

Activity #1: Mapping Our Cycle

In our relationship with our partners, we may often find ourselves stuck in a pattern of negative interaction when we're struggling to connect. This interaction, otherwise known as a "cycle," entails different thoughts or behaviors we have when we're trying to resolve a disconnect with our partner.

Oftentimes, there can be an individual who is very driven to resolve, "swipe the slate clean" per se, when there is a disconnect – a "pursuer." They may 'push or pry' to make sure the issue is resolved.

You may also find yourself pulling away in conflict – a "withdrawer" may have the tendency to step back – "I can't do this right now," "I need a moment," "I need to be alone" when there is a disconnect. It may also be difficult to come back into the conflict to resolve it, even if they've calmed themselves down.

MAP YOUR CYCLE – Work with your Partner(s) – for pursuers, there may be a tendency to share hurt, pain, and loneliness when they feel disconnected, while a withdrawer may experience rejection, inadequacy, or judgment.

When we're not in a good place, I feel:

- Angry, Pissed off, Sad
- Alone, Abandoned, Disappointed
- Justified in my anger, Like I have to figure this out myself
- Frustrated by him/her, Deprived
- Annoyed, Irritated Despairing, Hopeless
- Scared, frightened, Like I want to protect myself
- Anxious Hurt, Not heard, Not valued, Not important

When I feel this, I tend to:

- Criticize you, blame you
- Interrupt you
- Try to manipulate to get what I want from you
- Yell, Attack, Say nasty things to you
- Beg or Plead
- Demand
- Point out how you are letting me down or hurting me; try to get you to understand how you hurt me
- Explain again and again what I want
- Pull away, Withdraw, Give up
- Refuse to talk to you

- Get logical and point out how irrational you are
- Find solutions, try to fix it so the conflict will stop or so that you won't be so upset or angry
- Defend myself
- Try to show why I am right and you are wrong
- Justify my feelings and actions
- Counter-criticize or counter-blame or counter-attack and say nasty things to you

I do this (above), hoping that you'll:

When I do this (above), you seem to (use list above for reference):

When you respond this way, I start to feel (refer to first list of feelings):

If you're the one hurting, it can often feel difficult (feeling alone, rejected, or dismissed) when your partner struggles to respond to your reach for resolve.

Moving to connect on a deeper level –

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When there is a disconnect, what if I told you:

- I realize we are beginning a negative cycle and that I am contributing to it
- I realize we are a system and I am affecting you
- I would like to be safe and close to you rather than distant, disconnected, alone, and afraid of what will happen
- Our cycle feels like it is present and I want to help alleviate it
- I care about our relationship and I won't do the next thing that hurts or scares you and pulls you deeper into our negative cycle
- I'd love it if you slow down with me so we can reconnect. We can always figure out what to do about the problem later when we've provided assurance and safety and our physiology has returned to normal.
- If you aren't ready to de-escalate with me as a team, I will anyway because I love you and want to be close and connected.
- I realize and take seriously that you need to experience me as safe.
- I realize that when I'm wrapped up in my own needs and hurts and feel a need to protect myself, I'm not thinking about you and how you feel. I'd like to shift into protecting you and us instead of protecting just me.
- I realize and take seriously that if I am anxious, scared, angry, and frustrated, you probably are, too.
- I realize you are upset, too, and I am pledging you support and empathy even though I'm also upset.
- I want you to be happy.
- I want you to know how important you are to me, how much I care for you, and that I want to protect our relationship.
- I realize and take seriously that I have to trust you and also be trustworthy.

Which of these comforts touch on what you need in these disconnects?

Next time there is a disconnect, try this with your partner and see what happens. Are there also any physical types of love I can show in the moment?