

Protocol for the "Hard to Talk Abouts": How to do a Reality Check and ask for what you really want!

by Margery Silverton, LCSW-C
Certified Imago Relationship Therapist

Here's a way to bring up troublesome issues that gives YOU the opportunity to share your feelings and concerns, and also gives your PARTNER the space to respond non-defensively. Remember, unless you give your partner a chance to respond, you'll be left only with your internal assumptions, which are only part of the picture. Most reactivity is based partially on accurate perceptions of your partner's behavior and intentions, and partially on our own internal projections about what the behavior means.

When current conflicts re-activate earlier traumatic experiences, the chance for projecting negative intentions onto our partners is very high. Therefore, when in a mindful dialogue, it is very important to KEEP BREATHING AND SLOW THINGS DOWN . . . WAY DOWN! It is also very important to stay in touch with one's own positive intent. Otherwise, there is a tendency to protect oneself by withdrawing, withholding, accusing, and projecting.

You	Your Partner
1. Make an appointment. "There's something I want to clear up with you. When would be a good time?"	Partner tries to be available as soon as possible.
2. Make a statement of positive intent. Example: "My wish is to end this conversation feeling good about you and us."	Partner mirrors.
3. Make a statement of appreciation. Example: "I can see the effort you are making. . . ."	Partner mirrors.
4. Make a brief statement of your frustration, using the formula: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When . . . happens (state the specific behavior) • I feel . . . (state the emotion and/or body sensation) • Because . . . the conclusion I draw from that is . . . 	Partner mirrors, empathizes, and validates.
5. DO A REALITY CHECK: "What was (is) going on for you around that?"	Partner responds. Sender mirrors partner.
6. Make a statement about what you most deeply want around this issue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global wish: _____. • Specific wish: _____ (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time limited). 	Partner agrees to specific wish.