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Imago Dialogue Summary

The Imago Dialogue provides couples with the skills they need for great communication. Who doesn't need better communication?

The Basic Dialogue Ground Rule

In the Imago Dialogue, both parties agree to a basic ground rule: to talk one person at a time. The person who is speaking is called the "Sender." The person who is listening is termed the "Receiver." When in the Receiver role, you will be doing the three main steps of Dialogue.

Dialogue: The Three Main Steps

- Mirror
- Validate
- Empathize

STEP ONE: MIRROR

In the Mirroring step, when your partner pauses, or perhaps when you have asked them to pause, you will repeat back everything you heard them say. You may paraphrase, but you will mirror without analyzing, critiquing, modifying or responding.

How to Mirror:

"If I got it, I think you said..." or "So you're saying..."

Ask if there's more:

"Is there more?" or "Tell me more."

STEP TWO: VALIDATE

Once the Sender finishes speaking, the Receiver will attempt to validate what the Sender has said by letting the Sender know if what they said makes logical sense to the Receiver. If it does not, the Receiver will simply share what does make sense, then ask the Sender to expand upon the parts that do not yet make sense.

How to Validate:

"You make sense to me, because..." or

"That makes sense, I can see where..." or

"I understand what you're saying, because"

Ask for Clarification:

"This part (X) makes sense, but help me understand, can you say more about...?"

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STEP THREE: EMPATHIZE

In the final step, Empathy, the Receiver takes a guess as to what they imagine the Sender might be feeling with regard to what they have been saying. If the Sender has already said how they feel, then the Receiver can simply reflect this back once more. If, however, the Receiver can think of an additional way their partner might be feeling, this is where they can add that sentiment.

When sending empathy, it is fine to say something such as:

"I can imagine you feel like (e.g., you're the only one working on our relationship)."

However, it's important to know that once the word "like" comes into play, what's being expressed is a thought, not a feeling. The best way we have come to distinguish the difference between a thought and a feeling is that a feeling can generally be described in one or two words: e.g., happy, excited, safe, cared for, hurt, frustrated, scared.

Try to include some "feeling" words if you can in this step. Doing so, especially if you are able to accurately guess what your partner might be feeling, will often bring a look of recognition and joy to your partner's face much faster than anything else you could say.

How to Empathize:

"I can imagine you might be feeling..."

Ask for Clarification:

"Is that how you feel?"

Swap Places

Now that the Sender has gotten everything off their chest, and the Receiver has mirrored, validated, and empathized, the entire process reverses. The Receiver now gets their turn to respond with whatever came up for them while the first partner was sending, and the Sender shifts into being the new Receiver who does the mirroring, etc.

Note: When partners trade places, the new Sender does not start a new topic, rather they respond to what the first Sender said.

For more information, search for Imago Dialogue resources on the Humantold Resource page.

Adapted from: Imagoworks at <http://imagoworks.com/the-imago-dialogue/steps/>