

Aftermath of a Fight

These sheets are a guide for “processing” past fights, regrettable incidents, or past emotional injuries.

“Processing” means that you can talk about the incident without getting back into it again. It needs to be a conversation – as if you were both sitting in the balcony of a theatre looking down on the stage where the action had occurred. This requires **calm** and some emotional distance from the incident or Regrettable Incident.

Before You Begin

Keep in mind the GOAL is greater understanding – addressing the process and *how* the issue was talking about, without getting back into the fight. So, wait until you’re both calm.

We assume that *each* of your realities has validity. Perception is everything. Don’t focus on “the facts.”

Pay attention to the common barriers to communication and their antidotes as you move through the process. Remember to make eye contact with your partner when working through the steps.

Work through the following five steps together.

The Five Steps

1. Feelings: Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner’s feelings.
2. Realities: Describe your “reality.” Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner’s reality.
3. Triggers: Share what experiences or memories you’ve had that might have escalated the inter-action, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.
4. Responsibility: Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.
5. Constructive Plans: Plan together one way that each of you can make it better next time.

Step One

Feelings

Share how you felt, but not why yet.

(Read **aloud** the items that were true for you during the fight. Make eye contact with your partner when sharing. Do not comment on your partner's feelings.)

I felt:

1. Defensive
2. Not listened to
3. Feelings got hurt
4. Totally flooded
5. Angry
6. Sad
7. Unloved
8. Misunderstood
9. Criticized
10. Took a complaint personally
11. Like you didn't even like me
12. Not cared about
13. Worries
14. Afraid
15. Unsafe
16. Tense
17. I was right and you were wrong
18. Both of us were partly right
19. Out of control
20. Frustrated
21. Righteously indignant
22. Morally justified
23. Unfairly picked on
24. Unappreciated
25. Disliked
26. Unattractive
27. Stupid
28. Morally outraged
29. Taken for granted
30. Like leaving
31. Like staying and talking this through
32. I was overwhelmed with emotion
33. Not calm
34. Stubborn
35. Powerless
36. I had no influence
37. I wanted to win this one
38. My opinions didn't even matter
39. There was not a lot of give and take
40. I had no feelings at all
41. I had no idea what I was feeling
42. Lonely
43. Alienated
44. Ashamed
45. Guilty
46. Culpable
47. Abandoned
48. Disloyal
49. Exhausted
50. Foolish
51. Overwhelmed
52. Remorseful
53. Shocked
54. Tired

Step Two

Realities

Subjective reality and Validation

- a) Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don't describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame. Talk about what you might have needed from your partner. Describe your *perceptions* like a reporter, giving an objective blow-by-blow description. Say "I heard you saying" rather than "You said".
- b) Summarize and then validate your partner's reality by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it." Use empathy by saying something like, "I can see why this upset you." Validation doesn't mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience of the incident.
- c) Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, "What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?" After summarizing and validating, ask your partner, "Did I get it?" and "Is there anything else?"



Don't forget to look at your partner when you are talking and when you are listening!

Step Three

Triggers

Share what escalated the interaction for you.

What events in the interaction triggered a big reaction in you?

As you rewind the video tape of your memory, stop at a point where you had a similar set of feelings triggered in the past. Now tell the story of that past moment to your partner, so your partner can understand why that is a trigger for you.

Share your stories – it will help your partner to understand you. As you think about your early history or childhood, is there a story you remember that related to what got triggered in you, your “enduring vulnerabilities”? Your partner needs to know you, so that your partner can be more sensitive to you. Make sure you use eye contact when sharing.

Examples of Triggers:

- 1) I felt judged. I'm very sensitive to that.
- 2) I felt excluded. I'm very sensitive to that.
- 3) I felt criticized. I'm very sensitive to that.
- 4) I felt flooded
- 5) I felt ashamed
- 6) I felt lonely
- 7) I felt belittled
- 8) I felt disrespected
- 9) I felt powerless
- 10) I felt out of control
- 11) Other

Validation

Does any part of your partner's triggers and story make sense to you?

Step Four

Take Responsibility

Under ideal conditions, you might have done better at talking about this issue. When you are communicating with your partner, make eye contact. It shows interest and attentiveness.

1) What set me up for the miscommunication

Share how you set yourself up to get into this conflict.

Read aloud the items that were true for you on this list:

What set me up:

1. I've been very stressed and irritable lately.
2. I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately.
3. I've taken you for granted.
4. I've been overly sensitive lately.
5. I've been overly critical lately.
6. I've not share very much of my inner world.
7. I've not been emotionally available.
8. I've been turning away more.
9. I've been getting easily upset.
10. I've been depressed lately.
11. I've had a chip on my shoulder lately.
12. I've not been very affectionate.
13. I've not made time for good things between us.
14. I've not been a very good listener lately.
15. I've not asked for what I needed.
16. I've been feeling a bit like a martyr.
17. I've needed to be alone.
18. I've not wanted to take care of anybody.
19. I have been very preoccupied.
20. I haven't felt very much confidence in myself.
21. I've been running on empty.

2) Specifically what do you regret, and specifically, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?

3) What do you wish to apologize for?

(read aloud)

I'm sorry that:

1. I overreacted
2. I was really grumpy
3. I was defensive
4. I was so negative
5. I attacked you
6. I didn't listen to you
7. I wasn't respectful
8. I was unreasonable
9. Other:

4) If you accept your partner's apology, say "I accept your apology". If not, say what you still need. When your partner understands your issues and apologizes, tell them "I accept your apology".

Step Five

Constructive Plans

Share one thing your partner can do to make a discussion of this issue better next time.

(It's important to remain calm and to look at your partner as you do this.)

Then, while it's still your turn, share one **you** can do to make it better next time.

What do you need to be able to put this behind you and move on? Be as agreeable as possible to that plans suggested by your partner.