

Learning to Challenge with the Skill of Immediacy

1. The Skill of Immediacy

1. Immediacy is one of the most helpful skills you can learn for relationships. Immediacy involves being direct and open with your spouse about what is happening here and now and what is being stirred up in you. Immediacy is a skill which allows the relationship to move through difficult experiences and it is very helpful in conflict resolution
2. Carl Rogers defined Immediacy this way: *I am quite certain even before I stopped carrying individual counseling cases, I was doing more and more of what I would call confrontation. That is, confrontation of the other person with my feelings. . .*

For example, I recall a client with whom I began to realize I felt bored every time he came in. I had a hard time staying awake during the hour, and that was not like me at all. Because it was a persisting feeling, I realized I would have to share it with him. I had to confront him with my feeling and that really caused a conflict in his role as a client . . .

So with a good deal of difficulty and some embarrassment, I said to him, "I don't understand it myself, but when you start talking on and on about your problems in what seems to me a flat tone of voice, I find myself getting very bored."

This was quite a jolt to him and he looked very unhappy. Then he began to talk about the way he talked and gradually he came to understand one of the reasons for the way he presented himself verbally. He said, "You know, I think the reason I talk in such an uninteresting way is because I don't think I have every expected anyone to really hear me." We got along much better after that because I could remind him that I heard the same flatness in his voice I used to hear. The Skilled Helper, Egan, pp. 231f.

3. Immediacy is direct, mutual, you-me talk. Many couples have difficulty being open and direct in their relationships. A foggy, indirect, closed way of relating will show up time and time again. Compliance and blaming are methods of indirect communication that is most unproductive.
4. Immediacy is called for when you and your spouse experience tension or lack of trust or distance or find your interpersonal styles getting in the way of communicating and problem solving or when dependency issues are interfering with marital health. So immediacy is great for getting through roadblocks.
5. What immediacy looks like:
 - In immediacy you reveal how you are being affected by your spouse
 - In immediacy you explore your own behavior toward your spouse
 - In immediacy you share your hunches about your spouses behaviour which at this point seem to keep the relationship stuck
 - In immediacy you invite your spouse to a better marital relationship.
6. The formula for immediacy is:
 - I feel _____ as we _____.
 - It stirs up _____ in me.
 - My hunch is that _____. (You describe their behavior toward you)
 - Would you _____.
7. The short formula is: I feel _____ when we (you)_____. Let's work on it

together.

8. See if you can identify the four components of immediacy in this example: Fred, 43, is talking with his wife, Agnes, 49—who has recently stopped drinking, is in a recovery program and is trying to self-disclose with her husband about the lifestyle changes she is making. This is challenging for Agnes, though Fred is attentive. Agnes seems to have withdrawn quite a bit, and the interaction has bogged down.

Fred: I'd like to stop a moment and take a look at what's happening right now between you and me.

Agnes: I'm not sure what you mean.

Fred: Well, our conversation seems rather subdued. I've noticed that the muscles in my shoulders have become tense and that I feel a little flushed. I sometimes tense up that way when I feel I might have said something wrong.

Agnes: What could that have been?

Fred: Agnes is it just me or does it feel that things are a bit strained between us right now?

Agnes: Well, a little.

Fred: You were sharing about how you control your friends with your emotions. This gets you what you want, but you know the price you pay can be too high. You think that Elaine is becoming more and more wary of you. Now all of a sudden you've gone a bit quiet and I've been asking myself what I might have done wrong. To be truthful, I'm feeling a bit controlled, too. I'm obviously giving you my perspective; I'd like to get yours.

Evaluate Fred's use of Immediacy.

9. Note that there is a difference between confrontation, self-disclosure and immediacy.
- Confrontation is a request that your spouse examine some aspect of their life that is self-defeating.
- Self-disclosure is you sharing something about yourself, either in your past or some undisclosed thought or feeling.
- Immediacy is direct, mutual, here-and-now, *you-and-me* talk. It is a step beyond confrontation and self-disclosure. It means greater self-involvement—you want to move deeper. It is one of the important skills of intimacy. Immediacy is not dumping your feelings on your spouse or talking about your feelings or ideas from last week or last month or telling your spouse about someone else's judgments about him/her.
10. Immediacy is a complex skill with four components
- Awareness of what is happening including the unspoken messages between the two of you.
 - Accurately reading clues and deciding which interactions or messages need attention.
 - Being in touch with what is happening in you, what you are saying to yourself that you are not saying to your client.
 - Communicating your awareness using the formula or your own version of it.
11. Brief examples are:
- I feel frustrated when you agree to be here at a certain time and you are consistently late. Will you talk about it with me?
 - I felt like we are going nowhere when we talk about something that happened years ago to your ex-spouse. Tell me what you think.

12. Assertiveness. Immediacy is difficult because it requires assertive self-involvement. If one has difficulty with being open and honest, or difficulty with intimacy, then this is a difficult skill to master.

2. **Learning to Challenge: Responding to situations calling for immediacy**

Consider each of the situations below and form a written immediacy response. After we do 8.1 together as a group, get together in same gender groups of three and share your immediacy script with the two other persons in your group. Evaluate the immediacy response on the basis of the immediacy formula in 7.6 and the four components listed in 7.10.

1. You are visiting with Sherry, a 19 year old who is good family friend and reminds you of your 17-year-old daughter. As you listen you have mixed feelings as Sherry describes her struggles to establish some kind of reasonable independence from her parents. Sherry acts in very dependent ways toward you, telling you that she is glad that you are always available, asking your advice, and in various ways taking an “early adolescent” posture toward you. Then she switches and accuses you of being just like her mother and expresses that she doesn’t want to have anything to do with you.

Your immediacy response _____

2. A person in church who is of the opposite sex has approached you for prayer several times. After your most recent prayer time it has become evident that the person is attracted to you and has begun to make thinly disguised overtures for more intimacy. This person finds you both socially and sexually attractive. Some of the overtures have sexual implications.

Your immediacy response _____

3. A friend, 44, whom you know well and with whom you spend a good of time engages in an unusual amount of second-guessing with you. He tells you what he thinks you are thinking and

feeling about him in regard to a recent disagreement. He suggests ways that he thinks you would want him to act to resolve the situation. You have tried to ignore this behavior, but finally you are letting yourself get angry. He has good verbal skills and sometimes you feel that you are fighting for equal time with him.

Your immediacy response _____

4. **Experiencing Immediacy:** think of unresolved issue you have with your spouse and imagine talking to him or her. Write out an immediacy response using the longer formula in 7.6 above. Then get together in same gender groups of three and share your immediacy script with the two other persons in your group by following this script.

Naming the issue

Giving your immediacy response

Let your triad evaluate your immediacy response.

1. Revise your response on the basis of the group's feedback.
2. Now try this response out on your partner.

3. **Learning to Confront and Encourage with the DESI-DEE skill.** The DESI-DEE skill is a positive way to confront and to encourage your partner. An alternate version of this skill can also be used very successfully in parenting. Both are illustrated below.

1. **The DESI**

1. **Describe** the specific behavior that caused difficulty using the "when you..." formula
 "When you swear at me..."
 "When you interrupt me while I'm say saying something that is important to our son..."
 "When you threaten to leave me..."
2. **Express** the feeling elicited in you, using the "it stirs up _____ in me" or "I feel..."
 "...it stirs up hurt inside like I want to cry."
 "...I feel angry with you."
 "...I feel frightened, really scared."

Note: in using the "I feel ..." or "it stirs up ...", don't make it into "I feel ...because you...." This is experienced as blaming.

3. **Stop**—and wait for the other person's response-- don't blather on with explanations.

4. **Invite** your partner into a change process (regardless of their response) "I'd like to work on this with you and change what I can change; what do you want to do?"

2. **DEE: A way to encourage**

1. **Describe** the specific behavior that pleases you
 "When you bring me tea"
 "When you look at me and listen to me as I am talking to you..."
 "When you enjoy our dinner, talking..."

2. **Express** the feeling elicited in you
 - "...I feel glad to be with you."
 - "...I feel important to you."
 - "...I feel excited to connect with you."
3. **Encourage** (lit. "add strength")
 - "Thanks!"
 - "At times like this I think that I could tell you almost anything I"
 - "I like being with you"