

Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident

This exercise is for “processing” past fights, regrettable incidents or past emotional injuries.

“Processing” means that you can talk about the incident without getting back into it again. It needs to be a conversation – as if you were both sitting in the balcony of a theater looking down on the stage where the action had occurred. This requires calm and some emotional distance from the incident.

Before you begin

Keep in mind the GOAL is greater understanding — addressing the process and how the issue was talked about, without getting back into the fight. So, wait until you’re both calm.

We assume that each of your realities has validity. Perception is everything. Don’t focus on “the facts.”

Pay attention to the common barriers to communication and their antidotes as you move through the process. Keeping the “Four Horsemen” diagram handy can help.

Work through the following five steps together.

The Five Steps

1. **Feelings:** Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner’s feelings.
2. **Realities:** Describe your “reality.” Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner’s reality.
3. **Triggers:** Share what experiences or memories you’ve had that might have escalated the inter-action, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.
4. **Responsibility:** Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.
5. **Constructive Plans:** What is one thing your partner can do differently to avoid an incident like this from happening again?

STEP 1

Feelings: Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner's feelings.

I felt...

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. defensive | 19. out of control | 38. my opinions didn't even matter |
| 2. not listened to | 20. frustrated | 39. there was a lot of give and take |
| 3. feelings got hurt | 21. righteously indignant | 40. I had no feelings at all |
| 4. totally flooded | 22. morally justified | 41. I had no idea what I was feeling |
| 5. angry | 23. unfairly picked on | 42. lonely |
| 6. sad | 24. unappreciated | 43. alienated |
| 7. unloved | 25. disliked | 44. ashamed |
| 8. misunderstood | 26. unattractive | 45. guilty |
| 9. criticized | 27. stupid | 46. culpable |
| 10. took a complaint personally | 28. morally outraged | 47. abandoned |
| 11. like you didn't even like me | 29. taken for granted | 48. disloyal |
| 12. not cared about | 30. like leaving | 49. exhausted |
| 13. worried | 31. like staying and talking this through | 50. foolish |
| 14. afraid | 32. I was overwhelmed with emotion | 51. overwhelmed |
| 15. unsafe | 33. not calm | 52. remorseful |
| 16. tense | 34. stubborn | 53. shocked |
| 17. I was right and you were wrong | 35. powerless | 54. tired |
| 18. both of us were partly right | 36. I had no influence | |
| | 37. I wanted to win this one | |

STEP 2

Realities: Describe your "reality." Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner's reality.

Subjective Reality and Validation

- Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don't describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame. Talk about what you might have needed from your partner. Describe your perceptions like a reporter, giving an objective blow-by-blow description. Say "I heard you saying," rather than "You said."
- Summarize and then validate your partner's reality by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it." Use empathy by saying something like, "I can see why this upset you." Validation doesn't mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience of the incident.
- Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, "What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?" After summarizing and validating, ask your partner, "Did I get it?" and "Is there anything else?"

STEP 3

Triggers: Share what experiences or memories you've had that might have escalated the interaction, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.

- As you rewind the video tape of your memory, stop at a point where you had a similar set of feelings triggered in the past. Now tell the story of that past moment to your partner, so your partner can understand why that is a trigger for you.
- Share your stories – it will help your partner to understand you. As you think about your early history or childhood, is there a story you remember that relates to what got triggered in you, your “enduring vulnerabilities”? Your partner needs to know you, so that your partner can be more sensitive to you.

Examples of triggers

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| 1. I felt judged. <i>I'm very sensitive to that.</i> | 6. I felt lonely. |
| 2. I felt excluded. <i>I'm very sensitive to that.</i> | 7. I felt belittled |
| 3. I felt criticized. <i>I'm very sensitive to that.</i> | 8. I felt disrespected. |
| 4. I felt flooded. | 9. I felt powerless. |
| 5. I felt ashamed. | 10. I felt out of control. |
| | Other: |

Validation

Does any part of your partner's triggers and story make sense to you?

STEP 4

Responsibility: Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.

Under ideal conditions, you might have done better at talking about this issue.

1. What set you up for the miscommunication? What was your state of mind?

Share how you set yourself up to get into this conflict.

Read aloud the items that were true for you on the following list:

What set me up:

1. I'd been very stressed and irritable lately.
2. I'd not expressed much appreciation toward you lately.
3. I'd taken you for granted.
4. I'd been overly sensitive lately.
5. I'd been overly critical lately.
6. I'd not shared very much of my inner world.
7. I'd not been emotionally available.

What set me up (continued):

8. I'd been turning away more.
9. I'd been getting easily upset.
10. I'd been depressed lately.
11. I'd had a chip on my shoulder lately.
12. I'd not been very affectionate.
13. I'd not made time for good things between us.
14. I'd not been a very good listener lately.
15. I'd not asked for what I needed.
16. I'd been feeling a bit like a martyr.
17. I'd needed to be alone.
18. I'd not wanted to take care of anybody.
19. I'd been very preoccupied.
20. I hadn't felt very much confidence in myself.
21. I'd been running on empty.

2. Specifically what do you regret, and specifically, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?**3. What do you wish to apologize for?**

(Read aloud) I'm sorry that:

1. I over-reacted.
2. I was really grumpy.
3. I was defensive.
4. I was so negative.
5. I attacked you.
6. I didn't listen to you.
7. I wasn't respectful.
8. I was unreasonable.
9. Other:

**4. If you accept your partner's apology, say so.
If not, say what you still need.**

STEP 5

Constructive Plans: What is one thing your partner can do differently to avoid an incident like this from happening again?

Share one thing **your partner** can do to make a discussion of this issue better next time.

(It's important to remain calm as you do this.)

Then, while it's still your turn, share one thing **you** can do to make it better next time.

What do you need to be able to put this behind you and move on? Be as agreeable as possible to the plans suggested by your partner.

Write your plan to make it better:

Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes

