

The fear & the shame need to be brought into the light to be dealt w/

A ONE-PAGE THEORY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Crossroads moment: At any moment in your relationship with your partner, you can take:

Path 1. ATTACK or defend: You express some element of what you are experiencing, but in the form of a complaint that has the effect of coercing, criticizing, or retaliating rather than of illuminating.

"How come you always have so much to say to your friends and so little to say to me?"

Turns your partner into an enemy. Triggers an adversarial cycle.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner stings in response to feeling stung. Each feels too unheard to listen, too misunderstood to be understanding.

Path 2. AVOID, ignore, or downplay: You keep what you are experiencing to yourself and talk about something else.

"Anything good on TV tonight?"

Turns your partners into a stranger. Triggers a withdrawn cycle.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner's carefulness, politeness, or walking on eggshells stimulates the same in the other much as whispering stimulates whispering.

Path 3. CONFIDE or listen: You bring your partner in on what you are experiencing; you take in what your partner is trying to tell you.

"I'm embarrassed to tell you this, but I'm envious of how much fun you were having talking to Gail over the phone just now."

Turns your partner into an ally. Triggers an empathic (collaborative) cycle.

Which is self-reinforcing: Each partner's confiding, admitting, reaching out, and considering the other's viewpoint makes the other automatically do the same.

TRACKING A COUPLE'S EXCHANGE

First Crossroads Moment	Second Crossroads Moment	Third Crossroads Moment
Dan's Comment	Alice's Response	Dan's Response To Alice's Response
<p>1. Attack: "Why do you always have so much to say to your friends and so little to say to me?"</p>	<p>1. Attack: "Do you always have to be the center of attention?"</p> <p>2. Avoid (fix): "Well okay, let's you and me talk right now then."</p> <p>3. Confide: "I worry about that, too."</p>	<p>1. Attack: "It would be nice if, for once, you'd notice I'm even <i>here</i>." 2. Avoid: (shrugs.) 3. Confide (reach out with humor): Well, actually, only 90% of the time."</p> <p>1. Attack: "Don't patronize me!" 2. Avoid: "Okay." 3. Confide: "I worry it won't be as much fun as talking with Jane."</p> <p>1. Attack: "I don't believe you!" 2. Avoid: "It's probably nothing that <i>either</i> of us should worry about." 3. Confide (pleased) "Oh, you do?"</p>
<p>2. Avoid (disregard his feeling of jealousy and start talking about something else): "Anything good on TV tonight?"</p>	<p>1. Attack: "You're not going to watch TV again all night, are you?"</p> <p>2. Avoid (remaining at the impersonal, task level) "Not really. Just re-runs."</p> <p>3. Confide: "Yes, I feel like watching something too -- but lately when we do it, I get an empty feeling. Do you?"</p>	<p>1. Attack: "Look, I don't need you to give me a hard time about watching a little TV." 2. Avoid (fix): "Okay, what would you like to do, instead?" 3. Confide: "I guess you're telling me that I'd be losing you in the process."</p> <p>1. Attack: "I hope you'll watch with me & not spend all night on the phone." 2. Avoid: "Maybe we should get cable." 3. Confide: "That's just as well. Watching so much TV is getting me down."</p> <p>1. Attack: "Your problem is that you don't know how to relax." 2. Avoid (fix): "Maybe we should spend the evening reading." 3. Confide: "Yes, I know. For some reason we haven't been talking as much as we used to."</p>
<p>3. Confide: "I'm jealous of how much fun you were having talking to Jane over the phone just now."</p>	<p>1. Attack: "You shouldn't listen in on my conversations and, anyway, I'm <i>tired</i> of your always getting so jealous."</p> <p>2. Avoid (minimize): "It's just girl-talk; it doesn't mean anything."</p> <p>3. Confide: "That's sweet. I love it when you're jealous. It makes me feel better about the times that <i>I'm</i> jealous."</p>	<p>1. Attack: "I <i>wasn't</i> listening in, I'm hardly <i>ever</i> jealous, and I'm <i>tired</i> of you always jumping down my throat like this." 2. Avoid: (shrugs.) 3. Confide (sadly): "I'm tired of it, too."</p> <p>1. Attack: "Why do you always have to tie up the line with that stuff." 2. Avoid: "Yes, I've got to remember that." 3. Confide: "Well, if that's what girl talk is, I'd like to get in on it."</p> <p>1. Attack: "Why do you immediately have to turn the subject back to you?" 2. Avoid (says nothing). 3. Confide: "And you know what I'm <i>mostly</i> jealous of -- thinking I'm <i>not</i> the person who's the most fun to talk to."</p>

TRACKING SARAH AND JOE'S EXCHANGE

SARAH'S COMMENT

JOE'S RESPONSE

SARAH'S RESPONSE

1. Attack: "Would it have been so hard to stop half a second on the way home to pick up a couple of flowers?"

2. Avoid:

3. Confide (therapist speaking for Sarah): "I miss not feeling special to you the way I use to." (Or, I'm surprised how angry I am over something as silly as Valentine's Day, but I *am* very angry.")

1. Attack (defense): "You should have seen the traffic."
2. Avoid
3. Confide

1. Attack:
2. Avoid (fix it): "But you are special to me...I built that bookcase for you, didn't I..."
3. Confide (therapist speaking for Joe): "I feel bad hearing that you don't think I see you as special..."

1. Attack: "That's the feeblest excuse I've ever heard! I'll tell you what it *really* is: It didn't cross your mind to get me something for Valentine's day."
2. Avoid
3. Confide

**EXCEPTIONS:
CONFIDING DOESN'T ALWAYS TRIGGER A COLLABORATIVE CYCLE,
AND ATTACKING DOESN'T ALWAYS TRIGGER AN ADVERSARIAL ONE**

Confiding won't turn your partner into an ally if it:

1. Is too little too late; too much attacking has gone on for your partner to turn around on a dime.
2. Reminds your partner just how upset he or she is about the matter.
3. Is mistakenly heard as a complaint.
4. Is accurately heard as an complaint, that is, there is a complaint implicit in it that you don't realize.
5. Elicits your partner's reflexive reaction that he or she is at fault for whatever is distressing you or is responsible for fixing it.
6. Is unrecognized or unrecognizable as the bid for contact it is.
7. Triggers an experience in your partner to which he or she feels unentitled to and is unable to give voice.

Attacking *won't* turn your partner into an enemy if:

1. Your partner is used to being talked to in this way without taking it personally; everyone in his or her family-of-origin talks that way.
2. Your partner has a great day and is in a particularly resilient mood.
3. The issue isn't one your partner is particularly sensitive about.
4. Your partner is somehow able to see the hurt and distress behind your attack.
5. Sufficient good will exists in the relationship to cushion your attack.
6. Your partner never heard you make this complaint before, didn't know you cared, and feels touched that you do.
7. Your partner is able to create a meta-level from which to report his or her reaction to your attack rather than just react to it.

What do you do when you help one partner make a confiding (heartfelt, conciliatory, making-him-or-herself-vulnerable) comment only to have the other respond in an angry and defensive way?

You jump over to *that* partner's side and help him or her come up with a confiding comment. You may go back and forth between the partners in such a way creating an intimate conversation.

A ONE-PAGE THEORY OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY

Four Principles

1. **Leading-edge feeling** (unease of the moment).

At any given moment, there's a leading-edge thought or feeling that, if we knew what it was and could confide it, would turn our partners into allies and give us an immediate sense of relief.

2. **Loss (lack) of voice**

But much of the time, we don't confide these feelings—and may not even know we have them—because of (1) *shame* (guilt, embarrassment, humiliation, self-reproach, lack of self-compassion) about these feelings, (2) *fear* about these feelings or about how our partner might respond if we were to express them, and (3) *unfamiliarity* with these feelings (we're not used to talking about these feelings and may not even have words for them).

3. **Fallback measures**

When we can't pin down and express what we need to say—when we lose our voice—we are stuck without a good way to handle the situation. We resort to second-rate fallback measures that typically make matters worse—of which there are two major types:

4. **The adversarial and avoidant shifts** of everyday life—the two types of fallback measures

In the *adversarial* shift, we take the feeling that is making us uneasy and turn it into something that our partners are doing wrong. We thus turn our partners into enemies. "I feel guilty" turns into "You're trying to make me feel guilty." "I feel unlovable" turns into "You never say you love me." "I'm sensitive, I take things personally" turns into "You're cruel." "I have trouble sometimes asking for what I want" turns into "You should know what I want without my having to ask."

In the *avoidant* shift, we take the feeling that is making us uneasy and sweep it under the rug. We say nothing at all about it. We turn our partners into strangers.

Putting these Four Principles Together in One Sentence

If you lack the self-compassion and are unable to confide your leading-edge feeling which could turn your partner into an ally, you are stuck as a fallback measure making the avoidant shift which turns your partner into a stranger or making the adversarial shift which turns your partner into an enemy.