

# Creating a Stronger, Intimate Connection through Conversation and Vulnerability

## A 15-Minute Exercise for Couples

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This is a great exercise couples can use when you start to feel disconnected or if you are already feeling disconnected. The goal of this exercise is to create more intimacy in your relationship.

It sounds really simple: on a given day, one person talks for 15 minutes while the other person listens for 15 minutes.

**Talker's job:** Talk about *yourself* only. You are exploring yourself, uncovering who you really are in the middle of your life, with your partner witnessing and listening. The goal is to start to be vulnerable and to let your partner in, so that they can get to know you more deeply. You share *your* experience of your life, with the person that is most important to you.

**Listener's job:** Listen and time keep. Listening is an active role. You are putting your certainty aside and engaging your curiosity.

What can you learn here that you did not already know about your partner? Also, you are listening with curiosity to what is happening inside of you.

If you are having a hard time paying attention, ask yourself:

- “What is uncomfortable for me about what my partner is saying?”
- “Why is this uncomfortable for me?” or
- “Why am I having a reaction here?”

You can note what is happening inside you to explore later. Then, turn your attention back to your partner.

The goal is to connect to yourself and your partner at the same time.

### **Some additional rules:**

*You must talk for the full 15 minutes.* If you get stuck say whatever is on your mind, let it flow in a stream of consciousness.

The listener cannot rescue the talker, correct the talker, offer suggestions to the talker, or otherwise direct the talker. Your job is to listen and hold space.

*You may not disclose a secret in the exercise.*

You may not use what you learned against the other in a fight at a later date. Remember you are creating a safe place here.

After the 15 minutes, the listener says "Thank you." The exercise ends and neither partner discusses what was talked about in the exercise until the next day. It is important to let it sit for a bit.

*Only one person talks per day:* The listener from the first day then becomes the talker on the second day. The talker on the second day does not need to respond to anything their partner said on the previous day. The talker's job remains exactly the same: share about yourself as honestly and as deeply as you are able.

For some people, it is risky to share about themselves. In most relationships, we have taken risks before and been disappointed with the results. In this exercise, you are intentionally creating a safe space between the two of you to take some risks. So, as awkward as this may feel at first, it is set up this way to create a container for intimacy.

The exercise also lets you both practice how to manage your own anxiety/discomfort by not reacting right away. There are no emergencies here, and there is nothing that requires immediate action. If you hear or say something that makes you feel uncomfortable, take some time to sort through it on your own. Take some time to journal or think about it more deeply. You can share what you learned about yourself the next day with your partner.

If, on the next day the listener would like to talk about what they heard, you can say things like,

- "I would like to give you some feedback on what I heard. Are you open to that?"
- "I think maybe we have had a misunderstanding and I would like to clarify something"
- or
- "I would love to hear more about your thoughts on X, Y or Z."

**If you do get stuck in this exercise it is better not to police your partner**, but come in and see a counsellor ([either in person, online via Skype or Google Hangouts or by phone or email](#)) as we can help illuminate where and why you are getting stuck.

*This is an activity that I adapted from a book I read fifteen years ago called Intimate Partners by Maggie Scarf. It has changed for me over the years, but the core talking/listening piece has always been central to the activity.*