



Couples Wellness Clinic

with Aviva Longinotti & Rick Longinotti, MFT

Week 1: Empathetic Listening

Goals:

Becoming skilled at connecting to our partner's feeling and needs
 Avoiding the habits of response that don't connect

Week 2: Self-empathy

Goals:

Reduce our habit of reacting with defensiveness by listening empathetically to our needs.
 Self empowerment through getting clearer about our needs versus strategies

Week 3 Expression

Goals:

Expressing ourselves in a way that is connected to our needs and free of judgment
 Making requests that are specific, do-able and free of coercion

Week 4: Putting it all together

Goals:

Integrating self empathy with empathetic listening and expression

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Feelings When Needs Are Met

Happy

joyful
delighted
glad
encouraged
loving

Grateful

thankful
touched
moved
appreciative

Content

calm
relaxed
fulfilled
satisfied
peaceful

Interested

fascinated
curious
enthusiastic
amazed
thrilled
excited
surprised

Feelings When Needs Are Not Met

Angry

frustrated
impatient
irritated
annoyed
furious
upset

Afraid

anxious
uneasy
suspicious
tense
worried
distressed

Ashamed

guilty
embarrassed
self-conscious
awkward
flustered

Sad

disappointed
discouraged
lonely
hopeless
depressed
mournful

Confused

puzzled
hesitant
conflicted
unclear

Misc

exhausted
overwhelmed
stressed
numb
shocked

Some Needs

Acceptance
Self-acceptance
Connection
Contribution or Giving
Empowerment

Enjoyment
Gratitude
Hope
Love
Safety

Self-awareness
Shared celebration
Support
Trust
Understanding

Listening With Empathy

We listen past any judgmental or distressed thinking to hear the person's needs. Our guessing at their feelings and needs lets the person know that we are not judging them.

"Are you feeling _____? (frustrated, conflicted, concerned, lonely, etc.)

"Because you want _____ and you need _____?"

What Empathy is Not

Example:

Your partner is upset, saying, "I can't believe that my boss finds fault with everything."

Advising

"You should go over her head to the higher-ups."

Consoling

"Now honey, don't feel bad, you're doing your best."

Interrogating

"What did you do that she was unhappy about?"

Correcting

"Maybe it's not personal. She's just got high standards for everybody."

Shifting the Attention

"That's happened to me so often! One time my boss said..."

Agreeing with Judgmental Thinking

"You're right, she's obsessive compulsive."

Reassuring

"You'll be okay, I'm sure."

Empathy Without Reinforcing Judgmental Thinking

When our partner is angry because he/she feels mistreated, the focus is on the bad behavior of the other person. To help our partner shift the focus to his or her needs, we guess at what those needs are.

Example of agreeing with judgmental thinking: *“Don't you wish you didn't have such an inconsiderate boss?”*

Example of guessing at feelings, wants and needs: *“Are you feeling discouraged? Do you want some understanding about the all the effort that you put into that project?”*



Don't Feed the Jackals

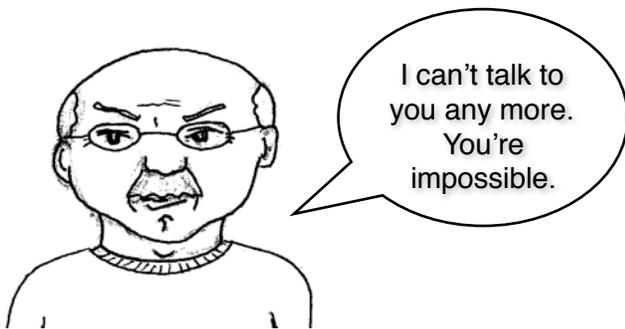
Thought of mistreatment	Possible feeling	Possible need
Misunderstood	Frustrated	understanding
Abandoned, neglected, rejected, left out	Lonely, scared, sad, bewildered	Connection, closeness, support, belonging, care
Attacked, blamed, criticized	Angry, scared, hurt, guilty	Safety, understanding
Betrayed	Angry, disappointed, confused, anxious	Trust, clarity, safety
Coerced, manipulated, pressured	Angry, anxious	Choice, autonomy, power to meet one's needs
Invisible, taken for granted	Sad, angry, disappointed	Appreciation/self-appreciation, connection
Put down, patronized	Angry, ashamed	Self-worth, connection as equals
Used	Angry, hurt, sad	Human connection, consideration

Pause....Take a time-out if necessary.

Communicating when angry is not likely to lead to a good outcome. The key to taking time out without fanning the flames is to take responsibility for my need to calm down, rather than blame my partner.

It helps to de-escalate if I offer my partner a time when I am willing to return to the discussion.

The Jackal Time-Out



Time out in Giraffe



Self Empathy

During the pause or time-out:

1. Notice judgment towards my partner.
2. Notice self-judgments.
3. Notice my feelings and my wants and going deeper, my needs.
4. Wonder about my partner's needs.

Using NVC in a Conflict

The Argument



Silent Self Empathy

1. Observe my judgmental thoughts without shame



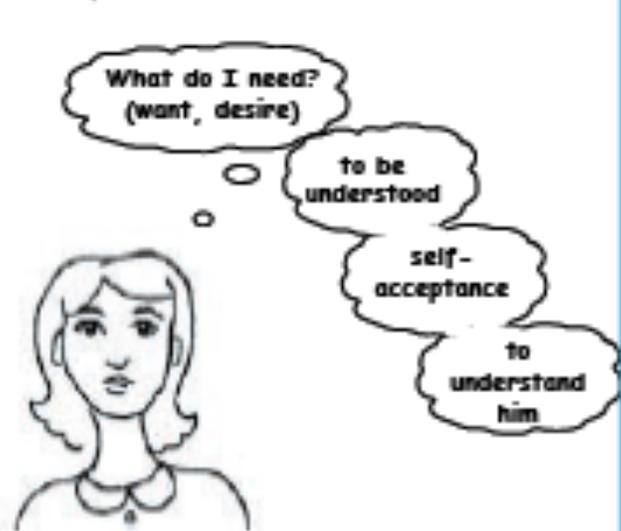
Silent Self Empathy

2. Look at what I'm feeling



Silent Self Empathy

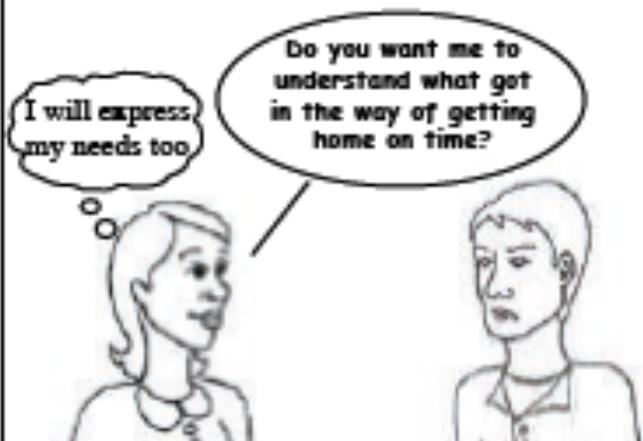
3. Look at my needs



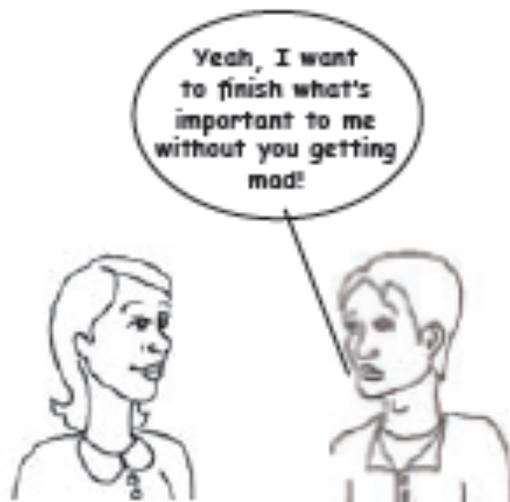
Silent Empathy for him



Expressing empathy for him



Listening with empathy



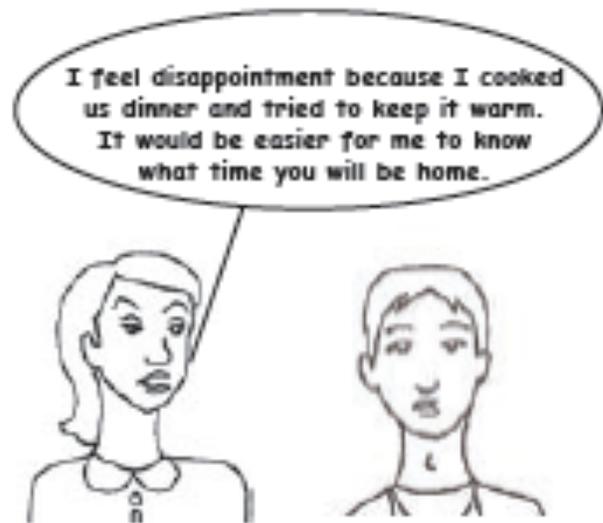
Empathetic guessing



Request for understanding



Expressing feelings and needs



Action request



Expressing gratitude



Transforming Negative Self-Judgments

I'm too:

Possible needs:

Angry	Understanding. Some confidence that my needs can be met.
Irritable	Lower stress. Peacefulness in spite of challenges
Nagging	Expressing my requests in a way that they can be better understood.
Selfish	Notice that the other's needs are not in competition with mine.
Inconsiderate	Mindfulness: noticing what is occupying my attention.
Talk too much	Intimacy: desire to connect.
Can't express	Connection; desire to overcome obstacles to open up to others
Controlling	Reassurance that my needs can be met (or that I'll be OK if they are not)
Submissive	Harmony; honoring my own needs as well as my partner
Sensitive	Self-acceptance; remembering my value
Insensitive	Awareness of my intentions--- noticing my care for my partner
Fearful	Security
Selfish	Awareness of what unmet need gets in the way of my natural generosity
Emotional	Acceptance of my reactions
Incompetent	More skill. Acceptance of my current level of skill.
Not present	Mindfulness; desire to connect
Not smart enough	Appreciation for how my mind works
Lazy	Wishing I felt more energy. Wanting to understand my lack of motivation.
Crazy	Serenity. Acceptance of my reactions.

Truths to remember

"The most fun game humans know how to play is giving." –M. Rosenberg

Giving is my nature, and when I don't feel generous, it's because I'm blocked by some unmet need.

Every action of mine is meant to meet a need, using the strategies I've learned. My intentions are good.

If the consequences were bad, my strategy was mistaken.

Making mistakes means I'm human. I learned a strategy that doesn't work well. I can learn a better one.

Self-empathy Worksheet

From Anger (or Fear, Shame, Sadness etc.) to Awareness of Needs

1. **Observation** What did the person say or do that triggered my reaction?

Describe it without judgement, the way a video camera would capture it.

2. **Judgment Out** What are my judgments about the person?

3. **Judgment In** What are my judgments about myself?

4. **Feelings** What are all the feelings that I can detect?

5. **Empathy In** What did I want in that situation? What did I need? or What were my intentions?

6. **Empathy Out** What might the other person need?

7. **Request** What is a specific, do-able request I can make of myself or the other person?

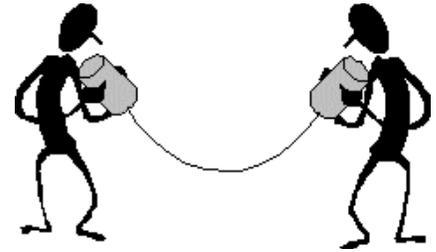
Truths to remember

“My intentions were good. If the consequences were bad, that means I used a mistaken strategy.”

“Making mistakes means I’m human, not worthless.”

“I learned a poor strategy. I can learn a better one.”

Expression



Before expression, self-empathy

What am I feeling and what do I need?

Do I have a request in mind?

Options when expressing:

1. Empathize with the other person, guessing at their feelings, wants and needs.
2. Expressing my own feelings, needs and requests.

Expressing my own feelings, needs, and requests:

1. **Observation:** Giving the context for my expression of needs and requests.

Just the facts, no judgment.

Example: “When you said, ‘I don’t like your idea...’ rather than “When you dissed my idea...”

Sometimes it makes sense to include a judgment, making it clear that it is our own interpretation.

Example: “When I see you drum on the steering wheel, I’m thinking that you’re getting sleepy...”

2. **Feeling:** Expressing emotion without adding a judgment

Example: “I feel nervous.” rather than “I felt like you aren’t being safe.”

3. **Need:** State the need motivating the request.

Example: “I want to feel more relaxed.”

4. **Request:** Make the request specific and do-able.

Example: “Would you be willing to stop and get a cup of coffee?” (a request for *action*)
or “Are you feeling tired?” (a request to *connect*)

Requests, Not Subtle Demands

Definition of a demand: “Do it, or else there will be a consequence.” (e.g. I will try to make you feel guilty)

We’ve learned to resort to invoking standards that contain subtle coercion rather than expressing our needs and asking for what we want. Examples of resorting to standards include:

- “The appropriate thing to do is ...
- “It’s only fair that you...
- “Reasonable people would agree that...
- “That’s not considerate...
- “That’s being over-sensitive...

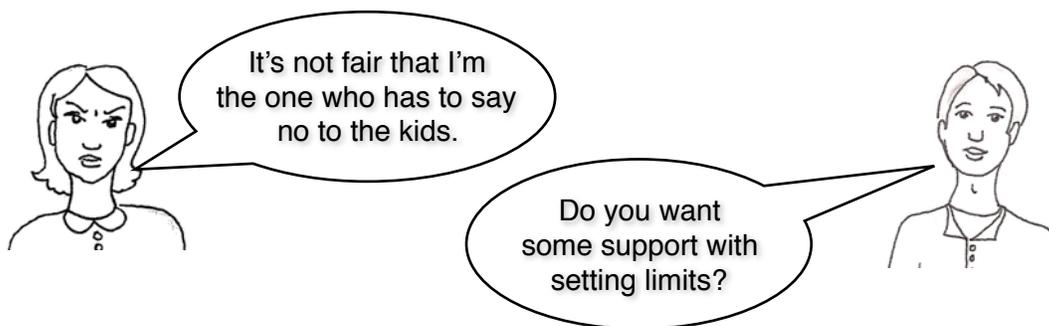
When we invoke standards we are relying on shame to motivate behavior. We are relying on “shoulds”, which can get results—but at a cost to our relationship.

Other common guilt-inducing approaches suggest that the other person is responsible for our reactions of hurt, anger, etc.

- “It would hurt me if you...
- “If you respected me you would ...
- “I’ll be disappointed if you...
- “I’ll be upset if you...

Responding to Subtle Demands

Listen past the coercion to guess at feelings and needs



From Obligation to Natural Giving

When we are motivated by obligation, we sow seeds of resentment.



Giving feels good.
When we lose touch with our natural generosity,
we need empathy to transform our judgments
into awareness of our needs.
When we understand ourselves — and our
partner, our judgments dissolve.



Enriching the Expression of Gratitude

Observation: State what the person did. Be specific.

Feeling: What feelings result from considering their words or action?

Need: State what those words or actions did to meet your needs.