Play and Practice

1. With your partner, pick a brief, unsettling (but not really difficult) incident from your relationship, one that happened in the past two or three weeks, and type into the box below a simple description of what happened as seen by a fly on the wall. Hopefully you can both agree on this description.

2. Now list the sequence of moves you made in the incident.

3. How did your moves link up with and pull out the moves your partner made?

4. Compare notes and come up with a joint version you can agree on. Keep it simple and descriptive.

5. Add in the feelings you both had and how each of you helped to create this emotional response. Share your responses and agree on a joint version. Now ask about the deeper, softer feelings that might have been happening there for your partner. Be curious. Being curious gives you valuable information. If your partner has a hard time accessing his or her softer feelings, see if you can guess using your sense of your partner's raw spots as a guide. Confirm or revise with your partner what his or her deeper feelings were. List your partners deeper feeling is the box below.

6. Using the information above, see if you can together describe or write out what you might have said to each other at the end of this incident, if you had been able to stand together and complete it in a way that left you both feeling safe. What would that have been like for you? How would you have felt about each other, your relationship?

7. Try the previous three practice questions with a difficult, unresolved incident. If you get stuck, just acknowledge that a certain part of the exercise is hard for you. If your partner finds the exercise hard, ask if there is any way you can help him or her right at this moment. Sometimes a little comfort is all people need to be able to stay with a task.

8. If you knew that you could take moments of conflict or disconnection and defuse or review them in this way, what impact would this have on your relationship in general? Share this with your partner and list the ways you both could have defused the conflict in the box below.