

► **Exercise:** **The Aftermath of Failed Bids**

Instructions: These exercises are a guide for processing and evaluating what happened when one of you felt that the friendship in your relationship was not working well, when perhaps one of you felt alienated and lonely, while the other may have felt a great need for autonomy, independence, or being alone. These exercises are designed to increase understanding between the two of you. The idea here is that there is no absolute reality when two people miss each other in turning towards one another or turning away; there are only two subjective realities. These exercises are designed to help you get at these and to ease these situations in the future.

Start with your feelings. In Part 1, read down the list of positive and negative feelings and say out loud which feelings you had when there was a failed bid, while your partner just listens. Then trade roles. In Part 2, take turns answering the questions about subjective realities and ways to express your needs and wants. If there's time, go on to also discuss the questions in Parts 3 and 4.

Part 1—Positive and Negative Feelings

Each of you takes a turn describing what you were feeling during the disagreement. You may either choose from the list below or come up with your own description. Remember to keep your comments simple and keep to the format "I felt. . . .:", avoiding statements such as, "I felt like you"

POSITIVE feelings: How did you feel this week?

1. During this week I felt calm.
2. During this week I felt loved.
3. During this week I felt appreciated.
4. During this week I felt respected.
5. During this week I felt happy.
6. During this week I felt powerful.
7. During this week I felt loving.
8. During this week I felt kind.
9. During this week I felt in control.
10. During this week I felt like we were making progress.
11. During this week I felt connected to my partner.
12. During this week I felt optimistic.
13. Other feelings (write in):

Negative feelings: How did you feel this week?

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| 1. I felt defensive. | 17. I felt neglected. |
| 2. My feelings got hurt. | 18. I felt disgusted. |
| 3. I felt excluded. | 19. I was disapproving. |
| 4. I felt angry. | 20. I was morally outraged. |
| 5. I felt sad. | 21. I felt taken for granted. |
| 6. I felt misunderstood. | 22. I felt like leaving. |
| 7. I felt criticized. | 23. I was overwhelmed with emotion. |
| 8. I felt like my partner didn't even like me. | 24. I felt excluded. |
| 9. I was afraid. | 25. I felt powerless. |
| 10. I was worried. | 26. I felt like I had no influence. |
| 11. I felt like I was right and my partner was wrong. | 27. I felt like my opinions didn't even matter. |
| 12. I felt out of control. | 28. I had no feelings at all. |
| 13. I felt righteously indignant. | 29. I had no idea what I was feeling. |
| 14. I felt unfairly picked on. | 30. I felt lonely. |
| 15. I felt unappreciated. | 31. I felt alienated. |
| 16. I felt unattractive. | 32. Other feelings (write in): |

Part 2—Subjective Realities and Changing the Way You Express Your Needs and Wants

Subjective Realities:

- Summarize your own subjective reality, how you saw this week, in terms of closeness and autonomy. What was your subjective reality? Share your subjective realities with each other and try to see how your partner's subjective reality might make sense, given your partner's perspective. Think of bids and turning towards or away.
- It is essential that each of you attempt to give some credence to your partner's subjective reality. Try to communicate your understanding of your partner's subjective reality about closeness and autonomy during this week.

How Can You Change the Way You Express Your Needs and Wants?

It is natural for each of us to make the fundamental error that it is all our partner's fault. Actually, because it is all a cycle, it is the fault of neither. What is necessary is to be able to move BOTH of you out of the defensive or attacking pattern into a more productive pattern. This starts by EACH OF YOU admitting some role (however slight at first) in creating this distance and loneliness. In finding the right balance for both of you in terms of connection (closeness) and individual autonomy (separateness), there is a need to first understand YOUR part in all of this.

- What are your needs? How did you express them? Is there a better way to express these needs?
- How did you (or your partner) express the needs for closeness or for dealing with loneliness?
- How did you (or your partner) express the need to be separate, autonomous, or independent or the feelings of being swamped and overwhelmed by your partner's needs?
- What is the conversation that you need to have but did not?

Part 3—What Were the Triggers?

Instructions: Say aloud which, if any, of the following items fit for you, while your partner listens. Then trade roles.

Events Related to Inclusion

I felt excluded. A great deal . . .
No one was interested in me.
I was being ignored.
I was not important to my partner.
I felt cold towards my partner.
My partner was not happy to see me.
Others:

Events Related to Affection

I felt no affection towards me.
My partner was cold towards me.
I definitely felt rejected.
I was criticized.
I felt no affection towards my partner.
I felt that my partner was not attracted to me.
Others:

Events Related to Influence

I had no power in this discussion.
I felt helpless to affect how the conversation went.
I felt there was a lack of respect towards me.
My sense of dignity was being compromised.
My partner was being domineering.
I could not persuade my partner at all.
Others:

Part 4: Do These Feelings Relate to Your Past?

Some self-examination is necessary here to identify where the triggers come from in your own past. When people are under prolonged periods of stress, old patterns of thought and behavior can emerge, old sensitivities can become heightened, and the fighting in the relationship is a symptom of older patterns. This section is designed to help you see what potential past events may have set the conditions for turning away from one another. Take turns answering the following questions:

- Q:** *How have I been responding lately when stressed?*
- Q:** *What sensitivities, thoughts, and feelings have I had lately in my relationship that may have influenced our friendship so it's not working well this week?*
- Q:** *What issues am I particularly sensitive about, and what is the origin of these sensitivities?*

They come from the way I was treated in my family growing up. (Explain)

They come from a previous relationship. (Explain)

They come from past injuries I suffered. (Explain)

They come from really hard times I endured. (Explain)

They come from traumas I experienced. (Explain)

They come from basic fears and insecurities I have. (Explain)

They come from things and events I have not yet resolved or put aside. (Explain)

They come from unrealized hopes I have. (Explain)

They relate to ways I was treated in the past by other people. (Explain)

They relate to things I have always thought about myself. (Explain)

They relate to old nightmares or catastrophes I have worried about. (Explain)

Other (Please explain):