

# Empathy

MARRIAGE IN MOTION ▶ Module 2: Conflict

2.3

MODULE 2, LESSON 3

## SUMMARY

- A secret to conflict management is empathy. **Empathy is the ability to understand another person's point of view.** But it's not just that. **It's the ability to feel what they're feeling.** To believe that their experience is valuable and important.
- **Emotional Intimacy** builds when you can validate your partner's point of view, even when you don't agree with it.
- Invite empathy from your partner by shifting your complaint from a "demand" to a "desire."
- When responding to your partner's complaints, respond with both tenderness and strength in order to create intimacy. You can be both compassionate to your partner's point of view, while also remaining clear in your own perspective.
- A **common enemy** is a powerful intimacy creator. Don't get stuck thinking your partner is your enemy. You are on the same team, fighting against a common enemy external to the relationship.
- **The most common misconception about conflict** is that your relationship will improve when you resolve your issues. But it's the other way around... you can more effectively resolve your issues once you improve your relationship.
- We waste a lot of time trying to make sure our partner understands our point of view. Your energy is much better spent trying to understand their point of view instead. People don't — in fact, they can't — change unless and until they feel known and understood by the other. Concentrate first on understanding (rather than being understood) in order to invite the change you're seeking in the relationship.

*Emotional Intimacy builds when you can validate your partner's point of view, even when you don't agree with it.*

# ACTIVITIES

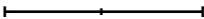
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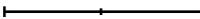
## 1 SELF-ASSESSMENT: Strong & Tender

Empathy is the ability to be both strong/clear in your position and also tender/compassionate with your partner's point of view. Rate yourself on your current ability to be both strong and tender in the midst of conflict.

### Strong

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being "really strong," how would you rate your ability right now to be strong and clear in your position. **You often ask for what you want or need by asking directly.**

MYSELF 

MY PARTNER 

### Tender

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being "really tender," how would you rate your ability right now to be compassionate and tender to your partner's point of view? **How open are you to hearing their difference of opinion?**

MYSELF 

MY PARTNER 



*Talk about your scores, and the dynamic that influences each area.*

## 2 AN EMOTIONALLY INTIMATE CONVERSATION

This exercise is designed to draw you emotionally closer together by inviting your partner into your inner world through story.

The goal of this conversation is to create a sacred and safe place for you to reveal your deepest thoughts and feelings to your partner and be met with compassion and empathy in return. This exercise will require that each of you show up as your most mature, gentle, and empathetic selves.

This might be the first time you've engaged in an exercise like this. That's ok. Stretch yourself. If you do the work, if you trust the process, you'll begin to make the forward progress that can turn into momentum.



## INSTRUCTIONS:

Set aside at least 60-minutes to practice the art of emotionally intimate conversation. Turn off digital distractions and clear the room for privacy.

One person begins as the speaker while the other person is the listener. The speaker will start by answering ONE of the Intimate Conversation Starter Questions (below). The speaker may choose whichever starter question they prefer.

The listener will use their list of questions below to help draw out the speaker's story.

Remember that the goal of this exercise is to allow your partner into your inner world and be vulnerable while sharing your story. Listener, provide your partner comfort through empathic statements or physical touch. See sample empathic statements below. Switch roles when the speaker is done. Be sure to thank one another.

### Intimate Conversation Starter Question (choose one from the list below):

- What is your earliest memory of loss or grief?
- What is your greatest dream not yet realized?
- What moment in your life are you most ashamed of?
- What toxic self-talk (self-criticism) do you struggle with?

### Listener's followup questions:

- What feelings come up for you as you think about this?
- How can I provide support for you right now as you talk about this?
- How does this impact your life now?
- What else is important for me to know?

### Example of empathic responses:

- I can see how painful this memory is for you
- You clearly have strong feelings about this; thanks for your vulnerability
- I can understand why you are so hurt

*Be sure to acknowledge each other at the end of your time. Consider how this experience can deepen what you most appreciate. And consider how the experience may deepen your empathy for one another the next time you have a major conflict.*



## TAKEAWAY

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**What was your #1 takeaway from this lesson? Describe any breakthrough(s):**