Initiator-Inquirer Exercise

We won't be solving any problems today, so take that pressure off yourselves.

We are going to instead focus on talking about this problem differently than you have been in the past.

We may not have time to do both perspectives in one session and that's ok.

One person will pick the role of initiator and the other will take the role of inquirer.

If you are the Initiator you will bring up one issue and only one issue with your partner, then describe your experience of it – what you think and feel – and the goal for you is to do it without blaming, without criticizing. If you are the Inquirer, you will be asked to listen to your partner without interrupting, shutting down, or defending yourself. Your aim is to try to be curious about your partner's perspective, and to ask questions to get to know your partner better and his or her perspective more deeply.

This is a no-change discussion for now. We are creating a new process for how you talk about things, that is the goal.

Initiator Role:

Think of a topic in which you would like to be better understood by your partner. Stay away from problem solving, you don't have to offer any solutions or even ideas on what to do about it, all you have to do is talk about your perspective. Talk about yourself: what you think, what you feel and what you desire here. Can you also try to identify what the vulnerable feelings underneath might be besides frustration or anger. The goal is to know more about yourself when you're done than when you started.

It's not about getting what you want or changing your partner, it's just about explaining how you feel, what you think about this topic; sharing your perspective.

The tone and words that you choose are important. If you'd like to be understood, then think about how you might say it in order to be understood. Try not to blame your partner for your feelings about this topic, see if you can find ways to describe your perspective without blaming language, use I statements. How do you want to be during this exercise? Do you want to be calm, open, self-focused, fair, clear? Write down your ideas on how you want to be as you approach this topic and keep them somewhere you can see them as you do this exercise.

Inquirer Role:

Recap and reflect on what you are hearing, check to make sure you have it right. Your role is to listen to your partner without interrupting except to reflect and inquire with the intention of learning more. Ask questions to better understand your partner's perspective. It will feel very tempting to talk about yourself, your feelings, thoughts and perspective. Try not to. Think of yourself as a journalist, can you be curious, without having to change or challenge anything?

This exercise is about getting to know your partner better. You don't have to agree with your partner to be willing to listen. You listening also does not mean that you are accepting any blame either. You are not condoning what they are saying by listening. Listening here is purely for the purpose of understanding. That is all you are required to do. Given all of that, how do you want to be? Do you want to be curious, open, present, non-defensive? Think about how you would like to show up for this exercise, what are the values you are attempting to honor, write them down and keep them somewhere you can see them.

For both of you

If your partner deviates from their guidelines don't use that as justification for you deviating from your own guidelines and your intentions for this exercise. Keep referring to your values of how you want to show up for this exercise, try to stay anchored and focused. Each partner is taking a risk and trying something new, can you offer support and patience to one another with that in mind?