

One in a series of articles by

Rachelle

## Connecting With Others: STATING YOUR NEEDS

From a reader:

I am looking after my young child at home. I had attempted to get clear information about my husband's timetable twice during the day. When I asked, he was vague.

When he comes home at dinnertime, the phone rings and while I'm answering it he leaves again without telling me when he would return. The sun is setting and I feel myself being out of balance emotionally and know the only solution is to go for a hike.

My reaction to his leaving is extreme; I snap into a panic attack, crying, wanting to "run away", self loathing, desperate, trapped, humiliated by my own reaction. What I thought I might say: "When you went out for a second time today without stating your return time, I felt panicked, frustrated, and very sad because I need time before dark to go for a walk in order to stabilize my energy so that I can cope with my life and I would like you to tell me your time commitments and give me the option to negotiate time for myself."

I find it difficult to state my needs without feeling diminished and failing in some way. I don't know how I could possibly hear a "no" to my request. This paralyzes me from making my request.

I would make a slight change to your request because first, it could come across as a demand and second, it expresses a wish and not a present

request - you've expressed what you would like him to do but you haven't requested anything.

How about "When you went out for a 2nd time today without stating your return time, I felt panicked and frustrated because I need support in order to get time alone to stabilize my energy. Would you agree to keep me informed about your schedule so that I can make other arrangements for the kids if necessary?"

I also suggest using less words as I have done which may make it easier for him to hear your needs. You'll notice too that I suggest asking for something from him immediately - an agreement.

Re your feelings of diminishment and failure: I suggest that you give yourself some empathy. When you peel away the self-judgments "diminished" and "failed, I'm guessing that you're feeling discouraged and hopeless. And that when you express your needs, you find it difficult to value and honour yourself. Perhaps you are telling yourself that you "shouldn't" have needs and "should" be able to manage everything by yourself?

Give yourself some space to simply sit with this and maybe even mourn the times you have not valued yourself (your needs) if this is the case. Since you are a busy mom, there are probably many times when your need to nurture others takes precedence over your need to care of yourself. Be with that and appreciate how at those times you are in fact meeting a need (to nurture others) and just how beautiful that is. If you do this, I am thinking that thoughts like "diminished" and "failed" will fall away and you might feel grateful for the fact that give as much as you do and that being in touch with your gratitude might become a source of energy. And since your giving meets



Rachelle Lamb

the needs of others (referring to your children whose needs for love, care, and nurturing are being met by your giving), it becomes apparent that all the things you do to take care of you are vitally important in order to sustain your giving. When you connect with this (and I am referring to a realization here that is beyond "I'm worth it" or "I deserve it" thinking which is still judgmental), you value yourself and your needs and will find it easier to be aligned with that energy when you ask others for help.

Expressing your needs is a gift to others - it is more likely that others will want to help you when you truly believe that your needs are a gift.

About hearing a no: Never hear "no"; only hear the needs being expressed behind the no. Let's just say that your husband does say "no" after you make the statement that I suggested. I would guess that even though a request was expressed, he likely heard a demand. With that in mind, we can guess that his needs for freedom and autonomy would not be met by complying with your request.

Here's a possible dialogue:

Wife: When you went out for a 2nd

time today without stating your return time, I felt panicked and frustrated because I need support in order to get time alone to stabilize my energy. Would you agree to keep me informed about your schedule so that I can make other arrangements for the kids if necessary?

Husband: No . . . I'm not going to be reporting everything I do to you!

Wife: (go straight to giving empathy) So when you hear me ask you to let me know what your schedule is, are you feeling irritated because you want the freedom to come and go as you please?

Husband: That's right! And half the time, I don't even know what my schedule is going to be until the last minute.

Wife: And when you find out about your schedule at the last minute, do you feel frustrated because you'd like more predictability as well as consideration for your time from people like your boss?

Husband: Yeah, it's a real drag. But he can't help it. That's just the way things are.

Wife: Am I hearing that you're feeling discouraged because you'd like some options but can't seem to see any at the present time?

Husband: Yeah, it's a drag.

(At this point, speech has likely slowed down a great deal - there would be a sense of connection, a flow of compassion and there and a greater sense of presence in the room. There may be silence as well.)

Wife: I'm wondering if there's anything more you'd like me to hear or anything I can do to support you.

Husband: No. I feel better just having

you listen.

Wife: If there's nothing more, I'd like to share what's going on for me. Would you be willing to listen?

Husband: Sure.

Wife: I'm feeling some sadness hearing about your frustration because I would like some ease for you in your work life. I'm also feeling relieved that we have spoken because it meets my need for connection with you and I am feeling less angst than I did earlier. I'm recognizing how when you feel frustrated about your work and your schedule, your might not be thinking about communicating to me about when you will be coming and going from home. Is this accurate?

Husband: Yes.

Wife: When you don't tell me what times you'll be leaving and returning though, I feel anxious because I need to take time to care for myself at the end of the day. Knowing when you will be home helps me to schedule this time. I'm wanting to be sure that I'm expressing myself with clarity and I'm wondering if you'd be willing to let me know what you're hearing me say?

Husband: I hear you saying that you'd really like to know what my work schedule is so that you can plan time for yourself away from the kids. (you'll only get a response like this if your husband is feeling connected with you as a result of having received empathy from you - if he doesn't repeat something like this back to you, he needs more empathy.)

Wife: Yes that's it and I'm wondering if you'd agree to keep me informed about your schedule?

Husband: Yes I'll do that.

This is one of many options of course.

If moving to empathy at the beginning isn't possible because you're needing empathy, then you have the option of restating your needs with clarity and persistence or you can take a time out if you predict that continuing with the dialogue will lead to even more disconnection. No matter what, remember that both of you are doing the very best you can given the resources you have at that moment.

Remember also that your needs can get met in other ways: perhaps you call a neighbour to watch your kids for 30 minutes instead of asking your husband. Then you might still feel angry because your need for consideration and shared responsibility might not be met by your husband leaving without letting you know when he'll be back. This might translate into head thoughts that you are being "taken for granted." You might want to dig deeper just to be sure what your needs are.

Sometimes when we express an unmet need and explore it, we find another unmet need which also needs to be addressed. It doesn't matter where you start or even if the first need expressed turns out not to be the core one.

What's important is to stay connected with feelings and needs and let them lead you in your process. I feel very grateful to you for helping out in this way.

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