

# Restructuring Frustration: The Process

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The original ideas come from many sources.

[Click Here for the Flow Chart in PDF.](#) [Click Here for the Prompts Sheet in PDF.](#)

## Introduction

This article is the result of 10 years of practice by my wife and I. It is a step by step structured process that will eventually both remove all critical frustrations from a relationship but will also build confidence and skills in dealing with new frustrations when they arise.

There are other ways to do what is called a Restructuring Frustration Process. This is the one we adopted for ourselves and teach.

The attached sheets ([Flow Chart](#) and [Prompts](#)) are useful during initial training. I suggest you print them and refer to them as you read this article. The steps below match the ones on the sheets. I also suggest you plan to get so good at this process that you can do it from memory upon demand. It works.

For background, you may want to pre-read my articles on [Healing Frustrations](#) and on [Behavior Change Requests](#).

I am going to present this material pretty much the way I teach it in the office. There are thirteen steps. I suggest you do them all for the first 20 or so processes. Later you can drop step 12–13 and do 1 thru 10. And even later the whole thing may reduce to steps 10 and 11 only.

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## Step One: Make an Appointment

The goal of relationship work is maintain as much a sense of safety as possible. This process is a bit difficult, takes concentration, and is often dealing with vital problems. I suggest you explicitly let your partner know when you want to do this. "Hun, I would like to do a Restructuring Frustration Process. When will you be ready?"

I think the responding partner should agree to the process as soon as is possible. There is an significant advantage to getting to it right away. However you may want to get ready – i.e. get some paper, get a copy of the Flow Chart form, put the kids to bed, etc. "Ok. I will be ready in 15 minutes. Let's do it."

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## Step Two: State Your Frustration in one or two sentences.

From now on the responding partner becomes the facilitator, and so I am giving you directions which you then give to your partner. You will prompt your partner and then mirror. Many of your prompts will be what are called sentence stems, the first part of a sentence with the last part left off. (Kind of like, "New York is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to .....") After step 8 you will also validate. In step 11 you will make a selection and step 13 is a chance for you to share. Otherwise for those moments, you are the facilitator of the telling of your partner's story.

And so, here we go. When you are ready you prompt your partner, "Please state your frustration in one or two sentences." You will mirror this and can make notes in box 2 to help you. Keep your partner to two sentences. Much more of their story is about to unfold, but first we must get the trigger.

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### **Step Three: State the Trigger Behavior**

Now, prompt your partner for the Trigger Behavior. This is the action you did, what a video camera would have seen or heard, that began your partner's frustration. It should not be an interpretation, but an action you can agree that you did. Examples of triggers: "You walked in at 10:45 pm." "You sighed and rolled your eyes." Examples of interpretations: "You were late." "You were disgusted with me."

Prompt: "State the trigger behavior you saw that drew your attention to your frustration."

Write it down. You are going to need the exact words.

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### **Step Four: State your feelings at the time.**

From step 4 thru step 8 you are helping your partner put together their story in a structured way. Their story began when you did the trigger behavior and so in each step you will retell their story starting with your trigger and finishing with a prompt for new information. Here we go.

Prompt: "So when I rolled my eyes [fill in the trigger behavior phrase from Step Three.] you felt.....? State feeling words."

Mirror, and make notes in Box 4. Do not let your partner say [Feel That or Feel Like](#). Make sure they use only [feeling words](#) and perhaps descriptions of intensity.

Example of Mirror: "So when I rolled my eyes, you felt hurt, sad, and diminished. Any other feeling?" Notice you have included the trigger phrase in the mirror. This is useful.

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### **Step Five: State your reaction at the time.**

Now, "reaction" refers to what they actually did. And I have found it useful to prompt for two kinds of reaction: visible and internal. But first let me tell how you prompt.

Prompt: "So when I rolled my eyes [the trigger from Box 3], you felt hurt, sad and diminished [the feelings from Box 4] and you reacted by....."

Note that you have restated the trigger one more time, you have mirrored their feelings again, and have now given a sentence stem inviting their descriptions of their reactions. This is the pattern for steps 5 thru 8: a) state and own the trigger, repeat their story up until this point of the process, and then prompt for new information with a sentence stem.

Now, let's go back to the two kinds of reactions. The first, pretty simply, is what they did. Examples: "I was quiet." "I complained." "I yelled, 'No!' three times" "I walked away." The second kind of reaction is about what is going on inside of them. You do not want them to share thoughts at this point, just whether they have lots of thoughts or silence inside them while the outside reaction is going on. Examples: "Inside feverish thoughts were

going on." "Inside all was silent. I went blank." "I started to think quickly and then shut down." You may have to prompt for that inner stuff, "And inside what kind of stuff was going on?"

You mirror this reactive stuff and make notes in Box 5.

Example of the Mirror: "So when I rolled my eyes, you reacted by being quiet while your mind was spinning. Any other reaction?"

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### **Step Six: State your hurt at the time.**

So, let's get the hurt out in the open. Note than in the prompt you say all the story from step 3 thru step 5 and then prompt for the data in step 6.

Prompt: "So when I rolled my eyes [Box 3], you felt hurt, sad and diminished [Box 4] and you reacted by being quiet while your mind was spinning (Box 5) and what hurt you so much was....."

You mirror the hurt and make notes in Box 6. I've found it useful if what your partner says does not contain a hurt, that I prompt again. "And what hurts about that is...." This is a special kind of Pull and I suggest you only do one of them. (See the [Gentle Art of Pulling](#).)

Example of the Mirror: "So when I rolled my eyes, what hurt you so much was that you thought I was judging you as worthless and stupid. Is there more to your hurt?"

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### **Step Seven: State your fear at this time.**

Now, we go for the fear under the hurt. Again in the prompt you tell the whole story again from step 3 through step 6.

Prompt: "So when I rolled my eyes [Box 3], you felt hurt, sad and diminished [Box 4] and you reacted by being quiet while your mind was spinning [Box 5] and what hurt you so much was that you thought I was judging you as worthless and stupid [Box 6], and what you feared happening was ....."

Sometimes your partner will identify a small fear. I find it worth it to Pull them into deeper stuff. So I prompt: "And if this happens every day, day in and day out, what you fear will ultimately happen is...."

Mirror this fear and make notes in Box 7. Only one more.

Example of this mirror: "So when I rolled my eyes, you feared that I would never come to respect you, it would get worse, and you fear I would eventually leave you. Did I get that? Is there more to this fear?"

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### **Step Eight: State what all this reminds you of from your childhood.**

This is the big step. It takes the present situation and evokes memories from childhood that are linked to the present. The reptilian brain always has these old memories and reacts to them. The present is just the context for the old pattern emerging.

And so for the big prompt: "So when I rolled my eyes [Box 3], you felt hurt, sad and diminished [Box 4] and you reacted by being quiet while your mind was spinning [Box 5]"

and what hurt you so much was that you thought I was judging you as worthless and stupid [Box 6], and you feared that I would never come to respect you, it would get worse, and you fear I would eventually leave you and you would be alone [Box 7]. [Pause] And what all this reminds you of from your childhood is...."

**A note to the frustrated partner at this point:** You are being invited to drop into your childhood memories. To make this leap of thinking, to jump down into the lower part of your iceberg, you have to be helpful. Let me share what I have found makes this easier. This is not about thinking, but about noticing. The memory you are looking for is already there, you just have to notice it. I suggest you don't try to make sense of the memory. Just let it emerge. What I do is I listen to my partner calmly mirroring back my story to me. I listen, and then when she delivers the prompt at the end, I just watch my mind. I look for a scene, a room, a place with people in it that just pops into my mind. I sometimes have to wait. I sometimes ask my partner to read my story again. But eventually that memory surfaces or perhaps surfaces repeatedly. I go for it. Grab that story and tell my partner all about it.

Listen to your partner's story. Mirroring works very well. Lots of Pulling works well. I've found that treating their childhood story as a scene from a play lets you do some Pulling like this. "Who was there?" "What were they doing?" "Tell me what you felt when they did that?" "What happened next?" "What was that like for you?" Acting and being interested helps.

When your partner is through telling their story and you are through mirroring, then you have a great chance to **validate** the whole story. The key is that the childhood memory was evoked by your trigger, way back in step 3. Thus each box 4,5,6,7 all make sense when you can see that the childhood memory was present. I have a lot of fun, like a detective, with this. Let me just start you off with an example, and note how I am reading through the boxes as I go.

Example of Validation Step: "Oh, I see, when I rolled my eyes you felt hurt and diminished cuz that was what you felt when your dad walked away. And you felt sad cuz you couldn't get him to come back. That's the feelings. Now the reaction. Oh. I see. You were quiet cuz you were embarrassed to make a big deal of dad walking away in front of all the other kids, but you were thinking fast and furiously about how to stop him. Let's see the hurt. Hmm. Oh. It hurt you when I rolled my eyes cuz it reminded you of your dad's walking away when you struck out (baseball) without swinging. It seemed he saw you as stupid, especially when later he told you "No one ever goes down without swinging." And the fear? Hm. Hell, he was walking away when you wanted him to like you so much. He even got in his car and drove away leaving you alone. And from what you've told me, he often left you alone. Wow. No wonder you reacted to my rolling my eyes."

I typically work my way through each box, seeing the sense in each by using the childhood memory as context for the present reaction. This step can have an awesome effect on the person who is receiving the validation.

The first part of a Restructuring Frustration serves to Validate the Frustrated person and to awaken their partner to what is going on when their partner is upset. To say it differently, this part helps with making both people aware when someone's button is pushed. In a way it validates both parties and prepares for the repair process.

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## Step Nine: The Global Request

The next three steps are the repair process put into action. You might want to review my article on [Healing Frustrations](#) to understand the repair process.

And now back to the facilitation steps. In this step you are to act like a magical genie. That may seem silly, and I think that sense of playfulness is useful. The idea is to get your partner to speak up about what they want fix their pain and wounds, but using the thinking of a child. This involve Magical Prompting and Magical Mirroring.

Examples of Magical Prompting: "So I am magical. What do you want from me that will fix these problems once and for all?" "I can do anything. Just ask."

Examples of Magical Mirroring: "Ok. So I will give you a new set of parents. No problem. What else?" "Fine. You win the lottery and have a million dollars a minute for the rest of your life. No problem. What else?" "Ok. I will tell you you are beautiful, every day, 24 hours a day, for the rest of your life. What else?" "Ok. I will listen to you all the time, 24 hours a day, for ever. No problem. What else?" "Fine, I will give you a great gift every day, just what you want, without your asking, by reading your mind. That sounds like fun. What else?" "OK. You now have a completely new childhood with parents who understand you all the time. Simple. What else do you want?"

If your partner says the do not want something, a negative wish, mirror it and invite them to ask for what they would like instead. Example: They request, "I want you to not interrupt me ever again." Mirror it, "Ok I will never interrupt you again, and instead you want me to.....?" Always get a positive action request - something to do.

Keep Pulling until they stop. The goal here is to activate your partner's little child inside of them which wants everything to be perfect. And we do this for two reasons. The next step will often be disappointingly concrete and practical. And, often this Global Request stage helps focus on something that will make a good BCR.

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### **Step Ten: Get Three Behavior Change Requests**

Now you will invite your partner to come up, one by one, with three [Behavior Change Requests](#). The whole theory and practice of these BCRs is explained in my paper on them. Invite your partner to come up with each one at a time. Before they go on to the next one, review it to see if you can do it. If you can't, then negotiate a revision. Your goal is to not leave step ten until you are presented with three do-able actions that may assist in the healing of your partner's wounds.

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### **Step Eleven: Select One BCR and Commit to do it.**

You are now faced with three possible actions to help heal your partner. At this point, these three are better than anything you will ever come up with on your own. Pick one. My partner used to pick the easiest one at first when I was the frustrated one, or at least it seemed to me. Later, she started trying to guess which one was the most powerful. I am not sure it makes any difference. The concept is that if you do one of these BCRs, you are doing 100% of what you can do. You can do more, but don't have to. Commit to one.

**And DO IT!** Once you have committed to it, I very strongly recommend that you do not fail to do it. I have seen relationships that could not recover from a BCR promised and the promise not kept. I think you are dealing with deep, deep emotional issues and a betrayal here can set you back for years. Treat this commitment as sacred. That's fair warning.

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**Step Twelve: Sender Shares about their Wound**

Prompt: "And in gifting you with this BCR, I am helping heal your wound of....."

You want your partner to name and become familiar with the wound they came by in childhood and that is still affecting their lives.

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**Step Thirteen: You get to share about your resistance.**

What is so wonderful about this process is that what frustrates your partner about you, is something that you need to work on as well. When you "heal" them, you "heal" yourself. Most often you will find something about what your partner asked for that is difficult for you to do. This is typically a stunted or undeveloped part of your self. So identify it and stretch into it. This whole process is a WIN-WIN for both of you.

"You are welcome. Giving you that BCR will help change my resistance to ..... and challenge me to grow ...."

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**One last note:**

Please note that at no time in the process did the Frustrated person blame their partner. Blaming surely defeats progress. Each time you say the phrase, "So when I rolled my eyes..." each time you repeat what you did as a trigger, you free your partner up for looking at themselves. And each time you do the process you will, I believe, become more and more at awe about what can happen in your partner when you do almost nothing. You are not capable of causing all this trouble in them. You are an incidental witness who can help heal them if you want.

My best wishes. AI