

Stretching

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to educate you to your partner's deepest needs and to give you the opportunity to change your behavior so that you meet those needs. As you stretch against your resistance, your partner will be healed and you will become a more whole and loving individual.

Comments: This is a very important exercise. Please give it your highest priority.

Directions:

1. The first step is to identify the desires that lie behind your frustrations. On a separate sheet of paper, make a comprehensive list of all the things that bother you about your partner. When does your partner make you feel angry, annoyed, afraid, suspicious, resentful, hurt, or bitter? Here is an example:

I don't like it when you...

Drive too fast

Leave the house without telling me where you are going

Criticize me in front of the children

Undermine my authority with the children

Read the newspaper while I prepare dinner

Criticize me in a joking manner in front of friends

Don't pay attention to what I'm saying

Turn away from me when I'm upset or crying

Criticize me for being indecisive

Criticize my housekeeping

Keep pointing out the fact that you earn more money than I do

2. Now get a second sheet of paper and write down the desire that lies hidden in each frustration. Skip several lines after each desire. Do not write down the frustration, only the desire. (This is necessary, because you will be showing this second sheet to your partner.)

Example:

Desire: I would like to feel safe and relaxed when you are driving.

3. Underneath each desire, write a specific request that would help you satisfy that desire. It is important that your requests be positive and that they describe a specific behavior.

Example:

Desire: I would like to feel safe and relaxed when you are driving.

Request: When you are driving, I would like you to obey the speed limit. If the road conditions are bad, I would like you to drive even more slowly.

Desire: I would like you to comfort me when I'm upset

Request: When I tell you that I am upset, I would like you to put your arms around me and give me your full attention.

Notice that these requests are for specific, positive behavior. The following request is a bad example because it is not specific.

Vague request: I would like you to be more attentive.

It should be rewritten to make it more detailed.

Specific request: I would like you to give me a warm hug as soon as you come home from work.

The next request is a bad example because it is negative.

Negative request I would like you to stop yelling at me when you're upset.

This should be rewritten so that it describes a positive behavior;

Positive request: When you are mad at me, I would like you to use a normal tone of voice.

4. Share your second list (the one that lists desires and request but not frustrations) with each other. Use your communication skills to clarify each desire and request so that it is clearly understood Rewrite the request if necessary so that the partner knows exactly what kind of behavior you want.
5. Now take back your own list and rank each request on the left side of the page with a number from 1 to 5 indicating its relative importance to you, 1 indicating "very important," 5 "not very important."
6. Exchange lists once again so that you now have your partner's requests, and assign a number from 1 to 5 on the right side of the paper indicating how difficult it would be for you to grant each request, with 1 indicating "very difficult," 5 "not at all difficult."
7. Keep your partner's list. Starting today, you have the opportunity to grant your partner three or four of the easiest requests each week. Remember that these behaviors are gifts, not obligations. Regardless of how you feel and regardless of how many changes your partner is making, keep to a reliable schedule of at least three or four behavior changes a week. (You are encouraged to add more requests to your lists as time goes on.)