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The Four Skills of Intimate Conversation

There are a set of skills to having conversations that are both intimate and meaningful. These types of conversations come easier to some, and the skills listed below will help you express how you're feeling and also guide you in helping your partner express how they're feeling. The skills and suggestions below aren't steps to follow in every conversation, although you certainly could.

Skill #1

Put into Words What You are Feeling

Try saying, I feel...

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaccepted | <input type="checkbox"/> Affectionate | <input type="checkbox"/> Understood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Close to You | <input type="checkbox"/> Tense | <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected | <input type="checkbox"/> Betrayed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distant from You | <input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstood | <input type="checkbox"/> Afraid | <input type="checkbox"/> Like You Don't Even Like Me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciated | <input type="checkbox"/> Baffled | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritable | <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unappreciated | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglected | <input type="checkbox"/> Comfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Alienated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Connected | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Agitated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Horny | <input type="checkbox"/> Alone | <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciative of You |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romantic | <input type="checkbox"/> Lonely | <input type="checkbox"/> Unattractive | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Like a Failure | <input type="checkbox"/> Regretful | <input type="checkbox"/> Alarmed | <input type="checkbox"/> Ashamed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disgusted | <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> Righteously Indignant | <input type="checkbox"/> Happy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belittled | <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehensive | <input type="checkbox"/> Joyful | <input type="checkbox"/> Insulted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Bored | <input type="checkbox"/> Tired | |

Now discuss WHY you have these feelings. This might include a description of the events that led to the feeling, a story from your childhood, an observation, an insight, or revelation that you've had. Anything that draws a connection between the feeling and what you think caused the feeling.

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Skill #2

Ask Your Partner Open-Ended Questions during an Intimate Conversation

Try asking questions like:

- What are you feeling?
- What *else* are you feeling?
- What are your needs?
- What do you really wish for?
- How did this all happen?
- What would you really like to say, and to whom?
- What are the feelings you are afraid to even think about?
- What mixed feelings do you have?
- Are there parts of yourself that are in conflict?
- What does this remind you of in your personal history?
- What are your obligations (or duties) here?
- What choice do you need to make?
- What do your values tell you about all this?
- Think of someone you really admire. What would he or she do, and how would he or she view this situation?
- Do these feelings and needs have spiritual, moral, ethical, or religious meaning for you?
- Who or what do you disapprove of?
- How does this affect your identity, your idea of yourself?
- How have you changed or how are you changing now, and how has this affected this situation?
- What's your major reaction or complaint?
- How do you *wish* things would be resolved now or in the future?
- Pretend that you had only six more months to live. What would be most important to you then?
- What are your goals?
- What *should* you take responsibility for in this situation?

Skill #3

Make Exploratory Statements to Help Open up Your Partner's Feelings and Needs During an Intimate Conversation

Try saying any of these exploring statements:

- Tell me a story about this situation.
- I want to know everything that you're feeling.
- Talk to me. I am listening.

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- Nothing is more important to me right now than listening to you.
- We have lots of time to talk. Take all the time you need.
- Tell me your major priorities here.
- Tell me what you need right now.
- Tell me what you think your choices are.
- It's okay not to know what to do, but what's your guess?
- You're being very clear. Go on.
- Help me understand your feelings a little better here. Say more.
- I think that you have already thought of some solutions. Tell me what they are.
- Help me understand this situation from your point of view. What are the most important points for you?
- Tell me what you're most concerned about.
- Tell me more about how you are seeing this situation.
- Talk about the decision you feel you have to make.

Skill #4

Express Tolerance, Empathy, and Understanding toward Your Partner during an Intimate Conversation

Try making statements like these:

- You're making total sense.
- I understand how you feel.
- You must feel so hopeless.
- I feel the despair in you when you talk about this.
- You're in a tough spot.
- I can feel the pain you feel.
- I'm on your side.
- Oh, wow, that sounds terrible.
- That must feel hurtful for you.
- I support your position.
- I totally agree with you.
- You're feeling so trapped!
- It sounds like you felt really disgusted!
- You're in a lot of pain here. I can feel it.
- That must have upset you.
- That is very scary.
- I would have also been disappointed by that.
- That would have hurt my feelings also.

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- That would make me feel sad, too.
- Wow! That must have hurt.
- That must have been really frustrating.
- No wonder you felt angry.
- Okay, I think I get it. So what you're feeling is...
- Tell me if you think I have this right. What you're saying is...
- That would make me feel insecure.
- That sounds frightening.

Adapted from: *Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. By: John Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, Doug Abrams, and Rachel Carlton Abrams.