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At Home Communication Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to increase communication, and, by doing so increase the aliveness and understanding in your relationships. Partners, in mate relationships, create greater intimacy, vulnerability and sharing, in addition to deeper bonding and increased sexuality. This exercise impacts all your important relationships by creating greater mutual respect, understanding, growth and aliveness.

1. Schedule and set aside in advance two half-hour periods of time on different days/nights; one for you and one for your partner. Make this a top priority, no canceling. Also decide in advance who will share and who will create the safe space on each night.
2. One of you will be sharing the entire half-hour and one will be creating a safe space the entire time during each session. This may seem like a long time, but the time will go quickly once you feel comfortable with the process. In fact, don't be surprised if you mutually decide to extend the time after you become familiar with the process.
3. If the one who is sharing has difficulty continuing for the entire time, the facilitator may ask questions or help the person who is sharing to focus. Any questions should be completely free from the facilitator's agenda or needs. Questions should not reflect value judgments. No facial expressions that reflect the listener's views or any personal "need to know" that the facilitator may be feeling during the session. When the speaker is talking, the space and time belongs solely to him or her. (Like the Indian talking stick exercise)
4. This is not a fault-finding mission. This is a time to express feelings and thoughts from an "I" space. No defending, demanding, ultimatums, no blame i.e. "you make me feel."
5. No matter what is said by the speaker, the listener responds "as if" the content has nothing to do with him or her. Act as if you are listening to a stranger with compassion, but without personal concern or the need to interject your personal agenda.
6. When you are finished, ask yourselves these questions:
 - a. What did you hear me say?
 - b. Did we do the process effectively?
 - c. Which questions took us out of the process?
 - d. Which questions took us deeper into the process?
 - e. How can we do it better?
7. Discuss ways in which the process could be improved. Do not discuss content unless mutually agreed.

IS IT WORKING?

When the process is working you will experience a **real connection** that includes genuine caring, compassion, informational exchange that is meaningful and authenticity.

When the process is not working you will experience sarcasm, disconnectedness, arguing, silence, ignoring, defensiveness and fault finding.

TOOLS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION

1. Listening Tools are: Silence, questions and facilitating statements. DO NOT TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY. Listen without judgment, without reference to self, without facial expressions that indicate you're feeling, disapproval or even positive responses. Just be a non-judgmental, compassionate presence that acts as a mirror.
2. Speak from an "I" space telling the other about yourself, your feelings, NOT about what they are doing wrong.
3. Honor whatever the other person says as truth for him or her and be accepting that it FEELS like fact to him or her. Discover "How" it is that it is true for them.
4. Be genuine in your level of presence to the process and to your partner. Be genuine in your interest. Become curious and seek understanding not change.
5. Act trustworthy. Never repeat intimate dialog without permission or use vulnerable information as a weapon when angry or hurt.
6. Don't take responsibility for the other person's reality. If your partner says they are lonely - don't assume it has anything to do with you. Just find out how it feels to them to be feeling whatever they are feeling.
7. Ask question to clarify and feed back what you think you are hearing to make sure you understand when in doubt. Do not assume you know the other person well enough to know what they are thinking and feeling no matter how *well* you think you know him or her.
8. Do not manipulate or be manipulated. Do not submit, become compliant, withdraw, agree in order to avoid conflict or *act as if* you understand. All of these are insulting and dismissing. Create trust by assuming you and your partner really want to hear each other.
9. Continue even if you find you are working from totally different sets of reality. If you say the wall is blue and your partner says it is green, simply find out how it is that they see the wall as green and continue trying to understand until you are able to share an understanding of what they feel even if you don't agree.
10. Do not criticize. Even if you feel you are offering constructive criticism, you are still criticizing and therefore you are telling someone they are wrong and should change. Instead, simply state what *you* want and how *you* feel.
11. Do not retaliate. In order to achieve really deep levels of communication, trust must be established. If people get punished or are made to feel about how they feel, soon the sharing will stop. Give each other a safe non-judgmental place to feel everything.
12. Don't withdraw. If anger comes up simply take a break to cool off. Don't leave the area, the process, or each other Anger is a normal, natural feeling. How you process it and what you do with it can be either positive or negative. Once you have allowed for a cooling off period return to the process. Do this as many times as necessary to avoid letting anger escalate and to return and resolve the issue.