



## **AN INVITATION TO BE REAL**

If I come to the communication with expectations, demands and ready-made solutions, I am not going to create room for open sharing of vulnerable feelings and thoughts. I am more likely to project my own story onto to the moment and as a result, not learn what *your* experience is. Much of the time, I am just talking to an imaginary you that I have created in my own mind, rather than give myself the opportunity of actually learning about what is really happening for you. I approach the communication in this way, because I am afraid of not getting what I want. I am trying to control you instead entering into the process of genuinely communicating with you.

Relationships break down when we fall into trying to control each other, which we are doing to avoid our own vulnerabilities. Feeling free and comfortable enough to be vulnerable with one another is the heart of relationship intimacy. It means we are accepting each other unconditionally to a high degree, which means we are making the relationship a sanctuary for one another.

We can only achieve and maintain this mutual sanctuary of acceptance by first accepting our own human vulnerabilities, our own fears and insecurities, in other words, which also means accepting full responsibility for learning how to compassionately open our heart/awareness to our own vulnerabilities and process them, like a loving parent looking after their own child. Our own mind is now our own child. If we don't know how to be there for ourselves, we won't learn how to create that sanctuary space for one another, which

is where we feel accepted and free to be whoever we are in the moment, as well as being free to grow and change. This acceptance of our humanness and accepting personal responsibility for caring for our own humanness becomes the foundation of our own self-worth, self-esteem and integrity that we can bring to the relationship, rather than expecting the relationship to provide it. We can then put more into the relationship than what we take from it.

It does not work to treat each other as our parent, so we don't have to deal with our own fears and insecurities. When we do that, we end up trying to conduct the relationship from the confused childhood conditioning where we didn't learn how to care for our own mind. As a result, we become emotionally dependent on one another, unconsciously holding each other responsible for shielding us from our own confusion that is causing our own fears and insecurities, that in turn cause us to emotionally react in fear-based ways. We then start to expect and depend on the other to not be human like us, which of course is impossible. When we get caught in this sort of expectation, we set ourselves up to be disappointed by our partner's inevitable humanness and become triggered into fight-or-flight reactions where we project blame and anger onto one another.

From the awareness that we gain from learning how to face, open our heart to and process our own vulnerabilities, we come to see that communication isn't about projecting a set of assumptions, expectations and demands onto one another, it is instead a process of open interaction underpinned by mutual acceptance. There are times when we need to address something that isn't working in the relationship, but here we need to understand that two different people are entering this communication space, who have different perceptions, needs, confusions, vulnerabilities, stories, personal histories and so on. Therefore, communication needs to be a process that accepts and makes space for each person's thoughts and feelings and to be heard without interruption or judgement. Each person is going to be processing the same information differently. Something may be easy for you to understand or let go of, but your partner may have some complex trauma, for example, to work through, that is being triggered by the dynamic that you are trying to work through. This makes their level of confusion much more dense than yours, and means they are going to take longer to work it through. When we expect our partner's process to be like our own, we can be prone to getting impatient and angry, assuming that our partner does not care about us. In fact, while working through the issue, which may take a few days or weeks, our partner may struggle to keep their heart open

at times because of the past emotional wounds that they are working through. The more we understand how vulnerable our own humanness can be and how challenging it can be to work through our own issues, the more we can understand and hold the space of patience and acceptance for our partner when they are working through their own vulnerabilities. Of course, this is not going to work if we blame our fears and insecurities on one another, or just keep avoiding them. Here we are not only abandoning our responsibility toward our relationship, we are abandoning our care for our own humanness. So doing what we need to do to care for our own minds, including educating ourselves about self-care and reaching out for help when needed, is essential for caring for our relationship.

Another important factor to be aware of when wanting to address an issue with your partner is that you may have been thinking about this issue for some time, but when you address it with your partner, it is not something that they have been thinking about. They may be preoccupied in a completely different headspace. It is going to take some time for them to adjust and be able to focus on what you have to say. This expectation that our partner be in the same headspace as us when we approach them is a very common problem in relationships and all communication situations.

Therefore an appropriate approach could be:

**“I need to talk to you about what happened last night. Is now a good time, or is there a better time for you?”**

To prepare for the communication, we first need to take responsibility for our own reactions and expectations. We then need to spend some time processing them so we can enter into the communication consciously. Let's say you are my partner and I am talking to you. An authentic way of communicating is to begin with a description of where I am in my process of sorting out my thoughts and feelings around a particular issue. Note the “I” statements, where I am owning my thoughts and feelings. I am avoiding drawing any conclusions about what is going on for you, because I can only know what is going on in my own mind, and even that can be a challenge.

For example:

**“When you said those things to me I found myself reacting to it. I found I was left sad and angry, but I am not sure why. Since**

**thinking about it and trying to get in touch with my feelings, I have gained a little bit of insight, which I would like to share with you. I would also like to know what you were feeling at the time, because I am still a little confused.”**

It is hard, of course, to be this eloquent in the moment. If you struggle to stay aware in the moment, so it is helpful to write it down first and have that with you when you say it. You can even read what you have written if you need to in order to get yourself past your old programming.

It is so important to emphasize that you are both human. Mutual acceptance means that you are not going to expect yourself and each other to communicate perfectly. You will each do your best to listen and try to understand each other without jumping to conclusions, as you each do your best to explore your thoughts as you talk it out, not necessarily knowing what you want to say or how to say it. Communication is a process of patient, mindful interaction, that eventually leads to a common understanding. It can take time. To learn more about this mindful approach to communication, investigate the process called “active listening”, and also non-violent communication or NVC. Don’t be put off by the title of that one – it is actually teaching you positive and compassionate communication skills.

This genuine description of where you are in the moment leaves the space open for further communication. You have done your best to not revert to blaming. Rather, you have chosen to parent your own emotions by connecting to and caring for your vulnerable human self. Some of this negative energy is still bound to remain and you may still feel victimized at one level or another, but you are willing to give your partner the benefit of the doubt. You are willing to consider that there is generally more to an issue than is reflected in your emotional reactions. Your willingness to approach your partner in this way demonstrates how you would like your partner to come to you when you unwittingly say something insensitive, or accidentally push that big red button labeled “rejection complex”, for example. A complex is another name given to an unconscious thought-pattern or program or conditioning that distorts the mind’s ability to perceive accurately, something we can bring into awareness and heal through this process of developing conscious-awareness and mindful communication.

Here is another example of mindful communication. Again, let’s

assume we are in a relationship:

**“I have been thinking about an issue I have had in our relationship for some time. I would like to sit down with you and tell you about it. I need some things to change in our relationship but I want to give you a chance to understand my needs and then have a think about it.”**

Here you are letting your partner know that you have an issue, that you want to make a time to talk about it and also that you are prepared to give your partner time to think about it.

Sometimes issues are too big or complex to sort out in one go. Being willing to work through the issue in stages, over a period of time, is very important. It is acknowledging that both parties have the right to spend time processing the issue. It is also important for you to consider that your partner may have some important input on the matter that you may not have considered. When approached in this way, you are more likely to feel respected and in control of your own process. Both yourself and your partner will have a better chance of discussing the issue in a relaxed and loving manner.

Our fear-driven egos, that want it all to be black and white and resolved straight away, tend to fall into blaming, demanding and accusing. While we are still human beings, wherever we go, so does our fear-based ego. Therefore, we are always going to be struggling within our own self to find appropriate and effective ways to communicate in the moment. Within any healthy relationship, this is understood and accepted. Perfection is not expected. Some initial confusion, negative emotion and miscommunication is seen as an inevitable consequence of being human. We are each responsible for doing our best to be aware of our own reactions and regain mindfulness as soon as we can.

When a time to communicate about an important issue is mutually arranged, all concerned are more likely to approach the communication in a constructive way, providing we are each taking ownership and doing our best to process our own fears and insecurities and not falling into holding each other responsible for our vulnerabilities. With this approach, we can each have time to consciously prepare and take care of our respective vulnerabilities. We will each feel more in control and empowered. Using this open and patient approach described here will better ensure that potential conflict is appropriately managed and damaging consequences

avoided. Our relationship can be opportunity to become more aware of past emotional wounds and heal them, rather than project them onto one another and therefore create more pain, suffering and confusion.

### **An Invitation to be Real Summary**

- ♥ Communication around a sensitive issue needs to be invited, not demanded.
- ♥ Mutually agreeing on a time to communicate around a sensitive issue helps each person feel more in control and empowered.
- ♥ Allowing your partner time to process his or her thoughts and feelings around the issue is important for creating harmony in the communication.
- ♥ Your partner may have something important to offer the discussion that you may not have considered.
- ♥ Processing an issue often needs to be taken in stages.
- ♥ Taking responsibility to process your reactions and expectations around a sensitive issue before you talk things over helps you to approach the communication consciously.
- ♥ Freely admitting your vulnerability right from the start helps to set the tone for open and honest communication.
- ♥ You need to be mindful to communicate with your partner in a way that you would like your partner to communicate with you.
- ♥ You both have the right to be human. Our attempts to communicate mindfully are naturally going to be clumsy at times. When we accept ourselves and each other while doing our best to be responsible for our own minds, we can be patient with our partner's attempts to communicate, and as the communicator, we can allow ourselves to have a go and learn from the experience.

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## **Changing the Old Program**

### **Inviting Communication**

1. Spend time contemplating how you can incorporate these skills into your relationship communication, for example:
  - using an invitation to talk
  - being honest about your vulnerability
  - allowing the other person time to process the issue.
2. Practice communicating in this way by writing down examples and trying them out with friends as well as with your partner, if your

partner is open to it.

3. You can also try communicating in the old non-constructive ways just to experience the difference. Let yourselves have fun with it.
4. Explore different ways to communicate using these skills and let your feelings guide you with regard to what works.