

TURNING TOWARD YOUR PARTNER'S BIDS FOR CONNECTION

Examples:

BID: My partner pours me a cup of coffee as I'm working at the computer.

Turning-away response: Silence. No acknowledgement.

Turning-against response: "Looks like you made it too weak again."

Turning-toward response: "Thanks, that's very thoughtful."

BID: My partner reads aloud a joke that he or she thinks is funny.

Turning-away response: "Have you seen my black shoes?"

Turning-against response: "I can't concentrate when you're reading like that."

Turning-toward response: "That's really funny."

Complete the responses below:

BID: My partner tells me some bit of news about a relative.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner mentions something that needs to be done in the yard.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner tells me we are out of laundry detergent.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner admires a neighbor's new car.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner touches me in an affectionate way.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

THE STRESS-REDUCING CONVERSATION

On a typical day, spend 20 to 30 minutes talking about whatever is on your mind outside of your marriage. This is not a time to discuss conflicts, but rather, an opportunity to support each other emotionally concerning other areas of your lives. The conversation involves "active listening" that is, to listen to your spouse with empathy and without judgment. The goal is twofold: to reduce stress in one another by sharing and to heighten the feeling of closeness between you. What follows are detailed instructions.

1. **Take Turns.** Each partner gets to be the complainer for 10-15 minutes.
2. **Don't give unsolicited advice.** Most of the time your spouse is not asking for a solution at all but is just looking for a good listener or a shoulder to cry on. Men, especially, think their role is to take care of the wife's problems. Wives usually just want to be heard and understood. If your partner asks for advice, then you may offer it, but remember, understanding must precede advice.
3. **Show genuine interest.** Don't let your mind or eyes wander. Stay focused on your spouse. Ask questions. Make eye contact. Nod, say "uh-huh" and so on.
4. **Communicate your understanding.** Let your spouse know that you understand and empathize. Act like a mirror and reflect back the feelings you hear between the lines, e.g. "You must be bummed out over that" or "Sounds like you felt humiliated" etc.
5. **Take your spouse's side.** This means being supportive even if you think your spouse's position is unreasonable. Don't side with the opposition because that will make your spouse feel resentful. The point is not about dishonesty, but about timing. This is not the time to disagree. Your spouse is looking for understanding, not advice or judgment.
6. **Express a "we against others" attitude.** If your mate is feeling all alone in facing some difficulty, express solidarity. Let him or her know that the two of you are in this together.
7. **Express affection.** Use both physical and verbal affection. Hold hands. Put an arm around his or her shoulder. Say, "I love you."
8. **Validate emotions.** Let your partner know that his or her feelings make sense to you. For example, say things like, "That would have worried me too" or "I can see why that would have annoyed you."

INTEGRATIVE EXERCISE

(Couples engage in a "stress-reducing conversation" about the events of the previous day while employing some of the guidelines from the handout.)

- Each couple tries stress-reducing conversation about some topic outside the marriage. Each one takes a turn as the speaker and listener (5 minutes in each role).
- After each turn, share with your partner what he/she did as a listener that you found effective.

HOMEWORK

(The suggested homework assignment has two tasks:)

1. Answer the questions on the handout entitled: "Reflection on Connection," which can be found on the following page. Once each spouse has answered the questions individually, then plan some time to get together to share and discuss your answers.
2. Plan a "stress-reducing conversation" for 20 to 30 minutes, at least three times each week.

REFLECTION ON CONNECTION

"Turning Towards"

1. What are three things your partner does that make you feel connected to him or her?
2. What are three things that you do to try to connect with your partner?
3. What are three things that you would like to see happen in the future to feel more connected to your partner?
4. What one thing can you commit to do more of in the future to stay connected?