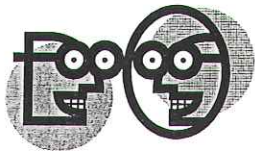




UPPER ISLAND ASSESSMENT AND RESOURCE SERVICE



Guidelines for Mirroring

(from *Getting the Love You Want*, by Harville Hendrix)

Mirroring:

1. Partner A asks for an appointment to say whatever is on her/his mind. It is easier to learn this skill by first talking about events/ issues other than relationship issues.
2. Partner B says "So I heard you say _____" The idea is to feed back your partner's words. The goal is not to memorize in order to parrot the words back, but to listen intently and then say what you heard. Quite naturally, you will find yourself using many of the speaker's words. Then ask "Have I got you?"
3. Partner A says one of:
 - a) yes, that's it
 - b) yes, but not quite. Give a percentage.
 - c) no, that's not what I meantIf either of the last two options, then A repeats the missing or inaccurate parts. B paraphrases again. A repeats step 3. It is important to repeat these steps until A is able to say "yes, that's 100 per cent" and feels heard. Remember that B is working hard, so offer encouragement.
4. Partner B says "Is there more?"
5. If yes, A says the next piece and steps 1-3 are repeated.
6. Then, when A has said all s/he wishes to say, B summarizes the main points. "So let me see if I've got all this...." and then at the end of the summary, asks "Have I got all that?"
7. Partner A will say one of: Yes, that's it, OR, Most of it, but this piece is missing....
8. Partner B mirrors any missing pieces. And then checks again to see if there is more about that.
9. If no, then conclude this section. If it is a highly charged issue, do not immediately switch roles. Let some time pass (certainly hours but perhaps a day or two) before Partner B talks.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF SENDERS AND RECEIVERS

Responsibilities of senders

- To talk about yourself, not the partner, use “I” statements
- To avoid all shaming, blaming, criticizing, belittling, invalidating of the partner. Pay attention to words, tone, body posture
- To send short amounts so as to not overload the listener
- To keep focused on one topic, to not bring in other topics
- To listen to the entire mirror without interrupting (verbally and non-verbally)
- To check the mirror and see if it accurate
- To give Partner encouragement if mirror is not all present, e.g., you got a lot
- To send more clearly anything that is not clear or accurate in the mirror
- To avoid repeating oneself when Partner has mirrored accurately

Receiver’s responsibilities

- To bring your focused attention
- To be curious. Listen with a beginner’s mind
- To temporarily suspend your own perspective and be open to hearing another’s view of the world
- Be willing for your Partner to have a view of the world which is different from your own.
- To build your capacity to contain your own reactivity and just allow your Partner to be the centre of attention

Some tips about mirroring

This process slows down communication; you will begin to notice how much we rely on assumptions in our talking. It is designed to clarify and honour the realities of both partners.

If you are the listener (also referred to as the receiver), it is okay to put up your hand to signal you need to pause to paraphrase.

As the listener, it is useful to begin each mirror with a phrase such as “So what I heard you say is....” or “So let me see if I’ve heard you....”

Starting each mirror with the same phrase has a soothing effect for the speaker (sender). For example, the speaker may be saying some difficult things. However, when s/he hears the partner begin with the same phrase, it tells her/him that the listener is staying with the process. Thus the speaker can relax a bit.

This may seem very picky but you will notice that the two example starting phrases contain “I heard”. This is for two reasons: 1) to own that this is what you heard. It may not have been what the speaker said or intended but this is what you’ve heard. 2) putting “I” in the starting phrase acknowledges the relationship between two people, what Martin Buber called the “I-thou” principle. We tend to objectify the speaker when we only say things like “so, you told me...” “you said”, etc.

Make every effort to mirror specific details and examples. This is how you learn the language of your partner’s world.

This process is about differing perspectives; it really isn’t about right or wrong. Therefore, avoid saying “Have I got that right?”

It is quite common to have more “yes, but not quite” responses that either “yes, that’s it” or “no, that’s not it”.

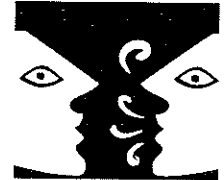
Percentages are a helpful gauge for the listener; the percentage quickly lets the listener know how accurate they were. It relieves some of the anxiety for those listeners who have a fear of doing it wrong. It also acknowledges the effort the listener is putting into hearing the speaker.

We frequently forget parts. Think about this as the angel of forgetting, fluttering about so that an important part can be said and/or heard again.

Here's another fine detail. When inquiring if the speaker has more to say, say something like "Is there more about that?" Avoid the word any as in "do you have any more to say?" Some of us are very sensitive to nuances that suggest we are taking up too much air time or attention.

After you become very comfortable with this part of the process, we will add further steps of empathy and validation. Stay tuned!

Working with validation and empathy



Once you feel comfortable with the *mirroring* part of the couples' dialogue, you are ready to add the next steps of:

- validation
- empathy.

These two steps, offered by the listener (receiver), are designed to increase the connection between the partners while acknowledging the realities of each partner. Each person brings to the relationship differing feelings, thoughts, perspectives and beliefs. Offering each other validation and empathy holds both realities in a loving container. Thus, a partner's reality comes to be seen as something to be understood and honoured, not changed.

Validation: communicates to your partner that you are receiving the information s/he is giving to you and that it makes sense. It indicates that you can see the information from your partner's point of view and can accept it has validity - it is true for the partner.

Validation is a temporary suspension of your point of view - stopping your home movie from playing long enough to see what is playing on your partner's screen.

Validation means saying "I see", not necessarily "I agree". You do not have to agree with your partner in order to validate.

You do not have to identify with what your partner is saying in order to validate it. You do not have to have lived a similar experience. The goal is to validate your partner's experience, and avoid talking about your similar experience.

It is simply enough to imagine walking in your partner's shoes and saying something like:

"It makes sense to me because..."

"I can see that...."

"I can understand that...."

The goal is to validate all of the key elements of the message we've just mirrored. We might do this in several ways:

- Sometimes we validate out of common sense. Your partner has just narrowly escaped a car accident and you can understand that s/he wants to get home and unwind.
- Sometimes a validation acknowledges our role in the interaction. For example, partner A might say to partner B. "I can understand that the edge in my voice reminded you of that awful tone your mother used when she was mad at you. It makes sense to me that you wouldn't feel so safe around me when I use that tone of voice."

- Sometimes, part of the validation draws on your knowledge and experience with your partner. For example, if your partner has grown up in a home where secrecy and lies ruled, you might refer to that when validating why the partner was so vexed when the boss lied.

A cautionary note, however. Done carefully and sparingly, this type of validation may be extraordinarily helpful. If overdone, it may sound like amateur psychoanalysis and only serve to annoy your partner. Not every current reaction has its roots in childhood experiences.

- Interestingly, one of the most difficult messages for listeners to validate is often compliments and other supportive messages. Frequently, listeners “forget” or stumble when validating why these compliments make sense.

Imago Therapist Wendy Palmer Patterson offers the acronym “Oh, I See”

Another perspective: **O-I-C**

Ownership- especially if you were late, etc

Imagine being on the receiving end

Connecting the pieces (knowing what I know about your childhood....)

Done well, this is a superb kind of validation. Done poorly it comes across as amateur psychoanalyzing and is likely to infuriate your partner!

Empathy: The final step is offering your partner the gift of honouring feelings. Offering empathy says, in effect, that what you feel is understandable given what you experienced.

Imagine what your partner might be feeling, either now or at the time of the incident under discussion. Begin with a simple sentence, “I imagine you might be feeling.....” and then finish with one or two feeling words. Simple feeling words are best.

Sometimes you’ll be clear about what your partner is feeling. Other times, it is okay to guess. Your partner will have an opportunity to respond to your guess.

Avoid long phrases. If you find yourself saying complicated sentences you are probably offering some kind of validation. This is not necessarily bad. It just means you still have to offer empathy.

Again, the goal is to focus on your partner’s feelings and leave out any description of your feelings.