



Judging – Learning to Learn

Putting ourselves and others down can really get in the way of our own learning and make it hard to be part of a group. Once we become aware that we're putting people down, the big question becomes "how do I stop?"

Being gentle with ourselves and others

Here are some things to think about that might help you to be gentle with yourself and others.

1. Where did you learn this?

Was there someone in your life that always put you or others down? Picture that person in front of you now. Do you like and respect them? Were they fair in their comments? Did you feel good when they were doing it? Do you admire what they made of their life? If you answered no to any of these questions, and even if you answered yes, tell them in your mind, "I don't have to listen to you and I don't have to be like you. I've managed so far on my own and I trust that I'll be okay."

2. Being fair

When you're putting yourself down, are you being fair? Are you only focusing on your negative qualities? What if you tried to say something good about yourself whenever you thought or said something negative? If you're not sure you can come up with anything positive about yourself, start a list. Write down at least 3 things that are special about you. Remind yourself of your wonderful qualities when you're giving yourself a hard time.

3. Comparing self and others

When you're comparing yourself to others, do you know their whole stories? If you think they're better or more successful than you, do you know what they think about themselves or about the troubles they face?

On the other hand, if you think you're better or smarter than they are, do you know some of their good qualities? Do you know about what difficulties they've had to overcome?

We all make assumptions about others based on very little information. Try to find out more about the lives of the people around you - it will help you to look for the little things that make people unique, including you.

4. Change the channel.

When you find that negative talk is taking over, look for something or someone else to concentrate on. Change what you're doing to help you change what you're thinking.

Many people find activities or hobbies they can lose themselves in, such as playing or listening to music, cooking, drawing, or swimming. Find activities that completely absorb you so you can give your negative messages a much-needed rest.

5. If you can't let it go...

If you just can't let go of the negative messages, stop what you're doing to consider if someone or something is really bothering you. If it is, ask yourself if you need to speak up, stand up for yourself, leave the room or do something else that takes care of your heart.

6. Be kind to yourself.

Ask yourself, "What kinds of things did I do for myself today?" If you're not even sure how you can be kind to yourself, make a list with at least 3 things on it. Then at the end of the day, you can think back on whether you did any of the things on the list or if there is something special you could do for yourself right now.

7. Be patient with yourself.

If you promise yourself that you will stop putting yourself and others down, but you don't, be patient. You can always try again, and again, and again. This is a long process and there's no deadline. It's something we all work on our whole lives.

Dealing with conflicts through dialogue

To live, work or learn well with others we may need to learn to deal with our conflicts. A structured dialogue process can help us do this.

The **Imago Dialogue** process for improving connection and communication was developed by therapists Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt. The key to this process is for people to agree to listen to each other without judgment, and to accept the other's views as being just as valid as our own. One person who has a frustration tells the other person what the frustration is and asks if this is a good time to discuss it. If the other says no, then they agree on a better time when both people can really participate, preferably no more than 24 hours later.

To help create safety, they begin the process by saying one or two things they appreciate about each other. Even if they have to really stretch to find something positive to say, this step can make it easier for both people to listen to hard stuff later without getting defensive.

The process has 3 steps: ***Mirroring, Validation and Empathy.***

Mirroring

In the **Mirroring** part of the process, the "Sender" uses "I" language (like "I feel," "I love," "I need ...") to send a message about their thoughts, feelings, or experiences to the "Receiver". They should avoid shaming, blaming or criticizing, and try only to describe their own experience: *"This is what it's like to be me..."*

Then the Receiver echoes the Sender's message as accurately they can, starting with words like, *"Let me see if I've got you. You said"* They don't comment on, interpret, or change the message in any way. This is mirroring, and it sounds simple. But when we have strong feelings about what the other person is saying, it can be very hard to hear. It may take many tries to get it all. We may have to work hard to put our feelings in the "parking lot" until it is *our* turn to be the sender.

Mirroring helps us to really hear what the other person is actually saying rather than listening to the reactions going on in our head while they're talking. We often get lost in the stories we tell ourselves about what the other is thinking and doing, or in the ways they remind us of people who hurt us earlier in our lives.

As the Receiver, once we've been able to mirror back what we heard, we ask, *"Is there more?"* and leave a little time to show that we really want to know. The more we reassure the other person that we're open to what they're saying, the more we can connect with them and see things from their perspective, even if we find it upsetting or confusing. Keep going on one topic until the Sender says clearly *"No, there's no more."*

At this point we try to sum it up, to make sure that we got it all: *"So, in summary I heard you say that..."* Then the other person might say *"Well, you missed this little bit – and it's quite important to me that you hear it."*

Validation

When we mirror the other person well, they'll probably already be feeling that we have heard their point of view, and have seen that for them it's valid. But it's nice to say it, too. After summarizing, the receiver can nod and say: *"What you're saying makes sense. I can see why you'd think this way."* This isn't agreement, it's just taking a look at the world through their glasses instead of our own and validating their point of view.

Telling someone *"That makes sense."* can be quite hard if the person sees things very differently than we do. But to be connected, it's important to recognize that their point of view makes sense for them, even if it's so different from ours that it seems "wrong". In dialogue, making the connection is the most important thing - who is right and who is wrong doesn't matter. It's healthy to be able to accept that we have different viewpoints.

Respecting the other person's reality and validating what they've said will make them feel relieved and safer to share more. It's a lovely thing to have our views validated by someone else!

Empathy

In this step, given what the other person has said, we imagine what they might be feeling, and validate their feelings too. Feelings can be expressed with simple words like angry, sad, lonely, afraid, happy, or joyful. For example, we might say *“I imagine you might be feeling afraid, and maybe a little sad too. Is that what you’re feeling?”* If they share other feelings, we can mirror those as well to show that we heard. *“Ah, a little excited too.”*

After the Receiver has mirrored, validated and empathized with whatever the Sender shared, they switch roles – the Sender becomes the Receiver and the Receiver becomes the Sender. They stay on the same topic, so that they get to see the same situation from each other’s point of view. (Other issues are saved for another dialogue.)

At first this process may feel uncomfortable. But practicing it for a while can help us hear each other more accurately and deeply, and move from just reacting to actually communicating.

Some words to help you try a dialogue

Try using this tool to share something that bugs you.

Start by taking turns sharing something you appreciate about each other. See how you feel when they mirror back your appreciation of them and when they appreciate you.

Here are some phrases to help you get started with a dialogue:

As **SENDER**, you might say:

I would like to dialogue with you about ...

Is now okay? (If now isn’t a good time, can we set a time within the next day or so?)

What’s bothering me is ...

I feel ...

I need ...

The RECEIVER would then respond using the 3 steps, ***mirroring, validation and empathy.***

First, Mirroring

Let me see if I've got you.

I heard you say ... (or You said ...)

Did I get that?

Is there more about that?

Let me see if I got it all ...?

Is that a good summary?

Then Validation

That makes sense to me, and what makes sense about it is ...

I can see how you would see it that way because sometimes I ...

Finally, Empathy

I imagine you might be feeling ...

Is that what you're feeling?

Then the sender and receiver SWITCH ROLES

The information on the Imago Dialogue process was adapted from the website of Imago Relationships International.