

The Couples Cure

Miraculous Recovery for Couples on the Brink

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

Lesson 7: Master Communication Toolkit

I'm super excited to dive into lesson seven because this is really what you guys have been waiting for -- The Master Communication Toolkit. You guys have listened to six, all about what are the pitfalls of communication and the things that you really want to avoid. That can make people feel a little bit nervous especially since they don't have the alternatives. So, I'm excited to present to you what it is that you should be using instead. The tools that I want you to make part of your repertoire that just will become your new habits going forward. You've created safety through emotional connection. You've cleared out resentments. You've used repair conversations. Hopefully, you have forgiven each other for things that have happened in the past before you knew any better. You know what your boundaries are, you know what your life dreams are, you've made commitments for boundaries, both external and internal. And you've really done the work to be led by your vision of what you want and what you're trying to create, rather than reacting out of a default to what you don't want. Now, you guys are ready to communicate with each other about the difficult subjects or the hot button issues and just use these tools going forward, to kind of keep the slate clean and raise the bar going forward. You really have a completely new story in how you interact with each other, how you communicate, how you problem solve and how you collaborate as a team.

I really thought about how to structure this because I don't want it to be overwhelming. So, I'm going to start with a macro view of what communication tools are really for, what the goal is of communication and then share the nitty-gritty of the various tools. I want you to become familiar with these but you don't have to use all of them at once. You are going to learn them over time. You'll figure out which ones work best for you. You might not use every single thing in this toolbox, but you will know that they're here for you if you need them. You'll get really used to what works for you and when to use certain tools in certain situations. There is a learning curve in terms of, I'm going to present this here to you now and you'll get a chance to kind of memorize these and get a sense of what they are, but then it will take some time for you to integrate these. So, don't put too much pressure on yourself to do it instantly perfectly right away. But if you take notes and you commit to these and you practice these and you print them out and you prepare yourself to be ready and next time something comes up, it really won't take long. I mean, it probably will just be by the end of this whole curriculum, this will be a habit for you.

The first thing I want to do is just start with a quote that I like. This is, for me, what the whole goal of communication is: "Honesty is telling the truth to ourselves and others. Integrity is living that truth." *Kenneth H. Blanchard*

Obviously, we can't tell the truth unless we're honest with ourselves, which you've been doing up till now. You've gotten some clarity about what's going on inside of yourself, you've looked at your blind spots, but then there's the whole next step of actually communicating that truth in healthy ways and then living that truth. Integrating those parts of you, all the parts of you. That's really what I think of when I think of authentic healthy communication. There's all kinds of parts of ourselves -- there's the underdeveloped sides, there's the scared parts, there's the bold parts, there's the parts of us that are still holding onto resentment, there's the parts of us that are really optimistic. But the entire purpose of communication and really living in integrity is to integrate all of those aspects of who we are and sharing our whole selves with each other. And lesson four, hopefully, with the emotional connection, helped you feel safe enough to do so. Now, it's really about executing and using these tools.

As I was really looking at this, I realized, everything sort of falls under two principles that I think you can commit to right out the gate. So when you're lost and you're like, "Oh no, which tool do I use?" If you just remember these two commitments and you have this as your intention behind every communication, I don't think you can really go wrong. This will help guide you. Everything that we do, in terms of communication, falls under these two tenets:

1. Reveal, don't Conceal

Reveal, do not conceal. That's your whole purpose. Communicating is about revealing who you are to the other person. It's

about revealing what your needs are, revealing what your wishes are, your requests, your fears, whatever it is. A lot of us have been taught to conceal through our communication, through the use of rhetorical questions, or not even being honest with ourselves because it isn't what we have been taught to, maybe feel like that's not okay to feel that way or it's not okay to want that. This might be undoing, for some of you, this might really be undoing an entire default mode of communication. But if you just remember, like, "Am I actually sharing something in this communication? Because if I'm not, then I'm not really revealing," and that's the intention.

2. Zero Blame

The other principle that I want you to commit to is just incorporating zero blame into your "communication diet." Zero blame. I know that sounds really hard. I think that so many of us are used to communicating in a finger-pointing way, especially if we grew up that way. It might seem like it's not possible, but it really truly is if you set your intention for that, you use these tools and you really follow these tools. You'll find yourself communicating very effectively and assertively with zero blame. These overlap as well because when you reveal, you're automatically in your lane and you're automatically not blaming.

Revealing is sharing about yourself. You're not overstepping any boundaries and talking about the other person. Most of us are used to talking about the other person, which can be a very slippery slope into accusations and finger pointing or at least to be perceived that way, even if that's not what you mean. When you can master these commitments, you're going to find that there's actually never any reason to argue. I know people say, "Well, every healthy relationship, there's going to be arguments, there's going to be fighting." I would agree that there's going to be conflicts. There's going to be differing opinions and differing agendas sometimes. Conflict is part of being with another person because you're not the same person. So you're not always going to have the same outlook or the same wishes or the same approach or the same default. But when you really internalize this stuff, you realize there's never any reason to fight, even in when there's conflicts or contrasts. All you're ever really doing is sharing a different vantage point in a place of momentary disconnection and then figuring out *how do we now collaborate*. It's really about negotiating differences, as opposed to trying to counter your spouse's preferences or arguing with their perception of you or judging their reactions or trying to convince them of something or using any of the losing strategies that we've already talked about in lesson six. There are specific things that can be done for each of these commitments. We're going to get into that now.

REVEAL, DON'T CONCEAL

For this first category, and I'll go into these just like as an overview. All of these tools fall under this category of Revealing, not Concealing. Then I'll go into them in more detail. But, essentially, they boil down to a commitment to:

1. Microscopic Honesty
2. Know your agenda
3. Statements instead of questions
4. Turn complaints into request
5. Be willing to rock the boat
6. Let go of the outcome

That's a lot easier said than done, but we'll get into that in a minute.

Microscopic Honesty

Let's start with microscopic honesty. Now, I love this concept, this came from the book called, *Conscious Loving* by Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, which is an old book but it's such a good one. They have this principle, the authenticity principle, and they also have the responsibility principle.

- Relationship only flourish when both people speak the truth
But the authenticity principle holds that relationships only flourish when both people are speaking the truth to each other. If there's a problem that keeps getting recycled and you're stuck over and over again, it's usually because there's a significant truth underneath that that has not yet been spoken. Microscopic honesty assumes, and when you live this way, you really are understanding that your relationship is going to be better for it.

- Share in detail the experience you are having

You will have a thriving relationship when you have a culture in your relationship for both of you and permission from each of you to become microscopically honest. What this essentially means is sharing in detail the experience that you're having and focusing mostly on the emotion, the physical sensation, what's happening within you. You're not really going to be microscopically honest about what you think is going on for the other person. This is where most people get it wrong. If you're really looking inward and sharing on honestly what's going on for you, you can never be wrong. There's nothing ever to argue with.

- Body Scan and then verbalize

It takes kind of a fine tuning of turning inward and really doing a body scan and then being able to verbalize what you're experiencing. Some of you have already seen the emotion wheel, some of you have already practiced using the feedback wheel, where you have to tune into like, *here's the meaning that I give something*. But this is really going deeper into the actual present moment of what are you experiencing in your body. If you think about it, emotions and feelings, those are in the body. What's in the head, is the interpreting, and the meaning making. This is going right into your body and saying, "All right, what's going on for me right now? Am I having a reaction?" I think a lot of people, they just don't do that. They don't want to say something because they're afraid they're going to hurt their spouse's feelings. They're afraid they're going to feel embarrassed or too exposed, maybe they shouldn't feel the way they're feeling. Maybe there's somebody's going to tell them, "Stop being so sensitive. You're overreacting." Maybe you're afraid that your spouse will get mad or that you feel like you should be able to handle it yourself. And so, you don't share these things. But if you turn inward and just simply say something along the lines of, "You know, I noticed when you said that my chest got really tight or my stomach just felt really upset," like, "I'm having a reaction right now." It's so important to be honest about that stuff because you can feel it anyways. If you're withholding what's really going on because you don't know how to verbalize it yet, you don't want to put it in the structure of the feedback wheel yet. It might not be even something that needs to be repaired, you don't have the full tools yet, this is a really easy way to start of just turning inward and saying, "This is what I'm experiencing." You don't have to have the answers. You don't have to know what it means. You don't have to know what you're asking for. You just have to be able to know what's happening inside yourself. To be able to communicate that so and to perceive the truth within yourself, that's a skill in and of itself. Like, that's not something that a lot of us have been taught to do. If you'd struggle with this, don't worry about it. If you're, like, "I really have no idea and what does this mean, body scan? Like I don't feel anything," just take some time and practice this. Just like with the emotion wheel and naming your emotions takes practice. Sometimes, we start with anger and then realize there's something underneath that. It's a real subtle tuning in to our truth and nobody can ever argue with that. So you want to get really good at being able to communicate that and sharing that, especially now that you have the safety of emotional connection.

An example of this might be like, "I feel really sad when I hear that," or "You know, I just heard this negative self-talk in my brain because I'm so scared," or "I have this tight feeling in my belly and this is how I used to feel when I was a kid, when I was afraid of getting in trouble," or "When you said you were going away for the weekend, I felt this heaviness in my stomach and a bunch of thoughts just flew through my mind, like, 'oh, my gosh, he's abandoning me or what am I going to do by myself?'" You're just sharing, like, you're just literally observing like a video camera would be recording your thoughts and sensations and then offering that up. Hopefully, by now, with your own inner work and your boundary work and everything, you've gotten pretty good at knowing how you're feeling or at least being willing to ask yourself those questions. That's what microscopic honesty is. We can hold space for our spouse to do the same. If you can sense that they're going through something but they don't know how to articulate it, you can ask, "What's coming up for you right now? What are you feeling right now?" There doesn't have to be any pressure on actually making meaning out of it or turning it into anything more abstract other than just what's actually happening in your body right now.

Know Your Agenda

The next thing that we want to look at, in terms of Revealing and not Concealing, is you want to really understand what is your agenda. I don't mean agenda in a negative way, like, conniving or manipulative when you think of, *she has an agenda*, I just mean, we all have a reason for saying what we say.

- What is your goal, intention, hope?

We just don't always know what it is -- *What's your goal? What's your intention? What are you hoping to get out of the interaction?* This is not always conscious. I'm trying to think of an example, like, if you say to your spouse, "Hey, you know what? I noticed the dogs ate the food on the counter." Are you saying that to make your spouse aware that you don't want them to

leave meat on the counter again? It's really a hidden request. Is it something to let them know because you're kind of mad at them? Is it something that you're just offering as information? Is it a hidden complaint? Know what your reason is for saying anything. What do you want out of the interaction?

I'll give you a personal example, this was years ago. I think I've given this example before in a different context, where my husband was not getting the garage door fixed. There was like a remote control that wasn't working and then there was a code on the outside that wasn't working. When the remote would die, then I couldn't use the code. He said he was going to get it taken care of. When I would ask him about it, I'd ask him, like, "Hey, did you get that done yet?" "Hey, how's that coming?" "Can you tell me what's going on with the garage door opener?" "So, when are you gonna do that?" And then, he would say what he thought I wanted to hear, you know like, "Yeah, I'm going to do that this week," "Don't worry, I'll get it done this week," but then I would just keep going. I would keep talking about it because really what I was trying to get him to do was not just recognize that it's still not done yet and I still care about it and I really like to know when it's going to happen and once he gives me that answer, we're done and everything's cool -- it's actually that what I wanted was for him to acknowledge that he hasn't yet done it when he said he would. And then, he'd start getting irritated because I kept pushing. He's thinking, "I just told you what you wanted to hear, like, why are we still talking about this?" I'm waiting for him to admit something but he doesn't know that and I don't even know that. I don't even know that that's really what I'm wanting and that this conversation isn't going to end until I get that. Like, in my mind, the conversation will be successful if he can tell me, "Yes, I'm really sorry I haven't done that yet, but I promise I'll do that this week." But what he gave me was, "I'll get that done this week," and not the first part, not the acknowledgement. But I wasn't clear about that and I didn't know that that's what I really wanted. So, we ended up having arguments about it. You have to really know, like, "Why am I continuing down this road? What do I want from this conversation?" and vice versa. If your spouse is going down some road and you feel, like, "Gosh, I don't know how to get out of this, like, it feels like there's tension here. I thought I could this up but now we're still talking about it," "What are we fighting now?" "What's going on?" You can just ask the other person what is it that you need right now, what is your intention in this communication. Is there something that you need right now? And give them a moment to think about it, I don't mean that as a rhetorical question, but truly asking. They might take a moment and be, like, "I think I just wanted reassurance," or "I think I just wanted emphatic commitment or agreement." You have to always be clear about what this is and anytime you get into a fight and if you kind of reflect back on it, and as you're revisiting a rocky moment, you'll probably see that you get derailed sometimes because you're not really clear on what your intentions are.

- Typical goal could be to: Obtain acknowledgment; Solve a problem; Collaborate on something; Repair hurts; Connect
- Some examples of what a goal could be in your conversation, like, what your agenda could be: You might be seeking acknowledgement. You might be bringing something up because you really wanted to solve the problem, even though your spouse hears it as you're criticizing or you want them to apologize, but really that's not it. You just want to solve a problem. You might be wanting to collaborate on something or share the mental load in figuring something out, whether it's child care or homeschooling or technological issues at home. You might be bringing something up because your intention is that you want to repair hurts or that you just want to connect. Maybe you're just saying something because you are reaching out as a bid for connection. Those are some common things to consider. If you're not sure, you're like, "Gosh, I don't know what my goals are in my conversations half the time," I would write these down and have these as like a template in your mind and that usually something that you're communicating is likely going to fall into one of these categories and be clear on that beforehand.

Statements instead of Questions

Another way to be really above board in revealing about yourself in communicating, as opposed to concealing, is to make statements instead of asking questions. Sometimes people will use rhetorical questions that are designed to prove a point. Something like, "Hey, did you honestly think that was a good idea?" That's a question but it's kind of a rhetorical question, like, you have a point that you're making that's more important than the actual question. Or "Didn't you just say you wanted x but now you're saying y. So, which one is it? Why should I believe you?" that's not the kind of question, that's not a real question. It's not something that you're asking to seek to understand. You're not asking it from a place of curiosity, of genuinely wanting to know. You're asking from a place of highlighting that you don't really like what they're doing or you don't like what they're saying or you're having a reaction to it. Instead of saying how you're reacting to it, you're really asking questions that's there's like a hidden statement behind those questions. Rhetorical questions are a no-no for me. I don't respond to rhetorical questions. That's something that used to be a huge bait for me. I would try to answer a rhetorical question honestly and like really try to give it a good answer. It would just not work because it was bait. It was leading me down a rabbit hole that wasn't the point. So, if you recognize what I'm saying, if you really resonate with what I'm saying, then just make that a rule for yourself, like, "No rhetorical questions if we're actually trying to figure something out."

- What is behind the question?

The other thing, too, is you might just have a really benign subtext. It might not be something that's really blaming or there's anger behind it or it doesn't have to be like nasty sarcasm, but it could just be something along the lines of, "Hey, haven't we talked about this long enough?" which would be a question. Instead of making the statement, which is, "You know what? I'm tired. Can we talk about this later?" Or "Hey, why are you taking that road? Why are you going that way?" "Why did you make that turn?" Instead of just saying, "I think we should go this way," say what you want to say instead of making them explain themselves. Because that just puts people on the defensive. Another example would be, like, "Hey, why didn't you feed the kids that healthy food that I left here?" "I made the stew, why didn't you feed them that?" Anytime you ask a question that requires somebody to explain themselves to you, that's putting them on the defensive. What you want to do instead is you want to always ask yourself, *what is behind the question? Is there something behind what I'm asking? If so, can this be stated?*

- Is there information you can share instead of asking them to share?

What information do you need to share instead of trying to get them to answer your questions? For example, instead of saying, "Hey, were you mad?" Like, let's say you sense that your spouse is mad, where something's not right and you feel disconnected. You're left making meaning out of it and you're bothered by it because you feel like, "Oh, we were having such a good time and now we're disconnected." You might ask a question, like, "Oh, are you mad?" And they say, "No, I'm not mad," but you don't really accept that because you're picking up on something and it doesn't make sense to you. If you think deeper, you realize, "Oh, I'm the one that's having feelings. I feel disconnected. The reason I'm asking if they're mad is because I want to make sense of something," or "I want to identify the barrier so that I can reconnect. So that I can fix it," but if they don't give you the answer that you're looking for, you're not satisfied. The question isn't the point because their real answer isn't what you want. What you really want is to say, "Hey, I'm sensing something," or "I'm feeling disconnected and I'm not sure why." That's revealing, not seeking them to reveal. You're the one that has some feelings that's why you're asking the question. You might as well just share the feelings. Does that make sense?

Requests instead of Complaints

Another really great rule of thumb is to make requests instead of complaints. This is one of the winning strategies, as identified by Terry Real. We've talked about this before. We've looked at the losing strategies.

- Every complaint can be a request

One of the winning strategies is to always turn any complaint into a request as often as you can. I know that there is such a thing as healthy complaining but as a general rule, I always try to just say, "If I have a complaint, I'm going to try to turn it into a request, if I can," because every complaint can be turned into a request.

- This transforms the role your spouse plays

This is going to actually transform the role that your spouse plays because instead of complaining or just highlighting something that you don't like, now you're actually asking them to consider something or you're asking them to make an agreement or you're asking them to take an action that supports something that you value or something that you know that they value, too. In that sense, it's constructive as opposed to pointing out things that are wrong, which is not very constructive. This is not an easy thing to do because we usually have a negative reaction to something that we don't like. Then we speak from that place of not liking something, that low vibe emotional state and that's to focus on the problem. It's hard to think beyond how we feel. If we're feeling irritated, a complaint is going to come out because that's consistent with that vibration of irritation in our bodies. But if you can pivot it and go, "What do I want instead?" that forces you to get really clear and articulating, "okay, what do I want instead?" It makes you take responsibility for creating and constructively putting energy into the new story. You just go right to the new story and you bypass any opportunity to trigger defensiveness or to just stay stuck in focusing on the problem or entering into that slippery slope, where you might be extrapolating or generalizing or veering into criticism. This is a game changer because you end up highlighting things and raising awareness in a lighthearted way without some big long discussion. If I say, "Hey, can you unload the dishwasher from now on in the morning when you come into the kitchen?" or "Hey, I know you've been busy for the last few weeks but would you be willing to pick up the kids on Wednesdays just to help me share the load?" or "Would you be willing to work from home a couple days a week to help me with the homeschooling thing?" You're focusing on what you want and helping them to think about what you're trying to create, rather than bringing it in, like, "You don't ever do this kind of thing," or "I'm unhappy because of what you're not doing." This is a really great guideline. This is actually a really simple thing to do. I think this is one of the easiest ways to communicate in a positive manner. The only reason people don't do it is not because it's hard, it's just because it's a habit to not do it that way. We're just very problem focused. We're just a problem focused culture. Diagnostically, when we think of

mental health we're very problem focused. Shifting that into a constructive creative approach, that's a game changer going forward. It's very in line with the work that we're doing here in being led by your vision and what you want.

Be Willing to Rock the Boat

Another thing that's so important in being able to really reveal about yourself and do this in a constructive way and to be really putting yourself out there, is to be willing to rock the boat. This is another winning strategy that Terry Real talks about, which is basically going for what you want.

- Act of vulnerable courage

I know that some of you are familiar with Brené Brown. It really is an act of vulnerable courage when you can rock the boat. It's scary, right? Sometimes, we are cruising along smoothly and we are pleasers maybe. Maybe we're in a peaceful moment and we really are enjoying it and we don't want to disrupt that. Maybe it's because we just got a message growing up that if we say something about what we want or we expose ourselves in that way, that we're too demanding. Who knows? For everybody, it's different, but there could be some limiting beliefs behind this, that hopefully, you've identified by now. You have to be willing to rock the boat and to be courageous enough to do that.

- Step towards your vision

What this is is really taking a step towards your vision. It's your birthright to be in an equal cherishing relationship, I really believe that. You have the right to be in a cherishing relationship in which both of your needs are met. If your relationship right now is working better for your spouse than it is for you, it is really going to feel like rocking the boat because they're going to feel like, *I don't see the problem*, because it's not a problem for them. You have the right to take a step towards your vision even if that means disrupting the equilibrium because that's really the only way to create a foundation that works for both of you.

- Necessary to avoid resentment

I also think this is very necessary to avoid resentment. If you don't find your voice and speak up for your needs and wants or your boundaries, resentment always grows. Like there's just no way around it. Resentment is a poison. It will erode the love between you and your partner, if it hasn't already. Let's say, you've already done the repair, you've cleared out the resentments, you've forgiven each other and you're in a new chapter, you really do have to make a commitment right now to continue to do this. We'll get into clearing the air, that's going to be part of this, but be willing to rock the boat and continuing to take steps towards your vision. Even though you've made progress and you're feeling pretty good, if you're not all the way there yet and stuff is cropping up, you have to be willing to rock the boat so that you don't resent your spouse, because really it's on you. If there's something that isn't happening that is part of your vision that you want to go for, then you have to be willing to take responsibility for that happening, rather than just like waiting for your spouse to do it for you. I mean it would be nice if they always knew what we needed and we may feel like it's not worth as much if we ask for something or *if we have to rock the boat to get it, does it really mean that much?* I absolutely think it means a lot. A lot of times, we think that we're not getting something if we're not getting it freely given from their default, then it isn't something that they want to give but it just might be it's not in their comfort zone. It's not in their radar. Asking your spouse to leave their comfort zone to join you in something that you're looking for, disrupting that sense of peace in a healthy way in order to elevate the standards of your relationship, is something that you cannot leave up to your spouse. It's something that they, hopefully if that you're doing this program right and especially if you're doing it together, that they're going to want to do that.

- Gift to your spouse

It's actually going to be, and this is really my fourth point, is that it's a gift to your spouse. It helps them succeed if you tell them up front what do you need and want, instead of waiting for them to fail. A lot of times, our subconscious beliefs are more invested in proving our beliefs right, that we can't trust people or that they can't be counted on. Whatever it is, sometimes that drive to prove a limiting belief right is stronger than setting something up for success. It's more comfortable to do the former rather than later. You really want to be encouraging and affirm them when they're trying to meet you halfway and give that gift to them. Let them know and give them an opportunity to pleasantly surprise you. Give them an opportunity to rise up to meet you. Look at it as an amazing growth opportunity, not just for you, to get what you want and what you're looking for, but also that it can be a great opportunity for your spouse to grow in ways that will give them fulfillment as well, even if they don't see that yet.

Let Go of the Outcome

The next thing is that you want to really be learning how to let go of the outcome.

- Your success is defined 100% by your input

Your success is 100 defined by your input, and not the outcome. This is so important. I know we've talked about this, where I'm saying you really want to stay connected to your vision and not be derailed by the feedback of your immediate environment because that's just left over. That's just the residue of the old story and the past. Right now, you're building the foundation for your new story and it takes time. Your input is all that matters. They might still be hearing you through the old lenses, you can't control that. You can't control the outcome. All you can do is control your input.

- It takes time and focus on your own vision

You have to just take the time and focus on your own vision and trust, *this takes time and I'm just going to stay focused*. Focus on what you want and just allow the chips to fall, where they may allow things to be disappointing, allow things to get derailed. If that's what happens, you just want to let go of the outcome and do not measure your success by that.

- Releasing outcomes builds trust, faith, and power.

What's cool about that is that when you release the outcomes and you just turn that over and you let go of that, it helps you build trust. It helps you build faith and your own power within yourself. You start to realize how powerful you are because you're like, "Oh, what I was so afraid of? It really can't hurt me that bad." Like, "even if I'm a little bit uncomfortable," or "even if that made me feel scared," or "I had to leave my comfort zone," that's okay. And you will get so much stronger in doing this.

ZERO BLAME

Zero blame, which is your second commitment for communication. One thing to say, "I'm going to eliminate all bullying from my communication," and it's another thing to do it. I remember having this problem like, I tried to not blame for. The first time I set my intention to do this, I gave myself like a two-week window. I was going to not blame for two weeks. It was literally, I had a hard time getting through one day. It was such a habit. So, I'm going to give you guys some tools that will really help you do this because setting your intention, as you probably know by now, your conscious intentions are not enough to actually be turned into a lived reality. I'm going to go through these just bullet points first and then we'll go into detail.

1. Speak from the "I"
2. Bring things up gently
3. Clear the air right away
4. Honor differences
5. Structure your conversations
6. Eradicate "you always" and "you never"
7. Keep calm
8. Listen and respond generously

If you can do these things, you will have a relationship where you are never blaming each other. You'll feel heard and understood. You will be able to actually move into the problem solving part of communicating, which is the part that most people don't get to because what they're really fighting about is not feeling heard, or not feeling cherished, or feeling judged. So, this is going to be a game changer. So, let's go into detail:

Lead Communication with "I statements"

Some of you have heard of "I-statement." Essentially, when you think about the feedback wheel, it is essentially an I-statement. But it does have that extra piece, where you're also "I'm not just saying how you feel," like, "I feel," but you're actually saying the meaning that I give something. But it's the same idea. You're not talking about the other person.

- Demonstrate responsibility for our thoughts and feelings

I-statements demonstrate responsibility for your thoughts and your feelings. That's the whole point, right? When you think about revealing, you're sharing. You're going to talk about you, not your spouse. You're exhibiting ownership and you're living

from a place of responsibility for your experiences and your own responsibility for communicating your experiences. When you're staying in the eye, it's so much easier because a lot of times, we don't want to say something because we're afraid it's going to sound accusatory because we don't remember, like, *there's actually a way to do it where it won't trigger defensiveness.*

- Communicate assertively while in your lane

The other thing about I statements is it allows you to be very assertive while staying in your lane. It allows you to not be passive and just feel like, "I just have to keep quiet in order to keep the peace because I don't want to blame. So I'm just not going to say anything at all." Sometimes people think there's this like false dichotomy but the I statement is that perfect balance.

- Reveal yourself and avoid blaming others

It also helps you reveal yourself and come forward with something that matters to you without venturing into that blaming, accusatory, finger-pointing, territory, or even to avoid the appearance of doing that, even if that's not what you're doing. For example: If you change a You statement to an I statement, it would sound something like, let's say you take an accusation like, "Hey, you know you're not even interested in what I have to say," "You don't even care," that's a common accusation. "You don't even care about what I say," or "You don't even care how I feel," that's a You statement. If you flip that around and turn that into an I statement, it would sound something like, "When you don't respond verbally to what I say, I feel disconnected and lonely." A You statement would be, "You spend money carelessly," or "You're spending too much," "You're just spending way too much money, you're not looking at the budget." An I statement would be, "When you spend money on recreational things and we have discussed it ahead of time, I feel nervous and I feel stressed. It makes me feel like we're not financially secure." See how that feels really different? You're just sharing and you're leading with an I statement and you're not blaming.

Another one is like when you come home at 11:15, again you're sticking with the facts just like with the with the feedback wheel, "Hey, when you came home at 11:15 after I expected you home at 10:30, I started to feel really worried and upset. Then my mind started going to all these places like that's really disrespectful or maybe his car went into a ditch." You just share. You're leading with an I statement.

Bring Things up Gently

The other thing you want to remember too is bringing things up gently. This is super important. John Gottman talks about the importance of soft startup. Some of you have heard of this before. This is so important because while we're very careful about what we say and how we say it and crafting our words with the repair, the feedback wheel and everything, and sticking with two sentences for each section, what we really want to be mindful of too is the energy that we bring to something. How we say something matters just as much, if not more than what we actually say. You could have the most perfect statement, the most perfect I statement, but if it's said in an angry tone, it's still not going to be received the way the words would convey. There's a couple things that soft start up or bringing things up gently entail:

- Choose your timing carefully

You really want to think about choosing your timing carefully. Choosing your timing for yourself so that you aren't bringing something up when you're feeling very agitated. Like, I know for myself I have to do that. If I feel too upset, even if I'm using the right words, I will still be heard in a light, I don't want to be heard and the truth is because that's really what I am vibing. I have to wait until I know that I'm not vibing that negativity when I'm bringing something up, that I want to bring up gently. So wait. Just wait until later. You're also choosing your timing based on where they're at. Maybe you're already calm or you feel like you would be fine with it but you can just sense that they're not in a place where they can hear it. You want to set that up for success by choosing your timing carefully.

- Start with something positive

The other thing is you want to start with something positive, especially if you're bringing up a hot button issue, even beyond the words. Just like when you think about if you have ever had a work evaluation or if you've ever given a work evaluation and you have to give them some feedback about things that they need to work on or things where the areas of improvement, you usually, good leadership, good managers, will lead with what they really like. *Here's what I love about what you're bringing to the table and here are some areas of improvement.* You lead with the positive. That's just good communication no matter who you're talking to. We do that with our kids, we do that with our co-workers. We know how to do this. Most of us know how to do this. Somehow, I think we feel like we don't have to do that with our spouse because we're just taking a shortcut and they

know us and we're taking liberties but I think we have to be mindful, especially if you have a history of a criticism defensiveness dynamic.

- Be clear about your intention

The other thing you want to do too is be very clear about your intention within yourself. That's really what I was highlighting earlier in the first commitment when I was talking about revealing and not concealing, is that you really have to know what your agenda is. But in this, what I'm really highlighting being clear with them about what your intention is. You can use a disclaimer. You can frame. You can initiate the communication by framing why you're even bringing it up in the first place because they don't always know why. Like, they might read into it based on the old story, especially right now, if you're on tenuous ground and you feel like the new story isn't really fully built yet, you want to be really clear up front, "The reason I'm bringing this up is because this is my intention, this is my goal, this is why." Then you're basically putting their lenses on for them. Now, we still can't control how they might still hear us and what happens inside of their own psyche, but you're setting yourself up for success when you can communicate your intention especially around a sensitive topic.

- Be mindful of tone and body language

Then finally, you want to be mindful of your tone and your body language. I may have alluded to this already, obviously. In your tone of voice, how high is your voice? How loud is your voice? Is there a sharpness to your tone? Are you talking really fast? Are you talking without eye contact? That verbal body language could be interpreted as anger or passive aggression. Are your arms crossed? Are you turning away from them? Are you walking past them as you're saying it? Like walking out of the room as you're saying it? Body language is so important. I can't remember what the stats on this are but it's like 90% of communication is non-verbal. What we pick up on, how you can just feel somebody's energy or we can just feel like, *they didn't like what i just said and they didn't even say a word but I just know it. I could feel it by the way they were looking at me*, you can tell by body language. You can feel a lot. Just like with the subconscious programs in the way that our brain actually can process so much information beneath the level of your awareness. You're picking up on things you don't even know that you're picking up on through body language, tone, energy, all of those subtle cues. That's very much part of bringing things up gently. It's not just your tone of voice but your body language, your timing, your intention, and the structure of the conversation and leading with something positive.

Clear the Air Right Away

The other important tenet of being able to remain out of blame, which is oftentimes fueled by lingering resentment, is that you have to be willing to clear the air right away.

- This is your responsibility

This is your job because if you don't clear the air, if something is bothering you, if you notice that there's tension or you're aware that you have something that's irritating you and you don't clear the air on it, you're basically making the decision to cause problems later. Even if it feels like you're just keeping the peace, even if you feel like you're doing your spouse a favor, you actually are choosing to have that be a problem later on. You're causing a barrier. You're allowing a barrier to closeness to remain and it really is just a matter of time. You have to take responsibility for things on your side that's in any way going to jeopardize the connection.

- This can be the feedback wheel or just acknowledging the tension

Now, this can obviously be the feedback wheel, which we've talked about before, or just acknowledging the tension in the room or just acknowledging, "Hey, you know what? I know I was a little bit irritable before and I can tell you felt that and I just want to acknowledge that" or "Hey, I can tell there's things aren't right between us, do you want to talk about it later?" Just committing to acknowledging and being willing to clear the air on an ongoing basis. It doesn't have to be like it piles up and now we have this whole mess that we have to deal with in one five-hour conversation. It can be something that takes five minutes.

- Principles of clearing the air: It's a gift to receive. Agree to be non-defensive. Be constructive.

It's just really important to be able to commit to that and have that be in the culture of your relationship because it's a gift to receive it. That's one of the principles of clearing the air. It's a gift to receive somebody, your spouse reaching out to clear the air. It's a gift. It's like "Oh! Thank god! I don't want this between us." It's really an agreement to be non-defensive and to be constructive with each other. If you make this commitment, whether you're doing this with your spouse, I mean and you can make this commitment to each other in the program, or if you're just doing this on your own and you make this commitment

to yourself that you're going to clear the air, remember that it is a gift to them to receive. Even if at first, they might feel like, "Oh my gosh, they're bringing something up. I don't really want to talk about this stuff." A lot of times, people get triggered especially husbands, I'm not trying to make a stereotype, can get a little bit defensive or defended right away when they hear, "Hey, we need to talk." You really want to make a commitment to "Let's agree that we both want to have clear air between us at all times and we each agree that if we notice the air is getting dirty between us and things are not feeling good, that we will initiate and risk the discomfort of bringing something up. At least, at the very least, to express the intention of wanting to clear the air." One thing you can do, instead of saying, "We need to talk," is to try using some other phrases to break the silence that express that intention to basically repair. You could say something like, "Hey, you know, we haven't been really talking lately and I've been feeling this way and I haven't known how to bring it up," or "Hey, can we check in? I know that I've been really like shut down lately and I'm not even sure how to explain it all but I'd really like to try, if you're willing to listen." And "If I can just like be given the chance to try to like bumble my way through something," you see, the ideal situation here is that you feel confident enough to know that you don't have to have all the answers to be able to repair and clear the air. Just saying, "I don't even know how to clear the air but I want to," that's like halfway there. Your spouse will feel that. That already is like an olive branch. Then, you can think about, "All right, how do we want to clear the air? Do we want to set a time to talk? Do we want to talk right now? Are we going to use the feedback wheel or are we just going to acknowledge?" Another phrase could be like, "Hey, I'm not even sure what's going on here but I feel like we really... I don't know. It just doesn't feel right. Do we have time to talk tonight?" Or it could even just be like, "I miss you. We haven't talked in a while and I don't know, I just miss you. I don't feel that close to you. I don't know why. I haven't brought it up because I'm kind of afraid of what you might say but I just want you to know I miss you," or "I miss us," or "I miss the good times." Even that sets you up to be able to clear the air with some good will between you.

Another way that you can clear the air too is just bringing up. This is part of the whole idea of being transparent and microscopic honesty, is stating your fears, "Hey, I know I'm not the best communicator all the time, but I don't think silence is good. I'm really nervous that we're going to end up fighting and I don't want to fight with you but I really want to clear the air." It's being willing to come forward into the arena without having the answers. It is vulnerable but it's super super powerful and you will know that you are taking a step according to your vision and what you're trying to create. You can feel good about yourself no matter the outcome. I've got some other frames too that I'm going to put in a handout for you but you get the idea. Like, we know how I was talking about putting a frame around it or declaring sort of the intention to set up the filter so that it can be received in a positive light, it could be something along the lines like, "Hey, you know, I don't want us to feel under attack at all. I know that I have a lot that I'm not doing right but we got to start somewhere so how about we start now?" and "I want to bring something up and I'm willing to hear what you have to say too," things like that.

Honor Your Differences

Another way to stay out of blame is to make a commitment in your relationship to really honor your differences. I think, most couples, 95% of couples, whether they're high conflict or avoidant, spend way too much time trying to either convince the other of their point of view or reacting to something that we don't like or that we don't think should be the case in our spouse.

- Don't expect your spouse to have your same preferences or care about the same things
What I mean by this is like you might want your spouse to care about something the same way that you do or you might want your spouse to have the same preferences. Honor your differences means to say "I'm not going to expect my spouse to play by my same rules all the time," "I'm not going to expect them to have the same preferences or care about the same things," and "I'm not going to get upset just because they're not doing what I would do." If we get upset and think "Well, I would just never do that," "What planet are they on?" Like, "Who does that?" "How could they do that?" "I would never do that!" "Can't they see that that needs to be done?" "Can't they see how important this is?" The truth is that maybe they don't share the same priorities on everything as you. Maybe they don't think that something needs to be done that you think needs to be done. When we expect them to have the same outlook, it really does come across as judgment.
- Use the differences as the foundation
So, what's helpful is to use your differences as the foundation, as the starting point. The starting point has to be the differences. What I mean by that is like asking yourself, "What would it look like if there was true acceptance?" What if it was really okay that your spouse didn't care about the same things that you did all the time, in the same way, right? Like for the example, my husband doesn't see what needs to be done around the house. "Well, if I didn't live here, maybe he wouldn't take out the garbage as much as I would want him to," or that "I would take it out sooner than he would," "If I didn't live here, he would take it out at the last minute or whatever." It's not personal, it's just that's who they are or that's just what their threshold is.

It's very different. That's a super minor example but if you just look at this as it gets dicier when you're dealing with your life dreams or things that are high stakes but what would it look like if there was true acceptance? What if you said "Okay, you know what? Given that this is how you feel and given that this is how you see it and given that this is how I see it and we don't see eye to eye and given that I'm not going to make any meaning about what that makes about how much you care about me or how much you care about this house or I'm not going to make any meaning about your character, I'm not going to make any meaning about what that means for our future and our compatibility, I'm just going to say 'okay, that's not up for debate so now what?'" That's where it starts. *You want this, I want that.* The starting point is *we're on, we are looking at it completely differently, now, let's negotiate.*

- Focus on negotiating, not convincing

From that place of acceptance, you can focus on negotiating, not convincing. This sounds really easy but it's not. Most people, unconsciously, are trying to convince their spouse of their point of view. Either because their point of view hurts them because they're giving it too much meaning or they're giving it the wrong meaning or because there's been a history of accusations or for whatever reason, but there's something at stake. There's something at stake in getting our spouse to see it the way that we see it. We're either trying to protect our reputation, we're trying to protect our ego, we're trying to ensure that we are compatible so that we can stay together because we don't want to think that maybe we don't have the right priorities. It can be scary. But what happens is when you accept, when you truly accept your differences, you actually get really creative. You start to think outside the box. When you're not attaching all this negative meaning or emotion to it, you're able to move into a more creative state, like availabilities come into your experience that you wouldn't have thought of before because you were in a dichotomy in your mind. You were in a paradigm that had you at me versus you, right versus wrong, black versus white. When you really have acceptance as your starting point, you're moving into a paradigm of outside the box thinking. It's like another paradigm of problem solving. It's just like what Einstein said, *you can't solve the problem within the same paradigm that created it.* You have to change your entire perspective and then come back in and see the problem from a different vantage point and then go "Oh, I see what I see it now, I didn't see it before. Here's what we could do." When my husband and I did this, and with other couples that I've worked with, when they really got to that point of acceptance without judgment of each other's differences, then they could move into actual problem solving, which is negotiation. You collaborate as two members of the same team who have separate and valuable contributions to offer. Now, you have a fuller experience. Now, you're in the us place, which is something we're going to get to in the final phase of this whole process, which is *we are a team and we are co-creating our lives together and the energy that I put in comes back to me double or more.* Where you're in that flow of energetic output like the momentum is now carrying you. This is where it starts. It starts with a willingness to stay in your lane, not blame and really accept your differences and then move into *now what.* I think I've touched on this before, but I can't really emphasize enough how important this is. Most couples will waste a ton of time ruminating on it, if they're avoidant or fighting about it and trying to convince each other and neither person ever feels heard or valued or cherished or understood. You never even get to the place of, "Now what? Okay, let's figure this out." So then, you're living in this place of like being on the brink because you can't even imagine how you're going to move forward together because you haven't even accepted your differences. This is really key. If you have any limiting beliefs about this or if there's any old story pulling you on this, then definitely journal about it, really craft your vision, reconnect it to your vision, and use your mantras, do the inner work to get here. And if you need help with this let me know.

Structure Your Discussions

Another really great tenet to stay out of blame is to structure your discussions. I was originally going to put Structure your Fights because that's what I used to say. But I really don't believe that you have to fight anymore. Like I said earlier, there's no reason to fight. So I'm just going to call it discussions and in those, you might have some feelings come up and you might have some contrasting opinions and you might have some conflicts. But it never needs to be a fight, especially, if you structure it. I think the biggest problem is that when people go on for too long because they haven't been accepting or because they've not stayed in their lane, because they have moved into blame or because you're not self-aware. You misunderstand each other and then you get derailed. You don't even know how you got derailed. You're like "Why are we still talking about this? What are we fighting about?" Like "We were originally fighting about this, but now we're fighting about this because of how you reacted. And now, it's like this whole other topic." You don't even know how you got there or you talk past the point where it feels like it's productive. Or if you have competing agendas for the conversation and you're not playing by the same rules, you're just never going to line up. An example of a structure for your discussion is the feedback wheel. That's a really great example of what that would look like. However, there are many different ways that you can do this. You guys can get creative now. You don't have to just stick with one way of doing it. As long as you guys both abide by the same rules. It's just like if you're going to play a game of monopoly, it doesn't work if you're not playing by the same rules. That's really what this is about is coming together and saying "What do we

want this to look like?" "How do we want to do this?" "What kind of conversation are we going to have?" There's other ways to structure a conversation like I said besides the feedback wheel. For example:

- Establish the intention and some ground rules
First, you can establish the intention and some ground rules. One of the ground rule would be to say "Let's just share. I'm going to just share what I have to say and I'm only going to use I statements. We're not going to use sarcasm. We're going to use calm voices and we're going to take turns and listen only. No crosstalk. No interrupting. Okay?" Whatever your ground rules are.
- Speak in just 2-3 sentences at a time
Another example could be to say "Listen, we're going to take turns." Some people will be like "I'm going to talk for 15 minutes straight. You're just going to listen and then we're going to take turns." Now that wouldn't work for me and my husband but some people do it this way. For us, it works better to say two to three sentences at a time and then it's my turn to respond to that.
- Paraphrase before you respond
I'll paraphrase before I respond and then it's your turn again.
- Take turns listening
Another example is "What if you just agree that within five minutes, we agree that we are going to be moving into constructive problem solving mode and if we're not able to start moving into collaboration or negotiation or problem solving within five minutes and we recognize that this is not productive, then we're going to stop talking and we're going to come back later." I'm literally talking like set the timer. Really putting outside in. When I say structure, structure is outside in parameters. It's scaffolding. It's external prompting. If you have to put a reminder and you like literally set your timer on your phone and it goes off in five minutes and you just take your temperature at that time, "Where are we? Did we get derailed? Do we need to take a break?" Just practice this. Practice trying to put some structure around. It will help you feel way more in control. It will help you go slow. The biggest reason why people move into blame is simply just because they're moving too fast and the habits take over. It's velocity. It's the power of the default mode. Then, all of a sudden, before you know it, you've done it. It's come out of your mouth so fast and then they respond so fast with a comeback and that triggers you. Then all of a sudden it's like, "Whoa, we're like 30 seconds into escalation." A lot can happen in 30 seconds before you even knew it. The structure will help you slow down and stay conscious of what your intentions are and what you're actually doing so that when you have a little reaction and that default mode does not just sweep in and take over. Now, as you practice, this is going to get easier and easier. It will become the new default, as I keep saying over and over again. But I just want to reiterate that because I know that as we learn this and as you're listening to this now, you might feel like "Well, it feels really pie in the sky right now. That feels way too hard. How am I supposed to do that? That doesn't even seem like we would be able to do that because of how quickly things derail." I just want to let you know that if you practice it and you're willing to fail at it, which is what practicing is, controlled failure, in the structure of these discussions, you will improve. That is just inevitable. Don't worry about perfection.

Eliminate "Always" and "Never"

The other thing that I think helps so much, especially in the tendency to move into blaming, is to eliminate the words "always" and "never." Like "you always" or "you never" or "I always have to," "I always end up this way" or "this never works out the way I want." Anytime you're using always or never, you're globalizing. That automatically is going to be moving into criticism or accusations.

- These are fighting words
Those are fighting words because it puts people in the defensive. It puts people into fear. It makes your spouse feel like they're responsible for the problem. They're either going to feel obligated or they're going to feel guilty or they're going to feel irritated or they're going to feel resentful. Those words are never driven by a desire to repair. Using the words "always" and "never" are not in support of repair or constructive collaboration or seeking to understand.
- It's not the truth
The other reason why they're good to avoid is because it's not the truth. If you really really think about it, I think that probably 95% of the time, you're not going to be able to say that your spouse never does certain things or that your spouse always does things a certain way. Every now and then, I hear somebody say "No, literally, I tried to think of something and I went through

our 20 years of marriage and not once, not once have they ever said I love you.” Whatever it is, most of the time, the vast majority of the time, it's just not true. Aside from the fact that they're inflammatory words, they're also just not accurate and what we're really trying to do is reveal and stay in our lane and to get to the truth here and to be authentic in our communication. And it's just not constructive.

- Comes from the old story, fear, or family of origin

The other thing to remember too is that these come from the old story, they come from fear, they come from the family of origin. It may be our fear that nothing's ever going to change and we move into despair or hopelessness or when we're really disempowered, we move into those words. Or maybe there's like a hidden agenda. Maybe there's like, we hope that if we say, “You never help around the house,” that they'll say, “I'm sorry, I'll do better.” Maybe you're just saying that as a way to like initiate or instigate some kind of reassurance or agreement but it's a negative way of doing it. We don't need that. This is not what we're trying to do. We're trying to lead with our vision of what we want and not leading with what we don't want or starting with a negative story in the hopes that our spouse might counter that or convince us otherwise.

Keep Calm

The other thing that's super important is to be able to stay calm and to commit to that in yourself. Nothing ever gets resolved when things are escalated. Nothing can be resolved when things are escalated because you're in fight or flight. You're not able to use your conscious mind. You're not going to remember the tools. You're not going to be able to show up successfully. So, if you try to work something out while you're escalated, even though you might have a sense of urgency behind it because you don't want to be left with those feelings of disconnection or disrepair, you have to know that if you keep going, you're setting it up to fail. It's just not going to work. I believe very strongly in making an agreement with your spouse to never engage when escalated. Now, we can't control what our spouse does but we can control what we do. Even though it feels like we can't, you have to be willing to at least say, “I'm willing to learn how even if I don't know how yet.” Have a hard rule. *We commit to staying calm when we are trying to resolve something and if things get escalated, we disengage. We give each other grace that the other person leaves the conversation because they're getting escalated. Either because we're getting escalated or because they are and they don't trust themselves to not say something they're going to regret or to do something that would feel like the old story.*

- Disengage when escalate

The first thing is that you have to make the commitment to do so. The commitment to disengage when you get escalated.

- Monitor stress levels

You also have to be able to monitor your stress levels. This is something that takes practice and is a skill. Sometimes, we think that we're not escalated when we really are. So you can monitor your heart rate. You can find out what your base heart rate is and then you will know what your escalated heart rate is. There is an exercise where I teach you how to do this, that's going to be one of the assignments, so that you can take responsibility for this. This is especially important when you do take a time out or if you start to engage in something where it gets escalated and then you disengage. Let's say you're having a timeout or you're trying to cool off or you're trying to think things through and you need time or you need space, during that time, you can monitor your heart rate and really make sure that you have completely come back to base heart rate or like resting heart rate. Most people will think that they are ready when they're not yet ready. They'll think “Okay, I'm ready now. It's been 20 minutes. I've calmed down and I'm ready,” but actually physiologically, they're not yet ready. It's actually longer than most people think. The general rule is to say 30 minutes at least, but you really want to monitor that for yourself.

- Agree to time-outs

Then the other thing too is really getting an agreement in of time outs and being able to know what does that look like in your relationship. Now, I really love Terry Real's 10 Commandments of a Timeout, which I'm putting in the exercises. There's literally 10 rules that you have to follow because it can be very triggering if you just walk away in the middle of a conversation. People can feel emotionally abandoned. And so, you want to be able to take distance responsibly. You have to create that agreement ahead of time though because once you're escalated, you're not going to remember how to say things the perfect way. Like “Honey, I'm feeling escalated right now and I'm afraid I might say something that I'll regret. So I'm going to take a few moments now and I'll come back in 30 minutes.” Like if you could say that in the right way, you wouldn't be escalated in the first place. You can't do it. You almost want to like agree to what you're going to allow like Terry Real talks about doing the time out sign. Like just physically doing the “T” with your hands. That means all of those words and you agree to that like, “I know that when you do that sign that means all of these things that you can't say right now because you're too upset.” It's responsible distance taking and you have a timeline agreement on it like within an hour will come back or whatever it is that

you decide. You want to use that time when you are in a time out to focus on self-soothing thoughts and not to stress maintaining thoughts. A lot of times, what really turns things around is what you do in that timeout. It's not just the time out and the time apart. It's what you do with it. The thoughts that you think, the actions that you take - whether it's tapping, journaling, having a mantra, doing belief work, reminding your like self-soothing thoughts - are really important I think during that time. Remembering like "We will work this out. We always will figure this out. I'm just upset right now." Maybe even looking at your brag book and you can see all these references to the new story even though this feels like a setback. You can see in the larger context, this is a minor setback in the scheme of overall progress. You really want to make use of that time. These are things that you can learn. These are tools that you can agree on. Then you can hold yourself to these things so that you can set yourself up for success and being able to actually have healthy communication. Keeping calm is really another way of saying *giving yourself permission to stop communicating and having release like firm and strict conditions under which you allow yourself to communicate.*

Listen and Respond Generously

Finally, under zero blame - you really want to listen and respond generously. This is something that will support our spouse in staying in their lane. We want to reward each other for staying in our lanes, like, if you see your spouse that they are trying really hard not to criticize, they're trying to share something using an I statement and it feels a little bit like they're not doing the best job because they're still learning how to do it, you want to try to be as generous as possible. Being generous is a winning strategy, like that's one of Terry Real's winning communication strategies.

● Acknowledge all that you can

When I say respond generously or listen generously, this is what he said actually, is what you really want to acknowledge everything that you can. Not only of what your spouse said, but also what they're asking for. Let's say they're giving you some feedback and you can acknowledge, "Yes, you know what? I have done that in the past." Maybe you didn't do that right now and they're accusing you of something right now but and you want to say, "No, but that's not true." If you really are trying to be generous, you can say, "You know, I see I have done that in the past. So I can get why you're concerned about that," "I can see why you would assume that that's maybe what I meant right now because I have done that in the past, right?" You're giving them that *what can you give them?*

● Seek to understand

Part of generosity as well is to seek to understand. Remember that the speaker role is different than the listener role. As a listener, you really want to hear and listen for the purpose of not rebutting what they're saying, not kind of formulating how you're going to counter them or argue or point out how that's not true. But you want to get curious. Just be really smart about getting curious and set aside any defensiveness. Give your partner more of what they're asking for. The way that you can do that internally is to take that stance, that mental stance of like "what will giving this really cost me?" "Is this something I can give?" Some things aren't that hard to give but they mean a lot to our spouse. It will go a long way. Maybe it's no skin off our back and so why not do it? Even if we're irritated with them because we see them through a certain light and we have resentment against them, if we really think about it and realize "this isn't that big of a deal. I'm willing to give it for this moment because this is who I am and this is what is going to create a culture of healthy communication. In this moment, I'm going to really seek to understand as if I were them, not to understand so that I can refute what they're saying."

● Meet immaturity and maturity

A way to listen and respond generously, this is Terry Real's terminology, is to say "to meet immaturity with maturity if you can." If your spouse is the one that has a problem and you don't have a problem and maybe you don't even understand what their problem is and maybe they're not communicating in the best way, you want to be mature. Especially if you're the one that's saying "You know what? It's not my problem. It's their problem." Meet immaturity with maturity. Everybody's going to act like a child in relationships sometimes. Everybody is. Everybody's going to have that adaptive child come up and that comes up in different ways, depending on who you are. By now, you probably have a sense of what that looks like in you and what that looks like in your spouse. If both people are in their adaptive child at the same time, that's just not going to work. Those are the times where you have to take a time out. If they're coming at you and they're being immature, you can respond to them maturely and reach into them and see if you can engage that grown-up part of them. Clarify if you feel that they've misunderstood you. You might want to reassure them and be like "Hey, this is what I really meant," "I think you might have misunderstood me. Here's what I really meant." Just try it a few times. Don't react in kind. Meet their immaturity with maturity. Come at it how you are, not how they are. Don't let their reaction become your reaction. You don't want to give them that power. You want to be strong for them. That's what generosity is. If you do this a few times and you can't pull them back and

they really want to pull you into the adaptive child place, they really want to fight and they're not going to be pulled back out into something more reasonable, then just stop banging your head against the wall. Then you recognize "All right, I've tried a few times, they do not want to engage as a functional adult right now," or "maybe they just can't right now," "I don't have to do that. I don't have to stay engaged." Give yourself permission to step out if that doesn't work. We just touched on that already but I just wanted to say that again because I think, a lot of times we put too much pressure on ourselves to like be taking the high road even to our own detriment . If we're taking the high road over and over again, then we could just be standing there taking verbal abuse or we could just be put through the ringer trying to be the mature one. But you don't have to do that. When it starts to kind of get toxic or it's going on for too long, then you're not really meeting immaturity with maturity anymore. Maturity would be to say "All right, that's not working. Let's all take a break and we'll come back later."

TWO MORE WINNING STRATEGIES

There's two more things that I do want to mention that are winning strategies to counter some of the losing strategies and the pitfalls of communication that we talked about in lesson six. They're not really under the broader categories here but they are really worth mentioning. So, I want to raise these two because they're super valuable:

- Cherish What You Have
- Empower One Another

These two, of course, are going to support healthy communication and creating a culture of connection and curiosity in your relationship. This is really about the mindset that you want to have and guiding the actions that you take in small moments, moment by moment, day by day.

Cherish What You Have

When I'm talking about cherishing what you have, we've talked about this already in the repair lesson, we talked about cherishing behaviors as a way of rebuilding trust and as a way of building that safety between you so that if there is a betrayal or if there is disappointment and hurt, that it's not that big of a deal because you've got money in the bank so to speak. The culture is largely cherishing and you do feel cherished. I want to mention this again here because I think it's so important in critical and healthy communications to have that be really an overarching principle, not just in repair, but just in day-to-day living. Just as a frame around all communication. Healthy communication happens when two people feel truly respected and valued. Really healthy communication can't happen without that.

Empowering One Another

Then empowering each other is worth mentioning as well too. We are going to talk about this more in the next phase, which is going to be about receiving and the art of acceptance. We're also going to get in the topic of how to remove defensiveness from the conversation, in response to some of these guidelines that I've just shared. Just because that really falls under the whole overarching outside in energy and receiving - how when we receive it's outside in and how can we hold the space for that receiving and defensiveness gets in the way of that. But right now, with communication, we're still thinking inside out authentically and how to speak our truth in healthy ways and set the culture of our relationship for that to be reciprocal so that we're cherishing them, they're cherishing us. There is a lot of reciprocity when we put something out there and when we give what's missing, we are so much more likely to get it back. Unless you're with somebody who's a full-blown narcissist, there will be some form of reciprocity eventually. But for now, what I want to say about this is that when you think in terms of empowering the other person and when that's your goal, you are going to be more likely to automatically seek to understand when you're asking questions or you're going to be curious. You're going to really be trying to understand from that place of empathy and generosity. You're automatically going to be listening generously. When you raise issues and you come in with that attitude of like *our role is really to empower one another*, you have a supportive energy behind everything that you communicate. Your spouse knows that you have their best interest at heart and you know that they have your best interest at heart. That's what it means to empower. There's nothing safer and healthier in a partnership than feeling like you each mutually empower each other, that you can be your best selves, that you can grow, that you can thrive, and that they're willing to be part of creating the environment that allows you to grow and thrive and be your best self. Even if that means they have to leave their comfort zone. Even if you feel like "Oh! I'm gonna have to leave my comfort zone to empower my spouse, to be their best self." If you think of it, the

relationship as a biosphere, and as Terry Real talks about this ecological approach, when you think in terms of an ecology, what you put out into the relationship is going to be the air that you breathe later on. You know the rising tide is going to raise all ships. What you put in even though it might feel uncomfortable and you feel like, "I'm doing this for them," you're also doing it for yourself. When you empower them, you create a way better relationship for you too. When they're empowered, they're going to do the same for you. They're going to be their best self. Their best self is going to be a really great person to be around because they're not going to be operating from limiting beliefs. They're going to be living in the new story. They're going to be confident that they can show up in the best way. They're going to be willing to use the tools that are going to create a positive relationship. If you just commit, take that mental stance of empowerment for the other, then you come in with a positive intention. It really takes you out of that me versus you approach. You remember "Hey, we're in this together. I'm in it so what I do for you directly comes back to me."

That's it for this you guys, in terms of communication tools. Now there's more, but these were the essential tools that I wanted to share with you guys. I didn't want to give you too many things. There is going to be something else I will be adding on to this as well within the next week. These are the master tools. If you only learn these things, you will be golden. Even if you only learned a few of these things and found some that really work well for you, they really speak to you and you feel like "This is something I could get on board with," start with those. You don't have to learn and implement all of them next week. It's really like you want to know what they are. You want to understand them all at least intellectually. Then you want to pick a couple that really resonate with you, that you feel like, "I can start there. I feel like that would be where I could get the most bang for my buck right now," or "this is what's most relevant for our particular issues right now." I also have some assignments here for you guys:

Exercises for Lesson 7: Communication Tools

1. Keep Calm Worksheet
2. 10 Commandments of a Time-Out
3. List of Guidelines

You can have it handy. You can cut them up, you can put them into note cards, you can laminate them, put them in your purse like whatever you need to do. You want to set these rules for yourself. Look at this as a standard that you are holding for yourself, these are the tools that you were going to use and these are going to replace what your defaults have been. Now that you're aware of the pitfalls, it's going to be so much easier to avoid them. Now that you have these tools. This is the good part. This is like the constructive exciting part where you actually have at your disposal everything you need to create a really healthy communication with your spouse - where you feel understood, where they feel valued at the same time and you can come together and solve the solvable problems without getting derailed, which is so much easier said than done. I have so much confidence that if you guys learn these things, you guys are going to be really on good footing.

Then we're going to be moving into the next phase is going to be outside in, how do we get our filters out of the way, how do we get our own stuff out of the way so we can truly receive and accept our spouse and what they are giving us, what they're offering us through new lenses, removing any defensiveness that comes up when people use these tools. Then the final phase will be getting on the same team. You guys are like pretty much halfway there at this point. I'm excited for you and I look forward to hearing how this is going. I'm here to support you. Please let me know if you have any questions. Reach out in the group, in our Facebook group. You can post your questions. Reach out to me in email if it's something you don't feel comfortable posting in the group. Celebrate along the way. Make sure you let us know what's going well and share that with other people in this group too because your wins are everyone's wins. When you are successful at using one of these tools and you share that with a larger group, everyone benefits from that. It helps to inspire. It helps to give hope. It helps to give an example of what that actually looks like in real life if somebody else is struggling with it. Plus, like I said earlier, the rising tide raises all ships. We're all in this together. We're all on this journey together. Most of us have not been taught this stuff in school or otherwise are at home. So it's all new. Being together in community will help energize these efforts as well. When you start to get really tired or feeling frustrated, just remember that the group is here. We're here to support you. Some days are going to be good. Some days are going to be bad. But you can really ride on the coattails of other people's wins to know that is possible and their success is my success because *if they can do it, I can do it, too, because that is the truth.*

All right you guys. Well with that, I am going to sign off. Good luck with this. And I'll see you inside the next lesson.