



Click here for Responding vs
Reacting Worksheets

A Guided Worksheet

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Introduction

Learning to respond rather than react takes lot of self restraint.

And when you master it, you'll rule over your emotions!

Because you'll know just what to say to temper your own triggers that are coming up and how to talk in a way where you can be heard and understood without blowing your fuse.

You already know the great importance of communication, that's why you're here.

You're about to gain access to some important tools that will work for you when you use them, just like the thousands of people that have been helped by using them!

We are here to support you in your pursuit of healthy communication, don't hesitate to reach out!

With best wishes for your relationship success,

**Rabbi Shlomo Slatkin, M.S., LCPC
TheMarriageRestorationProject.com**

When you are thrown into a situation where you feel like you are going to react, your safest bet for responding is to Mirror.

What is mirroring?

MIRRORING

- **Mirroring is essentially repeating back what you heard the other person say. You can paraphrase a little to sound more natural but best practice is to repeat what you heard the other person say.**

- **"I'm really frustrated because this report is not of the quality that I wanted to see nor does it fulfill the requirements"**

- **"What I'm hearing you say is that the report I handed in is not what you were looking for. Have I got that right?"**

- **Hopefully you can see from the above example how mirroring helps the person on the receiving end of criticism not feel the need to be defensive because he/she is simply repeating back what was said.**
- **Mirroring can also help the sender hear their tone of voice or their choice of words which may not have been the best choice. Sometimes just being heard will help the sender calm down.**

When you need to have a difficult conversation

There are times you will need to have a difficult conversation and there are various things you can do to ensure that your conversation will go well.

- Start by asking for an appointment to talk- asking "When is a good time to talk about something that's been bothering me?" Asking for an appointment makes sure that the other person is in a frame of mind to actually begin engaging with you. Without it, conversations often fall apart.

"IS NOW A GOOD TIME?"

- **Get into the habit of asking if now is a good time**
- Before you want to share or offer constructive feedback or talk with someone else, asking them "Is not a good time" will set the tone for the other to be ready to "receive" you when they are in the proper frame of mind. People tend to get reactive or feel defensive if they were caught "off-guard" or perhaps weren't ready to have a conversation or listen.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

An "I-statement" focuses on your own feelings and experiences. It does not focus on your perspective of what the other person has done or failed to do. Here are some examples.

Do you find
yourself saying?

Say this
instead:

“You don’t”

“I wish you
would”

“You never”

“I really want”

“Why can’t you?”

“I wish you
were”

“Why did you
do that?”

“I wish you
would have”



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Before reacting or responding, take time to identify your triggers

A. Identify potential triggers

Take time to identify what may lead you to feel angry, overwhelmed, anxious or trigger a negative emotional response. Triggers can be anything from people, places, and situations to events or even specific memories or thoughts. Make a list of your potential triggers in the space below:

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue dashed lines, resembling notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

Take time to assess how you typically respond when you're feeling upset, or anxious or depressed for instance. Write down your typical responses in the space below:

[illegible]

When you've done some work on identifying your triggers, and you've asked for an appointment to talk ideally, now you can proceed with the intentional dialogue process.

Now, that you've identified your triggers, take time to ask for an intentional conversation so that you can respond rather than react.

In our marriage counseling practice, we use the Imago dialogue or intentional dialogue to help couples navigate difficult conversations to ensure they are calm and productive.

You can watch a sample of the Imago dialogue here at this link where there is a video of us modeling it:

<https://themarriagerestorationproject.com/no-blame-no-shame-communication-system/>

The Imago Dialogue Script

The Imago Dialogue Script is an active exchange between a Sender (the speaking partner) and a Receiver (the listening partner).

Step 1: Send and Mirror Imago Dialogue Script

Sample Dialogue

I've been feeling really overwhelmed at work lately. There's just so much to do, and it feels like I can never catch up.

I hear you're feeling overwhelmed at work and that there's a lot on your plate. It sounds like you're having a hard time keeping up with everything.

Yes, exactly! I'm drowning in tasks, and it's stressing me out. I don't even have time for a proper lunch break anymore.

I can see that it's not only impacting your workload but also your overall well-being. It must be really difficult for you to have such a negative impact on your work and health.

When mirroring, the Receiver:

CONTAINS any personal response (for example, does not offer suggestions)

SUSPENDS analysis of his or her partner (does not respond in any way with his or her point of view)

REFRAINS from evaluations (evaluating positively or negatively what the partner says)

When you share, your partner's job is solely to mirror back. This means repeating back as close to verbatim as possible what you said to make sure he/she got it right.

After mirroring a statement or two, he/she will ask, "Did I get you?". If the answer is yes, the next question is, "Is there more?" If there is more feel free to continue sharing. If your partner didn't get you, repeat or rephrase what you said by telling him/her, "the part I'd like you to get is..." When you are fully done sharing, your partner will summarize what you said in the form of a summary mirror.

Mirroring is effective for a variety of reasons.

It ensures accuracy and prevents potential miscommunication. We all have our own filters and we process external information thereby. By mirroring, we ensure we heard what our partner really said, as opposed to our interpretation. It helps our partner feel heard. Sometimes all we really need to de-escalate is to feel heard. Mirroring back without a rebuttal or a response ensures that. Finally, it helps the listener not react and self-regulate. By mirroring back, we acknowledge that this is our spouse's experience, not necessarily ours. Consequently, we need not defend ourselves or take it personally.

Additionally, you'll want to:

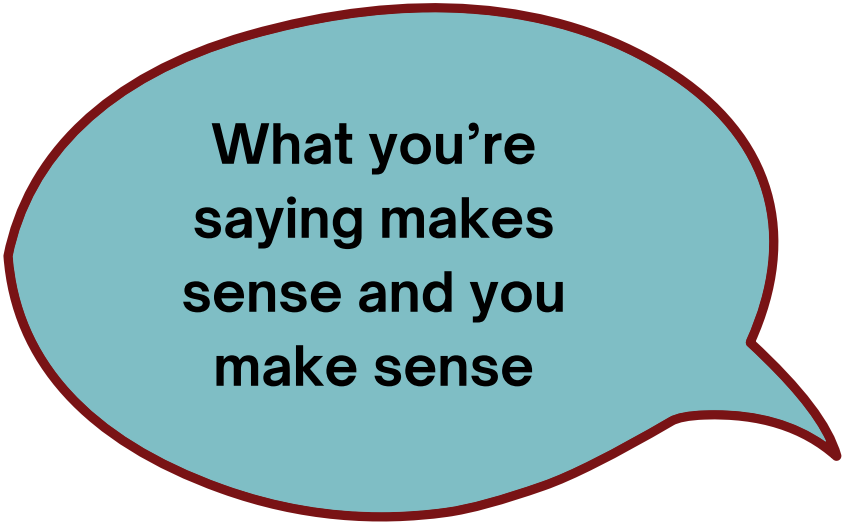
Eliminate all name-calling, finger-pointing, blaming, and shaming.

Take ownership for your feelings and frustration by focusing on why your partner's actions disturb you. Replace the "you" of "you always do this" with "I" – "how I felt when..."

Learn to ask for what you want. It's so easy to complain that we often forget what it is we are missing.

Step 2: Validation

The next step is to validate the other's perspective by saying, "what your saying makes sense and you make sense." This is not tantamount to agreeing or saying your partner is right. You are still entitled to your own opinion. What you are doing is letting the other person know that they are entitled to their own perspective and that their perspective is equally as valid as yours.

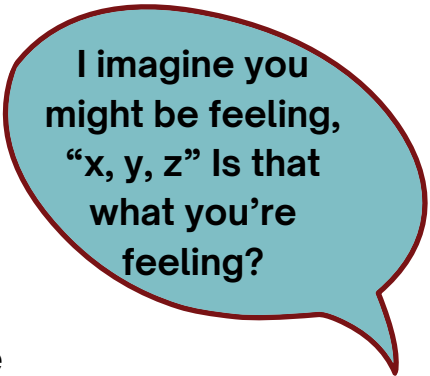


**What you're
saying makes
sense and you
make sense**

Step 3: Empathy

To truly listen and enter another person's world necessitates feeling their pain and experience. Empathizing allows them to know that truly get them. Guess two emotions the sender is feeling by saying, "I Imagine you are feeling Is that would you are feeling?"

If you didn't guess correctly, ask the listener to tell you. Remember frustration is not really an emotion. There is usually sadness or fear underneath.



**I imagine you
might be feeling,
"x, y, z" Is that
what you're
feeling?**

While there are some advanced dialogue steps to explore the painful issues in greater depth, there are the basic 3 Imago Dialogue Steps for Couples: Mirroring, Validation, Empathy.

Good Communication Matters

Communication is at the heart of all that is important in all relationships. It shows that you are connected. When communication is lacking, it's a symptom of a greater problem in that connection needs some attention. When you fix the root cause, you get everything you want and to start doing so you need to learn safe communication and not reacting to respond.

If you are continually reacting rather than responding, your partner may wind up being afraid to communicate with you!

Signs of this would be pulling away, the silent treatment, avoiding intimacy- this is all due to him/her not feeling safe around you.

GOOD COMMUNICATION BUILDS CONNECTION.

GOOD COMMUNICATION ENSURES A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.

GOOD COMMUNICATION CREATES SAFETY.

Tips for Improving Communication Skills

**Work on your
emotional
intelligence**

**Practice self-
awareness**

**Make room for
others to
speak**


**Practice active
listening**

EMPATHY AND COMMUNICATION

Empathy is crucial in any relationship but some people report having a hard time expressing empathy.

Discuss ways to improve your communication and understanding of each other's needs. Consider the following questions:

- How can we actively listen and show empathy when one of us is struggling with empathy?
- Are there certain communication strategies that work better for us than others?
- How can we create a safe space for discussing sensitive topics?

A large rectangular box with a solid teal border, containing 18 horizontal dotted teal lines for writing.

For more help with responding rather than reacting, check out our books on Amazon as well as the rest of the resources in our Etsy Shop.

Contact Us

*Speak to a Marriage Counselor at
The Marriage Restoration Project*



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