

Repair Exercise for Couples

Step 1: Express How You Felt During This Event

The goal of this step is to only list the feelings you felt during this event. Do not share why you felt this way and do not comment on your partner's feelings.

My partner went first and explained that she felt angry, unloved, not cared about, and overwhelmed. I shared that I felt misunderstood, unappreciated, and taken for granted, and that these feelings had made me stubborn.

Step 2: Share Your Realities and Validate Each Other

The next step is to choose a speaker and a listener. As the speaker, your goal is to share your own reality of what occurred during the regrettable event. Focus on using "I" statements and what you noticed ("I heard...," not "you told me") and what you needed during the event. Avoid criticizing your partner.

As the listener, focus on seeking to understand your partner's unique experience. Then summarize what you heard them say, not what you believed they meant, and **validate their experience by saying things like, "When I see things from your perspective, it makes perfect sense why you were so upset."**

After you validate your partner's experience, ask them, "Did I get it right?" If not, ask them to share what you're not understanding and continue to validate until they say yes.

It's also important to ask, "Is there more to this for you?"

Then switch roles. Do not move onto the next step until both partners feel understood.

Step 3: Disclose Your Triggers

Take turns as a speaker and listener and disclose what triggered a big reaction in you. Add any previous experiences of when you felt similar in the past, including during your early history or childhood, and share that with your partner, so your partner can understand this sensitivity.

Step 4: Take Ownership for Your Role

It's helpful to acknowledge the things that set us up for miscommunicating with each other, take ownership, and apologize. This step is about taking responsibility for your part in the conflict.

My partner shared that she had been stressed, irritable, and overly sensitive lately. She then mentioned that she regretted how critical she was of me and how she spoke to me. She then apologized for overreacting and attacking me.

Step 5: Preventative Planning

Have an open conversation with your partner and share one thing you could do to make discussing this issue better next time, and then share one thing you think your partner can do to make it better. Remember to make this a positive and actionable request, such as "I need to know more about what has been stressing you out lately," not "I need you to stop being a jerk."

It's important to ask, "What do we need to do to put this incident to rest so we can move on?" Focus on what you can agree on together.