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Rachel's: "How to talk different"

Many times, clients tell me how I say things doesn't occur to them and that the language I use feels foreign. This make sense to me in that not only are we using a new language in this work, but we were also trying to share our concerns with our partner in a different way then maybe we are used to. Often times, we find ourselves impinged upon by our partners and the way we get them to stop is by telling them how bad or wrong they are or how they are too much ("talk too much, feel too much, expressing too much, wanting too much) and we try to get them to stop by accusing them. What is different about this work, is that we are willing to take responsibility for the fact that we are not able to handle what our partner is sharing/doing, that we **experience** them as too much versus making them **being** too much. In this work, we then ask them to modify their behavior in order to help us to stay in connection with them, knowing that part of the responsibility lies with us being able to hold our partners more fully in the way that they show up. And we both gently grow. Notice I did not use the word "change". I do believe we are changing but it seems so much more powerful and accurate to say that we are growing up.

The following are some common examples of how we handle situations in our relationships the old way and then an invitation to try it on the new way. Notice the differences between them as you read them.

1. "Oh my God, you are always talking about work."

Versus "I can really see how important work is to you and at the same time I am struggling listening to all that you want to share. Would you be willing..."

2. "Why in the world would you want to go to the Millers for dinner? You are always saying that Mary is bossy and Bob is a bore. I can't believe you accepted their invitation to go to dinner. Are you crazy?"

Versus. "This is very confusing to me. Often times you say that you feel Mary is very bossy and we have talked about how both feel Bob is boring and so I'm confused why you would accept an invitation for dinner?"

3. "I can't believe you want to talk about that right now! I just got home from work and I'm exhausted and I haven't eaten and now you want to go on and on about the chores".

Versus. I don't mean to sound abrupt. I just got home from work and I'm exhausted and I haven't eaten. so would you be willing to table this until I am transitioned back home again?"

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4. "When we go to that store together, all you do is look at guns forever and I just stand around and wait and wait and wait and I'm tired of it. You never ask what I want to do. If you want to go to that store again, just go by yourself!"

Versus *"I know how fascinated you are by guns but the problem is for me that when I'm with you, it feels like we are there for so long and I'm not able to hang out and look at guns as long as you are. I know I also become really snarky when I feel like it's gone on too long. So would you be willing to put a time limit on it so I know how long I am being asked to support you looking at guns and you don't have to tolerate me being snarky?"*

5. Your parents are coming over for dinner again? They're here all the time. Why can't we just have dinner by ourselves once in awhile?

Versus *"Having a connection with your parents is important and at the same time, I think I am missing us having time alone on weekends where it is just us and so I'm wondering if you would be willing to cut down a bit on how often we have your parents over?"*

If you can, go over the examples and see what the common threads are that run through most of them. See what the difference is for the first set and then what the common threads are for the second set. Sometimes these examples are actually dialogues that need to happen for exploration and further understanding which can then result in you asking your partner if they would be willing to do something. But this is just a general idea to give you a sense of how many different areas of our lives we attack our partner instead of identifying our struggle, owning our struggle and asking for what we want.

If you are willing, I would like you to focus for the next two weeks on times that you end up attacking your partner and instead go back and try this format in terms of restating your concern, your struggle, your responsibility and your request. Remember Rachel's saying, "In a relationship, you can ask for anything you want. You may not get it and it is not okay to punish the other for not giving you what you want."