

Acknowledge, Validate, Reassure (AVR) Exercise

Building love and trust involves really listening to your partner, which is not as easy as it sounds. Below are three to help you listen to your partner and gain understanding of your partner's experience. Remember: do not argue for your point of view, postpone your own agenda, hear your partners pain even if you don't agree. Your task is to listen and ask questions, to attune to your partner, to allow them to feel known/seen/heard.

A: Acknowledge what has been said

Hear the Speaker's feelings and be present with your partner. Your goal is just to understand.

DO:

- Summarize and reflect back what you think your partner has said, it doesn't matter if you miss something, what matters to your partner is that you tried to attune to them, to witness them. This approach opens the heart. *See Page 2 for example phrases.*

DO NOT:

- Be critical, judgmental, or defensive.
- Minimize your partner's feelings.
- Take responsibility for your partner's feelings, try to make your partner feel better, or cheer your partner up.
- Engage in put downs or approach the discussion from a place of superiority.

V: Validation of feelings

For example: "It makes sense to me that you feel _____", "I can see how _____ would make you feel _____". If the partner is describing your actions as having impacted them a certain way "I can understand how when I _____ it caused you to feel _____" (you are taking responsibility for the *impact*, not your *intent* – Just because I didn't meant to step on your toe, doesn't mean that it didn't hurt when I did it).

R: Offer reassurance

If it is a behavior your intend to change in yourself that your partner describes "I am going to work on _____ by _____" (express your commitment to change and follow through). If it is something that you haven't played a role in "I am right here with you in this", "I hear what you are saying and you're not alone", "I am not going anywhere", "I am going to sit in this with you for as long as you need me to".

Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues that identify whether you have correctly acknowledged the issue, identified the feeling, and communicated reassurance. If you perceive having lost your partner in this process, be curious – ask "where did I lose you just now?", "What did I miss in what you shared? Please help me understand more".

Open Ended Questions for the listener to demonstrate curiosity

- Please say more about that
- Please share more with me about your thoughts/feelings
- Please share some more examples of this with me
- Tell me more about your beliefs on this issue
- Tell me more about why this issue is important to you
- What am I missing in terms of understanding this issue
- What is the story behind this issue
- How does this issue relate to your past experiences / background
- What do you wish for in this issue
- Tell me the feelings that arise for you on this issue
- What happened to make you feel this way
- If you were me, what would you have done
- What is your ideal dream when it comes to this issue
- What do you need from me
- How can I support you
- Please share how you would like me to do that more often
- What do you think is the best way forward on this issue
- Is there is deeper meaning in this issue for you
- How does this issue relate to underlying beliefs or values that you hold

Expressing appreciation for the speaker's disclosures

- Thanks for bringing this to my attention...
- I am glad that we are talking about this...
- It's helpful for me to hear your viewpoint, so thanks for being willing to have this discussion
- I know this is important to both of us...

Summarizing/restating the other person's comments to illustrate understanding

- Repeat what the speaker said, or what you think they said.
- Check for accuracy:
 - I think I heard you say _____. Do I have that right or do you remember it differently?
 - It sounds like you want/need/feel _____. Do I have that right, or would you describe it differently?
 - My takeaways from your sharing just now are _____. Is there anything you think I have missed in my summary?