

I have created this “cheat sheet” version of the “couple’s dialogue,” but do take time to go over the long version, too, to make sure you are doing this with fidelity!

Remember: you invite the other person to a dialogue. If they say no, they must offer another date/time to do the dialogue, preferably within a day, and that person is to make sure the two of you follow up on the scheduled dialogue. No rescheduling over and over.

1. **Mirror:** “sender” shares his/her/their perspective in short sentences using non-violent communication. No shaming, blaming, criticizing. This may take time to learn a new way of sharing your perspective. Consider “describing” your perspective so you are less likely to personally attack the other person e.g., “It is a problem for me when we are supposed to leave for dinner at 7, and you come home at 8pm” **versus** “When you don’t care and blow me off, you make me feel like I’m a bad person.” **After one or two sentences**, the sender pauses, and the “receiver” says back **exactly** what the other person says, starting with “What I hear you saying is....” or “So you are saying” then says, “am I with you?” Once the sender says yes, you did, the receiver says, “is there more”?

BOTH people are **totally silent** when the other is talking, (no interrupting/crosstalk), but both people can nod their heads or show interest and openness non-verbally as the other is talking to signify you are listening/engaged. I encourage you to hold hands or touch in some way throughout the dialogue as well. I recommend you do try to make this less robotic and formulaic by trying to send verbal and non-verbal signals of “welcome” and understanding while you are sending and receiving.

If you don’t remember what the sender says, the receiver may ask for the person to “send” again if he/she didn’t get it all the first time. Sender, do not interrupt the receiver as they are mirroring; if they missed something, bring it gently to their attention after they say, “am I with you?” Remember to do so without judgment...no criticisms. The goal is to not interrupt each other, ever. Even if the receiver is mirroring things, you don’t think you said, wait until the person is done and asks, “am I with you” to say, “not quite.” Then share what you want them to mirror.

Receiver: if the sender says, “you didn’t quite get it” don’t argue, just listen to the sender say what you missed and mirror that part back (without any criticism or snarky comments)!

2. **Summarize and empathize:** when the sender is done sharing his/her/their perspective (on just ONE topic), the receiver summarizes *the essence of* what the sender said. Don't add anything in from your perspective; to avoid this, try to use the sender's language when sharing the *essence* of what you heard, "So the essence of what you are saying is...." After you summarize, you say, "am I with you"? If you missed anything, the sender adds it in and the receiver mirrors that missing part back, then says, "am I with you?" and then "is there more?"

When the sender says that you have the essence, the receiver adds, "**With that, I imagine you might feel....**" and offer feelings words (NOT thoughts).

Feelings are **one word, not a sentence**. You don't have to add an explanation for the feeling, e.g., mad because you...or excited because I. Just the feeling. Remember to check in with "am I with you," after you offer a few feelings. The sender can say yes/not quite and add in more feelings words if you missed some. If the sender adds feelings, the receiver mirrors them back, "so you also feel lonely and scared." Always ask, "are there any other/more feelings?"

During this part, try to show some kindness, compassion, understanding, or love as you empathize. It may seem difficult for many people. Hearing feelings can ignite defensiveness. Try to avoid being flat, automaton or visibly perturbed when you are showing empathy as it can take away from the "sender" feeling empathized with!

3. **Validate:** Receiver says, "You make sense," then follows with "You make sense because..." and say something here about the particulars of the SENDER's perspective (not the receiver's). Here you can add in more about your partner's perspective that links to what is being said if you'd like to illustrate how it makes sense. Do not add anything that is about the receiver's perspective e.g., "I feel that way, too/I agree/I am sorry/I didn't mean that," any "I" statement really. Keep it about the other person, so try "you" language instead of "I" language. It may sound like, "*You make sense, Janet...You make sense because **you**....have told me something similar before; work hard around the house and don't get many breaks; are worried our relationship might be damaged.*" These are examples with no context, but they show how you keep it all about the sender's perspective.

The "validation" step is intended for the sender to feel seen, heard and understood. If the receiver doesn't *agree* with the sender's perspective, think of saying "You make sense..." to signify that you honor your

partner has a separate perspective from you. Again, it is okay that you don't agree. This is an important part of a healthy partnership: learning to validate one another even when you don't agree. This can take some people a long time to grasp, so be gentle with yourself and the other person.

Remember: you are listening to understand, not reply (argue, disagree, shut down, change, etc.).

Switch roles and now the other person shares his/her perspective on that exact topic.

After one or more rounds of the dialogue, you may be ready to find a solution to the problem if just speaking has not resolved the issue for one or both of you. When you connect first, truly listening to understand the other person, finding an acceptable compromise may be much easier.