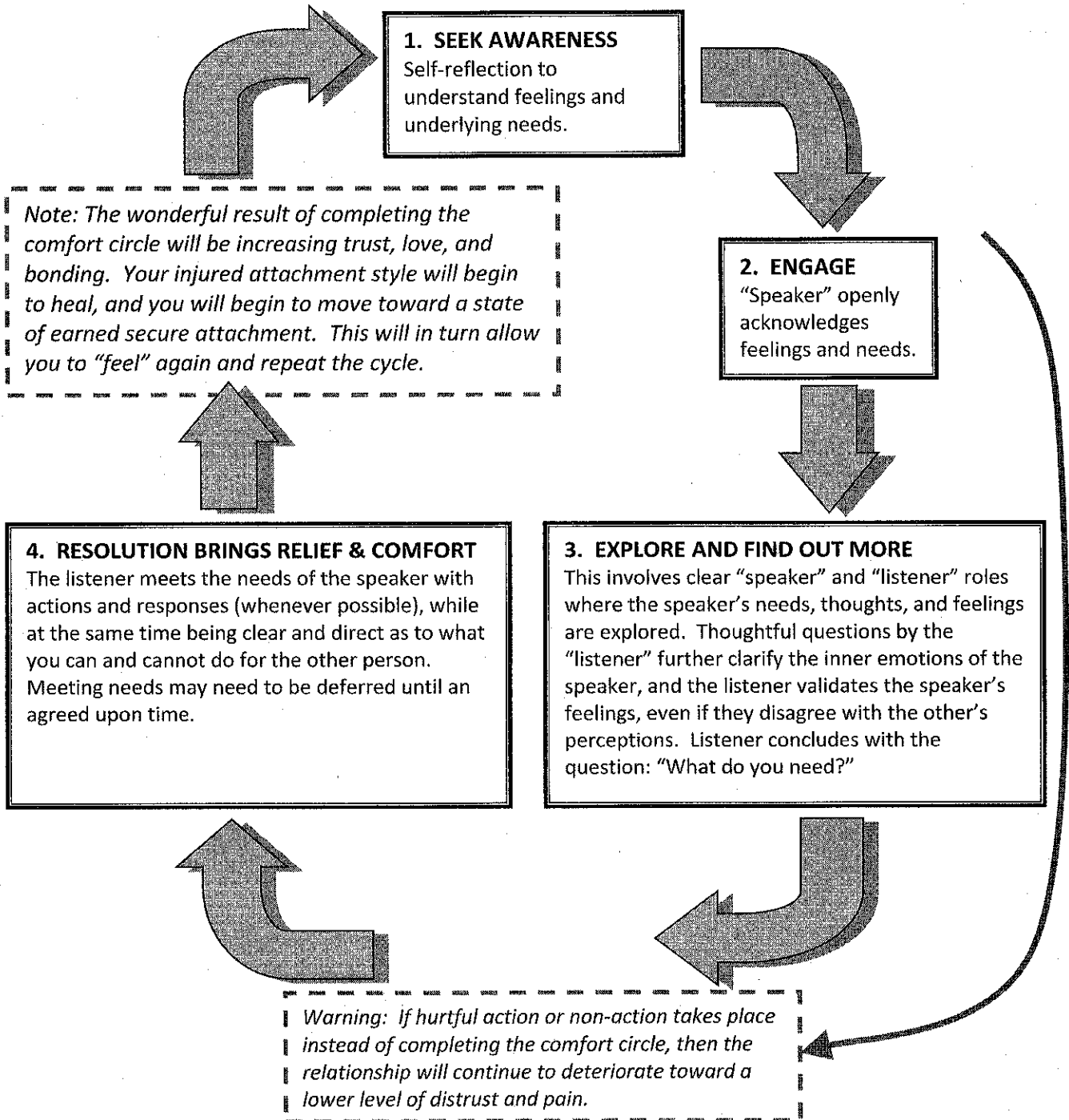


How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

COMFORT CIRCLE

How We Create Bonding



How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

THE LISTENER

LISTENER GOALS:

"But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (James 1: 19-20)." The goal is to enter the perspective and mindset of the other person until I can see the situation through their eyes. We need to ask questions and probe for deeper understanding and expand our knowledge of the other's feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

LISTEN CALMLY:

- Don't defend yourself, argue, explain or problem solve. You don't have to agree with what you are hearing to listen and explore.
- Focus on the speaker's experience, not yours.

CONTROL YOUR REACTIVITY:

Remember, when defenses go up.... listening goes down. Remind yourself: I can listen with an open mind even if I disagree. The speaker is a separate person with his or her own feelings, thoughts, personality, and family history.

BE AWARE OF YOUR NON -VERBAL RESPONSES:

- Don't roll eyes, sigh, groan, or give responses that stop communication.
- Maintain eye contact and encourage the Speaker to continue.

FOUR STEPS OF LISTENING

- Listen and ask the speaker to stop and let you summarize if it gets too long.
- Repeat back in your own words what you heard and check for accuracy.
- Ask questions that will broaden your understanding.
- Respond with empathy ... "I see what you are saying" or "I can see how you might feel that way."

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- "Tell me more, I want to understand."
- "How does that make you feel?"
- "Are there other times you have felt this? Are there times you felt this as a child?"
- "Are you hurt? Afraid? Scared? Angry?"
- "What are your Hopes? Expectations? Desires?"
- Don't ask "Why"? (It is can sound challenging or blaming) Ask: "Where? How? Who? What?", questions.
- If you are wrong, don't apologize until you have fully listened.

RESOLUTION: Key guiding question: "What do you need right now?"

- **Ownership:** "I need you to admit and own the problem, infraction or mistake."
- **Forgiveness:** "I need a well thought through forgiveness statement and an apology."
- **Little or nothing:** "You know, I don't think I need anything right now, I just feel better having gotten that off my chest."
- **Reassurance:** "I need to hear from you that things will be OK, or that you will work on this or that you still really love me!"
- **Agree to disagree:** "While we still do not agree on this, I do feel like we understand and accept one another."
- **Negotiation:** "I need for us to find some middle ground or a compromise on this!"
- **Analysis / problem solving:** "Would you help me figure out how to solve or fix this reoccurring problem?"
- **Comfort and Nurture:** "Would you please hold me and comfort me while I cry?"

(For additional information on resolution see page 23.)

How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

THE SPEAKER

SPEAKER GOALS:

"Speak truth, each one of you for we are members of one another (Ephesians 4:25-32)." The goal is to choose a topic of concern that you would like to explore and to share your concerns in a way that minimizes defensiveness in the listener.

GET STARTED:

- Make a clear statement about your desire to talk about ONE TOPIC. For example, *"I need to talk to you about the monthly finances"*. Don't hint (*"Maybe we could spend some time together"*) and don't drop bombs (*"Well the bank is going to take the house this month"*).
- Check the listener's readiness to listen and agree upon a time. *"When would be a good time for you to discuss this?"*

TRY THE FOLLOWING:

- Introduce the issue you'd like to discuss by talking about yourself, your experiences, and your feelings.
- Use "I" statements rather than "YOU" statements. For example, *"I am feeling sad that I didn't get to spend any time with you"* instead of *"You are always busy and never have time for me"*. If you need to share something negative about the listener, start and end with a positive affirmation about them.
- If the Listener is causing you to feel unsafe, share what is happening (or could happen) that is making you feel unsafe. For example, *"I am feeling unsafe because your tone of voice sounds disinterested and defensive."*
- If you have a concern about how the talk might go, start with it that. For example, *"I need to have you listen without the television on."*

EXPRESS YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS:

- Use feeling words to help explain your experience.
- Be honest. Pretending or minimizing is dishonest. Speak the truth in the most loving way you can.
- Be vulnerable. Try not to avoid pain or embarrassment that may be a part of sharing deep feelings.

IF YOU ARE ANGRY:

- Try and discover the feeling under the anger. Hurt and sad feelings are usually underneath the anger.
- Take a "time-out" if necessary. Don't use time-out to escape and avoid. The following statement works well... *"I'm getting so angry that I need to call a 'time-out' so I can cool down and we will continue this talk in (10 minutes, 1 hour etc.)."* Don't blame, accuse, or name call as this always is destructive.

How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

SOUL WORDS: A Feelings Word List

HAPPY, cheerful, delighted, elated, encouraged, glad, gratified, joyful, lighthearted, overjoyed, pleased, relieved, satisfied, thrilled, secure, optimistic.

LOVING, affectionate, cozy, passionate, romantic, warm, tender, responsive, thankful, appreciative, refreshed, pleased, comforted, reassured.

HIGH ENERGY, energetic, enthusiastic, excited, playful, rejuvenated, talkative, pumped, motivated, driven, determined, obsessed, jittery.

AMAZED, stunned, surprised, shocked, jolted, enlightened.

ANXIOUS, afraid, uneasy, fearful, nauseated, nervous, restless, preoccupied, worried, scared, panicky, tense, fearful, terrified, insecure, indecisive, hyper-vigilant, cautious.

CONFIDENT, positive, secure, self-assured, assertive.

PEACEFUL, relieved, at ease, calm, comforted, cool, relaxed, composed, protected.

OVERWHELMED, apprehensive, boxed in, burdened, confused, distressed, guarded, hard-pressed, panicky, paralyzed, tense, weighed down, edgy.

TRAUMATIZED, shocked, disturbed, injured, damaged, unloved, unlovable, hated.

ANGRY, annoyed, controlled, manipulated, furious, grouchy, grumpy, irritated, provoked, frustrated, hateful, cold, icy, bitter cynical.

LOW ENERGY, beaten down, exhausted, tired, weak, listless, depressed, detached, withdrawn, indifferent, apathetic, lazy, bored.

ALONE, avoidant, lonely, abandoned, deserted, isolated, cut off, detached, disconnected, unwanted.

SAD, unhappy, crushed, dejected, depressed, desperate, hopeless, grieved, heavy, despairing, weepy.

BETRAYED, deceived, fooled, duped, tricked, misled, skeptical.

CONFUSED, baffled, perplexed, mystified, bewildered, misunderstood, disoriented.

ASHAMED, guilty, mortified, humiliated, embarrassed, exposed, stupid.

DISAPPOINTED, let down, disheartened, disillusioned, distrustful.

INVISIBLE: forgotten overlooked, unimportant, invisible, disregarded, lost.

DESPISED: ridiculed, dumb, belittled, mocked, scorned, shamed, hated, detested.

How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

COMFORT CIRCLE: Guide for the Listener

GOAL: To complete the comfort circle as the listener. Increase self and other awareness by listening to them and asking good questions. Ask the questions below pausing between questions to reflect, rephrase and validate feelings. Take notes if necessary.

1. **PROMPTING EVENT:** Share with me one thing that is stressing you, concerns you, or is upsetting to you.
2. **IDENTIFY FEELINGS:** Using the *Soul Words* list tell me the top three feelings you have about this circumstance and try to use more than one category on the soul words list.
3. **RATE FEELINGS:** Rate the intensity of each feeling from 1(low) to 10 (high).
Reminder to listener: Try not to judge the feelings you are hearing as right or wrong. As a listener, you may not understand or agree with the feelings or behaviors. The goal is to listen to gain understanding rather than reacting. The more we listen the more likely we will reach a resolution.
4. **PHYSICAL REACTIONS:** How do you experience these feelings in your body? Try to describe places of pressure, tension, pain, and tightness. When experiencing these feelings is your breathing deep, shallow, fast, or slow?
5. **BEHAVIORS/ACTIONS:** What did you do (behaviors/reactions) because of these feelings? How did you express the emotions or what actions did you take?
6. **CONSEQUENCES:** Were there any consequences because of these feelings, actions, or behaviors?
7. **BELIEFS/ASSUMPTIONS:** When you have these feelings and reactions what are your beliefs or assumptions about God, yourself, or others?
 - When you feel (respond) this way what do you believe about God?
 - When you feel (respond) this way what do you believe about yourself?
 - When you feel (respond) this way what do you believe about others?
8. **CHILDHOOD FEELINGS:** Did you experience this feeling (or these feelings) as a child? What happened? How old were you? **If the answer is yes, ask questions 9 & 10. If the answer is no, skip to question 11.**
9. **CHILDHOOD BELIEFS.** If you had these feelings as a child, how did you find relief? Did you form any beliefs about yourself or family members because of these experiences?
10. **RELATE PAST TO PRESENT:** How much of your **current** feelings and reactions in our relationship are about the past versus the present? Try and give a percentage.
11. **BRING FEELINGS AND NEEDS INTO RELATIONSHIP:** Can you summarize by telling me what you need when you feel this way? (See question 2). *"When I feel (see question 2) _____ I need _____".*
12. **LISTENER SUMMARIZE:** Summarize and thank the speaker for sharing. *"Thanks for sharing. Here's what I learned from our conversation".* If you cannot meet the request, look for a compromise. Don't make promises you cannot keep.

How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

PRACTICING CONVERSATIONS

FOUR STEPS OF LISTENING: (Listening is the harder role!) Overview of the Comfort Circle

- Listen. Then ask the speaker to stop and let you summarize if it gets too long. Ask them for feelings.
- Repeat back in your own words what you heard and check for accuracy.
- Ask questions that will broaden your understanding.
- Respond with empathy, "I see what you are saying" or "I can see how you might feel that way." Ask what they need from the resolution options.

CONVERSATION STARTERS: ("Awareness" Part of the Comfort Circle)

- "Pick a word from the **Soul Words** list that fits with an event in your day and tell me about it."
- "Tell me about the best thing in your day and the worst thing in your day."
- "Choose an area in our life—work, relationships, church, friends, hobbies, and so on—and then pick a few feeling words that describe your current experiences and feelings about that area."
- "Pick a feeling and tell me about a childhood experience when you felt that emotion."
- "Choose the feeling you felt most during your day and tell me about it."

GOOD QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES: ("Explore" Part of the Comfort Circle Part I)

- "Tell me more, I want to understand."
- "What can I do to make it safe for you to open up to me?"
- "How long have you been feeling this way?"
- "Are you feeling anything in addition to the emotion you just shared?"
- "On a scale of 1-10, how strong is your feeling?"
- "Can you give me an example?"
- "How does that make you feel?" (When you see a feeling, reach out and touch.)
- "Are there other times you have felt this? Are there times you felt this as a child?"
- "What are your Hopes? Expectations? Desires?"
- "Ask: Where? How? Who? What?" questions. Don't ask "Why"? (It is often accusatory)
- Stay with feelings and refrain from problem solving.
- Tie the memories to the current reactivity.
- If you are wrong, don't apologize until you have fully listened.

VALIDATION (EMPATHY) STATEMENTS: ("Explore" Part of the Comfort Circle Part II).

- "I understand how you could feel that way."
- "From your perspective, your feelings make sense."
- "I would probably feel the same way if I were in your situation."
- "I see your tears, and I see how hurt you feel."
- "I see how angry you feel and how upset this makes you."
- "It makes sense to me that you would feel _____."
- "I can't imagine what it would be like to _____."
- "I can see why _____."
- Reflect what you see in his/her eyes right now. "I see _____."

RESOLUTION: ASK, "WHAT DO YOU NEED?" ("Resolve" Part of the Comfort Circle)

- See next page "Resolution".

RECONNECT EVEN IF YOU DON'T RESOLVE:

- Praise one another for making the effort to listen and grow.

How We Love

A Relationship Workshop

RESOLUTION: Repairing After a Rupture

Goal: To follow Christ's example of being willing to initiate restoration, seek harmony and reconciliation after a rupture occurs. The gospel is a story of rupture and repair. God initiated, moved toward the problem, and sacrificed his very life to accomplish repair and resolution in our relationship with Him. We are called to follow his example.

Summarize and Affirm: After both parties fully listen to one another (using the awareness worksheet) summarize what you heard and affirm the person to whom you are listening. Even if you disagree, express understanding for their feelings and thank them for listening and/or sharing. Remember; be aware of your body language, voice tone, and facial expressions. *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Romans 14:19).*

Pray: Pray aloud asking God to give you wisdom and enable you to reach resolution. Ask that each of you be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. *The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)*

Reassurance and Comfort: Sometimes being deeply listened to brings resolution. Perhaps your partner just needs comfort; a hug, holding, affirming or reassurance.

Ownership: Review the prompting event and consider your own behavior. Do you need to apologize? Do not blame, rationalize, or excuse bad behavior but rather own and apologize for any mistakes, overreacting, unkind words, inappropriate anger, defensiveness, or selfishness. Apologize by summarizing your errors, asking forgiveness, and stop. Don't say, *"But you..."* *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (Prov. 12:18). He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)*

Needs: Take turns asking your partner, *"What do you need?"* or *"What would help you move on and feel better?"* Listen to the request and reflect what you heard.

Requests: If you are asking your spouse to change a behavior make the request specific and observable. (Not, *"I want you to spend more time with the family"* ...rather *"Could you plan one night per week to be available for game night with the family?"*) Consider your spouse's history and skill level in your request. Ask yourself, *"Is my request reasonable?"* *"Does my spouse have the skill level to be successful?"*

Compromise: Remember, we can win the battle but lose the war. Look for resolutions that make both people feel like they have been heard. Try for a win/win rather than a win/lose. If you are stuck, stop, and have each partner write several possible suggestions or solutions. Share your ideas with one another so you can look at more than one option. *A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions (Proverbs 18:2).*

Test a Solution: If one spouse is reluctant to proceed with a plan or proposal, agree to try one possible solution for a specified period. Set a date to review how the idea is working. Adjust after evaluating or try the other partner's idea for a specified time.

Agree to Disagree: Sometimes in marriage we need to agree to disagree. There should be a balance of give and take rather than one partner always getting their way.