

## Client Worksheet

# WHO AM I IN A CONFLICT? THE SEQUENCE TRACKING WORKSHEET

Tracking sets the stage for a U-turn and reveals the protectors who engage in conflict. By becoming familiar with how they engage in arguments, you will, right away, begin the process of breaking uncomfortable patterns of fighting.

1. As you watched your partner say or do whatever it is that triggers your protectors, what did you notice?

What happened in your body?

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What did you hear yourself saying to yourself?

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Were you aware of any feeling(s)? If so, which ones?

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What was your first impulse?

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2. What did you do or say in relationship to that person?

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3. What response did you get back?

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4. How did you react to that?

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5. What did you notice as you stepped back and allowed yourself to see this cycle of reaction and counterreaction?

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6. What did you learn about:

Your protector's job or role?

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Your protector's wish for you?

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How long it has had this job?

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What it fears about not responding in this way?

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Who it protects?

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7. How did your protector respond to your invitation to be in relationship with you in this moment?

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## HELPING COUPLES BEGIN HARD CONVERSATIONS

This handout, which details more U-turn questions, illustrates how therapists can help partners unblend, speak for their parts, and listen from the Self. These queries can teach couples how to have any kind of difficult conversation without self-attack or hurting their partner. If a particular conversation causes trepidation in advance, start by talking about having the conversation.

### First Inquiry

- Check inside: "When you think about having this hard conversation, what comes up? Which parts activate? What are their concerns?"
- "Instead of speaking *from* your parts (e.g., *I'm anxious about looking into my anger*), speak *for* your parts (*I have a part who feels anxious about finding out why I get so angry*)."

### Second Inquiry

- Check inside: "What is the cost of *not* speaking up and *not* having this conversation successfully? Again, speak *for* your parts."

### Third Inquiry

- Check inside: "How do your parts impact your partner? Speak *for* your parts as you consider their impact."

### Fourth Inquiry

- Check inside: "What is your intention in having this conversation? What outcome do you want for you, for your partner, and for your relationship? Speak *for* your parts about their intentions."

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# THE U-TURN AND RE-TURN FOR COUPLES

Learning to make a U-turn, unblend from reactive parts, and speak *for* them instead of *from* them is the key to having hard conversations safely. The process supports each person in gaining clarity, calming the nervous system, and getting perspective on the needs beneath their reactivity. This worksheet is a roadmap for the U-turn and can be used in the office with the help of a therapist or in between sessions.

1. Pause, breathe, and do a U-turn by focusing your attention inward.
2. Pay attention to your body. Describe your:

Breathing

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Heart rate

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Muscle tension

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Inner voices

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Impulses

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3. Befriend the parts you notice by saying hi and letting them know you're here to listen and learn. What do you say to these parts?

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4. Explore your part's fears and vulnerabilities.

What do they fear?

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What's under that fear?

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What do they need?

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5. Report what you learned.

In my body, I noticed:

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I have a part who fears:

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6. Speak for these parts.

I have a part who needs:

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I have a part who wants:

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7. Make a request from the Self. What is the core need?

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## Client Worksheet

# A CHOICE IN EVERY MOMENT

In relationships, we often view frustration and anger as protective attempts to get emotional needs met. With the help of your therapist, use this worksheet to understand the emotional needs behind your frustration or anger and to learn to make requests from your Self instead of making demands from protectors. Partners respond better to an invitation than an obligation.

1. Focusing on your feeling of frustration, what do you notice?

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2. What words do you hear?

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3. What is your normal ("knee-jerk") response when you are frustrated?

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4. Which parts of you react (e.g., controlling, angry, impatient, manipulative, submissive, analyzing)?

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5. What response does your reaction elicit from your partner's parts?

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6. What happens *inside* you when you get this response from your partner's parts (e.g., angry, sad, happy, excited, anxious)?

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7. What do you notice about this cycle of reaction and counterreaction between your protective parts and your partner's protective parts?

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8. Can you see, feel, or sense the vulnerable part underneath your protector's frustrated reaction? What do you know about that part?

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9. What pattern of interactions or incidents in childhood wounded you?

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10. What core need did your young, wounded part look for but not get (e.g., to be heard, noticed, loved, witnessed, held, understood, feel connected)?

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## Client Worksheet

# FINDING AND SPEAKING FOR EMOTIONAL NEEDS

This exercise is a clarifier. Feelings (and the needs they speak for) find expression in the body before becoming conscious thought. By turning to the body with our full attention, we tap into a wealth of crucial information. As the poet, Rumi, said, "The cure for pain is in the pain. These pains you feel are messengers. Listen to them." After listening, speak for the parts you hear. When we listen to parts carefully and speak for their needs, we receive their gifts in return.

1. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and turn your focus inward. Think of a person in your life with whom you have an intimate connection who can anger or frustrate you. Call that person up in your mind's eye and invite them to do or say that angering or frustrating thing. Observe your reactions:

What do you feel in your body?

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What do you hear yourself saying to yourself?

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What feelings are you aware of?

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What is your first impulse?

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Can you recognize this impulse as a "part" of you?

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2. Now let the image of this person float away, and invite your reactive part to turn toward you and begin a gentle inquiry:

What is your role?

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What are you concerned would happen if you didn't react this way?

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Who are you protecting?

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What vulnerability concerns you?

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What childhood incident(s) launched this pattern of reactivity?

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3. Now ask yourself: What did this young part of you need and not get from an adult at that time? Listen for core needs, like the need to be heard, noticed, loved, witnessed, held, understood, or to know you are not alone. Relax and listen. Don't push for an answer or rush your parts. Allow them to take their time and give you information.

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4. Are you available to meet those needs internally right now? Can you be present to that child in the here and now? Why or why not?

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5. To end this inquiry, thank your parts for any and all information, no matter how much or how little. And then check in again with your reactive part. How is it feeling?

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6. Finally, ponder this question: What would it be like to speak for those underlying needs instead of speaking from your reactive parts?

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## Client Worksheet

# DO A U-TURN WITH YOUR PARTS

"Doing a U-turn" means turning your attention inside, to your own parts, when you have a feeling or reaction to someone else that you want to learn more about. Most of us have protectors who deflect attention from vulnerability by downplaying the importance and meaning of our feelings (that is, the feelings of other parts internally) by insisting that some external person caused us to feel that way. Instead of taking this inner voice of blame at face value, we can treat it as a signal that some other part of us, either another protector or an exile, needs to be heard. The U-turn liberates us from the paralysis and powerlessness of blame.

1. First, think of someone in your life who offends you. Make this personal. What does this person do or say that is offensive? Listen to your judging part as you describe them.

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2. Then ask yourself the following questions:

What do your parts want this person to *do* differently?

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Who do your parts want this person to *be* for you?

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What advice do your parts have for this person?

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Let your critic judge this person without censoring. List your thoughts about the person's behavior in this situation.

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What is it about this situation that your parts don't ever want you to experience again?

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In order to feel less offended and be happier in a relationship with this person, how do your parts want you to act with this person?

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3. Now ask the critic to give you some space inside to be curious and to listen, and when you can feel that space, do a U-turn. First, turn global criticisms about this person into factual observations.

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4. Now ask yourself: When someone treats me badly, how do I treat myself? Do my parts criticize me? Do my parts plot revenge? Do my parts repeatedly avoid accepting and feeling sad about what happened by rehearsing a different scenario with a different outcome? If so, ask them: Whom do you protect?

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5. Once you have uncovered the part of you who is being protected, with permission, ask that part: What happens to you while these other parts are criticizing, plotting, and undoing?

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6. Now check again: Do you still have space inside to be curious and to listen? If so, inquire about which of your parts are involved in the relationship with this person, and consider how your parts behave. Make a list of these parts, and set an intention to get to know them better.

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*Adapted from the work of Byron Katie*

## Client Worksheet

# A U-TURN IN A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

It's not easy to notice our own projections—protectors who use this strategy don't intend us to notice ourselves at all. This thought experiment asks you to revisit an activating situation by going inside and noticing in hindsight. This is a good way to introduce yourself to protective parts who only come out for emergencies and can otherwise be hard to find. This is an opportunity to meet your protectors and find your exiles.

1. Go back to a situation when someone hurt you. Notice how your protectors reacted. Did they immediately start thinking about what to *do*? If so, what was it? And what did they do? Did your response include: insisting on being understood correctly, complying to forestall conflict, or plotting for revenge? Jot down whatever you learn.

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2. Now ask the parts who reacted to join you in answering these questions:

Which part got hurt in that situation?

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What happened to the hurt part when other parts reacted?

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Will the reactive parts give you permission to help the part who got hurt? Why or why not?

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Would the hurt part like help? Why or why not?

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3. Then consider these questions:

Have I behaved in the same (hurtful) way with other people? How so?

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Do I have parts who act this way internally? If so, which parts?

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What other parts of this person have I noticed?

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How do those parts behave? Make a list.

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## THE IFIO DO-OVER: Catch Your Protector in Action and Try Again

A *do-over* is a quick repair. As we befriend protectors and become aware of harm they have caused, it gets easier to notice when we are misattuned or unkind to our partner and interrupt the cycle by apologizing and asking to *redo* the interaction in a Self-led way. We outline the steps of a communication *do-over* here:

1. Acknowledge your misattunement or unkindness.
2. Ask your partner if they will stay with you so you can *redo* the communication.
3. Wait for their agreement.
4. Try again by speaking *for* your part, and then take time to notice and speak for the part's underlying (exiled) need.
5. Check in with your partner. What do they hear from their parts?
6. Listen from the Self.

### Here is an example:

1. A frustrated part takes aim: "I've asked you over and over not to do that!"
2. The do-over: "I'm sorry I lashed out. I don't want to talk like that. May I try again?"
3. Wait for partner's affirmative response.
4. Then: "I have a part who feels frustrated when this happens repeatedly. I wonder if we could talk about the pattern at some point?"
5. Check in: "Did that land differently for you? Is there anything you want to say?"
6. Listen to the impact of your behavior without defensiveness.

## Therapist Worksheet

### **THERAPIST PARTS: RESPONDING TO OUR OWN REACTIVITY**

All therapists get caught in their own dilemmas during therapy. As a rule, from the beginning of treatment, we ask therapists to be curious about their own responses to the partners in a couple. The following questions will help you be curious when your parts get reactive.

1. What sensations do you feel in your body? Describe their location, their intensity, and the movement of their energy.

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2. What are your initial impulses (e.g., flight, fight, run, hide, numb, laugh, collapse, give up, protect)?

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3. What do your parts say to you?

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4. Identify and describe your protectors, either managers or firefighters.

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5. Identify and describe your exiles.

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6. Look back over your notes to identify any parts who react predictably and repeatedly. Would they be willing to meet your Self? What would help them be willing to unblend?

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## Therapist Worksheet

# EXPERIMENTING WITH EXPERIENCES: Re-Enactment

To set up the following two experiments, begin by asking the couple if they are interested in experimenting, and describe what you have in mind. Create safety during this process by noticing first if you have the confidence to stay present for whatever happens. If not, help your parts unblend. Then get permission from the couple to try something new and welcome resistant parts.

During an experiment, pay attention to moments when a partner's inquiry could deepen, and encourage them to express vulnerability. Help them anchor their experiences by continually asking what they notice and what's happening in their bodies.

Finally, leave time for processing individual and relational experiences.

### Experiment #1: Reversing Roles

1. Invite the couple to choose and describe an incident to focus on. Choose an incident that evoked strong sensations, feelings, and thoughts in one or both partners. Before proceeding, help them decide what they can agree on about the event, and remind them that memory is inaccurate, especially when coupled with strong feelings.
2. Invite the partners to stand and move around the room if they're willing.
3. Negotiate whose experience will be attended to first. We will call this person Partner A.
4. Invite both to go inside (do a U-turn) and ask protectors to unblend so each partner can find the parts who were involved with the event in question.
5. Check to see if Partner B is aware of their parts and can stay present to listen.
6. Then direct your attention to Partner A and ask, "What did Partner B say or do at the time that triggered this cascade of sensations, feelings, and thoughts?"
7. Tell Partner A that you are going to ask Partner B to reenact that triggering behavior, and ask Partner A to notice:
  - Their body
  - What they hear their parts saying internally
  - Their feelings

- The part who seems most vulnerable in this situation
8. Then ask Partner B to reenact the triggering behavior.
    - Check in with Partner A during this time. Did they notice the vulnerable part under their reactivity? Take a moment to explore its hopes, fears, and needs.
  9. Check in with Partner B:
    - What was it like to act that way again?
    - What did they notice about their parts?
    - What feelings come up now?
  10. Now (if there's time) or in the next session, reverse roles and repeat the sequence.

### **Experiment #2: Going Deeper: Becoming the Other**

With the aim of helping partners truly understand each other and gain a broader perspective on their dynamic, this experiment goes beyond role reversal by asking each partner to use their imagination to embody the other partner and feel into the other's parts. This experiment begins with the initial steps of experiment #1:

1. Ask Partner A, "What did your partner say or do at the time that triggered this cascade of sensations, feelings, and thoughts?"
2. Invite Partner B to reenact the trigger behavior while Partner A notices:
  - o Their body
  - o What they hear their parts saying internally
  - o Their feelings
  - o The part who seems most vulnerable in this situation
3. Check in with Partner B:
  - o What was it like to act that way again?
  - o What did they notice about their parts?
  - o How do they feel now?
4. Now, instead of simply reversing roles, ask Partner A to imagine *being* Partner B. Slow this way down. Explain that Partner A will repeat the triggering behavior while noticing their body, what they hear inside, and what they feel. Then invite Partner A to enact the triggering behavior.
5. Now explore what Partner A noticed while doing the behavior, and ask Partner A to speak for the wishes and needs of Partner B's parts.

6. Next, ask what Partner B noticed about being in Partner A's shoes, and ask Partner B to speak for the wishes and needs of Partner A's parts.
7. Ask each partner to speak for the experience of being in the other's shoes:
  - What have they learned?
  - What surprised them?
  - Did they notice any projections? That is, anything that belonged to them rather than the other person?
  - Take time to explore how this might inform future inquiry.
8. Finally, invite them to rescript their original interaction to see how it goes now.
9. Take time to note new insights before stopping.