

Imago Dialogue

Purpose: *Imago Dialogue* is a process that ultimately transcends conflict and creates connection and understanding, allowing two realities to exist in a safe context. You initiate a Dialogue when:

1. You want to express your appreciation and love.
2. You want to be listened to and understood.
3. You are upset about something and want to discuss it.
4. You want to discuss a topic that you think might be “touchy.”

Begin Imago Dialogue with exchanging positive messages so that Dialogue will have positive associations. Later, when you are proficient in the skill you will learn how to express a frustration effectively.

Make an Appointment

SENDER

The one who wants to send a message must take the initiative.

I would like to DIALOGUE about Is now okay?

RECEIVER

It is the RECEIVER'S job to grant an Imago Dialogue ASAP, now if possible. [If not now, set an appointment time so that the SENDER knows when s/he will be heard, and take the initiative to keep the appointment.]

I'm available now.

STEP 1: The Send, the MIRROR, and the Check

SENDER

Begin to tell RECEIVER about a topic you wish to discuss. Use “I” language – “I feel...,” “I fear...,” “I love...,” “I tell myself...,” “I need...” Let your partner see inside you. Share your feelings about what happened, what you tell yourself, what it's like for you. When talking about your partner only refer to specific behaviors or words, e.g. “When you said..., I felt...,” “When you did..., I interpreted that to mean....”

RECEIVER

Mirror and check for accuracy.

Let me see if I've got you. I heard you say.... Or You said.... Am I getting you? Or Did I get that?

SENDER

Indicate accuracy. Resend the message if necessary:

Yes, you got me. Or The part you got was . . . and I also want you to hear . . . or I'd like to express that again more clearly....

RECEIVER

When mirror is 100% accurate, ask:

Is there more about that?

SENDER and RECEIVER

Continue sending and mirroring until the SENDER says there is no more.

A Note about "Overload": If at any point the RECEIVER goes on "overload," s/he can signal a pause and say, "I really want to hear all you have to say. Let me see if I have it so far" Mirror what s/he has heard, check for accuracy, then ask the SENDER to continue.

The Summary

RECEIVER

Summarize the SENDER'S thought until 100% accurate.

Let me see if I got it all. In summary, what you said was. . .

Am I getting you? Or Did I get all of that? Or Is that a good summary?

SENDER

Indicate accuracy and resend if necessary until complete.

Yes, you got it all.

STEP 2: VALIDATION

RECEIVER

Validate. State the logic of the SENDER'S point of view.

You make sense, and what makes sense is....

I understand that you... given that....

I can see how you see it that way because sometimes I do....

SENDER

Listen to and receive the validation.

STEP 3: EMPATHY

RECEIVER

Empathize. Unless the SENDER'S feelings are obvious, make some guesses as to what the SENDER is or was feeling. Feelings are stated in one word (i.e., happy, angry, confused, sad, cherished.) If your guess entails more than one word it is probably a thought (e.g. "You feel that you don't want to go with me" is a thought, not a feeling.)

I imagine you might be feeling . . . or I imagine you might have felt . . . or

I can imagine your feeling of . . . (if feelings were stated.)

Accuracy check. Is that what you are feeling?

SENDER

Listen to and receive the empathy. If RECEIVER did not get the feelings or did not get all of the feelings, share with RECEIVER what your feelings were, e.g. I think I felt more... or Yes, and I also felt....

RECEIVER & SENDER

Continue mirroring and sending feelings until accurate and all is said about that.

When all three steps are completed (mirroring, validation, and empathy)

SWITCH ROLES.

The RECEIVER says: **I would like to respond now.** The RECEIVER now becomes the SENDER. Ways to begin the response are to say:

What I experienced inside as I listened to you just now was.... Or

The way I would like to respond is....