



Healing difficult situations with your child's other parent

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series.

When tackling any conflict with your child's other parent, it's really important to connect with yourself first, offer yourself empathy to whatever is going on for you and then, and only then, try to connect with them. Because if you are supercharged with emotions like anger or resentment, what you might mean to say or do might well be the opposite of what you really mean, and it could turn into a fight and you probably won't get the result you wish for, or your needs met. Sometimes we need to bite our tongues until we have dealt with what is arising in ourselves rather than burst out with comments and opinions fueled by those supercharged emotions.

So, let's begin taking some time to find comfort in your posture and take some deep breaths in and out to help bring yourself more into your body. It can be helpful to breathe out through pursed lips to slow down your exhalations, to bring you into a quieter, calmer state of mind, breathing and allowing any thoughts to come and then go, as you follow your breath in and as you follow your breath out.

When feel ready, gently bring to your mind a conflict you are having right now with your child's other parent. It could be over household chores, coming in late, childcare responsibilities, or finances. Let whatever difficult situation is present right now in your relationship naturally come to your mind.

Pay attention to any voices in your own head that are creating judgments or blame about your partner's behaviour. Notice if you're stirred up inside by this conflict. You are bringing your own stuff to this moment. And then leave that there in the mind without get dragged into the story or drama.

Allowing your attention to come down into your body now, to sense where any feelings - directly associated with the problem - may be present. Remembering feelings live in the body, so you are checking in, being present with what is alive in your body. Let those feelings reveal themselves to you.

And now give yourself self-empathy. You're not trying to solve anything at this stage, just offering words of empathy to yourself. For example, *"it's okay to feel this," "how human of me to feel this way,"* and maybe a phrase of compassion such as *"may I be at ease... may I have a balanced mind."*

Once you feel you have softened, you are ready to approach the situation with your partner or ex-partner. Imagine the right time and place to have this interaction - not when the kids are present or maybe when you're tired or late at night, maybe not over the phone or when you are rushed for time. Be really specific and imagine a time when you think you will both be willing to sit and listen.

Now imagine that this is that time and you are with that person. You might start by saying to them: *“Are you ready to talk about XYZ?”* Be specific and name the issue. *“I am ready to listen to what you have to say.”*

And then let them speak. Imagine you are really listening with your heart, remembering what's it's like for yourself when you feel truly listen to.

Even if you think the other person is wrong, it's really important at this point to listen to what they're saying. Listening is to give silent empathy to the other person for what they are going through.

Imagine them now telling you what is going on for them in this conflict and how they really feel.

Notice if you are already planning the answer, and if so you are not truly listening. As you listen mindfully, you can begin to silently guess their feelings, and maybe their needs that aren't being met in this conflict. Breathe as you notice these. Remind yourself that you don't have to agree - you are just trying to understand where they are coming from in this conflict.

You are imagining with empathy, compassion and kindness the situation from their point of view. You are not trying to fix it or solve anything as they are telling you their perspective, and often, just you listening with empathy might be all the person needs or wants and then something begins to shift.

Then rehearse saying these sentences, letting them know that you have heard them and giving them empathy out loud now:

“I can hear that you feel...” Then adding in the emotion or feeling you feel they have expressed. Then saying:

“It sounds like your need for [adding in their need] “isn't being met. Would you tell me how your needs might be better met here?”

As you picture this conversation with your child's other parent, maybe you are sensing there is a little bit more connection between you now; that you are fitting together in a slightly different way. You may even feel to some level the problem is resolved just by understanding them more, or maybe you are already feeling some, for example, forgiveness.

Once they have finished speaking it's time to carefully choose your words. Remembering words can sometimes put up walls instead of bridges if we use judgements, and our child's other parent can become defensive. So instead of judgements, for example, blaming, shaming, can we make real observations instead? So, not what you think happened but what the facts of the matter are.

Start with something like: *“When I hear, or see, or think about [name exactly what has happened] I feel or felt [adding in your feeling maybe irritated or hurt] because my need for [adding in your need - maybe for support, or safety, or love] wasn't or isn't being met.”*

Now you imagine making your request as to how they might meet your needs. We try to avoid making requests before we have expressed our needs, as this will come over as demand rather than a request. Saying something like this:

“Would you be willing to, or are you willing to commit to [adding in what they might do or commit to at a specific time to meet your need].”

Imagine being open to what they say. You may not get the result you want straight away, so sensing what might come up for you when you don't get what you want straight away - any judgement arising, or negative feelings, and give yourself self-empathy. Then try to rephrase your sentences until you feel connected and they begin to show some willingness to meet your needs.

And of course it's okay to say to your partner at any point in this conversation: *“I really want to continue this conversation but I feel charged or triggered right now,”* or *“I need some time out,”* *“I need to come back to this conversation at a different time so that I can be truly present and we can hear each other better”* - especially if you know that you have stopped listening, or are not present with what is alive in you right now.

You can imagine how helpful it would be to you in that moment, to take yourself away for 10 mins or so, and to return with a calmer more even mind, or maybe even re-visiting the conversation on another day.

And you could finish your whole conversation with something like: *“How do you feel hearing that from me?”*

And now take a moment to reflect on how this more empathetic, compassionate and non-harming conversation feels in your body and in your mind.

Maybe on imagining this conversation, there is more connection felt between you and your child's other parent now. Stay with your breath for a few more moments, acknowledging how this type of communication might help your relationship for the better.

See if you can give that a go for real when you are next met with any conflict. Don't worry about getting all the words right to begin with - just by starting to use some of that non-violent communication can start to shift things. Remembering this order can be useful: the observation, the feeling, the need, and then the request.

Take care and I'll see you next time.