



THE SPACES
BETWEEN

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15 Minute Exercise

This exercise is designed to:

- improve the communication in any relationship.
- create safety and space to express without interruption or judgments.
- help practice listening skills.
- help learn self-regulation to stay calm and present with others.
- give a safe structure to learn about yourself and other.

When to use? Couples can use this exercise anytime they are feeling disconnected or if there are unresolved conflicts.

Goal of this exercise - to create more intimacy in your relationship.

It sounds really simple: on a given day, one person talks for 15 minutes while the other person listens for 15 minutes.

Instructions:

- 1/ Pick a person whom you would like to improve your relationship. This person does not have to do anything but listen.
- 2/ You will be speaking for 15 minutes (or agreed upon time) about yourself and how you are feeling about anything. Use statements such as, "I feel...."
- 3/ It's important that you avoid pointing a finger at anyone during these 15 minutes.

TIP: In the beginning it may seem like you have nothing to say, so say that, or whatever is felt at that moment, "I feel kind of dumb about this..." "I feel embarrassed about this..." "This reminds me of school when I had to do something uncomfortable..."

The other person just acknowledges that they have heard you, maybe by saying "I hear you" or just nodding, whatever works for you.





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***IMPORTANT:** your partner cannot bring up whatever is discussed during the 15 minutes, it is your thoughts for you to discuss again if you like.

***If your partner would like to also take their 15 minutes they can do so on another day. The exercise is to be on alternate days.**

Talker's job -Talk about yourself only. You are exploring yourself, uncovering who you really are in the middle of your life, with your partner witnessing and listening. The goal is to start to be vulnerable and to let your partner in, so that they can get to know you more deeply. You share your experience of your life, with the person that is most important to you.

Listener's job -Listen and time keep. Listening is an active role. You are putting your certainty aside and engaging your curiosity.

What can you learn here? - That you don't know everything about your partner. Also, you are listening with curiosity to what is happening inside of you.

If you are having a hard time paying attention, ask yourself: "What is uncomfortable for me about what my partner is saying?", "Why is this uncomfortable for me?" or "Why am I having a reaction here?"

You can note what is happening inside you to explore later. Then, turn your attention back to your partner.

You are learning to connect to yourself and your partner at the same time.

Some additional rules

- You must talk for the full 15 minutes. If you get stuck say whatever is on your mind, let it flow in a stream of consciousness.
- The listener cannot rescue the talker, correct the talker, offer suggestions to the talker, or otherwise direct the talker. Your job is to listen and hold space.
- You may not disclose a secret in the exercise.





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-You may not use what you learned against the other in a fight later.

*Remember you are creating a safe place here.

After the 15 minutes, the listener says, "Thank you."

Let it sit for a bit -The exercise ends and neither partner discusses what was talked about in the exercise until the next day.

Only one person talks per day - The listener from the first day then becomes the talker on the second day. The talker on the second day does not need to respond to anything their partner said on the previous day.

The talker's job remains the same - share about yourself as honestly and as deeply as you are able.

Feeling Discomfort is expected.

You're learning to stretch and grow to be more vulnerable in a safe space and that will bring up discomfort, upset, confusion, reactivity, and uncertainty. But doing this in a structured and safe way will give you more freedom to connect and to give and receive love.

It can be risky to share about yourself - In most relationships, we have taken risks before and been disappointed with the results but stretching yourself and leaning in brings opportunity. You are intentionally creating a safe space between the two of you to take some risks. So, as awkward as this may feel at first, it is set up this way to *create a container for intimacy*.





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Emotional Regulation to stay present - The exercise also lets you both practice how to manage your own anxiety/discomfort by not reacting right away. There are no emergencies here, and there is nothing that requires immediate action.

Reflect on Discomfort - If you hear or say something that makes you feel uncomfortable, breathe, and take some time to sort through it on your own. Take some time to journal or think about it more deeply. You can share what you learned about yourself the next day with your partner.

Respectful Request to Reply - If, on the next day the listener would like to talk about what they heard, you can say things like, "I would like to give you some feedback on what I heard. Are you open to that?", "I think maybe we have had a misunderstanding, and I would like to clarify something" or "I would love to hear more about your thoughts on X, Y or Z."

*If you do get stuck in this exercise it is better not to police your partner but book a session to safely discuss it to illuminate where and why you are getting stuck. This is an activity adapted from a book called Intimate Partners by Maggie Scarf.

