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Safe Conversations

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1

Dear Ones,

Are tempers a little frayed at your house? I hope not. But let's be realistic – some tempers are fraying in some house somewhere. This prolonged change in our circumstances, the anxiety many of us are carrying in our hearts, grief and loss, even simply not being able to move around freely – all of these are making us a bit edgy. And possibly grumpy. Or even downright angry at times.

And when you get angry, who do you turn that anger on first, normally? The person you love the most! The one who is closest to you.

I remember when my kids were little, they were as *good as gold* for their teachers. And perfect little wretches for me! Ugh! I only realized later on why that was: they trusted me. They knew that no matter what they did I would still love them. Which is true... although there were days....!

Recently I have had to pull out an old and trusted resource in order to share it with a couple of folks who are having some difficulty communicating. It happens to us all! But in close quarters, in strange times, it can feel pretty frightening to be out of sync with someone.

Just in case you might need this – or you might know someone who could benefit – I thought that I would share it here. Tuck it away if it doesn't apply right now. You never know.

And just to be completely honest here: Yes! I still need stuff like this myself! I see using structured conversations as a *sign of strength* not of weakness. Heck, I will use ANYTHING that will help me and someone else to restore compassion and kindness in a relationship. Hurt feelings hurt!

And we know that this is the godly path. Jesus challenged his own disciples to be reconciled with each other. If it was good enough for them, it is good enough for us.

In case you want to learn more about this, it comes from a fabulous book by Harville Hendrix called *Getting the Love You Want*. You can find some free resources here: <https://relationshipsfirst.org>

Grace to you, and peace,

Kate

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Three Steps to Intentional Dialogue

(Harville Hendrix)

1. MIRRORING

Those of you who know how to reflectively listen will recognize this step. Basically you mirror or reflect back as clearly and simply as you can what the other person is saying. Hendrix suggests you mirror as "flatly" as possible. What that means is as much as possible, mirror back what is being said WITHOUT DISTORTION. Resist the tendency to explain, justify, defend, attack or solve problems. You are just mirroring back what the other person has said in your own words. This step is more simple than most people make it, but it is also harder to do. (Not complex, but not easy)

Some useful lead-in phrases:

- a) So you . . .
- b) It sounds like you. . .
- c) So when. . . you . . .

2. VALIDATION

This is the process of letting the other person know that what they have said to you makes some sense to you, that it is logical. The difficulty in this step is that sometimes what the other person is saying may not make sense, or you may not agree with them. The beauty of this process is that you don't have to agree with them to be effective with this. Use phrases that are honest and validating.

Some useful lead-in phrases:

- a) Given what you have gone through, what you are saying makes sense. . .
- b) From your viewpoint, I can see that there is some logic in what you are saying. . .
- c) Now that I have heard more of your feelings, I'm starting to understand this. . .

3. EMPATHY

In this stage you explore and talk about how you can feel some response to what they are feeling. The focus is on talking about what the feelings are, and how they are felt. (Both your feelings and theirs)

Some useful lead-in phrases

- a) It looks like you are feeling. . .
- b) What is it like for you to feel so . . .
- c) How do you experience that feeling?
- d) That must be difficult to feel so. . . how does it affect your life?
- e) Listening to you this closely, I'm feeling some of your pain
- f) My heart aches as I listen to what you are feeling. . .

Cautions:

- 1) Stay away from agreeing or disagreeing.
- 2) Don't solve the problem. . .problem solving **NEGATIVELY** impacts this process.
- 3) Work on not talking about yourself.
- 4) If you counterattack this process will shut down.

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*