

A Powerful Tool For Couples

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1. Describe techniques of collaborative communication between couples.
- 2. Discuss strategies to help clients recognize and name their emotional triggers in order to lessen their reactivity toward their partner.
- 3. List tools to help couples calm down and enhance emotional regulation when feeling triggered.
- 4. Describe methods to repair after a rupture in communication.





PARTS TO THIS WEBINAR

- 1. What is collaborative communication?
- 2. What gets in our way?
- 3. Techniques of collaborative communication







PART I: WHAT IS
COLLABORATIVE
COMMUNICATION?

WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION?

• A method of exchanging information that helps people work toward a common goal





COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

Collaborative communication encompasses all the intricate ways we communicate through:

Verbal signals

Body language

Tone

Timing

Volume

Intensity of response

Posture

Gestures

Eye Contact

Facial Expressions

Touch



COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

Collaborative communication happens when:

- 1. A person first sends off a signal to another person. This signal can take any form including a non-verbal signal like eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, body gestures, or a verbal signal like a word. That signal is sent from the mind of person "A" to person "B" who receives the signal.
- 2. A contingent response would be that "B" is not only able to perceive the signal sent by "A", but also that "B" is able to process it and make sense of it.
- 3. "B" then would send back a signal that is not just a mirror of what "A" sent, but actually is a process interpreted signal that reflects that "B" has taken the signal in, made sense of it, and now is sending a signal back to "A" as part of this collaborative dance of communication.

Source: https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/interview-with-daniel-siegel-md/



IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

- Infants become attached to people who are collaborative and not so attached to people who aren't collaborative.
- Hard-wired set of structures in the brain that not only take in the signals from the outside world, but process how we respond to those signals, which is fundamental to how a sense of self is created.
- "A person's whole sense of self can be enriched by collaborative kinds of communication."
- "When there is contingent collaborative communication, the brain functions optimally both within itself and within present and future relationships."

Source:

https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/interview-with-daniel-siegel-md/



NON-VERBAL SIGNALS

- Focus on the non-verbal sharing of signals
- "Often, as adults we forget that nonverbal communication is so crucial and we focus too much on the content of words and the definitions of what's being said. But the non-verbal messages are the most important for contingent communication."
- They allow us to develop the ability for self-regulation and to have a narrative sense of self that is coherent.

Source:

https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/interview-with-daniel-siegel-md/



COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

• Studies have shown that couples who practiced collaborative communication experienced more overall relationship satisfaction.

Source: Bannon, SM, Taggart, TC, Kehoe, CM, O'Leary, KD. Collaborative communication efficiency is linked to relationship satisfaction in dating couples. *Pers Relationship*. 2020; 27: 385–400. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12319



SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

- Enhancing your ability to communicate with more vulnerability, openness, and empathy creates more trust in the relationship.
- Couples can form much stronger connections where each person feels known, understood and felt by the other.



PART II: WHAT
GETS IN OUR WAY

4 CONCEPTS:

- 1. Attachment Theory
- 2. Triggers
- 3. Critical Inner Voice
- 4. Fantasy Bond







ATTACHMENT PATTERNS

- Formed in early childhood with important figures in our lives.
- These patterns go on to function as "working models" for relationships in adulthood.
- They influence how we behave and how we expect others to behave.
- We see relationships through the lens of our past.
- Expect our partner to behave in patterns we experienced in our history and that we have adapted to.



SECURE ATTACHMENT

• As children, if we experienced a **secure** attachment pattern, we were able to feel **safe**, **seen**, and **soothed** by a parent (or primary caretaker) and to see that parent as a secure base from which we could venture out and explore.

As an adult, we tend to be more satisfied, supportive, and secure in our relationships, feeling connected, while also allowing ourselves and our partner the space to move freely.



ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT

If we experienced an anxious ambivalent attachment as a child, our parent was probably intermittently available, sometimes making us feel safe, seen, and soothed, but other times being unavailable, intrusive, or mis-attuned to our needs. This created a pattern where we had to turn up the volume on our needs in order to get them met.

As adults, we may be more likely to form a **preoccupied attachment** in relationships and to feel insecure and unsure of our partner's love. We may feel desperate, anxious, fearful, or jealous, and act in ways that come off as controlling, clingy, or possessive.



ANXIOUS-AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT

• Having a preoccupied attachment style makes us more likely to feel triggered by a romantic partner in specific ways.

For instance, if our partner is quiet at dinner, we may think, "Why isn't he talking to you? He finds you boring. Make him tell you what's wrong."



AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

If we had a parent who was emotionally unavailable or rejected our bids for connection, we most likely formed an avoidant attachment pattern and learned to put our needs below our level of awareness. Because when we felt them, it was painful, frustrating, and shame-inducing.

As adults, we're likely to form a **dismissive** attachment in which we are emotionally self contained and "pseudo-independent." We may dismiss our partner as needy when they make bids for our attention.



AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

When we feel triggered by our partner, we may see their attempt to connect as needy, dramatic, or overwhelming. Our voice attacks may say: "Why is she so focused on you? You need your space. He is so emotional all the time. You can't deal with this right now. She asks too much of you. You need to create a boundary. He's such a baby."



TRIGGERS

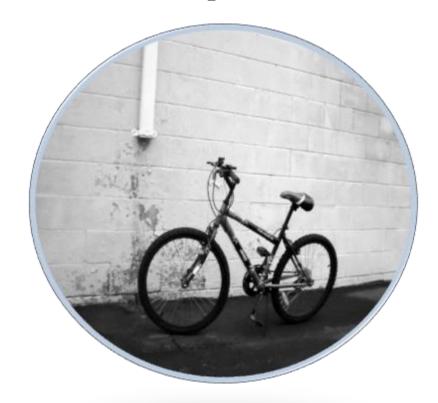
• When our responses are intense, it is often because they are heavily shaped by our past.

• The feelings or words that trigger us have direct connections to the ways we were seen and treated as well as attitudes to which we were exposed.

• Triggering events tap into early, often implicit, memories of painful experiences.

IMPLICIT VS EXPLICIT MEMORY

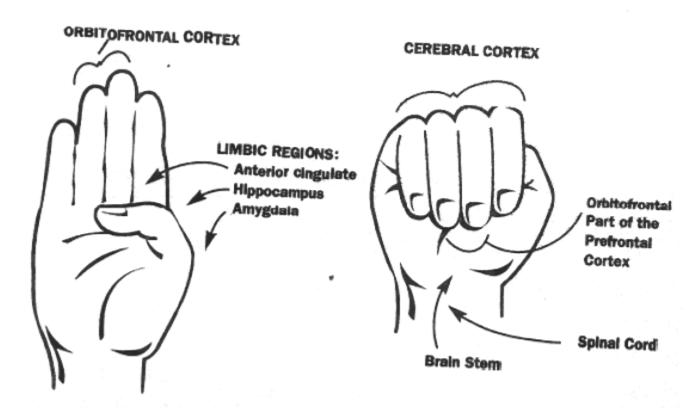
Implicit



Explicit

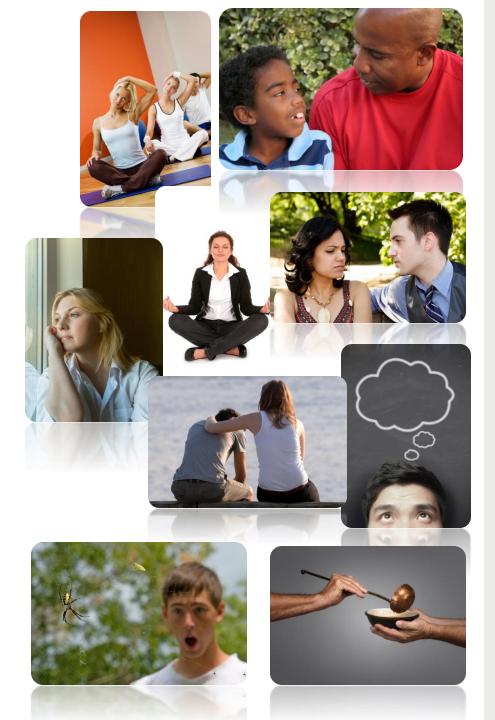


THE BRAIN IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND



Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain,



9 FUNCTIONS OF THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

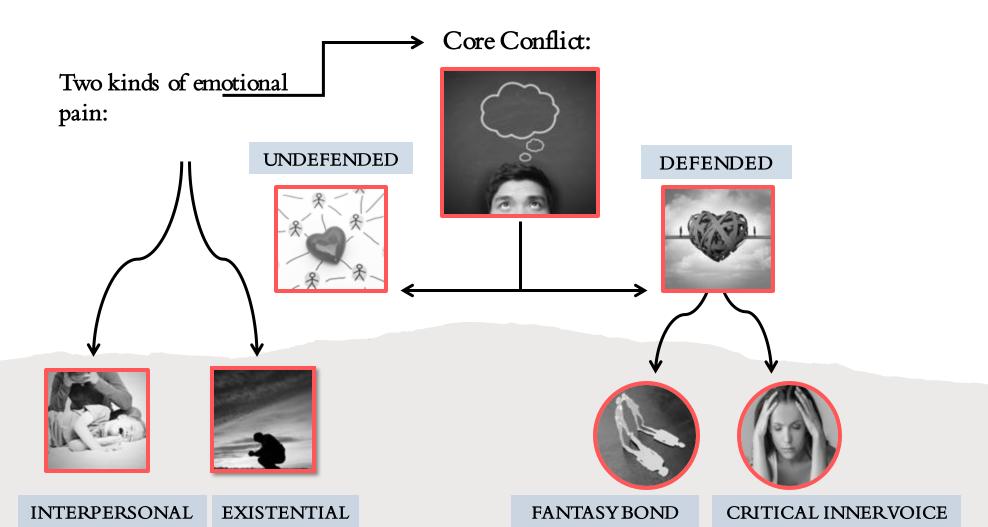
- 1. Body Regulation
- 2. Attunement
- 3. Emotional Balance
- 4. Response Flexibility
- 5. Empathy
- 6. Self-Knowing Awareness (Insight)
- 7. Fear Modulation
- 8. Intuition
- 9. Morality



SEPARATION THEORY

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought





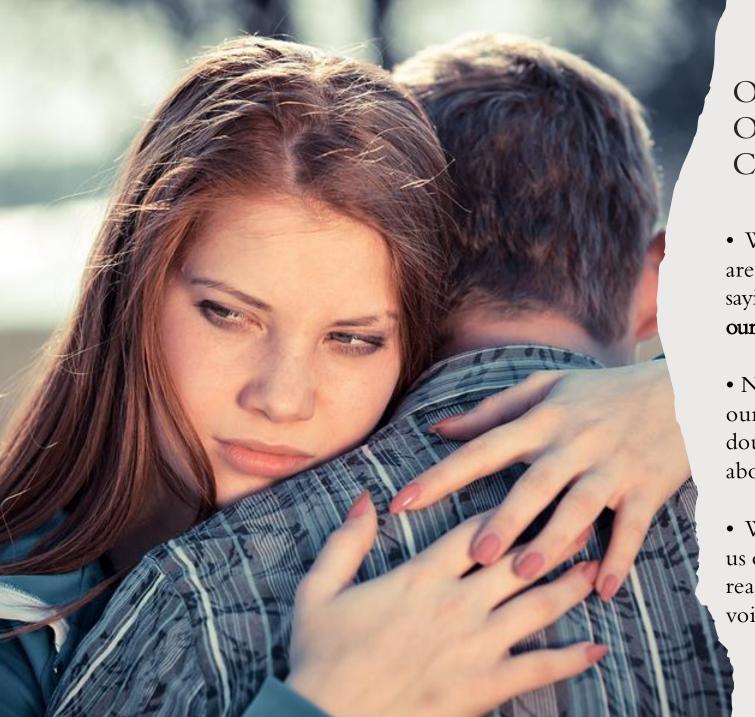
THE FANTASY BOND

- By not communicating directly, we preserve a fantasy about our relationship.
- We avoid knowing what our partner really thinks or feels, because it breaks our fantasy.
- We often think we know how our partner thinks or feels without expressing our feelings or listening to theirs.



THE CRITICAL INNER VOICE

- Refers to a well integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward our selves and others.
- At the root of much of our maladaptive behavior.
- Fosters inwardness, distrust, selfcriticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities.
- Affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, and our performance and accomplishments at school and work, and our way of communicating.

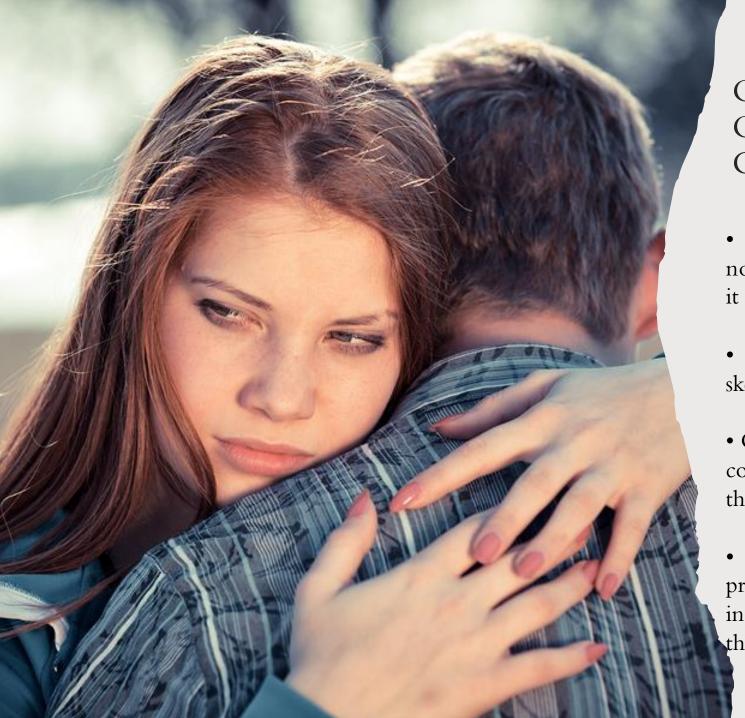


OUR TRIGGERS SETS OFF OUR INNER CRITIC

• When we feel triggered by our partner, we usually aren't just dealing with what the other person is saying or doing, but whatever we are **telling ourselves** about what they are saying or doing.

• Not only does our critical inner voice influence our own sense of identity, becoming the cruel and doubting "voice" in our head, but it also warns us about other people and relationships in general.

• When someone says or does something that upsets us or we're faced with a triggering event, our reaction can be exacerbated by our critical inner voice attacks.



OUR TRIGGERS SETS OFF OUR INNER CRITIC

- The reason this "voice" is so destructive is not that it notices real things that need to be addressed, but because it distorts the world through a dark filter.
- It exaggerates and adds an interpretation that is often skewed.
- Our behavior can become a response to an internal conversation we're having with our inner critic rather than to what's really happening in the moment.
- This heightened response is much more likely to provoke the other person (as well as their own critical inner voice) and begin a cycle of one person triggering the other as nothing gets resolved.



PART III:
TECHNIQUES OF
COLLABORATIVE
COMMUNICATION?

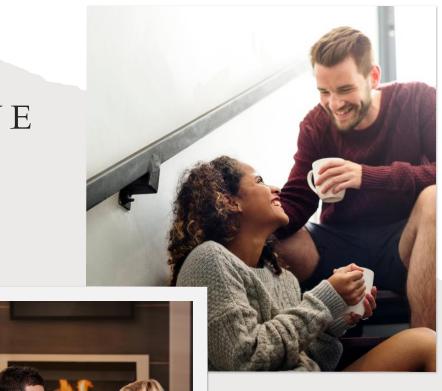


THE FIRST STEP
IN
COLLABORATIVE
COMMUNICATION

Make sure that you are in a calm state and have your lid on.

STEPS IN COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

- Find a quiet place where you can focus.
- Make sure you are at eye level with the person and making eye contact.
- Ask your partner to express how they saw the interaction from their perspective.
- Be genuinely curious and try to see it from their perspective.





HOW DO YOU GET BETTER AT COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION?

- Fight any impulse you have to come from a reactive, defensive, or combative place.
- Accept that your partner has a sovereign mind and will see things differently.





THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

- Make a concerted attempt to get in the other persons shoes and see it from their perspective.
- Attempt to align your state with theirs.
- Cultivate a COAL attitude
- Try to draw the other person out
- Ask questions
- Be open to how they perceived your tone, body language etc.
- Reflect back to your partner what you are hearing them say to try to make sure you are hearing them clearly.



DON'T ASSUME THE WORST

- Assume your partner has positive intentions
- Don't let your critical inner voice tell you what your partner is thinking/saying/meaning

AVOID ASSUMPTIONS DRIVEN BY YOUR CRITICAL INNER VOICE

We assume:

However:

• Our partner doesn't care or is reacting a certain way on purpose

• They may be triggered in some old reaction



EXPRESSING YOUR POINT OF VIEW

- When your partner is completely done communicating their perspective, you can then share your perspective.
- Share your feelings without attacking or blaming your partner.
- Being defensive is a natural response to feeling attacked.
- Communicate with calmness and curiosity.
- Use "I" statements to express how you feel rather than "you" statements that imply blame

RUPTURE AND REPAIR

"Everybody in relationships has moments when there's a rupture in this contingent collaborative dance that we all try to engage in and never fully succeed. We can't fully succeed. We're preoccupied. We're having a bad day. We just didn't understand. Our minds were somewhere else. Whatever the issues, we're exhausted and just simply did not have the energy to respond as fully as someone needed us to. There are a lot of reasons why at a moment of needing collaboration, it doesn't happen."

RUPTURE AND REPAIR

- "The idea of repair is that during the rupture that happens, the individual who really needed to be connected to at that moment is often filled with a really horrible feeling of not only being alone when they want to be together, but also that they can start developing a **feeling of shame**."
- "It can really affect someone when they send out signals to connect and they do not get acknowledged.
- For extended periods of time, this shame and humiliation can be very toxic, not only to feelings that the person has, but even, I think, to their brain. Now, what I just described happens in more extreme cases of misconnection.

Source: https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/interview-with-daniel-siegel-md/

RUPTURE AND REPAIR

- Notice the misconnection: "Something doesn't feel right. My partner seems quiet or introverted since our interaction."
- Think about what occurred: "I was really distracted when they were telling me about their day. They may have felt ignored or unimportant."
- Reconnect: Approach the person and say something like, "I'm sorry I was distracted when you were talking to me and that I didn't give you my full attention. I'd love to know what happened to you today."





UNILATERAL DISARMAMENT

In a moment of tension, shift your focus from your partner's words and behaviors to your own. Try to soften within yourself and approach your partner from a vulnerable and open stance

- 1. Relax.
- 2. Don't lash out.
- 3. Respond with warmth.
- 4. Say something stressing your feeling of wanting to be close rather than at odds.
- 5. Empathize with your partner.

Remember, you have 100% control of 50% of the dynamic.



JOURNALING: INSTEAD OF REACTING, REFLECT

Think about a recent time that you got triggered...

o How did you feel at the time?

o What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?

o Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.

Lonely
Dismissed and Unimportant
Frustrated and Helpless
On Guard and
Uncomfortable

Scared
Hurt
Hopeless
Helpless
Intimidated
Threatened

Panicked
Rejected
Like I Don't Matter
Ignored
Inadequate
Shut Out and Alone
Confused and Lost
Embarrassed
Ashamed
Blank
Afraid

Shocked Unwanted
Sad Vulnerable
Forlorn Worried
Disappointed
Isolated
Let Down
Numb
Humiliated
Overwhelmed
Small or Insignificant

Source: Johnson, Sue. Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love. Little Brown & Co, 2011.



SELF-COMPASSION

"Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering"

From Kristin Neff:

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

3 Elements:

- 1. Self-kindness Vs. Self-judgment
- 2. Mindfulness Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
- 3. Common humanity Vs. Isolation

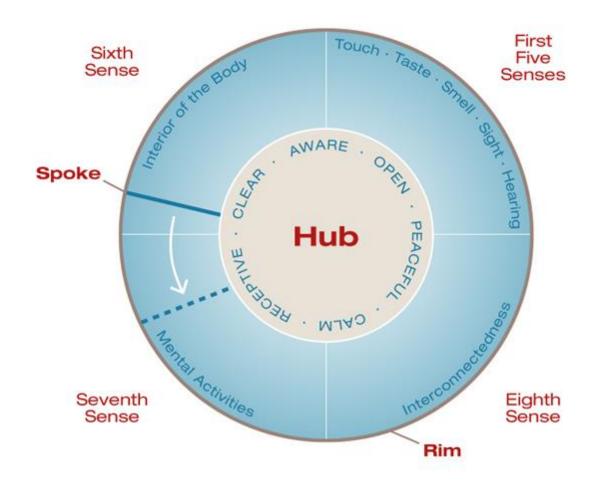
TOOLKIT

- Name it to Tame it
- Wheel of Awareness
- RAIN Approach
- Balance the Mind
- 4–7–8 Breathing

R.A.I.N

- Recognize
- Allow, accept and acknowledge
- Investigate
- Non identification

WHEEL OF AWARENESS



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CONTINUING EDUCATION INFORMATION

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THANK YOU

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