

and thinking that by getting at underlying feelings, the patterns will go away. They won't go away. The patterns have to be directly focused on in order to change them.

6.4.3. Conflict: Goal #3  
Move from Gridlock to Dialogue on a Perpetual Issue.  
Help the Partner Understand the Underlying Dreams.  
The Dreams-Within-Conflict Intervention.

This intervention creates initial rapid and dramatic change. Couples typically come into therapy with a gridlocked conflict on one or more perpetual issues. The partners are unable to get over these issues or to discuss them calmly. Usually, they have had the issues for some time without being able to make any headway on them. These issues are damaging the relationship and undermining the couple's confidence in the relationship. The partners feel somewhat desperate about them. In their assessment, typically one or both partners will score below 85 on the Locke-Wallace couple satisfaction scale, and one or both partners may score 4 or above on the Weiss-Cerretto scale of divorce potential. During their first assessment 10-minute interaction, they are often in one of two states: either the Four Horsemen are present and repair is ineffective, or, there is great emotional distance and isolation with lots of tension, underlying sadness, and no positive affect. Then at the beginning of their first intervention session, they will often present with one of these states as well.

The goal is not to solve their issue, or resolve their conflict. The conflict will probably always be there for the life of the relationship. *The goal is to help them move from gridlock to dialogue on their issue.* Keep this in mind. What is important here is the affect around which they *dialogue* about the problem.

Accomplishing this goal is a two-step process. The first step is to surface their hidden dreams. That means each partner has to identify and disclose the dream he or she has that underlies his or her position on the conflict issue. For this to happen both partners have to feel understood and supported by you and by each other. And the relationship has to feel safe enough for these tender dreams to emerge. One issue we often encounter is that partners do not know their own dreams related to their entrenched positions in the gridlocked conflict. This is most commonly true for women.

We have found that women have usually been socialized to not honor any dream for themselves that isn't about relationships. Dreams related to being a good mother, partner, daughter, sister, helper, or friend are okay. Thus, many women are conflicted internally. On the one hand they believe that they are entitled to develop as separate autonomous individuals, and that any dream is okay as long as it is consistent with their moral choices. On the other hand, they have been raised

to believe that fulfilling their own dreams is selfish and bad.

Hence we find many women who have their own dreams. They need help to identify and honor their dreams.

the couple "honor" one another's dreams very deliberately in the extent to which they honor them. At the lowest level of encouragement, one partner's dream need not be a fixed goal or priority in their pursuit of it. That is fine. It does not have to. But each partner's dream, and each partner's dream, must be honored independently. You can't do it for the other. You can't make up their existential dream. You can create the conditions for them to be able to do this themselves, but ultimately it is their responsibility and each other's responsibility to honor them to any level of extent. They may not stay on track. They may not talk about this issue. They may not honor one another's

dreams for years. So all you can do is set the trajectory. They will do it on their own path in a way that is consistent with their personalities. Remember, they will not stay on track. They will get off gridlock and onto a perpetual problem.

For the couple influence to be effective is not difficult to do. It is difficult to maintain these changes. Interventions may need to be

The second step in this process is helping one partner honor the other's dreams. We use the word "honor" deliberately here. Honoring implies a hierarchy of values. One partner can support the other's dream, but there might be interest, respect, and work involved. At the highest level there is a joining in the dream and teamwork to fulfill it. But honoring is a state. Partners may want their own autonomy in the pursuit of a dream, not a joining together to fulfill it. This state may change over time, although it doesn't have to. Each partner, at the least, has to respect their partner's dream. Each partner has to arrive at this independence for themselves. It is not for them any more than you can clear up questions about God. In other words, you can't make conditions for them to be able to do this themselves. They have to do it. Honoring their dreams is not your responsibility. Getting one partner to honor one another's dreams is the goal of the intervention, but our experience is that as they talk over time, they will find new ways of honoring their dreams.

Sometimes this whole process will take a long time. What we are doing is starting them on a new trajectory. The work necessary to move along that trajectory is consistent with their personalities. Remember, if they solve the problem, they will just move on to a new path toward dialogue with this perpetual problem.

This second step may require changing patterns on their perpetual issue. This intervention is for a short time, but it is hard to maintain. The Dream-Within-Conflict intervention may be repeated multiple times.

## Dreams-Within-Conflict

**Work On A Gridlocked or Perpetual Problem:  
Help Your Partner Understand the Underlying Dreams,  
History, Beliefs or Values in Your Position On This Issue**

One person will be the Speaker and the other the Listener for 15 minutes: then you'll change roles.

***SPEAKER'S JOB:*** Your task is to honestly talk about your feelings and beliefs about your position on this issue. Explore what this position means to you, what the dream might be behind your position, tell the story of the source of this **dream** or this belief: where it comes from and what it symbolizes. You must be clear and honest. What do you *really* want on this issue? Why is it important to you? Try to make your partner understand.

**Don't argue for nor try to persuade your partner of your point of view; just explain how you see things. Tell your partner all of your thoughts and feelings that you have about your position on this issue.**

You may want to look over the list on the following page for a sample of dreams that people sometimes have (or have lost) that could underlie the position you have taken on this issue.

***LISTENER'S JOB:*** Your job here is to make your partner feel **SAFE** enough to tell you what's behind their position on the issue: their belief, dream or story. Toward this end, you will **LISTEN**, the way a friend would listen. **Ask the questions** that are listed on the next page as sample questions for the dream catcher which draw out your partner and his or her point of view. You can contribute to this climate if you **suspend judgment** and don't act like a judge but like someone who wants to hear your partner's story, and the dream behind the story. Just hear it and don't judge it.

**Don't try to solve the problem.** It is much too soon for that. You first need to end the opposition of dreams and become one another's friend instead of one another's foe. Try to understand the meaning of your partner's dream. Be interested.

*It is important to realize that the goal is not to solve these problems.  
The goal is to move from gridlock to dialogue, and to understand,  
in depth, their partner's position..*

**Do not argue for your point of view! Just listen and ask questions.**

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS for the Dream Catcher (the listener):**

- ① Do you have any core beliefs, ethics or values that are part of your position on this issue?
- ② Is there a story behind this for you, or does this relate to your background or childhood history in some way?
- ③ Tell me why this is so important to you.
- ④ What feelings do you have about this issue?
- ⑤ What would be your ideal dream here?
- ⑥ Is there a deeper purpose or goal in this for you?
7. What do you wish for?
8. What do you need?
9. Is there a fear or disaster scenario in not having this dream honored?

**SAMPLE DREAMS for the Dream Speaker:**

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|---|---|
| 1. A sense of freedom                   | 20. Exploring an old part of myself I have lost |
| 2. The experience of peace              | 21. Getting over a personal hang up             |
| 3. Unity with nature                    | 22. Having a sense of order                     |
| 4. Exploring who I am                   | 23. Being able to be productive                 |
| 5. Adventure                            | 24. A place and a time to just "be"             |
| 6. A spiritual journey                  | 25. Being able to truly relax                   |
| 7. Justice                              | 26. Reflecting on my life                       |
| 8. Honor                                | 27. Getting my priorities in order              |
| 9. Unity with my past                   | 28. Finishing something important               |
| 10. Healing                             | 29. Exploring the physical side of myself       |
| 11. Knowing my family                   | 30. Being able to compete and win               |
| 12. Becoming all I can be               | 31. Travel                                      |
| 13. Having a sense of power             | 32. Quietness                                   |
| 14. Dealing with my aging               | 33. Atonement                                   |
| 15. Exploring a creative side of myself | 34. Building something important                |
| 16. Becoming more powerful              | 35. Ending a chapter of my life                 |
| 17. Getting over past hurts             | 36. Saying goodbye to something                 |
| 18. Becoming more competent             | 37. Love  |
| 19. Asking God for forgiveness          |   |

*The bottom line about dreams is this:* You don't want to have the kind of relationship in which you win and are influential in the relationship but wind up crushing your partner's dream. You want the kind of relationship in which each of you support one another's dreams. If your dreams connect, so much the better.