

Communicating Feelings & Attachment Needs

Using Self-Energy to strengthen connection and protect boundaries

In close relationships, moments of conflict or misunderstanding often activate **attachment-related parts** whose job is to protect us from disconnection, rejection, or overwhelm. These parts are not the problem—they are trying to help.

This guide offers a way to **slow things down**, access **Self-energy**, and communicate in ways that support **secure attachment, emotional safety, and clear boundaries**.

1. SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

Get curious about the other person's parts and attachment needs before responding.

When someone is upset, a *protector part* or *wounded attachment part* is often activated. Before sharing your own experience, focus on understanding **what part of them is speaking and what it needs**.

Reflect back what you heard using their **exact words**, then ask a clarifying or confirming question. Move slowly and repeat as needed.

Supporting language

- *"What I'm hearing is that a part of you feels ___ and needs ___. Is that right?"*
- *"I'm noticing you might be feeling ___ and needing ___. I could be wrong—can you help me understand?"*
- *"I sense there's emotion here, but I don't want to guess. Can you help me understand what you're feeling?"*
- *"It sounds like you're feeling ___ about what happened. Am I getting that right? Is there more?"*

Stay with this step until the other person feels **accurately seen**.

Why this works (Attachment + IFS)

- Feeling understood reduces attachment threat and nervous system activation.
 - Curiosity invites protector parts to soften.
 - Accurate reflection helps the other person feel emotionally safe.
 - Safety makes connection and problem-solving possible.
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2. BE SELF-AWARE

Check which parts of *you* are activated before continuing.

Pause internally and notice:

- *"What parts of me are coming up right now?"*
- *"Am I in Self-energy (calm, curious, grounded), or is a protector part taking over?"*
- *"Do I have enough capacity to stay present and regulated?"*

You do **not** need to feel perfectly calm. You do need enough Self-energy to avoid reacting from a protector part (e.g. defensiveness, withdrawal, fixing, attacking).

- If **yes**, move to Step 3.
- If **no**, take a brief pause to regulate and return when more grounded.

Example pause

- *"I'm noticing a part of me is activated right now, and I need a few minutes to ground so I can come back present and respectful."*

This is not avoidance—it is **Self-leadership**.

Why this works

- Protector-led reactions escalate conflict.
 - Grounding helps Self-energy come forward.
 - Naming a pause reduces abandonment fears.
 - Regulation protects both connection and boundaries.
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3. CONNECT

Clarify the attachment need and what support is being asked for.

Different parts need different kinds of support. Instead of assuming, ask directly.

Questions that help

- *"Do you need comfort, help, or just to be heard right now?"*
- *"What does this part of you need in this moment?"*
- *"What would help you feel more secure or supported right now?"*

Honouring your own boundaries

Being supportive does **not** mean ignoring your own needs or limits. Self-energy includes compassion **and** boundaries.

It's okay to say:

- *"I'm not able to help with that right now, but I could offer ___ instead."*
- *"I don't have capacity for this at the moment, but I can come back to it at ___."*

If you set a limit, follow through on what you offer and return to Step 1 when you reconnect.

Why this works

- Attachment distress decreases when needs are named.
- Asking prevents resentment and mind-reading.
- Boundaries protect against burnout and enmeshment.
- Secure attachment includes mutual respect for limits.

4. REPAIR

Address ruptures and collaborate to reduce future reactivity.

All relationships include moments where protector parts take over. Repair is how safety is restored.

If your reaction caused hurt, name it—with ownership, not self-blame.

Repair language

- *"I'm sorry for the impact my words/behaviour had on you."*
- *"A protector part of me took over, and that wasn't the energy I want to bring into our relationship."*
- *"I care about us, and I want to understand how we can handle this differently next time."*
- *"What would help both of us stay more regulated when this comes up again?"*

Repair focuses on **impact**, patterns, and collaboration—not fault.

Why this works

- Repair repairs attachment ruptures.
 - Taking responsibility builds trust and safety.
 - Naming parts reduces shame and defensiveness.
 - Collaboration strengthens secure attachment over time.
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5. APPRECIATION

Reinforce Sicherheit (felt safety) by naming what went well.

Acknowledging effort helps both nervous systems settle and signals ongoing connection.

Examples

- *"It means a lot to me that we stayed with this."*
- *"I appreciate you being open with me."*
- *"I noticed we handled this differently than before, and that matters to me."*

Why this works

- Appreciation helps the nervous system return to safety.
 - It reinforces new, healthier relational patterns.
 - Security grows through felt experiences, not perfection.
 - Ending with connection supports emotional integration.
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Closing Reminders

- Your parts are not bad—they are protective.
- Secure attachment is built through **slower moments, clearer needs, and repair**.
- Progress looks like **less intensity, shorter ruptures, and quicker returns to Self-energy**.