

HOW TO ACCESS AND RELEASE DIFFICULT FEELINGS WITH INTIMATES

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The Problem

When we are distressed with loved ones, it is a difficult experience for most of us. We can find ourselves in a painful conflict. Sometimes a part of us is so angry we just want to let them have it and may even want to hurt them the way they have hurt us.

But we also don't want to do or say something that will damage the relationship. And letting some one "have it" (hopefully) does not agree with our values or express the kind of person we want to be. So, we may be pulled back and forth, not knowing how to talk about our distress, or even whether to talk about it.

We may even be too afraid of the angry or defensive reactions we think we will get if we share our experience at all. So we avoid talking about it, or act the feelings out in ways that just make things worse. Like slamming pots around, or driving off, or becoming silent.

The Solution: A "Love Letter"

When we are in this kind of conflictual pain, our feelings, our assessments of the situation, the other person, and ourselves can get confusing. In order to get some kind of clarity, writing the person a letter can help us begin to sort things out for ourselves. John Gray, author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, calls that writing procedure "A Love Letter."

How "Love Letters" Help

1) Self-soothing through self empathy

In the "Love Letter" process you first get in touch with your own feelings, wants, and desires, through writing the letter. Then you can look at what you have written and usually feel calmer just because you have been nourishing yourself by contacting yourself and your needs. You may not need to do anything else to get re-centered. Getting in touch with yourself is an act of self empathy, self honoring. It is enormously helpful to have self understanding before approaching another person – if you decide to do that.

2) Help choosing *what* you want to communicate

You could also look at the letter and chose which things you DO want to communicate to the person. You can choose what you want to address based upon what you would feel a loss of self integrity about if you didn't share.

You can choose based upon what is most urgent. You can choose based upon what would best move you both forward. I stress moving "both" of you forward because if you are omitting attending to your needs, you are actually doing violence to the relationship.

3) Help choosing *how* you want to communicate

By the time you have reached the end of the structured love letter, you will probably be in touch with the love that is underneath the anger, hurt, fear and sorrow. Being in touch with your connectedness helps you pick ways of communicating that will enhance the receiver's ability to take in what you need to have understood..

How To Structure The Release Love Letter

Below is the structure of the “love letter.” Going through each category of emotion and writing your specific reactions that apply can do so much to help.

If you decide to send the letter- or parts of the letter, you could start it with something like, “I am writing this letter to share my feelings with you.”

1. For Anger

I don't like it...
I feel frustrated...
I am angry that...
I feel annoyed...
I want...

2. For Sadness

I feel disappointed...
I am sad that...
I feel hurt...
I wanted...
I want...

3. For Fear

I feel worried...
I am afraid...
I feel scared...
I do not want...
I need...
I want...

4. For Regret

I feel embarrassed...
I am sorry
I feel ashamed...
I didn't want...
I want...

5. For Love

I love...
I want...
I understand...
I forgive...
I appreciate...
I thank you for...
I know...

Love,

P.S. The response I would like to hear from you is...

When we feel all jumbled up with strong, difficult, and sometimes contradictory feelings, we may feel frozen and silent. Or we may lash out and hurt others and our relationships. Taking the time to fill out the Release Love Letter slows us down, so that we can have more clarity.

Most people find such relief at writing the letters that they can think more clearly about what, how, when, and for what purpose they would like to share.

Dr. Jane Bolton, a marriage and family therapist, master results coach and contemporary psychoanalyst is dedicated to supporting people in the fullest self expression of their Authentic Selves. This includes Discovery, Understanding, Acceptance, Expression, and Self Esteem. Call 310.838.6363 or visit www.Dr-Jane-Bolton.com