
Gottman-Rapoport Intervention

Goal

Discuss a topic in a manner where you both feel understood by each other.

Principle

Before you can engage in persuasion, you each have to summarize your partner's position to your partner's satisfaction. This is a far deeper process than an Active Listening exercise in that it requires each of you to interview your partner extensively about your partner's position, to ask questions, and to summarize and validate your partner's position.

The Assumption of Similarity

If you find yourself attributing a positive trait to yourself, try to see some of that trait in your partner. If you find yourself attributing a negative trait to your partner, try to see some of that trait in yourself as well.

Taking Notes

For the Listener, it is often helpful to take notes to aid in accurately reflecting back to the Speaker your understanding of the Speaker's position.

Rules for the Speaker

Your task is to honestly talk about your feelings and beliefs about your position on this issue.

Do not argue for or try to persuade your partner of your point of view; just explain how you see things. Tell your partner your thoughts and feelings about your position on this issue.

- *No blaming, criticism, or contempt.*
- *No "You" statements.*
- *Only use "I" statements about a specific situation.*
- *Talk about your feelings.*
- *State a positive need using a gentle start-up. Within every complaint there is a longing. When that longing is expressed, a recipe for how to fulfill it may emerge.*

Rules for the Listener

Building love and trust involves really listening to your partner, which is not as easy as it sounds. Below are four steps* to help you listen to your partner and gain understanding of your partner's position. *Remember, do not argue for your point of view. Your task is to listen and ask questions.*

* More information on building listening skills can be found in the "How to Be a Great Listener" booklet in The Relationship Guide series.

STEP 1 Prepare Yourself

- Postpone your own agenda.
- Tune into your partner's world.
- Hear your partner's pain, even if you don't agree with the details.
- Try to understand your partner's world from her or his perspective, not your own.

STEP 2 Attune

Hear the Speaker's feelings and be present with your partner. Your goal is just to understand.

DO:

- Ask open-ended questions (i.e. questions that can't be answered with a yes or no). These open the heart.
- Ask questions for clarification and elaboration that deepen your understanding of your partner's needs, such as "Tell me the story of that," "What do your values tell you about this?" and, "How does this situation affect you?"

DO NOT:

- Be critical, judgmental, or defensive.
- Minimize your partner's feelings.
- Take responsibility for your partner's feelings, try to make your partner feel better, or cheer your partner up.
- Engage in put downs or approach the discussion from a place of superiority.

STEP 3 Summarize and Reflect Back What You Hear

A big part of listening is witnessing and being present for your partner so that your partner doesn't feel so alone. A powerful way to "be there" for your partner is to identify and reflect back their feelings, and to restate what you heard your partner say using your own words. The goal is to be able to summarize the Speaker's position to the Speaker's satisfaction.

STEP 4 Validate, Communicate Understanding and Empathy

Validation doesn't mean that you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience. For example, you can validate and express empathy by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it. I can see why this upset you."

Ask your partner if she or he feels understood. If so, switch roles. If not, 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?"