



Conscious Communication Guidelines

As You Come Together...

- Dialogue by appointment only, with clear agreement on the time, place, and length of practice.
- Take equal time for each person to be the Speaker, or schedule two sessions of equal length. Consider 5-10 minutes each to start. Feel free to use a timer or a bell, with the Listener indicating when there are a couple minutes remaining.
- Create the physical and emotional environment of intimacy that supports openness, honesty, trust, safety, and being more fully available to each other.
(See the *Creating a Safe-Authentic Space – With a Partner* handout in the “Resources” section of my website.)
- If either the Speaker or Listener needs to take an immediate time-out to take care of them self, state it calmly and indicate when you would like to revisit the interaction.
- Sit face to face comfortably. With an inner smile, silently look into the other’s eyes acknowledging each other’s presence.
- Take a few minutes to close your eyes and become present to your physical sensations, emotions, and breath. Align with your core values and motivation to bring the best in you to this interaction.
(See the *Core Values* handout.)
- As you speak and listen, maintain eye contact as much as possible.
- Soften your belly & remember to breathe.
- Take turns naming and removing any negative or undesirable qualities from this space you are creating, such as “judgment,” “impatience,” “the past” ...
- Take turns naming and inviting in any positive or supportive qualities, such as “acceptance,” “understanding,” “compassion,” “laughter”...
- Take a few minutes each to share, for this interaction, your intentions, fears, and “boundaries” – a place where two meet in a way that works for both. (See the *Intentions, Fears & Boundaries* handout.)

Speaker’s Goal: Self Inquiry

1. Show up and choose to be present.
2. Pay attention to what has heart and meaning.
3. Speak your truth without blame or judgment.
4. Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome.

Cross-culturally these four areas reflect the four human resources of Power, Love, Vision, and Wisdom.

From *The Four Fold Way* by Angeles Arrien Ph.D.

Speaker: Guidelines

- The focus for the Speaker is to increase your own self awareness and educate your partner about your experience – rather than focus on solutions. Pick one topic at a time to speak about. Take your time.

- Stay present to what most matters to you and speak with clear and simple messages. Be sensitive to flooding the Listener with too much information.
- Pause frequently to ask the Listener to reflect back what they have heard so far, to ensure that they are present, attuned, and hearing accurately.
- Talk about your experience. Be curious to learn something about yourself.
- Make clear “I-message” statements about feelings, needs, body sensations, and behaviors.
- Let yourself not know – practice tolerating uncertainty, ambiguity, and differences from your partner.
- Be willing to disappoint your partner to be true to yourself.
- Truth unfolds. Speak your truth without expectation of validation or reward.
- Stay in the present. Use what hasn’t worked in the past to inform what is true for you now, and what you want to create.
- Keep returning to relaxed breathing, soft belly.
- Self soothe. Regulate your own anxiety and reactivity without leaking it verbally or non-verbally.
- Practice skillful self-listening. Use any feelings of insecurity, hurt, fear, frustration, or defensiveness for self awareness and transformation.
- Adapt all or part of the following steps in a way that creates the attuned connection that is most comfortable for you and the Listener.
- Remember that relationship – like life and nature – involves ongoing cycles of harmony-disharmony-repair. Learn to ride the waves with increasing skill, as well as kindness and compassion for yourself and your partner.

Speaker: Self Inquiry

“When you...

Describe behaviors. State facts without evaluation or interpretation.

“I feel...

See the *Feelings Inventory: “When Needs Are Not Met”* to help identify your emotional experience.

The categories include: Annoyed, Angry, Aversion, Confused, Discomfort, Disconnected, Embarrassed, Fearful, Pain, Sad, Stressed/Tired, Vulnerable, Yearning.

(The *Feelings* and *Needs Inventories* are from *Nonviolent Communication* workshops. www.cnvc.org)

“Because...

Childhood experience, family pattern, relationship pattern, core value...

“The story I tell myself is...

Your projection about your partner or yourself.

“I have a need for...

See the *Needs Inventory* to help identify your specific needs.

The categories include: Autonomy, Celebration, Integrity, Independence, Physical Nurturance, Play, Spiritual Communion.

“What I would like to feel is...

See the *Feelings Inventory: “When Needs Are Met”* to help identify what you would like to feel.

The categories include: Affectionate, Interested, Glad, Grateful, Hopeful, Peaceful, Rested.

“What I would prefer in the future is...

Visualize a scenario that would unfold exactly as you would like, so that your feelings and needs are truly met.

“I would like to request...”

Specific, measurable, quantifiable actions. Give a few options or variations for the Listener to consider trying, then at an agreed upon time explore how the new behaviors were for you and your partner with the Feedback Guidelines below.

Speaker: After the Listener Reflects

“Thank you for all that you heard clearly. What you missed was...”

“What I want you to hear/understand is...”

“These are the (two or three) things that matter the most to me...”

“The most important thing that I want you to hear is...”

“The essence of what I am saying is...”

Closure: Gratitude and Awareness

Express gratitude: **“Thank you for hearing my truth.”**

Close your eyes and feel your physical sensations, emotions, and breath.

Listen to what your felt experience is communicating to you in this moment – about yourself... about your partner... about the connection...

Listener's Goal: Deep Listening

Curiosity makes us sincerely interested in the person we are listening to.

When we are curious, we ask more open-ended questions and are eager for the answers.

Our curiosity conveys to the speaker that we care for and appreciate them.

Curiosity fuels a desire to lead the speaker deeper and deeper into their truth and invites them to share it with us. Can you love and appreciate and forgive how it actually is, let go of the ways you think it should be different, and listen in ways that will allow things to change in directions you'd like them to, without the need for control?

From *A Little Book of Listening Skills*, by Mike Brady Ph.D. and Jennifer Autstin Leigh

Listener: Guidelines

- The focus for the Listener is to hold a silent space for the Speaker and to listen deeply and well.
- As you go along, ask to reflect back what you have heard the Speaker say to ensure that you remain present and are hearing accurately.
- Asking for clarification is important as it shows an intention to understand. Be careful to focus on what most matters to the Speaker and not get lost in details.
- Contain the urge to analyze, interpret, agree or disagree with what is shared. Simply witness and honor the Speaker's reality.
- Receive the Speaker's truth with gratitude for their willingness to be honest with you, compassion for their experience, and acceptance of their reality.
- Maintain eye contact, relaxed breathing, and soft belly.
- Maintain a neutral compassionate witnessing presence, verbally and non-verbally.
- Contain your own feelings and needs until it is your time to speak.
- Welcome silence when it arises. Give your partner space to reflect, feel, and explore deeper within.
- Use any silence – even long silence – as an opportunity to soften your gaze, relax your body and heart, and practice non-judgment and compassion for the Speaker and yourself.
- Listen to what the speaker's body language, movement, tone, facial expression, and eyes are saying. Listen with your whole body. Listen between the words.
- Listen beyond the content and the story for unspoken feelings, needs, and values.
- Provide a safe space for the speaker to share even hard truths.
- Keep returning to relaxed breathing and soft belly.
- Hold on to yourself as you stay present, attuned, and connected with the Speaker.
- Self soothe. Regulate your own anxiety and reactivity without leaking verbally or non-verbally.
- Practice skillful self-listening. Use any feelings of insecurity, hurt, fear, frustration or defensiveness for self awareness and transformation.
- Seven steps for the Listener: 1. Listen well 2. Reflect 3. Clarify 4. Inquire 5. Validate 6. Empathize 7. Honorable Closure. Adapt all or part of these steps in a way that creates the attuned connection that is most comfortable for you and the Speaker.
- Stay present and listen fully so you are prepared to reflect, validate, and empathize with what the Speaker truly wants you to hear and understand.

(Some of this material is adapted from Imago Relationship Therapy by Harville Hendrix, author of the *Getting the Love You Want Workbook* – a valuable support to self awareness & exploration of relationship.)

Step 1: Listen Well

1. Show up and choose to be present –
Hold a neutral, compassionate presence for yourself and the speaker.
2. Pay attention to what has heart and meaning –
Listen beyond the Speaker's content and delivery to the "melody" behind the words.
3. Listen to the Speaker's truth without blame or judgment –
Simply witness their reality. Contain the urge to agree or disagree verbally or non-verbally.
4. Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome –
Practice self awareness and attuned connection, not problem solving.

Step 2: Reflect

Reflect the Speaker's reality – it may not be your reality. Clearly reflect their content, feelings, and needs with an intention of curiosity, genuine interest, and understanding.

"I heard you say..."

"So if I've understood what you've said so far, you..."

"Oh, so when I said/did _____, you felt _____, because _____, and what you would have preferred is _____."

What you really would like/need is _____ .

Step 3: Clarify

When you are unclear of what the Speaker wants you to hear and understand, ask simple questions to help the speaker remain focused on what most matters them, and clarifies for you.

"You felt _____. Is that it?..."

"Can you say _____ in a different way? ... in fewer words?"

"Is _____ what you meant?"

"When I reflected just now, did I get what you said and felt?"

"Oh, so when I said/did _____, you felt _____. Is that closer?"

Step 4: Inquire

Ask open ended questions (not yes or no questions) that help the speaker deepen their self exploration. Be creative.

"What do you notice when..."

"What do you need when..."

"What interested you most about that..."

"I'm curious to hear more..."

“Then what happened...

“How did you feel when...

“Tell me more...

“When I do/say that, how do you feel...

“What do you want/prefer at those times...

“Is there something you need from me right now that would help...

“What would you like me to develop in myself that would help you...

“What would feel more...

Step 5: Validate

Authentically validate the speaker’s truth without needing to agree with their reality.

“It makes sense to me that you felt/needed _____ when I did _____.

“I can understand that you felt...

“If I didn’t/wasn’t _____, I can imagine you might have felt...

“I can see that...

“I get that ...

Step 6: Empathize

Step into the Speaker’s reality & feel in to their experience with your body & heart. Draw upon times in your own life when you – and countless others – may have had a similar experience to the Speaker.

“I can imagine that you might feel...

See the *Feelings Inventory: “When Needs Are Not Met.”* The categories include: Annoyed, Angry, Aversion, Confused, Discomfort, Disconnected, Embarrassed, Fearful, Pain, Sad, Stressed/Tired, Vulnerable, Yearning.

“I sense you need...

See the *Needs Inventory.* The categories include: Autonomy, Celebration, Integrity, Independence, Physical Nurturance, Play, Spiritual Communion.

“I sense you would like to feel...

Express understanding and compassion for expressed and unexpressed feelings and needs.

See the *Feelings Inventory: “When Needs Are Met.”* The categories include: Affectionate, Interested, Glad, Grateful, Hopeful, Peaceful, Rested.

Step 7: Closure: *Gratitude and Awareness*

Express gratitude: **“Thank you for sharing your truth.”**

Close your eyes and feel your physical sensations, emotions, and breath.

Listen to what your felt experience is communicating to you in this moment – about yourself... about your partner... about the connection...

Feedback: Integration & Connection

To complete the Dialogue Practice:

- **Extend Gratitude**

Verbally and non-verbally express gratitude for what was shared and learned, and for taking this time for connection.

- **What was the easiest/most enjoyable part –
1. for yourself 2. for the connection**

Ways you have stretched, grown, and moved beyond the knowable and familiar that was pleasurable for you.

- **What was the most difficult/challenging part –
1. for yourself 2. for the connection**

Ways you have stretched, grown, and moved beyond the knowable and familiar that was challenging for you.

- **What are you willing to develop/cultivate/ practice –
1. for yourself 2. for the connection**

A step of repair, reconnection, and extension of the heart.

- **Bonding Relaxation**

- Take 5-10 minutes to relax and bond in stillness and silence. Stand together and hold your partner in a soft embrace, lie together and spoon (take turns who is in front), lie side-by-side, or sit facing each other.

- Close your eyes, and connect in silence and without movement.

- Make any adjustments to be completely comfortable, supported, and relaxed so you can deeply surrender into relaxation and stillness.

- Let go of any “doing” and simply “be” together, staying present to the non-verbal shared connection.

- If thoughts arise, notice them then let them go, and keep returning to awareness of the physical sensations, breath, and melting connection.

- Let go into the silent stillness.

- **Closure**

- As you open your eyes, express gratitude non-verbally. Take time apart in order to integrate the shared experience alone. Consider journaling your experience to bring your self awareness to the next dialogue.

- Resist the impulse to talk about the interaction until the next time you create a conscious communication dialogue.

- Honor yourself for your courage, honesty, and caring to take the time to explore.

~ Enjoy the connection you are co-creating ~

Dyadic States of Consciousness

Adapted from research on social-emotional development and self-regulatory processes in infants and young children by Edward Tronick Ph.D., Chief of the Child Development Unit at Harvard Medical School

A dyadic state of consciousness is present when...

two people (any dyad – parent/child, friends, teacher/student, think tank, lovers, making love)...

are both in a core state of affect (present, mindful, open, in the moment, in the body, deep connection with self)...

and when there is:

- Trust, safety, security, calm
- Presence, attunement, openness, truth
- No defenses or reactivity
- Both are engaged in attuned, resonant communication – verbal and non-verbal
- Subjective experience is shared back and forth
- Emotions are flowing – neither repressed or flooding
- Each is in their own subjective and experiential field
- Both are riding and regulating their own affect
- Both are experiencing the other as a secure base, and a “true other” – their true self exists and is reflected back (love meeting love)
- Mental consciousness/affect is co-regulated

...then mental processes expand, new things can emerge that haven't been before, energy increases, and consciousness and communication expands.

Listening...

Is all about giving. It heals through the power of generosity. It's an open handed gift that asks nothing in return. Listening asks that we become empty. Willing to receive without agendas or judgment. To be surprised. Good listening requires both attention directed toward the other person, and also toward our own inner life. We need to pay careful attention to our own sensations, feelings, and intuitions. This is what allows us to resonate with another person.

- Frank Osteskeski, Founding Director of the San Francisco Zen Hospice Project

Empathy...

Means entering in to the private perceptual world of the other, and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It means temporarily living in her life and moving about it delicately without judgments. It includes communicating your sensings of her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes. It means frequently checking with her as to the accuracy of your sensings and being guided by the responses you receive.

To be with another in this way means that you have to lay aside the views and values that you hold of yourself in order to enter the world of another without prejudice. In some sense, this means that you lay aside yourself. And this can only be done by a person secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange and bizarre world of the other. Because he knows that he can comfortably return to his own world when he wants.

– Carl Rogers, psychologist and founder of Client-Centered Therapy