

Imago Dialogue: The Basic Steps

Getting Started: The Basic Dialogue Ground Rule

In the Imago Dialogue both parties agree to a basic ground rule: to talk one person at-a-time. This gives you a person who is speaking, we say “sending”, and another who is listening, or “receiving”. It is when you are in the role of the Receiver that you will be doing the three main steps of Dialogue.

Dialogue: The Three Main Steps

There are 3 main steps to the Imago Dialogue:

- Mirroring
- Validation
- Empathy

Let’s take them one at a time.

STEP ONE: MIRROR

In the Mirroring step, when your partner pauses, or perhaps when you have asked them to pause, you will repeat back everything you heard them say. You may paraphrase, but you will mirror without analyzing, critiquing, modifying or responding.

How to Mirror: *“If I got it, I think you said...” or “So you’re saying...”*

Ask if there’s more: *“Is there more?” or “Tell me more.”*

STEP TWO: VALIDATE

Once the Sender says there is “no more”, the Receiver will attempt to validate what the Sender has said by letting the Sender know if what they have been saying is making logical sense to the Receiver. If it does not, the Receiver will simply share what does make sense, then ask the Sender to say more about the parts that do not yet make sense.

How to Validate: *“You make sense to me because...” or
“That makes sense, I can see where...”*

Ask for clarification: *“This part (X) makes sense, but help me understand, can you say more about...?”*

STEP THREE: EMPATHIZE

In the final step, Empathy, the Receiver takes a guess as to what they imagine the Sender might be feeling with regard to what they have been saying. If the Sender has already said how they feel, then the Receiver can simply reflect this back once more. If, however, the Receiver can think of an additional way their partner might be feeling, this is where they can add that.

When sending empathy, it is fine to say something such as: *“I can imagine you feel like (you’re the only one working on our relationship).”*

However, it’s important to know that once the word “like” comes into play, what’s being expressed is a thought, not a feeling. The best way we have come to distinguish the difference between a thought and a feeling, is that a feeling can generally be described in one or two words: e.g., happy, excited, safe, cared for, hurt, frustrated, scared.

Try to include some “feeling” words if you can, in this step. Doing so, especially when you are lucky enough to hit the proverbial nail on the head, will often bring a look of recognition and joy to your partner’s face faster than anything else you could say.

How to Empathize: *“I can imagine you might be feeling...”*

Check it Out: *“Is that how you feel?”*

Finish

Now that the Sender has said all they have to say and the Receiver has mirrored, validated and empathized, the whole process reverses. The Receiver now gets their turn to respond with whatever came up for them while the first partner was sending and the Sender shifts into being the new Receiver who does the mirroring, etc.

Note: When partners trade places, the new Sender does not start a new topic, rather she/he responds to what the first Sender said.

The Imago Dialogue

The Sender



Request an Appointment

*"I'd like to dialogue.
Is this a good time?"*

SHARE

*Respectfully share
what you want to say*

*Pause
so Receiver
can Mirror*

*Accept / Correct
the mirror as needed*

*Keep sending
until you've said
it all*

SUMMARY (optional)

*Partner may
offer summary*

1. If a lot has been said, the Receiver may offer a summary. If needed, offer respectful corrections.
2. If not, and you would like one, simply **ask**:
"Could you just let me know the gist of what you've heard?"

VALIDATION

*Partner
validates &/or
asks for more
information*

*Accept or Correct
the validation as
needed*

1. In the Validation step, the Receiver lets you know what parts are making logical sense to them and any parts that need clarification. If needed, make gentle corrections or additions.
2. If the Receiver does not offer validation, gently **ask**:
"Is this making sense to you?"

EMPATHY

*Partner guesses
what they think
you might be
feeling*

*Accept or Correct
the validation as
needed*

1. In the **Empathy** Step, the Receiver shares what he/she *imagines* you might be feeling, then checks it out with you.
2. If the Receiver does not offer any empathy, gently **ask**:
"Can you understand how I feel?"

END

*"Thanks for
listening"*

*"Would you like to
switch?"*

NEGATIVE FEELING PROMPTERS

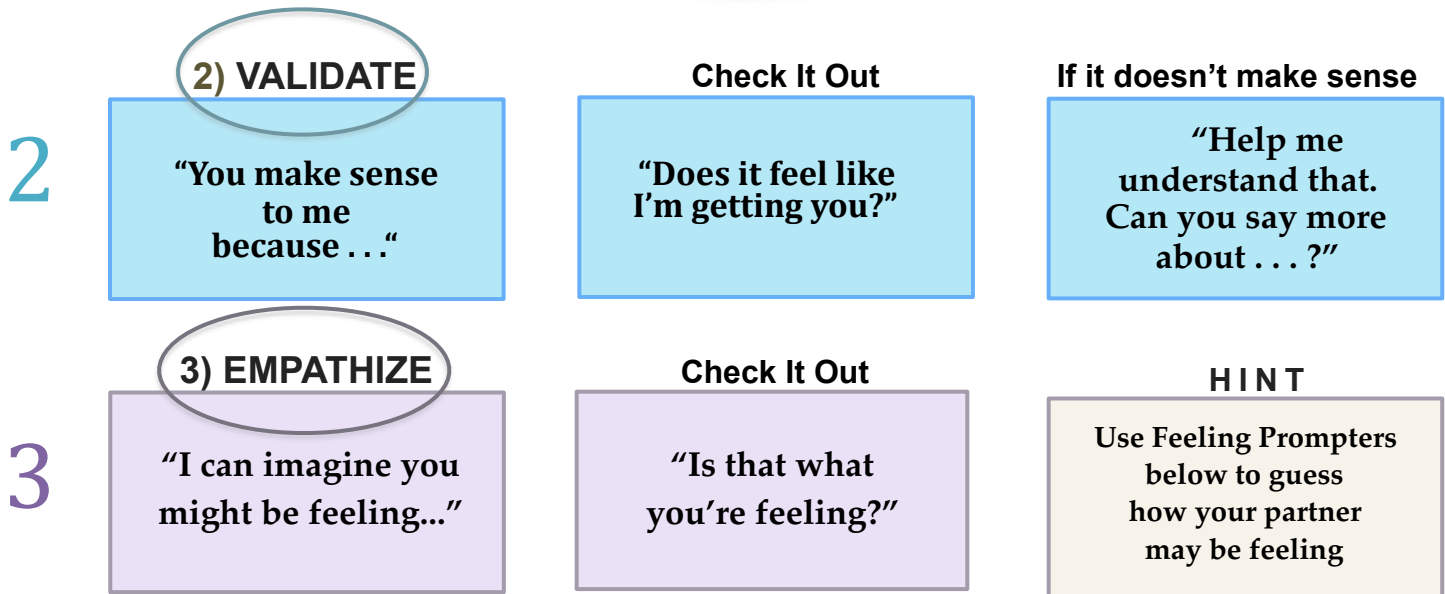
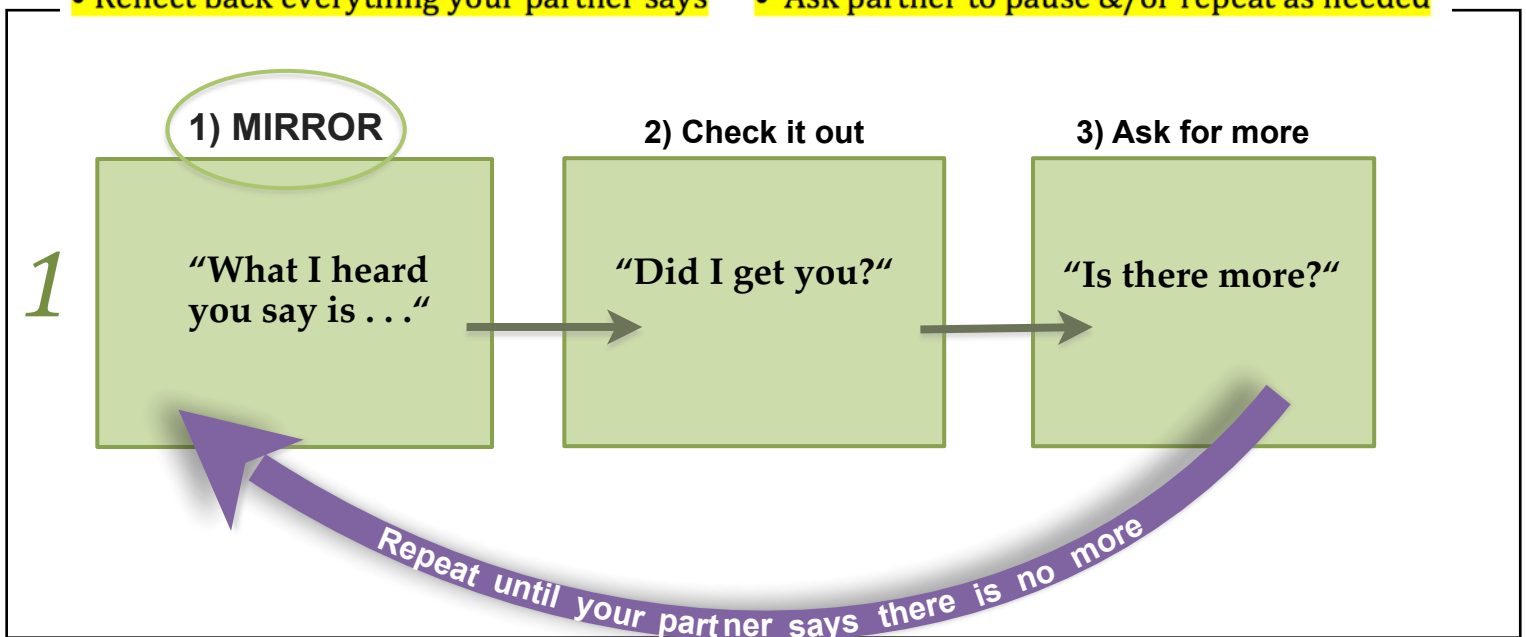
frustrated	sad	rejected	overwhelmed	betrayed
irritated	anxious	abandoned	unheard	cheated
angry	helpless	lonely	discounted	guilty
hurt	hopeless	alone	invisible	embarrassed
criticized	insecure	controlled	unloved	humiliated
attacked	scared	pressured	confused	ashamed
depressed	neglected	trapped	manipulated	enraged

The Couples Dialogue

The Receiver Flowchart



- Reflect back everything your partner says
- Ask partner to pause &/or repeat as needed



NEGATIVE FEELING PROMPTERS

frustrated	sad	rejected	overwhelmed	betrayed
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The Appreciation Dialogue



Steps for the Sender

(Send with soft voice & good eye contact. Pause often so partner can mirror)

1 "Something I love / appreciate / admire about you is . . ."

Elaborate a little - maybe give a few examples
Keep it positive!

2 "When you are this way', or "when I think about you in this way", I feel . . ."

(Suggestions)

Cared for	Connected	Relieved	Heard
Loved	Accepted	Lucky	Seen
Cherished	Secure	Grateful	Valued
Wanted	Safe	Blessed	Trusted
Chosen	Supported	Proud	Special
Special	Relaxed	Confident	Respected

3 "And, you're doing this", (or "being this way"), meets my need for . . ."

(Suggestions)

Care	Respect	Unity	Competence
Support	Acceptance	Connection	Growth
Nurturance	Love	Trust	Aliveness
Value/Worth	Empathy	Reliability	Fun & Play
Recognition	Affection	Stability	Challenge

4 "Something this reminds me of from my childhood is . . ."

This could be something you experienced growing up and were grateful for
OR . . .
something you didn't receive but wished you had.

5 "Thank you for listening"

Now switch roles

The Appreciation Dialogue

Steps for the Receiver



Reflect back *everything* your partner says. Ask the sender to pause &/or repeat

