

# COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION AFTER THE AFFAIR

## 1. Inhibit!

### *Inhibit nasty outbursts*

- Think about your intent. You may feel better after unloading your nasty outburst, but your partner will likely feel poisoned. A new barrier to healing may be created.
- One zinger will erase 20 acts of kindness. Don't use words as weapons.
- We usually attack with anger when we are afraid and become insulting when we are hurt or jealous.
- Unmonitored emotional outbursts get in the way of future healing!
- *Inhibit negative cycling*
- Negative cycling occurs when you feed off each other's words, facial expressions, or body language until the negativity turns into screaming/fighting/distancing.
- Refuse to add more fuel to the fire. The best defense is NOT a good offense.
- When you reach gridlock on an issue, table it and walk away. Save it for your next therapy session.
- You must be willing to hear, understand, and acknowledge your partner's point of view (remember you don't have to agree!)
- *Inhibit rehashing*
- Avoid arguing about what you've argued about.
- Do not expect that you will have the same memories of past arguments and discussions.
- Start fresh and start over. "What is your position on this issue right now?"
- Create a shared list of forbidden topics. Avoid these until goodwill has been established or save for your next therapy session.
- *Inhibit interrupting and contradicting*
- Let your partner finish speaking and then calmly/respectfully state your perspective.
- *Inhibit mindreading, analyzing, and editorializing*
- Trying to demonstrate to your partner that you know more about them than they do, will surely lead to resentment, hopelessness, and ultimately, more distance.

## 2. Play Ping-Pong

### *Don't hold the ball for too long*

- Keep your message short so your partner can reasonably process and respond to what you're saying.

### *Take turns*

- Remember this is a dialogue based on *real* communication, not a debate.
- Practice alternating between listener and speaker. Listener: be attentive, make sure your body language conveys receptivity, don't interrupt, acknowledge what you've heard and respond in a calm/respectful manner.

## 3. Use "I" Messages as the Speaker

### *Express your own feelings*

- Pause for a moment, go inside your head and body, and identify what emotion you are feeling. Then express yourself directly without blame or interpretation.

#### **4. Be a Good Listener**

*Listening is a four-way street*

1. I send a message,
2. You acknowledge receipt of my message,
3. You send,
4. I acknowledge receipt

*Use active listening skills*

1. *Reflect* on what your partner is saying (like a mirror),
2. *Validate* that their point has worth/merit,
3. *Empathize* with the emotions underlying your partner's message.

*Avoid problem-solving for your partner and empty reassurance.*