

Behavior Change Requests

A Specific Relationship Tool for Making Progress

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This article is part of the Healing Frustrations paper. [Click Here](#).

Now, I really like being efficient. Doing something over and over that doesn't work seems an utter waste to me. Thus Behavior Change Requests (BCRs) are for me wonderful. How many times have I asked myself, "Specifically, what can I do to make things better?" and gotten no answer. I used to think on my gravestone they would write, "He tried." Now, I think they might write, "He did it." I love finding out WHAT WORKS!

By the way, the term BCR came from Imago Relationship Therapy developed by Harville Hendrix. Their process is a bit different from the one that Sandra and I developed. What I am sharing is our process.

For me, a BCR is a specific thing to do, that may "fix" your partner's frustrations. At a minimum it will be in the right direction. Elsewhere I have written about Caring Behaviors and Caring Days. These generate specific actions that help make your partner feel safe. Notice my emphasis on the word "specific." Caring Days stresses the difference between Global Requests and Specific Requests. A Specific Request can be done. A Global Request is too abstract and vague to be more than a useful starting phrase.

A BCR is a Caring Behavior targeted on your partner's wound. I am not just talking about Safety. I am talking about healing – getting the Right Person to do the Right Thing. The selection of the Right Person is ensured by the wonderful process of partner selection – falling in love and joining up. Next you need to develop the habit of finding the Right Thing, using trial and error – BCRs.

Like Caring Behaviors/Days, the only one who can possibly come up with the right action, the Right healing Thing-to-do, is the receiver. It is critical to identify who is the sender and who the receiver. And you both can be frustrated, or upset, at the same time. (See my Story: On Horses in the paper on Healing Frustrations. [Click here](#).) If both are upset, flip a coin and go for one first. Then do the other. Take turns. So let's focus on the roles.

Sender: Your job is to bug your partner! You don't have to try as you will do it anyway. Bugging, or supplying triggers, is why you were selected. Your habits of clearing your throat often, of picking your nose, of interrupting, of speaking critical comments, of going slowly, of impatience, of speaking loudly, of ignoring hot topics, of withdrawing, of pushing, etc. were all part of why your partner selected you. All those things serve to trigger your partner into frustration. Good for you. Don't stop bugging them too soon, not until you've solved that frustration that pops up in your partner.

Your job is to be part of a team with them to heal their hurts by identifying and addressing their hidden fears. Your job is to hear and validate them. And your job is to practice the BCR that they come up with in order to see if it heals their wound.

By the way your job is to be a receiver also. Don't forget this. Relationships have to be balanced. If you work three times on their frustrations and don't work on any of yours, things will go wrong quickly. Try it. You'll see.

Receiver: Your job is to get upset when your partner does a trigger behavior and notice it. Don't rush. Trust me, they will bug you. When you or your partner notice your upset,

your job is to be part of the team to fix the wound you carry. Yes, it is your wound, and it needs attention. Perhaps it has been waiting for a long time. When you are upset, the wound is near the surface. Move as a team quickly when the wound hurts.

Your job is to cooperate with your partner in validating you and your wound. The Restructuring Frustration process is a great aid. Stick with it till the end. Your job is to work at coming up with a guess of what is the Right Thing for your partner to do. Yes, I said "guess." It is extremely probably that you don't yet know what is the Right Thing that your wound needs. You have to come up with the pot-shots that the team is going to make. Your design this pot-shot (BCR) and your partner does it.

It is your job to experience your partner's BCR actions and to sense whether they are on target or off. And then it is your job, eventually to repeat the process and guide your partner into the target – Right Person doing Right Thing.

How do you know you — your BCR that your partner is doing — are on the target? You will feel grateful that your partner is trying, that they are doing what you asked, but it doesn't feel complete yet and the trigger behavior still bugs you.

How do you know you are close, that your BCR that your partner is doing is almost Right? My experience is that when they a close BCR, you may stop breathing, you may feel startled, you may deeply pause. There is often a feeling of awe – wow!

How do you know you've "done it?" Well my experience of that is as follows. One day, I notice that my partner is doing the trigger behavior again and I haven't been bugged by it in several weeks or months. The reactive energy is no longer present. It went away while you were not noticing it.

What is a BCR?

I love the memory device I was given years ago. A BCR is **SMART**.

SPECIFIC: This means that whatever you ask for it is exact and concrete. It is not vague or abstract. Both people should really know what to do. Particularly the receiver should be so clear about the request that they know they can do it. I like the idea that it has to pass the **Stranger Test**. If a stranger picked up this request, they could do it. It doesn't need interpretation.

Example: Call me before you leave work to come home. Tell me, "I'm on my way." Listen to my response. If I don't answer the phone, just say that you are leaving for home and hang up.

MEASURABLE: This means that success is easily defined. The goal is to make sure that the Sender's actions are defined in such a way that they can do the BCR without needing to worry about the effect on the Receiver. I think it very important that the Sender knows they can be successful before the Receiver finishes defining the BCR. This includes defining times and numbers of repetitions. Also, I like the idea that this must pass the **Deadman's Test**. In other words, a dead man cannot do it. It is an action and not a non-action. "Don't call me during work" will fail this test as a deadman could not call your partner. A BCR must be an action.

Example: When I come in the door every day for the rest of this work week, I want you to give me a hug from the front, say, "I am glad you are home", and hold me for at least one minute.

ACHIEVABLE: This means that the BCR must be within the reasonable capacity of the Sender. This rules out magical or Global requests. When the Receiver is developing the BCR, it is critical for the Sender to consider what is doable. Requesting "at least three calls at work during the next week" and achieving that is ten times better than requesting a call every day and missing a few.

Example: I want you to offer to schedule at least three date nights within the next month. I want them to be an evening with just us doing something away from the home. I want you to come up with several suggestions at least three days ahead of the night, which I can pick one from.

RELEVANT: This means that the BCR should be in some way related to the content of the Frustration: the Desire Blocked, the Feelings, the Thinking Processes, the Reactive Behavior, the Hidden Fear, the Deep Desire, or anything else about the wounding that surfaces during the process. I am amazed at how "far off target" the BCR can seem and yet still be on Target.

Example: (The issue seems about abandonment.) I want you to take out the garbage every other day for two weeks.

TIME-BOUND/TIME-LIMITED: It is very important that there be a beginning and an end to the BCR. If you put in no end, then I think you are requesting Magic from your partner. Doesn't seem to work. It may be that your partner adopts the BCR as a new behavior and makes it a habit. That's fine, but it should not be part of your request.

Example: Over the next two weeks, I want you to take my face gently in your hands, pause for at least 10 seconds, then look into my eyes and say, "I love you just the way you are." Then hold my face for another 10 seconds at least or let me just hug you. I want you to do it at least 3 times each week. That's a minimum of 6 times. Thanks.

How many should you do?

I believe in peel-the-onion process of relationship work. I mean that I work on the next thing that comes up. Following this rule I think it right to be doing one BCR at a time, finish it, and then do another. I think this works best. Of course when we started this process there seemed to be lots of Frustrations around. Still I think this process works best.

Some people believe in the shot-gun process. Work on everything at once. This involves creating a large list of BCRs. We tried this and didn't adopt it.

I think you should be prepared to do BCRs whenever a Frustration appears. This may be for the rest of your lives, though in practice solving the wounds means that the use of BCRs drops off.

In the Frustration Process you will see that I recommend that the Receiver comes up with three BCRs and lets the Sender pick one of the three. I found this very useful. The Receiver is challenged out of passivity to work at healing their own wounds. The Sender gets some choice while at the same time gets many ideas of what might help their partner. Doing one BCR is 100%. Doing more than one is ok, if you feel that generous.

One question that came up is what to do if you are doing one BCR for your partner and they get frustrated right in the middle of the time. It is kind of like you are doing a two week BCR and your partner wants another cuz they just got frustrated. What we have done is a) go through the whole frustration process, b) develop some possible BCRs, and then c) let the Receiver chose to keep the old one that was ongoing or a new one.