

HANDOUTS

DAY ONE

Non-confrontational Communication Structure

1. Observation / Description

Describe the action that the other person does that you find difficult, or the words they have said, or the facts of a situation:

'When you do / say...'

2. Feelings

Express your feeling when this happens:

'... I feel...'

3. Needs

Work out and express what your need is behind this feeling:

'...because I need...'

4. Request (optional)

Ask for something that would meet your need:

'Would you be willing to...'

Make your request specific, concrete and measurable.

Example

'When you come home and leave your shoes on the floor I feel exasperated, because I need order. Would you be willing to put your shoes in the cupboard when you come in?'

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED

aggravated
dismayed
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated

ANGRY

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
puzzled

DISCONNECTED

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET

agitated
alarmed
disturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE

burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired

weary

PAIN

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD

depressed
dejected
despair
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
gloomy
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy

TENSE

anxious
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
irritable
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING

envious
jealous¹
longing

Needs Inventory

The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

CONNECTION

acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect
safety
security
stability
support
to know and be known
to see and be seen
to understand and
be understood
trust
warmth

HONESTY

authenticity
integrity
presence

PLAY

joy
humour

PEACE

beauty
communion
ease
equality
harmony
inspiration
order

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

air
food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression
safety
shelter
touch
water

MEANING

awareness
celebration of life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness
growth
hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding

AUTONOMY

choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity

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Non-confrontational Communication Exercises

Work in threes or fours (couple and therapist/observer)

In the following conflictual couple scenarios, judgements are being expressed that are liable to trigger defensiveness and conflict escalation.

Couple: choose an example below and role-play a feisty argument in front of your therapist.

Therapist: listen for a while, and when you think you have a handle on what each partner is saying, interrupt the couple. Then using Nonconfrontational Communication structure, construct an alternative way in which they might express themselves to their partner more productively in one sentence summarising the Observation, Feeling and Need of each partner.

*‘So, let me just pause you there (turning to one partner); so are you saying that: ‘When (observation/fact/trigger), you feel (guess feeling), because you need (guess need)?’
Repeat with the other partner.*

1. Partner A: When A comes home from work exhausted, A loves to settle down to watch East Enders on TV four nights per week.

Partner B: Says TV is 'mindless & boring' and that only 'stupid people' watch soaps.

2. Partner A: Wants to get married and has been dreaming of a fairytale wedding since childhood. A tries dropping hints to her B about getting married. However, Partner B doesn't seem interested, so A is wondering whether to end the relationship.

Partner B: Has been through a sticky divorce and is sure about not wanting to get married again. B says that marriage is 'no more than a piece of paper'.

3. Partner A: Is untidy and leaves their clothes on the floor. Partner B calls them dirty and a 'slob'.

Partner B: Is resentful at having to pick up clothes every day.

4. Partner A: Would like to have sex every day, but is frustrated that Partner B never initiates sex and calls B 'frigid'.

Partner B: Would rather have a cup of tea and a cuddle. B thinks Partner A is a 'sex maniac'.

5. Partner A: Wants to save their joint money for retirement. He is furious that Partner B comes home with a new pair of shoes every week.

Partner B: Thinks Partner A is tight with money and should loosen up.

6. Partner A: Loves the opera. A thinks Partner B should be more sophisticated and like it too. A is angry when B refuses to go with them.

Partner B: Does not like opera.

7. Partner A: Longs to hear B say that they love A. The fact that B does not say this must mean that B does not care.

Partner B: Thinks A is needy and controlling. B disputes what the word 'love' really means anyway.

Three step Imago™ Dialogue

1. SENDER

Check if partner is ready;

Send message using 'I' language.

When talking about your partner describe their behaviour, not their character.

RECEIVER:

Mirror - 'I heard you say ...'

'Did I get that?' 'Is there more?'

(Sender to gives more if necessary, and is mirrored again by the Receiver)

Receiver gives a full summary at the end of sending.

2. RECEIVER VALIDATES

'That makes sense to me ...' / 'I understand that you ..., given that ...'

3. RECEIVER EMPATHISES:

'I imagine you might be feeling...' (guess feelings)

Eight Step Imago™ Dialogue

1. Sender: 'Are you available for dialogue?'

Receiver: 'Yes' / 'No', or specifies a more appropriate time;

2. Sender: expresses their observation, feelings and needs in short phrases (e.g. regarding a frustration or appreciation);

3. Receiver: 'What I heard you say was...'; 'Did I get that?'; 'Is there more?'

4. When the Sender has said all they have to say on the topic, the Receiver summarises all they've heard;

5. The Receiver validates the Sender: 'It makes sense to me that you are feeling... given that you need ... because...'

6. The Receiver empathises with the Sender by suggesting other emotions that the Sender might be feeling (other than those that the Sender has already expressed): 'I imagine that you might also be feeling...'

7. The Sender thanks the Receiver for listening and the Receiver thanks the Sender for sharing with them;

8. It might be appropriate to reverse roles and repeat the process, maybe a number of times.

Imago™ Tools for Dialogue between Sender and Receiver

Guidance for the person talking ('Sender'):

1. Focus on one issue only. Before you begin, get clear on your main concern. Check your Receiver is ready to hear you. Keep to one issue.
2. Express your feelings, needs & thoughts. Go beyond one feeling if you can. Look for the vulnerability underneath an initial feeling such as anger.
3. Avoid blaming, naming, criticising, name-calling and shaming your Receiver.
4. Be open to self-discovery. Going deeper into how you feel will enable you to uncover all kinds of things about yourself.

Reminder to self: this is my problem; I'm expressing who I am; it is about me revealing myself and being willing to express my feelings and needs. I'm taking a risk in speaking my truth. I'm increasing my ability to tolerate difference.

Guidance for the person listening ('Receiver'):

1. Listen calmly. Don't defend yourself, argue or cross-complain. Remind yourself you don't have to take what's said so personally. Hold on to the 'Big Picture'.
2. Reflect back to the Sender everything they've said using their words. Check with the Sender to see if it's accurate ('Have I got that?'). If you forget something they've said, simply ask them to repeat.
3. Keep control of the pace of the Sender by holding your hand up to pause them if they're saying too much for you to remember.
4. Summarise: when the Sender has finished talking, repeat back to them as accurately and completely as you're able, what you've understood.
5. Validate: offer the Sender a validation. You don't have to agree with what they've said, but simply agree that their way of viewing the world makes sense to you: *'That makes sense to me ... given that you're a person who ...'*
6. Empathise: do your best to put yourself in the Sender's shoes; guess two or three emotion words for what they may be feeling.

Reminder to self: The Sender is a separate person with their own feelings, thoughts, personality and family history. I only need to listen, not look for solutions.

Common Couple Scenarios
Practising Imago™ Frustration Dialogue

Choose one of the following, or you can role-play your own idea:

- 1. Partner A:** Lives for their work and likes to spend as many hours at the office as possible. They call their partner 'passive and lazy' for preferring to spend time on leisure activities.

Partner B: Sees work as a 'necessary evil' and their partner as a 'workaholic', often complaining that they're leading 'separate lives'.

- 2. Partner A:** Has a low sex drive and would rather have a cup of tea than have sex with B.

Partner B: Feels neglected and is desperate for their old sex life to resume.

- 3. Partner A:** Is the disciplined parent with regard to raising the children.

Partner B: Believes children should be allowed to play and doesn't like to set too many boundaries.

- 4. Partner A:** Doesn't like Partner B's family members. In particular they don't like the fact that Partner B is on the phone to their mother every day.

Partner B: Is frustrated that Partner A doesn't make more of an effort to get on with their family. He wonders why Partner A can't just accept that B is close to their mother and that's why B speaks to her so often.