

The background of the image is a tranquil natural scene. A still body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, occupies the middle ground, its surface acting as a perfect mirror for the sky and the surrounding landscape. The water is a deep, clear blue. On either side of the water, there are dense forests of tall, dark evergreen trees. In the far distance, a range of mountains is visible, their peaks softened by a light mist or haze. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and majestic. The text is overlaid on this scene, with the main title in large, bold, white letters and the subtitle in a smaller, italicized white font.

Healing Conversation Blueprint

(Clean the slate in a healthy way)



Unresolved pain in a relationship is a major source of resentment and it creates a wall between partners.

The Healing Conversation Blueprint is designed to give you a framework to process and resolve *any* emotional hurt, which frees you of the pain that an event caused.

Read through the workbook first and the last page contains a shortened format for you to follow and apply the framework to a situation that needs to be repaired.

Introduction

STEP 1: INJURED PARTNER SHARES

In order to have a healing conversation, it simply requires each person to interact on a different level. When we share our deeper emotions and do so in a more vulnerable way, it changes the quality of the conversation and allows for healing and closure.

The meaning we make out of a situation determines how we feel.
Exploring the meaning and the message a particular event sends us then helps the listener to understand why the other felt hurt. As a result of the event and meaning that is made, when the injured partner shares, be sure to include the softer feelings and hurts that were caused.

Throughout the steps in this workbook, we'll use the example of a wife being hurt by an emotional affair that her husband had. The injured partner will use the questions below to guide what they share with their partner.

What situation occurred and how were you impacted by what happened? What meaning did you make out of the event? How did / do you feel as a result?

Example: When I found out that you were having an emotional affair, I was completely devastated. It felt like my world fell apart because someone came between us. The message it sent me, the meaning I made, was that I wasn't enough for you so you had to look somewhere else and I felt so hurt and alone. Whenever I think about it, I feel inadequate.

STEP 2: EMPATHIZE AND VALIDATE

The next step is for the listening partner to empathize and validate their feelings. The reason why emotions get amplified and intensify is because they aren't seen and validated.

Before continuing on, watch this short video on the difference between sympathy and empathy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Empathy involves feeling *with* someone else. When you are able to help your wife share how she feels – all of what she is going through underneath the anger – she is no longer alone.

In order to validate a feeling, you can say things like, “I get it.” “That make sense to me that when ____ happens that you feel ____.” We want her to walk away from the conversation having *felt* that ***you understand why she is feeling the way she is*** even if you see the situation differently.

“When I had the affair, I can fully see and understand why you felt so sad and hurt by that (validation). I hear that it’s been so painful and immensely hard for you to trust me ever since. It was such a bad decision for me to make and I can see how much you’ve been hurting because of it (empathy).”

STEP 3: APOLOGIZE AND OWN

Apologizing doesn't mean you're admitting you're a bad person.

Sometimes people get stuck with the fear that if they admit or take responsibility for one of their actions that caused pain that it means they are bad, unworthy, or defective in some way.

***Very simply, an apology is just your saying sorry that your actions caused pain and that you care about how the other person feels.*

When you take ownership, you're taking accountability for your actions, which is a recognition that what you did impacted your partner. *Taking ownership helps your partner to feel validated and that you acknowledge the impact that occurred.*

Example: "I'm really sorry that I hurt you so deeply (or sad, afraid, felt rejected, etc.,) when I started communicating with that person. It wasn't my intention for you to feel bad, so I'm sorry that you were impacted like that. I recognize that my actions caused the pain you're feeling."

It's also important to provide the context of the action in order to change or soften the meaning that the injured partner perceived.

"When I began having the affair, I realize now that I was reaching out because I felt bad about myself and I wanted validation. I didn't know how to turn to you and open up to share, and so I avoided my feelings and turned to someone else. It wasn't because you weren't enough, I just didn't know how to resolve this in a healthy way and I made a terrible mistake."

STEP 4: MAKE A PLAN

The last step you need to take is to make a plan to address the event to prevent it from happening again. This is what helps to bring a resolution and allows for the other person to heal.

The parts necessary for a successful plan are:

1. Identify how the situation happened (this is the new context that is shared from the previous example)
2. Develop an action plan that will help you to avoid the situation in the future
3. Share this plan with your wife

“I am fully committed to learn more about the underlying feelings that led me to want to distract myself and escape by getting attention from another woman. I am going to begin journaling and reflecting on how I feel, and I will share with you what is going on for me internally so you are aware of my feelings and aren’t left in the dark. I’ll reach out to you for support and help if I’m having a hard time and will process how I feel in a healthy way. I have already cut off contact with the other person and I won’t respond and will tell you if she ever does try to contact me. My priority is to be more vigilant about protecting our marriage.”

PRACTICE SHARING

Each of you take a turn to share an injury that you'd like to process and resolve. In the beginning, make sure to pick an event that isn't too charged. Please don't pick the biggest and most painful event in your relationship history as your first conversation with this framework. We do want to repair and resolve those, but it's best if we have a foundation and practice with this approach first.

Follow the steps below and have the injured partner share how they feel. Work through the entire exercise and then you can switch roles and the other can share the experience they'd like to process.

Refer to the previous example if you need some more help with what to say.

Step 1: Injured partner shares – What situation occurred and how were you impacted by what happened? What meaning did you make out of the event? How did / do you feel as a result?

Step 2: The other partner responds with empathy and validation – Express a sense of understanding and concern about what you just heard. Tap into what *their* experience was of the event (**even if you see it differently**). What feelings come up for you as you listened. Offer validation and understanding.

Step 3: Sincerely apologize and own your actions. Provide a new understanding and context of what happened. Help your partner understand where you were mentally and emotional at the time of the event, while still owning your decisions and actions. A new context can help to reshape your partner's meaning of the situation.

Step 4: Make a plan – Share with your partner what you are going to work on doing differently in the future. Then show the person by your actions moving forward that you are committed to following through on your plan.

After you go through this process, check in to see how the injured partner feels. Every situation and person is different, so if there are certain things they need to hear in order to be fully validated and reassured, ask them what else they might need.

After there is a sense of closure in the moment, you can switch roles and go through the steps again so you each have a chance to process through a painful event.

The more you have these powerful conversations, the more closure, healing and closeness you will create in your relationship. If you have a successful conversation only to find that the same event is brought up again, *it's perfectly normal and ok*, especially for bigger events. It doesn't mean that it didn't work – all it means is that you have a chance to do it again.

If you repeat the exercise and share similar things (sincerely and with feeling), then that might be all that needs to happen. We need reminders and lots of reassurance in order process painful wounds and reassure fears and hurts. Be patient and take your time with the process.