
5. Gottman-Rapoport Intervention

5.1. Summary

Before either partner engages in Persuasion, they each have to be able to summarize their partner's position to their partner's satisfaction, that means hearing both the position, the feelings, and the needs of the partner. But this is a far deeper process than the Active Listening exercise. It requires each person to interview their partner extensively about their partner's position, and to ask questions, and summarize and validate their partner's position. This can't be done when the Four Horsemen are present.

Rapoport also suggested that each person agree to the following. If you find yourself attributing a positive trait to yourself, try to see some of this trait in your partner. If you find yourself attributing a negative trait to your partner, try to see some of this trait in your self as well.

Each person takes a turn as speaker and listener. Give them the Conflict Blueprint, which list four bullet points for the speaker and four for the listener. Give each person a pen and a clipboard so they can take notes when they are the listener. All this slows things down, which is very good. Ask the person who starts as the speaker to "wait and contemplate" for a moment so that the speaker follows the bullet points. There are:

Speaker's Job. The speaker is asked to make a mental transformation. The speaker must state complaints as his or her wishes, hopes, and needs in a positive manner, recalling that behind every complaint is a longing or need, and within every need is a recipe. That recall may require a mental transformation from blaming and criticism so that the complaint is transformed to a stated positive need.

- No blaming, no "you" statements.
- Talk about your feelings
- Use only "I statements" about a specific situation.
- State a **positive** need. Within every complaint there is a longing, and a recipe.

The Listener's Job. The listener has to agree to be willing

to meet the speaker's needs, at least to some degree. The listener must take notes and repeat the speaker's position to the speaker's satisfaction. This implies four things for the listener:

- Hearing the content of the speaker's needs and perspective, the narrative
- Hearing the speaker's affect (being able to label the affects, and feel a bit of them)
- Summarizing to the speaker's satisfaction the speaker's content and affect
- Validating the speaker by completing a sentence like "It makes sense to me that you would feel that way and have these needs, because..." Prior to validating, the listener may need to ask some questions that begin with the sentence, "Help me understand why this is so important to you. Is there a story behind this need?" In being flexible, the speaker may talk about the "region of validity" of the speaker's point of view, that is, the conditions under which the speaker's point of view is correct.

Don't let them skip validating. Summarizing is not enough. Remember listening must be empathetic and to the partner's satisfaction. As the therapist, it may be helpful to say something like the following:

The Therapist Can Say: Psychologists have studied babies' orientation to things and noticed that a baby is in one of two modes of responding to information and energy. The first mode can be called "What is this?" mode. The Russian psychologist Sokolov called it the orienting reflex. For a young baby it means behavioral stilling (they stop moving and stop sucking the nipple) and a heart rate reduction. They are taking in stimulation, or taking in information and energy. The second possible mode can be called "What the hell is this?" mode. This is a defensive mode, in which motion increases and heart rate accelerates. There may be some alarm or wariness, and rejection of the information and energy. Many of us are in "What the hell is this?" mode when we are trying to listen to our partner. That's because as we are listening, we are formulating our rebuttal. So we are listening with only half of our mind. We are defensive, or "What the hell is this?" mode. Our conflict blueprint is designed to put you into "What is

this?” mode instead of “What the hell is this?” mode. This “taking in” of the information and energy of our partner is even more important in intimacy and sex than in conflict, so it is the most important mode to cultivate. That’s hard to do, because naturally in conflict we want to get our leading edge feeling across, so we are in persuasion mode, which has to be a “What the hell is this?” mode. By postponing persuasion and your agenda for a while, we are going to try for the “What is this?” mode of listening and information processing. That’s the goal.

Persuasion

Once Rapoport’s conditions are met, persuasion can then begin in a structured fashion. You will have to be very active in keeping this discussion on track, and suggest that this become the way the couple fights at home. Use the two-oval method of compromise.

Flooding

Many people may need to self-soothe. Physiological monitoring is very helpful.

5.2. Additional resources

Level 1: Bridging the Couple Chasm - Chapter 6

Level 2: Assessment, Intervention & Co-Morbidities - Chapter 17, Intervention #28

Level 2: Assessment, Intervention & Co-Morbidities, 2014 edition - Chapter 11

