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**Exercise:**

***Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident***

**STEP ONE**

*Feelings:* Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner's feelings.

I felt...

- |                                    |   |                                      |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. defensive                       | 19. out of control                        | 38. my opinions didn't even matter   |
| 2. not listened to                 | 20. frustrated                            | 39. there was a lot of give and take |
| 3. feelings got hurt               | 21. righteously indignant                 | 40. I had no feelings at all         |
| 4. totally flooded                 | 22. morally justified                     | 41. I had no idea what I was feeling |
| 5. angry                           | 23. unfairly picked on                    | 42. lonely                           |
| 6. sad                             | 24. unappreciated                         | 43. alienated                        |
| 7. unloved                         | 25. disliked                              | 44. ashamed                          |
| 8. misunderstood                   | 26. unattractive                          | 45. guilty                           |
| 9. criticized                      | 27. stupid                                | 46. culpable                         |
| 10. took a complaint personally    | 28. morally outraged                      | 47. abandoned                        |
| 11. like you didn't even like me   | 29. taken for granted                     | 48. disloyal                         |
| 12. not cared about                | 30. like leaving                          | 49. exhausted                        |
| 13. worried                        | 31. like staying and talking this through | 50. foolish                          |
| 14. afraid                         | 32. I was overwhelmed with emotion        | 51. overwhelmed                      |
| 15. unsafe                         | 33. not calm                              | 52. remorseful                       |
| 16. tense                          | 34. stubborn                              | 53. shocked                          |
| 17. I was right and you were wrong | 35. powerless                             | 54. tired                            |
| 18. both of us were partly right   | 36. I had no influence                    |                                      |
|                                    | 37. I wanted to win this one              |                                      |

## STEP TWO

*Realities:* Describe your "reality". Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner's reality.

### Subjective Reality and Validation

- a. Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don't describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame. Talk about what you might have needed from your partner. Describe your perceptions like a reporter, giving an objective blow-by-blow description. Say "I heard you saying," rather than "You said."
- b. Summarize and then validate your partner's reality by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it." Use empathy by saying something like, "I can see why this upset you." Validation doesn't mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience of the incident.
- c. Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, "What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?" After summarizing and validating, ask your partner, "Did I get it?" and "Is there anything else?"

## STEP THREE

*Triggers:* Share what experiences or memories you've had that might have escalated the interaction, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.

As you rewind the video tape of your memory, stop at a point where you had a similar set of feelings triggered in the past. Now tell the story of that past moment to your partner, so your partner can understand why that is a trigger for you.

Share your stories- it will help your partner to understand you. As you think about your early history or childhood, is there a story you remember that relates to what got triggered in you, your "enduring vulnerabilities"? Your partner needs to know you, so that your partner can be more sensitive to you.

### Examples of triggers

- |   |                          |                            |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. I felt judged. I'm very sensitive to that.     | 4. I felt flooded.       | 9. I felt powerless.       |
| 2. I felt excluded. I'm very sensitive to that.   | 5. I felt ashamed.       | 10. I felt out of control. |
| 3. I felt criticized. I'm very sensitive to that. | 6. I felt lonely.        | 11. Other:                 |
|   | 7. I felt belittled      |                            |
|   | 8. I felt disrespected . |                            |

### Validation

Does any part of your partner's triggers and story make sense to you?

## STEP FOUR

*Responsibility:* Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.

Under ideal conditions, you might have done better at talking about this issue.

### 1. What set me up for this miscommunication?

Share how you set yourself up to get into this conflict.

Read aloud the items that were true for you on the following list:

#### *What set me up:*

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| 1. I've been very stressed and irritable lately.           | 5. I've been overly critical lately.            | 9. I've been getting easily upset.         |
| 2. I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately. | 6. I've not shared very much of my inner world. | 10. I've been depressed lately.            |
| 3. I've taken you for granted.                             | 7. I've not been emotionally available.         | 11. I've had a chip on my shoulder lately. |
| 4. I've been overly sensitive lately.                      | 8. I've been turning away more.                 | 12. I've not been very affectionate.       |

#### *What set me up: (continued)*

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 13. I've not made time for good things between us. | 16. I've been feeling a bit like a martyr.   | 19. I have been very preoccupied.                  |
| 14. I've not been a very good listener lately.     | 17. I've needed to be alone.                 | 20. I haven't felt very much confidence in myself. |
| 15. I've not asked for what I needed.              | 18. I've not wanted to take care of anybody. | 21. I've been running on empty.                    |

### 2. Specifically, what do you regret, and specifically, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?

### 3. What do you wish to apologize for?

(Read aloud) I'm sorry that:

1. I over-reacted.
2. I was really grumpy.
3. I was defensive.
4. I was so negative.

### 4. If you accept your partner's apology, say so. If not, say what you still need.

## STEP FIVE

*Constructive Plans:* Plan together one way that each of you can make it better next time.

Share one thing your partner can do to make a discussion of this issue better next time. (It's important to remain calm as you do this.)

Then, while it's still your turn, share one thing you can do to make it better next time.

What do you need to be able to put this behind you and move on? Be as agreeable as possible to the plans suggested by your partner.

Write your plan to make it better:

# Stop the four Horsemen with their Antidotes

Strong Indicators that  
Divorce is Likely

Defuse a Toxic Situation  
with These Techniques



**CRITICISM**

Verbal attacks on their partner's  
personality or character



**Gentle Start-Up**

Talk instead about feelings and express a  
positive need. Complain without blaming.



**DEFENSIVENESS**

Seeing self as the victim; use to  
reverse the blame



**Take Responsibility**

Take responsibility, even if only for part of the  
conflict.



**CONTEMPT**

Attacking partner's sense of self;  
they feel despised or worthless



**Build Culture of  
Appreciation**

Show respect and appreciation for partner.  
Focus on what is good about them.



**STONEWALLING**

Withdrawing from interaction; a  
partner shuts down, becomes  
walled off; doesn't respond  
appropriately



**Do Physiological Self-  
Soothing**

Stop the conflict discussion; explain need for a  
break; spend time doing something self-soothing  
to be able to reconnect.