

Module 11: Connection Dialogues (Copyright by Eckhard Roediger)

Indication: As soon as the couple is able to stop/exit the mode cycle and balance themselves sufficiently in a bonding-oriented way, work on the *content-related problems* can begin in the form of this dialogue.

Goal:

Phase 1: Functional expression of one's own perceptions and feelings. Acceptance of the partner's position as equally valid as one's own ("Agree to disagree").

Phase 2: On the basis of this acceptance of differing perspectives, express wishes and contributions toward conflict resolution, leading to a concrete agreement that is to be upheld.

Formal Prerequisites:

- Ideally, the couple meets twice a week for about 30 minutes. Frequency matters more than length. In the beginning, they don't need to master all the steps—it's about *practicing the stance* of speaking in this way. Usually, this level is reached after about a month (\approx 8 couple dialogues). The rules can then be loosened.
- As a preliminary stage, it may make sense at first to give both partners time to simply express their own feelings—without time limit and without repetition (cathartic speech).
- These dialogues are a fixed appointment that must be planned and kept. Whoever cancels must arrange a replacement appointment.
- No outside disturbances; work mode either sitting or walking together.
- A token (e.g., a marker) determines who may speak. The other listens.
- Between the couple there should be an *imaginary free space* into which statements are placed and not commented on, so both statements stand side by side.
- In Phase 1, it is enough if both manage to listen to each other, repeat what they heard, and genuinely get to know the other's position and accept it as equal. No immediate content resolution is required.
- Through repetition, contributions become shorter and more concise, the pace slows down, and awareness increases. The repetition must be confirmed by the partner before continuing. This way, the partners' awareness converges (the "smartphone is rotated").
- Moving on to wishes and contributions for solutions (Phase 2) can only succeed once both have opened to the other perspective and both positions stand side by side as equally valid (*acceptance*). The impulse to fight the other's view subsides, and tension decreases.
- Only from a sufficiently bonding-oriented, accepting stance is agreement possible.

Steps Connection Dialogue

1. **Decide on a concrete topic.** Ideally, focus on a very specific, current situation. Begin only with a description of the situation, not feelings or interpretations. Avoid generalizations like *"You always ...!"* Better: *"Yesterday you promised to come home at 8:00 to put the kids to bed. You came at 9:00, so I had to do it and couldn't go to yoga. That's a problem for me, and I'd like to talk to you about it now."*
2. **Present personal experience:** Express personal perception in max. 1–2 sentences at a time (working memory limit). No "you-statements." Each partner stays on "their own side of the fence". The other listens empathically.
3. **Repeat what was said:** The listener repeats what was heard in their own words. This must be confirmed by the speaker. If not, the token goes back, and the correction must be repeated and again confirmed. This further slows the process. Thus: nitpicking corrections (RED leg) are "punished" by the system itself, while generous acceptance (BLUE leg) pays off. The quick back-and-forth weaves a "conversation carpet" instead of monologues. Still, partners will initially experience the echo-listening as tedious!
4. **Role reversal:** The other partner now expresses their view and feelings while the first listens, repeats, and confirms. Over time, this creates a sense of being heard and a basic sense of connection. It takes multiple rounds (Phase 1).

Note: This process guides partners from self-assertion into fair openness "to the other side of the smartphone." At first, they need not directly tie into the partner's statements. Gradually, positions are exchanged and a "constructive boredom" emerges. The associated "bluish" relaxation marks the turning point in the dialogue—and perhaps in the couple's conflict culture.

5. **Wishes:** Only when calm and understanding have been reached can wishes be expressed (Phase 2). These too are repeated reciprocally and un-commented. Agreement is not yet required. The goal is a climate of mutual understanding, acceptance, and goodwill.
6. **Suggestions:** Based on differing wishes, both try to explore how they can meet halfway—always balancing the self-assertion leg and the bonding leg. Patience and goodwill are needed.
7. **Agreement:** Once positions converge, a specific behavioral agreement should be made. For important issues, write it down—since each partner may later remember it differently! Broken agreements can be revisited in future sessions.

Note: It is a good sign if both feel they gave too much. A good compromise is always painful for both sides. If one thinks the compromise is "just right," it was probably unbalanced.

Another note: The solution doesn't need to be a compromise. Taking turns is an option (spending the holidays one week at the sea and one week in the mountains), as well as walking on parallel tracks (You go to the sea, I go to the mountains). The key goal is: Stop the fighting and go with the flow.

Homework: Practice regularly. Between dialogues, also try to find this stance more often. Couples who do this make significantly better progress!