

ST-C Module 10: Training the Healthy Adult mode

After you manage to bring both partners “in touch” with both their need for attachment and assertiveness (this is what we call “standing on both legs”) you can support the direct communication between them.

1. Let them start talking to each other.

They can discuss e.g. one of their latest conflicts or issues.

2. Interrupt the overcompensating partner and offer your help “coaching”

If one of them shows difficulties to moderate his or her speech and talk in a “balanced way” you can ask them to stand up with you while the partner remains sitting on the chair below. This is one of the rare occasions when we are not all on the same level. An explanation for Tom when working with Betty could be: *“Tom, would it be ok with you if I asked you to remain seated while I move to the “healthy adult laboratory level” with Betty to train how to talk to you in a functional way?”* Usually the sitting partner agrees because they are in a comfortable observer position while the other partner has to do the work.

Therapist (standing side by side with Betty looking down on Tom): *“Betty, could you please try to tell Tom how you felt last night when he was running late and didn’t call? You are the “reference point” feeling how the message will reach Tom. If she is still too aggressive (dominant) then just interrupt her friendly. “Sorry Betty for interrupting you. But I am afraid if you talk this way to Tom he might get the feeling you are mainly accusing him. Could you please try to speak a bit more from your vulnerable.....Yes, that sounds much better! How about: Tom, it makes me feel lonely if I don’t know when you will come. It reminds me too much of how I felt when I was left alone as a child... How does that sound? ... Does it sound right to you?... Can you try to say this in your own words? ... How does that feel? ... Do you feel more balanced now?.”*

You might make use of an image from the conjoint imagery exercise in Module 9. Don’t hesitate to give the client feedback in an empathic but straight forward way. If they allow you to then make some suggestions like described above.

3. Let the healthy adult try the new strategy out

Once they feel comfortable with their speech, go and place the former dominant chair beside the two child mode chairs and ask the client to sit down on this chair. You take a seat slightly behind the client. Therapist: *“Ok, now try to say what you said in the standing up position to Tom on eye level, please... How does that feel?... If you feel ok please hold this feeling for a moment.”*

The therapist moves beside Tom asking: *“Tom, you followed the process. How does it make you feel if Betty talks to you this way now?.....Is there something that you don’t like?.....How are you inclined to react?”*

If Tom makes adequate suggestions go back to Betty and try to support her to meet Tom’s needs of being respected or seen. Try to help the couple to find a functional solution for the problem you addressed.

The exercise works both ways and you might support Tom in the standing up position to strengthen his assertive leg instead of avoiding taking a clear stance. Standing “above” Betty picks up on the “empowerment imagery” in some way and it might be easier to speak up to Betty in an adequate way. You always end the exercise with both partners sitting on eye level. However, it makes quite a difference to talk from “above” compared to talking on eye level. Once both partners are sufficiently trained to talk in a self-reflective and balanced way you can proceed to the connection talk exercise in module 11.