

A QUICK GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION CYCLE

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THIS GUIDE IS NOT MEANT TO REPLACE PSYCHOTHERAPY, SIMPLY TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A FEW TOOLS TO HELP UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNICATION CYCLE.



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First, before you read any further, take a moment and consider how you can be a part of the connecting process with your partner. Sometimes it can become easy to only think about how your partner should be better at communicating or meeting your needs. But, I challenge you to really think about what helps you engage and show up for your partner and what gets in the way of it.

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Now that you've explored what can be a barrier to connecting with your partner, consider what it is you need from your partner. Try to think beyond your immediate needs such as "to be listened to, have more sex, or to have your partner agree more," and think about what feeling fuels those needs? What happens to you when you don't feel listened to? Or connected to your partner through sex? Or if you feel like your partner doesn't ever agree with you?

Maybe it creates feelings of loneliness, fear, inadequacy, or feelings like you or your opinions are not important to your partner



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3 The feelings that fuel your behavior are often termed primary emotions. These emotions usually happen fast because they are more vulnerable, harder to sit with, and generally uncomfortable. These are the feelings you just identified above. And as you know, the vulnerability of these feelings makes it difficult to turn to your partner and reach for their comfort or reassurance when you feel them. So instead, we hop to secondary emotions that are less risky and it is this emotion that our partner usually sees.

Maybe those less risky feelings include anger, frustration, resentment or defensiveness

4 We tend to DO something with those emotions called an action tendency. Our action tendency is the behavior our partner sees and usually what fuels the cycle to keep going. *Maybe those less risky behaviors or your action tendency includes withdrawing, going quiet, turning away, sealing off? Or maybe they include yelling, showing intense emotion, getting defensive, or obsessively trying to prove your point?*

5 Secondary emotions happen subsequently, with our primary emotions fueling them and our action tendency displayed to our partner. If you can slow down and work to identify your primary emotion, carefully sharing these more difficult emotions with each other, you can start to slow down the communication cycle that happens so quickly. This exercise also helps your partner know what is happening underneath those secondary emotions and action tendencies. Since your partner can't read your mind, anything you can do to cue them to what you are feeling will help guide you in the right direction.



Here is one way to start that conversation!

(Adapted from Dr. Sue Johnson's, 2008 book, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*).

Take turns sharing your answers with each other

When we are stuck in our cycle I show you [action tendency]:

- Yelling
- Dismissing you
- Complaining
- Withdrawing
- Going quiet
- Raising my voice
- Telling you to change
- Pointing out your mistakes
- Shutting you out
- Turning away
- Not responding

I imagine my partner sees my behavior [action tendency] and believes I'm feeling: _____

But really underneath the behavior above, I'm feeling:

- Fearful
- Alone
- Inadequate
- Abandoned
- Rejected
- Dismissed
- Sad
- Hopeless
- Unlovable

In our negative communication cycle more I see you (action tendency) _____, the more I (action tendency) _____ and around and around we go in our cycle.

Underneath my action tendency I feel (primary emotion) _____, and what I need from you is _____. This would help us redirect our cycle.