

Exercise 7: Mirroring

Time: Approximately 45–60 minutes.

Purpose: This exercise will train you to send clear and simple messages, to listen carefully to what your partner has to say, and to paraphrase your partner accurately. These skills will lead to clear and effective communication.

Comments: Do this exercise together.

Directions

1. Practice this exercise by communicating a simple, neutral statement. Choose one person as sender. Have that person say a simple statement that begins with the word "I" and describes a thought or feeling. For example, "I woke up this morning and felt anxious about going to work."
2. If the sentence appears too complex, the receiver can ask for simplification: "Could you say that in fewer words?" Once a clear and simple sentence has been sent, the receiver paraphrases the message and asks for clarification. Example: "This morning you woke up feeling that you would rather stay home than go to work. Did I understand what you said and felt?" (Asking for clarification is important, because it shows a willingness to try to understand.)
3. The sender responds by saying, "Yes, you did," or by making a clarifying statement, such as "Not exactly. I woke up this morning wanting to go to work but dreading what was going to happen." This process continues until the sender acknowledges that what was said and thought and felt has been accurately communicated. (This exercise will feel like an unnatural, cumbersome way of relating, but it is a good way to assure accurate communication.)
4. Switch roles and communicate another simple statement. Practice this technique several times until you become familiar with the procedure.
5. Now use this communication technique to share what you learned about yourself by doing Exercise 2, the fantasy exercise. Take turns. When it's your turn to listen, give your partner your full attention. You may ask clarifying questions, but do not try to psychoanalyze your partner or make interpretive comments. As you listen, try to visualize the "wounded child" in your partner.