

The Couples Cure

Miraculous Recovery for Couples on the Brink

Phase II: Authentic Self-Expression (Inside-Out)

Lesson 4: Emotional Connection

I'm excited! We're entering phase two now, which is all about authentic self-expression, which is that inside out energy. I know that for phase one, we were really looking inward and getting really clear on why we chose our spouse, how we got here in the first place, what the opportunities are for growth, clearing out the limiting beliefs, all that good stuff, maintaining boundaries, really knowing who you are. Now we're moving into the phase where we can use that self-awareness to be able to have authentic self-expression, which is really difficult to do until we really do that foundational work and laying the groundwork in phase one.

Before we get into lesson four - emotional connection, I'm just going to do an overview of this phase. There's four lessons in this phase:

4. The Foundation : Emotional Connection
5. Repair: Resentment, Trust, and Forgiveness
6. Common Pitfalls and Losing Strategies
7. Communication Mastery

The first one is going to be today, which is Lesson 4 - The foundation of emotional connection. Then in Lesson 5, we're going to be looking at repair and all the topics of resentment, trust, forgiveness, and everything that that entails. Then we're going to look at where most people get tripped up in communication and this is going to be in Lesson 6 - the common pitfalls and losing strategies, looking at some challenges around communication. Then finally, in lesson four, we're going to move into communication mastery. You'll get the toolkit. It's called a master toolkit. You'll be able to communicate anything that you want to communicate from a place of authenticity without worrying about causing problems. Just knowing that you're free to say what is true for you and actually bring you closer as opposed to farther apart. The very foundation of doing all of this in phase two and being able to express ourselves authentically so that our spouse can really love who we are without us hiding any parts of ourselves is emotional connection.

So for Lesson 4, we have to start with the very foundation of healthy communication and that is how do we create emotional connection, which sometimes is overlooked in relationship work. A lot of times, we jump right to communication skills or problem solving and we skip this super essential part. Now the reason why this is so important is that you can't grow while you're still in self-protection. An emotional connection is what allows you to go from protection mode and staying inward, like we did in phase one, to the growth phase and expansion because now you're safe and you feel nourished enough to do so.

And I love this quote by Anaïs Nin, where she says, "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." I love this because I think a lot of you are at this point right now where it's too painful to stay where you are. Even though the pain of the risk is also scary. Feels really scary to like get out of protection mode and expanding and come out and say, "here's what's really going on for me to be really vulnerable to build that emotional connection." But at this stage, after you've done this work, it's actually more painful to stay where you are and to remain hidden. The work that you've done, we're going to actually put to really good use right now.

But first I want to define what is emotional connection. In a nutshell, emotional connection is not just about affection. It's not about sharing emotions necessarily. It's that deep knowing that you're safe with your spouse, that you can reach for them, and they're there for you. It's that essential primal safety that comes from meeting attachment needs which all adults have. That is not just for kids, like, I think there's this myth of individuation and independence where we think that attachment needs are something that we outgrow. And that if we still have needs and that means that we're somehow not a grown-up or we're not independent enough or there's something wrong with us like we're underdeveloped. This has been supported actually by the cutting-edge research and the new brain science, that was put forward by Dr. Sue Johnson. It was actually originally put forth by John Bowlby, who did work on attachment. It's now having a resurgence in the work that Sue Johnson's doing in light of the

work that she's done. But the premise of this science goes against the idea that in order to be a healthy adult, you have to be "independent" and shed your needs for attachment. In fact what it says is that independence isn't even healthy because what's healthy is to be connected and interdependent, to truly need each other and to be in environments where we can need each other, because we do. But we have to be able to find healthy environments to do that in order to create healthy relationships in which we can do that. We can't actually be healthy as a person unless we have healthy attachment in our lives, in our relationships. We're wired for attachment all the way up until we die. We're never going to outgrow our need for attunement. We're never going to outgrow our need to feel safe and being able to trust other people. Specifically in this case, our spouse or our partner, that's going to be such an important component of having health in the relationship.

There's three things that constitute emotional connection according to Sue Johnson. I like this breakdown, too:

- Accessibility: Can I reach you?

Number one is accessibility, which really answers the question of, *can I reach you?* This is a desire for our spouse to be willing to struggle to make sense of what's going on for us. Like the desire of our spouse to want to understand what's going on or for us to be curious about our spouse's emotions so that they're not so overwhelming, so that you're with each other in that experience. That requires staying open to our partner even when we feel insecure or to remember that our spouse might feel insecure and to hold that space for them.

- Responsiveness: Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?

The other thing is responsiveness. That answers the question of *can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?* So it goes beyond accessibility and attunement. But it's really about being able to indicate to your spouse how their emotions impact you or for our spouse to indicate to us how our emotions impact them. Sending a clear signal of comfort. It's like saying, "I'm putting a priority on your emotional signals," "I see your emotional signals," "I'm prioritizing them and I'm giving you comfort and care." That calms us on a physiological level. That's the responsiveness piece.

- Engagement: Do I know you will value me and stay close?

Then finally, there's the engagement piece. Engagement is more than just responsiveness. It's a knowing that the other person values us and is going to stay close to us. It's really communicated through presence. Like if your spouse is really giving you eye contact, looking at you, you can see that they see you. They're touching you more, they're more tuned in. There's more of that physical presence. It's something that you can feel. We can feel when someone is there with us. We can see when someone is seeing us even if they're not even saying anything. It's that sense of value that we get from knowing that that person is close. That gives us emotional connection.

The other way to define emotional connection is it's a predictability of accessibility and that it's consistent over time.

It's the predictable accessibility of:

- Attunement/curiosity,
- Caring response, and
- Touch/physical presence.

When those three things are there, consistently and it's predictable. It doesn't mean it's like a 100% perfect. Nobody's going to be 100% perfect at attunement, being really connected with us. But if there's consistency and it's more or less predictable, generally speaking, I know my spouse is there for me in these ways, then you have emotional connection.

Why is Emotional Connection So Important? The reason why this is so important is that it's really, we can look at this in terms of what happens when we don't have it, without it spouses feel very alone and operate as though you're the enemy. You probably have that experience where you don't feel connected. You don't feel like they're tuned in to you. You don't feel like they care. You're gonna respond to them like they're not on your side.

Without it, spouses:

- Do not hear each other accurately.

That lack of emotional connection changes the perceptual filter so you're hearing things through the lenses of this *person's my enemy. They are not for me. It's me versus them. I have to fight them. I have to convince them.* That actually changes how we hear people. That's why it's so important. With the emotional connection, we have a much more positive perceptual filter of everything that they're saying.

- Go into primal panic

The other thing that happens is that we go into primal panic in disagreements or disconnection. This is a term that was coined by a neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp. I like this term primal panic because it's a really intense sense of fight or flight. Now we all have fear when we have a disagreement with our partner. There's always a little bit of tension around that, some anxiety. But for couples with a really secure bond, it's just a blip on the screen. It's not a big deal. But for couples where the bonds are really weak and there's a history of disconnection growing up or there's a history of disconnection in that relationship, that fear can be really overwhelming.

- Don't trust their spouse

Then the other thing that happens when there's not emotional connection is there's not a sense of being relaxed and there's no trust. People don't trust their spouse when there's no emotional connection and that causes arguments. You're anticipating the worst. It's connected to the perceptual filter. But the primary reason people fight is to protest against disconnection. We protest against disconnection by fighting. We might not even realize it so we get angry or we make demands or we make accusations or we complain a lot. Those are really just cries for safe connection. They're a way of crying out to say, "there's something missing that I'm trying to get." Sometimes we would rather fight and feel like we're getting connection through fighting than to not fight and to just feel that emptiness. That's just a human reflex. It's funny when I talk to people on the phones, in enrollment calls, and you know the first thing I ask is, "what's the thing that's not working? What's the top thing that's not working in your relationship?" Most of the time people will tell me it's communication or we just can't talk honestly, we just don't understand each other, my spouse ignores me or my spouse wants to talk too much. They think it's about the communication or some other stressor in the relationship outside of them. But then after I explore further with them and I'm asking questions about like, *what's at stake for you and what's the worst part about that for you?* It always comes to light that it's usually because they don't feel emotionally connected. They don't really feel like this person is on my side, they're on my team, they've got my back. That's how I know that that's the primary thing. When that's in place everything else will be better. It really is about safety. When people don't feel safe with each other, they don't hear each other right away. So that psychological connection has to proceed healthy communication. That's why we're starting with this first.

When we do not feel safe:

- Spouses use unconscious strategies to deal with the fear of losing connection

The other thing that happens when we're not feeling safer, when there's no emotional connection, is that spouses tend to use unconscious strategies to deal with their fear of losing connection. You've probably already identified some of these as you were doing previous lessons, like, *what your child states are, what your adaptive child does, what your losing strategies are.* These are largely unconscious. It comes from that fear of losing connection. And as a distressed partner resorts to those more and more, it sets up a spiral of behavior. It creates more insecurity. One person becomes defensive and sort of blocks the connection. Then each person is left assuming the worst about each other in the relationship. It's just a vicious cycle.

- Respond with anger or frustration; demanding rather than questioning

The other thing that will happen is that people will make the mistake of trying to connect with anger or frustration because of a lack of confidence. This is connected to what I just said about the unconscious strategies. This is the most common, very specific one that I see because we end up demanding rather than questioning. We end up being like an angry pursuer rather than coming in vulnerably and sharing or really seeking to understand first before we make assumptions. Then that can lead to power struggles.

- Focus on sex to get the connection

And then, another really common way to deal with lack of emotional connection is to focus on sex to get the connection. Sometimes this works to like open up the emotional connection. Sometimes it doesn't. It really depends on the couple and their history. A lot of times, people need the emotional connection first in order to then connect physically. People can get in gridlock around this issue. A lot of times people confuse that and they think, *oh my spouse only just wants sex.* Actually, it's more than that. It is about that sense of being desired and feeling like, *you're with me and we're together and I can trust you.* These are things that are all happening because most people have not been taught the language of attachment. We're going to get to the answers in just a minute.

Healthy couples don't necessarily talk to each other in any more of a "skilled way."

What's interesting to me actually that came up in Gottman's work is that, and this is just to highlight the importance of emotional connection versus having communication tools, he found that healthy couples actually, like the couples that have really gone the distance, they don't talk to each other in any more of a skilled way. They don't communicate in the best ways all the time. They don't always listen empathetically to each other. They don't always understand how their past might have set up problematic expectations. Even the very articulate skilled couples can still fail or not listen empathetically or just miss the cue or not be there sometimes for their spouse.

But because they perceive they are safe, it's not an ongoing issue.

But if they're essentially emotionally safe with each other, then these actions are not perceived as a threat to safety. If your partner falls short or they disappoint you, it doesn't become a big deal. It's not like evidence that they're not there for you. It's just, *oh that was disappointing, they missed that.* But they can easily repair because they feel safe at the core, in spite of the moments of misses or disconnection. It's really the perception of safety that's the most important thing. This is where couples get tripped up, too. It's like, *well, of course I care. Of course, you're safe.* But it's the perception that matters. It can be true or it can be imaginary based on the past. It's the perception that counts not the reality. If you are committed to coming forward and being vulnerable with your spouse about what you need for safety and if you, as a spouse, are committed to finding out what your spouse needs for safety, then it's really not that hard to do. This isn't really that hard. I think that the stuff I'm going to teach in this lesson is, even though it feels risky in some ways on an emotional level, technically it's just not that hard. Like compared to belief work or even boundary work. That's the good news.

How can couples feel safe with each other? What can be done to build that into the fabric of the relationship so that even in those unskilled moments, it doesn't turn into triggers for pain and distress and feeling alone and more evidence for the old story?

EMOTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS

Now, we're going to get into the solution, which Dr. Johnson calls emotional responsiveness. This is essentially the three things that I mentioned above: the accessibility, the responsiveness and the engagement. Specifically, in a nutshell what this means in terms of how you show up, and this is just broad strokes I'm going to show you how to do this. It means:

- **Sharing softer emotions**
But it means the willingness to share softer emotions so that you can see each other differently. This is something that a lot of people don't miss. Sometimes we feel like our spouse should be able to see our vulnerabilities. They don't see it. They might not see it because we come in as a fighter or we come in really strong. We're talking about them. We're not really talking about us or the emotions that we're communicating are not the soft emotions. So it's really hard for them to hear that. Tuning into and sharing softer emotions is a very big part of creating that emotional connection.
- **Identifying the dialogue/script and recognize that as the enemy**
You also want to be able to identify the dialogue or the script that you get into. There's these scripts that we play and like we talked about earlier, the old story and the roles that you each play in that, you want to be able to identify that in particular and really break that down. Recognize that dialogue is the enemy, not the other person. When you guys can unify together against that dynamic and the dynamic becomes the problem. The dynamic becomes a thing to focus on. It can unify you. Just like people will bond and unify over gossiping about another person. It's the same thing. It's like you can bond with each other over against this other thing that is perceived as outside of us as the threat. That's a really powerful. I'm going to show you how to do that in just a minute.
- **Take risks, show the sides you learned to hide**
You also have to be willing to take risks and show the sides of you that you learn to hide. A lot of people do this so automatically. You don't even know you're doing it half the time. My hope is as you go through this lesson, you will discover all the ways in which you have hidden yourself or learned to hide and that you're doing it automatically. You might not realize you're doing it or if you are aware that you're doing it, you just can't seem to stop. That we will help you have some alternatives to be able to stop doing that.
- **Bonding: moving closer, holding and reassuring**
Then finally, there's the bonding experiences. That's moving closer to each other, holding the space for each other and being able to comfort and reassure each other. This is really what it's going to take. Dr. Johnson said in her book, *Hold Me Tight*,

which is one of the books that I'm drawing from for this lesson, she said nothing else will do. I just thought that was so powerful. Nothing else will do. This has to happen. You can't skip this or the skills that you're going to learn later are not going to sustain you. But the good news is it's actually kind of fun to do. It's not that hard.

HOW TO BUILD EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

What we're going to be doing is learning how to have certain conversations within a structure that are going to allow you to have a greater understanding of each other. Hopefully a greater understanding of yourselves and truly hear each other and to connect. Now I adapted these conversations from that book, *Hold Me Tight*, which is a super dense book. It's basically her emotion focused therapy model on building emotional connection. I'm going to be taking four of her seven conversation templates that we're going to use. We're going to go through the first four in order.

1. Recognize the pattern, recurring theme

First, we're going to be looking at the pattern like I mentioned in the recurring theme. The recurring theme in your arguments and the points of disconnect that keep happening will identify the damage in the dance that you're in and look at the steps, kind of in slow motion. It's sort of like recognizing like, *the more I push, the more he withdraws. The more I ask questions, the more he gets defensive.* It's the more, the more kind of pattern that we're going to be identifying. You probably already have a pretty good idea of what that is. We're just going to go a little bit deeper in a structured way.

2. Find your and your spouse's raw spots

Then, you're going to be finding you and your spouse's raw spots or areas of sensitivity or attachment sensitivities.

3. Revisit a recent conflict to analyze

Then we're going to look at a recent fight that you've had or a recent point of contention and break that down. Analyze how it plays out specifically so you can prepare for the next time because it goes so fast. Those things happen so fast. From 0 to 90. Breakdowns happen so fast. We can't even see what happened. When it's loaded and then we try to revisit it later on, if we don't do it right, we end up just fighting again about the same thing. This will give you a really structured way to break it down. Analyze it to learn from it so that you can write a different story going forward.

4. Engage and connect deeply

And then finally, the fourth conversation is going to be engaging and connecting deeply. That's the one that transforms relationships in the deepest way. This is the exchange that really moves partners into being more accessible and responsive and engaged. This is the one that's really the antidote to all of the negative dynamics that have come before. I just want to say at the outset if you're doing this alone and you're not doing this with your partner, that's okay. You're going to have a worksheet that you're going to do on your own to better understand your part. You will know how to guide these conversations when the time is right with them. Even if they don't do it with you. You'll have what it takes to transform your connection just by changing your part in the script. Being able to know what questions to ask to help your spouse open up on those things, too, in a completely new way if they're open to it.

RECOGNIZE THE PATTERN

Let's go into the first conversation, which is finding the pattern. This is what she calls dialogues. There's three most destructive dances or destructive patterns fall under three categories. We want to kind of look at which category does my pattern fall into.

1. Mutual Blame
2. Criticism/Defensiveness
3. Mutual Withdrawal

Mutual Blame (Find the Bad Guy)

1. Escalating mutual blame

In the first pattern, the mutual blame, this is like the 'find the bad guy,' that's what she calls it. She calls it finding the bad guy. That's like each person is trying to point the finger at the other person. It's essentially escalating mutual blame and finger pointing.

2. Keeps spouses at arms length

This is going to drive each spouse to separate corners of the ring, where they're going to shout accusations. They're going to be keeping each other at arm's length.

3. Reactions become more preemptive

They're going to be telling each other what's wrong with each other. They're going to be making a lot of you-statements. They're going to be bringing up the past. It's just essentially a tit-for-tat blame game. It starts when one of us gets hurt by our partner. We feel vulnerable and then because we no longer feel safe, we lash out. One person lashes out because they felt unsafe but they didn't say that. They just lashed out because that's just what we do to try to feel in control of our emotions again. Then the other person reacts by lashing back. And as time goes on and this pattern goes on, then you start to expect that that's going to happen. Then you start actually attacking each other preemptively. You preemptively try to hurt your partner before they can hurt you. You know they're going to think this about you. You know they're going to accuse you of this. You know they're not going to hear you. And so then you just expect it. It really becomes exponentially worse over time. It becomes easier and easier to blame our partner rather than looking at our own role in the relationship's difficulties because they've played such a strong role in this as well. It is easy to point the finger when you're in the mutual blame because they're giving you a lot to work with.

Criticism/Defensiveness

1. One partner pursues in protest, the other defends and then shuts down.

Now the second pattern is the criticism/defensiveness pattern. This is where one spouse pursues in protest and the other one defends and then shuts down. It looks like one partner is upset about something and they're coming in the wrong way. It's usually in the form of demands, criticisms to make their point. Then the other person instead of fighting back like in the first cycle, the responding partner tries to defend themselves but then soon gets overwhelmed. Then eventually shuts down and withdraws.

2. The shutting down devastates the protesting partner, so they escalate

Now the shutting down is actually devastating to the protesting partner. Even though you wouldn't know it because they're coming in with anger. It's hard to see that. But they do feel really devastated by the shutdown. Then they get even more mad. Then they escalate because they feel abandoned by the shutdown. And then that causes even further withdrawal by the other. Both people are actually protesting the loss of connection in their own way. Both people in this scenario are suffering. Both people are hurting and are in despair in this pattern but they just are missing that and not seeing that in each other.

3. When this goes on a long time, one or both partners feel hopeless and give up.

When this pattern has been going on a long time, what ends up happening is that one or both partners start to get really hopeless and then they often give up. They take a step back to escape the hurt and despair. They're barely connecting at all and that leads to the next one, which I'm going to get into. This demand withdrawal pattern, this criticism defensiveness pattern, is an indication that a couple is starving emotionally. It's actually the most dangerous pattern for marriages. What she pointed out is that because couples just end up so focused on the content of the argument and who is right and it doesn't even matter what they're fighting about. It's really about the process underneath the argument is always just the message of *you don't hear me or it's never good enough. I'm not enough for you. We just don't talk versus we don't have sex.* The underlying message is always *you're not hearing me, you're just not understanding me* and the pain just continues. The couples that are in this pattern, the pursuing retreating pattern, they actually have more than an eighty percent chance of divorcing in four to five years. This is a really high risk pattern. If you recognize yourself in this pattern, *I was in this pattern, I can remember the pain of this pattern*, it's imperative to be able to break out of this pattern. I'm going to teach you how because it really becomes automatic. It also leads into the third one very easily, which is the freezer flee, which is also a very high risk pattern.

Freeze and Flee

1. Mutual Withdrawal

The freezer flea pattern is basically the mutual withdrawal pattern. This is where both people just shut down on their emotions. They really are numb. They're numb and they're distanced.

2. Things may appear peaceful

It's interesting because this is where couples actually appear to be fine in the sense that they're not crying when they're talking about it. They're not upset when they're describing the negative patterns. They're not even feeling any emotions at all. Nobody's vulnerable in this scenario. Nobody's angry in the scenario. It's generally an indication that their dance, their destructive dance, has come to a complete halt. So the partner who previously would have been protesting, has just given up. They've just burned out. They've given up and they've settled for peace without connection because the battle wasn't working. Now they're just like, *fine, I'm just going to choose peace because nothing I say is going to matter anyways*. That is really dangerous to be in that sense of defeat because it leads to the parallel lives that John Gottman talks about, which is a high risk pattern. When people have already gone their separate ways, like they're living parallel lives. They're at very high risk. They're definitely not in the five to one ratio any longer. The other thing that's interesting about this is that it might really appear that they're peaceful. It's almost like when you hear about people who take their lives, I know this is a morbid example and I'm sorry for that, but somebody who takes their life and people around them say that, *I thought they were better. I thought they were better. Things were fine. I'm so surprised that this happened*. It's sort of like they've already given up and they're just at peace with that *it's not going to work. Life's not going to work*. It's the same in this kind of situation. You can see partners are acting like they're cordial to each other and they give the appearance of being in a functional relationship, but because their closeness has been lost and that has been left unaddressed and the connection is basically gone. There is no more love relationship. The relationship no longer is the source of secure connection. It's no longer a safe haven, if it ever was. It's not a source of comfort or security for each partner. That is detachment. For a lot of people, what's the point of being married then? If your spouse isn't going to be a safe haven, if you're not going to feel like you have that ally in life, and you have the connection that reinforces that alliance, then people will move on.

3. The relationship is vulnerable to competing attachments

With this cycle present, relationships become very vulnerable to competing attachments. Like they're vulnerable to affairs, is another way of putting it. We need that attachment. We need to be seen and heard. That need is so strong that people will act outside their values. This is how emotional affairs start at work. There's somebody that feels like, *this other person at work really sees me* and then that becomes more of their primary relationship. Even if it's not a full-blown affair, it's a competing attachment now because that is so important to people. Eventually they're going to want to find that somewhere. I'm not defending affairs right now, I'm just saying it happens for these reasons.

FIND THE RAW SPOTS

Once you guys have figured out really where your pattern falls in those three broad categories, and there is a PDF worksheet that you're going to go through to help you identify that to get really clear, then we're going to move on to the next conversation. That kind of sets you up for this next one, which is the raw spots. Finding what your raw spots are.

What are raw spots?

Areas of hypersensitivity

1. Formed by a person's history of attachment needs being repeatedly neglected, ignored or dismissed

Raw spots are areas of hypersensitivity or sensitivity. Sometimes, there's a difference between sensitivity and hypersensitivity. In this case, I'm just going to say hypersensitivity because it's at the stage where it's super triggering. Usually by the time people are at this stage, they might just already have an area of sensitivity but now it's exacerbated in the relationships. So now they've become hypersensitive. Usually areas of hypersensitivity are formed by a person's history of attachment needs being repeatedly neglected, ignored or dismissed. That can happen in childhood so that then they are particularly sensitive in a relationship of feeling like they're not fully connected or if they feel like their spouse isn't that attuned to them. It's going to be triggering the old unmet needs pain. Or it could be just in your existing relationship. There's been a history of having those attachment needs overlooked or not met that results in feeling abandoned. There's like a feeling of abandonment that comes from that.

2. Resulting from big transition or crisis

It can also come from just having a big transition or crisis. If somebody's going through a loss in their family like let's say their family member dies or their mother dies or they got fired from a job or they got laid off, something that was really important to them or you're dealing with a chronic illness, anything that is just putting you under additional stress, is going to create raw spots and areas of sensitivity.

3. Appears any time there is a more intense need for support

Then any time it appears that there's a need for more support. A lot of times we just go through phases in life where people need more support. They're going through something emotionally. They're going through a transition in life. Sometimes people go through a midlife crisis. There's postpartum stuff, there's early childhood years, early years of parenting, I would say are one of those times, where there is a more of an intense need for support from our spouse. It doesn't stay that way but we have to recognize that those things are going to crop up every now and then.

Signs you hit a raw spot

1. Sudden radical shift in tone of the conversation

And how you can tell that you've hit a raw spot is that there's a sudden radical shift in tone of the conversation. Have you ever been talking and then all of a sudden you're like, *what just happened? Suddenly my spouse just got so upset like 0 to 90 and I don't even know what I did.* That means there was a raw spot that got hit.

2. You are thrown off balance

In your case, like if it's for you, that you all of a sudden feel thrown off balance like, *oh my goodness. I don't feel good. That felt really bad. I feel upset and I don't know why,* you feel struck. You're having physiological reaction to something and you might not even be able to process it completely but you just feel that you've been thrown off balance. That could be a sign.

3. The reaction is out of proportion

The third thing is that if your reaction is way out of proportion. If it's disproportionate to what's going on, that is a sign that it's connected to a raw spot. As you've been listening this you probably have thought of like, *remember this time where I have had this raw spot or I know this about my spouse.*

But if you want to really get proactive in identifying what those are for you and what those are for your spouse or if you're struggling with what those are, you want to think about these things:

1. Think of a time you got thrown off balance

When was the time that I got thrown off balance? When did it go off the rails for myself? When did I just feel so upset and I really wasn't even able to explain why? And write that down. Anytime that you can think of that that happened. Then you can use that as an opportunity to further probe and say what was really going on for me at that time.

2. What was happening in the relationship? Stressors/External situations/Prior hurts?

That's the next question, *what was happening in the relationship? What were the stressors? What were the external situations? Were there any prior hurts that I had been accumulating? How was I feeling? Was I already really tired? What's happening in the relationship? What's the context of that?*

3. What was the trigger in the moment?

Then, *what was the trigger in the moment or the "negative attachment" queue?* The cue that sent that signal to your brain that says *things are not safe. It's like code red. What was that trigger in the moment? Was it the word someone said? Was it the facial expression that your spouse made? Was it the body language? What was that exactly? Was it a lack of reaction?* And then you get really clear on what those are for you.

To answer that third question and looking at what the triggers are, sometimes people struggle with that. You can ask yourself a few questions, and this will be in the PDF as well, but just to get the wheels turning right now, you can ask yourself:

1. What was your general feeling in the split second before you reacted?

What was I feeling right before that?

2. What did they do to spark this? What did somebody else do?

What was the spark of that? It could be anything. Maybe it isn't even your spouse that triggered it.

3. What happens to your body?

As you think of a moment when this happened, what happens to your body? Do you feel spacey? Do you feel detached? Do you feel really agitated like tight in the chest? Do you feel small like your shoulders are hunching? Like shame? What

are you feeling in your body when you think about that?

4. What does your brain decide is means?

Then what does your brain decide to do with that? What meaning do you make out of all of that. The meaning that we're making in those situations is so fast. It's so unconscious. What do you say to yourself when this happens if you're aware of it? If you're noticing any self-talk like it could be something like, *oh there they go again, they're never here for me*. Or is it something about yourself. Is it about feeling like you can't trust anyone? And you might really access some core beliefs here that are cropping up. That are still at play in your perceptual filter. If this comes up, then definitely use your belief change work to help you with this.

REVISIT A RECENT CONFLICT

Then once you've identified the raw spots, which is actually the second conversation that you're going to be having this. There's a structure for this. The third structure and the third conversation is revisiting a rocky moment or revisiting a recent conflict. This is going to help you get closer emotionally by looking back on what happened and then breaking it down together and analyzing how it played out. So that you can learn from it and work together and prepare for it. So that you really know like, *here's what we can do next time*. It doesn't mean it's going to be perfect after doing this one time. The exercise of doing this together is really powerful to kind of unify you and give you greater insights.

1. Put it in slow motion. What pattern were you in?

First, what you would do is you would pick an incident, make it a shorter one if you can. If you can think of a shorter one to just learn the mechanics of this process first. Once you have that, the first step is to put it into slow motion or stop the game. Kind of like if you're watching football and then they kind of do a replay of a move and they do it in slow motion. You can see exactly what happened. You can see what pattern you were in. Do that like in your mind and write this down. Actually, I think you're going to do the first three of these by yourself. The remaining steps on this process, you're going to be doing with your spouse. But the first three, you want to do this on your own first just to get some clarity.

2. Own your moves

After you slowed it down and you've replayed it, you're looking at what happened. You're going to say, *what are my moves? Own your moves. Here I attacked. Here I withdrew. Here I dodged them. Here I counter attacked. Here's what I did and when.* Own your moves, even though you can see their moves, too, but just focus on owning your moves in this situation.

3. Claim your feelings

Then you want to claim your feelings. Look at the raw spots from the previous conversation. This is what you're going to be drawing from. Look at what you were really feeling at the time. At the time that you did that move, what were you feeling? What were you feeling right before you did that move? What were you feeling after your spouse did certain moves? Claim all of your feelings for each blow by blow of that scenario.

4. Own how you shape your spouse's feelings

Then own how you shape your spouse's feelings. For this part, you're guessing and you're going to find out once you ask them about it, but for now, knowing them, you're going to have a guess. You're going to say, *I think that when I criticized them about that, that made them feel really defensive and so then they felt like they had to counter-attack*. What's your part in that? We're not taking responsibility for them or their feelings or their actions. We're just looking at what part we played in this dynamic. This is actually really empowering. It's not about blame. *But what moves did you make that trigger their moves? And what moves did you make that might have triggered their feelings?* That's what you want to ask for that part.

5. Ask about your spouse's deeper emotions in an active and supportive way

Then in the next step, you're going to ask your spouse. This is where you come together after you've taken notes on this, and like I said you're going to go into this in more detail with the worksheet. You want to ask your spouse about their deeper emotions in an active and supportive way. *What were they feeling? What were they feeling when that happened? When I made this move, how were you feeling? Before you made that move, how were you feeling?* And really listen. You want to ask questions, ask follow-up questions, to really understand. It has to be really supportive. There's no disputing or challenging here. It's just 100 percent curiosity and accepting what they say.

6. Share your own deeper, softer emotions

Then you're going to flip it and you're going to share your own emotions. You're gonna try to focus on the softer emotions, like fear or sadness or shame. It obviously feels safer to express anger than it does to express the underlying feelings of hurt or fear or sadness or those softer emotions. It's so much healthier for the relationship if you can lead with the softer emotions. If you don't know, that's okay because your spouse can ask you. You come in with what you can access. Then as they get curious and they ask you in active and supportive ways, you can even go a little bit deeper. If you struggle with it and you don't want to answer how you're feeling because you feel like, *well, that's really oversimplifying. That's not how all of me felt.* Then you can use like parts of me to be able to answer the question. You can say, "part of me feel like I can never get this right," "A part of me wants to escape and numb out," "A part of me felt rejected." That way, you're allowing for the complexity. You're not oversimplifying it. You're allowing for the nuance. You're giving yourself some grace. It doesn't have to be all encompassing and completely categorical. It's like *this is part of what I was feeling and even if I didn't get to all of it, that's okay.* Even if you just get to part of it, that's progress. It's just practicing hearing each other without judgment and feeling their curiosity and really listening to you.

7. Stand together on common ground as allies

Then once you've done that, then you're going to come together for the common ground. This is where you become allies. This is where you set your intention to comfort one another. This is when you ask the question what would you do differently if you could go back? *What would I do differently if I could go back and rewrite this incident? How would I change my moves? What would I do to help my spouse? What would I do to protect them from how I made them feel with the moves that I did?* Then each of you answers that and you imagine that together. Then you ask each other *what's it like to do this together right now?* It's a really neat experience. Asking each other what that's like is part of the building that intimacy. You can also ask your spouse what would have helped you if you don't know, like, you might have a guess as to what would help them. If you could go back in time and do it differently but they might really want something else. So you ask them *what would help you in the future if we could replay that again?* Or if there's a similar type of argument, *what moves would be better next time?* Then you're going to actually write that story.

● Fill in your new story

Fill in your new story, like, building off of here's now that we've flipped the script in detail from this previous argument. Write it down. *What could you do differently? What are we going to do going forward?* And commit to that in writing. Each of you fills that out. Create it together. If you can. If you are doing this work with your spouse, try to do this together.

● Commit to it

Then commit to it. Make that agreement to each other. Then do it repeatedly. Anytime you had a setback, you can come to it. Anytime you have a rocky moment and you're like, *we need to figure out what happened here because that was super triggering,* you can use the worksheet. You can use it to learn and get better and better at practicing this stuff and disrupting the pattern.

● Keep practising

Then you want to just keep practicing. Remembering that every time you do it, you are going to glean a new nuance. You are going to get closer and closer as a team. You're going to build that feeling of being safe with each other. Being able to talk about what really went down within you and what's at stake for you and how you were feeling and owning your part and really hearing each other. Then we move away from displacement or reaction. We move into fully owning what's inside of us and sharing it vulnerably. Allowing the other person to be that comfort. That is what emotional connection is truly. If we are not willing to allow that, then we won't receive it. Even though we might be able to easily see how our partner isn't giving that to us. We also have to really look at our part in paving the way to receive that. Opening the door for that to happen. That might be scary like I said. But do some belief work if necessary for this.

ENGAGE AND CONNECT

Finally, we're going to move into the fourth conversation - the engaging and connecting conversation. This is after you've had the three previous conversations. You don't want to do this one first. Even though it's the most impactful. It's the most impactful because it's building on what you've already done in the previous three conversations. The purpose of this one is to tune into your spouse and deliberately create moments of engagement and connection. This is the one where you're learning to speak the language of attachment. It's a really positive bonding event. It's an antidote to all the negative cycles that you're in. It's really simple actually. It's essentially a two-part conversation. You're going to be asking yourself these questions and sharing them

with your spouse.

1. What am I most afraid of? Go deeper than you think you can, even if painful.

What am I most afraid of? You're going to want to go deeper than you think you can, even if it's painful. You can ask this of yourself and share it with your spouse. You could actually do this on your own first. Write it down and then share it with them. Or you can just sit down and ask each other what are you most afraid of. Have them go deeper.

There's two sub-questions that have to be asked for this to be as deep as it can be,

- a) What is it like to say that?
- b) What is it like for them to hear that?

When you're identifying what you're most afraid of and you're really going deep into the softer emotions, then you're going to ask yourself and share, *what is it like for me to say that out loud?* Then ask them, *what is it like for them to hear what you just said?*

2. What do I most need from you? Speak your needs.

Then you're going to do the same for this. You're going to ask, *what do I most need from you based on what I'm most afraid of? What do I most need from you?* You want to speak really clearly. Speak from your needs and very coherently in a way that invites your partner to respond. This is where you can be really vulnerable. This is the key to feeling safe. Think about what that means. If you're the one listening, you can ask more specifically what that means. Like what that would actually look like if you're not sure what that exactly looks like.

- a) What is it like to say that?
- b) What is it like for them to hear that?

I'm going to give you an example, like I heard Dr. Johnson doing this with a couple. She was asking him what is it that he needed most from her. What his fear was that if he showed his wife, behind the curtain so to speak. If he shared himself with her, he like showed her, *here's what's really going on in my mind*, that she wasn't going to like what she saw. That was his biggest fear. That she wasn't going to like what she saw and that she was gonna reject him. When she asked, *what is it that you need from me?* What he said was, *I need to know that if I show you what's behind the curtain, that you're going to be okay with it. You're not going to judge it. You're going to accept it.* She asked further what that would exactly look like. *What would that look like? Do you need to hear reassurance verbally? Do you need me to ask questions to find out what's happening?* There's specific ways that you can say in broad strokes what you need from someone, like, *I just need to know this.* How would you know that? What would they have to do for you to know that?

That's the thing to keep in mind. It's very easy to begin kind of gloss over and keep things really surface level in this exercise. But you really want to go deep. If you're doing it with each other, then you can probe with each other in that really supportive way. What's cool about this is that when you do this and you create that emotional connection from this exercise, it floods your brain with oxytocin. Oxytocin is what creates that pleasure and comfort and calm within our bodies. It reduces stress. It becomes a positive bonding event. You'll actually really enjoy doing this. I recommend doing this as often as possible. Once you've really ironed out the first three conversations and you've been able to do those successfully, then you would be able to do this one, more than once. Anytime you kind of need to get that deep connection in the situation that came up. You can literally go right from a rocky moment and revisiting a rocky moment, doing that, and really really kind of like broad strokes to kind of connect with *here's what I did*, *here's what I was feeling*, and then going right to *here's what I was most afraid of and here's what I need from you.* You can see how these really build on each other.

That's it! Those are the four conversations that build emotional connection. This is how you can lay the foundation for healthy communication for the rest of your relationship. I'm excited for you guys! I'm really excited to see how this goes.

I'm going to share with you just real quick what these exercises are that I've alluded to just so you have clarity. These are going to be taking a little bit longer than the ones that you've had in previous lessons. Please pace yourself. You might want to do one of these every other day. Or if you have a long block of time, you can do them all in a row. Although that would be a long block of time, that would be like you know spend a day doing it. Or you could split them up and say we're gonna do two now and then we're gonna do two another time. You have some flexibility in how you do it but I don't want you to go too long in

between them. I definitely don't want you to feel overwhelmed either. But if you can try to not let too much time go by between these exercises because you want to kind of freshen your mind. You're building from one to the next. They're not really separate.

Exercises for Emotional Connection

1. Identify Your Pattern

“Recognize your destructive dance”

2. Identify Your Raw Spots

“Finding Your Raw Spots”

3. Revisit a recent conflict

“Revisiting a rocky moment”

4. Engage and Reconnect

“Engaging and Connection exercise”

Then the final one is the engaging and connecting exercise.

The work you do in here is basically going to set you up for success for all the communication skills and all the repair, all the recovery, all the forgiveness work that we have coming up, is so much hinging on what you do in this lesson. Do take your time with it. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. I want to be here to support you. We might even want to use a one-on-one for this, where I can guide you through this process. For this lesson in particular, it can be very helpful to have guidance and to use one of your one-on-ones for this. Then beyond that, just enjoy and trust the process because it feels good. These exercises actually feel really good. So stay the course. Stay on track. Reach out if you're struggling or if you have any questions. I will see you guys in the next lesson!