

Three Words

Often times in our relationships, we find ourselves thinking that our partner has done something to us to hurt us. What we often do then, after making up the story that they've hurt us, is then to act on those feelings of hurt that we have by either accusing or retaliating. So if our partner does something, we feel, to hurt us, they have torn a bit at the fabric of our relationship and then if we retaliate back, we have then done even more damage to the fabric of our relationship.

I'd like you to consider that if you take the storytelling that we're learning in our work together, that there are three words that you can use that might help you to navigate through when you are not understanding why your partner has done something. Those words are "noticing", "curiosity" and "wondering". So after we *notice* ourselves making up a story, we can then *curious* about where that story might be coming from for us and *wonder* then if we can make up a different story or at least check out the story we've made up. Then, when we go to our partners, instead of accusing, we do the same three steps of *noticing*, *curiosity* and *wondering* with them. We will **notice** their behavior to them, we will be **curious** to them about what that might be about and if they can then help us understand what was happening for them or what was going through their head or what they were experiencing when they did that behavior and then finally, **wondering** if they can do that behavior in a different way.

In this way, we place the behavior *in the space between us* and we both explore it to try to understand it rather than assuming that the behavior is only informed by "our world". In other words, from only our point of view and "I" get to decide what it means, "I" get to have feelings about it and then "I" get to respond to it as though my world is the real and true world.

So for instance, let's say you're planning a trip with your sister and your partner can't go and you make reservations with your sister and your partner says to you, "Why did you make those reservations behind my back?". You then are in a position of *noticing* first that your partner has jumped to a conclusion to *noticing* that they have had feelings about it and then having accused you and so you might say to them, "I'm noticing that you seem to have made the assumption that I was making the reservations behind your back, and not wanting to include you and I'm also noticing that you seem to feel angry and hurt about it and I'm curious if you can tell me what your story is about my reservations so that I can understand why you are seeming to think I went behind your back?". You can also add, maybe after your understanding, that you're wondering if they would be willing to rephrase that in the form of a question as opposed to an accusation? If your partner had done the three-step process I just outlined, they might notice to themselves that they're making up a story that I am making plans behind their back and get curious about why they would assume that and begin to understand why they have this distrust of me. They can then articulate that mistrust to me in a way that forwards our relationship and maybe heals some of the mistrust. We know from our work, also, that more likely than not, much of their mistrust is an

80% from their past. The old paradigm (assuming and accusing) doesn't heal us or bring us into connection and is more than likely to cause a rupture. If you have in your mind that your goal in the relationship is to protect yourself, then you will rarely be able to move the relationship forward. If your goal is to grow connection and use your relationship to heal past wounds, then you are motivated to move to a place of noticing, curiosity and wondering.

Here is an exercise to try:

At least three times in the next week, I want you to do this three step process on yourself, with anyone in your life, including your partner, family members and the community at large. They never even have to know that you are doing the noticing, being curious and wondering if you can do a different behavior, because most of this self work happens internally. If at some point, you can share with them what you discovered about what ***you did*** with their behavior, great. And it is not necessary to do some growing up yourself.

The second exercise is to try the three step process with someone you are close to on them. Noticing their behavior to them, being curious about what it is about and then wondering if they can try on a different behavior.

Good Luck and be invested in the connection, growth and adult way it will help you feel!