

Steps for Effective Dialogue

Communication covers every possible way we can interact whether verbal or non-verbal. We may communicate well or poorly, but we cannot not communicate.

Three effective processes that support communication between people are: **mirroring, validation, and empathy.**

Mirroring is the process of accurately reflecting back the content of a message from one party to the other. The most common form of mirroring is paraphrasing. A paraphrase is a statement in your own words of what the message the speaker sent means to you.

Mirroring indicates to the speaker that you are willing to transcend your own thoughts and feelings for the moment in an attempt to understand your partner from his or her point of view. Any response made prior to mirroring is often an interpretation of what has been said and often contains a misunderstanding.

The intention in mirroring is that each person has an opportunity to send his or her message and for it to be paraphrased until it is clear that the message has been understood and accurately received.

Validation is a communication to the sending partner that the information being received and mirrored makes sense. It indicates that you can see the information from your partner's point of view and can accept that it has validity—it is true for the speaker. Validation is a temporary suspension or transcendence of your point of view which allows your partner's experience to have its own reality.

Typical validation phrases are: "I can see that...," "What you are saying makes sense to me...," "I can understand that you would think..." etc. Such phrases convey to the speaker that his or her subjective experience is not crazy, that it has its own logic, and that it is a valid way of looking at things.

To validate your partner's message does not mean that you necessarily agree with his/her point of view or that it reflects your subjective experience. It merely recognizes the fact that in every situation, no objective view is truly possible. In any communication between two people there are always at least two points of view, and every report of any experience is an interpretation which is the "truth" for each person.

This material is adapted from Imago Therapy techniques developed by Harville Hendricks and available in his books *Getting the Love You Want* and *Keeping the Love You Find*.

The process of mirroring combined with validation increases trust and closeness between partners.

Empathy is the process in which the listening partner reflects or imagines the feelings the sending partner is experiencing about the situation being reported. In this deep level of communication, you attempt to recognize, reach into, and on some level, experience the emotions your partner is sending. Empathy allows both partners to transcend, perhaps for a moment, their separateness and to experience a genuine "meeting." Such an experience has potential for tremendous healing.

Typical phrases for empathic communication include: "I can imagine that you might feel...," "When you experience that I hear/understand that you feel...," and "That must feel really awful."

An example of using the 3 processes in effective dialogue might go something like this:

"So if I understand you correctly, you are saying that if I don't look at you when you are talking to me, you think that I am disinterested in what you are saying. I can understand that, it makes sense to me. I can imagine that you would feel rejected and angry. That must be a terrible feeling."

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