

The Imago Dialogue

From "Getting the Love you Want: A Guide to Couples" Harville Hendrix, PhD – 20th Anniversary Ed

Great exercise to ensure clear and accurate communication as all too often our words can be misunderstood.

A 3-Step Process involving listening, validating and empathizing

1. Listening actively and accurately/Mirroring
2. Understanding and validating what your partner has said/their perspective
3. Expressing appreciation, respect, and empathy for your partner's feelings

Step 1 – Deep Active listening

Partner 1 (P1) starts with: **"I would like to have a talk. Is now a good time?"**

Partner 2 (P2) responds with either: **"Now's a good time"**

OR

Partner 2 responds with: **"I can't right now because I have XXXX to finish but how about in 1 hour?"**

P2 needs to respond as soon as possible if now's not a good time and provide a time that works. This keeps P1 from wondering when they will be heard and knowing that their beloved is committed and takes the need for a talk seriously.

P1 talks very briefly making their message simple about what it is they want P2 to know. For example, P1 woke up with a sore throat and didn't feel like going to work and so took the day off.

Partner 1 (P1) starts with: **"I woke up this morning with a sore throat and didn't feel like going to work and so I took the day off"**.

P2 responds by paraphrasing what P1 said.

Partner 2 starts with: **"If I heard you correctly you said you woke up this morning with a sore throat and didn't feel like going to work and decided to take the day off. Did I get it?"**

Partner 1 Yes. If not, you need to explain what was missing and add it without any criticism. Then P2 must mirror the message again adding what was missing, etc. P1 needs to confirm that their message was clearly received.

Partner 2 adds **"Is there more you want to say about that?"**

P1 – if you have something more to add then this is the time. This is very important because it's your chance to add all the thoughts and feelings that were attached to your original message. Stick to one message at a time and don't bring anything else in.

Partner 1: **"Yes, I feel really bad because I know that some people were counting on me AND I'll have a lot to catch up on when I go back into work. I feel especially bad because I've let some people down."**

Partner 2 now summarizes the message and any additions made.

Partner 2 starts with: **"Let me see if I got all of that.... You woke up this morning with a sore throat and didn't feel like going to work and took the day off. You feel bad because some people were counting on you and**

you've let them down. You'll also have a lot to catch on up when you get back to work for taking the day off. Did I get it all?

Understand your partner's point of view/their logic even though it may seem trivial to you. It is NOT to them. If something matters to them, it should matter to you however small. There will be times when the tables are turned, and you'll see the value of this exercise.

Partner 1 "Yes". If not, clarify what was inaccurate and P2 mirrors back till message is correct.

Step 2 – Understanding and validating your partner's point of view (your judgment aside)

Partner 2 now validates P1's message starting with: **"What you're saying makes sense, you had a sore throat and so didn't want to go into work. At the same time, I can see how you feel you were letting people down who depend on you"**.

You don't have to agree but it's ESSENTIAL that you see the logic/truth of your partner's experience and convey that. This way they will see that you are listening to them and understand. That's crucial. It's not about being right or wrong.

Step 3 – Expressing empathy

Partner 2 now needs to express empathy starting with: **"I can imagine that you might be feeling frustrated that you had to miss a day of work and sorry that you let some people down who were counting on you"**.

This way P1 sees that you have listened and that you care enough to be empathetic. They will feel 'seen and heard'. This is CRUCIAL.

Partner 2 needs to check for accuracy by asking: **"Is that what you were feeling? Did I get your feeling right?"**

Partner 1 "Yes". P1 needs to confirm if all of this is accurate and, if not, explains the feeling. Then again P2 mirrors back and, once correct, asks P1:

Partner 2: "Is there more about that feeling?" Continue the process until the exchange is completed.

Partner 1: "No, you got it all".

Once P2 has gone through all three steps – active listening and mirroring, understanding and validating, and empathizing – the partners should switch roles.

This time P2 begins with a new, different simple message and the reverse roles.

Once completed, discuss with your partner what you have learned about yourself when relating to your partner (did you find yourself: impatient, judgmental, frustrated, in a hurry, wanting to downplay or fix the situation, or sympathetic, interested, glad your partner was sharing something important to them?)