

Gottman- Rapoport Exercise

Goal

Discuss a topic in a manner where you both feel understood by each other.

Principle

When discussing an issue it's important to be able to summarize your partner's position to your partner's satisfaction before engaging in persuasion. This means it's important to be a very good listener. To listen well, you don't bring up your own position while your partner is describing theirs. Instead, ask questions that can help you understand your partner's position, like, "What was the most upsetting part of that for you?" Or, "What makes this so important to you?" After your partner is finished describing their position try to summarize what you heard your partner say to make sure you've understood them well. Then offer your partner validation or assurance that their position makes sense to you. Then it's your turn to describe your own position while your partner listens well and then summarizes and validates what you've said.

If you find yourself attributing a positive trait to yourself, try to see some of that trait in your partner. If you find yourself attributing a negative trait to your partner, try to see some of that trait in yourself as well.

Taking Notes

For the Listener, it is often helpful to take notes while your partner is speaking to aid in accurately reflecting back to the Speaker your understanding of the Speaker's position. Also, taking notes will help you to stay calm as a listener.

Rules for the Speaker

Your task is to honestly talk about your feelings and beliefs about your position on the issue you've chosen to discuss.

Do not argue for or try to persuade your partner of your point of view; just explain how you see things. Tell your partner your thoughts and feelings about your position on this issue.

- No blaming, criticism, or contempt.
- No "You" statements.
- Only use "I" statements about a specific situation.
- Talk about your feelings.
- Avoid the trap of saying, "I feel that you are (something negative)."
- State a positive need using a softened start-up. Remember, it's much easier to listen to a positive need and to want to satisfy it than to listen to a resentment or negative need.

Rules for the Listener

Building love and trust involves really listening to your partner, which is not as easy as it sounds. Below are four steps to help you listen to your partner and gain understanding of your partner's position. *Remember, do not argue for your point of view. Your task is to listen and ask questions.*

1. Prepare Yourself

- Postpone your own agenda.
- Tune into your partner's world.
- Hear your partner's pain, even if you don't agree with the details.
- Try to understand your partner's world from their perspective, not your own.

2. Attune

- Hear the Speaker's feelings and be present with your partner. Your goal as a listener is to understand as well as you can.
- **DO:**
 - Ask open-ended questions, questions that can't be answered with a simple one word answer but take more thought and explanation. These open the heart. These include questions like, "Can you tell me the story of that?" Or, "How does this situation affect you?"
- **DO NOT:**
 - Be critical, judgemental, or defensive.
 - Minimize the importance of your partner's feelings.

- Take responsibility for fixing your partner's feelings by trying to make your partner feel better, or cheering up your partner.
- Engage in put downs or act superior to your partner, for example by lecturing them.

3. Summarize and Reflect Back What You Hear

A big part of listening is witnessing or being present for your partner so that your partner doesn't feel so alone. A powerful way to "be there" for your partner is to identify and reflect back their feelings, and to restate what you heard your partner say in your own words. Your goal is to be able to summarize your partner's position to your partner's satisfaction.

4. Validate, Communicate Understanding and Empathy

Validation doesn't mean that you agree with your partner's position, but that you can understand from your partner's point of view why they hold that position. You can validate your partner simply by saying, "I get it, your position makes sense to me," or, "I can see why you feel that way. If I were you, I might feel like that, too."

Ask your partner if they feel understood. If the answer is yes, switch roles. If not, ask, "What part am I missing?" After summarizing and validating again, ask your partner, "Did I get it?" and, "Is there anything else?"