



## THE WORKSHOP GUIDE

Core Theory

Mirroring an Appreciation

Version Q1-2021

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Safe Conversations® is a cutting-edge relational methodology that transforms polarization into connecting and full aliveness.

A new way of talking without criticism listening, without judgment, and connecting beyond differences.

**Conflict is Growth trying to happen**

# The “Con” in Conversation



Conversation is a shared exchange. The “con” in conversation means “with.” Most of us, however, tend to talk “to” rather than “with.” Most conversations are parallel monologues: both people talking and no one listening.

In a monologue, competing, controlling, dominating and winning are the goals and conflict and polarization are the inevitable outcomes. In such interactions, the conversation itself becomes the problem and the issues are obscured. This makes talking the most dangerous thing most people do and listening the most infrequent.

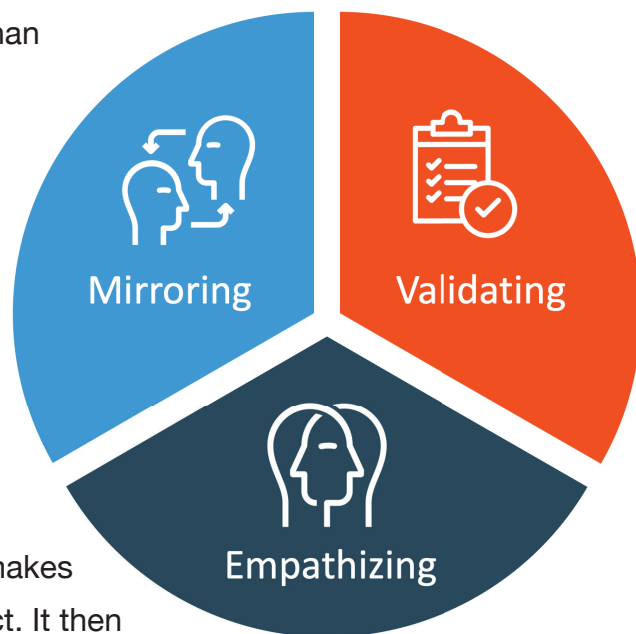
Learning how to talk without criticism and to listen with accuracy and without reacting negatively makes conversations safe and connection beyond difference possible. Talking may not solve all problems, but no problems can be solved without relational safety. Accurate listening with curiosity and empathy are essential to a thriving relationship.

# What is a Safe Conversation?

Safe Conversations® is a skill that transforms all relationships by creating a safe environment in which people can talk with anyone about anything and experience connecting rather than polarization. In a Safe Conversation, each person takes turns talking and listening with curiosity and acceptance and without judgment. But such conversations are rare.

Safe Conversations is a structured, three-step dialogue that invites two people to take turns talking and listening. Its magic and power lies in the fact that the structure makes it safe to talk and to listen with mutual respect. It then becomes an efficient communication tool for the exchange of energy and information. With structure, safety happens; and when safety happens, connecting happens.

When connecting occurs, a co-creative process is ignited that transforms the negative energy of conflict into the vibrant energy of full aliveness.



# Safe Conversation Concepts

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## MYTH

Everyone naturally knows how to be in a relationship.  
Relationships are easy if you are with the right person.



No one naturally knows how to be in a relationship. Our early life influences how we interact with others in the present.

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## MYTH

Conflict means you have the wrong people in your life.



Conflict is growth trying to happen. If you end your relationships, you miss the growth. Stay in the canoe and paddle!

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## MYTH

You have to love yourself before you can love others.



Self-love is the simultaneous outcome of our love for others. In the act of loving others, we experience the love we give.

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## MYTH

Thriving relationships and communities promote sameness and discourage diversity.



Thriving relationships and communities accept difference and celebrate diversity.

# Safe Conversation Concepts

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## MYTH

Competition, control, domination, winning and being the “best” is what life is all about and should be promoted as primary values.



Collaboration, cooperation and co-creation are what life is all about and are essential for thriving relationships, organizations and communities.

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## MYTH

Everyone knows how to talk and should be allowed to express whatever they think and feel without being concerned about its impact on others.



No one naturally knows how to talk. Learning how to talk without polarizing is an essential skill that increases safety, regulates anxiety, restores connecting, recovers full aliveness and creates thriving organizations and communities.

# The Human Problem

Ruptured Connecting

## The Disruptor

Negativity

## The Consequences

Anxiety

Symbiosis

Objectification

## The Solution

Restored Connecting

## The Skills

Safe Conversations

Zero Negativity

Affirmations

## The Result

Safety

Full Aliveness

Wonder



# The Space Between



The Space Between is where life is lived. Relationship is the exchange of energy and information between the poles. A relationship, therefore, is not two or more people interacting, but their interactions in the Space Between.

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1

## **Safe Conversations®**

A three-step structured dialogue process.

2

## **Zero Negativity**

The practice of Zero Negativity keeps the Space Between safe by eliminating all words, tone of voice, facial expressions and body language that communicate a “put-down” to another person.

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## **Practicing Zero Negativity**

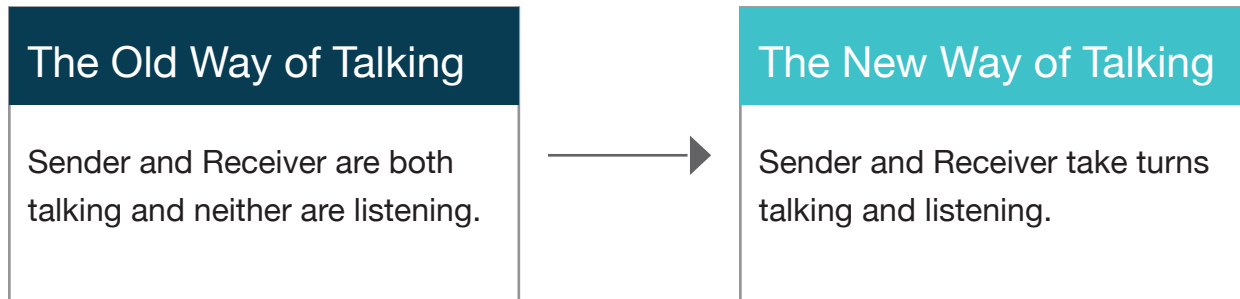
Removes anxiety and relaxes the defenses which allows the experience of connecting. This is the sensation of full aliveness, and relaxed joyfulness, and wonder.

4


## **Affirmations**


Practicing affirmations, appreciations, gratitude, curiosity, acceptance, showing excitement and having fun—deepens safety in the Space Between and sustains connecting, full aliveness and wonder.

# The Structure of Safe Conversations



In the Safe Conversations Process:

One is the Sender (talks). 

 One is the Receiver (listens).

The Sender and Receiver take turns talking and listening while using the three step dialogue process:

- 1 Mirroring
- 2 Validating
- 3 Empathizing

# The Safe Conversations Process

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The Sender follows these simple rules:

- 1 Asks for an Appointment.
  - 2 Makes eye contact without words.
  - 3 Sends message in short sentences.
  - 4 Uses I-language.
  - 5 Makes no criticisms of partner.
- 



The Receiver follows these simple rules:

- 1 **Mirroring**  
Let me see if I've got it.  
You said... Did I get it?  
Is there more about that?
- 2 **Validating**  
That makes sense, and what makes sense is...
- 3 **Empathizing**  
I imagine you might be feeling...  
Is that what you are feeling?  
Are there other feelings?

# Getting Ready



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING AN APPOINTMENT**

Honoring boundaries is essential in all relationships. When you want someone to be present and listen while you are talking, ask if this is a good time to talk.

The other person may respond with a “yes.” But if they are not available at the moment, it is ok to delay. Set a time, as soon as possible, when they are available, and then show up at precisely that time, without having to be asked again.

Ex. “Is now a good time to talk about ... (our schedule, an appreciation, a frustration, an experience, etc.)?”

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-VERBAL CONTACT**

Eye contact contributes to the quality of the exchange of words.

Although we cannot consciously see the pupils of another person, our brains can tell whether they are small or large. When the brain sees a large pupil, it interprets the other as “open” and safe and switches its defenses. If their pupils are small, the brain interprets them as “closed” and dangerous, which activates defenses. Open pupils facilitate sharing vulnerable feelings and thoughts; small pupils call for caution and monitored sharing.

When the appointment time is agreed upon, if both persons make eye contact and take at least three deep breaths in sync, their brains will be flooded with oxygen, which will enlarge their pupils and lower their blood pressure. Both people then begin to feel more safe and the words they exchange will be connecting rather than polarizing.



## MIRRORING

In a Safe Conversation, a Sender and a Receiver alternate speaking and listening. Mirroring, the first of the three steps of a Safe Conversation, is listening accurately, reflecting the content and tone of the Sender's message. The Sender may want to be mirrored "word-for-word" or may prefer a "paraphrase" that uses the Receiver's words, but accurately reflects the Sender's message. They should designate their preference before beginning the dialogue.

### SENDER RESPONSIBILITY & TIPS FOR MIRRORING

- Use I language: I feel, I need, I want. (Avoid using "You never... you always...!")
- Send all information respectfully and kindly.
- Be succinct. You will flood your partner using too many words.
- No shame, blame or criticism – NOT EVER!
- ASK for what you want. Don't tell your partner what NOT to do, or what they are doing wrong. Tell them what you want.

## THE PAUSE

If at any point the Receiver is feeling "overloaded," gently raise your hand to ask for a pause and mirror back what you heard thus far.

**"I'm on overload. Let me see if I got it so far. You said..."**

In response, the Receiver echoes the Sender's message word for word or by paraphrasing and uses a sentence stem as follows: **"Let me see if I've got it. You said..."**

Then the Receiver checks for accuracy by asking: **"Did I get it?"**

If the Sender did not feel accurately mirrored, the Receiver asks the Sender to repeat the part that was missed, and they send and receive until the Sender feels fully heard.

When the Sender confirms that the Receiver mirrored everything accurately, the Receiver then asks: **"Is there more about that?"**



## USING “IS THERE MORE?”

This question expresses curiosity, a vitally important expression of interest, respect and validation.

## THE SUMMARY

When there is “no more about that,” the Receiver offers a summary of all that they heard and check again for accuracy. You can respond with, “**So, in summary, I heard you say**” ... or “**Did I get it all?**”

## VALIDATION

When you validate, you cross the bridge into another person’s world, see their point of view and accept it as their “truth” without necessarily accepting it as your own. Validation is not agreement. You can respond with, “**That makes sense, and what makes sense is...**”

## EMPATHY

And finally, you empathize and imagine what the other person feels in that moment and state what those feelings might be. Empathy imagines or mirrors the feelings that attend the thoughts and experience that have been validated. You can respond with:

“**And I can imagine you might be feeling...**”

“**Is that the feeling?**”

“**Are there other feelings?**”

## CLOSURE

After all three steps are completed, the Sender and Receiver move into closure.



“**Thank you for listening.**” (Sender) “**Thank you for sharing.**” (Receiver)

Closure can be achieved with a hand shake or high five, or if comfortable, with a hug. Now switch roles and repeat the process.


# Mirroring an Appreciation Dialogue Process & Exercise




# Mirroring an Appreciation

- 1 Decide who will be the first Sender  and who will be the Receiver 
- 2 Follow the structure and use the sentence stems precisely as indicated.
- 3 When all the steps are completed, switch roles and repeat the process.

## MAKING AN APPOINTMENT

 I would like to express an appreciation.  
Is now a good time?

Yes, now is a good time. 

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

## SHARING THE APPRECIATION

 One thing I appreciate about you is \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to the Receiver:** If at any point in the dialogue you get overloaded, raise your hand and say: “I’m overloaded, let me try to mirror you back so far.”



## MIRRORING FOR ACCURACY

 Checks for Accuracy

Let me see if I've got it. You said \_\_\_\_\_. Did I get it?



Yes, you got it. - *or* - The part you got was \_\_\_\_\_  
and I also said \_\_\_\_\_



 Shows Curiosity

Is there more about that?



Yes. When you do that I feel \_\_\_\_\_  
- *or* - When I see that in you, I feel \_\_\_\_\_



 Continues Mirroring, Checks for Accuracy, Shows Curiosity

Let me see if I've got it. You said \_\_\_\_\_.  
Did I get it? Is there more about that?



Yes, you got it. - *or* - The part you didn't get was \_\_\_\_\_



When I feel \_\_\_\_\_ it reminds me of a time in  
the past when \_\_\_\_\_.



Let me see if I've got it. You said \_\_\_\_\_. Did I get it?



**Continue the process until the Sender agrees the Receiver "Got it".**

## SUMMARIZING

Let me see if I got all of that. In summary you are saying \_\_\_\_\_.



 Sender listens to the summary to Verify Accuracy

Yes. You got me. - *or* - The part you got was \_\_\_\_\_ and I also said \_\_\_\_\_.



## CLOSURE

Thank you for listening.



Thank you for sharing.



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

## SWITCHING ROLES

**When all the steps are completed, switch roles and repeat the process.**

# Zero Negativity



# Zero Negativity Process



“Negativity” is any transaction another person experiences as a “put down.” It can be words, a tone of voice, an eye roll that communicates criticism, shame, or blame. It may be intentional or accidental, but in all cases, a “put down” ruptures connection.

Whoever reports experiencing a “put down” is the judge of whether or not it is “negative.” If s/he says it was negative, it was negative! Negativity ruptures connecting. That triggers anxiety in which we anticipate potentially catastrophic outcomes from current and future negativity. Having entered the scene of universal human suffering, our defenses go on line and our interactions become strategic and tactical rather than relational and collaborative.

Immediate repair of the rupture replaces the activation of adrenalin and cortisol, the neurochemicals of fear, with endorphins and dopamine, the neurochemicals of safety and joy which prevents becoming habituated to chemicals of fear.

## **THE ZERO NEGATIVITY CHALLENGE**

We invite you to take the Zero Negativity Challenge and sign the Zero Negativity Pledge.

The Zero Negativity Pledge means you will refrain from giving a “put down.” You can still express painful feelings or deal with problems. In fact, when you remove negative energy from your conversations you will be able to deal more efficiently with painful feelings and relational issues because they are not overloaded by negative charge.

Your signature means that you have committed to practicing Zero Negativity (ZN) for the next 30 days.

# Zero Negativity Pledge



I pledge to make my relationships a zone of Zero Negativity for the next 30 days by omitting from all my interactions any words, tones, or body language that could be experienced as a “put-down,” thus rupturing connection.

If I experience a rupture, I will send a gentle signal (bing, ouch, wow, oops!) immediately to communicate that I have experienced a “put-down,” and then use the repair process to restore safety and connecting.

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**Get Daily Reminders to Practice Zero Negativity:  
Text “ZeroNegative” to 484848**

# ZN Reconnecting Process



Okay, you've taken the pledge.

Here are some guidelines if you experience a "put-down".

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**1** If you experience a put-down, give a gentle signal like bing, ouch, wow, oops.

**2** Then select the reconnecting process that would restore connection for you and engage your partner in the process until you feel connected.

**3** There are various options to help the repair process:

- Offer a re-do. Take time out, start over, and re-do the transaction. Ask how you might resend the message so it doesn't produce a "put down".
- Offer a reconnecting behavior, a single behavior like an apology, flowers, or a hug.
- If the repair needs more attention, request a Safe Conversations dialogue.

**4** Conclude the reconnecting process with an appreciation or a caring behavior.

**REPAIRING A NEGATIVE:** The relational sciences say that 5 positives are required to repair 1 negative. If someone says they experienced a "put down," keep this ratio in mind, and give them 5 appreciations.

# Tracking Zero Negativity



According to research, achieving sustainable change requires daily repetition of a core change activity for at least 21-30 days. Since Zero Negativity (along with using the structured Safe Conversations dialogue and practicing regular Affirmations) is the foundation of relationships, we invite you to commit to the Zero Negativity Pledge for 30 days.

## **INSTRUCTIONS:**

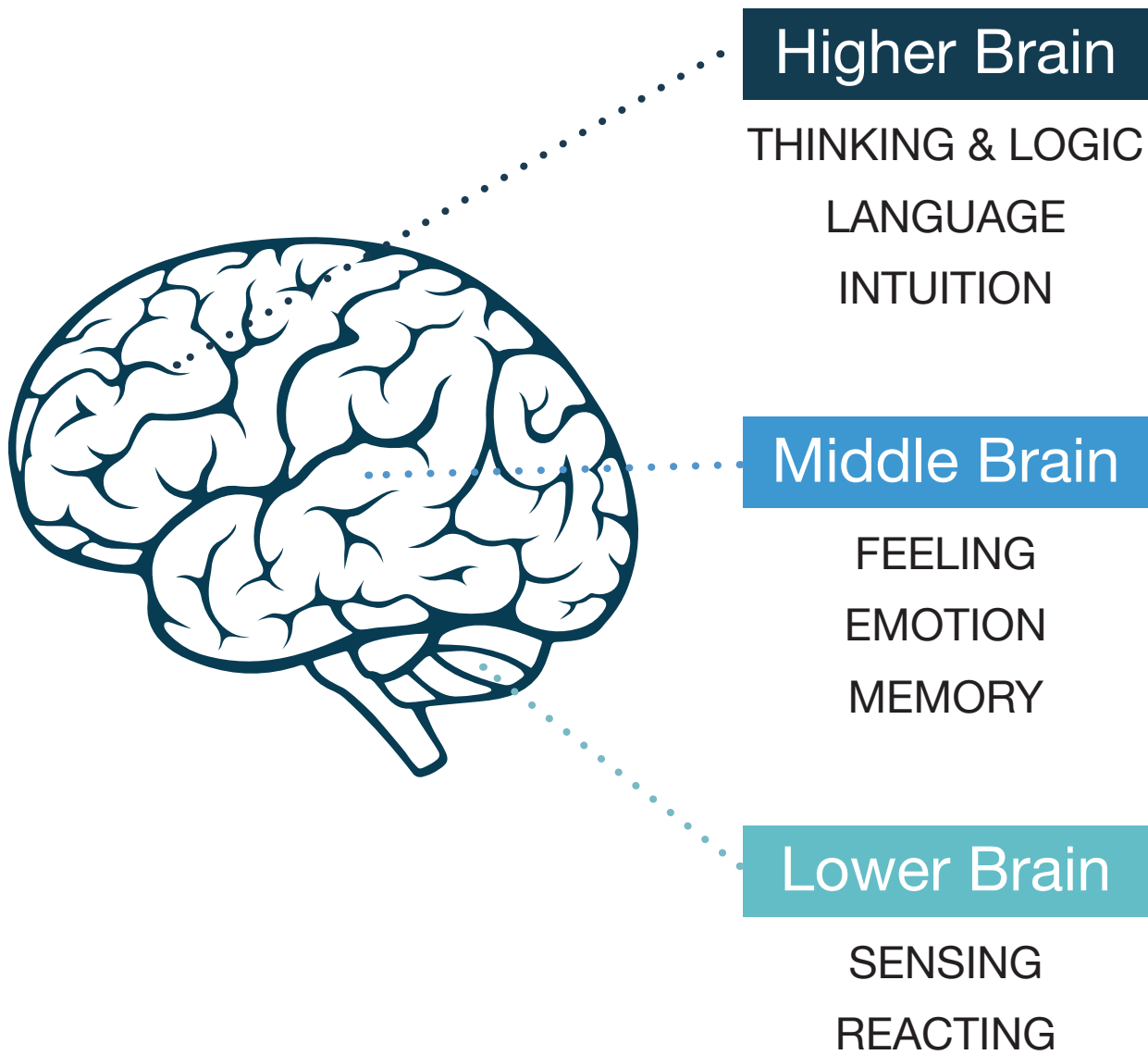
1. Keep in mind that you pledged to keep your relationship free of negativity. You will be assessing your relationship, not each other.
2. Create a calendar and place it where you can see it, like your bathroom mirror.
3. At the end of each day, draw a “smiley face” on the calendar if you have successfully practiced Zero Negativity. If not, draw a “frowning face” on the day. It’s OK! Zero Negativity is a process. Share an Appreciation before you go to bed, and start fresh tomorrow.

# The Brain & Neuroscience

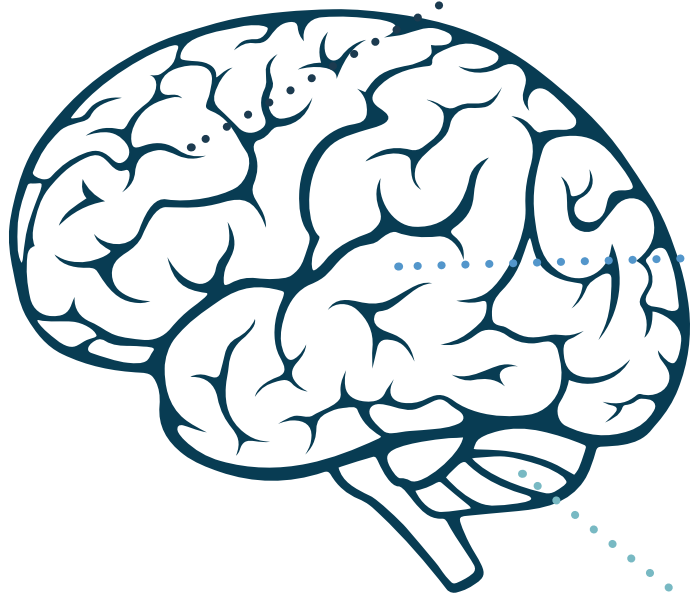




# Our Tripartite Brain



# Our Tripartite Brain



## Higher Brain

EXPERIENCE  
FULL ALIVENESS

## Middle Brain

FEELING ALIVE

## Lower Brain

STAYING ALIVE

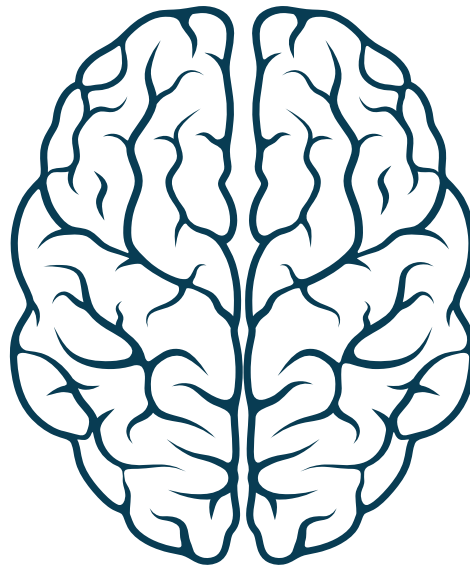
# Neural Integration



Higher Brain

Left Brain

THINKING



Right Brain

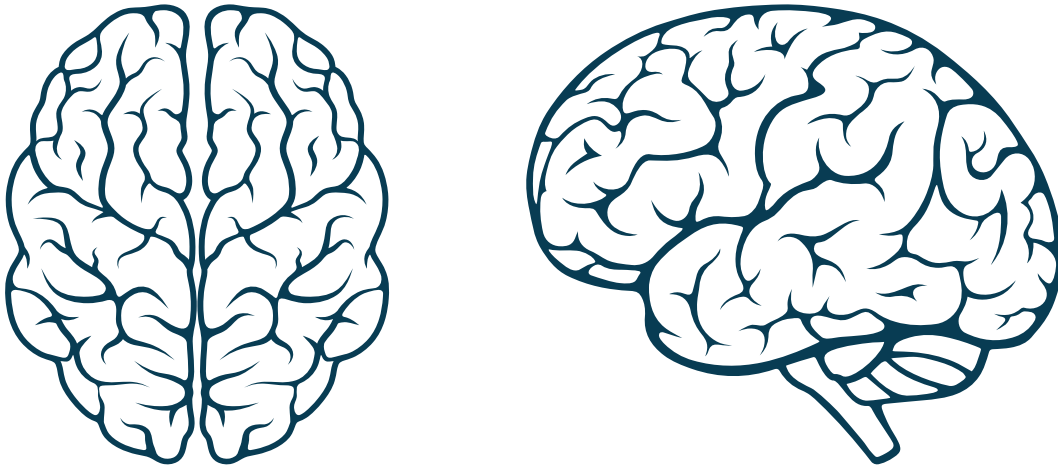
FEELING

Lower Brain

## THE GOAL:

- To make sure your higher brain is always in charge.
- To balance the left and right – thinking and feeling.
- To integrate these 4 parts of the brain.
- Because thriving relationships require a healthy brain.

# Neural Integration



“Tolerating ambiguity is a sign of mental health.”

When we feel reactive, and instead use the structure of Safe Conversations:

If I heard you correctly, you said...

Is there more about that?

Did I get it?

We move into our higher brain.

By slowing down and entering into curiosity and wonder, we learn to tolerate ambiguity, which invites us to experience full aliveness!

# Congratulations



HOORAY! You have just completed your first step toward creating a safe relationship. If you practice the FOUR simple skills you learned in this workshop, you will unleash the potential in your relationship.

## 1 USE SAFE CONVERSATIONS:

- Take turns talking.
- Take turns listening.
- In a Safe Conversation:

Sender asks: “Is now a good time to talk?”

Receiver: *Mirroring*: “Let me see if I’ve got it...”

*Validating*: “You make sense.”

*Empathizing*: “I can imagine you feel...”

## 2 30-DAY ZERO NEGATIVITY PLEDGE

- Relationships needs safety to thrive.
- Negativity destroys safety.
- It’s not about what you say, it’s how you say it.

We invite you to take the Zero Negativity Challenge and sign the Zero Negativity Pledge.

3

### **GIVE DAILY AFFIRMATIONS:**

- It is a gift you can give every day.
- It doesn't cost a dime!
- Sharing appreciations makes both of you feel WONDERFUL.

4

### **TRAIN YOUR HIGHER BRAIN**

- When talking with your partner, respond from the higher brain instead of reacting from the lower brain.
- You can train your brain! The Safe Conversations Process brings the higher brain online.

And remember to use **SENDER RESPONSIBILITY:**

- Use I-language. (I feel, I need, I want...)
- Send all information positively, respectfully, and kindly!
- No shame, blame or criticism – NOT EVER!
- Ask for what you want.
- If you do all this, you will have kept your pledge to ZERO NEGATIVITY!

# Additional Support & Training



Some days you will feel fully alive and experience the wonder of being! Until you integrate all these processes into your relationships and all of your life, you may have days when you feel pretty awful. That's the thing about learning new skills – it's often two steps forward, one step back.

When you feel discouraged, be gentle with yourself. Remind yourself that you're learning new skills. If you find that you're having more bad moments than good, you don't have to go it alone. There is a network of counselors and therapists around the world who have been specifically trained in working with couples in Imago Relational Therapy. A session with them will help you deepen the process.

For more information about the Safe Conversations workshops, products and Leader Training, please visit [www.safeconversations.com](http://www.safeconversations.com).