

One in a series of articles by

Rachelle

Connecting With Others: PARTNER COMMUNICATION DIALOGUE

From a reader:

I've read the Nonviolent Communication book and it all makes a great deal of sense to me. I am really struggling though with putting it into practice.

My partner will not talk about his feelings so I don't know how to get anywhere with this. Whenever I try to discuss something with him that's important to me, he usually says, "I don't want to talk about it. It's your problem - you fix it."

First of all, it sounds like this type of exchange has happened more than once between the two of you. I'm guessing you feel a lot of frustration because you really value your relationship and you want to trust that a quality of intimacy and connection can be experienced between you. I imagine you'd enjoy hearing about his feelings and needs and that you'd also like your feelings and needs acknowledged and that from this depth of connection, some wonderful sharing would take place. Let's see how this might happen.

If you're making a choice to use Nonviolent Communication, you have two options at your disposal to:

1) express your own feelings and needs and

2) connect with his feelings and needs.

I would try handling this in the following way:

Partner 1: Dearest, when you tell me you don't want to talk, I feel scared and alone. I really value being able to share things with you and my needs for connection and support are met when we talk about things. At the same time, it sounds like you're irritated because you want ease and harmony between us and I'm wondering if you're nervous that this will end up being a discussion where one of us loses in the end.

Partner 2: Isn't that always the way when you have a problem with our relationship? You say it's our problem but really it's about what's wrong with me.

Partner 1: Are you worried because you're needing reassurance that I will be able to take responsibility for my own feelings and not blame you for how I'm feeling?

Partner 2: That would certainly be nice for a change. Whenever you feel poorly, I always seem to be involved somehow.

Partner 1: It sounds like you'd like some understanding for the pain you experience when I tell you about things I don't like in our relationship and that you'd really appreciate it if I would express myself in a way that makes it very clear to you that I'm not criticizing you or asking you fix something you don't know how to fix.

Partner 2: I really hate it when you complain about us and then get angry when I tell you you're just not seeing things accurately. You make everything into such a big deal.



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Partner 1: So you really value a level of realism about what's happening as well as some ease in our relationship.

Partner 2: Yes . . . can't we just get along without having all this process stuff?

Partner 1: Are you frustrated because you need connection too and you want it to happen without so much work?

Partner 2: Yes, don't you?

Partner 1: I suppose I do and now I'm somewhat surprised because we're having a connection right now which is what I'm wanting and yet it wasn't so hard. How is this for you?

Partner 2: It's ok - I'm not quite sure.

Partner 1: Would you be willing to hear more about what's happening for me?

Partner 2: Sure.

Partner 1: I'm grateful for this experience. I would like us to be able to hear each other this way more often. I like being able to hear what you're saying without

judging you for it. I also really want to be able to share my concerns openly with you so that we can experience a deeper connection. I'm wondering how you feeling hearing this?

Partner 2: Yes, I can see that it would make a difference for us even though I'm not so sure it will always happen.

Partner 1: It sounds like you like what's happening yet you're unsure about whether or not you can trust that we will be able to maintain a respectful connection in the future, especially when we're really triggered.

I think we can all see how taking this approach is going to get us a lot closer to getting everyone's needs met.

To add a little piece to this, at the beginning the reader said "my partner will not talk about his feelings". I like to respect a person's wishes when they say they don't want to talk about their feelings. I'll do it in two ways:

- 1) simply drop the word feeling from my words while still referring to feelings (this is the choice I made above in some cases) or
- 2) drop all references to feelings and focus only on the need (also done above).

I hear the person's needs for emotional safety and respect as well as their need for reassurance that they will not find themselves in an uncomfortable place without their consent.

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