

The Relationship Institute

www.therelationshipinstitute.org

Responding rather than Reacting to Your Partner

1. REMEMBER: It's not about me! S/he and I are separate people and I must listen to what is important to my partner. S/he is describing and sharing her/his experience. We are different people with different viewpoints.
2. As you notice yourself reacting with words or strong urges to speak, disagree, explain yourself, etc., *take 6 deep, slow belly breaths*, and it does not count if you do this to attract attention. You are doing this to soothe and calm yourself so that you can listen to your partner's perspective. The only way the two of you can have a healthy relationship is by knowing how you each see things differently. Your goal is to be *two separate and equal people* who are speaking, sharing and earnestly working to understand two different perspectives.
3. When your partner has finished speaking, to be certain you have understood what was said, STATE THE OBVIOUS.

For example, "You are really mad. It's hard for me to listen, I want to defend myself, but I will calm myself and respect what you have to say."

Stating what is obvious about your partner, and real for you helps you to calm yourself and gives you an opportunity to *switch from reacting to responding*, thus engaging your thoughts *and* feelings while putting your needs, thoughts and feelings second to your partner who is speaking and sharing. You can wait for your turn. Waiting is an act of personal and relationship respect as well as an act of maturity.

4. Then as you calm and push yourself to stay focused on what your partner is saying, ask him/her TWO questions. These are questions designed to objectively and empathetically learn more about what your partner is feeling, thinking and needing. These questions are genuine and designed to help your partner really share and describe his/her feelings.

For example, "How long have you been angry with me about this?" or "What first made you angry?" and "Do you have other feelings about this?"

Each time you practice this new set of behaviors you will find this becomes easier and that you are able to remain in the conversations longer and to a more productive end.