

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together. The hand on the left has purple nail polish. The hand on the right has a diamond ring on the ring finger. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

REPAIRING A DISCONNECTION

5 Steps to Improving Your Relationship

Do you feel like you argue all the time?

Or, equally as frustrating, find yourself getting stuck playing it safe to avoid an argument? Perhaps you're feeling distant from him or her, afraid you've become more like roommates than romantic partners. Are you looking to deepen a healthy relationship, rejuvenate a worn-out one, or save one before it ends prematurely?

When you and your partner feel like you're on separate teams, it's hard to be connected or find the support from one another that is vital to a healthy relationship.

We all want a safe, secure, and loving relationship. Unfortunately, we don't always know how to create one. As one partner recently shared with me, "I don't know if I was capable of reassuring her; I never had that modeled for me."

In matters like this, we need a game plan. Below are the five steps to repair a disconnection which will help you establish a healthy relationship.



1. Start by recognizing the disconnection.

All relationships will experience disconnection. It's normal. However, these can make us feel very unsettled, unsafe, or afraid - often causing hurt. This hurt comes from broken promises, unresolved emotional injuries, etc. It's imperative that we try to understand what has caused the hurt before we can move forward towards healing. What is most important is not that we had a disconnection, but that we learn how to repair it.

2. Check in with your inner world.

What do you notice is happening inside of you? We tend to focus more on our partner. We look at our partner's facial expression, we hear their tone, we sense they are upset with us and we shut down. I like to say we have two eyes that are outwardly facing. Our eyes pick up on everything around us. What if we imagined turning these two eyes inward? What would we notice is happening inside our inner world? Maybe you can't identify a feeling; but maybe you can identify a sensation. Do you have the urge to run? Do you feel your shoulders tense up? Do you notice that what you are really experiencing is more hurt than anger? Focus on what you are noticing. When we can understand what we are experiencing, we can learn to put words to these experiences and are more likely to send a clear message to our partner.

3. Learn to sit with unpleasant emotions.

Emotions can feel scary. Unpleasant. Uncertain. Some clients tell me that they don't want to feel the sadness or the hurt because they are worried it will last forever and they will end up a puddle in the corner of the room. They fear they will be no longer able to function, putting the emotion in a lock box inside of themselves to deal with at some future point. An

unprocessed emotion will eventually come out in our behavior, looking like resentment or shutting down. What we don't talk about, we act out. As you better understand your feelings, you expand your tolerance of these emotions and can send a clear message through conversation. To face hurt and begin communicating, we need to create a safe environment for each other to share. Demonstrating that you are there for one another and that it is okay to be vulnerable enables your partner to open up. Be tender towards each other.

4. Set your intention.

What do you hope to get out of the conversation? What is your motive? An unhealthy motive is generally about wanting to be right; look good or punish others. A healthy motive is about building the relationship, getting closer, or problem solving. Once you set your intention, your behavior, facial expression and tone will follow that intention. So if you want to be right, you'll tend to come off as critical or condescending. If you genuinely want to strengthen the relationship you will probably have a softer tone; a more open facial expression and body language that communicates you want to be closer. When your healthy intention is expressed, your partner will be more likely to engage fully.

5. Express your true longing – deliver a clear message

I love the word longing. It helps us get under the emotion. We have checked in with our inner world. We can identify that we are feeling hurt and afraid. We know our intention is to build a healthy relationship. Now what is your longing? What do you hope for in your relationship? Many of us long for closeness, intimacy, and feeling safe in our relationships. When we tap into our emotions and uncover our true longings we tend to step out of criticism, withdrawal and defensive postures with our partners and into being more open hearted, warm and speaking with clarity. When we send clear signals to our partners, they are more likely to feel safe enough to come forward and meet us to repair the disconnection. Embrace humility. These can be difficult conversations but ones that allow the bond to deepen.

The truth is, even when following these steps, the conversations can be difficult.

We create patterns in our relationships that sometime have us unintentionally pushing each other away when what we really want to do is pull each other closer. Allowing a qualified third party to help walk alongside you and your partner can be the difference between a productive conversation and setting yourself up for failure.

Dr. Lee LeGrice, with over 25 years of experience working with others, will be guiding couples just like you, through Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) in Hold Me Tight workshops. These workshops will help couples learn the skills to create a safe, secure, loving relationship. Contact Dr. LeGrice for availability at 817-307-8725.

