

humantold

Emotional Presence (A.R.E.)

In Sue Johnson's *Hold Me Tight* she discusses that attachment theory teaches us that our loved one is our shelter in life. When that person is emotionally unavailable or unresponsive, we face being out in the cold, alone and helpless. We are assailed by emotions – anger, sadness, hurt, and above all, fear. This is not so surprising when we remember that fear is our built-in alarm system; it turns on when our survival is threatened. Losing connection with our loved one jeopardizes our sense of security

Most fights are really protests over emotional disconnection. Underneath all the distress, partners are asking each other:

- Can I count on you, depend on you?
- Are you there for me?
- Will you respond to me when I need, when I call?
- Do I matter to you?
- Am I valued and accepted by you?
- Do you need me, rely on me?

The Three Ingredients: Researchers findings about the ingredients that further promote safety and security in relationships. They identified the crucial theme was emotional presence which they broke down into three ingredients

A.R.E.

Accessibility: This means that I can access your attention, presence and support when I need it. Consider the following:

- Can I reach you physically and emotionally?
- Can I get your attention?
- If I reach for you, will you be there? Will you be open and receptive to my feelings?
- Can I depend on you to make me a priority?

Responsiveness: This means that I can count on you to respond to my cues and needs. Consider the following:

- Will you tune into my feelings?
- Will you empathize with me?
- Will you express sensitivity and compassion?
- Will you comfort me when I need it? (in the way that feels right to me)

Engagement: This means that you will keep me close and cherish me as someone who holds a unique place in your life. Consider the following:

- Will you confide in me?
- Will you let me close and share your vulnerabilities, doubts, and worries?
- Will you listen to my feelings and allow yourself to be affected by them?

humantold

- Are you interested, curious, drawn to me? Will you tune into my (and your) relationship needs and cues?
- Will you express your affection to me in words, gestures, the way you look at me and/or touch me? Will you accept my affection expressed in these same ways?

Researchers found that these ingredients can serve couples to recover from distress and build a stronger bond between them. When one partner feels insecure in their attachment needs it can feel like a combination of fear, uncertainty, and/or anxiousness. Sue Johnson refers to this as “primal panic.” When you turn to your partner with understanding, compassion and reassurance this can break the cycle and help both partners feel secure again.

In the activity below and moving forward, challenge yourself to integrate these ingredients into your conversations and the ideas learned about safe haven and secure base.

Exploring our emotional presence

Describe a recent example of when you were accessible to your partner

In the scenario, how did you respond to your partner?

How would you describe your level of engagement?

humantold

What would a casual onlooker say about the quality of your engagement as a couple?

Describe a recent example of when your partner was accessible to you

In the scenario above, how did your partner respond to you?

How would you describe your partner's level of engagement?

What would a casual onlooker say about the quality of your engagement as a couple?

humantold

Emotional security is developed very consciously, it does not happen automatically. If you turn to your partner in times of need, seeking comfort, support, and care and find them not available or responsive it can lead to you feeling lonely, afraid, hurt, or angry. When this becomes a cycle they evolve into deeper fears and insecurities.

Common fears include being rejected, abandoned or considered a failure; fear of not being accepted or valued; fear of being controlled. These fears are legitimate for the person concerned and become easier to understand when they are considered in the context of previous or current close relationships. Sometimes these are expressed as:

- I don't know for sure if my partner is there for me
- I am invisible in this relationship
- No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to please my partner
- My opinions don't carry much weight
- I don't feel wanted
- I don't think my partner finds me attractive
- I can't get my feelings heard
- I am powerless to make an impact
- There's not much space for my needs in this relationship

These feelings of insecurity can evolve when you feel like you can't openly acknowledge your fears and get a comforting response or when your partner isn't there at a time when you need them the most. If you believe that you can't turn to your relationship when you need support it may feel like your bond is insecure. Starting to understand and acknowledge your partners fears implementing L-O-V-E conversations and A.R.E ingredients can unpack this. Try the activity below:

humantold

Activity: Perhaps you and your partner read the list above. Read them again out loud, **slowly**, notice which strikes a chord with you. Write below the impact and feeling of those words. Do you sense distress and make sure to make this about your experience and not your partner's flaws. Describe the feelings and/or sensations in your body

Share with your partner how you are impacted. Remember to try to integrate L-O-V-E conversations and A.R.E ingredients.

Hurt, anger, fear, sadness or shame are understandable reactions to relationships that feel insecure and as these patterns persist the intensity of the protest to the insecurity grows.

Stepping out of the cycle allows for hope for repairing the bond.

Johnson, S. M. (2008). *Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love*.

Kallos-Lilly, V., & Fitzgerald, J. (2021). *Emotionally focused workbook for couples: The two of Us*. ROUTLEDGE.