

A Deck: Acknowledge and Attune

Acknowledge. *Listen to Understand. I hear you say xx. I acknowledge your experience is valid.*

Acknowledgement does not equal agreement. When your partner expresses an emotion or need or complaint, validate their experience. Dismissal inspires defensiveness. From Secure Love by Julie Menanno. www.thesecurerelationship.com

Attune. *Notice: Mirror tone, emotion, and posture gently.*

Attunement is a core emotional need. When we attune, we show we are paying attention and demonstrating we care. Pay attention to your partner, especially when they are dysregulated.

Affirm. *Earnestly say: It makes sense that you would feel this way.*

When your partner brings something up that may be difficult to hear, affirm their experience. Instead of, “I didn’t mean it like that”, or “that wasn’t my intention,” recognize that they are expressing impact, not intention. Affirm that you understand that you can’t argue with someone’s experience even if you don’t agree.

Adopt their View. *Embody: **Try it on.** Fully. Find the grain of truth.*

Our therapist invites us to “try it on.” When someone brings up a challenging observation and shares how your behavior impacted them, they ask you to “try it on.” If you accept, then create some space for it to be true. Try it on like you’d try on a sweater. You don’t have to buy the sweater or like the sweater, but before you immediately dismiss their request, give it a real try. Sit with it and try to find the grain of truth. Take a look in the mirror; turn around, and examine the reflection. Your partner wouldn’t have brought it up just to annoy you. They are expressing their pain and long to feel heard and understood. -Dr. Maryanne Comaroto. <https://maryannecomaroto.com>

Ask for more. *With curiosity: Tell me more. Help me understand you.*

When someone gives you challenging feedback, instead of defending, defleting, or denying, try the opposite. LEAN IN. It feels scary at first but works way better than what you’ve likely been avoiding.

Assess Emotion *with curiosity. You seem (hurt, angry, afraid)...is that right?*

When your partner is upset, meet their complaint with curiosity. Instead of defending yourself, try leaning in with this statement. Watch your partner relax when they feel heard.

Ask for Clarity. *Kindly say: Can you say it differently, so I can understand?*

Is their tone, phrasing, or attitude difficult to hear or understand? Ask for them to say it differently, so you can actually hear them through your defensive walls.

Admit Importance. *Earnestly say: I can feel that this matters to you.*

You might not agree or understand what they are saying, but they at least want to know that you care, and that you notice they are upset. Say this when you don't know what to say.

This statement is a good starting place. Follow up with **Ask for Clarity, Affirm, Acknowledge**, etc...

Adjust Tone. *Relax. Practice tone stripping: Listen for what is under the tone.*

When your partner comes in hot, if you have capacity, listen to what they are trying to say UNDERNEATH the sharp tone. No one is perfect, and once someone is hurt, their tone is a signal that they don't feel safe. Try to not shame them or label them as bad, just because their tone hurts.

ALSO: check your tone. If you have a tendency to get a sharp tone when you're angry, be aware. It's harder for your partner to hear you and empathize with you, when they feel attacked. Slow down, use I statements, and calm the fire before continuing to speak.

Apologize. *For them.*

1. *I am sorry for...*
2. *I did/said that...*
3. *Acknowledge impact*
4. *Offer amends*
5. *Make a new promise*
6. *Ask for forgiveness*
7. *Change behavior*

These steps form a real repair based apology. Often, when you say, "I'm sorry" it's for you to release shame and guilt. However, the person who is hurt doesn't feel resolved. This template creates an environment for real repair and resolution, so that elephants and eggshells don't build up.



ACKNOWLEDGE

Listen to Understand

I HEAR YOU SAY...
I ACKNOWLEDGE
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