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COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

A Training to Build Constructive Relationships
(& Preclude or Defuse Conflict)

Healthy intimate relationships- particularly in the intimacy of marriage or committed relationships is impacted strongly by good to poor communication. This extensive training looks at experiences with young children as applicable to adult relationships, boundaries, the components needed in personal relationships, the ability to follow through (often affected by family-of-origin issues), the key factors in validating one another, figuring out what is going on, dealing with the challenge of reality, how one may sabotage oneself, appropriate and inappropriate goals in the relationship, devolution of relationship warnings, and more about healthy communication.

Child & adult correlation

The principles about adult interaction are as true for working with babies and children.

The goal is to take intuitions about people and bring them out into tangible and concrete principles and concepts that can be applied across a variety of life situations.

BOUNDARIES ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT IN ALL RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships (including abuse) can be defined in terms of boundaries.

WHAT A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP ENTAILS

1) INVESTMENT

First, always remember that relationship means investment.

Gains from investment versus loss from not investing.

2) REVEALING (SELLING?) YOURSELF

Revealing Yourself leads to **Trust**- without with it's always all uphill work.

(Bringing Your Real Self to the First Date)

The Intimate Personal Relationship- Investing in a positive alliance with your partner.

Gains: Support, the benefit of a doubt, a background of trust and respect.

Losses w/o: No support, suspicion, no trust and respect, adversaries.

Connection, Rapport: Your partner needs to know that you are for and with him/her.

Integrity, Honesty: Your partner needs to trust in your word and actions. That you will not try to make things sound good when they aren't. That you have the best interests of the him/her and of the family at heart.

Competence, Knowledge: Your partner needs to know that you know what you are doing; and doing what you know well.

Availability: Your partner needs to know that you are available to them when they have concerns.

A Real Relationship: Your partner needs to know that you are a real person and not just a role- wife, husband, spouse.



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CREATING THE ABILITY TO FOLLOW THROUGH (Family of Origin Issues)

The ability to create "real" constructive relationships is not a matter of finding another program or another book. It is dependent on being able to follow through.

The ability to follow through, i.e. to sell a real self that the partner can trust depends less on technique (the lessons of most how-to instruction) than the individual's ability

to integrate learning about effective techniques despite unconscious or semi-conscious previously acquired maladaptive responses;

to become aware of how and when one sabotages more adaptive responses;

to apply more adaptive responses despite the drive to satisfy or appease urges that will sabotage constructive interaction;

to be aware of his/her own self-esteem, security/insecurity, fears, strengths & weaknesses (the origins of why he/she has had to previously sabotage more adaptive responses).

The individual needs to be aware of and understand his/her own real self to the point where he/she no longer needs to sabotage him/herself.

DIAGNOSIS AND POSITIVE INTERACTION

1ST STEP

PSYCHO/EMOTIONAL DIAGNOSIS/EVALUATION

*** The ADULT PARTNER who comes to you with a problem, demand, or crisis, is VERY MUCH LIKE THE CHILD WHO COMES TO YOU.

*** Like the BABY and the CHILD, the ADULT IS IN A STATE OF, OR FORM OF DISTRESS!

*** When IN DISTRESS, EVERY PERSON whatever the age wants and needs SUPPORT AND VALIDATION.

*** When any person is in distress, in the immediate moment, THE FACTS DON'T COUNT!!

2ND STEP

PSYCHO/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, CONNECTION, & VALIDATION

*** Before and Later don't matter- NOW IS WHAT COUNTS!

*** **Make the emotional connection to the person.** Validate his or her feelings.

*** The person WILL CONTINUE TO BE DEPRESSED, NEGATIVE, COMPLAIN, ATTACK, OR DEMAND (usually intensifying) according to his/her personal style UNTIL HE OR SHE GETS THE VALIDATION or until he or she is depleted.



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FOUR INGREDIENTS FOR VALIDATION AND CONNECTION

1) GESTURE/VISUAL EXPRESSION

*** A part of this message is that HIS/HER FEELINGS ARE NOT FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN FEELINGS.

*** The feelings/issue at hand are going to be RESOLVED NOT BY VIRTUE OF RELATIVE STATUS, POWER, OR AUTHORITY, BUT INSTEAD BY BEING EMOTIONALLY CONNECTED.

2) VOICE TONE

*** If frustration, anger, or **fear** is your dominate state at the time, the OTHER PERSON WILL SENSE YOUR ANGER AND WILL NOT FEEL VALIDATED.

*** A RECEPTIVE, GENTLE TONE COMMUNICATES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND ACCEPTANCE of the person's upset state, and offers him/her a bridge out of his/her upset; your calmness is like a lifesaver thrown into his/her turbulent sea.

3) TOUCH

*** TOUCH IS **THE** PRIMARY FORM OF VALIDATION.

TO TOUCH, EYE CONTACT/BODY ENGLISH, & TONE, ONE CAN ADD THE COGNITIVE COMPONENT.

4) THE VALIDATING MESSAGE

*** This is a further solidification of the contact, and INADEQUATE ON ITS OWN.

*** TOUCH, EYE CONTACT/BODY ENGLISH, & TONE ARE OFTEN ENOUGH IN THEMSELVES.

*** THE VALIDATING MESSAGE IS **NOT JUDGMENTAL**. It is AN OBSERVATION OR LABELING of what is.

*** THE LABELING of what is- what is happening, is in itself REASSURING.

*** A person will NEGATE VERBAL VALIDATION WITH CONTRARY TOUCH, PHYSICAL EXPRESSION, AND TONE. The other person will almost always feel this.

Examples:

"I can see that you feel terrible about this...."

"If I thought that had happened to me, I certainly would be upset too...."

"I imagine this is quite frustrating for you...."

"I'd be worried too...."

"It would be hard for me to not be scared too...."

"That doesn't feel fair, does it?...."

"I understand, I'd get mad too if I thought someone wasn't being fair...."

"It must be difficult to have to have to bring this up...."

"I would be surprised and disappointed too...."

"I can understand how you may feel betrayed by us...."

"I get mad too, when I can't get what I want...."



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THE REALITY MESSAGE

*** THE REALITY MESSAGE CANNOT BE HEARD UNLESS VALIDATION HAS OCCURRED **FIRST**.

*** THE REALITY MESSAGE IS **EXPERIENCED AS INVALIDATION** when presented WITHOUT PRIOR VALIDATION.

Regret Phrases

*** THE REGRET PHRASE of your Reality Message CONVEYS EMPATHY AND CONNECTION TO THE EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE OTHER PERSON.

Examples:

"Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time for that..." (Message is that you want it too)

"My problem was that it would have been hard for me to do that because of ..." (Message is that although you want it too & have tried for it, there are obstacles; it wasn't just arbitrarily decided)

"Despite everything, sometimes things just got out of my hands...." (Message is that you are trying and are doing your best, but that some things are beyond intervention)

On the other hand, if the PARTNER IS CORRECT, I.E. HAS A LEGITIMATE COMPLAINT, you must acknowledge that, and commit to it yourself.

"I should have been on top of that. I'm know I messed this."

"I agree. That's something I need to improve on."

"I made a mistake. I should have acted differently."

"I messed up. That's my responsibility. I have to do that better."

"I need to be clearer."

"I'll make sure next time."

Whether or not you agree or disagree then you must, offer what you can do or are willing to do and are going to do (including alternatives) *****and explain it*****

"I'll change how I do that."

"I'll make sure."

"If you want me to, I'll just...."



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INITIATING THE PROCESS and HOW YOU CAN SABOTAGE THIS PROCESS

*** YOUR PERSONAL PSYCHO-DYNAMIC PROCESS WHEN YOU FEEL THREATENED, ATTACKED, OVERWHELMED, FRUSTRATED, STUCK, OR UNDER PRESSURE DETERMINES YOUR ABILITY TO USE THIS PROCESS.

THE SEVEN TYPICAL DEFENSIVE RESPONSES TO BEING IN THIS STATE ARE:

- 1) To attack back;
- 2) To get defensive;
- 3) To placate;
- 4) To disassociate;
- 5) To distract;
- 6) To run;
- 7a) To take the high ground morally.
- 7b) To take the high ground intellectually.

USING YOUR OWN PROCESS TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY

*** 1) By **KNOWING** WHAT YOUR PERSONAL DEFENSIVE STYLE is when attacked or otherwise negatively affected, and being aware that it has been evoked, THEN YOU CAN MORE EASILY **RECOGNIZE** HOW YOU HAVE BEEN AFFECTED;

2) If you recognize that you have been negatively affected (perhaps, attacked), then you can try to **INTERFERE** WITH YOUR NORMAL DEFENSIVE RESPONSE;

3) If you can stop your normal defensive response, then it becomes possible for you to **REALIZE THAT HE/SHE HAS ATTACKED OR REACTED NEGATIVELY BECAUSE HE/SHE IS IN DISTRESS!**;

4) Once you recognize that he/she is in distress, then you can **INITIATE** THE VALIDATION PROCESS AND TECHNIQUES.

RENEW THE COMMUNICATION CONTRACT

The Risk in Confrontation

Energizing for Confrontation

Thank the person for bringing the problem up. Upfront people are much safer to deal with than people who hold in concerns and get all worked up.

"I'm really glad you brought this up."

"I really need your help to do better."

"I know it wasn't easy to complain, so I want you to know that I appreciate your trust in me to bring this up."

"I'm glad you gave me a chance, instead of being upset and keeping it all to yourself."



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GOALS OF COUPLES COMMUNICATION

NOT SO GREAT GOALS- DANGEROUS GOALS

- 1) "I'm really happy that we're talking, so that you can fix yourself!"
- 2)so you can admit how wrong you are!"
- 4)so I can prove myself right!."
- 5)so I can hurt you back!"

BETTER BUT NOT QUITE IT GOALS- INCOMPLETE OR PROBLEMATIC GOALS

- 1) "So I/we find out how doomed we are."
- 2) To save the relationship
- 3) For the kids

APPROPRIATE GOALS (HOPEFULLY)

To learn better Communication Skills

To learn how to express feelings appropriately (how to be mad w/o becoming abusive, be sad w/o becoming helpless, be caring w/o becoming condescending, etc.)

To learn how to receive expressions of feelings appropriately

To learn how we fight

To recognize damaging fight techniques (dirty fighting)

To learn how to fight

To learn how to fair fight

To identify what each of us needs

To learn how to be vulnerable, resilient, and available

To learn why we fight

What are our scripts- what we bring from our families of origin (including cultural differences)

What are our expectations that we bring into the relationship: conscious, semi-conscious, & unconscious

What are our secrets and rules

To build appropriate boundaries and define healthy roles

To break negative cycles of interaction

To understand our temperamental fit and misfit

To achieve clarity

Clarity that the relationship is over, or should end

Clarity that the relationship should go on

Clarity that there is hope, that the process is not finished

To make the one last attempt (so I can leave you w/o feeling guilty about not trying enough).

To be happy as individuals first and as a couple second (or is it the other way around?)



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STAGES OF COUPLES RELATIONSHIP DEVOLUTION

based on the work of John Gottman, Ph.D., "Why Marriages Succeed or Fail"

It is often useful to identify at which stage of a negative relationship progression a couple is in. This theory sees six stages of decay. Depending on which stage the couple is in, the challenges to couples therapy and to rebuilding the relationship are different. Needless to say, the more advanced- the more devolved the relationship, the more difficult is the rebuilding process.

1) COMMENTING

A partner will **comment** about a behavior that s/he finds uncomfortable or negative in the hopes that the other partner will figure out the implicit message- that is, the expectation of the commenting partner is that the receiving partner will process thus- "Since s/he mentioned that, it must be something that bothers her/him. And, since I care for her/him, I will automatically change my behavior." Commenting may be one- sided or mutual.

2) COMPLAINING

After commenting about the behavior, but getting no response (change), the partner will **complain** specifically about the undesirable or absent behavior. The expectation of the complaining partner is that the receiving partner will process thus- "Since my partner has complained specifically about this behavior, and since I care for her/him, I will automatically change my behavior." Complaining may be one-sided or mutual.

3) CRITICIZING

After complaining about the behavior, but getting no change, the partner will move from complaining about behavior and begin complaining specifically about the other person; in other words, the partner begins **criticizing** the other person's personality or character. The logic of the criticizing partner is "Since my partner who I complained to has not changed his/her behavior, there must be something wrong or corrupt about his/her personality or character." Criticizing usually becomes reciprocal.

4) CONTEMPT

After criticizing the other partner's personality or character, and still being frustrated in getting the behavior the partner desires, the criticizing partner adds intentional insult to the criticism, thus conveying a sense of disgust, that is, **contempt** for the other person. At this point, any positive qualities or previous good experiences are forgotten, and the partner begins to abusively treat the other person. The logic of the partner holding contempt is that, "My partner has failed to behave properly because s/he is disgusting, stupid, incompetent." Contempt tends to be very reciprocal!

5) DEFENSIVENESS

After contempt enters the relationship and both partners are abusing each other, both feel victimized by the other, and respond by being **defensive** about his/her behavior. The logic of each is, "It (including my behaviors) are all her/his fault. Her/his behavior and/or flaws forces me to behave so negatively in response. I know what her/his evil motivations are (mind reading)." Instead of answering complaints or criticisms, each responds with her/his own set of complaints or criticisms.

6) DISCONNECTING EMOTIONALLY

After engaging in the fruitless negative and painful cycles of arguing, eventually one or both partners disconnect from her/his partner in order to avoid the pain of caring for someone who appears to not care for you reciprocally, to avoid the rejection and abandonment, and to attempt to stop the mutually abusive battles.



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DIAGNOSTIC ORDER FOR UNDERSTANDING & APPROACHING BEHAVIOR

1) Developmental factors (including life cycle issues for adults)

CAUSE: development, age, maturation

TREATMENT: satiation of developmental needs

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting normally to normal development

TOLERANCE: high (if developmental stage is recognized)

2) Situational factors (other people, availability of resources)

CAUSE: situation

TREATMENT: change the situation

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting normally to the immediate situation only; the behavior is not something he/she does all the time

TOLERANCE: high

3) Physical condition

CAUSE: fatigue, hunger

TREATMENT: treat condition- rest or feed

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting normally to the condition; condition changes, then behavior changes

TOLERANCE: high

4) Emotional condition (situational)

CAUSE: fear, anxiety, joy, sadness, grief

TREATMENT: validate emotions, teach appropriate expression

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting normally; colleague or supervisor may have judgment about appropriateness of the feeling

TOLERANCE: high (depends on own comfort w/expression of emotions)

*5) Temperamental factors

CAUSE: personality

TREATMENT: adjust for temperament/ socialize

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting based on innate normal traits for him/her

TOLERANCE: *high for temperament, *low for behavior

*6) Environmental/ecological factors (family, school, work systems)

CAUSE: family/school systems, turmoil, constraints- dysfunctionality

TREATMENT: alter system, change environment

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is reacting normally to an adverse environment; victim of the environment

TOLERANCE: high- sympathetic (colleague/supervisor may have guilt)

*7) Pathology (psychological)

CAUSE: person's psychological problem/disorder

TREATMENT: treat problem/disorder- "sick" patient

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: something is wrong with the person

TOLERANCE: low to high?

**8) Morality

CAUSE: evil or rotten essence

TREATMENT: abandonment, punishment, damnation, or seeking of spiritual

intervention

IMPLICATIONS/JUDGMENTS: person is unsalvageable by another's activity or intervention

TOLERANCE: none to ?



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THE WORKING IT OUT PLAN

PART I: TELLINGS

First, one person speaks while the other person listens carefully without interrupting.

SAY: What I FELT.
What I WANTED.
What I LIKED or DIDN'T LIKE.

THEN SAY: What I think YOU FELT
What I think YOU WANTED
What I think YOU LIKE or DIDN'T LIKE

Now, the other person says the same things to you while you listen carefully.

PART II: HAPPENINGS

First, one person speaks while the other person listens carefully without interrupting.

SAY: What I DID when I was upset.
What I want to happen INSTEAD.
What I can do DIFFERENTLY or BETTER next time.

Now, the other person says the same things to you while you listen carefully.

PART III: CONTRACT, CLOSE, and COMMIT

TOGETHER decide

What WE can do differently or better.

PLAN for the next time.

CLOSE by shaking hands or hugging.



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THE FOUR HONORINGS OF COMMUNICATION

When you need to communicate something difficult, scary, uncomfortable, dangerous, potentially embarrassing, or anything else that may be experienced as threatening or humiliating to someone you have a vested relationship with (spouse, colleague, friend,...boss!), you are often caught between your integrity and honesty, and your fear of the potential damages. Too often, you just don't know how you can do without the harm, so you say...nothing. And, the other person stays uninformed to his/her detriment, to your detriment, to the relationship's, family's, business', or organization's; and/or you stay silent filled with growing resentment, anger, and a sense of impotence. To protect the relationship, you stay quiet; yet by staying silent you allow the relationship to accept a kind of time-release poison that compromises it.

The choice becomes to stay silent and accept the certainty of the pain of unresolved issues, or to speak and risk explosion. The choice to speak...to communicate becomes more viable with improved communication skills. The Four Honorings of Communication offer guidance.

When you need to communicate something risky or uncomfortable, first communicate the Four Honorings, in order:

- 1) Honor the feelings of the person to whom you are speaking;
- 2) Honor the value relationship between you and the person;
- 3) Honor your own integrity- your need to be honest;
- 4) Honor the higher purpose the relationship between the two of you serves; and the both of you own;

then speak the truth the best you can.

For example:

"I need to tell you something that is very difficult for me to say. I realize that it may feel hurtful or critical or make you feel uncomfortable, and I really don't want that to happen but I need to say it. I also know that it may harm our relationship...a relationship that I enjoy and value but again I need to say it, because I don't know how to not say it and be honest with myself; or not say it and be true to the reason we're here together in the first place. I need to speak out for us both to do right by ourselves and our mission. Is it ok if I tell you?"

At this point, except for the most insecure and defended individuals (and unfortunately, there will be such individuals), while nervous and apprehensive, most people will take your communication fairly receptively. Good Luck! Good Communication! Good Relationships!