
How to Dialogue Without a Coach

Thoughts of the Month: January 2008

The Intentional Dialogue is a wonderful tool for making better connection with our life partner, our children, or anyone who is present in our life. In fact, I think of it as a way of being in connection more than as a tool or technique.

While people are universally astounded at the power of dialogue in the workshop, most folks find it difficult to practice in real life.

Let me see if I can help with several tips:

- If your lizards have become activated to the point that you want to inflict some sort of pain/negativity on your partner, then the dialogue will not work. Better to step back, breathe deeply, run around the house, or whatever it takes for you to come back and send or receive a message from the newer part of your brain. I recommend telling your partner something like, "I cannot do this right now safely. Let me make an appointment to come back as soon as possible."

Real dialogue is just a series of visits back and forth to each other's world. If you enter someone's world locked and loaded with anger or too much fear, the visit will do more harm than good! Likewise, if you invite someone into your world but are waiting to jump him/her with negativity, he/she will likely leave and not come back.

- If your partner has already launched into a tirade from the reptilian part of their brain, then it's best to stay present and as calm and silent, (and curious,) as you can. Just contain with silent mirroring. At the end you can validate the outburst with "I get how angry/afraid/disgusted you are." Replace retaliation with presence and connection.
- If you want to have a dialogue with your partner but are afraid they won't listen, then the invitation is all important! "Would you be willing to come into my world for a bit to hear something important to me?" This always beats, "We have to talk!"
- Finally if you are with someone who does not know the dialogue process or refuses to use it, your best bet is to temporarily suspend what you want to say and just enter his/her world for a bit with the mirroring/validating/empathy skills that you know and that you wish he/she would use with you. I call this the "golden rule" of Imago. DOING FOR ANOTHER WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO EVENTUALLY DO FOR YOU. You'll be surprised how contagious the process is.

Happy New Year!

With great encouragement and hope,
David and Donna

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