

Recording 7 – If Your Partner is Putting You Down

Practice Sequence

1. Imagine yourself in a future situation where it seems likely that your partner is going to be angry and may start putting you down. Think about the particular thing that she might be angry about, imagine what her disrespectful words might be, and visualize the expression that she might have on her face.
2. As you picture this, take a big inhale and as you exhale, completely relax your body. Quietly say to yourself, “There’s no need to panic.” “I know what to do.”
3. Picture yourself beginning with the a simple statement, such as:
“Don’t!” “I’m listening!”
4. If you’re able to relax and make this simple two-part statement, chances are good that your partner will become less harsh. When this happens, use the skills you rehearsed using Recording 4 (In fact, *any* time your partner stops putting you down, switch over to the skills described in Recording 4).
5. But you should also be prepared for the possibility that your partner will continue putting you down. Imagine this happening. In your mind, hear the words she might say and see her expression. As you do this, relax your body and slow your breathing. Picture yourself interrupting her and repeating your request, this time with a little more emphasis, saying something like:
“Hey, I can’t listen when you talk to me this way. Obviously you’re upset and I probably need to hear what you have to say. Don’t make it hard for me to listen!”
Chances are good that, if your first request didn’t work, this one will.
6. Pause the recording, back up and memorize each of these phrases or come up with similar ones in your own language. Take the time to picture yourself your partner putting you down, and then practice relaxing your body, slowing your breathing and saying these statements out loud. Do this over and over again until it feels natural to you and you can make these statements from memory.
7. The odds are good that making one or both of these statements will be all that you need. But you should be prepared for all possibilities, so for the moment let’s assume the worst. Imagine yourself making these requests and picture your partner continuing to put you down. Here, you need to draw a line. Picture saying something like, “You know what? I need a break,” and then walking away from your partner. As you’re imagining all of this, continue to relax your body, taking big inhales and long, slow-release exhales.
8. When you begin to walk away, there are a couple of things that might happen. Let’s anticipate each of them and practice your response.

- A. Imagine that your partner is mad that you're walking away, and is following you angrily, refusing to let you go.

Imagine yourself responding by turning to her and telling her that you will talk if she can talk to you differently, but you're not going to stay in a conversation where you're feeling put down. At this point, she may do one of two things:

- B. Realizing that you're about to walk away, she might actually change her attitude for the first time and simply start talking to you about what's bothering her.

Picture this in your mind, and as you do it, relax your body, take a big inhale and let the air out slowly and picture yourself accepting this change, hitting the reset button, and simply listening to her complaint with an open mind— using the skills you rehearsed in Recording 4.

- C. But let's say she doesn't become more respectful. Picture her instead continuing to follow you and trying to prevent you from walking away.

Here you would need to do whatever you can to get away – short of getting physical or verbally attacking her. If she pushes it this far, you're going to need to have a conversation with her later where you let her know that you can't continue your relationship normally unless she agrees that it's never okay to prevent you from getting some space when you need it. The skills you can use for this are described in chapter five in the section called, "When your partner commits an obvious offense."

9. But now let's picture you getting away. In fact, *let's assume that you're in this spot right now.*

Your main task is to avoid making a big deal in your own mind of the fact that you had to walk away. Try to take the attitude that it doesn't have to be an awful thing. Begin letting go of your frustration or anger by letting go of any physical tension you may have in your body.

- Sit down (or lay down) and release any tightness you may have in any part of your body.
- Take a big inhale, and then a long, slow-release exhale.
- Say yourself, "Okay. She crossed the line. I gave her a chance to stop it and she didn't. But I think I got my point across. If I can stay on track here, the odds are that she won't do this as much in the future."

10. Pause the recording and do this relaxing, breathing and letting go of frustration process for 2 or 3 minutes. Then, get involved in a project or activity that requires your full attention for a while. Take your mind completely off the situation and see if you can get to a place inside where you are feeling okay. Once you do these things, come back and listen to the rest of this recording. It will help you mentally rehearse the remaining skills that you'll need.

(take a break)

11. Imagine yourself approaching your partner sometime soon and letting her know that that you're still interested in understanding what she was upset about. Picture yourself coming into this conversation, completely relaxed, without a chip on your shoulder. So there you are

- You're not demanding an apology.
- You aren't trying to get her to see how awful she was in the previous discussion.
- You're just hitting the reset button and letting her know that you care about the fact that something was bothering her you want to understand it.
- You're listening with an open mind, but you're also ready to use the same sequence of skills again if she starts putting you down.

12. Let's prepare for a couple of other things that could happen. Picture your partner venting anger about the fact that you walked away from her when she was expressing her feelings to you the first time. Imagine yourself responding to her by saying,

"I don't know what to tell you. I couldn't feel okay about the way you were talking to me -- but that was then, and this is now. I do care about the fact that something was bothering you and I bet it will go better if we try to talk about it now."

13. Imagine your partner continuing to press the issue, insisting that there wasn't anything wrong with the way she was talking to you, and that you should need to apologize for walking away. As you imagine this, relax your body and picture yourself responding by briefly pointing out some concrete things that made you feel put down – like any name calling that might have happened, or below the belt jabs. Imagine her insisting that she wasn't putting you down, or justifying her actions. Picture yourself responding by saying,

"Look, I don't want to get into a debate about what happened. We're just going to end up arguing about how we were arguing. What I'm thinking is that we should try to resolve the thing that was upsetting you in the first place. I bet we can steer clear of trouble this time if we both try to relax and just talk about it. Can we do that?"

If there were no clearly identifiable derogatory words or phrases that lead you to decide to walk away (what bothered you was her condescending attitude or tone of disgust), imagine yourself saying something like:

"OK, I don't know for sure if it was you or me, but I was feeling put down, and I can't stay in a conversation if I feel that way. But that was then, and this is now. Do you want to try to explain again?"

Imagine that she continues to insist that you apologize, and that there was nothing she did that justified you walking away. Imagine yourself responding by saying something like:

"I don't think that either of us is exactly in a position to be unbiased about what happened back there. And we could argue about it all night. I'm willing to let it go and try to talk about the thing that got you upset in the first place. Do you want to do that or not?"

14. If your partner continues to blame you, you'll need to continue walking away. But this probably won't happen if you're able to do the things I've described. So let's imagine that your partner does begin to talk again about the thing that she was upset about in the first place. Here, you would be responding, using the skills summarized in Recording 4. If she started putting you down again, you would do the things you're rehearsed in this recording again. But this probably wouldn't be needed. Your partner would probably be more respectful in the second conversation.
15. If for some reason she didn't become more respectful during a second conversation, you might repeat the process and try it a third time. If she still continued to put you down, there's one final skill that you may need to consider -- "*Refusing to Continue Business as Usual.*" This skill is described in Chapters Two and Five.

If you come to a situation where you think that you need to implement this skill, please do it in consultation with a therapist. But the odds are very good that you won't need to do this. The openness and flexibility skills along with the standing up skills summarized in this recording will likely be enough to elicit more respect from her.