

How To Make Love



Dr. Janz 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 Real 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.

Hello, Dear Reader

Thank you for caring. Caring enough to want to have great relationships. Caring enough to want the best for yourself 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.

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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. I have written articles on each 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 often 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 first step of How to Make Love through Deep Listening with the Saxe poem.

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!

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