

DO Therapy

Say the Thing

Knowing what you're experiencing is useful. But relationships also require us to make some of that internal experience **available to the other person**.

Sometimes we communicate the reaction instead:

- “Whatever.”
- “It's not a big deal.”
- “You always do this.”
- “I'm fine.”
- “Just forget it.”

Or we say nothing and hope our partner figures it out.

This exercise is about practicing a different move: **Say enough about what's happening inside you that your partner has a chance to understand you.**

NOTICE

Think about a recent moment when you wanted your partner to understand something but had difficulty saying it.

Maybe you:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Got defensive | • Got louder | • Said “nothing” |
| • Became quiet | • Explained yourself | • Expected your partner to know |
| • Changed the subject | • Criticized | |
| • Made a joke | • Walked away | |

Ask: **“What was I trying to communicate through my reaction?”**

Maybe:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| • I felt hurt. | • I didn't know how to disagree without creating conflict. |
| • I wanted you to notice me. | • I was afraid what I said wouldn't matter. |
| • I felt criticized. | • I wanted you to know I was trying. |
| • I was overwhelmed. | |
| • I wanted reassurance. | |

Sometimes the behavior communicates something. It just doesn't communicate it **very clearly**.

REVIEW THE GAME TAPE

Look at what your partner actually received.

You may have been trying to communicate: **“I feel like I'm disappointing you.”** But what came out was: **“Nothing I do is ever good enough for you.”**

You may have meant: **“I need a little time to think.”** But what your partner experienced was silence and distance.

You may have wanted to say: **“I miss feeling close to you.”** But what came out was criticism about how much time they spend on their phone.

Ask: **“If my partner could only see my behavior not what was happening inside me what message might they have received?”**

Then: **“What did I actually want them to understand?”**

That difference is the opportunity.

PRACTICE

Try building the message in five small pieces.

- **WHAT HAPPENED:** “When _____ happened...”
- **WHAT HAPPENED IN ME:** “I noticed I felt _____...”
- **WHAT IT MEANT TO ME:** “I think part of what was happening for me was _____...”
- **WHAT I WANT YOU TO KNOW:** “What I want you to understand is _____...”
- **WHAT WOULD HELP:** “What would be helpful is _____.”

You don't have to use every part every time. The structure is there to help you move from **reaction** → **communication**. For example:

Instead of: “You never appreciate anything I do.”

- Try: “When we started talking about everything that still needed to get done, I noticed myself getting defensive. I think underneath that I was feeling unappreciated because I've been trying really hard to keep up. I want you to know that's where my reaction was coming from. I'd like us to talk about what's working too.”

Or instead of: “Leave me alone.”

- Try: “I'm getting overwhelmed and I'm having trouble staying in this conversation. I don't want to avoid it. I need a little time to settle down, and then I want to come back to it.”

You don't need perfect words.

You need words that give your partner **better access to what is actually happening**.

BUILD REPS

Practice saying things **a little earlier**. Before frustration becomes anger. Before disappointment becomes withdrawal. Before uncertainty becomes defensiveness. Before wanting connection becomes criticism.

Notice:

- Did I communicate the emotion or only the reaction?
- Did I tell my partner what mattered to me?

- Did I describe my experience without making my partner responsible for it?
- Was I specific enough to be understood?
- Did I make a request—or expect my partner to figure out what I needed?
- Did saying it earlier change what happened next?

You don't have to share every thought or feeling.

The practice is recognizing when something important is happening internally and deciding: **“Is this something my partner would benefit from knowing?”**

If it is—**say the thing.**

NOTICE IT → NAME IT → MAKE IT VISIBLE → SAY WHAT MATTERS → ASK FOR WHAT HELPS

DO Therapy

NOTICE → REVIEW THE GAME TAPE → PRACTICE → BUILD REPS → TEST & LEARN

Notice what's happening. **Review the game tape** with curiosity rather than judgment. Choose something to **practice**. **Build reps** by trying it more than once and noticing what happens. Then **test & learn**—keep what helps, adjust what doesn't, and try again.

The goal isn't to get it right. The goal is to learn from what happens.