn’t listen. I told him that this was being videotaped and he didn’t know it until we got here -- but I told him. That tells you how much he listens. After awhile, you quit talking.

Pittman: Do you? And start making lists?

Susan: Yeah. I just make lists.

Tom: She’s got little post-it notes everywhere.

Susan: Maybe he’ll get a clue. I put it on the wall. Maybe he’ll get a clue and do something.

Pittman: Okay. So, this guy -- he’s been hurt. He’s feeling like he’s got
to do everything right. He’s feeling like he’s got to somehow figure out that he thought of that idea before or he was right or -- he’s still defending himself as if somebody’s abusing him.

**Susan:** He’s very defensive.

**Pittman:** You know that. You see that.

But his primary way of protecting himself is by not talking.

**01:06:02**

**Susan:** Or fighting -- yelling. Mm-hmm.

**Pittman:** Well, yelling is a way of not talking.

**Commentary:** This comment accomplishes a couple of things. First, it defines yelling as simply a non-communication device. Second, it defuses some of the emotion around the yelling.

**Susan:** Yeah, it is. That’s right.

**Tom:** Yeah, I hadn’t thought of that.

**Pittman:** That’s what it’s about.

**Susan:** I feel like he’s running. He’s just always running. Can’t let anybody close. I felt that that’s one reason Melissa was always in the other room. I feel that way with me too -- that I can’t get close to him.

**Pittman:** Right.

**Susan:** Cuz I’ll hurt him. He thinks I’ll hurt him.

**Pittman:** Well, you can’t get close to him and overwhelm him at the same time. Because what he’s learned, what he’s quite expert at is not talking about things. He’s become very good at not talking about things. But he’s desperately trying to do it right. He just doesn’t have the foggiest notion how to do it right.

**Susan:** mm hmm

**Pittman:** He’s trying to do two things at the same thing. One of them is to do parenting right and the other is to make sure nobody ever controls and dominates him the way his father did.

So, you say you know the right way to do it. He can either do it your way and let you control and dominate him the way his father did -- or
he can holler at you and scream at you, stop the conversation and try to bumble around doing it his way without a model.

Susan: Right. I’ve said to him, we’re both way out here --

Pittman: This is lousy.

Susan: I know.

Pittman: This is lousy.

Susan: We need to get together.

Pittman: But the way to get together, I should think --

Susan: Is communication.

Commentary: Susan comes through as co-therapist again!

Pittman: That’s what I would think.

01:08:00

Susan: That’s what I think…I talk a lot.

Pittman: But I would think that just hearing more clearly what you’ve got on your list is not communication.

Susan: I didn’t start making lists for -- I mean, we’ve been together six years.

Tom: She’s made a list from day one, let me tell you.

Susan: I’ve had lists for my life, not your life. Now I’ve got lists for your life.

Tom: She was in college. I saw all the lists of lists.

Susan: I had to keep lists of what I was doing.

Tom: It was a study for when to go to the bathroom, when to take a shower. I’ve never seen anybody with lists like that in my life.

Susan: Now I’m starting to give him the lists.

Commentary: It’s important to note that Susan and Tom are fairly light-hearted about the lists here.

Pittman: Right.

Susan: Right.
Pittman: Right -- and he screams.

Susan: Right -- and it still doesn’t get done.

Pittman: Of course not. Do you understand why? He can’t let you bully him the way his father did.

Susan: Mm-hmm -- but why do I have to let him bully me? Let is the operative word.

Commentary: This question that Susan raises would be an interesting one to explore in future sessions. For now, it is important that Susan understands that they have both participated in this problematic pattern.

Pittman: And you certainly don’t -- but what we’re trying to figure out is how he gets a voice, not how he gets to take over as his father.

Susan: He needs to feel inside and be able to voice that.

Pittman: How does he know what a man thinks and feels if he’s never talked to one? How does he know how fathers decide what to do, if you’ve never talked to a man about fathering?

Susan: He always thought he couldn’t play with his daughters because they were girls. He can only play with boys. There’s nothing to do with the girls.

Pittman: Here I am, trying to get him to clean out the bathroom with his daughter -- but --

Tom: Girls play with Barbies. I mean, what can you --

Pittman: Play with Barbies.

Susan: They play basketball. They play games. They do all sorts of things.

Pittman: Play with Barbies, play basketball -- do the whole thing. We know you don’t know how to do it. We know that. We also know that you are extremely conscientious and you’re going to do it right if you possibly can. The only source of information you’ve got at the moment is Susan.

Commentary: Pittman is empowering Tom to broaden his parenting repertoire with his daughter.
Tom: Yeah. I kind of wondered too if I sat down and actually talked to her father if -- the way he gets pushed around by her mother, I’m afraid -- if I sat down and actually talked to him --

Susan: He wouldn’t go talking to her.

Tom: And I started going along with what he wanted to do -- he’s already preprogrammed to --

Pittman: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Just because you talk with somebody doesn’t mean you have to do it their way. Something in your experience has taught you that it’s dangerous to talk to people because they’ll get control of you if you talk to them. If you talk to your father-in-law about how to be a father and how to make decisions and how to raise a daughter and all of these things, you don’t have to do it his way.

Commentary: Here Pittman is empowering Tom to be in charge of his own decisions, regardless of what others say. Pittman also highlights the idea that communication is not dangerous.

Tom: Yeah, I don’t.

Pittman: If you talk with Susan, you don’t have to do it her way.

Susan: That’s true.

Pittman: Even if she’d like for you to -- even if she thinks she’s right, you don’t have to do it her way. You do know that, don’t you?

Susan: Oh, Yes.

Tom: I guess I could get his opinion.

Pittman: Is he important enough to you for you not to have everything he does done your way?

Susan: This man?

Pittman: Yeah.

Susan: See, with everything that’s gone on, that’s -- I just started going to counseling for myself because the thing that I have to worry about is my two year old and my one year old’s future. I can’t make him or
change him or help him or talk with him if he won’t talk to me. I don’t want my two year old and one year old to constantly keep telling us to stop fighting.

Pittman: So, you try to figure out how to get this guy to talk to you.

01:12:00
Susan: Right.

Pittman: Okay. Have you ever had any doubt about anything in your life?

Susan: Mm-hmm.

Pittman: Okay. That’s very useful. What happens when you say, honey, I don’t know what to do. What do you think?

Susan: Say that again. When I say that to somebody?

Pittman: Yeah. What would happen if you said to Tom, I don’t know what to do about this. What do you think?

Susan: I do it to him all the time and he leaves it alone. He kicks it to the gutter. He won’t have the conversation. I don’t know, he says. And it’s still sitting here on my lap.

Pittman: Life is very hard for fatherless fathers. Please understand that. What it means is, he needs to be right, but he doesn’t have the foggiest notion what he’s supposed to do.

Susan: Mm-hmm. And we’ve gone so far, now I have the need to be right.

Pittman: Will you believe me on something -- which is that you don’t have to do it right? It does not have to be done right.

Susan: Right. You just have to be there to do it.

Pittman: If you’re doing it wrong, even the two year old will tell you. You don’t need to worry about doing it right. But it is an emergency in you all’s lives that he has to get a voice. You’ve got one. I’m not worried about you losing it.

Susan: But it’s being heard.

Pittman: Can we consider the crisis of the moment -- the job to be
done is to get him a voice? The best way to do it --

Susan: Oh no.

Pittman: I think the best way to do it is for him to try talking with your father. If that gives him the realization that he doesn’t have to do it somebody else’s way, he may even be able to talk to his father.

01:14:05

Susan: Mm-hmm. I’ve asked him to talk to his friends, but guys don’t talk about that.

Pittman: Guys don’t talk like that.

Susan: I know. Why not?

Pittman: Sorry. I don’t know. We don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. I got raised as a guy. I don’t know. What do I know?

But what I do know is that getting him under your control is not going to help.

Susan: He needs to be under his own control.

Pittman: Right -- which means he has to be his own expert. He can get some expertise from talking with the two fathers and that’s crucial -- okay?

Commentary: At this point Pittman has already empowered both partners to move beyond their patterns, to stop yelling and to have Tom be a more active parent to his daughter. This intervention-- to talk to Susan’s father and to his own father--may or may not yield any useful parenting ideas for him, but it will at least make him more comfortable addressing topics of parenting with less conflict, and will help him practice being more open to different models of parenting.

Tom: Okay.

Pittman: Thank you.

Susan: Thank you.

Tom: Thank you.
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