Engaging and Connection (Conversation 4)

Part 1: What am I most afraid of?

a) Go to a rocky moment.
b) Find your emotions and write them down. Ask your partner to do the same.
c) Then sit with your partner.
d) Which one of you is the most withdrawn? That person starts (the person who is most tuned into their hurts and fears should not go first).
e) Answer the question, What am I most afraid of? Tune into core fears, share them, and say what it feels like to reveal them.
f) If you are the listening partner, respond by saying what it was like to hear the disclosures. Was it easy or hard to understand the message? If it was hard, at what point did it become difficult to listen? What feeling came up then? Examine the feelings together.
g) Now the listening partner repeats the disclosure process.
h) This conversation will be especially beneficial for distressed couples, but it is also valuable to those insecure relationships. We all have attachments and fears, even if they have no edge or urgency at the moment.
i) Above all, keep in mind that this is a sensitive conversation: you are both exposing your deepest vulnerability. You each must respect the risk the other is taking. Remember, the two of you are taking this step because you are special to each other and are trying to create a very special kind of bond between you.
j) What is it like to say that? What is it like for your spouse to hear that?

Part 2: What do I most need from you?

a) Openly and positively speak your needs in a way that invites our partner to respond. Example: "I need to know that when I am not the perfect husband and get confused, do not know what to do, you still want to be with me. Maybe that you want me even if you are upset. Even if I get overwhelmed and make mistakes, hurt your feelings. I need to know you will not leave me. When you are depressed or very mad, it seems like you have already gone."
b) Focus on a secure relationship. What would you tell them is your deepest attachment need? How do you think they would have answered?
c) Now think of a past relationship when you did not feel secure. What was it that you really needed from this person? Try to express it in two simple sentences. How would he or she have replied?

d) Now move on to your spouse. Think about what you most need to feel secure and loved. Write it down. Then begin this conversation for real with your partner.

e) Here is a list of phrases partners can use in this conversation. If it helps you, you can simply check the one that most fits you and show it to your partner. If this is too hard to do, take a smaller step and talk about how difficult it is to explicitly formulate and state your need. Tell your partner if there is some way he or she can help you with this. This dialogue contains the key emotional drama of our lives, so sometimes:

- I need to feel, to sense that I am special to you and that you really value our relationship.
- I need that reassurance that I am number one with you and that nothing is more important to you than us.
- I need to know I am wanted by you, as a partner and a love, that making me happy is important to you.
- I long to know I am loved and accepted, with my failings and imperfections. That it's ok that I can't be perfect for you.
- I am needed. You want me close.
- I am safe because you care about my feelings, hurts, and needs.
- I can count on you to hear me and to put everything else aside.
- I can ask you to hold me and to understand that just asking is very hard for me.

f) If you aren't sure how to respond or feel anxious, just share that. Being present is the secret here, rather than responding in any set way.

g) How does it feel to share this with your spouse? How does it feel for them to hear it?

h) Confirm you have heard your partner's message, that you appreciate what they are sharing with you and that you want to be responsive is a positive first step.

i) After the conversation, write down the key statements each of you made below. The key statements will help you further clarify your internal and external dramas and guide you in future conversations.

NOTES from Connection And Engagement Conversation