



DIALOGUE GUIDE


How Past Challenges Impact Current Relationships

Purpose of This Dialogue



Relationship challenges in our past inevitably show up in our relationships in the present. We may experience patterns that increase in intensity over time. Or past challenges can create persistent frustrations that inhibit our ability to connect with others in every part of our life.

Sharing about Past Relational Challenges and Current Relational Needs in a safe, structured dialogue is the pathway to becoming more empathic and less judgmental and it deepens connection and mutual respect for one another – our intimate partners, our family, peers and colleagues.



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Relational Challenge in the Past



Past Relational Challenges influence how you interact with others in the present, and how they interact with you. Describing these challenges guides us to identify the need we bring to the present.

Study the list below and **select and circle one (only one)** that best describes your biggest relational challenge with significant others in the past. If none of them describe your Past Relational Challenge, write it in your own words in the Notes on the next page.

My biggest Relational Challenge in the Past was:

- Experiencing being controlled by others.
- Being told what to think and how to express my thoughts.
- Being told what and how to feel.
- Experiencing my thoughts and feelings as not important to others.
- Being told what to do and how to do it.
- Feeling invisible, unseen and unvalued.
- Feeling abandoned and alone.
- Experiencing myself as insignificant.
- Receiving no support for what I thought and felt.
- Feeling that what I wanted and liked was uninteresting to others.

Notes:



Relational Need in the Present



The Relational Challenge you experienced in the past creates a Relational Need you bring into the present - which impacts how you relate to others and how they relate to you. Identifying that need will help you understand all your relationships, and sharing this need with others will help them understand your behavior in the present.

Study the list below and **select and circle one (only one)** that best describes your biggest Relational Need with significant others in the present. If none of them describe your Relational Need, write it in your own words in the Notes on the next page.

My biggest Relational Need in the Present is:

- To be free to do what I want to do with my time.
- To be trusted by others for my thinking and my decisions.
- To have my emotional and physical boundaries honored when I set them.
- To experience recognition and appreciation for my perspective.
- To experience what I do being valued by others.
- To experience interest in what I am talking about.
- To be asked for my opinion on subjects being discussed.
- To be included when plans are being made.
- To experience others being curious about my experiences in life.
- To be valued for who I am as well as what I do.

Notes:



Minimizer vs. Maximizer



Relational challenges in our past triggered anxiety about our survival, to which we responded by MAXIMIZING or MINIMIZING our energy to protect ourselves. Whenever our Relational Need in the present is not met, we re-experience that anxiety and automatically defend ourselves by Maximizing or Minimizing our energy.

In Safe Conversations, we call these adaptations Turtles (Minimizers) and Hailstorms (Maximizers) for graphic impact, and since they are automatic, to remove judgment. Because they affect how we relate to others, and in response, how they relate to us, it is important to identify the defensive strategy you typically use when you feel threatened.

Study the descriptions below and circle the one you think best describes you.

MINIMIZER (“Turtle”)

WHEN I GET UPSET I TEND TO:

- Feel tight inside and do not verbalize my emotions.
- Adopt an “I’ll take care of myself/I don’t need anyone” attitude.
- Express very few, if any, needs and exclude others from my personal space.
- Listen poorly and attempt to figure things out by myself.
- Remove myself from my relationships without explanation.

MAXIMIZER (“Hail Storm”)

WHEN I GET UPSET I TEND TO:

- Express myself with passion and energy, using many words.
- Repeat myself and interrupt others.
- Feel an intense need for a response.
- Express many needs and listen poorly.
- Adopt a victim stance.

Notes:



Sharing My Early Challenge & Need

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT



I would like to share my Past Relational Challenge and a Present Relational Need that impacts how I relate to others in my current relationships (at home, at work or in my community). Are you available now?

Yes, I'm available now.



Connect Non-Verbally: Make eye contact and take three deep breaths in sync.

SHARING A PAST CHALLENGE AND RELATIONAL NEED



Before I start, I would like to share something I appreciate about you: _____.

i Mirrors

Let me see if I got it. You want to express an appreciation of me which is _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it?



i Verifies Accuracy



Yes, you got it.

SHARING A PAST RELATIONAL CHALLENGE



My Past Relational Challenge was _____
(the Challenge circled on page 3).

i Mirrors the Challenge

Let me see if I've got it. You said that your
Past Relational Challenge was _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it?



i Sender Verifies Accuracy



Yes, you got it. - or -
Yes, and I also said _____.

i Shows Curiosity

Is there more you'd like to say about
your Past Relational Challenge?



**Receiver continues mirroring, checking for accuracy and asking
"Is there more?" until the Sender says: "There is no more."**

When I remember _____ (Past Relational Challenge),
I feel _____ (sensations, feelings, emotions),
and I respond as a Maximizer – or – Minimizer
(as circled on page 7) by doing _____.



i Mirrors

Let me see if I've got that. When you remember your Past
Relational Challenge, you feel _____, and you respond
as a Maximizer – or – Minimizer by doing _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it?



i Sender Verifies Accuracy

Yes, you got it. - or -
Yes, and I also said _____.



i Shows Curiosity

Is there more about that?



**Receiver continues mirroring, checking for accuracy and asking
“Is there more?” until the Sender says: “There is no more.”**

SHARING THE RELATIONAL NEED

Now I'd like to share a Relational Need that is connected to this Past Challenge. The Need I bring into my present relationships (at home, at work or in my community) is _____ (the Need circled on page 5).



i Mirrors

Let me see if I've got it. The Relational Need you bring to your present relationships (at home, at work or in your community) is _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it?



i Sender Verifies Accuracy

Yes, you got it. - or -
Yes, and I also said _____.



i Shows Curiosity

Is there more about that?



Receiver continues mirroring, checking for accuracy and asking "Is there more?" until the Sender says: "There is no more."

If my Relational Need, which is _____ was met in my current relationships (at home, at work, in my community) by _____ (new actions or behaviors that would meet the Relational Need), I would think/do _____.



i Mirrors

Let me see if I got that. If _____ (your Relational Need) was met in your current relationships by _____ (new actions or behaviors that would meet the Relational Need), then you would think/do _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it?



i Sender Verifies Accuracy

Yes, you got it. - or -
Yes, and I also said _____.



i Shows Curiosity

Is there more about that?



Receiver continues mirroring, checking for accuracy and asking "Is there more?" until the Sender says: "There is no more."

SUMMARIZING

Let me see if I got all of that. When you remember your Past Relational Challenge, which was _____, you feel _____, and you react by Maximizing – or – Minimizing (circle one).



Connected to that Challenge, you have a Relational Need, which is _____, and if this need were met in your current relationships (at home, at work, in your community) by _____ (new actions or behaviors that would meet the Relational Need), then you would think/do _____.



i Checks for Accuracy

Did I get it all?



i Sender Verifies Accuracy

Yes, you got it. - or -
Yes, and I also said _____.



You make sense! What makes sense is that the Relational Challenge you experienced in the past made you feel _____ and caused you to react by Maximizing - or - Minimizing. And it makes sense that your Past Challenge produced a Relational Need, which is _____, and that you would like that need to be met in your current relationship by _____ (new actions or behaviors).



VALIDATE

 Checks for Accuracy

Is that a good validation?



Sender: Confirms the validation. If anything was not validated, asks to send that part again.

EMPATHIZING

 Expressing Empathy & Checking for Accuracy

I can imagine that if your Relational Need, which is _____ was met in your current relationship by _____ (new actions or behaviors), you would feel _____ (glad, happy, fulfilled joyful, etc).



 Checks for Accuracy

Is that your feeling? Are there other feelings?



 Verify Accuracy

Yes. - *or* - Yes, I would also feel _____.



CLOSURE

Thank you for sharing all that with me.



Thank you for listening.



Give each other a handshake or high five, or with an intimate partner give each other a one minute hug.

 **SWITCH ROLES**