



Now the Healing Can Begin

Start the healing of emotional injuries within your relationship by taking the following steps: The injuring partner stays emotionally present and acknowledges the wounded partner's pain and his/her part in it. Until the injured partners see that this pain has been truly recognized, they will not be able to let it go. They will call again and again to their partner, preoccupied with protesting and demanding. This makes perfect sense if we understand attachment. If you do not see how, you have hurt me, how can I depend on you or feel safe with you? In past discussions of the trauma, the injuring partner may have retreated into shame and self-blame.

It helps to remember that in love, mistakes are inevitable. We all sometimes miss our loved ones' calls for closeness. We all find ourselves distracted. We all get stuck in our own fear or anger and fail to catch loved ones as they fall. There is no perfect soul partner, no flawless lover. We are all stumbling around, treading on each other's toes as we are learning to love.

Perhaps a partner has never before tuned in to attachment messages and only now really begins to understand the pain he or she has caused. It is important to remember that, even though the incident happened in the past, an injuring partner can change how it affects the future. Helping the wounded lover understand the injuring partner's response helps to restore predictability. And staying emotionally present allows the hurt partner to deal with pain in a different way.

The injuring partners now take ownership of how they inflicted this injury on their lover and express regret and remorse. This cannot take the form of an impersonal or defensive apology. Saying *Look, I'm sorry, okay?* in a cool tone doesn't signify regret, only dismissal of the partner's pain. If we want to be believed here, we have to listen to and engage with our lover's pain.

We have to show that our lover's pain has an impact on us. For example, *I really let you down, didn't I? I wasn't there for you when you needed me.*

Injured partners identify what they need right now to bring closure to the trauma. They then directly ask for these needs to be met, that is, for their lovers to respond differently than the way they did in the original incident. This shapes a new sense of emotional connection that acts as an antidote to the terrifying isolation and separateness the incident precipitated.

As a team, couples can discuss how to help each other learn from and continue to heal this injury and prevent further injuries. Continuing to heal might involve setting out rituals that reassure the hurt partner. The exercises below will help you as a couple to work toward becoming a team.

Our Relationship

- *What types of things do I say or do that help you feel loved?*
- *What types of things do I say or do that cause you to feel unloved?*
- *What initially attracted you to me?*
- *What is your favorite thing that I do during lovemaking?*
- *Do I touch you enough?*
- *Do I compliment you enough?*
- *How / when do I help you feel special?*
- *Do you have an interest in a sexual activity that you haven't told me about?*
- *What scares you the most (if anything) about our relationship?*
- *What is the most pleasurable thing about our relationship?*
- *How can I help you maintain your individuality?*
- *Think about your impression of me when we first met. What has changed since then?*
- *Is there anything you think I'm not 100 percent truthful about?*
- *If you could change one part of your body, what would it be?*
- *What is the most hurtful thing I have ever said or done to you?*
- *Tell me something you wish I would do during lovemaking:*
- *What is your favorite thing about my body? My mind?*
- *Name a behavior of mine that irritates you.*
- *Tell me what sets me apart from other people.*

- *When we met, how long did you think we would be together? How long do you think we will be together now?*
- *How do you feel when we are apart?*
- *What do I contribute to your life?*
- *What do you think attracted me to you?*
- *What are some thoughts you have when you see me talking to an attractive member of the opposite sex?*
- *How can I show you my support?*
- *Have you ever worried that I would be unfaithful to you?*
- *Have you ever thought about being unfaithful to me?*
- *When do you most admire me?*
- *Are you confident in how I feel about you? What could I do to increase that?*
- *Do you think we spend too much time together? Too little?*
- *Is our relationship less exciting now compared to when we first met? In what way?*
- *What is your biggest fear?*
- *When do you feel most alive?*