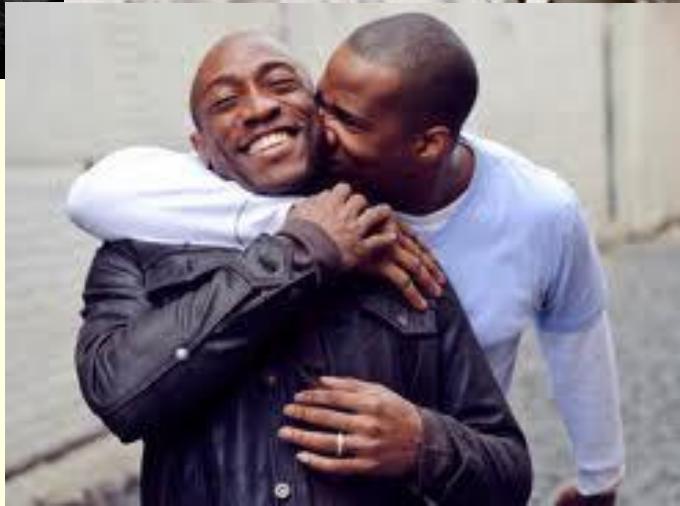


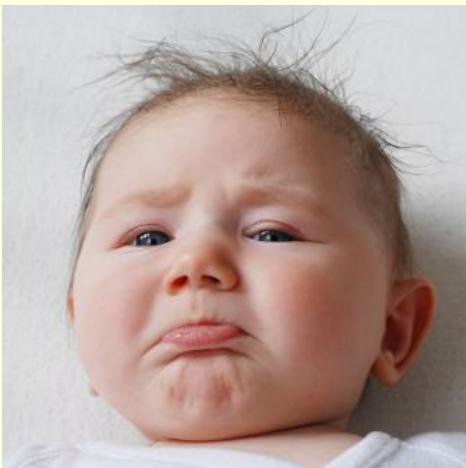
# ACT With Common Relationship Issues Russ Harris, 2013

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# Are relationships easy?





1. The perfect partner
2. It should be easy
3. Everlasting luurrve
4. You complete me

# Workshop Aims

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Day 1 – first half: setting up therapeutic contract, taking a history, basic principles for every session; reluctant partners; ‘stay-or-leave’ dilemmas

Day 1 – second half: intimacy; attachment; barriers to intimacy; compassion vs criticism; feedback vs blame/judgment; handling negative feedback

Day 2 – segment 1: how to accept what can’t be changed

Day 2 – segment 2: how to change what can be changed; effective communication & handling conflict.

Day 2 – second half: repairing; infidelity; trust; forgiveness; unacceptable behavior; (and if time, sexual issues)

W

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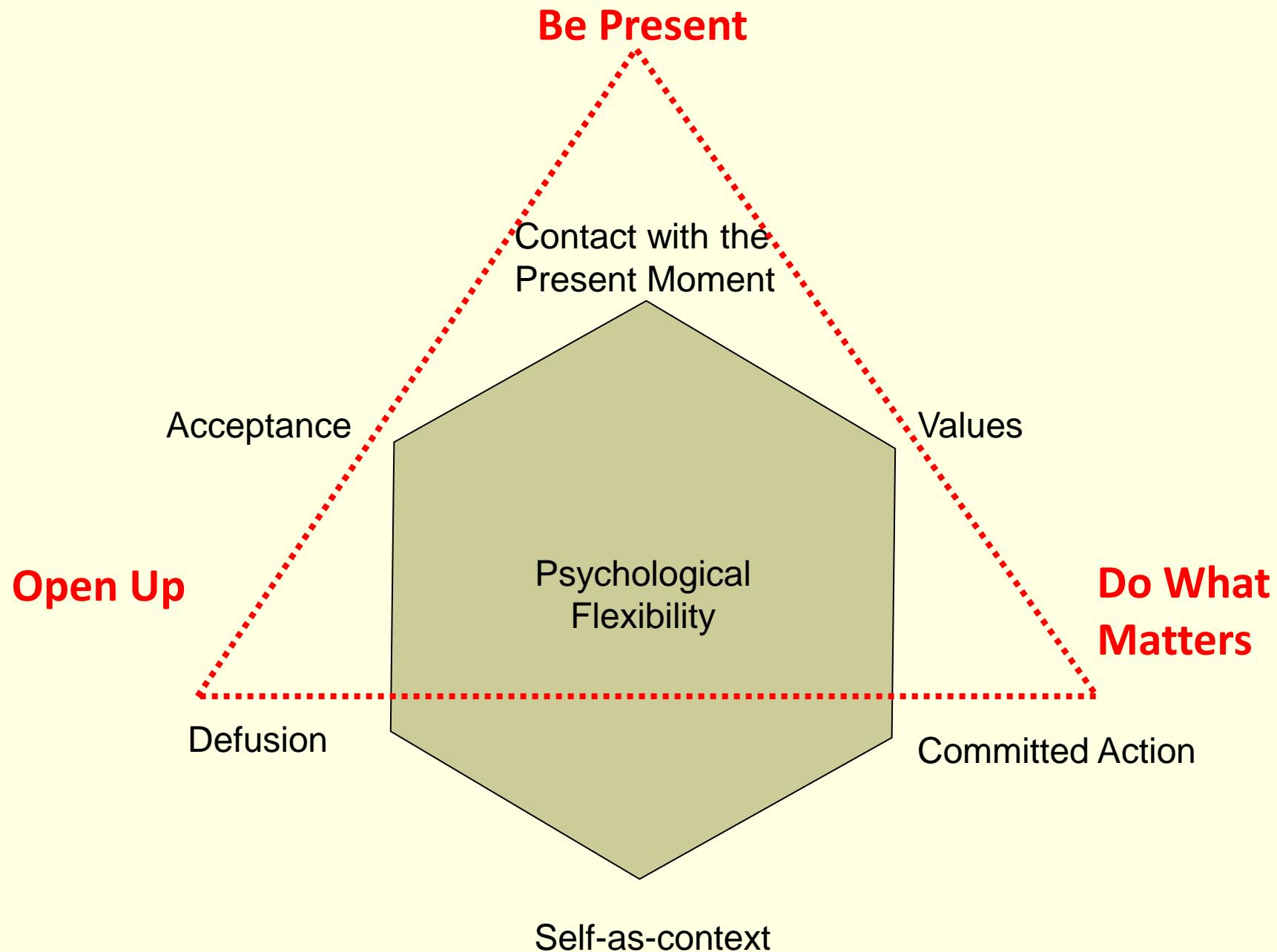


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# N.B. REPETITION IS GOOD!!!!

---

- Be curious
- What can you learn? How can you improve?



Engaging

Letting go  
Opening up  
Valuing  
Engaging

Psychological  
Flexibility

Letting go  
Opening up

Valuing



# DRAIN

---

- Disconnection
- Reactivity
- Avoidance of discomfort
- Inside-your-mind
- Neglecting values
- Fill in DRAIN form, page 7

# LOVE

---

How to (re)build a healthy relationship:

- Letting go
- Opening up
- Valuing
- Engaging

Engaging

Letting go  
Opening up  
Valuing  
Engaging

Psychological  
Flexibility

Letting go  
Opening up

Valuing

# INFORMED CONSENT: ACT

Learning new skills to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more effectively

Clarifying values: what sort of partner you want to be & what sort of relationship you want to build

Taking action: to solve your problems, to *influence your partner constructively*, and do things that make your relationship better

***Like learning to play guitar: needs practice in session and between***

THE WHOLE ACT MODEL RESTS ON ....?

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**Workability**

# Setting Up - Workability

---

Workability is the ultimate authority

Clients, not therapist, decide what is workable

*This approach is based on a concept called workability*

*'Workable' means it's working in the long term to give you the relationship you want*

*'Unworkable' means it's NOT working in the long term to give you the relationship you want. Might work short term to make you feel better or get your needs met, but long term it worsens the relationship.*

*Can I have permission to interrupt you and point out workable and unworkable ways that you are influencing each other?*

*When I interrupt you, I'll ask you to pause for a moment – stop speaking and just notice what you're feeling and thinking, and how you are behaving, and how that's affecting your relationship.*

*Of course, I can only make an educated guess about what's workable. You are the experts; you will tell me if it's workable or not.*

# ACT is based on Behaviour Analysis

---

***The ‘Three Term Contingency’:  
antecedents, behavior, consequences  
Reinforcement vs punishment***

## 'Triggers' (antecedents)

Situation

Thoughts

Feelings

**Mindfulness:**  
present moment,  
defusion, acceptance

**Situation:** heated argument with wife about drinking habits

**Thoughts & Feelings:**

'I can't stand this marriage'

Anger & anxiety

Righteousness: 'Who is she to tell me what to do?'

Urge to drink

## Behaviour

Something an organism does

Public or private

## Values & action

Drinks alcohol

## 'Payoffs' (reinforcing consequences)

Immediate outcomes that maintain the behaviour

Feeling of relief; painful thoughts, feelings, urges disappear

## Workability

## Payoffs versus costs

*Drinking problem worsens; tension in marriage worsens*

# 7 Common Reinforcing Consequences (payoffs) for Unworkable Behaviour

---

1. I avoid/escape an unpleasant situation/event
2. I avoid/escape unpleasant thoughts/feelings
3. I feel good
4. I gain attention
5. I get my needs met
6. I feel like I am ‘problem solving’
7. I feel like I am ‘making sense’ of things

**WORKABILITY:**  
payoffs VS costs

**'AWAY'**

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike* the person you want to be

**'TOWARDS'**

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving *like* the person you want to be

Difficult or Unhelpful  
Thoughts & Feelings

Values You Want To Live By  
& Skills/Strengths You Can Use

Mindful  
Pause

Challenging Situation

# The Mindful Pause

---

STOP

S – Slow down (slow your breathing down; slowly press your feet down )

T - Take note (notice your thoughts & feelings, & where you are & what you are doing)

O - Open up (make room for your thoughts & feelings & allow them to freely flow through you)

P - Pursue values (take action guided by your values)

# Behaviour Change 101

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# Behaviour Change 101

---

- Motivation: what motivates behaviour, and how can we change it?
- Positive reinforcement: how to change behaviour
- Negative reinforcement: how to change behaviour



# Behaviour Change 101



our, if  
o?

# Behaviour Change 101

---

- Ideal ratio of positive reinforcement to punishment?
- 5: 1
- What is the ratio in your relationship?

# In-session: Behaviour Change 101

---

In each session, therapist aims to:

- *Model, instigate, & reinforce* workable behavior
- *Undermine* unworkable behaviour
- Teach clients to do likewise.

# Workable In-Session Behaviour

---

What might we look for?

How might we reinforce it?

# Reinforcing Workable Behaviour

---

5 overlapping strategies:

1. Do you notice .....
  2. What is that like for you?
  3. How might this be helpful?
  4. What I notice .....
  5. What that is like for me .....
-

# Unworkable In-Session Behaviour

---

What might we look for?

How might we address it?

# Addressing Unworkable Behaviour

---

5 overlapping strategies:

1. Do you notice .....
  2. What is that like for you?
  3. How might this be *unhelpful*?
  4. What I notice .....
  5. What that is like for me .....
-

# Taking A History

**May decide to leave this part until later in some situations, e.g. if one partner has had an affair**

- What do you appreciate about your partner?
- What are his/her greatest strengths/qualities?
- What do you like to do together?
- What attracted you when you first met?

# Taking A History

---

Relationship history: how did you meet, what attracted you, wedding day etc.

What did you appreciate in your relationship & your partner back then?

What do you *not* want to change in your relationship?

# Taking A History

---

Can you pick just one recent event that represents the main issue(s)?

What have you tried so far to fix this? How did that work?

# Venting

---

Clients need to tell their story – important part of taking a history and building rapport

But beware old Freudian ideas of catharsis, often implicit in ‘supportive counselling’

When does ‘venting’ become unworkable?

.

# Venting

---

Therapist needs to make a judgment call on how much venting to allow.

If therapist listens mindfully, compassionately, respectfully, clients can quickly feel heard, understood and validated – N.B. brief therapy

While venting is happening, notice its effects on a) the client, b) the client's partner, and c) yourself. Is it making things better or worse?

# Venting

---

Look out for 'Lifeless storytelling'.

Look out for excessive blaming, ruminating, worrying, threatening, judging, criticising,

Look out for giving multiple examples when one or two are enough to make the point

# Venting

---

Ask both partners to notice how venting usually makes things worse in the relationship, not better

Have the person who is venting notice the effects of this behaviour on both self and other

# Venting

---

T: In the short term, venting makes you feels better because you get it off your chest

T: But in the long term your relationship will probably get worse, because when you speak in this way, your partner is likely to switch off.

T: And even if it does get your partner to listen, it's likely to come with long term costs to your relationship.

T: However, I could be wrong. When you speak like this at home, what effect does it usually have?

# Venting

---

T: So is it okay if we spend some time in these sessions helping you *both* to speak about your pain and your difficulties in a way that makes it easier for your partner to listen and respond - so that you are more likely to get your needs met in a way that *is healthy for the relationship*?

Is it okay if I interrupt each of you at times, and coach you in more effective ways of speaking? This will be frustrating for you, but it's an essential skill for better relationships.

# Venting

---

Explain why excessive venting is unworkable

Coach the client to:

Talk about their emotional pain

To be specific about the problem

To be specific about what they want

To notice when they are 'lost in the story' and come back to the room

# Taking A History

---

- What sort of workable and unworkable behaviour might we observe as we ask these questions?
- How could we reinforce the workable stuff?

# Taking A History

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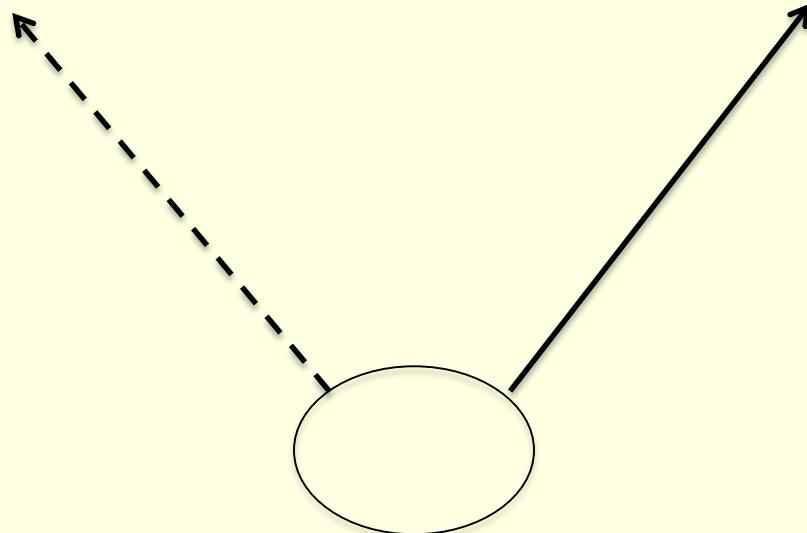
Model, instigate & reinforce factual description  
versus judgment & criticism

## ‘AWAY’

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike the person you want to be*

## ‘TOWARDS’

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving *like the person you want to be*



# Taking A History

---

‘Differences versus defects’ (Jacobson, ICBT)

Evaluate the behaviour, not the person

# Taking A History

---

Model, instigate & reinforce mindfulness: open, curious, flexible attention

# Mindfulness of the Hand



# Are there deficits in perspective taking?

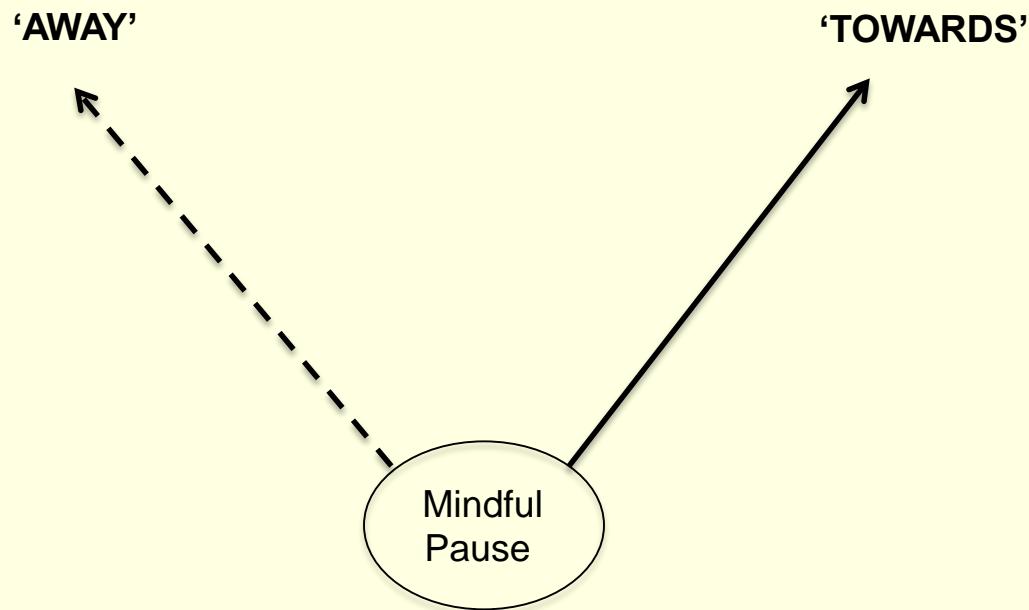


# Taking A History

---

Draw out values wherever possible. How?

Continually ask clients to notice both values-congruent and values-incongruent actions.



# Taking A History

---

Q: In your relationship, what would you like there to be more of – a) from your partner and b) from yourself ?

NB: 'dead man's' goals

# Taking A History

---

Q: If I could wave a magic wand, so that your partner was suddenly perfect – then how would you behave differently?

# Willingness To Work At It?

---

On a scale of 1-10, how much work are you willing to do to improve the relationship?

If score is low, therapist models accepting, non-judgmental stance & moves to 'resilience formula'

# The Resilience Formula

---

4 approaches to any problematic situation

1. Leave
2. Stay & change what can be changed
3. Stay & accept what can't be changed & live by your values
4. Stay & give up & do stuff that makes it worse

# Addressing Willingness

---

Q: So in terms of changing the situation, what do you have most control over?

Q: So let's come back to workability: how will it affect your relationship if you are not willing to work on it?

If one partner is unwilling?

# Stay or leave?

---

- If possible, see client alone.
- AGREE: anything shared privately can be raised in a dual session
- Compassionately & non-judgmentally consider pros & cons of each choice
- Q: Have you given it your best shot?

# Stay or leave?

---

- Unlikely to resolve it in today's session
- Both options = anxiety, doubt, uncertainty
- If one option was obviously much better, you wouldn't have a dilemma!!!

# Stay or leave?

---

- Live by your values, whether you stay or leave
- Until the day you leave, you're staying – so what do you want to stand for as a partner?
- Each day, choose to live those values

# Stay or leave?

---

- 5-10 mins daily to reflect on the pros & cons with pen & paper or computer
- Rest of the time, unhook & get present. How?
- Lots of self-compassion!!!

# Taking A History

---

Family of origin: how much do you need?  
Why not gather this ‘on the hoof’?

# Taking A History

---

E.g. How old is this story? When was the earliest you can remember it showing up? What happened at that time in your life?

E.g. Where does that rule come from? Who told you, or how did you learn it?

# Taking A History

---

E.g. How old is this behaviour? Did anyone model this for you, growing up?

E.g. Have you reacted that way in the past, in other relationships, with parents, siblings etc?

# Taking A History

---

Therapist: So notice how this 'old stuff' keeps showing up in the present

# End of first session

---

What is one issue that you'd like to address first?

Both agree? If not, each choose one issue.

*NB: sexual issues – almost always need to improve the non-sexual aspects first*

# End of first session

---

1. Notice what you *each* do that's workable
2. Notice what you *yourself* do that's *unworkable*
3. Notice what thoughts & feelings show up before you start doing the unworkable stuff

# 6 Things Each Partner *Can* Do

1. Stop doing things that make it worse
2. Act mindfully on your values: behave more like the partner you ideally want to be
3. Accept what is out of your control
4. Notice & reward behavior in your partner you like
5. Create rituals to cultivate affection, warmth, fun, sensuality, sexuality, intimacy etc.
6. Effective negotiation & communication skills

**In ACT, we focus on all six - but first & foremost on 1, 2, 3 & 4. Why?**

# 6 Things Each Partner *Can* Do

---

- 1, 2, 3 & 4 are totally within your control
- The Paradox: If you live mindfully by your values, stop trying to control your partner, instead practice acceptance, and actively show appreciation ... often your partner will make positive changes spontaneously!

**NB: Pre-empt - *No two partners will do these things to the same extent!***

# ‘Give And Take’

---

Vividly recall 2 memories:

- a) A moment of great loneliness/yearning for someone you love
  - b) A moment of being very loving to someone
- What does this say about what you want to give and what you want to get?



# Acceptance & Change

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Each partner typically starts from this:

- *You need to change ...*
- *...but accept me as I am!*

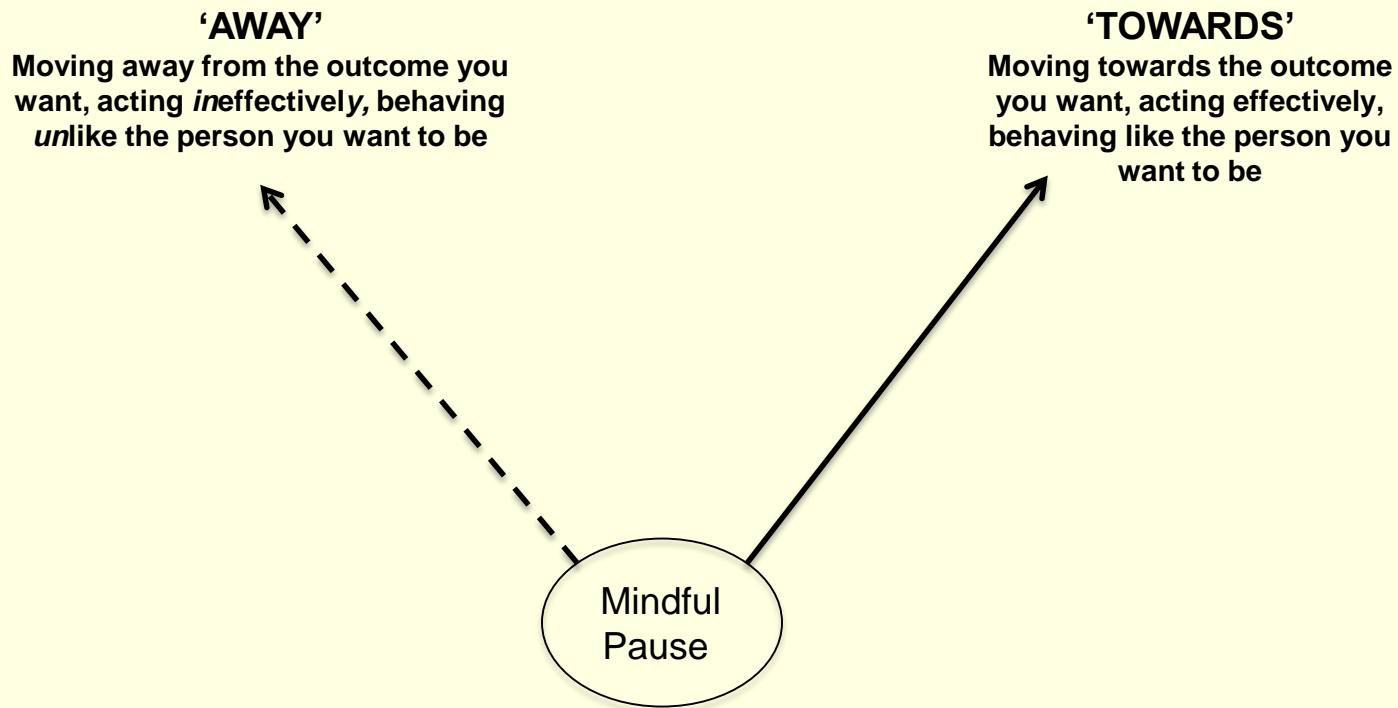
# How do you see your partner?

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# Defusion

- Think of everything that's wrong with your partner. Write it down
- Now let's play around with it



# Compassion for your partner

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What is it like to be looked at ‘as a problem’?

Imagine your partner as a young child – and yourself as an adult, shouting all those negative judgments & criticisms

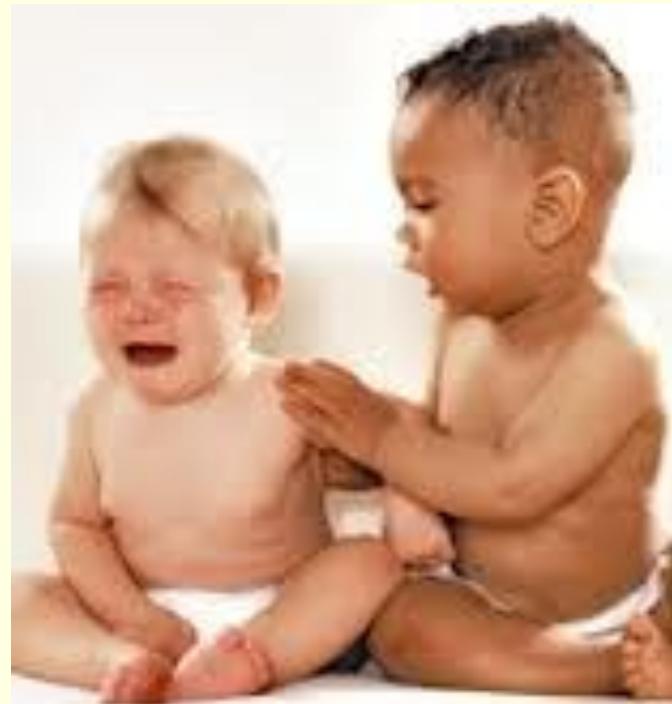
What would that little child feel like?

How would you like to treat that little child?

# Compassion For Others

---

I see you're in pain  
I care about you  
I'm here for you



# Mr & Mrs Fix-it

---

Problem-solving & advice is often invalidating

**After** you've done this: I see you're in pain; I care about you; I'm here for you

**Then** you can ask: 'Is there anything I can do to help?'

# Kindness

---

Kind thoughts & imagery

Kind words

Kind touch

Kind deeds

# Intimacy

---



# Stories/behaviours that isolate/separate

- the role you've been conditioned to play?
- the role you think you should play?
- the role you play to hide away?
- the role you play to get approval?
- the role you play to avoid being hurt?



# Barriers to intimacy

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Avoidance of 'vulnerability'

Avoidance of pain - especially fear (rejection, hurt, betrayal, entrapment, burden, abandonment etc)

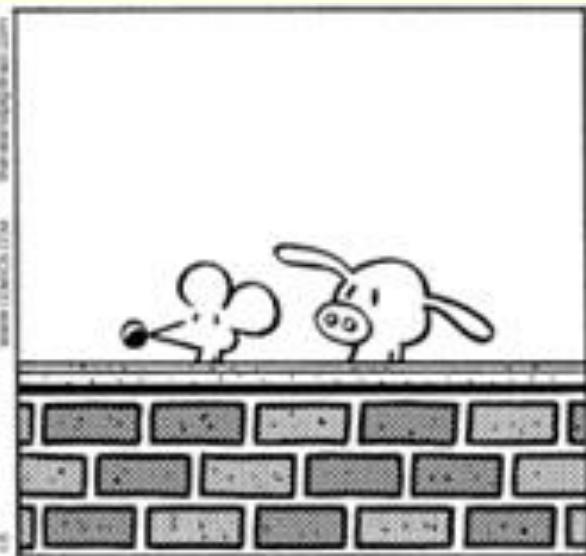
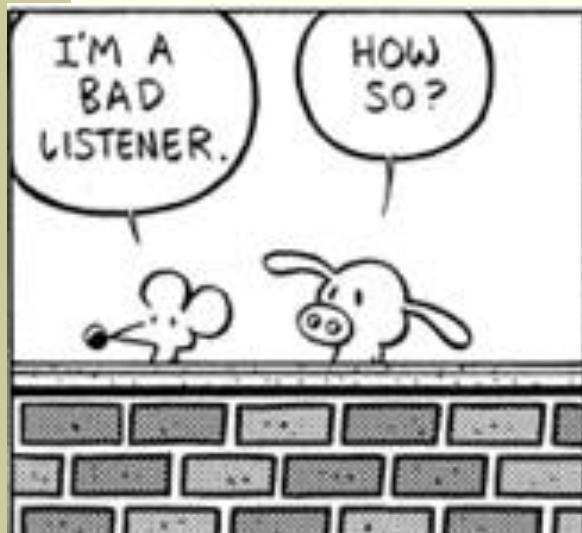
Fusion with conceptualised self

'Looking good' and 'Being right'

Others?

---

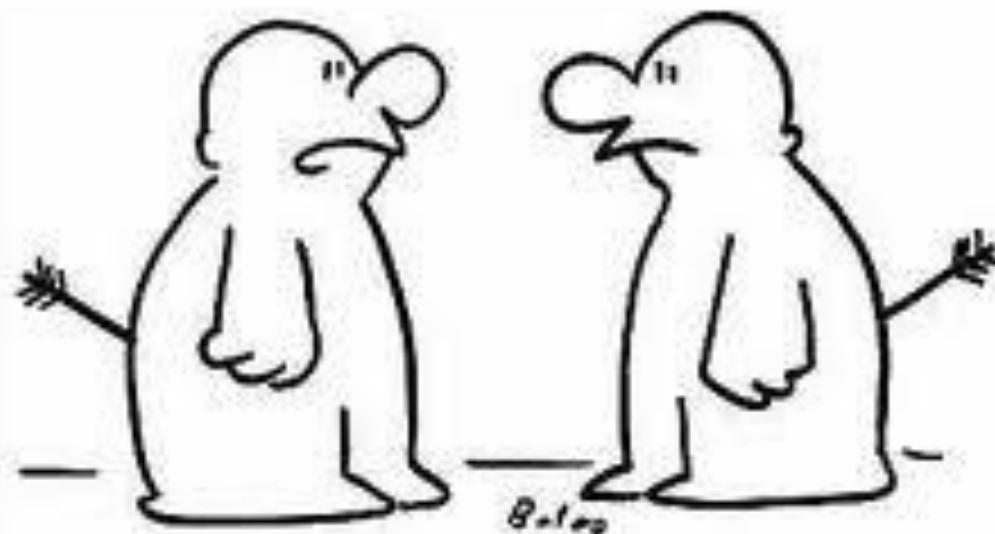
# Barriers to intimacy: Deficits in Perspective Taking



# I see you are in pain: Emotional awareness



# I feel your pain too: Empathy



"I know exactly how you feel."

I see your pain, and respond with kindness:  
Compassion



I can see things from your point of view,  
understand how you think and feel, get what  
motivates you: Theory of Mind

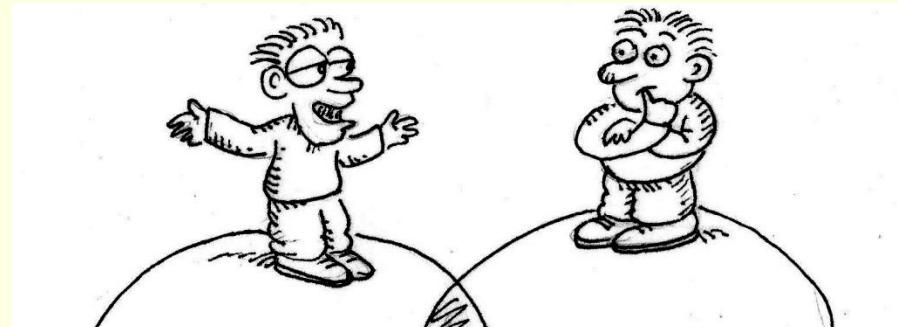


# Why might some people want to avoid empathy?



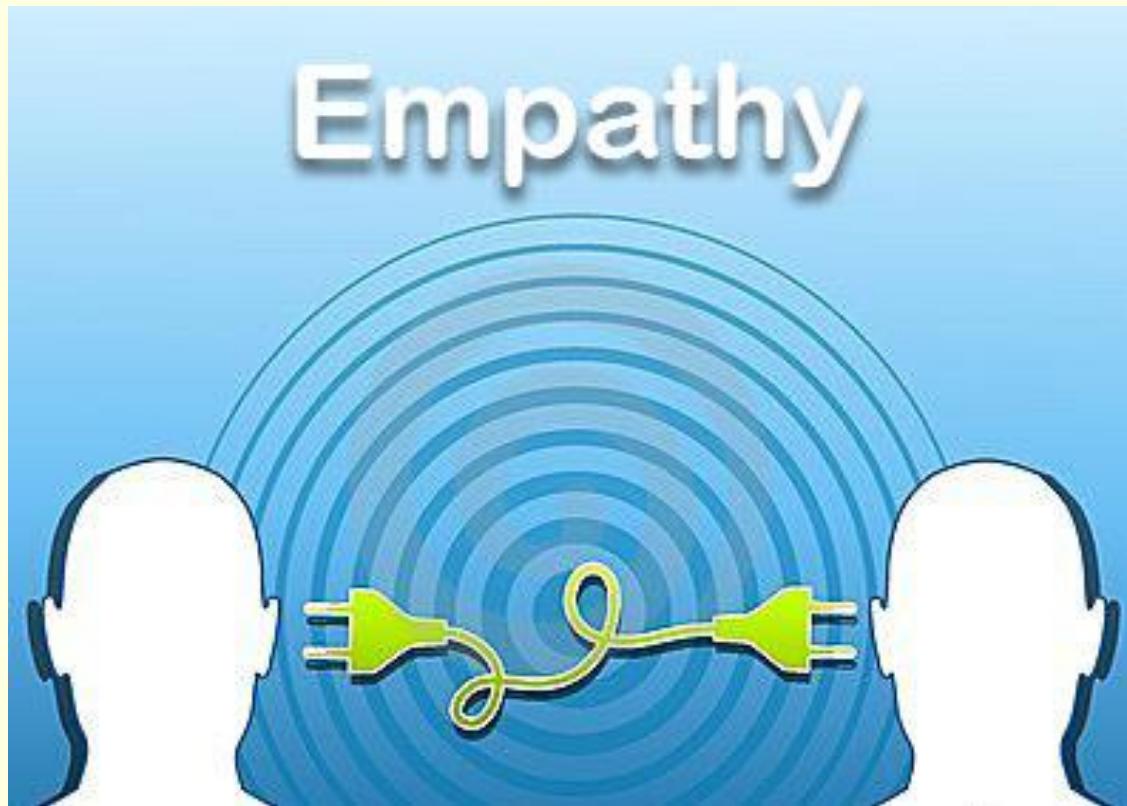
"'Empathy'? — that doesn't  
sound very *adaptive*!"

- I am curious about and open to your thoughts, feelings, point of view
- I may not share your thoughts, feelings, point of view, but I acknowledge them as normal, natural and perfectly reasonable, given our differences in biology and life history



- I can allow you to have your thoughts and feelings and points of view, and I can remain engaged and open with you, without trying to change them

- If I had *your* DNA, *your* biological makeup, *your* education, family and upbringing, *your* perspectives and attitudes and belief symptoms – not *mine* - then in this situation, I would feel the same!'



# What Is Intimacy?

---

The price of admission to intimacy?

Vulnerability

Which always comes with?

Pain!

# John Bowlby -*Attachment and Loss* - 1969

---

Attachment in relationships has survival value:  
keeps infants close to caregivers who can  
provide nurture & protection

For decades, primarily ‘psychodynamic’  
Recently, behaviour analysts got interested  
Eg. *A Behavioural Perspective on Adult  
Attachment style, Intimacy, and Relationship  
Health* – Mansfield & Cordova

# Bids For Protection & Nurture

---

Closeness, companionship, comfort, protection, caretaking, reassurance, and sustenance

Caregiver has 3 possible responses to a bid:

Reinforcement, punishment, ignoring

Ratios of these responses lead to different attachment repertoires

# Attachment Repertoires

---

High reinforcement, Low ignoring, Low punishment

‘Secure’

Generally positive, healthy, intimate relationships

# Attachment Repertoires

---

High reinforcement, High ignoring, Low punishment

‘Preoccupied’

Yearn for attention

Often clingy, fearful, jealous

Potentially dysfunctional and depressogenic

---

# Attachment Repertoires

---

**Low reinforcement, High ignoring, Low punishment**

‘Avoidant-dismissive’

Little or no nurture-seeking. Why?

Often lonely, and not in relationships

# Attachment Repertoires

---

High reinforcement, Low ignoring, High punishment

‘Anxious-Ambivalent’

Fear, anger, desire to run, vigilant monitoring

Often passionate short-term relationships. Why?

Often most at ease when alone

---

# Attachment Repertoires

---

**Low reinforcement**, Moderate ignoring, **High punishment**

'Fearful-Avoidant'

Avoid closeness to avoid threats the other poses  
Difficulty forming relationships; often very brief

# NORMAL



What does it **feel like** for you when he/she **behaves** like that?

What does it **feel like** for you to hear that's how your **behaviour** affects him/her?



## 'Triggers' (antecedents)

Situation

Thoughts

Feelings

**Mindfulness:**  
present moment,  
defusion, acceptance

## Behaviour

Something an  
organism does

Public or private

**Values & action**

## 'Payoffs' (reinforcing consequences)

Immediate outcomes  
that maintain the  
behaviour

**Workability**  
**Payoffs versus  
costs**

### ‘AWAY’

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike* the person you want to be

### ‘TOWARDS’

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving like the person you want to be

Difficult or Unhelpful  
Thoughts & Feelings

Values You Want To Live By  
& Skills/Strengths You Can Use

**STOP  
Slow down  
Take note  
Open up  
Pursue values**

Challenging Situation

# Self-compassion & Attachment

---

Self-compassion: positive reinforcement  
of your own bids for nurturing

Form a secure attachment with yourself

Foundation for secure attachment to others

Intimacy with myself  $\Leftrightarrow$  intimacy with others

# Intimacy & Acceptance

---

The ultimate form of *intrapersonal* acceptance?

Self-compassion

The ultimate form of *interpersonal* acceptance?

Compassion for others

# Barriers to Compassion

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Blaming/judging/criticising etc.

Possible functions?

Contrast: constructive, compassionate feedback

Defensiveness to negative feedback: why?

# Handling Negative Feedback

---

Feedback you least like from loved ones?

The most hurtful thing they could say?

Why is this so hurtful?

Relation to your conceptualised self?

.

# Handling Negative Feedback

---

If this feedback were true, what would it mean about you?

Can you find a grain of truth in it?

Do you have to turn away or hide from or struggle with that truth?

---

# Handling Negative Feedback

---

What do you do that is unhelpful when you encounter criticism, disapproval or rejection?

Would it be useful to learn how to stay present and open in the face of it?

# Handling Negative Feedback pt 1

---

In pairs. Number 1s: tell number 2s the feedback/criticism you fear/resist most

2s: say it aloud to number 1s: “You are ....”

Number 1s: stay present; notice what thoughts and feelings arise; open up and make room for them.

Notice what it was that triggered this reaction in you: just words. Is there anything in those words you have to fight with or run from?

# Handling Negative Feedback pt 2

---

Can you find a grain of truth in those words? Can you identify some type of unworkable behaviour that they refer to? Is there some way you can accept that grain of truth; take it on board, and learn from it; maybe even grow from it?

# ACT With Common Relationship Issues Russ Harris, 2013

ACCEPTANCE & CHANGE: Which comes first?

Remember the resilience formula

Do what you can to *constructively* influence your partner's behavior, so as to a) get your needs met *and* b) build a healthy relationship

Fact: there will always be some unsolvable problems in your relationship, and some behaviours in your partner that you don't like, want or approve of.

Even if your partner works really hard at it!

The 'Perfect Partner' Story?

Can you accept this? What happens if you don't?

'I want to accept, but.....'



1. **Defuse from unhelpful stories**
2. **Open, curious attention**
- 3. **Make room for painful feelings**
4. **Say ‘Yes’ to reality**
5. **Cultivate gratitude & appreciation**
6. **Evaluate the behaviour, not the person**
7. **The behavior is one small part of the whole**
8. **Acknowledge similarities**
9. **Validate differences**
- 10. **The ultimate: practice compassion**

1. Defuse: What does your mind say to stop you accepting? Notice those words in your head. Name these words: 'The not good enough story'
2. Open, curious attention: Let your mind chatter away like a radio in the background. Notice X, with the curiosity of a young child who has never encountered anything like this before. Notice ... (give examples)
3. Make room: Are difficult feelings present? Notice where in your body you feel it most. Breathe into this area; open up around the feeling. Place a hand on it.
4. Say 'yes': In a calm voice – either out aloud or inside your head – say 'yes'. Acknowledge, right now, this is how it is. This is reality. If you run from it, you will miss out on important parts of your life. And if you fight with it, you will lose. The only way to vitality is to make peace with it. So with an attitude of peacefulness, once again, say 'yes'. (Yes, this is how it is.)

# Key Issues: Acceptance of Pain – Why?

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d3d Serie Love

- In front of you is the person you love, all the things that you enjoy doing in your relationship, and all the problems and challenges you want to deal with
- These are all the **thoughts & feelings** you don't want. Push them away, hard!
- Notice 3 things: 1) How tiring is it? How much energy does it consume? 2) How distracting is it; how difficult is it to fully engage or connect with the person you love, or focus on the task at hand? 3) How difficult is it to take effective action, to do the things that make your relationship better? (give examples)
- Now rest it on your lap.
- How much less effort is that? How much easier is it to engage and connect and focus? How much easier is it now to take effective action?
- Notice your **thoughts & feelings** (i.e. the paper) haven't disappeared. But you have a new way of responding to them, so they don't hold you back or tie you down or stop you taking action or engaging with your partner or focusing on the task at hand

# Self-Compassion - Neff, 2002

- Mindfulness
- Kindness
- Common humanity



# Self-compassion & Attachment

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Self-compassion: positive reinforcement  
of your own bids for nurturing/protection/caring

Secure attachment with yourself

Facilitates secure attachment to others

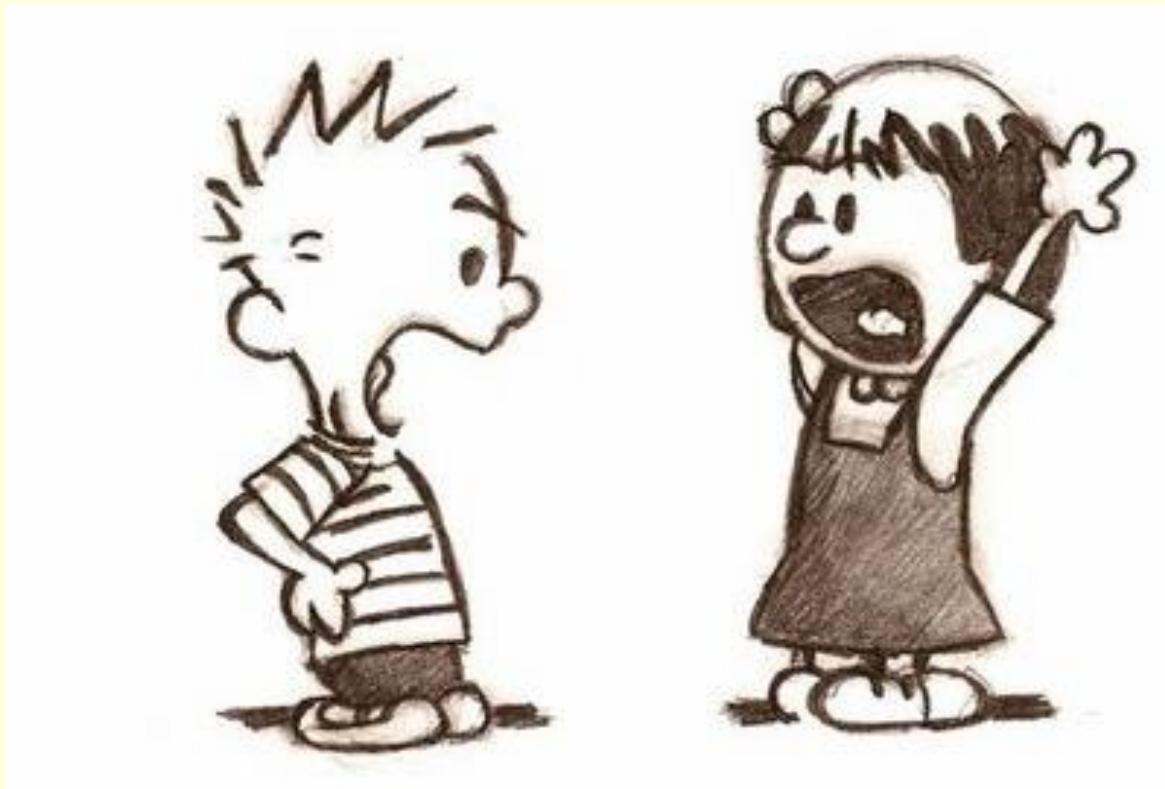
Self-compassion  $\leftrightarrow$  compassion for others

- Think of someone you love
- Think of what's painful in the relationship
- 
- Contact the pain
- Contact the love
- Open up and make room for both
- Notice how interconnected they are
- Reach out to yourself with kindness (kind thoughts, words, imagery, touch, deeds)

# Key Issues: Conflict Is Inevitable

---

- Increase awareness of triggers
- Increase acceptance



# Getting Needs Met

---

Respect – for self and other



Shark vs puppy dog

# ‘Needs’ and values

---

- Values: how do I want to behave while I try to get my ‘needs’ met?
- Values: how do I want to behave when I don’t get my ‘needs’ met?
- Values: how do I want to behave when I DO get my ‘needs’ met?

# Key Issues: Communication 101

Learnt this young

Ask nicely

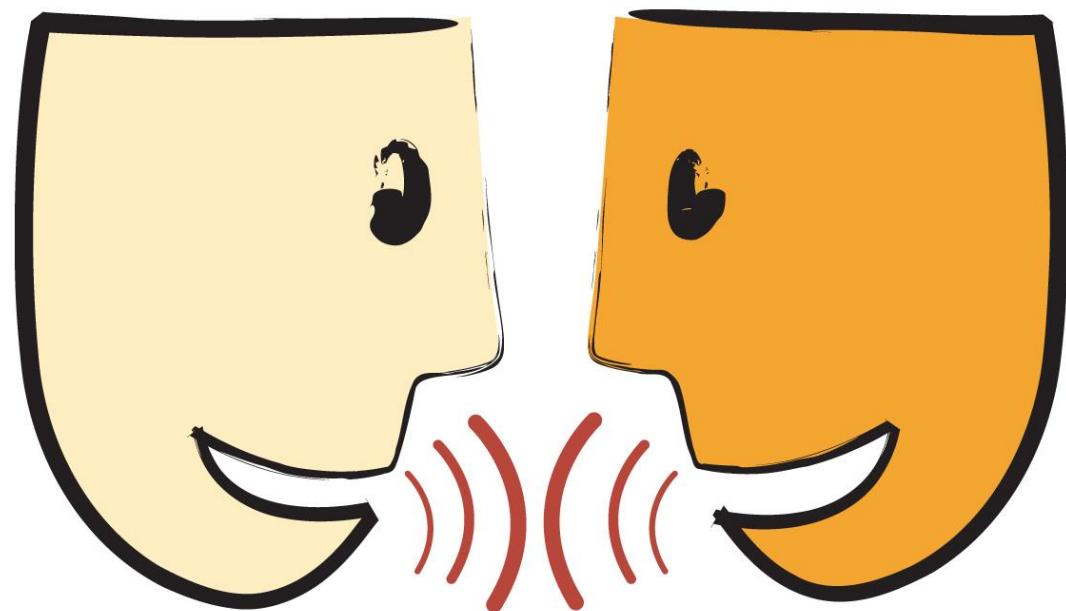
Say thank you

Say sorry

Listen carefully

Be fair

— Take turns



# Key Issues: Communication 101

---

Ask clearly for what you want (& explain why) –  
video description, non-judgmental

Express clearly what you don't want (& why) –  
video description, non-judgmental

Be clear about boundaries & consequences --  
video description, non-judgmental

# Key Issues: Communication 101

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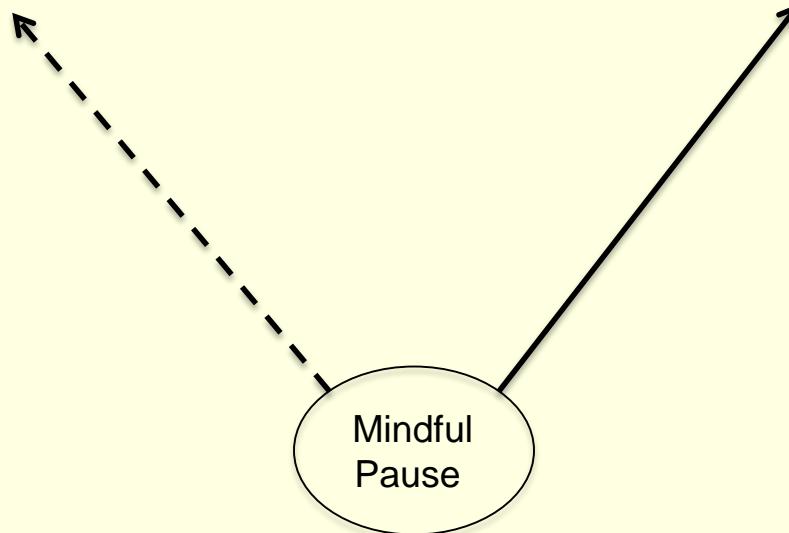
Speak in a way that works to build the relationship – body language/voice/ vocab

## **'AWAY'**

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike* the person you want to be

## **'TOWARDS'**

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving *like* the person you want to be



## Win-win options:

- Ideal: outcome meets both partner's needs
- Exchange: tit for tat
- Take turns
- Relative importance
- Willing sacrifice

## Draw-draw options:

- Compromise

# Lose-lose options:

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- DRAIN
- In relationships, there is no ‘win-lose’ option
- A ‘win-lose’ for one = ‘lose-lose’ for the relationship



# Key Issues: Solutions

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Win-win solutions are ideal, but not always possible

E.g. one wants a child, the other doesn't  
Shift from a specific goal/outcome to  
brainstorming multiple ways of meeting both  
partner's needs on an ongoing basis

Recommended reading: *Getting To Yes*

# Key Issues: Solutions

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Some problems are unsolvable

Validate 'reality gap' & facilitate compassion

Recall: 4 approaches to any problematic situation

How can I get some of my needs met, even though I can't get the specific outcome I want?

Acceptance & grieving

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# Values

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- Ideal vs reactive partner
- Mindfulness of the hand
- Memory of being very loving
- 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary – partner gives a speech



# The 3Cs

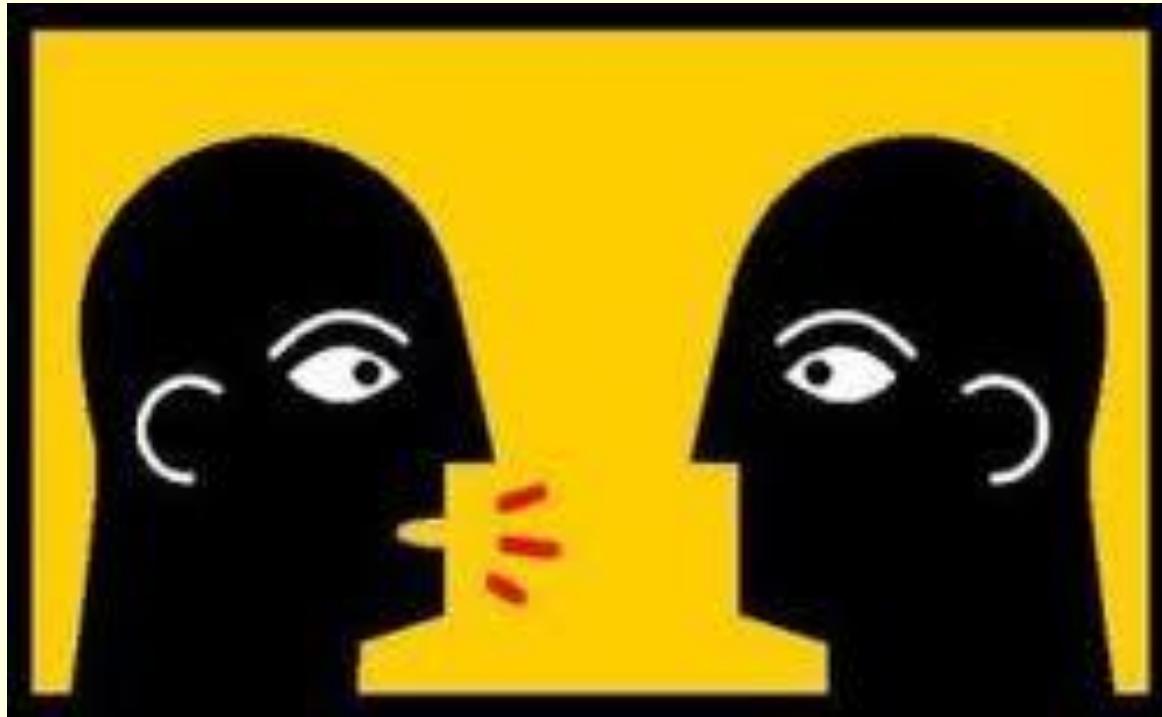
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- Connection
- Caring
- Contribution

# Sharing Values

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- In session or on a date
- Mindful listening



# Values to Goals to Actions

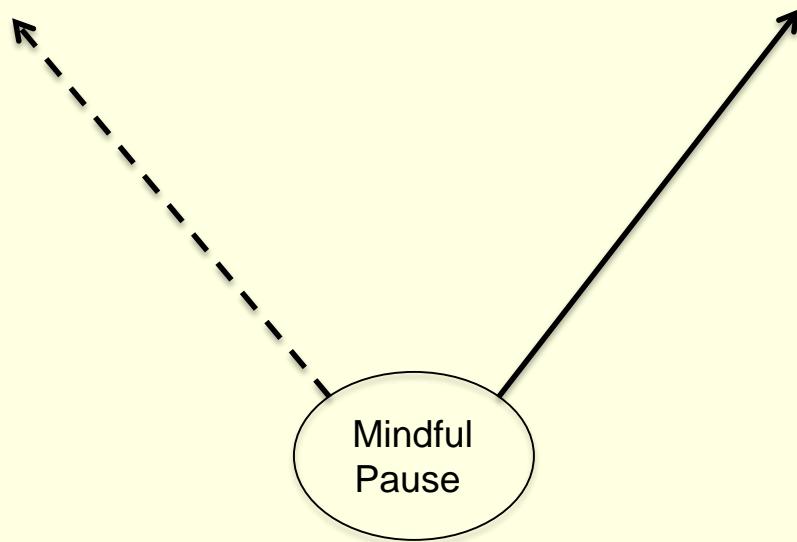
What's a small step/ little thing you could do?

**'AWAY'**

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike* the person you want to be

**'TOWARDS'**

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving *like* the person you want to be



# Reinforce Workable Changes

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If your partner does that, what difference would it make to you?

How will you let your partner know that?



# If client makes workable changes:

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- What was that like for you?
- What happened to your relationship?
- What's another little step?



# If no workable changes:

---

- What was that like for you?
- What happened to your relationship?
- **What got in the way?**
- **FEAR => DARE**

# Key Issues: Willingness

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- Willingness versus wanting to change
- Values-driven versus fused/avoidant change. E.g.?



# Examples of fused/avoidant change

- resentful change
- guilt-induced change
- trying to 'keep her happy'
- trying to 'put up with him'
- trying to stop him from leaving
- trying to stop her from yelling
- others?



- Name your tactics
- Name your 'pet arguments'
- Agree to notice and name them
- With humour, kindness, respect!!!



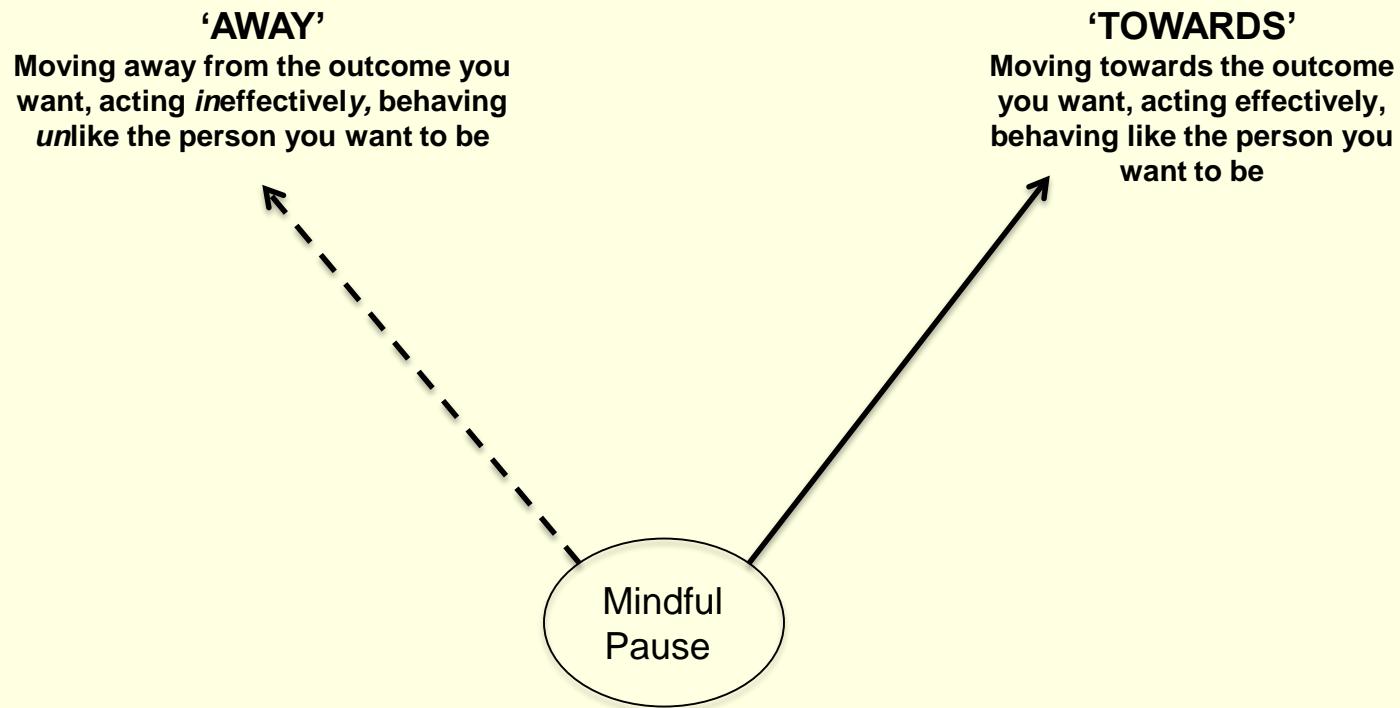
# S.T.O.P. Conflict In Session

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- ***Slow down:*** Slow down your breathing; Slowly push your feet down into the floor; Slowly press your fingertips together
- ***Take note:*** Where are you? What are you doing? What are your thoughts and feelings?
- ***Open up:*** Breathe into the feeling; name the story; ‘bring up the lights on the stage show’.
- ***Pursue values:*** What sort of partner do you want to be?

# Key Issues: Conflict

## ■ Workability rules!



# Conflict

---

- What judgments does your mind make about him/her?
- What happens if you buy those judgments?
- I'm having the thought that ..
- Naming the story
- Putting it on a card
- Silently saying to yourself 'Judging'

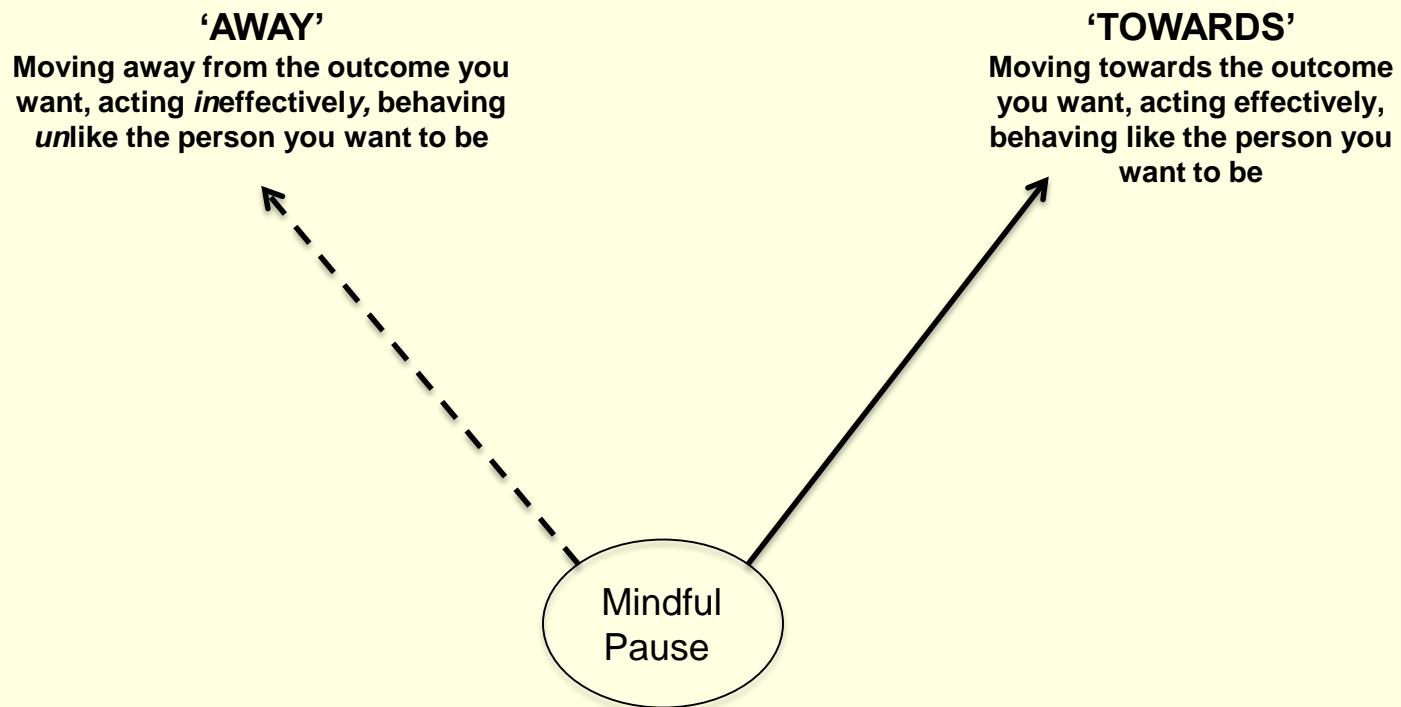
# Key Issues: Conflict

- Being right versus being loving
- “I’m right; you’re wrong” exercise



# Key Issues: Conflict

## ■ Superior/inferior stories



# Clench Fist: Defusion Exercise

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- A ‘Right/Wrong’ or ‘Not Good Enough’ story



# Clench Body: Acceptance Exercise

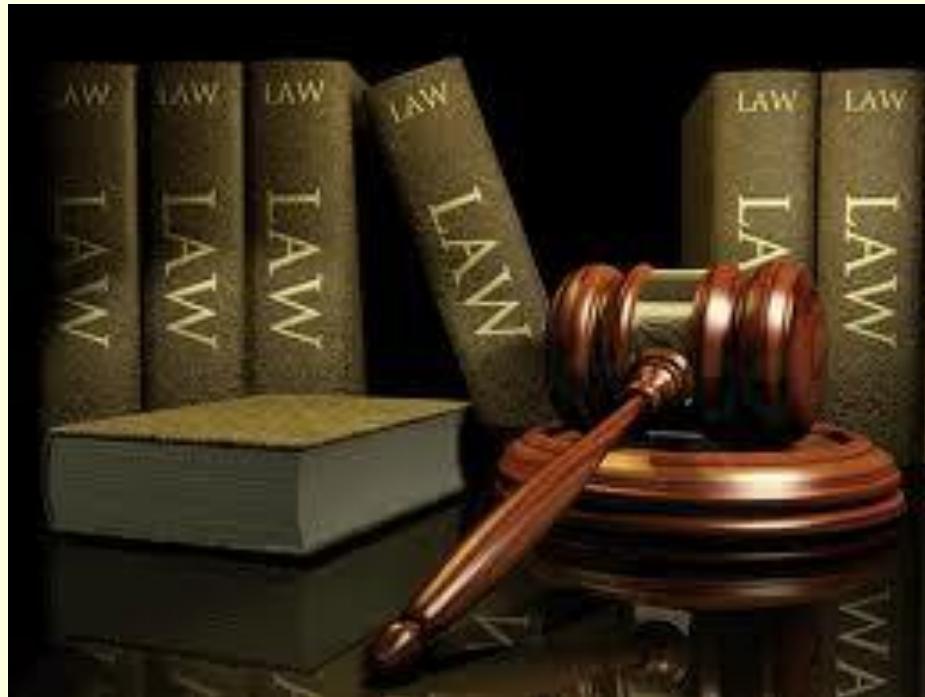
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- Locate a painful feeling
- Clench your body around it: tense muscles, use arms and hands and legs
- Unclench; release tension
- Expand awareness

# Conflict: Values Versus Rules

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- What are your rules?
- What are your partner's rules?
- (Possibly: Where did these rules come from?)



# Rules

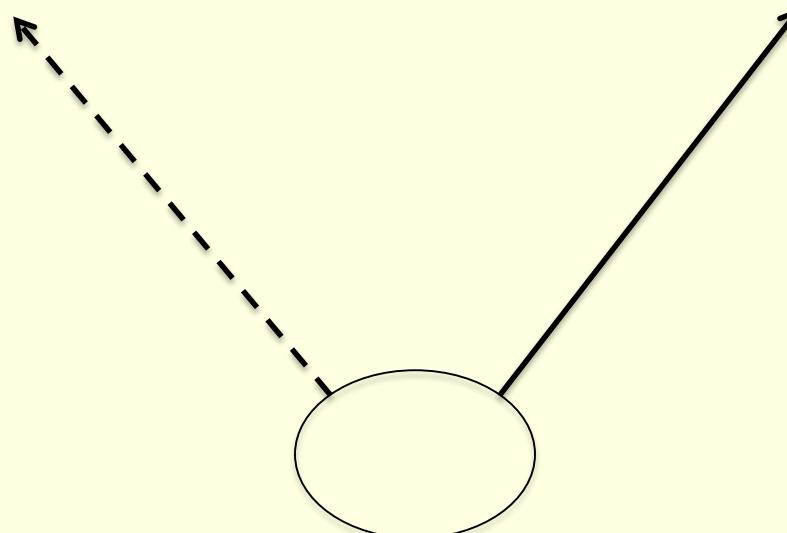
## ■ What happens when you fuse with them?

### ‘AWAY’

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike the person you want to be*

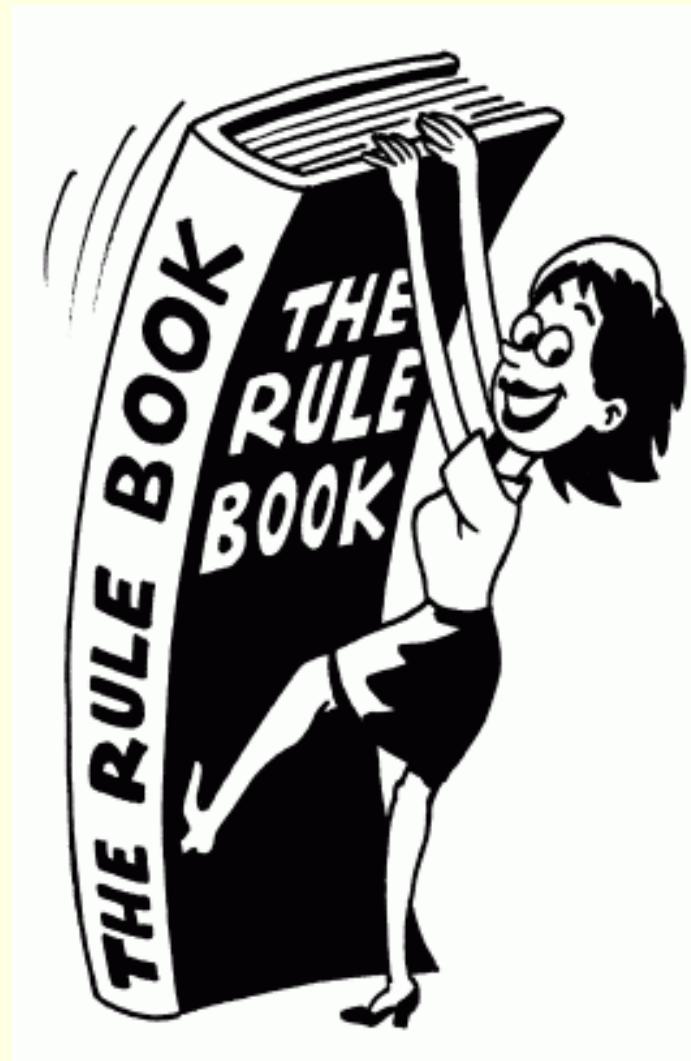
### ‘TOWARDS’

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving *like the person you want to be*



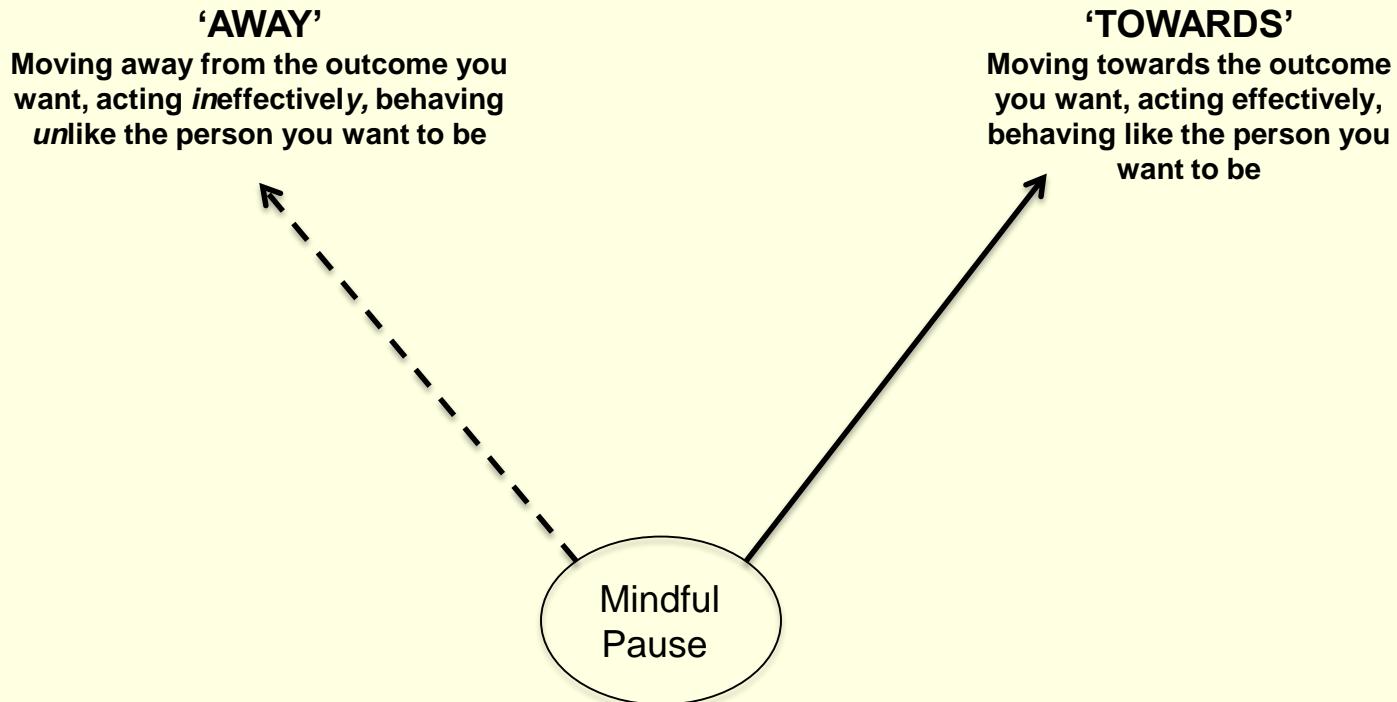
# Defusion of Rigid rules:

- Expect them
- Notice them
- Name them
- Fist-clench defusion



# Key Issues: Conflict

- Staying on track: Two cards exercise
- Card 1: values to live by while we discuss
- Card 2: the issue, and the desired outcome



# Set-up For Two Cards

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- Are both partners willing to work hard?
- Do both know this is a skills-building exercise?
- Have both have had ample opportunity to talk about their difficulties in earlier sessions (so can respectfully interrupt unworkable ‘venting’)
- T: Involves learning to take a mindful pause even when really worked up or upset - so you can change your behavior to do something more workable. I will frequently interrupt you both. This can be very frustrating.
- T: At times you may really want to speak your piece – but learning how to stop yourself from doing this is a very valuable skill. You will feel frustrated if interrupt you – but learning how to handle your own frustration effectively is a vital part of the work

# Aims In Two Cards Exercise

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- Train the mindful pause
- Reinforce workable behavior: ‘towards’ moves
- Interrupt and point out unworkable behavior (‘away moves’):body language, facial expression, tone of voice, language
- Experiential Role Play method – get them to try different types of communication, verbally and non-verbally
- If necessary, teach ‘communication 101’ e.g. ‘I’ statements

# Aims In Two Cards Exercise

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- Compassionately and respectfully interrupt any form of 'lifeless storytelling' or 'unworkable venting' and point out the effects it is having on both partners.
- Ask the person to switch to more workable communication:
- What the specific issue is, with ONE specific example (no more!!!!)
- How it affects you
- What you would like your partner to do
- Interrupt and point out judgment, blame, contempt, and 'getting lost in the story' – and ask about the effect it has on both partners

# Repair attempts (John Gottmann)

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- Tiniest step that might repair some damage?
- Make sure both partners agree on them!!!
- **Acknowledge & accept** repair attempts



# Repairing Damage

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- Conflict into compassion
- Vulnerability and openness
- Drop the story
- Share the emotion



# Reframing Problems

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- How can I grow?
- What can I learn?
- Partner as a personal trainer or life coach that you have hired to help you grow: what skills can you learn, what strengths can you develop?

# Key Issues: Aggression

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- ‘Anger Management’?
- Run through: Triggers, Behaviour, Payoffs

### ‘AWAY’

Moving away from the outcome you want, acting *ineffectively*, behaving *unlike* the person you want to be

### ‘TOWARDS’

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving like the person you want to be

Difficult or Unhelpful  
Thoughts & Feelings

Values You Want To Live By  
& Skills/Strengths You Can Use

**STOP  
Slow down  
Take note  
Open up  
Pursue values**

Challenging Situation

Is there a wound beneath your armour?

— Peel it back, take a look.

Self-compassion



# Key Issues: Calming down

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- S.T.O.P.
- Acting calm versus feeling calm: which do you have most control over?
- If necessary leave the situation
- If you do leave the situation: defuse from unhelpful stories, self-compassion, grounding

# Key Issues: Calming down

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Once grounded, ask yourself

- What sort of partner do I want to be? What are my values here?
- If I could be that ideal partner, I would ...

# Key Issues: Relapse

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- Inevitability
- When your partner screws up, how will you respond?
- When you screw up, how will you respond?

# Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

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- Follow all legal obligations & be transparent about it.
- After that, it is up to the client to decide.
- The extreme case: domestic violence.

# Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

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- If client's request conflicts with your ethics?
- Declare it!
- State what you can and can't do

# Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

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- You can share your feelings, in a defused, open, accepting, non-judgmental manner - but do not try to *enforce* your beliefs on the client.
- Deal with your own stuff!

# Key Issues: What Is Unacceptable?

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- Focus on building the therapeutic relationship and making a safe space for the client.
- Help clients increase their psychological flexibility.
- Then let them choose for themselves.

# Key Issues: Affairs

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- Metaphor: it's like taking drugs
- To avoid pain & gain pleasure
- Relationship problems don't cause affairs
- Affair = a personal choice (like taking drugs)



# Affairs: Both Partners

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- Validate pain
- Full disclosure or not?
- Discuss pros and cons
- If yes, ensure it is ‘once off’, not lingering on

# Affairs: The Unfaithful Partner

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- Resilience formula: 4 options
- Take responsibility
- Acknowledge personal choice
- Genuine apology
- Make amends

# Affairs: The Betrayed Partner

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- Resilience formula: 4 options
- What can your partner do to make amends?
- Normalise the desire to know ‘why’
- No explanation is likely to be satisfying
- Can you accept an apology?
- How can you both rebuild?

- Action of trust vs 'feeling' of trust
- No control over 'feelings' of trust – only over the actions.
- Balance values: trusting & self-protection

- Mindful trust Vs Blind trust. Look for?
- Sincerity
- Reliability
- Responsibility
- Competence
- Respect



# Actions Vs Feelings of Trust

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- Feelings of trust are out of your control
  - What are small actions of trust you can take?
  - Mindfully assess what happens!
  - How can you honour your values around self-protection?
  - How can your partner demonstrate trustworthiness?
-

- Acceptance of time involved
- Acceptance of both partners' emotional reactions
- Self-compassion for both
- Compassion for each other
- This will never be forgotten!
- Commitment to working on the relationship

# Key Issues: Intimacy

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- Be present
- Share valued activities
- Practice connection
- Acceptance of vulnerability/anxiety



# Key Issues: Intimacy

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- Emotional, psychological and physical
- Sharing thoughts
- Showing feelings
- Mindful touching
- ‘Eyes on’ exercise

# ‘Eyes on’ exercise

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- I see you
- I see you, seeing me
- I see you, seeing me, seeing you



# Physical Intimacy: Sex Issues

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Values-focused versus goal-focused sex

Mindfulness to enhance sensuality

Defusion from unhelpful stories

‘Differences Versus Defects’

Acceptance of uncomfortable feelings

# Sexual Issues

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Open communication

Modify traditional sensate focus exercises  
(Masters and Johnson) to emphasise  
mindfulness and values

# Key Issues: Forgiveness

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- **Give** yourself what was there **before**
- Anger & resentment – costs of fusion
- Respond with mindfulness

# Forgiveness Ritual

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Each partner writes:-

The thoughts, feelings/ memories I've been holding on to are ...

How holding on has hurt me & our relationship:

# Forgiveness Ritual

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Commitment to letting all this old stuff come and go without holding on to it

Choose a special place, read it out, do something symbolic (e.g. burn it & scatter the ashes) then do something to connect lovingly

# Other Common Issues

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- Chaser/distancer cycles
- Deep-seated fears
- Jealousy
- Anger/blaming cycles
- Parallel lives

### ‘AWAY’

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### ‘TOWARDS’

Moving towards the outcome you want, acting *effectively*, behaving like the person you want to be

Difficult or Unhelpful Thoughts & Feelings

Values You Want To Live By & Skills/Strengths You Can Use

**STOP  
Slow down  
Take note  
Open up  
Pursue values**

Challenging Situation

# What have you taken?

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In pairs: what have you taken from this workshop?

Personal work – committed action for one important relationship: make one commitment

# Parting Words

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“For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of our tasks; the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke

# Willing Vulnerability: pt 1

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Accept a compliment?

Speak highly of yourself?

Share in pairs: your 5 best attributes/greatest qualities

In the listening role, what qualities do you want to embody, knowing the speaker is vulnerable?

When the chime goes, pause and follow instructions

# Willing Vulnerability: pt 2

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Share in pairs something you're embarrassed or ashamed of – something that contradicts the qualities/attributes you identified in part 1

In the listening role, what qualities do you want to embody, knowing the speaker is vulnerable?

When the chime goes, pause and follow instructions