

Workshop Notes for Love Work: Skills for Staying in Love

Love Work offers a practical application of Daniel Siegel's statement.

..."secure attachments in both childhood and adulthood are established by two individuals sharing a nonverbal focus on the energy flow (emotional states) and a verbal focus on the information processing aspects (representational process of memory and narrative) of mental life. The matter of the mind matters for secure relationships." Dan Siegel: The Developing Mind- How Relationships and The Brain interact To Shape Who We Are p.86

Presenting Love Work:

Love Work is a user-friendly model for brief, effective relationship repair. Brain functions which protect partners personally often interfere with their ability to connect emotionally. You will learn skills to calm distressed partner's self-protection impulses and instead find deeper security in mutually nurturing relationships.

Love Work's Purpose: Summary

Love Work is a tool that can stand on its own or be used with a wide variety of other therapeutic orientations. This workshop has focused on using the **Search Path** to calm upset partners and make their relationship more secure. In addition, Love Work shows individual partners how use their **Share Path** to get their partner's emotional support. Love Work then shows couples how to use their **Action Path** to adapt their behavior to meet challenges that may confront them. Finally Love Work shows couples how to **Integrate** these three sets of tools and use them together to maintain their connection and meet life's challenges over the long term.

Love Work helps couples struggling with three basic issues:

1) "I'm fine; he's got a problem!" (Your partner carries too much load.):

Solution: **Search Path**

2) "I've got a problem; he's doesn't get it!" (You carry too much load.):

Solution: **Share Path**

3): "I'd be fine, if only my partner would do what I want." (The relationship feels out of control.)

Solution: **Action Path**- 6 Ways to Get Your Partner's Cooperation.

These three are interrelated, in that problems in one area often cause problems in the other two. This workshop will focus on the **Search Path** as the most effective way to begin to change relationship dynamics.

The Love Work Model:

1) Understand how early life experiences affect Brain Function, Feelings, and Attachment.

2) Understand why Communication, Connection and Cooperation often break down in relationships:

(The “Emotional Balloon” Metaphor).

A) **High pressure** triggers Amydala (Lizard Brain) Functioning: fight/flight, lonely, distrustful, win/lose oriented.

B) **Low Pressure** increases emotional closeness, increases Neocortex functioning. The couple feels secure, and cooperative. Complex win/win solutions occur.

Love Work offers skills Counselors can use to:

1) form a positive relationship with both clients, even though they are in conflict.

2) calm volatile emotions in the couple.

3) slow couple interaction down.

4) move couple to thoughtful rather than reactive communication strategies.

5) allows the counselor to decentralize from the couple's efforts to triangulate the counselor.

6) leaves the counselor free to move in and out of the couple's interaction at will.

Love Work helps the couple develop skills to

1) protect self from partner's anger.

2) calm partner's emotional turmoil.

3) move partner to thoughtful rather than reactive communication.

4) develop respect for and understanding of each partner's emotional landscape.

5) build calm secure connection with each other.

LoveWork Basics: the Search Path

Table 1: Why Brain Function Affects Human Relationships

When Protect Mode gets triggered, Connect Mode doesn't function very well.

	<u>Protect Mode</u>	<u>Connect Mode</u>
Brain Function	Brain Stem, Amygdala	Limbic System, Neocortex
Emotional Pressure:	High	Low
Response:	Fight/ Flight/ Freeze	Cooperative/ Connected
Feeling:	scared, angry, alone, defensive	secure, happy, capable
Attachment:	lost/ abandoned	found/ loved, cared for
Perception:	distorted: projection	calm, objective
Identity:	"Me" focus	"We" focus
Communication:	push own agenda; distrust other's input; questions seen as attacks; other points of view discounted	work with partner's point of view; respond openly to questions; seek mutual understanding
Problem solving:	simple solutions: I have to win; "you lose" is acceptable.	complex solutions: Win/ Win; all participants' needs considered.
Relationship:	power oriented	connection oriented
Personality:	differences are irritating	differences broaden response range
Behavior:	oppositional, punishment oriented "Wicked Stepmother's Rule"	cooperative, reward oriented "Grandma's Rule"
Focus:	rigid	flexible
Biochemical:	Cortisol, Adrenalin, Noradrenalin	Oxytosin, Serotonin, Dopamine
Physiological:	Tense, Stressed	Relaxed, Comfortable
Reaction:	Impulsive, reactive	Thoughtful, Deliberate
Energy:	Deficit	Surplus

The Connect Mode Relationship Deal

The Connect Mode Relationship Deal: "I'll take care of you; you take care of me; we'll take care of each other!")

The Problem: When Protect Mode get triggered, the deal goes out the window: "You're not taking care of me!" Fear and anger prevail.

The Solution: Don't try to solve all the problems separating you. Instead focus on a process to **lower the emotional pressure** holding you apart. **Shared problems only become solvable when couple members are feeling close and connected.**

Dealing with Feeling: Search Path Intro

How Can You Break Out of Protect Mode Reaction Patterns? Hint: How did your mother calm you when you were an infant? Those same early response patterns still exist within each of us.

- 1) She recognized **How You Were Feeling**: frightened, helpless, alone.
- 2) Then she guessed **Why You Were Feeling That Way**.
- 3) Finally, she **Responded** to meet those needs.

When you do those same things for your partner, as your partner begins to feel heard and understood, the same response occurs. They calm; the emotional pressure between you lowers; your partner moves towards Connect mode; and you become able to reconnect. Your partner can then return the favor and use the same skills to calm you.

The Problem with Feelings

- 1) They are invisible.
- 2) They are changeable.
- 3) They often fool us.

It is easier to ignore them and hope they all go away. (Only problem: when they remain unaddressed, emotional tension continues to grow.)

The Goal

When members of a couple feel heard and understood, they move out of Protect Mode and toward Connect Mode in their relationship with each other. This causes:

- 1) reduced emotional tension,
- 2) increased understanding of each other,
- 3) stronger emotional connection,
- 4) possibility of increased intimacy,
- 5) complex, win/win solutions become possible.

How to Do the LoveWork “Search Path”

The Search Path consists of a simple pattern of conversation that you use over and over to calm your partner and discover your partner's emotional landscape. Here are the steps:

- 1 The calmest partner takes a deep breath and self-calms further so they can think clearly. (This might be either partner, depending on the topic. This person takes the “Searcher” role)
- 2 The Searcher imagine **how their partner might be feeling and why their partner might be feeling that way**, based on their observations of their partner. (Guess)
- 3 The Searcher tells their partner their tentative guess is about their partner's emotional state and reasons that their partner might be feeling that way using this format: "**I think you might be feeling _____ because _____**.(Search) (Notice that the Searcher is not asking his partner questions. They are making a guess about their partner's emotional world and leaving room for their partner to correct the guess.)
- 4 The Searcher waits patiently for his partner to respond.
- 5 If their partner says little, the Searcher invites more information by saying simply, "**Tell me more.**" If their partner starts talking nonstop, the Searcher breaks in with, "**Let me see if I understand you so far.**" (Getting Feedback) (The Searcher still does not use questions)
- 6 The Searcher listens for agreement or disagreement, correcting their next guess about their partner's feelings and reasons for them, based on the new information that the Searcher has just received. (Adjusted Guess)
- 7 The Searcher then goes back to step 1) and **repeats** the process. The Searcher continues this process over and over until their partner feels calm, heard, and understood.
- 8 The Searcher then invites their partner to switch roles.
- 9 They continue this process until both feel fully heard and understood. (Notice that this does not mean that they necessarily agree. There is room here for different perspectives.)

In Summary:

You can use two dimensions to explore feelings using the Search Path: 1) state a **Name** for your partner's Feelings, and 2) state a thoughtful **Reason** your partner might feel that way. Then **Listen** to feedback and **Repeat** the process. Once your partner feels calm and understood, your partner can return the favor.

Benefits:

- 1) You gain a better understanding of your partner's emotional landscape.
- 2) Your partner can see you investing time and attention seeking to understand him/her- evidence that you care.

- 3) As your partner feels heard and understood, he/she begins to calm down and move away from Protect Mode and into Connect Mode,
- 4) Thus becoming more receptive to your point of view as well.
- 5) You learn to put your own reactions on hold while you attend and seek to understand your partner. Thus you become less reactive and better able to manage your own Protect Mode reactions.

This Is Harder Than It Sounds

This process is harder than it sounds because, as Listening Partners, we have to deal with our own Protect Mode reactions, and those get in the way of our ability to pay attention to our partner's feelings.

It's hard to make a guess and allow for the possibility that we may be wrong. We like to be right.

We get anxious when we step into unknown territory. We don't know how our partner will react.

As we listen and our partner relaxes and tells us how they really feel, we are likely to hear something we disagree with. Then we don't want to listen further, and want to counter with our own point of view.

When we move the focus to our own point of view, instead of calming our partner, emotional pressure blows right back up again in our partner and we have defeated our purpose.

Suffering: Self Control of Your Protect Mode

Instead, we do better when we calm ourselves and hear out our partner's point of view. **Listening doesn't mean we have to agree.** Putting off our own point of view until our partner feels heard and understood is hard work-suffering for our partner- but it allows both partners to move back into Connect Mode, where we can accomplish things together and relax with each other. Our personal reactions will have their time to be heard once our partner has calmed enough to listen.

It works best when you **don't try to escape or change painful feelings.** Doing either will re-inflate the Emotional Balloon between you and keep your partner in Protect Mode. Your job, as Searcher, is to **stand calmly with your partner in the presence of their feelings, good or bad**, and seek to identify and understand them. Just being there, calmly present to your partner, will demonstrate your caring and allow your partner's difficult feelings to calm, too.

Examples of Protect Mode Strategies *That Don't Work*

Argue or Persuade: (It discounts your partner's feelings.)

Apologize: OK, Sorry! (You won't be believed.)

Question: Why would you think that? (When in Protect mode, your partner will see them as attacks.)

Minimize the feelings: "I guess you are a "little" irritated...etc." When in doubt it's better to exaggerate: "You are furious!" Let your partner be the one to say it's not that bad.

Use the passive tense: "You think mistakes were made." (This looks like you are avoiding responsibility, Use the "I" word instead: " You think I made mistakes.")

Evaluate partner "I think you are right about that!" (Neither praise nor criticize. It diverts the focus to you and away from your partner.)

Repeat yourself: "You are mad because I was a jerk" over and over. (Use a response only once. If your partner continues to tell you new details, you need to respond with those details. Otherwise, your partner won't believe you are really attending her.)

Reassure: (You won't be believed.)

Solve the problem: (Your solution will be discounted.)

You will need to practice the Search Path in order to use it effectively in real life. In situations you care deeply about, it is easy to get upset and move into Protect Mode where it is hard to focus on your partner rather than on your own needs. If you have practiced enough to be comfortable with your Search Path tools, simply being aware that you know what to do will help you calm yourself enough to move into Connect Mode and use your new skills effectively.

You can find practice exercises and more information on the Love Work approach in the book [Love Work: Skills for Staying in Love](#) by Walter Mehring. It is available on Amazon.