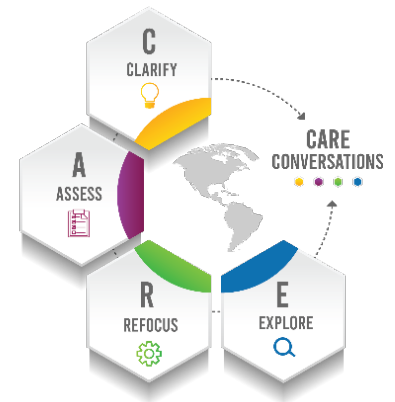


Exercise 3:

Managing Conflict, Conversation Killers



The Magic Ratio

Aim: To help couples effectively resolve any conflict that may arise.

A study of 11,196 romantic relationships looking for commonalities amongst long, happy unions, showed that the ability to resolve conflict well is one of the five secrets to a successful relationship.

According to John Gottman, the relationship therapist, you need five positive interactions to neutralize one negative encounter. This is popularly known as The Magic Ratio 5:1. You can find more about this on his blog at www.gottman.com and the exact link can be found in the *Resources* section.

Conflict is inevitable. We experience criticism as a threat. The brain's natural response to a threat of any kind, whether it is physical, like an approaching grizzly bear or psychological, like in an argument – is fight or flight. When we feel threatened our cognitive capacity is affected and we can no longer be trusted to interpret what is going on with total accuracy. By the same token our reactions can be misguided and impulsive. So what can we do when we need to deliver negative comments and know we are being lucid but need our partner to take the news calmly? How can we productively express our criticisms? The answer is to 'complain positively.' This is done by rephrasing your criticism using 'I' messages, by being specific and focused in your complaint and by telling him or her how you 'feel.'

Gottman cautions against delivering direct criticism because of its eroding power in our relationships. On the other hand, burying or avoiding criticism because you are conflict averse is not good either, because it just leads to resentment in the long run. It is always best to bring criticism out into the open. But this needs to be done in a productive way so that you feel you are being heard.

The example below shows some examples of critical comments on the left and then a positive version on the right.

Criticism	Positive Complaint
"You are so selfish; you only care about your career."	"I feel hurt as it seems so unfair when I am not consulted when you make career decisions."
"You just don't care about my career aspirations; I just have to follow you."	"I feel angry and frustrated when you are not concerned about my career aspirations."

Now go ahead and list any career related criticisms you have about your partner in the remaining boxes and rephrase them using 'I' messages, being specific and using 'I feel' as in the example above. Remember to do this when you are discussing things with him/ her.