# What is the Imago Dialogue?

It is a basic, three-step exercise to help people communicate thoughts, feelings or experiences, with the intention of being clearly heard and understood and to hear and understand the other. On a deeper level, the Imago Dialogue invites, creates, enhances, and preserves connection. Simultaneously, it strengthens two distinct, separate selves.

Mirroring

Using "I" language, the Sender sends a "message" to convey his/her thoughts, feelings, or experiences to the Receiver ("I feel," "I love," "I need…"). In response, the Receiver echoes the Sender's message word-for-word or by paraphrasing, using a lead sentence like, "Let me see if I've got you. You said...." Then the Receiver checks for accuracy by asking, "Did I get you?"
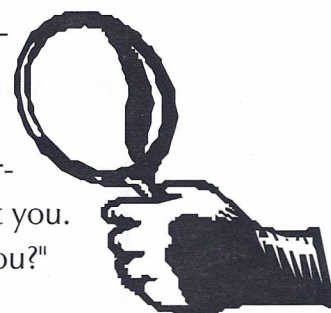
Validation

In addition to learning to listen fully to the other, the Receiver stretches to understand and acknowledge the validity in the Sender's point of view, especially when it is different from his/her own. The second step, validation, invites this understanding. It is a communication by the Receiver that the Sender "makes sense." In validation, the Receiver discovers and embraces the differences of the Sender's point of view. Simultaneously, validation also meets the needs of the Sender: to be understood and acknowledged in his/her uniqueness. It allows the Sender's internal experiences and perceptions of the world to exist.

Validation does *not* mean, and this is important, "*I must agree with you.*" Validation means, "*I understand you and I accept you.*" It allows two different worlds to co-exist—the both/and rather than the either/or.

Empathy

The third and final step of the Imago Dialogue is empathy. In empathy, the Receiver imagines the feelings of the Sender, steps into the Sender's shoes, feels their pain, anger, fear, appreciation or joy. It is important to verify that the imagined feelings are correct. Over time, we move from a staring at exteriors to a sharing of interiors, as we learn to participate in the emotional realm of the other, while holding onto our own, separate experience.