

Recording 6 – When Being Open and Flexible Isn't Enough

Practice Sequence

The skills summarized below are for situations where, in spite of you clearly communicating openness and flexibility, your partner remains closed and inflexible. He makes no attempt to understand your viewpoint even though you've taken time to try and understand the logic of his feelings. In other words, you've already used the skills described in recordings 2-5 in this series, but your partner has made no effort to use the skills.

1. Picture yourself in a past situation where you were trying to be open-minded and understanding, but your partner wasn't doing the same. He was saying or implying that your viewpoint was stupid, or obviously lacking in some way.
2. As you picture this, relax your body so that you're loose, and slow your breathing. Imagine yourself back in that situation thinking to yourself, "There's no need to panic. I know what to do."
3. Picture yourself back in the situation saying something like,

"Please don't act like it's obvious that obviously you're right and I'm wrong. I'm trying to see the possible good things about your point of view, and need to feel like you're trying to do the same." (This is an example of a skill called "Ask and Offer." You ask your partner to reconsider his assumption that there's something wrong with your thinking or your preferences, and you offer assurance that you're going to try to do the same.)
4. If your partner continues with the same attitude in spite of your request, imagine repeating your request, using the same formula where you ask for something but also give something at the same time:

"Who made you the judge of what counts as a good enough argument? My perspective makes more sense to me than yours does, but that doesn't mean that there's *nothing* good about what you're saying. Come on, man. Let's try to work together here."
5. Imagine that he continues to be closed-minded or inflexible in spite your second request. If this happens, rather than concluding that he's being controlling or selfish, say to yourself, "There must be some reason why he's being this way that I don't understand." Broaden the scope of possibilities. Think about possible explanations for his attitude that might go beyond the present circumstances (e.g., maybe this situation strikes a nerve or symbolizes something for him that you don't understand; maybe he has felt taken advantage of or disrespected by other people lately and he's taking it out on you; maybe he has been giving into you lately in ways that you don't realize and he feels like you owe

him.)

Say something to him like,

“I don’t think I understand what’s going on here. This isn’t like you. I feel like I’m trying but I’m not getting anything back. Are you mad at me about something else? Why are you being so inflexible? I feel like you’re sort of putting me down.” (This skill is called *Broadening the Scope*)

If he starts talking about some underlying things that may be affecting his attitude, find things that are understandable about his feelings using the same skills you practiced using the other recordings.

If he continues to be closed-minded or inflexible, begin your exit from the conversation, saying something like, “You know what? I’m not up for this conversation anymore. In fact, I need a little space.” Then walk into another room, or tell him that you want to get some fresh air and go outside.

Note: Don’t cut off the conversation until you’ve demonstrated in several ways that you are willing to be open and flexible. Only break it off if he doesn’t respond in kind, even when you use the “ask and offer” and “broaden the scope” skills described above.

6. When you are by yourself, 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 physical tension.
 - 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.
 - Tell yourself, “It isn’t over yet. If I can stay on track here, odds are that he’ll become more respectful.
7. 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 with your partner and see if you can get to a place inside where you are feeling okay.
8. Once you are feeling more relaxed, think back on what happened for a minute and try saying to yourself something like,

“I guess it’s not exactly a crime for him to be stuck in his own way of thinking. It’s natural for him to want to have his own way. I think I got my point across. He’s going to have to respect my feelings as much as his own.
9. Later, bring up the unresolved topic again without having a chip on your shoulder.
 - Don’t demand an apology.
 - Don’t try to get him to see how awful he was in the previous discussion.
 - Just hit the reset button and start talking about the issue again.
 - Again, show yourself to be open and flexible -- and if he doesn’t do the same, begin the

sequence of skills described above, breaking off the conversation again if needed.

10. If for some reason he doesn't become more respectful during a second or third conversation, 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 need to implement this skill it's a good idea to 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 above will likely be enough to elicit more cooperation from your partner).

11. Whenever your partner shows signs of being more open and flexible, return to the openness and flexibility skills described in recordings 2-5 with the goal of making agreements that take both of your feelings into account.