

How To Make Love



Through
Deep
Listening

Dr. Jane Bolton

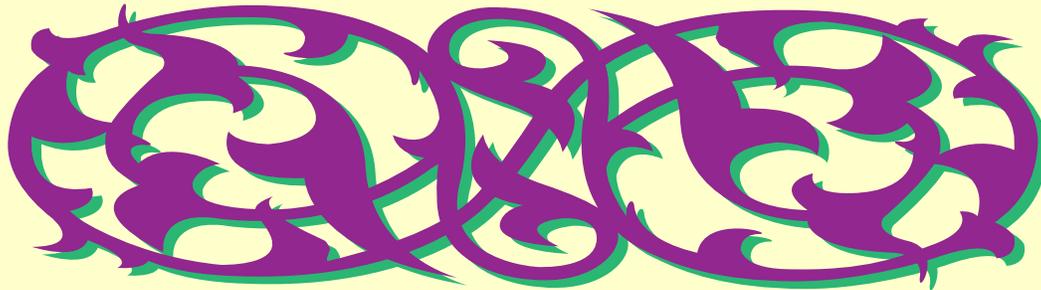
How To Make Love Through Deep Listening

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About The Author



Dr. Jane Bolton, PsyD, LMFT, CC has both personal and professional reasons for being an expert in self-esteem, relationships and the communication skills that build both self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. Born with the gift of being an "unwanted" child to a depressed mother and an enraged father, she has the joy of learning and earning her own high self-esteem. Professionally, she has spent 16 years working to help other people love themselves more fully.

Head Stuff:

She is a licensed marriage and family therapist, a contemporary psychoanalyst and certified master life coach and hypnotist. She practices in Culver City, (a Los Angeles suburb) California. She is an adjunct professor and training analyst at the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Santa Monica, California. She also supervises psychotherapists for Los Angeles counseling agencies, and gives empowerment workshops to enhance Self Growth and Self-Esteem.

Heart Stuff:

Her mission is to support all people in the highest and fullest expression of their True Selves. This involves supporting Self Discovery, Self Awareness, Self Acceptance, Self Understanding, Self Growth and Development, Self Expression, Self Esteem and Self Expansion. In short, she helps people love themselves more fully so that they can love others more fully too.

She carries out her mission by providing Psychotherapy, by giving Supervision and In-Service Trainings to psychotherapists, and giving Workshops and Presentations to corporations and the general public.

To learn more about her work, call her at 310.838.6363 and visit her websites at: www.Dr-Jane-Bolton.com and www.FreedomFromShame.com.

Dedication

I believe we all yearn to love well.

Many people with near death experiences report that as they were reviewing their lives, they were in a non-judgmental way answering the questions, "Did I love," and "Did I matter."

For me, love is more than a temporary feeling state. It involves a conscious commitment to actions that nourish the other person. One of the most nourishing actions towards others is to Listen Deeply to their experience, particularly when there is disharmony born out of misunderstanding.

Most of us have not grown up in an environment that modeled how to communicate when there is distress between people. We've seen distancing, walking out, yelling, criticizing, dismissing, and defensiveness- anything but tuning in and listening. So in order to love well, we have to learn how to Listen Deeply now.

This book of Love Lessons, *How to Make Love through Deep Listening* is dedicated to all my clients--past, present and future. You have taught me, and I know you will continue to teach me so much about how to love.

Introduction

Hello, Dear Reader. Thank you for caring. Caring enough to want to have great relationships. Caring enough to want the best for you and the others in your life.

When I first started to learn communication lessons, I was willing to try ANYTHING to improve my relationship with my father. I was 30 and in therapy. I learned a very valuable lesson: how to speak in "I" messages. I thought that if I learned how to express myself better, using I messages that it would make it less necessary for him to be defensive. I practiced the skill and saw beautiful results with friends, and relatives and even strangers.

So after several months of honing my I-ing skills. I wrote him a long letter expressing my hopes for improving our relationship. I got the letter returned to me with bright red marker circles around all of my 'I's. "All you do is talk about yourself," was his only response, slashed out in big bold letters across the page. At the time I could not see any other way to improve things.

Many years later, when I entered marriage and family therapy training school, it was partly to learn exactly what it took to build and keep a deeply satisfying and growth producing relationship. Many years after that, I returned to school to get my doctorate in contemporary psychoanalysis to learn how to be the person who could exercise more deeply the skills I had learned. About 20 years later, by Jove, I think I've got it!

Over the years I have seen couples resolve long standing issues by using these Deep Listening Skills. I have seen men and women (and women and women, and men and men) build trust where there was almost none to begin with. I have seen relationships repair and become stronger after betrayals. I have seen couples who were broken up still be able to work together to parent, using these skills.

Since I have seen these steps work so often with so many people on so many issues, I want to share them with a wider audience than just my clients. The learnings are so valuable; I hope to pass them along to you, to nourish your life.

*Mirror, Mirror, When You're Up Against The Wall:
Step #1 To Lovemaking Through Deep Listening*

Mirror, Mirror, When You're Up Against The Wall: Step #1 To Lovemaking Through Deep Listening

Mirroring Section Outline

Introduction

What is mirroring?

What happens when there is not adequate mirroring: Pain

Joanne's journey

The importance of mirroring

The mirroring process detailed

The Parable of the Blind Man

Introduction

I had no idea when I first thought of writing this article, how difficult it would be for me. I wanted to write something filled with memorable, useful content, but in a playful and humorous style. I was thinking of mirroring in the context of my work of coaching unhappy couples and family members get from distressing fights to deep understanding. While many people in pain are urgent about getting to "solutions", it is only from the place of deep understanding that they can create any real and lasting solutions to their issues.

I was in that playful mood while making up the title. The "up against the wall" was a reference to how trapped and helpless we can feel during destructive fights - disagreements without mirroring. The "Mirror, Mirror" refers to Snow White's stepmother's trusty mirror who would always tell the undistorted truth when asked "Mirror, Mirror, on the wall, who is fairest of them all?" But my chipper mood evaporated as began to reflect upon the enormous significance of the subject to

me. I found myself encountering sorrow at the ways I have not mirrored others, and the ways I had been deprived of mirroring myself while growing up.

What is mirroring?

I'd better describe what mirroring is, and is *not*, before giving personal examples. Mirroring is a process that reflects, or feeds back to the other person what they have said. That process reassures them and yourself that you understand the content of what they have said. A useful analogy might be to think of your self as a flat mirror which reflects an accurate image of their communication – a reflection without the magnifying or minimizing distortions that convex or concave mirrors give.

If you make an interpretation and add what *you* understood or what *you* think, rather than what the other person said, you distort what they have said. And if they this are in a highly charged emotional state, your distorting leads to further judgments, conflict and pain for both of you.

Rest assured that mirroring is not giving up your own experience or point of view. And it does not mean that you agree with the other person's way of seeing things. It is recognizing that the other person has had an experience too, and that their experience--though different from yours--is equally as valid. There are very good reasons the other has experienced what they have experienced. Even if you don't realize it yet.

It's just part of our uniqueness that others will not, and in fact could not, have the same experience as you. Until we learn that others are not us, we cannot relate to others; we can relate only to ourselves.

What happens without adequate mirroring: Pain

Wanting to examine my own experience of absent or faulty mirroring before writing, I am remorseful as I remember the pain I've caused others by not mirroring their perspectives. An example: An old boyfriend saw a note I had written a girlfriend psychotherapist asking her about a male colleague of ours. My boyfriend thought I was interested in dating the man. I was so stuck in my perspective of loyalty to my boyfriend, and how wrong he was about his belief, that I could not mirror how hurt, scared, distrustful, lonely and sad he was feeling at the time.

I think of the pain I've felt at having my good intentions or actions misread. A sincere, "Thanks for dinner, Mom" was interpreted as my trying to butter her up to get something, or worse, as hiding anger towards her. In another example with my father: in my never-been-kissed yet teens, he interpreted my sitting in the car shyly after a date, as my having intercourse. Ha! I could barely say "Hello" to any of my crushes, much less you-know-what.

I remember how I first experienced mirroring from my therapist. When she would start a sentence with, "You..." I would cringe, expecting some awful description to follow: "You don't have the brains you were born with." "You don't know what you are talking about." "You have all kinds of pipe dreams." It took months and months to learn that after "You" nothing horrible was going to follow. Though an interim

stage was that if she said something merely descriptive, I interpreted it as a criticism. Once she said, "You want him to be engaged in the conversation." Recognizing the truth of her statement, I thought she meant I must want too much, and I'd better stop wanting it.

I think of the pain I see in clients who were abysmally and chronically deprived of mirroring responses as they grew up. A client I'll call "Joanne" shared with me just this morning one of the consequences of such early deprivation. (I protect client confidentiality by using different names, sexes and life details.)

Joanne's Journey

"What's happening?!?" an alarmed Joanne asks herself. She sits at the head of the dinner table with five of her gallery's artists gathered together before the opening of their show. Joanne suddenly feels as if she's at the end of a long tunnel. Everyone else grows bigger and bigger; she gets smaller and smaller. She can't breathe and she knows something ominous is about to occur. She watches herself carry on cordial conversations, fulfilling her role of artist support person. All the while, inside she feels so much pain that she wishes she would die. Her terrifying reaction was due to an experience of being invisible which triggered awakening memories of early childhood experiences.

So what happened? Earlier that day she had been interviewed by a media writer whose publication had awarded the gallery a "Best in LA" award and one of the six "Best in the USA" awards for sales. The writer had made no make eye contact. He answered her questions with a curt "yes" or "no." And afterwards, the writer had called to offer her gallery co-owner a gift of a day spa treatment, but did not offer her one.

As a child, her divorced and depressed mother would sit on the sofa watching TV all day, and did not look at her, or answer her questions. Many years later when Joanne took her mother to Hawaii, in a desperate attempt to give her mother pleasure, when Joanne asked her how she was experiencing the trip, whether she was enjoying herself, her mother responded with a flat tone, a flat face and no eye contact, "Yes, it's fine."

These brief examples are but tiny tastes of ongoing painful relational interactions with what some psychological researchers call "still faces," faces that do not show response to the other person. In experiments with toddlers, when the mothers were instructed to hold their faces expressionless, the toddlers burst into tears.

Joanne's harrowing experience is an extreme example of how we most of us react when we feel unseen, invisible, and misunderstood. The opposite is a feeling of acceptance and well being. The difference is in the experience of being mirrored.

The importance of mirroring

Looking beyond my personal experiences, I recall several famous relationship experts and their emphatic expressions of the necessity of developing the relational skill of mirroring.

"Developing the ability to experience the world through your partner's eyes, while holding on to your perspective, may be the single most important skill in intimate relationship," write Pat Love and Steven Stosny in their book, *How To Improve Your Marriage without Talking About It*.

Harville Hendrix, in his *Keeping the Love You Find*, notes that mirroring is "a crucial relationship skill" and that if you cannot mirror what your partner says, "You cannot relate to another person's internal reality; you only relate to your version of it, which means that you are relating [only] to yourself." And, he continues, "you can count on the distortion and conflict that ensues."

Management expert, Stephen Covey, author of the best-seller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, calls his Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood. "Communication is the most important skill in life," and, "Habit 5 is the first step in the process of win/win." Most people, he notes, listen with the intent to reply, not to understand the other and then we tend to automatically respond in one of four ways: 1) we evaluate 2) we probe 3) we advise 4) we interpret. And none of these help when the other person is in an emotional state.

The mirroring process detailed

The steps in the Deep Listening process are 1) Mirroring 2) Reality Checking 3) Eliciting 4) Validating and 5) Empathizing. Each chapter in this e-book explains one of these steps to help expand your relationship skills.

We can look at a simple scenario to illustrate the mirroring process. The Wife has made a special dinner that is overcooked. Ashamed of not having a perfect dinner, she vents her frustration in an unproductive way: "You're never home on time." The Husband has been out in the pre-Christmas traffic after working extra hours to earn enough money to surprise her with the pearl necklace he knows she's dreaming of. He responds, "I'm out there working my butt off for you, and all you do is complain. I can just never win with you. I can't take it anymore!" You can see where this is going. It may take hours or days to get over this painful interaction.

If only they could mirror each other, the conversation might go something like the following. Wife: (still starting badly) "You're never home on time." Husband: (sincerely trying to see from her perspective without judging her perspective) "Oh, Honey, you've been waiting and waiting for me since I said I'd be here at 6 and it feels like this happens all the time, that I'm never here on time." (He knows perfectly well that he was actually earning money to shop for her Christmas present, but he wisely waits until she feels understood, and therefore calmer and more able to listen to his experience before he tells her what has happened from his point of view.)

The purpose of mirroring is to allow the reality of the other person's mind to enter yours, without evaluation. The goal is for communication that clarifies, and develops an appreciation for and acceptance of the inner world of others.

Mirroring is oven extremely difficult to do, especially if you are just learning. It requires that you not allow yourself the frequently used reactive old brain

nonmirroring responses - all of which invalidate the other person and show, either blatantly or subtly, that they are wrong:

Criticizing: "You are too sensitive and exaggerate everything."

Defending/denying: "What do you mean, 'always:' I was here yesterday at 6."

Rationalizing/explaining: "But the order came in at the last minute - a big order - and the cell phone battery died as I called you to tell you I'd be home after 6."

All of the above nonmirroring responses can create reactive fear and shame and escalate the conflict, confusion, frustration and anger.

In the John Godfrey Saxe poem about the parable of the blind men and the elephant below, we can easily see how each man had good reasons for his conclusions. In our differing points of view with our sighted friends, however, it is often harder to see that they have good reasons for their conclusions. But that's because we can't see their internal logic.

It's also harder to see someone's good reasons when that someone has an opinion about *us* that's, heaven forbid, less than admirable. So we have to put some effort into that. Okay, a lot of effort.

But the effort is worth it! Learning to give up our ego's automatic reptilian brain response to someone else's differing point of view may just be the biggest gift we could ever give ourselves. We can stop the disputes loud and long. We can have harmonious and joyful relationships with others. The choice is to mirror or to invalidate and argue.

I leave you in this discussion of the Mirroring first step of How to Make Love through Deep Listening with the poem by Saxe, printed on the next page.

The Parable of The Blind Men and The Elephant

It was six men of Indostan, To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant, Though all of them were blind,
That each by observation, Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant, And, happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side, At once began to bawl:
"God bless me, but the Elephant, Is very like a wall!"
The Second, feeling the tusk, Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp? To me 'tis very clear
This wonder of an Elephant, Is very like a spear!"
The Third approached the animal, And, happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands, Thus boldly up he spake:
"I see," quoth he, "The Elephant Is very like a snake!"
The Fourth reached out an eager hand, And felt about the knee:
"What most the wondrous beast is like, Is very plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant, Is very like a tree!"
The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear, Said, "Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most; Deny the fact who can:
This marvel of an elephant, Is very like a fan!"
The Sixth no sooner had begun, About the beast to grope
Than, seizing on the swinging tail, That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan, Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion, Exceeding stiff and strong.
Though each was partly in the right, They all were in the wrong!

How To Stop Ass-Making by Reality Checking:
Step #2 To Lovemaking Through Deep Listening

How To Stop Ass-Making by Reality Checking: Step #2 To Lovemaking Through Deep Listening

Reality Checking Section Outline

Introduction: My personal discovery of the need for reality checking
Using the learnings of reality checking
What reality checking looks like: "Did I get that right?"
Avoiding the waste of not reality checking our assumptions and beliefs
Conclusion

Introduction: My personal discovery of the need for reality checking

We've all heard the saying that when we assume, we make an ASS of U and ME. Well, let me tell you about how I began to learn to reality check instead of "mind read." At one point, I didn't even know I was making any assumptions.

When I was in my late twenties, I was living in a loft in the Mission District in San Francisco with my sculptor boyfriend. I had quit my job as gallery assistant director, agreed to let my two boys go on an extended visit with their father and his new wife, and had moved into the loft. All of this was to be able to build a sculpture concept I had in mind. My plan was to fabricate a 'garden' of about twenty 8' high translucent plastic plants. I wanted the imagined viewers to have a dizzy, delighted sort of Alice-In-Wonderland feeling. But after all the changes I had made to be able to work full-force, I was not actually working at all.

So I was depressed and confused about my non-productivity: I had never been unable to produce before. I thought I was Ms. Productivity USA. I didn't know what was happening to me, but I knew I needed help to get back to my Producer Self. Since I ever-so-luckily come from a family that considers people

who go into therapy as the cream-of-the-crop (Thank you, Mom), I went to a therapist.

The first lesson I learned about myself in therapy was that I was always trying to control myself. If I started to cry in session about missing my kids, I'd tilt my head back and widen my eyes in an attempt to keep the tears within the pockets of my eyelids. But if I couldn't control that, and a tear drooled over the edge, I would open up a Kleenex as far as I could and hide my face with it. I would also hold my breath in while simultaneously trying to push out. Whew! All this contortion to suppress any outward expression of sadness.

The next lesson I learned in therapy is how important it is to do "reality checking." The definition of 'reality check' from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary is: something that clarifies or serves as a reminder of reality, often by correcting a misconception. In fact some people consider reality checking a matter of "clarification."

From my current vantage point, it's hard to believe that at one time I didn't know there was such a thing as a reality check. When I first heard that phrase, I thought it meant someone was having hallucinations and needed to stop it. But, to validate myself, if you grow up in a family with the unspoken rules, "Do not think, do not feel, and certainly do not speak about your thoughts or feelings," you would not even conceive of sharing a feeling, thought, or belief about another person. Much less ask if it is really true.

As I explored my non-productivity and depression in therapy, I realized that I had made an assumption that, because my boyfriend was an artist, he would support my artistic ambitions. I had never asked him how he felt about my ambitions.

The Night of the Necklace changed that assumption. I love making unusual ornaments to wear to openings and other art functions. On The Night we are preparing to attend a museum opening. I happily put on my newly finished flashing silver Mylar necklace bedecked with silver vacuum-formed rat skulls and wispy fluttering feathers. (We artists dress outrageously so that the San Francisco Chronicle art reporters and photographers will want to shoot us.) As I put on my final makeup touches, I catch my boyfriend's angry eyes in the mirror. He asks me to take off the necklace. He says he does not want anything to detract from *his* getting attention. I am shocked. I comply - after all, his career is certainly more important than mine. (Yes, yes, it was many years ago.)

Now I am alerted. I begin to ask more questions about his desires. Lo and behold, I find that his vision of a perfect relationship is with someone who wants to cook and have more children with him, and not do any art work at all - ever. I soon leave my sculptor boyfriend and the loft. And my unproductiveness and depression leave me at the same time.

Never again would I not ask about what kind of a relationship another person wants before I actually enter one. I had learned the painful results of not doing a reality check.

Using the learnings of reality checking

I next experience the pleasurable results of reality checking. I've learned enough in my therapy to know that I need to learn respect for my feelings, and learning acting seems like a good way to learn that. I am now studying acting at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. A fellow classmate and friend, Abby, and I talk about getting an apartment near the company theatre.

A few weeks later, Abby and Sally (another actor friend) are visiting me. Abby mentions that she and Sally have looked at an apartment. Immediately, I assume that that means that Abby no longer wants to room with me. I am crushed. I want to keep quiet, pretend nothing is the matter. I also want to cry because I am so hurt at being left out and at the same time I want to make sure they don't know I am hurt. Being hurt means to me that I was admitting weakness. It means that I will be scorned by anyone who knows. Also, if I show my hurt they will feel guilty and I don't want them to feel bad.

With the painful lessons of past assumptions vibrating in me now, I breathe deeply, several times, and gather my courage to say something like, "Gee, does that mean that you no longer want to room with me?" I am (of course) looking at the floor, too scared to see the faces of derision I know will be there if I look up. "Oh, no", Alice blurts, "I was hoping that we could all room together so that the rent would be less." Luckily, I really like Sally and think it would be fun for the three of us to share a place. We end up spending two more fun and growth-filled years as we train.

Here's another example of how reality checking saves. Years later - okay, decades later - I am just starting to date a man I later married. He calls to ask if I have gotten an email he had sent: I hadn't. A few minutes later I get an email from him saying, "I don't know why you didn't get it. I resent it." Oh my God, I think. I wonder if he has an anger problem. I better check this out. (By this time, I had become a Gold Medal reality checker.) I very kindly ask, "What do you resent about my not getting your email?" He burst out laughing, "Re-sent. I meant I sent it to you again!"

Doing reality checks also has become terrifically important in my work as a psychotherapist. So many of our upsets with other people come from the tendency for us to think we know the meaning of what others say. But we are so often unable to see beyond the meaning that we ourselves have given to what they have said. So an excruciatingly important part of the making love through Deep Listening is practicing the reality check.

So, after Mirroring, (explained in "Mirror, Mirror, When You're Up Against the Wall: Step #1 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening), the Second Step to Deep Listening is reality checking.

What reality checking looks like: "Did I get that right?"

The way reality checking appears is in saying an equivalent of "It seems to me that what you are saying is (fill in the blank - this is the mirroring part) and then, the reality check magic phrase: "Did I get that right?" Other examples of the reality

check are: "Did I understand you?" or "Is this what you mean?" Then you wait for their answer.

Though you probably already know whether you got it 'right.' You can usually tell by the expression on their face. If you got it right they are pleased. If they are angry and/or hurt, you might notice their face softening. They often nod their head up and down as you are talking. If you didn't get it right (and there are so many reasons for this) you can tell that too. They usually get even more upset as they see how you are stating your misinterpretation of them, rather than what they meant. We humans so long to be understood, to be recognized for who we are. So having our feelings, or intentions, or our reasons misunderstood can be terribly painful.

Avoiding the waste of not reality checking our assumptions

The idea of - or the fact of - wasting our potential makes me very sad. And not using reality checking can contribute to a terrible throwing away of the love and joy that is available to us.

Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart* provides an instructive story of the devastation that can occur when we omit reality checking. In the story, a man has to leave his pregnant wife to go to war. Two years later he returns home and tries to get his toddler son to call him Daddy. The little boy refuses saying, "You are not my Daddy. My Daddy is somebody else. He visits us every night and my mommy talks to him every night and very often she cries with him. And every time my mommy sits down, he sits down too. Every time she lies down, he lies down too." As he listens, the man's heart turns to stone; he starts staying out nights drinking and returning only in the wee hours.

The young woman's suffering is so great that she throws herself in the river and drowns. When the husband hears of this he returns home. That night he lights the night time lamp. When his son sees the light, he excitedly points to the shadow of his father on the wall. "Mister, mister, it's my Daddy: he's come back." All along his wife had been crying to her husband in her imagination, "You must come back home soon." And when she would sit down, the shadow would sit. When she would sit down lie down, the shadow would lie down. The man's misperceptions were cleared up, but it was too late.

Conclusion

I agree with Thich Nhat Hanh as he remarks, "I do not want you to make the same mistake in your everyday life. We are subject to misperceptions every day, so we have to pay attention. . . . You must always check things out by going to the person in question."

I am dedicated to helping all people live life to the fullest. And we can't do that without reality checking.

“Elicit,” I Said, Not “Illicit:”
Step #4 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening

“Elicit,” I Said, Not “Illicit:” Step #4 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening

Eliciting Section Outline

Introduction
What is eliciting?
What does it look like?
What is the purpose of eliciting?
An example of how eliciting can help

Introduction

This section is noticeably shorter than the others. But don't hold on to the idea (if you had it) that eliciting must not be worth much. My experience has been that if two people can really be patient with this step, much important material can be gleaned.

Being human, none of us can be completely aware of all of our thoughts, beliefs, feelings and memories at all times. When we are in conflict and possibly feeling emotionally threatened, our focus narrows in the fight/flight response. So we often either forget or are too afraid to access important emotional elements that have contributed to our conflict. Eliciting helps create safety and compensates for the automatic narrowing of consciousness.

What is eliciting?

Webster defines the verb 'elicit': to draw forth or to bring out (something latent or potential).

What does it look like?

In the course of the 5 Step Lovemaking through Deep Listening process, eliciting is asking the present Sender of the communication something like the following: "Tell me more," or "Is there more about that?" or "Anything else?"

What is the purpose of eliciting?

Eliciting attempts to bring to the surface any beliefs, feelings, needs that in the heat of conflict may have been buried. When the Receiver authentically desires more understanding, the sender can be reassured enough through eliciting to bring out previously hidden material.

An example of how eliciting can help

A father ("Martin") and son ("Bob") had been estranged for about 10 years. They rarely spoke, and then only superficially. The son, Bob, had wanted to distance from his father who, he felt, did not respect his boundaries. When they came to see me there had been many years of hurt feelings, but they both felt under a time crunch. Bob now had terminal cancer, he was in excruciating pain, and his doctors predicted that he only had a few more months to live. They wanted to heal their relationship in the time they had left.

As we went through the Deep Listening steps, with much coaching required, it was eliciting that turned the tide. As Bob was sharing the beginnings of his distancing from Martin, he talked of how Bob had felt when he was a teenager and Martin had come into his room, pulled his journal out from under the bed and read it. As Martin mirrored how invaded, hurt and angry Bob had been, and checked out that assumption. Bob agreed that was his experience.

Then when Martin elicited by asking, "Is there more about that?" Bob burst into tears. He went on to say that what had hurt him the most was he had used that journal to write down all his hateful, angry feelings specifically so that he would not have to speak them or act them out at his father. He had wanted to protect Martin from his "bad" feelings because he loved him. When the journal was invaded, he no longer had a place to vent. But even more painful was that Bob knew that Martin would only know the angry part; Martin would not know that Bob wrote the things because he didn't want to hurt his father. His motivations were not understood. And that's what had hurt the most.

The next day both Martin and Bob called me, separately, saying that they were both so grateful: they felt reunited. In the weeks that followed Bob allowed Martin to care for him at home, moving his painful limbs, feeding him, sitting with him in the darkness of early mornings. Martin was there when Bob died, with his last breaths saying he loved his father, and was so glad to have found him again.

This is how eliciting can bring out crucial material that may not come to the surface at first. In this example, Bob did not feel fully understood until his father recognized the love and consideration behind Bob's journaling. And this is why eliciting is so vitally important. Asking "Tell me more" is an act of love.

Validation Is Not Just for Parking: Step #4 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening

Validation Is Not Just for Parking: Step #4 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening

Validation Section Outline

Introduction: My recent reminder of the value of validation
The shame and pain of invalidation
What is validation?
The validation difference
Conclusion

Introduction: My reminder of the value of validation

I lay on the purple velvet couch in the euthanasia room. Soft new age music wafted out of the tiny boom box on the floor. A water fountain bubbled on the altar before me, next to clusters of aromatic oil bottles nestled on a tray. And on my stomach I held my beloved cat of 18 years, "Punky" (short for Pumpkin). He was suffering from the end stages of kitty diabetes. His right front leg was taped, holding in the needles for the fluids which would follow.

I had gone in earlier to spend time with Punky before our 5 pm appointment with the veterinarian. My eyes were filled with tears, making it hard to see into his eyes as I pet him. But I did not want to move my hands away from stroking his now boney body which was shutting down, cooling right before me.

At 5, Doctor Schwartz entered gravely and started talking. Blah, blah, blah (medical stuff about Punky's compromised liver), blah, blah, blah (that if I had given him appetite stimulants, they would have had bad side effects), blah, blah, blah (that he was 18 years already, a good life time for a cat). At this, I begin to listen. "If you asked me what I'd do if he were my own cat, I'd say that this is a good option. I know you've been devoted to him. You are not killing him; you're preserving the end quality of his life." At such a time, his kindness was a great gift. He was validating me and my choice to have Punky put to sleep. That validation has helped me through the days since then. Dr. Schwartz's validation reminds me

of how important it can be when we are in pain or conflict to know that another person realizes that we and our actions make sense.

Validation is particularly important when we are distressed. And when we are in conflict with a loved one, we are distressed. Receiving validation helps with the worry that we are seen as "less than" by our significant other. Giving validation can help to keep our partner feeling safe so that s/he can remain open and working towards a harmonious outcome. As Patricia Love and Steven Stosny say in *How to Improve Your Marriage without Talking about It*, "A prerequisite to listening is feeling safe". And you don't feel safe with the threat of fear or shame hanging over your head.

The shame and pain of invalidation

My guess is that you have experienced how bad it feels when you have shared about something you are upset about and then heard, "I don't see what you are so upset about" or "you're always making a mountain out of a molehill" or "there you go again!" After all the word "validate" comes from the Latin "validu", meaning strong, and powerful. So to invalidate another's perspective means to (attempt to) make them weak.

One of my personal invalidation favorites was when I told my father in a phone conversation that my younger sister, who is also a therapist, had asked me to go into private practice with her. The unexpected response was, "You have all kinds of pipe dreams!" I was so taken aback that I was confused (how could he object to that??). I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. "Gee, Dad, that sounds critical. Did you mean it that way?" Another invalidation attempt followed, "You always make everything negative! 'Pipe dream' has been used in the English language for hundreds of years." When I hung up, I was so confused and doubted myself so much I even looked up 'pipe dream' in the dictionary. (And I used to be an English teacher!) The reference was to the dreams someone has when smoking heroin. I felt validated by the dictionary!

Here's how a disagreement between Suzy and Sam might play out without the validation step. Let's say Suzy thought she had a date with Sam on Tuesday night and she had cooked a pie to surprise him. Sam does not call on Tuesday and does not arrive at their usual date time. She says to him, "I thought we had a date Tuesday and you didn't call or come by. I'm so confused. Did I make a mistake? Or did you stand me up?"

Sam could invalidate her by saying, "What's the matter with you? I don't see how you could think that. Not insecurities again! I can never relax and just be myself." When we invalidate - say in one way or another that the other person is illogical, wrong, stupid, crazy, neurotic, we shame them.

The consequence of shaming or frightening the other person is that it both erodes the relationship and moves us further away from solving the problem. The experience of the Shame/Fear Dragon makes blood drain from the thinking and language center of the brain, the neocortex. It adds the fuel of confusion, hurt, and a desire to withdraw or lash out to the fire of people who are already hurting.

What is validation?

Many people are confused about validation. The American Heritage Dictionary says it is: to prove something to be sound or logical. Often members of an arguing couple will say, "I don't want to say s/he makes sense because that would mean that I am wrong. Somebody must be wrong, and I know I'm not!"

So, let me clear up the confusion by saying what validation is not. Validation is not agreeing with the other person's experience. Validation is not giving up your own interpretation, meaning, or point of view. It is not admitting they are right and you are wrong. It is not submitting to some one else's' opinion.

Validation is recognizing and accepting that the other person has also had an experience, and that though their point of view is different from yours, it is equally as valid and has its own logic when viewed from their point of view. "Remember that others are not you. Until that is learned you cannot relate to others; you can relate only to yourself," says Harville Hendrix, in *Keeping the Love You Find*.

The validation difference

Imagine the different dialogue between Suzy and Sam if Sam were to see the situation from her point of view: "Wow! From what you thought-that we had a date and that I didn't either call or come over- no wonder you were upset. (Or, "You make sense.") That must have felt terrible."

In the steps of Lovemaking through Deep Listening, the Validation Step can change the whole distressed feeling between you. While often very hard to do when we are in conflict, validation can smooth the way, and helps leave both people feeling whole and better able to reach an understanding.

To validate another you have to put yourself in their shoes, and as if you were behind their eyeballs, look at the situation from their eyes. This is the ability that separates us from other animals. It is an ability to transcend our limited view and the old reptile brain stimulus/response patterns. This is consciousness in practice.

None of us has a God's Eye point of view. While we may try to be "objective" we can never really manage that. We cannot help but observe from our own eyes. Modern science has shown us that we change whatever we observe, just by observing it.

But we can rise above the rigidity of our limited point of when we practice what John Godfrey Saxe demonstrates in his poem "The Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant." In turn each blind man thinks the elephant is a wall, a spear, a snake, a tree, a fan, a rope. Ultimately "Though each was partly in the right, they all were in the wrong!"

Conclusion

None of us can legitimately evaluate someone else's experience. Another person's experience--and our own experience too--always makes sense when we know enough. May we all recognize our limited point of view and commit to validating our loved ones' perspectives. That is my hope.

Empathy, Empathy, Two By Four,
Can Help You Through The Heart's Little Door:
Step #5 to Lovemaking through Deep Listening

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Empathy Section Outline

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What is empathy?

Why is empathy so important?

If it's so important, what makes us practice empathy so little?

Barriers to giving empathy

1. Impatience at having our needs for empathy temporarily unmet
2. Desire to punish "bad" others
3. Desire to punish "bad" self
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5. Lack of empathy for self- not knowing one's own feelings and needs

Barriers to receiving empathy

1. Confusion about pity, sympathy, and empathy
2. When a need for empathy is met, vulnerability may arise

There's a learning curve for developing empathy skill

Introduction

"How could you do that to me!?" I heard that phrase, I mean really heard it, when I called my mother to tell her that I had decided to get a divorce from my doctor husband of 10 years. By that time I had experienced enough therapy with empathy to know that her response was ever so self-centered. There was no concern for what I was going through, or for how it would impact my children, or even for my later-to-be ex-husband.

I had known in my guts, thought not yet in my head, that any distress that her offspring had would be experienced by her as a betrayal--as treason, even. I knew not to expect any compassion.

That was then. Now, remembering the exchange is very funny to me; it's so outrageously unempathic. Now I can have compassion for the emotionally fragile woman, who had always longed to become an MD herself and who felt she needed academic status to feel worthwhile. Now I know in my bones the immeasurable difference it makes to receive and give empathy, and to do without it. And now I have a passion to make a difference to people who are deprived of empathy, people who still have to live with the daily disconnect and lasting loneliness.

The problem is, many people may have had little experience with being given empathy and don't know the difference. Well, maybe I can help some. That is the purpose of these articles on Deep Listening.

What is empathy?

Webster defines empathy as: *n. (1904)* The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or the present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated directly.

Another definition: the ability to accurately understand and sensitively respond to the experience of another living being.

Examples of empathy

Imagine a toddler trying to walk over to a puppy, lose his balance and plop to the floor. His first response is a surprised look. An empathic mother might respond lightly: "Uh oh!" showing she understands that he made a surprise blooper- from his point of view. He didn't achieve the continuous walk he had intended. If she runs to him, shrieking, "Oh my God, you poor thing!" she is showing her own anxious point of view.

A more complex empathy might be with a teenage daughter who is pleading for an expensive prom dress, which the parents are unwilling to buy. Saying, "You want to feel special and look extra-beautiful on this very special night. And you want to fit in with what your friends are wearing" would be empathic. It shows that you understand her point of view. "Who do you think you are," or, "Money doesn't grow on trees," are not empathic responses. There's nothing about her point of view in either statement.

Or, to use a dating example, a woman, I'll call her Judy, tells her live-in boyfriend that she is going to see the movie *Lars and the Real Girl* with her friend Sally that night. He heard her speak two weeks ago of getting free tickets to that movie from a movie survey company. When she comes in later than expected, her boyfriend is withdrawn. He tells her, "I remember that you got free tickets and went to that movie a couple of weeks ago. Judy empathically responds, "Since you thought I had already seen *Lars and the Real Girl*, I can imagine you thought I might be lying when I said I was going to see it with Sally. I can imagine it made you feel distrustful."

Spontaneous empathy

Empathy can sometimes seem to appear spontaneously. More often, there needs to be a deliberate effort to experience and express it.

Here's an example of the spontaneous version. Once as an old boyfriend and I were breaking up, he stood at my open front door as he was making his final exit, shouting, "And you can go to Hell!" As I told a girlfriend about that goodbye scene, she said, "How could you take being treated like that?" But I wasn't hurt by his uncharacteristic explosiveness. I had seen into his usually sweet blue eyes, I saw the pain there. I was not insulted or afraid. I understood.

Willed empathy

Empathy is usually, however, a controlled, intentional activity with a thoughtful, active and intelligent exploration. The focus is on what lies under the surface of another human being.

Empathy requires balance between over-heatedness and frigidness. We must integrate feelings and thoughts in order to not get over-aroused by our emotions. In an intense encounter, it requires that we slow down so that thoughts can catch up with our feelings.

So-called "negative" emotions like fear, anger, shame and guilt make high metabolic demands on our bodies. When there is such high physiological arousal, our focus narrows. This narrowing of perspective has helped us for millions of years to survive in an emergency by eliminating anything that would distract us from being able to fight or get away.

The problem at this stage of our human evolution is that functioning from our old brain allows us to go into "prove them wrong and myself right" position (fight) or "I'll just get out as fast as I can, or withdraw internally" (flight). Our widened perspective of the whole picture vanishes. And we can get "blinded" by our emotions and say and do things which only escalate the conflict.

Why is empathy so important?

A basic everyday, all day human need is to be seen, heard and recognized for who we are. Not for how someone would like us to be. Not for how someone is trying to get us to be. But for who we are inside: Our feelings, thoughts, desires, and dreams.

Receiving and giving empathy meets that indestructible human need for recognition. Empathy is so appreciated by Sam Keen, author of *Fire in the Belly*, that he dubs it one of the Ten Heroic Virtues. He writes: "We need to feel connected to each other. We need to feel we belong, are worthy of metaphorically being reached for, of being held." Keen goes on to say that empathy is not simply receptive. "[Empathic] Listening is the art by which we reach across the space between us. Passive attention does not work."

We were born hardwired to feel our emotions. All of our feelings are survival mechanisms. When we pay attention to our feelings, and think about them, we

can use them to help us understand what we need from moment to moment. With the knowledge of what we need, we can take action to meet those needs. When another person makes an attempt to guess or can sense and express what we feel, it brings us closer to being able to act upon what we need. That way we can meet our human obligation of taking good emotional care of our selves.

Pat Love & Steven Stosny, authors of *How to Improve Your Marriage without Talking about It*, say, "Developing the ability to experience the world through your partner's eyes, while holding on to your perspective, may be the single most important skill in intimate relationships."

"I have come to believe that empathy, more than any other human faculty, is the key to loving relationships and the antidote to the loneliness, fear, anxiety, and despair that affect the lives of so many people," writes Arthur Ciaramicoli in *The Power of Empathy*.

I've spent decades learning about the power of empathy to heal and support blossoming of the self and relationships. And I have come to believe that love is the commitment to be willing to see any and everything from the other person's point of view. To me, then, commitment to conscious empathy is real love.

If it's so important, what makes us practice empathy so little?

Even if we have developed the skill of empathy, we still have barriers to both giving and receiving empathy.

Barriers to giving empathy

1. Impatience at having our needs for empathy temporarily unmet

One of the most difficult times to be empathic is when someone is misunderstanding us and not thinking well of us. We can feel a desperate need to explain why we did what ever we did, i.e., "I was just trying to help you." We may feel an urgency to at least prove they are wrong about their opinion about us: "I didn't mean it that way!" Alternatively, we may want to prevent them from feeling pain, as in, "But I love you, how could you think I would do that."

But to really build the safe haven of relationships, we first need to connect before correcting their interpretation of our behavior. We connect by speaking of where they are emotionally before giving our point of view. Let's say you are an office supply salesman at a party with your new wife. A woman finds out what you do and starts telling you about a new recycled paper her company uses for their business cards.

At home, after the party, your wife is distressed at what she thinks is your flirting. The empathic path would have you saying something like, "Oh, so it seemed as if I was flirting with her when I leaned over and took her card. I can understand that. I wonder if you were afraid I was going to call her and ask her for a date." With empathy, you correct her understanding second. Only after verbalizing her viewpoint, you explain that the woman was telling you about a new recycled paper and that she was showing you her business card which was made of it.

That's the hard part-waiting to share your point of view, allowing yourself to be misunderstood for a while.

2. Desire to punish "bad" others

Unfortunately many of us were raised with the idea that the most important, even the first thing to do when there is conflict, is to determine who is right and who is wrong, or who is innocent and who is guilty, who is the victim and who is the perpetrator. (Does the playground blurt, "You started it!" sound familiar?)

When one person "punishes" another by attack, or by withdrawal of either the self or of love, nothing helpful ever happens. A dramatic example is when one partner has an affair. The "bad"/punished one may stop an outward activity, but internally the resentment at feeling coerced and the fear of being treated without caring lingers on and on and on.

The person who "wins" by punishing and therefore stopping the other's behavior never really feels safe either. He/she knows the new behavior didn't come from a real owning of the different behavior. Understanding what unmet needs or false beliefs underlay the affair needs to happen for real change to occur.

3. Desire to punish "bad" self

Just as unproductive as finding fault with the other, is the self flagellation that may occur after one learns his/her activities have triggered hurt in another. Let's say an adult child, in an attempt to find self respect by finally speaking up, tells her mother of ways she was hurt in her childhood by constant criticism.

The mother may deny that her daughter's view ever happened, she may turn and blame the adult child, "But you kept breaking the house rules!" The mother may give her reasons,

"My parents did the same with me, and I turned out all right, so I thought it would be good for you too."

But even more unproductive may be the mother's crumbling into guilt and shame, "I know I was a terrible mother; I never paid attention to anything but success. I feel terrible, I don't know how I can live with myself, I'm such a selfish person, I wish I were dead," etc. The conversation can get right back to focusing on the parent's pain. Once again this leaves the adult child's feelings and needs unseen, and unrecognized. In this case, what the adult child needs is to see the parent's pain, his real remorse about the fact that the adult child was hurt. Not that the parent is hurting about his own self.

The longer one is judging him/herself about his/her actions, the longer it will take to develop true understanding. Because it is by understanding and accepting one's self that desired change may happen. And it is the understanding of self and other that helps to restore the hurt person's sense of wellbeing. Punishing never helps in the long run.

4. Fear of rewarding or encouraging "bad" behavior

When I was growing up, there was much interest in "conditioning" good behavior. There was a belief that if one responded with warmth to another's pain, it only made the person express more pain to get more sympathy. "If I try to understand him, he'll keep coming home late!" is the belief.

I remember getting sick just once when I still lived in my parents' house. I was fourteen, too sick to go downstairs to eat, sitting propped up against some pillows, waiting for my unwanted lunch to be brought upstairs by my mother. I saw her walk across the room towards me with a tray in her hands. As she leaned down to place the tray on my lap, she rammed the tray into my stomach. I cried out in shock, "Why did you do that?" She scowled back, "I don't want to condition you to be sick by rewarding you!"

The belief is that if someone is treated kindly when they do something that doesn't please us, they will just do the 'bad' thing more. The desire is to control the behavior of the other. Many people have rigid rules about how other people should act and they think that the others are 'bad' if they do not act according to their own rules.

I have heard parents say "Ignore him. He just wants attention." To me this is similar to saying, "Don't feed him. He is just hungry." I've even heard hospital personnel say, "She's just trying to manipulate us by threatening suicide, so I'll just say, 'go ahead and jump!'"

5. Lack of empathy for self-not knowing one's own feelings and needs

If you have a personal rule about never getting angry, you will probably judge others when they are angry. You will try to get them to stop, or will want to get away. If you are not comfortable showing tenderness, you will be embarrassed with saying lovey things, and will inwardly criticize others when they do. If you are not comfortable with the natural human need for attention, you will be critical when you see others trying to get attention. And on and on. We cannot recognize someone else's needs as legitimate if we think our own needs are illegitimate.

We may forget that no one person can possibly evaluate another's feelings or needs. We simply do not know enough.

Barriers to receiving empathy

1. Confusion about empathy, sympathy, and pity

Most people do not want to feel less strong, capable, or intelligent than others. When we are feeling the vulnerability of distress, fear, sadness or anxiety, the responses of other people to our feelings can make us feel better or worse. Being looked down on will make us feel worse.

Pity is a separating emotion. "Oh, your poor thing!" might be one thing one might express when feeling pity. Few people want to feel pitiful, or pathetic. Pity is often

condescending and may include feelings of superiority, contempt (a mixture of disgust and anger) and rejection.

Sympathy is when one person feels the feelings of the sufferer as if he or she were the sufferer. Sympathy is automatic, involuntary response to another's emotional state, while empathy requires much more of an advanced integration of thought and feeling.

If someone feels the sadness of another which arouses his/her own unacceptable sadness, s/he may try to stop the sadness of the other so s/he won't have to feel the pain. This indicates not only lack of empathy for the self and other, but a lack of a healthy boundary as a separate (but relating) person.

Sympathy is thus shared suffering. Sympathy often seeks to console, while empathy seeks to understand. In sympathy, one's own past is brought in as in "I remember when _____(some past experience, i.e. "when MY father died") I was incapacitated for months!"

The person sympathizing may, over time, feel burdened or burned out. To look at the other side of the sympathy equation, the one being sympathized with may feel as if they are causing pain to the sympathizer, and feel guilty.

In empathy, no past is spoken about. The only thing present is the other person's experience, feelings, and story. As Kelly Bryson says in *Don't Be Nice, Be Real: Balancing Passion For Self With Compassion For Others*, "Relating to another's experience is about you. Empathizing is about them."

Empathy happens when one person understands the other's plight and at the same time maintains a healthy emotional distance. Active thinking is required to calm one's own possible emotional reactivity. The automatic impulse to judge and criticize must be put aside.

Empathy is concerned with a much higher order of human relationship and understanding: engaged detachment. In the above example of the toddler the mom was not shocked herself, but could see her child's surprise. In empathy, we "borrow" another's feelings to observe, feel, and understand them, but not to take them onto ourselves. By being a participant-observer, we come to understand how the other person feels. An empathetic observer enters into the equation to be with the other's experience, and then removes him/herself to think about and to verbalize.

Since the empathizer is not taking the other's feelings personally, the empathizer does not feel that he/she has "caused" the other's feelings and thus react with anger, shame or guilt.

2. When a need is met, a vulnerable tenderness may show up

In my clinical practice, I often find that when a client's unrecognized need is met, there are tears. Tears of gratitude, of relief, and also of sadness at the former deprivation. Last week, in a difficult call to my client's teacher, I defended the validity of my client's point of view. After the call, my client, sobbed, with all of the above feelings, "No one has ever stuck up for me like that. Thank you."

A personal example: In the 70's, I, a cigarette-smoking San Francisco artist, had recently broken up with my boyfriend and was lonely and depressed. I had gone for an initial interview for therapy at a local clinic. The interview was confronting, and to comfort myself, I rummaged in my purse for a cigarette. I dug and dug but couldn't find my lighter. When the male interviewer asked, leaning over with a book of matches, "Would you like a light?" I burst into tears at his kindness, which I had not felt for so long.

People who have difficulty with receiving empathy often also have difficulty allowing themselves or others to show tenderness, softness, or vulnerability of any kind.

There's a learning curve for developing empathy

We are born hard wired for empathy. Even newborns evidence a low order of empathy. When one baby in the hospital nursery cries, the whole room starts crying. However, although we have a genetic predisposition to feel other's distress and a desire to remove their discomfort, the skill of verbal empathy needs focused attention and practice.

The challenge of learning advanced empathic skills

For people who are beginning to be conscious of this skill, it can be very difficult.

Many people experience difficulty slowing themselves down when they have been used to free-wheeling, though sometimes unprofitable, verbal expressions.

Some people who have been over-controlled by others may initially experience resentment at having to follow a structure of communicating.

At times some people feel as if they are "submitting" when they temporarily put their own biases aside to see another point of view.

To master the art and skill of empathy requires practice, and many people have the belief that talking to others should just come naturally, without effort.

Finally, it can be frustrating as one inevitably makes mistakes.

Steps toward skilled empathy

I am hoping that you will be empathic towards yourself as you learn to increase your empathic abilities. We don't suddenly become proficient when we have learned other less useful practices and then spent a lifetime using them.

Our ability to be empathic may fluctuate based upon our emotional state at the time, the state of any particular relationship, and our stage of skill development. Below are the common steps along the way to mastering empathy.

Below is a list of the 6 stages and skills in the development of empathy.

1. Basic empathy
 - a. Inborn, no effort required
2. Novice
 - b. Sensing others' global emotions, includes sympathy-- sensing other's feelings by remembering one's self
 - c. Learning facts, rules, applications of empathy
3. Advanced novice
 - a. Practice and failure as receiving feedback about the accuracy of their empathic efforts
 - b. Feelings of the other person are felt and distinguished as different from one's own feelings
 - c. Reception of the other's feelings and reflection about the other person are experienced
 - d. Exploration beyond the known is possible
4. Skilled empathy
 - a. Reception of the other's feelings and reflection about the other person
 - b. What to focus on is understood consciously
5. Proficient empathy
 - a. Feeling the other at a deeper level
 - b. Multiple levels of feelings and issues are experienced
 - c. Empathy is quicker
 - d. Problem solving is faster since the person knows what needs to be done
6. Expert empathy
 - a. The experiences of flow and oneness with the person empathized with

The point here is not to learn all the steps, but to have compassion for yourself if you are just beginning to make conscious efforts to practice empathy. And it does take time and conscious effort.

An example of expert empathy

Kelly Bryson, author of *Don't Be Nice Be Real: Balancing Passion for Self with Compassion for Others* gives an example of expert empathy in a difficult exchange. To another's statement, "You don't care about me!" An empathic, compassionate comeback offered is, "Are you feeling hurt and needing some indication that you do matter to me?"

Bryson gives a structure for empathic responses to another's distress towards us: When you saw (remembered, or heard) _____ did you feel _____ because you were wanting _____? And would you like me to _____?

Conclusion

Much has been written about empathy. What happens when we don't give it: pain. What happens when we don't get it: pain. A whole school of psychotherapy, Self Psychology, is based upon it. Self psychology emphasizes our ongoing need for empathy in building and maintaining a robust and joyful self. Heinz Kohut, who founded the theory of Self Psychology calls empathy the "oxygen" of life. We never outgrow our need for it.

Our basic human needs for attention, recognition, closeness, separateness, and belonging are all met through empathy. I am committed to practicing it, and I urge you to "go forth and empathize."

The Map: Walking The 5 Step Path

The Map: Walking the 5 Step Path

The Map: Walking the 5 Step Path Section Outline

Introduction

Getting started

The 5 Steps

1. Mirroring
2. Reality Checking
3. Eliciting
4. Validating
5. Empathizing

Taking Turns and Switching roles

Conclusion

Introduction

This 5 step Deep Listening Dialogue Process is used when we are upset about something and want to discuss it, or for when we think that the topic might be upsetting.

The process requires an intention to understand each other and helps create emotional safety so that problem solving can occur afterwards.

Following the structure of the steps requires focus and cognitive involvement. Having to think helps slow down the communication and therefore to keep the physiological arousal manageable.

Getting Started

When one person (The Sender) recognizes the need to talk to regulate distressful feelings, he/she asks the other (The Receiver) for a Deep Listening Dialogue. (The languaging of the name of this process may seem too pretentious between partners, so you can make up your own name for the process.)

It is the Receiver's job to grant the Deep Listening Dialogue as soon as possible. If NOW is not okay, the couple makes an appointment to talk so that the Sender knows when he/she will be heard.

The 5 Steps

1. Mirroring

The Sender makes her/his statements and when the Sender makes a natural pause the Receiver paraphrases (MIRRORS) or says word for word what the sender says. The Receiver may need to regulate the speed of the communication if too much is coming too fast. He/she can signal (possibly with a hand gesture) the Sender to stop so that he/she can accurately mirror all that is being expressed by the Sender.

2. Reality Checking

The Receiver CHECKS to see if the paraphrasing is accurate with phrases like, "If I got it right, you are saying...", or "It sounds like you're saying..."

3. Eliciting

The Receiver asks, "Is there more about that?" or, "Is there anything else?" Often surprising and important information is discovered as buried material surfaces.

4. Validating

When the Sender has finished sending, the Receiver summarizes and VALIDATES the Sender by saying something to the extent of, "I can (see) (hear) (sense) what you are saying." and "You make sense."

5. Empathizing

The Receiver EMPATHIZES with the sender's feelings by saying, "I imagine you might be feeling..." or "I imagine you might have felt..."

Then you make some GUESS at what the sender is feeling.

Feelings are stated in one word (angry, confused, sad, hurt, upset, etc.).

If your guess is more than one word it is probably a thought, not a feeling. For example: "You feel that you don't want to go with me". This is a thought, not a feeling. We also need to do another reality check, since we never know for sure what another person is feeling.

The Receiver REALITY CHECKS the guess by saying, "Is that what you're feeling?" or "Did I get it?" AND AGAIN The Receiver ELICITS by continuing

to ask, "Are there any other feelings you are having?" AND AGAIN MIRRORS what is said.

Taking Turns

Sometimes harmony will be restored once the person who needed to be understood is understood and knows it. In that case, there will be no need for the Receiver partner to take his/her turn.

However Senders/Initiators need to go into the Deep Listening Dialogue willing and interested in giving the same service to the Receiver.

The Receiver needs to know that his/her feelings and perspectives will be honored if s/he is generous (and sensible) enough to postpone being understood.

Switching Roles

When desired, the Sender and the Receiver switch roles and go through the 5 steps.

Conclusion

Over the years I have seen hundreds of couples resolve long standing issues by using these Deep Listening Skills. I have seen men and women (and women and women, and men and men) build trust where there was almost none to begin with.

I have seen relationships repair and become stronger after betrayals. I have seen people who were broken up still be able to work together to provide excellent parenting, using these skills.

I have even seen people with auto-immune diseases resolve their grievances and recover their health using these skills.

Since I have seen these steps work so often with so many people on so many issues, I want to share them with a wider audience than just my clients.

I wish you the awesome beautiful experiences of growing love through listening deeply in your relationships.

The End