

Making Amends

Use this tool if you are the one who did the thing which triggered your partner's upset. Examples. You yelled, and your partner withdrew into the bathroom. You forgot your partner's birthday. You came home long after they expected you to. Etc. The focus here is on you, not on them. Occasionally this process helps the one who was upset, but that's not the goal. The goal is to leave you feeling complete about your side of what went on.

Note that it is very likely that your partner, the upset one, may still need something when you are through. After all you didn't do anything about their triggered problem. Do not use Making Amends as a way of telling your partner that the issue is over. When you are done, ask them about what they need.

Restructuring Frustration

This is the Master Tool used to restructure that frustration into a healing situation. With this tool you can eventually heal all wounds that each of you carry and virtually get rid of upsets in your relationship, your little community. This tool takes practice. It is complex, but well worth it. I have written about it extensively under the topic of Healing. I suggest you get good at Restructuring Frustrations and the skills it teaches.

Porcupine Day

This is a time when one of you senses that things are tense. Perhaps one of you is growly. Perhaps one of you wants to talk about a "sensitive" subject: money, sex, in-laws, too little time together, the kid's behavior, etc. etc. The cue to a Porcupine Day is simple tension sensed in yourself or your partner.

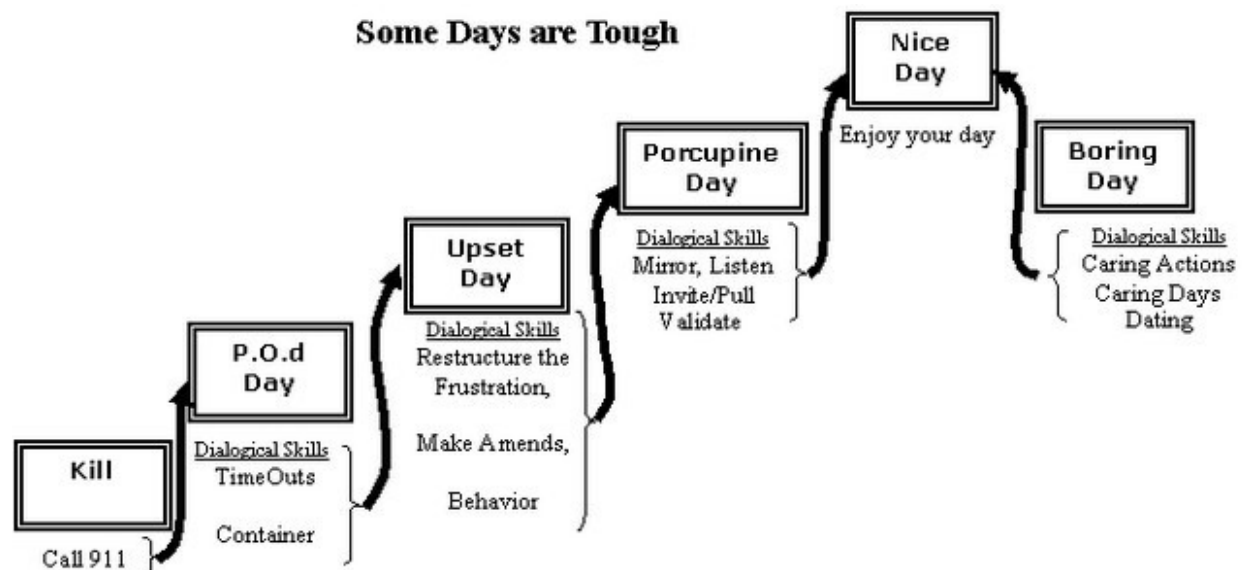
The tools for this day are all those simple dialogical communication tools, the ones that give structure to talking. I like to think of a Porcupine Day as a time when I am walking on a tightrope and would like a railing alongside. Use listening and inviting – "I hear you and would like to hear more." Use Mirroring and pulling – "What I heard you say was.... Did I get that?.... Please tell me more about that. or Could you tell me more about" Use Validation – "Oh, I get it. You did that because for you....." or "No wonder you feel really scared cuz you think that..." Shift into, and stay in, structure until the tension starts to subside and then you will be back to a Nice Day.

Nice Day

This is a time when everything seems ok for both of you. The skills to use now are "to have a nice day." Pretty simple.

Boring Day

Occasionally this may happen. Either one or the other begins to feel bored. Hey, this does happen and it's not fun either. That, of course, is the problem – lack of play/fun or lack of meaningful things to do. The skills to do here are the Safety skills of Caring Behaviors, Caring Days, Surprises, Dating, etc. Remember that these are not attitudes or thoughts. These are actions – practical things to do that evoke excitement and fun and pleasure. Go for it.



Some Days are Tough

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I built this table several years ago as a handout to help couples see what tools to use when things were going awry. Years ago when I was working as (pretending to be) a carpenter, an old guy said, “Al, first things first. Always use the right tool. Saves time and effort.” Well, depending on what is happening in a relationship, there are different tools. Here’s the range.

I call these “days” since so often couples tell me, “we had two good days and then things got bad again.” From experience I am fully aware that a Nice Day can turn “bad” in a split second. The real question for me was how to get back to having a nice day. Here are my suggestions about skills to learn and use, starting with the most extreme “bad” day. Each day has a clear definition so that you can tell if you are here, and a suggestion of what to do.

Kill Day

This day is remarkable and awful, but common. My definition is that at least one of you witnesses physical injury or expects physical injury imminently to someone. Note that the physical injury or anticipation of injury can be to anyone in the community: self, partner, children, relatives, friends, etc. All of us are capable of physical violence. But almost no one is trained to deal with this situation. Silence doesn’t work, yelling doesn’t work, etc. In the long run, the only thing that works is never experiencing a Kill Day. So my suggestion is that you call 911 – the authorities. They are trained to deal with this situation. The experience may not be nice, but the goal is to return your relationship to the Nice Day status as soon as possible. Since people can wander into Kill Days when they least expect it, I suggest you get a prior agreement that you will call 911 if it gets to that point. That way you can start to talk about it before you go there. This is good prevention. ““Oh wow. If we don’t cool it, I am going to punch in 911 in a couple minutes.”

P.O.d Day

This is a day when at least one person is venting lots of energy or passion – usually anger. My belief is that venting blocked up energy in safe/appropriate ways is always desirable. But given the training in our culture, many of us often do this in inappropriate or unsafe ways. This is the realm of emotional abuse and verbal battery. I want to help people get out of this kind of day as soon as possible, and head toward a Nice Day. The only good that can happen on a P.O.d day (P.O.d stands for Pissed Off’d) is that the ventor will get that passion off their chest and that both parties will realize there is something important that needs attention – the underlying problem. But the underlying problem will never be solved on a P.O.d. Thus I want people to get the passion out, and get on to the problem solving.

People can be pretty subtle about whether they are venting blocked energy, and so I have a simple test. Use [Mirroring](#) to test. If they are too hot to mirror or to be mirrored, consider it a P.O.d day. Use their unwillingness to mirror as the test.

There are two skills to apply here. I train any couple where this seems a problem in taking TimeOuts. No tool works as well, I’ve found. When both of you believe that the other will use a [TimeOut](#), then you will both move toward solving problems at a less explosive level.

While some of you may like to have a crowd witness your tantrum-like actions, I think there is not absolute need for it. I don’t believe you are entitled to anyone standing around while you rant. Thus a [TimeOut](#), a specific time break, is ideal. Get good at them if temper is one of your challenges. My experience is that you need to use enough [TimeOuts](#) until each of you “get it.” After that you won’t need TimeOuts very often.

Many of us were taught to have tantrums. The training program involves other people giving in. I’ve never found an adult who has tantrums or rages who had not been encouraged over and over, thousands of times in their past by people submitting. If this is true for you or your partner, now is the time to stop the pattern. And read the essay on Problem with Short Tempers to help you.

The other skill to use is fairly advanced and I don’t teach it until couples get good at TimeOuts. It is called a Container Exercise, and one day I will write it up. For now, use those [TimeOuts](#).

Upset Day

These are very important days. I think of these as the problem solving days. This is a moment when one of you is upset by something the other partner (or even someone at work) has done, yet you aren’t so upset that you cannot be mirrored. This is the realm of Frustrations and the best time to address and solve problems. I repeat, this is an event where one of you is triggered into upset by something the other person did and still you are able to dialogue – talk – about it using mirroring.

There are two powerful tools to use depending on who wants or gets to go first.