

ACT For Relationship Issues

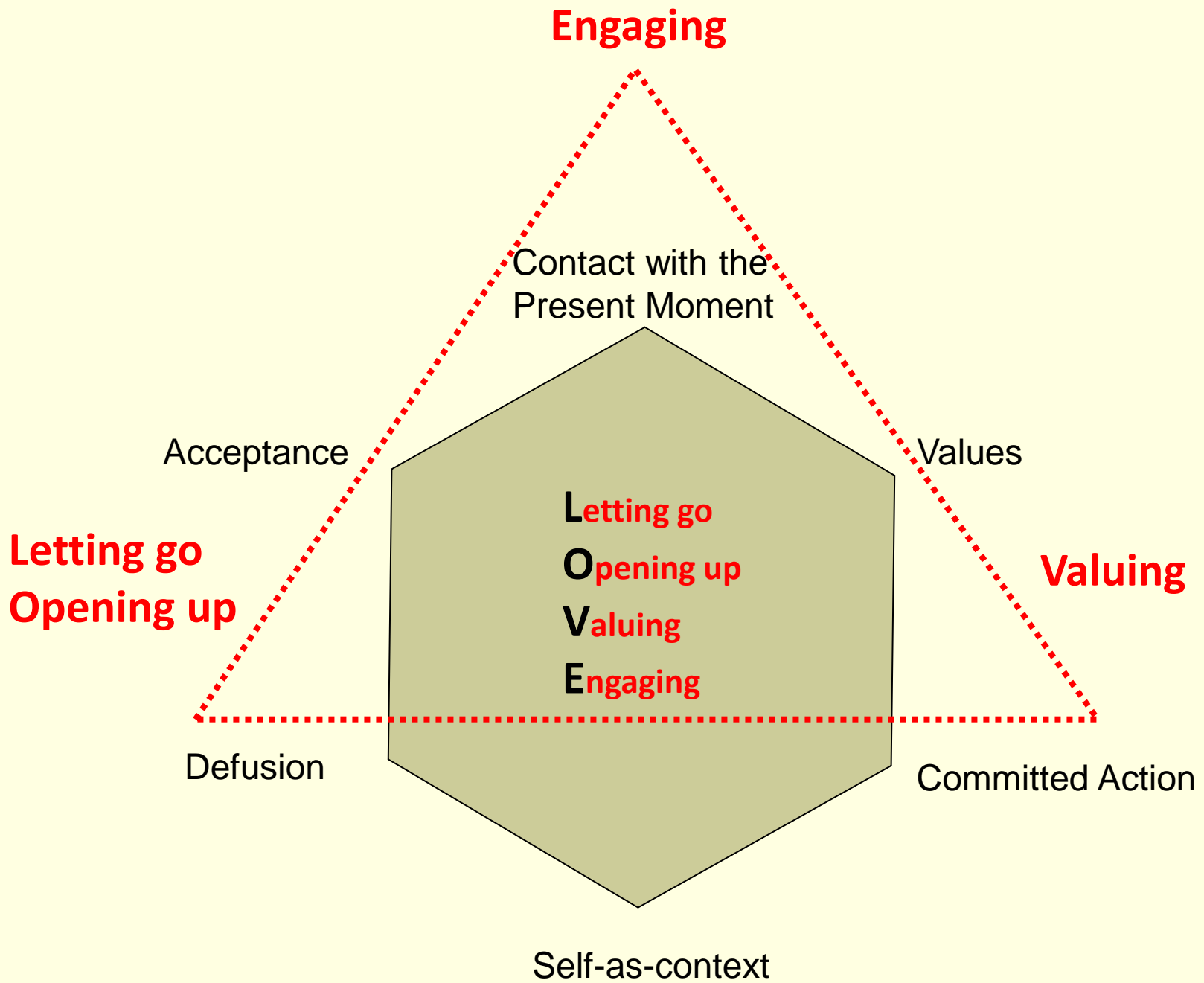
Russ Harris, 2017



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Relationship Myths

- 1. The perfect partner**
- 2. It should be easy**
- 3. Everlasting love**
- 4. You complete me**

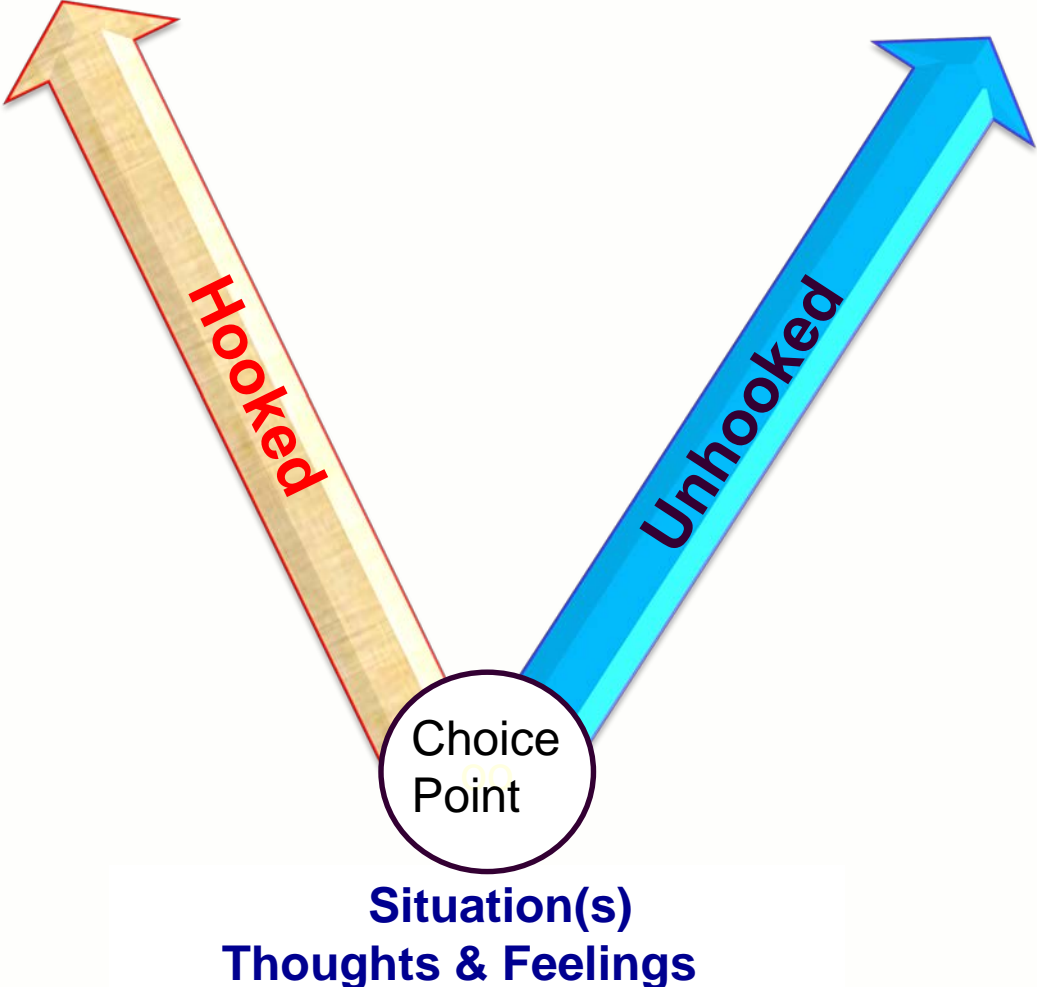


AWAY

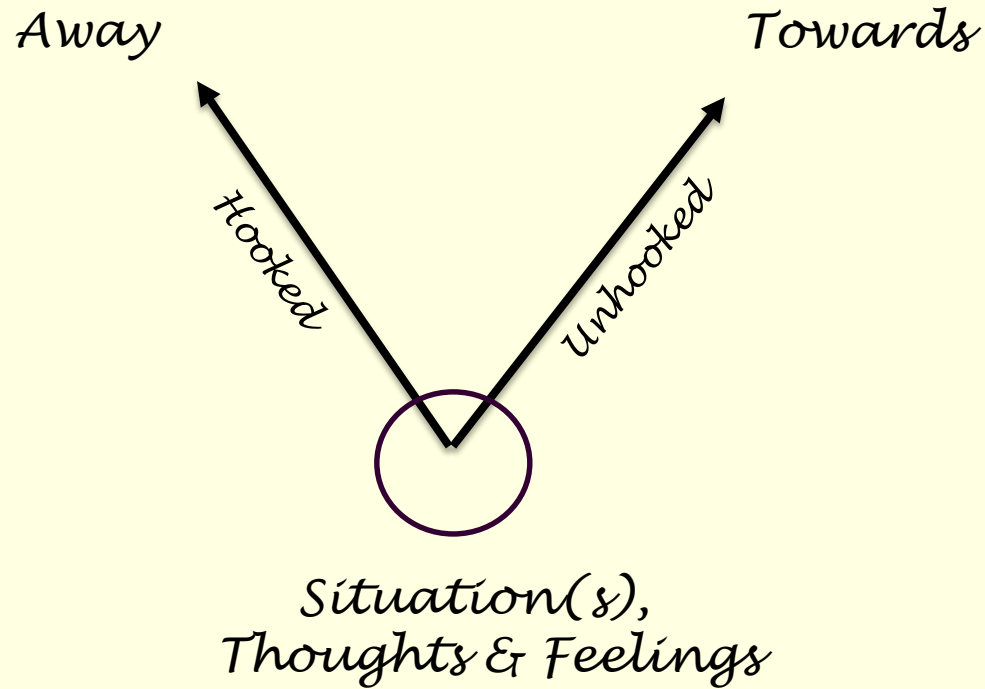
What I do
that's ineffective,
behaving unlike the
person I want to be

TOWARDS

What I do (or want to
do) that's effective,
behaving like the
person I want to be



Drawing it by hand ...



Reactive Vs Ideal Partner (p4)

What is the difference?
What does this tell you
about your values?

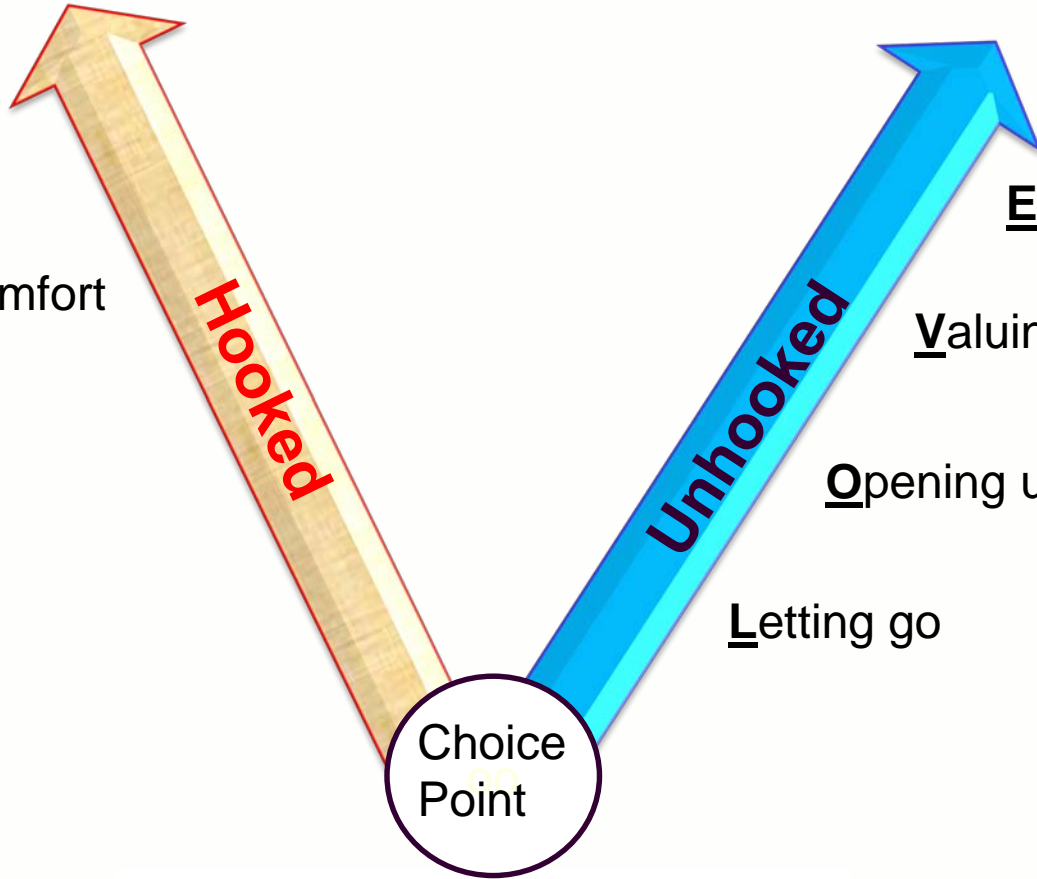
DRAIN – page 12

- **Disconnection**
- **Reactivity**
- **Avoidance of discomfort**
- **Inside-your-mind**
- **Neglecting values**

AWAY

TOWARDS

Disconnection
Reactivity
Avoidance of discomfort
Inside-your-mind
Neglecting values



Engaging

Valuing

Opening up

Letting go

Choice Point

Situation(s)

Thoughts & Feelings

INFORMED CONSENT – p4

Learning new skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively

Clarifying values: what sort of partner you want to be & what sort of relationship you want to build

Taking action: to solve your problems, to *influence your partner constructively*, and do things that make your relationship better

Bit like learning to play guitar: needs practice in session and between sessions.

I'm going to ask you each session to take something away and do it, to actively improve your relationship

THE WHOLE ACT MODEL RESTS ON?

Workability

Clients, not therapist, decide what is workable

Often what works in the short term to get your needs met or avoid discomfort, doesn't work in the long term to build a healthy relationship

WORKABILITY & PRESS PAUSE (p4)

In this approach we use a concept called workability

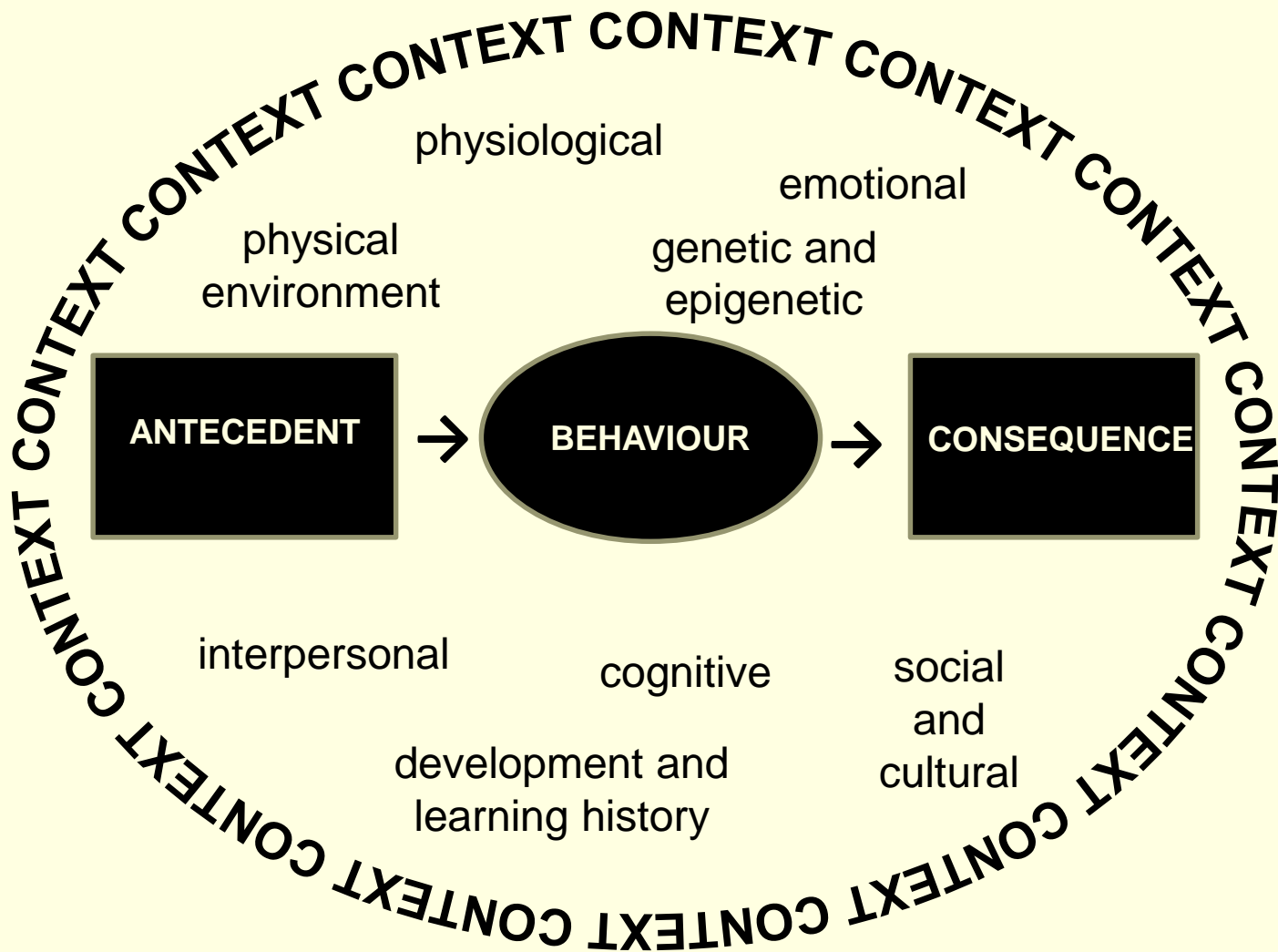
‘Workable’ means it’s working to build the relationship you want

‘Unworkable’ means it’s NOT working to build the relationship you want. It may work short term to make you feel better or avoid discomfort or get your needs met, but long term it worsens the relationship.

Can I have permission to ‘press pause’ at times, and get you to notice and workable and unworkable ways that you are influencing each other?

When I ‘press pause’, I’ll ask you just to pause for a moment – stop speaking, take a moment to slow down and simply notice what you’re feeling and thinking, and reflect on what you are saying and doing, and notice how that’s affecting your relationship –whether it’s making things better or worse

Of course, I can only make an educated guess about what’s workable. You are the experts; you will tell me if it’s workable or not.



Slide courtesy of Jennifer Villatte

'Triggers' (antecedents)

Situation
Thoughts
Feelings

present moment,
defusion, acceptance,
urge-surfing,
dropping anchor,

Situation: heated
argument with wife
about drinking habits

Thoughts & Feelings:

'I can't stand this
marriage' 'Who is she
to tell me what to do?'
Anger & anxiety
Urge to drink

Behaviour

Something an
organism does

Public or private

Values & action

Drinks alcohol

'Payoffs' (reinforcing consequences)

Immediate outcomes
that maintain the
behaviour

Feeling of relief;
painful thoughts,
feelings, urges
disappear

Workability

**Validate payoffs
& contact costs**

*Drinking problem
worsens; tension
in marriage
worsens*

11 Common Reinforcing Consequences (payoffs) For ‘Away Moves’ (p4)

- 1. I avoid/escape an unpleasant situation/event**
- 2. I avoid/escape unpleasant thoughts/feelings**
- 3. I feel good**
- 4. I gain attention**
- 5. I get my needs met**
- 6. feels like I’m problem solving or preparing**
- 7. coherence: ‘making sense’ of things**
- 8. I feel powerful or in control**
- 9. I feel like I am ‘in the right’**
- 10. feels comfortable, familiar, well-known**
- 11. feels like I’m getting what I deserve**

**WORKABILITY:
Validate payoffs &
Contact costs**

Intermittent Reinforcement

Don't need the reinforcement every time

Exercise in pairs: 'Functional Analysis'

Client: name an 'away move' you make in an important relationship

Therapist: a) Identify antecedents (triggers): situation, thoughts, feelings

b) Identify reinforcing consequences (payoffs)

NB: You are NOT assessing pros and cons!

Maximum of 5 minutes. Then swap over.

If finish with time to spare, go again

The Mindful STOP (p4)

- S – Slow down (slow your breathing; slowly press your feet down; slowly stretch; slowly press fingertips together)
- T - Take note (notice your thoughts & feelings, & where you are & what you are doing)
- O - Open up (make room for your thoughts & feelings & allow them to freely flow through you)
- P - Pursue values (take action, guided by values)

Behaviour Change 101

- How do we influence behaviour?

Behaviour Change 101

- Most effective way to influence behaviour, while maintaining a good relationship?
- Positive reinforcement of desired behaviour

Behaviour Change 101

- Least effective way to influence behaviour, if you want to maintain a good relationship?
- Punishment of unwanted behaviour

Behaviour Change 101

- Ideal ratio of positive reinforcement to punishment?
- 5: 1
- What is the ratio in your relationship?

Control Versus Influence (p7)

To influence your partner constructively you need control over your actions

Which means you'll need to learn new ways to handle your thoughts and feelings

How I try to influence my partner (p 16)

In-session: Behaviour Change 101

In each session, therapist aims to:

- *Model, instigate, & reinforce* workable behavior
- *Raise awareness of* unworkable behaviour
- Teach clients to do likewise.

Taking A History (p8)

We'll return to the problem shortly, but first:

- What do you appreciate about your partner?
- What are his/her greatest strengths/qualities?
- What do you like to do together?
- Aside from looks, what attracted you when you first met?

May leave this until later in some situations, e.g. if one partner has had an affair

Taking A History

Relationship history: how did you meet, what attracted you, wedding day etc.

What did you appreciate in your relationship & your partner back then?

What do you *not* want to change in your relationship?

Taking A History

Can you pick just one recent event that represents the main issue(s)?

What have you tried so far to fix this?

How has that worked, short term and long term?

How did you meet? p 14

In pairs, run through as much of this as you can; you have 7 minutes each.

Don't go on to the 'on reflection' part

Venting

Clients need to tell their story – important part of taking a history and building rapport

But beware old Freudian ideas of ‘catharsis’

When does ‘venting’ become *unworkable*?

-

If therapist listens mindfully, compassionately, respectfully, clients can quickly feel heard, understood and validated

Notice effects of venting on:

- a) the client
- b) the client's partner
- c) yourself

Is it making things better or worse?

Unworkable Venting

‘Lifeless storytelling’.

Blaming, judging,
criticising, comparing

Ruminating, worrying

Giving multiple examples
of ‘the problem’ when
one is enough

Making threats



Ask both partners to notice effects of venting: does it usually make things better or worse in the relationship?

Have the person who is venting notice the effects of this behaviour on both self and other

T: In the short term, venting makes most of us feel better

T: But the more you do this, the worse your relationship

T: Why? Because when you speak in this way, your partner is likely to switch off.

T: Even if it does get your partner to listen, it's likely to come with long term costs to your relationship.

T: However, I could be wrong. When you speak like this at home, what effect does it usually have?

Venting

T: So is it okay if we spend some time in these sessions helping you *both* to speak about your pain and your difficulties in a way that makes it easier for your partner to listen and respond?

T: Learning to do this means that you are more likely to get your needs met in a way that ***is healthy for the relationship***

Venting => Press Pause

T: Is it okay if I interrupt each of you at times, and coach you in more effective ways of speaking?

T: You will feel frustrated when I do this, but it's an essential skill for better relationships: to learn how to have difficult feelings like frustration or anger, and yet still act effectively.

Venting

Explore why excessive venting is unworkable

Coach clients to:

Use 'I statements'

Talk about their emotional pain

Be specific about the problem

Be specific about what they want

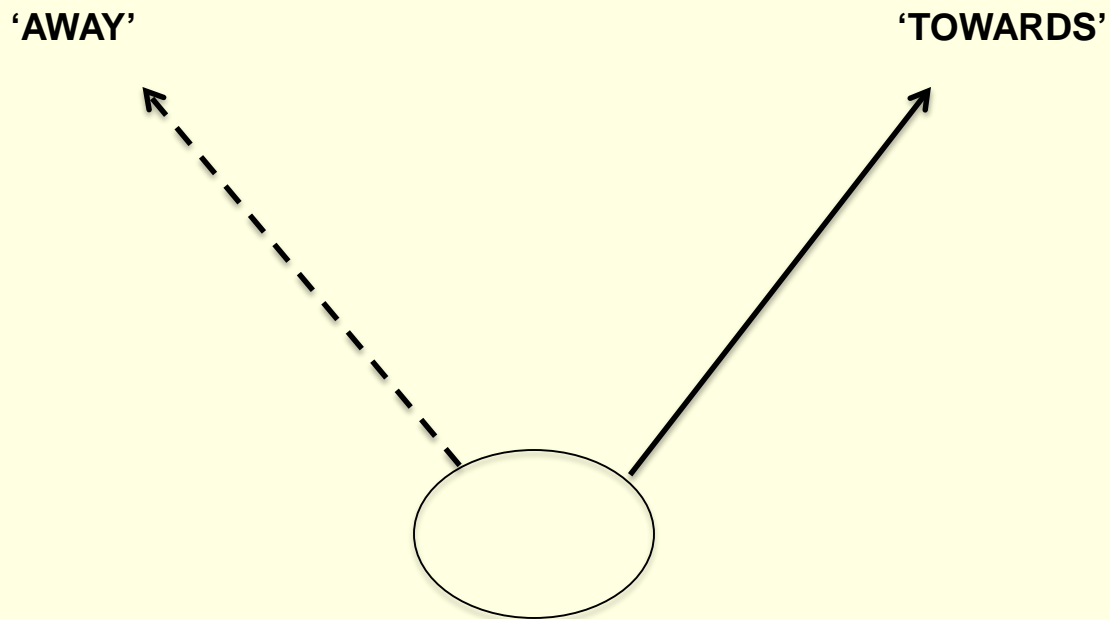
Notice when they are hooked, drop anchor, reconnect

Taking A History

- What sort of workable behaviour might we observe as we take a history?
- How could we reinforce the workable stuff?

Taking A History

Model, instigate & reinforce factual description
versus judgment & criticism



Exercise: factual description versus judgment & criticism

Pick a problematic client behavior that is showing up in session.

Write down a factual description of the behavior, devoid of judgment/criticism

Check your answer with your group

Taking A History

‘Differences versus defects’ (Jacobson, ICBT)
Evaluate the **behaviour**, not the person

Taking A History

Model, instigate & reinforce mindfulness: open, curious, flexible attention

Mindfulness of the Hand

What was new or interesting to you?

Did your relationship with your hand change:

A) in a positive way? Describe how

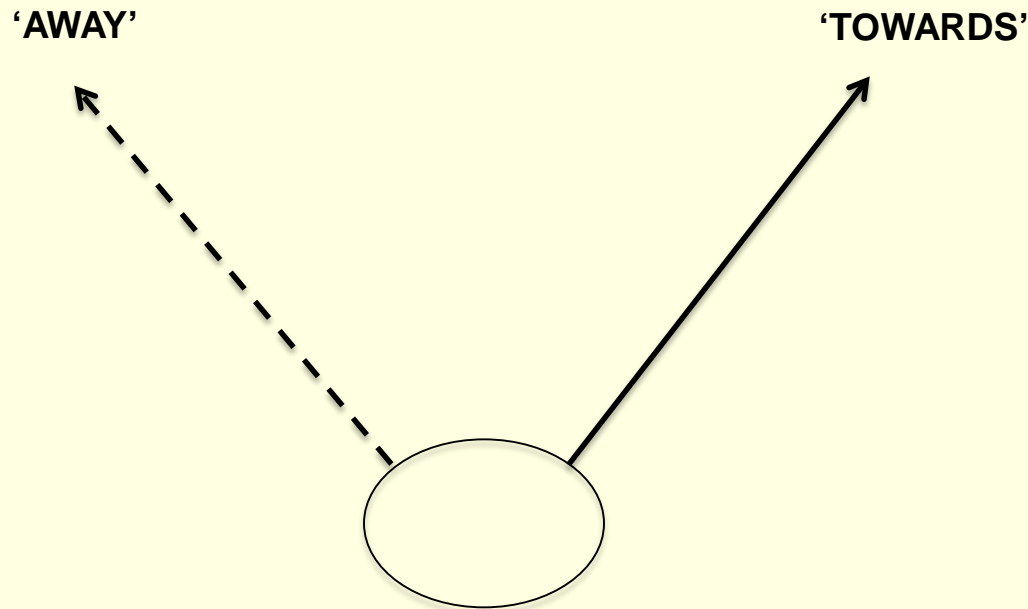
B) In a negative way? If so, what story about your hand hooked you?

What is the relevance of this exercise to your relationship?

Are there deficits in perspective taking?

Taking A History

Draw out values wherever possible. How?
Continually ask clients to notice both values-
congruent and values-incongruent actions.



Taking A History

Q: In your relationship, what would you like there to be more of: a) from your partner and b) from yourself ?

Turn 'dead person's' goals into 'live person's goals'

Taking A History

Q: If I could wave a magic wand, so that your partner were suddenly perfect – then how would you behave differently?

Effort (p7)

On a scale of 1-10, how much work are you willing to do to improve the relationship?

If score is low, therapist models accepting, compassionate stance & moves to 'challenge formula'

The Challenge Formula

For any challenging situation:

1. Leave
2. Stay & change what can be changed
3. Stay & accept what can't be changed & live by your values
4. Stay & give up & do stuff that makes it worse

Addressing Willingness

Q: So in terms of changing the situation, what do you have most control over?

Q: So let's come back to workability: how will it affect your relationship if you are not willing to work on it?

If one partner is unwilling?

Stay or leave?

- If possible, see client alone.
- **AGREE:** *anything shared privately can be raised in a dual session*
- Compassionately & non-judgmentally consider pros & cons of each choice
- **Q:** *Have you given it your best shot?*

Stay or leave?

- Unlikely to resolve it in today's session
- Both options = anxiety, doubt, uncertainty
- If one option was obviously much better, you wouldn't have a dilemma!!!

Stay or leave?

- Until the day you leave, you're staying – so what do you want to stand for as a partner?
- Live by your values, whether you stay or leave
- Each day, choose to live those values

Stay or leave?

- 5-10 mins daily to reflect on the pros & cons with pen & paper or computer
- Rest of the time, unhook & get present. How?
- Lots of self-compassion!!!

Taking A History

Family of origin: how much do you *really* need to work effectively with the client?

Coherence = very reinforcing for therapist & client

Danger: “analysis paralysis” or “insight addiction”

Why not gather this info ‘on the hoof’?

Taking A History ‘On The Hoof’

Fusion with a ‘story’ or ‘rule’ shows up:

T: How old is this story? When was the earliest you can remember it showing up? What happened at that time in your life?

T: Where does that rule come from? Who told you, or how did you learn it?

Taking A History ‘On the Hoof’

E.g. How old is this behaviour? Did anyone model this for you, growing up?

E.g. Have you reacted that way in the past, in other relationships, with parents, siblings etc?

Taking A History ‘On The Hoof’

T: So we can't alter our pasts. But we can notice how this 'old stuff' keeps showing up in the present;

T: And each time we notice that, there's a choice point: continue to let that 'old stuff' push you around, or unhook from it and do something new.

End of first session

What's the one issue you'd like to address first?

If can't agree, each choose one issue.

NB: sexual issues: almost always need to improve the non-sexual aspects first

End of first session

1. Notice what *you do* that's workable
2. Notice what *you do* that's *unworkable*
3. Notice what thoughts & feelings hook you and pull you into the unworkable stuff
4. Notice what *your partner* does that's ***workable***

6 Things Each Partner *Can* Do

1. Stop doing things that make it worse
2. Act mindfully on your values: behave more like the partner you ideally want to be
3. Accept what is out of your control
4. Notice & reward behavior in your partner you like
5. Help to create, and actively participate in, rituals to cultivate affection, warmth, fun, sensuality, sexuality, intimacy etc.
6. Effective negotiation & communication skills

In ACT, we focus on all six - but first & foremost on 1, 2, 3 & 4. Why?

6 Things Each Partner *Can* Do

- 1, 2, 3 & 4 are totally within your control
- The Paradox: If you live mindfully by your values, stop trying to control your partner, actively cultivate acceptance, and actively show appreciation ... often your partner will make positive changes spontaneously!

NB: Pre-empt - *No two partners will do these things to the same extent!*

‘Give And Take’

Vividly recall 2 memories:

- a) A moment of great loneliness/yearning for someone you love
- b) A moment of being very loving to someone

What does this say about what you want to give and what you want to get?

Values - Relationships

- Caring
- Connection
- Contribution
- Typically these are both values and needs
- ***Goes both ways!***

Acceptance & Change

Each partner typically starts from this:

- *You need to change ...*
- *...but accept me as I am!*

How do you see your partner?



Defusion (p5)

What judgments does your mind make about your partner?



Exercise created by
Natasha Lazareski

Compassion for your partner

What is it like to be looked at ‘as a roadblock’?

Imagine your partner as a young child – and yourself as an adult, shouting all those negative judgments & criticisms

What would that little child feel like?

How would you like to treat that little child?

Compassion For Others

I see you're in pain

I care about you

I'm here for you

Mr & Mrs Fix-it

Problem-solving & advice-giving is often
invalidating

After you've done this: I see you're in pain; I
care about you; I'm here for you

Then you can ask: 'Is there anything I can do?'

Kindness

- Kind thoughts & imagery
- Kind words
- Kind touch
- Kind deeds

Stories/behaviours that isolate/separate

- ■ the role you've been conditioned to play?
- the role you think you should play?
- the role you play to hide away?
- the role you play to get approval?
- the role you play to avoid being hurt?

Barriers to intimacy

Avoidance of 'vulnerability'

Avoidance of pain - especially fear (rejection, hurt, betrayal, entrapment, burden, abandonment etc)

Fusion with conceptualised self

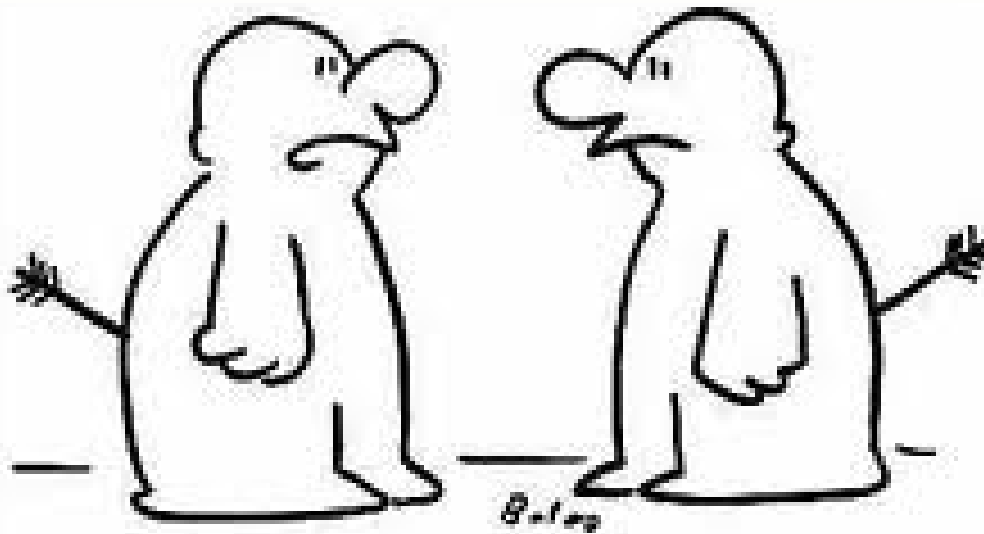
'Looking good' and 'Being right'

Others?

I see you are in pain: Emotional awareness



I feel your pain too: Empathy



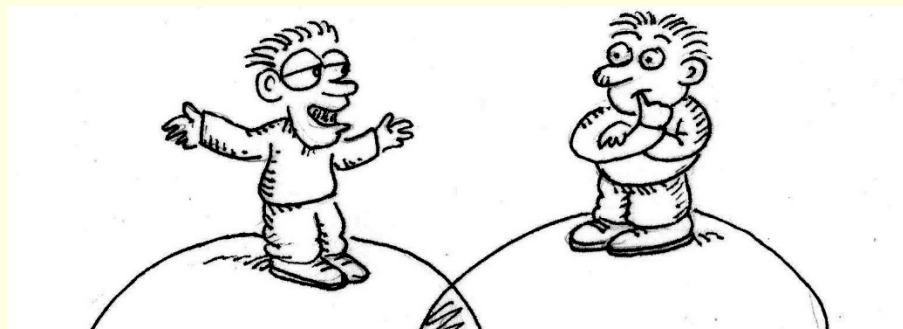
"I know exactly how you feel."

I acknowledge your pain, and respond with kindness: Compassion



I can see things from your point of view,
understand how you think and feel, get what
motivates you: Theory of Mind

- I am curious about and open to your thoughts, feelings, point of view
- I may not share your thoughts, feelings, point of view, but I acknowledge them as normal, natural and perfectly reasonable, given our differences in biology and life history



- I can allow you to have your thoughts and feelings and points of view, and I can remain engaged and open with you, without trying to change them

Invalidation

If I were in your shoes, I'd think/feel differently

Don't think/feel that way

Why can't you just?

Others?

- If I had *your* DNA, *your* body, *your* biological makeup, *your* family and upbringing, *your* education, *your* life experiences – not *mine* - then in this situation, I would think and feel the same!’

What Is Intimacy?

The price of admission to intimacy?

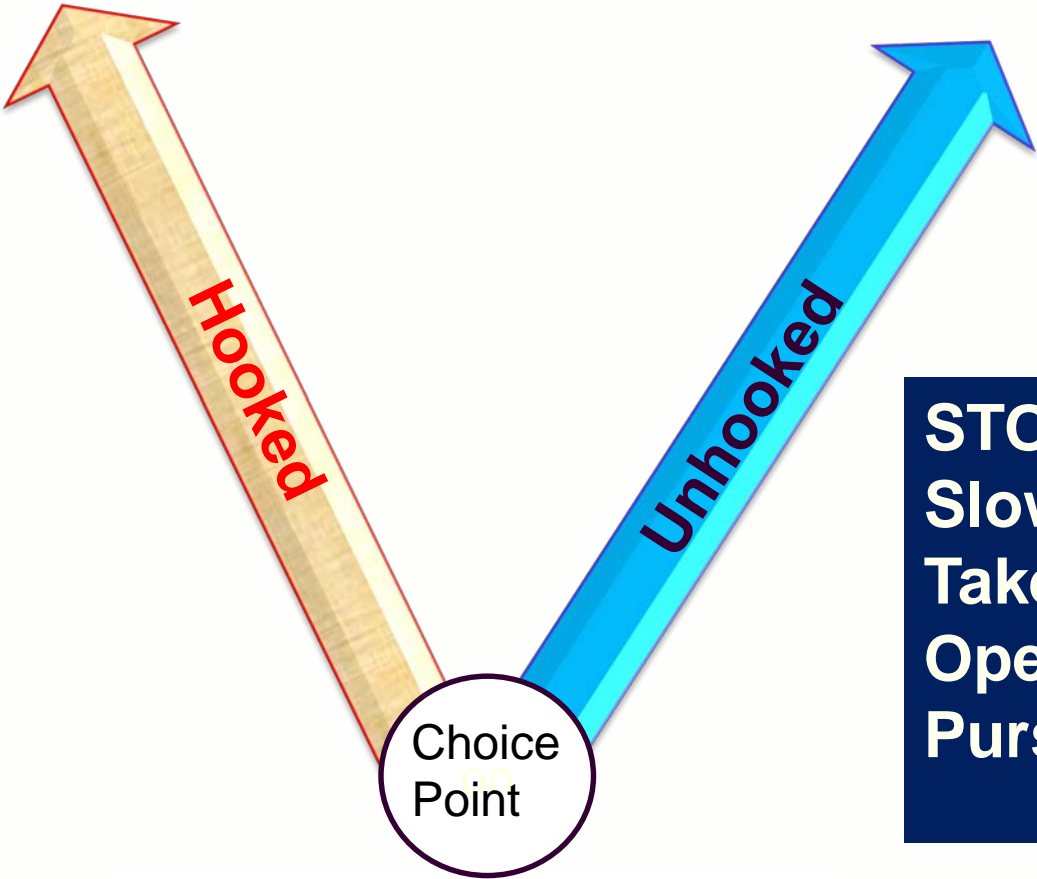
Vulnerability

Which always comes with?

Pain!

AWAY

TOWARDS



STOP
Slow down
Take note
Open up
Pursue values

Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings

**'Triggers'
(antecedents)**

Situation
Thoughts
Feelings

**Mindfulness:
present moment,
defusion, acceptance**

Behaviour

Something an
organism does

Public or private

Values & action

**'Payoffs'
(reinforcing
consequences)**

Immediate outcomes
that maintain the
behaviour

**Workability
Payoffs versus
costs**

What does it **feel like** for you when he/she **behaves** like that?

What does it **feel like** for you to hear that's how your **behaviour** affects him/her?

Self-compassion & Attachment

Self-compassion: positive reinforcement
of your own bids for nurturing

Form a secure attachment with yourself

Foundation for secure attachment to others

Intimacy with myself ↔ intimacy with others

Intimacy & Acceptance

The ultimate form of *intrapersonal* acceptance?

Self-compassion

The ultimate form of *interpersonal* acceptance?

Empathy and compassion for others

Barriers to Compassion

Blaming/judging/criticising etc.

Possible functions?

Contrast: constructive, compassionate feedback

Defensiveness to negative feedback: why?

Handling Negative Feedback

Feedback you least like from loved ones?

The most hurtful thing they could say?

Why is this so hurtful?

Relation to your conceptualised self?

.

Handling Negative Feedback

If this feedback were true, what would it mean about you?

Can you find a grain of truth in it?

Do you have to turn away or hide from or struggle with that truth?

Handling Negative Feedback

What do you do that is unhelpful when you encounter criticism, disapproval or rejection?

Would it be useful to learn how to stay present and open in the face of it?

Handling Negative Feedback pt 1

In pairs. Number 1s: tell number 2s the feedback/criticism you fear/resist most

2s: say it aloud to number 1s: “You are”

Number 1s: stay present; notice what thoughts and feelings arise; open up and make room for them.

Notice what it was that triggered this reaction in you: just words. Is there anything in those words you have to fight with or run from?

Handling Negative Feedback pt 2

Can you find a grain of truth in those words? Can you identify some type of unworkable behaviour that they refer to?

Is there some way you can accept that grain of truth; take it on board, and learn from it, grow from it?

ACCEPTANCE & CHANGE: Which comes first?

Remember the challenge formula

Do what you can to *constructively* influence your partner's behavior, so as to a) get your needs met *and* b) build a healthy relationship

Fact: there will always be some unsolvable problems in your relationship, and some behaviours in your partner that you don't like, want or approve of.

Even if your partner works really hard at it!

The 'Perfect Partner' Story?

Can you accept this? What happens if you don't?

'I want to accept, but.....'

- 1. Defuse from unhelpful stories**
- 2. Open, curious attention**
- 3. Make room for painful feelings**
- 4. Say 'Yes' to reality**
- 5. Cultivate gratitude & appreciation**
- 6. Evaluate the behaviour, not the person**
- 7. The behaviour is one small part of the whole person**
- 8. Acknowledge similarities**
- 9. Validate differences**
- 10. The ultimate: practice compassion**

Key Issues: Acceptance of Pain – Why?

- In front of you is the person you love, all the things that you enjoy doing in your relationship, and **all the problems and challenges** you want to deal with
- These are all the **thoughts & feelings** you don't want. Push them away, hard!
- Notice 3 things: 1) How tiring is it? How much energy does it consume? 2) How distracting is it; how difficult is it to fully engage or connect with the person you love, or focus on the task at hand? 3) How difficult is it to take effective action, to do the things that make your relationship better? (give examples)
- Now rest it on your lap.
- How much less effort is that? How much easier is it to engage and connect and focus? How much easier is it now to take effective action?
- Notice your **thoughts & feelings** (i.e. the paper) haven't disappeared. But you have a new way of responding to them, so they don't hold you back or tie you down or stop you taking action or engaging with your partner or focusing on the task at hand

1. Make room: Are difficult feelings present? Notice where in your body you feel it most. Breathe into this area; open up around the feeling. Place a hand on it.
2. Defuse: What does your mind say to stop you accepting? Notice those words in your head. Name these words: 'The not good enough story'
3. Open, curious attention: Let your mind chatter away like a radio in the background. Notice X, with the curiosity of a young child who has never encountered anything like this before. Notice ...(give examples)
4. Say 'yes': In a calm voice – either out aloud or inside your head – say 'yes'. Acknowledge, right now, this is how it is. This is reality. If you run from it, you will miss out on important parts of your life. And if you fight with it, you will lose. The only way to vitality is to make peace with it. So with an attitude of peacefulness, once again, say 'yes'. (Yes, this is how it is.)

Self-compassion: 6 Elements

1. Contact the present moment: notice & acknowledge your painful thoughts & feelings
2. Kindness: pursue the value of kindness towards yourself – (in words, thoughts, imagery & action)
3. Defusion: defuse from harsh judgmental self-talk
4. Acceptance: open up and make room for painful thoughts and feelings
5. Validation: validate your pain as a normal & natural part of being human
6. Connectedness with others: acknowledging and empathizing with pain of others & recognizing your commonality; sharing your pain with kind and caring others

Kindness To Self

- Kind self-talk (in both content and tone)
- Kind imagery
- Kind self-touch
- Kind deeds

Self-compassion & Attachment

Self-compassion: positive reinforcement
of your own bids for nurturing/protection/caring

Secure attachment with yourself

Facilitates secure attachment to others

Self-compassion ↔ compassion for others

- ❑ Think of someone you love
- ❑ Think of what's painful in the relationship
- ❑ Contact the pain
- ❑ Contact the love
- ❑ Open up and make room for both
- ❑ Notice how interconnected they are
- ❑ Extend kindness to yourself



Key Issues: Conflict Is Inevitable

- Increase awareness of triggers
- Increase acceptance

Getting Needs Met

Respect – for self and other



Shark vs puppy dog

'Needs' and values

- Values: how do I want to behave while I try to get my 'needs' met?
- Values: how do I want to behave when I don't get my 'needs' met?
- Values: how do I want to behave when I DO get my 'needs' met?

Key Issues: Communication 101

Learnt this at kindergarten

Ask nicely

Say thank you

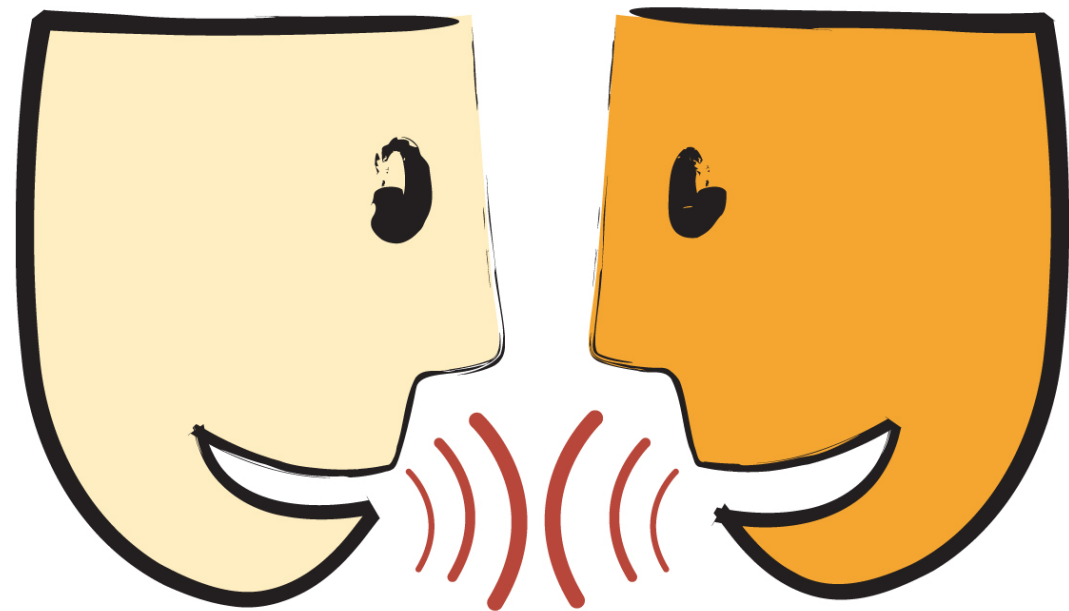
Say sorry

Listen carefully

Be fair

Take turns

No biting!!



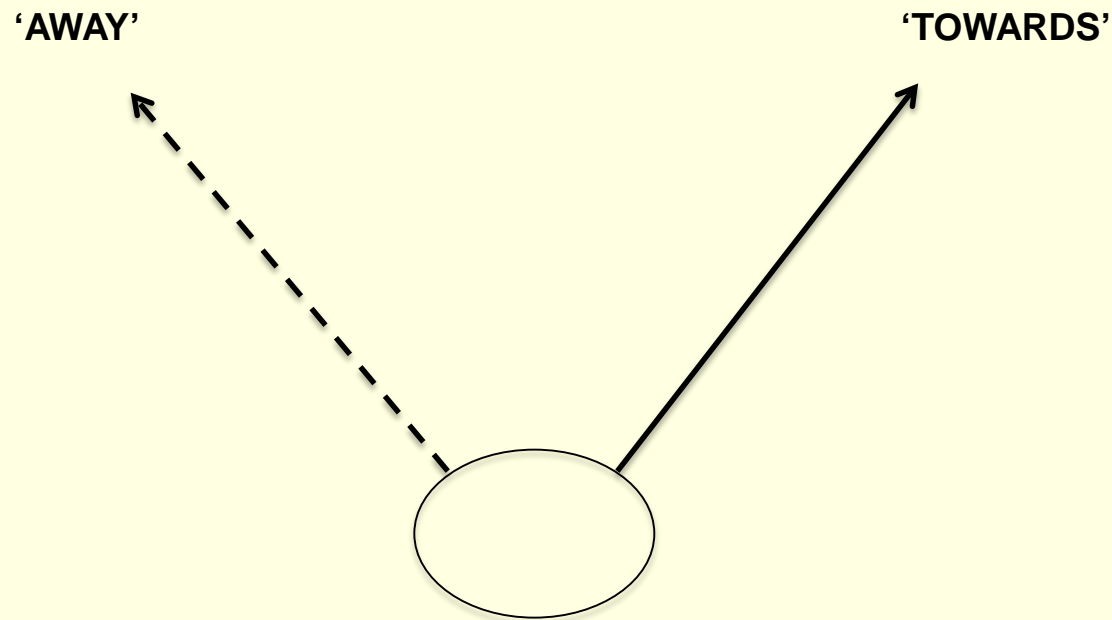
Ask clearly for what you want (& explain why) –
video description, non-judgmental

Express clearly what you don't want (& why) –
video description, non-judgmental

Be clear about boundaries & consequences --
video description, non-judgmental

Key Issues: Communication 101

Speak in a way that works to build the relationship – body language/voice/ vocab



Win-win options:

- Ideal: outcome meets both partner's needs
- Exchange: tit for tat
- Take turns
- Relative importance
- Willing sacrifice

Draw-Draw: Compromise

Lose-lose options:

- DRAIN
- In relationships, there is no 'win-lose' option
- A 'win' for one partner = a 'lose' for the relationship



Key Issues: Solutions

Win-win solutions are ideal, but not always possible

E.g. one wants a child, the other doesn't

Shift from a specific goal/outcome to brainstorming multiple ways of meeting both partner's needs on an ongoing basis

Recommended reading: *Getting To Yes*

Key Issues: Solutions

Some problems are unsolvable

Validate 'reality gap' & facilitate compassion

Challenge formula: 4 approaches to any problematic situation

How can I get some of my needs met, even though I can't get the specific outcome I want?

Acceptance & grieving

Values

- Ideal vs reactive partner
- Mindfulness of the hand
- Anniversary speech (p17)
- Perfect Partner (p 19)

The 3Cs

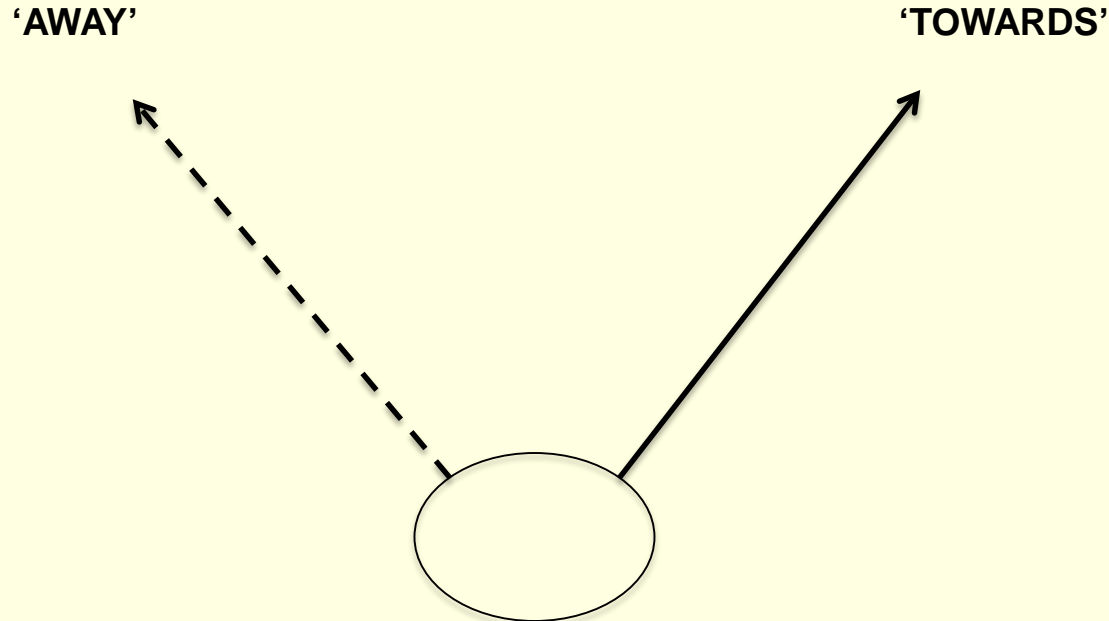
- Connection
- Caring
- Contribution

Sharing Values

- In session or on a date
- Mindful listening

Values to Actions p 18

What's a small step/ little thing you could do?



Reinforce Workable Changes

If your partner does that, what difference would it make to you?

How will you let your partner know that?

If client makes workable changes:

- What was that like for you?
- What happened to your relationship?
- What's another little step?

If no workable changes:

- What was that like for you?
- What happened to your relationship?
- **What got in the way?**
- **FEAR => DARE**

Key Issues: Willingness

- Willingness versus wanting to change
- Values-driven versus fused/avoidant change. E.g.?

Examples of fused/avoidant change

- resentful change
- guilt-induced change
- trying to 'keep her happy'
- trying to 'put up with him'
- trying to stop him from leaving
- trying to stop her from yelling
- others?

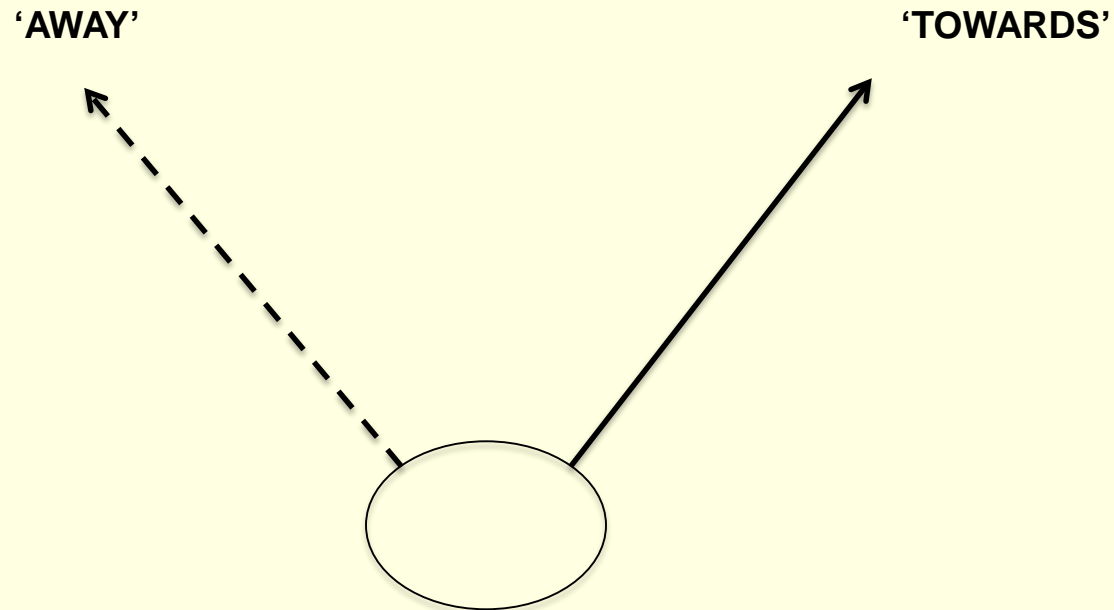
- Name your tactics
- Name your 'pet arguments'
- Agree to notice and name them
- With humour, kindness, respect!!!

S.T.O.P. Conflict In Session

- ***Slow down:*** Slow down your breathing; Slowly push your feet down into the floor; Slowly press your fingertips together
- ***Take note:*** Where are you? What are you doing? What are your thoughts and feelings?
- ***Open up:*** Breathe into the feeling; name the story; ‘bring up the lights on the stage show’.
- ***Pursue values:*** What sort of partner do you want to be?

Key Issues: Conflict

- Workability rules!



Conflict

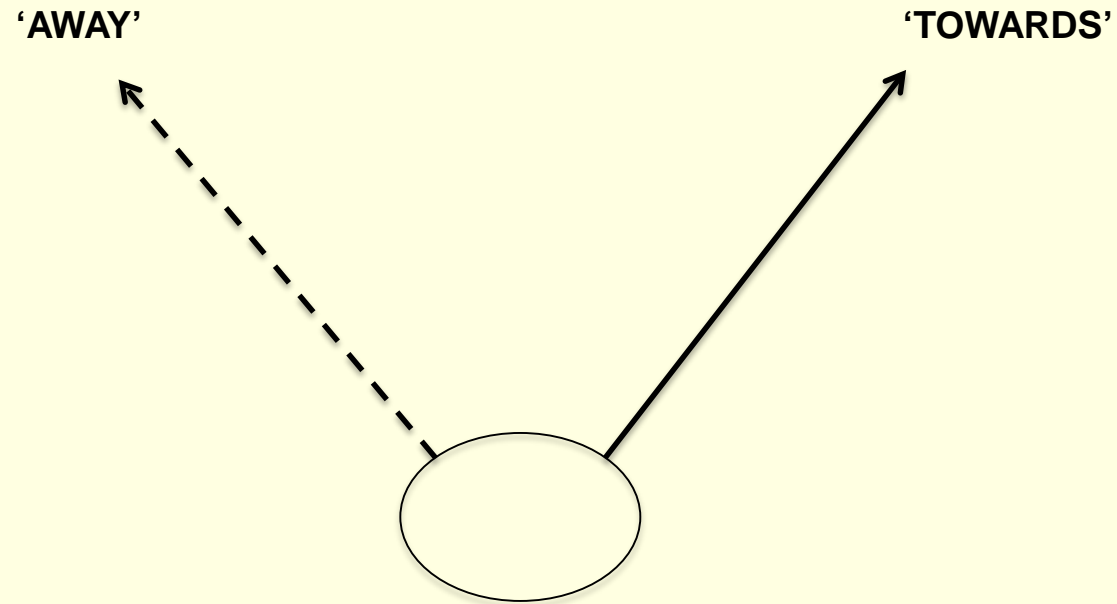
- What judgments does your mind make about him/her?
- What happens if you buy those judgments?
- I'm having the thought that ..
- Naming the story
- Putting it on a card
- Silently saying to yourself 'Judging'

Key Issues: Conflict

- Being right versus being loving
- “I’m right; you’re wrong” exercise

Key Issues: Conflict

- Superior/inferior stories



Clench Fist: Defusion Exercise

- A 'Right/Wrong' or 'Not Good Enough' story



Clench Body: Acceptance Exercise

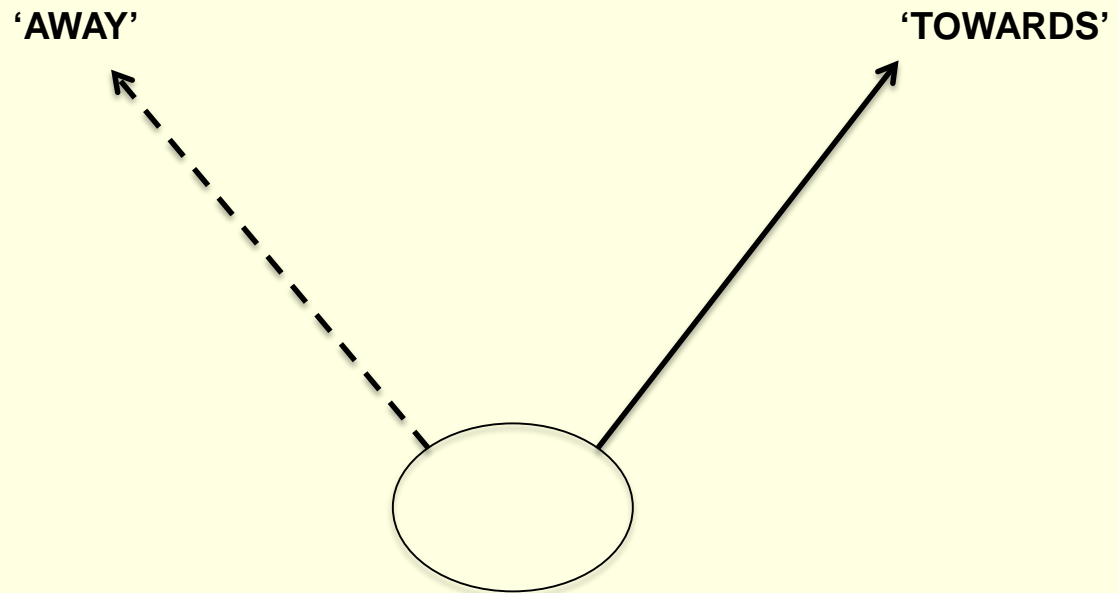
- Locate a painful feeling
- Clench your body around it: tense muscles, use arms and hands and legs
- Unclench; release tension
- Expand awareness

Conflict: Values Versus Rules

- What are your rules?
- What are your partner's rules?
- (How old are they? Where did they come from?)

Rules

- What happens when you get hooked?



Defusion of Rigid rules:

- Expect them
- Notice them
- Name them
- Unhook

Staying on track: 3 cards exercise

- Card 1: Values we want to live by while we discuss this
- Card 2: ONE specific issue, and what we hope to get from discussing it; the desired outcome for both partners
- Card 3: Unhelpful tactics/stories that maintain conflict

Set-up For 3 Cards

- Both partners willing to work hard?
- Both know this is a skills-building exercise?
- Have both have had ample opportunity to talk about their difficulties in earlier sessions?
- Do we have permission to press pause?

- T: Involves learning a powerful circuit-breaker – in other words how to pause what you're doing – how to stop talking and take a break for a few seconds to calm down - even when really worked up or upset - so you can change your behavior to do something more workable.
- T: This is an essential but tricky skill to learn. I will frequently interrupt you both. When I do this, it often triggers feelings of frustration.
- T: At times you may really want to speak your piece – but learning how to interrupt yourself, how to stop yourself from speaking when what you're saying is unhelpful - is a very valuable skill.
- T: You will probably feel frustrated if interrupt you – but it's a really valuable skill to learn how to have these difficult feelings, yet still do things that are workable with your arms and legs and mouth.

Aims In 3 Cards Exercise

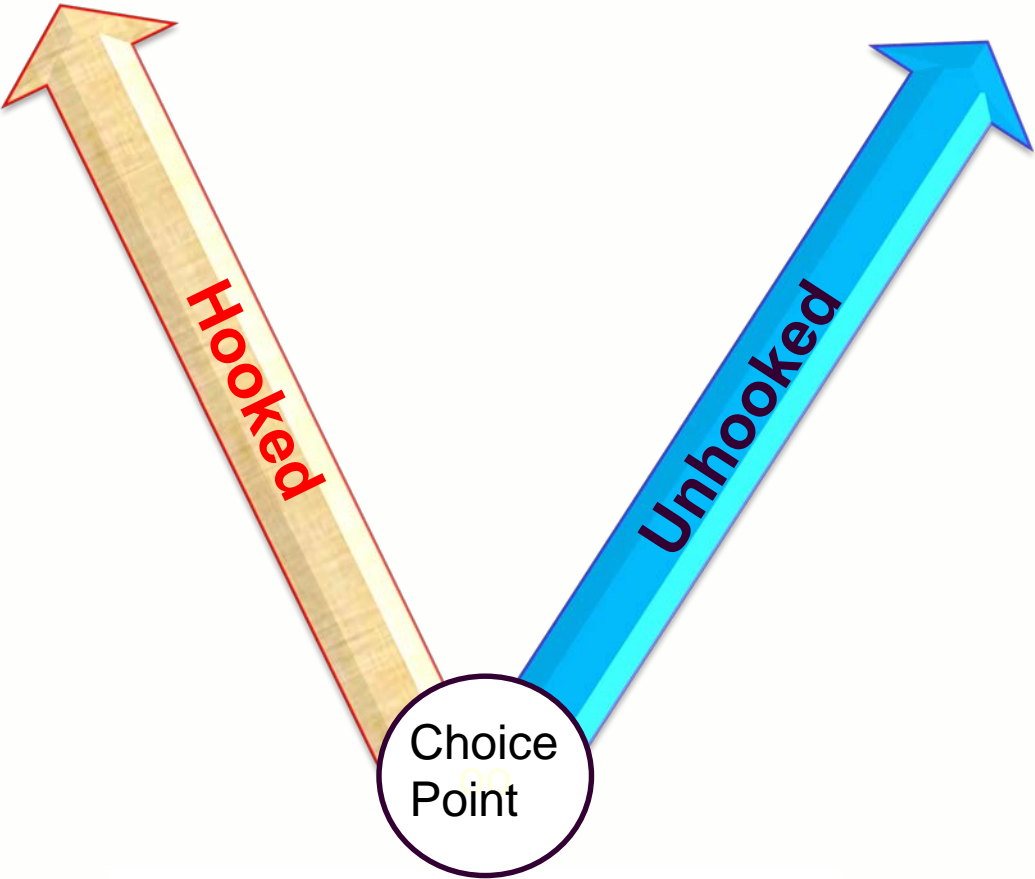
- Train the mindful “circuit-breaker”
- Instigate & reinforce workable behavior: ‘towards’ moves
- Raise awareness of unworkable behavior (‘away moves’) – N.B. body language, facial expression, tone of voice, language
- Experiential Role Play – get clients to experiment with different types of communication, verbally and non-verbally, and notice the effects
- If necessary, teach ‘communication 101’ e.g. ‘I’ statements

Aims In Three Cards Exercise

- Compassionately and respectfully interrupt any form of ‘lifeless storytelling’, ‘unworkable venting’, judging, criticising, blaming, aggression, contempt etc - and explore the effects it is having on **both** partners
- Ask the person to switch to more workable communication:
- What the specific issue is, with ONE specific example (no more!!!!)
- How it affects you: I feel X
- What you would like your partner to do differently: I’d like you to ...

AWAY

TOWARDS



**Situation(s)
Thoughts & Feelings**

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Repair attempts (John Gottmann)

- Tiniest step that might repair some damage?
- Make sure both partners agree on them!!!
- **Acknowledge & accept** repair attempts

Repairing Damage

- Conflict into compassion
- Vulnerability and openness
- Drop the story
- Share the emotion

Reframing Problems

- How can I grow?
- What can I learn?
- Imagine partner as a personal trainer or coach
- You have hired this person to help you grow
- What skills can you learn?
- What strengths can you develop?

Key Issues: Aggression

- 'Anger Management'?
- Run through: Triggers, Behaviour, Payoffs

Is there a wound beneath your armour?

— Peel it back, take a look.

Self-compassion

Key Issues: Calming down

- S.T.O.P.
- Acting calm versus feeling calm: which do you have most control over?
- If necessary leave the situation
- If you do leave the situation: defuse from unhelpful stories, self-compassion, grounding

Key Issues: Calming down

Once grounded, ask yourself

- What sort of partner do I want to be? What are my values here?
- If I could be that ideal partner, I would ...

Key Issues: Relapse

- Inevitability
- When your partner screws up, how will you respond?
- When you screw up, how will you respond?

Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

- Follow all legal obligations & be transparent about it.
- After that, it is up to the client to decide.
- The extreme case: domestic violence.

Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

- If client's request conflicts with your ethics?
- Declare it!
- State what you can and can't do

Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

- You can share your feelings, in a defused, open, accepting, non-judgmental manner - but do not try to *enforce* your beliefs on the client.
- Deal with your own stuff!

Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

- Focus on building the therapeutic relationship and making a safe space for the client.
- Help clients increase their psychological flexibility.
- Then let them choose for themselves.

Key Issues: Affairs

- Metaphor: it's like taking drugs
- To avoid pain & gain pleasure
- Relationship problems don't **cause** affairs
- Affair = a personal choice (like taking drugs)

Affairs: Both Partners

- Validate pain
- Full disclosure or not?
- Discuss pros and cons
- If yes, ensure it is 'once off', not lingering on

Affairs: The Unfaithful Partner

- Resilience formula: 4 options
- Take responsibility
- Acknowledge personal choice
- Genuine apology
- Make amends

Affairs: The Betrayed Partner

- Resilience formula: 4 options
- What can your partner do to make amends?
- Normalise the desire to know 'why'
- No explanation is likely to be satisfying
- Can you accept an apology?
- How can you both rebuild?

- Action of trust vs 'feeling' of trust
- No control over 'feelings' of trust – only over the actions.
- Balance values: trusting & self-protection

- Mindful trust Vs Blind trust. Look for?
- Sincerity
- Reliability
- Responsibility
- Competence
- Respect

Actions Vs Feelings of Trust

- Feelings of trust are out of your control
- What are small actions of trust you can take?
- Mindfully assess what happens!
- How can you honour your values around self-protection?
- How can your partner demonstrate trustworthiness?

- Acceptance of time involved
- Acceptance of both partners' emotional reactions
- Self-compassion for both
- Compassion for each other
- This will never be forgotten!
- Commitment to working on the relationship

Key Issues: Forgiveness

- **Give** yourself what was there **before**
- Anger & resentment – costs of fusion
- Respond with mindfulness

Forgiveness Ritual

Each partner writes:-

The thoughts, feelings/ memories I've been holding on to are ...

How holding on has hurt me & our relationship:

Forgiveness Ritual

Commitment to letting all this old stuff come and go without holding on to it

Choose a special place, read it out, do something symbolic (e.g. burn it & scatter the ashes) then do something to connect lovingly

Parting Words

“For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of our tasks; the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke