

# THE NICOLA METHOD WORKBOOK



FOR  
PARTNERS OF  
HIGH-CONFLICT WOMEN

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## **THE NICOLA METHOD WORKBOOK**

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## INTRODUCTION

There is one word that can sum up all of the behaviors of your high-conflict partner. This word describes what is at the root of every one of your partner's negative and destructive actions. It is what fuels her anger, her rage, her rants and every unfair accusation she has ever made about you. It is the thing that drives people to hurt those they love, and it is at the heart of all emotional and physical abuse. It is what schoolyard bullies, high school mean girls and tyrant bosses all have in common. That word is insecurity.

But before you blame insecurity for all of your partner's actions, let's be clear. Insecurity itself is not the real culprit. What is causing all of the problems in your relationship with your high-conflict partner is her deep need to at any cost avoid feelings of insecurity. As you probably already know, the high-conflict partner is more than willing to do this at your expense.

If your high-conflict partner came up to you in the beginning of your relationship and announced that she was insecure and was hoping you would be willing to occasionally give her extra reassurance that you are not going to leave her, it would be so easy for you to provide that reassurance. If she admitted that she sometimes gets scared for no reason and asked you if she could get a reality check if she started to doubt your feelings for her, in a heartbeat you could agree to do that for her. After all, you love her. She is the one you chose over everyone else to spend your life with.

If your partner could allow herself to be vulnerable enough to ask for your reassurance in exactly this way, she would not have to engage in any of the negative behaviors that are the calling card of the high-conflict partner. What you are about to learn is a way to go under your partner's defense mechanism that hides her insecurity so you can reestablish your communication with her. This will allow you to resolve the issues that are causing her negative behavior.

## ***PART 1***

# **UNDERSTANDING ANGER IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Although there are many factors involved in conflict, at the base of all couples conflict is anger. Without anger we probably wouldn't even call it conflict. We would just call it resolving an issue. It is the constant and unrelenting anger that causes most of the heartache and pain for partners of the high-conflict woman.

The goal when using the Nicola Method will be to give you the ability to lower your partner's anger levels throughout the entire relationship, to stop her negative behaviors, and to overcome her insecurity so she returns to a state of trust and respect. You will be shown how to do this without disturbing or upsetting your partner and in a way that will make her feel good afterward with herself and towards you. Because what she is really concerned about inside is very different from what she might say or show you on the outside, you will find that you will be able to resolve her complaints about you without having to change your behavior or your style of relating.

In the second part of this workbook you will be learning what these real worries are behind each of her complaints, but the first tool you will learn about is a phrase that will temporarily lower her emotions when she gets excessively angry. This sentence is what we will call an emotion regulator. That means it directs her through the steps that people naturally use to turn their emotions down, like you would a faucet.

Although insecurity about her worth as a partner is what triggers or sets off your partner's high emotions, your partner's biggest problem is the inability to regulate her emotions. Emotional regulation may sound complex, but it is a natural neurological process that people use all the time when their emotions get uncomfortably high.

There are two steps to emotional regulation. One is to figure out what emotion you are feeling, and the other is to figure out why you feel that way. It is the second step that your partner is unable to carry out. Her emotions escalate too quickly and she gets stuck in the feeling state. You are going to use a phrase that directs her thoughts to the second step of regulation, the "why" of her emotions. Here is the sentence you are going to use:

## **THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE**

**“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

This sentence is designed to sound like a casual observation, but it has several powerful conflict-reducers built into it. You simply need to memorize it and say it when your partner expresses anger at you that you feel is more excessive than the situation calls for. It has been designed to be accepted by someone who is in a highly-emotional state. Its job is to subtly suggest that she direct her focus to the “why” of her emotions. When people understand why they are feeling the way they do, they gain mastery over their emotions and feel more in control. They may still be having the emotion, but the uncomfortable part drops away. Now let's look a little closer at how difficulties with emotional regulation affect high-conflict women.

## **HOW HIGH-CONFLICT WOMEN HANDLE HIGH EMOTION**

Your partner gets under the influence of emotions in the same way people get under the influence of alcohol. Like someone who is intoxicated, she is not able to think clearly in this state but doesn't realize it when she is under the influence. High emotions affect us in a similar way that alcohol does by lowering our inhibitions, clouding our judgment and allowing impulses to take over. Because women tend to have higher emotionality than men, they generally understand what it feels like to have unregulated emotion. They treat other women who are under the influence of emotions in some of the ways that people might treat a drunk friend. They may go along with the uninhibited things that are said at the time, but they don't take them seriously, and they don't embarrass their friend the next day by holding them to the things they said when they were under the influence. This is how your partner expects you to treat her after an incident of unregulated emotion as well.

Unregulated emotional states are a normal part of many women's lives. Men tend to have the opposite problem with their emotions. Although high and low

emotional settings are a natural part of our biological wiring, we have to overcome our biology a little bit in order to live peacefully with each other. Most men need to learn to get more in touch with their emotions, and most women need to learn to regulate theirs in order to co-exist comfortably.

Because men usually don't realize their partner is unregulated, they take what their partner says and does in these states seriously. They do not know how to make separate compartments for things said and done under the influence of emotions the way women do with each other. Even if a man was able to compartmentalize this behavior and ignore it, high-conflict partners are under the influence so often that it would not be possible to have a normal relationship. The Nicola Method's anger-regulation sentence has been developed so you can regulate your partner's emotions as soon as she enters an unregulated state in order to keep her away from destructive behavior.

Let's take another look at the anger-regulation sentence that you will be using every time your partner shows excessive anger towards you:

**“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

It may not be easy to memorize this sentence because it is somewhat awkward, but it has been constructed this way to keep your partner from distorting the meaning with a negative slant and interpreting it as an insult or a snide remark. The sentence should be said as neutrally and casually as possible. Right after you say this sentence, your partner may tell you that you didn't do anything wrong, but she is frustrated or upset about something else. When this happens, it is best to simply respond casually and drop the subject. Occasionally she will say she was upset about something you did or said. However, this will be announced in a fairly neutral or calm manner. Because she is now in an emotionally regulated state, you will be able to engage in the kind of normal conflict resolution that most couples use to resolve their issues. If she gets unregulated again in the conversation, you can use the sentence again to lower the emotions.

In the beginning your partner may not listen to you and you may need to use the phrase again. Your goal will simply be to get her to direct her thoughts to what she thinks you did wrong. Focusing her on what you did wrong may seem like a bad idea at first and the opposite of what you should do to avoid conflict. However, you will find that as soon as she thinks about why what you did was wrong, she will be moved out of her angry state and she will become emotionally regulated. You can change the sentence a little bit the second or third time you say it so it sounds more natural, as long as she knows that you want to know what you did wrong. If she ever asks you why you say that sentence, you can let her know how important it is that you know if

you did something wrong. This is good partner behavior and she will like the concept, particularly since it means you are paying attention to her feelings.

Now that you have a sentence to use to lower your partner's anger, let's see how it works in a real-life scenario so you know what to expect:

**“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

\* \* \* \* \*

HER: Are you kidding me? You bought that cheap cut of steak again? Do you seriously expect me to eat this?

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

HER: Well, I guess you didn't do anything wrong. I have just had the worst day. I really wanted some special treatment from you when I got home.

\* \* \* \* \*

HER: I can't believe you chose that shirt! What could you possibly be thinking?

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

HER: It's not that it's wrong. It's just that I can't stand the idea that Patty is going to be there tonight judging us. She's always trying to find something negative to talk about.

\* \* \* \* \*

HER: I ask you to go out on a simple errand and you bring back this? I should have just gotten it myself!

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

HER: Well, I guess strawberry and raspberry are pretty similar. It's just that it makes me feel like you aren't paying attention to me when you can't remember what I like.

\* \* \* \* \*

You will notice that the partner in this scenario is not angry anymore. You may not see an apology, but you will see that she is ready to drop the subject. These are

the kind of results you will be looking for from your partner as well.

Before moving on to the next tool, let's take a look at a few more uses of the anger-regulation sentence. If your partner is angry at a third person who is not there with you, you can regulate her anger at that person. You can simply substitute in the name of the person in the anger-regulation sentence. We will call this version the third-person anger-regulation sentence:

### **THIRD-PERSON ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE**

**“When you said that it seemed like you thought Tom did something wrong.”**

By substituting in the name of the third person, you can now regulate her anger at Tom. You will be redirecting your partner into a calm state where she will have perspective on her problem. She will usually let you know what was really under her anger at Tom. Using the third-person version of the anger-regulation sentence lets you get under your partner's defenses so you can talk with her in a more realistic way about her problem with another person. Let's take a look at how the third-person anger-regulation sentence plays out in a real-life scenario:

\* \* \* \* \*

HER: I hate Tom. I can't believe he went with Cindy's idea instead of mine. Cindy doesn't know what she's doing. My idea was much better than hers.

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought Tom did something wrong.

HER: Maybe it wasn't wrong. It's just that I am going to feel like an idiot when everyone on our committee finds out he chose her over me.

\* \* \* \* \*

The anger-regulation sentence not only works on high-conflict partners, but it can regulate the emotions of anyone who is acting excessively angry, insulting or aggressive. Using this sentence you can regulate a person's anger without their knowledge, whether they want their anger to be lowered or not. Once it is lowered the person will feel better. You will find it works on people with borderline personality traits

and individuals with narcissistic types of personalities. It also works on friends and family or any random person who happens to be momentarily angry at someone. You can even use it on yourself. The next time you find yourself excessively upset at someone, simply ask yourself why that person's action was wrong. You will experience an emotional shift and then clarity about the situation that is upsetting you.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **RESISTANCE TO THE ANGER-REGULATION SENTENCE**

You have now learned the first set of tools. Before getting started on the second set of tools of the method, let's go over a few tips for resistant partners:

If your partner deflects or ignores the anger-regulation sentence the first time you say it, you can just say it again. It might go like this:

\* \* \* \* \*

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

HER: I don't know what you are talking about.

YOU: It just seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

If she deflects it again you might handle it this way:

\* \* \* \* \*

HER: What's it to you, anyway?

YOU: It is important that I know what I did wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

Don't forget that if your partner ever wants to know why you keep using the anger-regulation sentence, you can simply say that it is very important for you to know

what you are doing wrong. If she is continues to give you resistance by saying something like, "You don't act like you care if you do something wrong," you can always answer, "I don't know why it isn't coming out the way I meant it. I can't always control that, but I want you to tell me if that happens again so I can clear it up."

There is one more use of the anger-regulation sentence that we haven't yet covered. It requires a slight modification to the original sentence. This will be your second tool, and it will work to stop all of the put-downs, insults and disrespectful behaviors from your partner. To make it easy to remember when to use it, we will call it the put-down sentence. You will use it whenever your partner tries to put you down.

## **THE PUT-DOWN SENTENCE**

Any time your partner insults you or tries to manipulate you, you will be able to use this modification to the anger-regulation sentence to get her to take back the insult or to clarify her true intentions behind any questionable behavior. You will be using the original anger-regulation sentence but with a slight change. You will be adding a new ending to the sentence depending on what you think she is insulting you about. The rest of the sentence will be the same to make sure she still believes you are just making a casual observation. Here is how it works:

\* \* \* \* \*

"When you said that it seemed like you thought (I wasn't being a good husband)."

"When you said that it seemed like you thought (I wasn't being honest with you)."

"When you said that it seemed like you thought (I was being selfish)."

\* \* \* \* \*

Whenever your partner insults you, you are going to give her the words behind her emotion by naming whatever you think your partner might be implying and adding it to the end of the sentence. In case you are having second thoughts about this one, you don't need to. You are not giving permission for your partner to insult you. The sentence will do its job and her anger will drop if you stick to the basic construction of

the phrase.

Your partner's insults are usually simply coming from her chronic frustration and anger that high-conflict partners seem to carry around. You will find that as soon as her emotion is disengaged and she transitions into a regulated emotional state she will no longer be angry. She will also know what she was really upset about, and she will tell you in a somewhat reasonable way. Here is what you might expect when you use the put-down sentence to reverse an insult:

\* \* \* \* \*

"What's the matter with you? These look like they were put together by a child. Can't you do anything right?"

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I didn't care."

(Pause) "I know you care, I'm just tired of never getting any compliments on our Christmas decorations the way my sister always does."

\* \* \* \* \*

"How many times do I have to tell you something before it sinks in?"

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I wasn't intelligent enough."

(Pause) "I know you are smart enough. I'm just in a really bad mood today."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Don't you even care how it is going to look if I go without you?"

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I was just pretending to be sick."

(Pause) "I know you really are sick, but I just hate going anywhere by myself."

\* \* \* \* \*

You don't need to worry if you can't find the words that fit her insult at first. It can be very difficult to think when you have just been insulted. Just use the anger-regulation sentence which you will have memorized until you feel more comfortable with the construction of the put-down sentence.

Now you will learn a variation of both the anger-regulation sentence and the put-down sentence that works for unspoken anger and insults. Body language gives people a free ride to say extraordinarily rude things to other people without being held accountable for it. Using this variation will put a stop to non-verbal negative behavior. When you notice your partner has used body language or actions that show she is angry or that make you feel insulted, you can use another modification of the same sentence. For non-verbal displays of anger and put-downs change it from:

**“When you SAID that it seemed like you thought...”**

to:

**“When you DID that it seemed like you thought...”**

When the anger or insult is silent, you substitute the “you did” for “you said.”

Here are a few examples of situations where you can use these variations to lower the emotion in your relationship. Let's say your partner rolls her eyes at something you said. You can say, “When you did that it seemed like you thought I was acting in a way you didn't respect.” Your partner may slam a door. You can say, “When you did that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

This variation of your first two tools allows you to regulate your partner's anger and stop her insults in every kind of situation. If you are using all of the phrases you have learned so far with their variations, you should be able to put a stop to most of your partner's negative behavior.

Stopping the conflict and putting an end to negative behaviors is a great goal and one that is necessary for a good life with your partner. However, simply stopping the negative behaviors will not restore your relationship back to where it was when you first got together. Your partner's problems go beyond her anger and rude behavior towards you. She has a real issue that is getting in the way of her putting down her defenses with you so she can be a loving and caring partner. In order to resolve the conflict in your relationship in a way that not only stops your partner's negative behavior but also restores her good will towards you, it is necessary to put the last set of tools into place.

Before we move on to the last set of tools, let's take some time to answer a very important question for many partners of high-conflict women. This intermediary section will briefly address a serious issue which will determine whether the last set of tools in this final section will work with your partner. The issue we are referring to is whether or not your partner should be labeled as an emotional abuser.

## IS THIS ABUSE?

The Nicola Method has been designed for partners whose relationship insecurity overwhelms them to the point where their fear turns into a certainty that their partners have treated them badly even when they haven't. They engage in extremely punishing behaviors towards their partners to get revenge for perceived betrayals. This state of mind is sometimes referred to as emotional dysregulation. When their emotions, triggered by relationship insecurity, rise to a certain level, these women become emotionally uninhibited and express everything they are feeling. Their experience while they are in this state is that they are simply expressing what they are thinking and feeling in the only language available to them at the time.

Most high-conflict partners who are loving and caring people and who only began to engage in the negative behaviors after commitment would fall into the category above. For purposes of this workbook, although their behavior would be considered abusive because of its destructive effect on you as a partner, we won't label these women emotional abusers. There are many ways to define the characteristics of an emotional abuser, but for our purposes the definition will be "someone who tries to make their partner feel bad on purpose in order to gain some type of benefit they are not entitled to from the relationship".

Although most high-conflict women in relationship fall into the highly-triggered category, there may be some partners who at some point cross the line. When they cross this line into abuse they may begin to use purposeful displays of anger or manipulation in order to take advantage of you. When a partner uses a display of anger or engages in any kind of threatening or demeaning behavior on purpose, the first two sets of tools of the Nicola Method will work in a different way. The tools will work to stop this behavior by directing your partner to the flaw in her argument. This flaw is always present any time a person tries to take away the self esteem of another. When you direct her to the flaw in her reasoning, her attempt to make you feel bad will lose its power. Over time she will learn that these behaviors no longer work and she will stop using them.

For the triggered partner the tools will not only stop the behavior, but they will move her into a calmer state. This allows her to realize that you were not trying to hurt her. You can then reestablish your emotional connection with her which will not be possible with a conscious abuser.

The tools that you will be using with your partner have a psychological and a neurological component built into them. If your partner is pretending to be angry, the psychological part of this tool will work. The neurological part of the method cannot work in this situation because the consciously abusive partner is pretending to be out of control and does not need her emotions regulated. Although you cannot regulate an abusive person's emotions and you will not be able to reconnect with her emotionally, if you use the tools you have learned so far you will be able to put a stop to the abusive behavior.

## **USING THE TOOLS WITH AN EMOTIONAL ABUSER**

In case your partner has crossed the line into conscious abuse, here is how she will respond to the tools of the Nicola Method. Let's start with your first tool, the anger-regulation sentence:

**“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”**

If a partner is using anger as a conscious tactic to make you feel bad, she will know very well that you didn't do anything wrong. She is simply playing psychological games with you. The way that emotional abusers get you to feel bad about yourself is to act like you did something you should feel ashamed of. In order for this tactic to work, she has to count on you not calling her on her bluff by asking what you might have done to deserve to feel bad.

When you casually point out that you might like to hear what you did wrong, which is what the anger-regulation sentence is designed to do, you are calling her bluff. In a completely non-confrontational way you will be asking her to show her cards. Since your partner already knows you did nothing wrong, she will probably back out of the conversation or switch the subject with a flippant comment. The psychological component of the tool will work, but the neurological part will not because she was only pretending to be emotional. She will therefore not reestablish connection with you the way a highly-triggered partner will after her emotions are regulated.

Let's now take a look at your second tool, the put-down sentence. The way this tool works with a conscious abuser is also slightly different than the way it works with a triggered individual. Here is a real-life scenario that may help make it more clear:

\* \* \* \* \*

“What kind of man are you? Can't you do anything right?”

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I was not being a good husband.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The highly-triggered partner will not have been aware that she has said anything offensive, and she will just imagine she was stating that you made a mistake and she needed to show you strongly she didn't like it so you could change your ways. When her emotion is regulated, she will correct her statement and tell you it's not that you are a bad husband. Then she will tell you what's really bothering her.

Let's look at the same scenario, this time with a conscious abuser. This scenario includes an attempt by the abuser to try to ignore your use of the put-down sentence the first time you use it:

\* \* \* \* \*

“What kind of man are you? Can't you do anything right?”

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I was not being a good husband.”

“That's right. And it's about time you figured that out!”

*(You will continue to use your tools. She just insulted you again, so you will use the put-down sentence again:)*

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I should know what I did that was bad.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Now the bluff has been called. If your partner is using conscious tactics, she will

have no choice but to either tell you exactly what you did that was so terrible, which will not hold up because you didn't do anything bad, or back off of the insult. If you use this tool consistently with a consciously abusing partner, she will eventually stop using the tactics on you because they no longer work. She will not, however, feel good and want to reestablish communication with you.

There are some high-conflict women who do not believe in the agreements of mutual support that most consider to be the foundation of a romantic partnership. This woman may consciously wish to take advantage of you by weakening your self-esteem. She may do this by acting as though you do not deserve fair treatment and respect so she can get more than she is entitled to in the relationship. Sometimes this woman can cross back over that ethical line once she is stopped from playing these destructive psychological games.

If your partner's mindset about the relationship does not reform once you stop her from using the tactics of emotional abuse, the final stage of this method will not work with her. The reason it won't work is that the third set of tools are based on the agreements between partners to mutually support each other and to share their resources fairly. Partners do not need to be capable of fulfilling these agreements for the method to work, but they do need to believe in these principles, at least in theory.

At this point you don't need to worry about whether your partner is triggered and trying to get revenge for imagined betrayals or whether she is consciously trying to make you feel bad in order to take advantage of you. Your focus simply needs to be on lowering the conflict in your relationship by stopping the negative behavior which can be accomplished with both types of individuals by using the tools you have learned so far. Let's now take a moment to review your first two sets of tools so you can start using them to lower the conflict in your relationship.

## **PUTTING THE FIRST TWO TOOL SETS TO WORK**

By now you should be ready to memorize the anger-regulation sentence and try it out with your partner when she is excessively upset with you. Take as much time as you want to learn how to calm your partner down with this sentence. After you become comfortable using it, you might want to try out the other versions of this sentence such as the third-person version of the anger-regulation sentence to calm her emotions towards other people. You can begin to use the put-down sentence as well whenever you sense she is insulting you in any way. The put-down sentence can be a little more difficult to get started with. In order to get used to creating put-down sentences, you can practice by writing down past insults your partner has made about you. Then you can try to put words to what she was insinuating with that insult.

To help you with this, here is a list of sample put-down sentences that will give you some ideas of how you might phrase your response to an insult:

“When you said that it seemed like you thought...”

I wouldn't get it done on time.  
I couldn't handle the job.  
I wasn't a very good father.  
I wasn't listening to you.  
I didn't make enough money.  
I wasn't a very good person.  
I wasn't competent at my job.  
I wasn't a likeable person.  
I didn't deserve it.  
I wasn't a good provider.  
I wasn't a good family man.  
I wasn't an attractive person.

Do not use derogatory words in your put-down sentences. This tool supplies your partner with cognitive words that put her in a thinking state. Derogatory words have a high emotional charge and may have the opposite effect. Frequently your partner will use the same insults over and over. You should be able to prepare yourself for one or two of them and then be ready to use the put-down sentence when she uses a familiar insult.

As you begin to practice the tools you have learned in the first section, you can continue reading the next section where you will learn how to translate the language of emotions, which is the hidden language behind your partner's unjustified complaints about you. In this section you will find out how to address and overcome your partner's real concern, which is her belief that you may not care about her or the relationship any longer.

## ***PART 2***

### **DISMANTLING THE INSECURITY DEFENSE MECHANISM**

In this section you are going to learn what is really behind all of your partner's upset. You will find that your partner's concerns behind her anger are exactly the same ones you have. They are the concerns we all have from time to time in our relationships, but because the high-conflict woman has heightened sensitivity to these common concerns, her reactions become extreme.

We will also be taking a close look behind the mystery of female emotionality to see what it is really about. What you may find when you look past the mystery is a few common female personality traits that most women would prefer you did not focus on. These traits are part of the slightly higher emotionality settings that are natural for many women. However, they can cause embarrassment in the presence of men who for the most part do not understand high emotions. The traits we are talking about are the difficulty many women have regulating their emotions and their heightened fear around threats to their romantic relationship bonds.

Before we continue, it is necessary to include a disclaimer. A large part of the female population who face this challenge do make the adjustment after entering a relationship and learning that they are sometimes more insecure than the situation warrants. They accept that they are oversensitive at times and don't blame their insecurity on their partners. Many women with challenges in this area also learn to regulate their emotions.

Whether your partner is a woman who has not made the effort to overcome these problems or she is someone who was born with extreme sensitivities, you can be assured that she is capable of mastering these skills. She is simply stuck in a negative pattern but can change her habits with appropriate intervention. The method you will be learning has been designed to allow you to take her through this process until she learns how to regulate her emotions and overcome her insecurity for herself.

## THE LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS

In order to understand female emotionality, you must first become familiar with the way women communicate. The language you will be learning is one that most women speak fluently and one that your high-conflict partner uses exclusively. It is the language of emotions. This is the language you will need to learn to understand your partner's real concerns. Your partner already believes you know the language of emotions. She believes that you are aware that this is only a symbolic language not meant to be taken literally.

She thinks that you will recognize she is under the influence of emotions, similar to someone who may be intoxicated, and that you understand that she will be unable to suppress them. She assumes you know how to read past all the negative things she says and that you won't embarrass her later by pointing out that she was out of control. She believes you know that all she really wants is your attention so you can make her feel better about something that has bothered her, worried her or concerned her, usually related to relationship insecurity.

You may feel that this explanation of the extreme behavior you have been subjected to by your partner is inappropriate or that it comes across as minimizing a problem too serious to be taken so lightly. You are about to find out that not only is this interpretation of her actions accurate, but it can be used to show you how to overcome the high conflict in your relationship and reestablish a respectful partnership.

In order to give you a foundation for this explanation of the negative behavior you are experiencing from your partner, let's take a look at the reasons why women with higher emotions use a different language to communicate than most men. High emotions influence the thoughts and feelings of many women throughout their day. They assume everyone else experiences the same thing. They use the awareness of how it feels to interpret the language of others. If they notice that another person seems more emotional than the situation calls for, they make the adjustment and filter out what they believe are the excess emotions so they can understand more clearly what the other person is trying to say.

Because there is a lack of understanding surrounding the differences between male and female emotionality, most people assume we all experience it the same way. This assumption causes many of the common problems in male/female

communication. Men assume women can read the emotion into their communication, and women assume men can filter it out. The extreme difference between a low-emotion male and a high-emotion female in relationship can cause extreme problems. Because a woman's emotional setting will feel normal, she, like most women, will assume that you are perfectly capable of filtering out her excess emotions so you can understand what she is trying to say.

## **WHEN SHE SHOWS INSTEAD OF TELLS**

You will discover that as long as you are interpreting what your partner is showing you on the outside in a literal way instead of translating the symbolic language of emotions, you will always unintentionally end up offending and insulting her which will raise the conflict even higher. If you don't translate her symbolic outer behavior to what she is really trying to say underneath, she will believe you know exactly what her real feeling is behind the dramatization and that you are ignoring it because you don't care about her. The moment you show your partner that you have understood the meaning the dramatizations are meant to portray, she will stop using the language of emotions and normal communication will be reestablished.

In order for you to accomplish this without being subjected to her high emotions, you will be using the anger-regulation and put-down sentences to lower her emotion before you attempt to translate her language. You may not have time to learn the entire language of emotionality, so you will be taught the basics and then be given reference sheets that provide you with the translation of what your partner is really trying to say when she gets upset with you.

We will now look at what is going to happen to your partner as you use this next set of tools that have been designed to heal her from her relationship insecurity. In the very beginning of this workbook we talked about your partner's inability to get the assurance she needs to get over her insecurity due to her refusal to admit to herself that she has a problem in this area. The next set of tools will allow you, over time, to show her that she can come to you when she is insecure. She will learn that you will reliably assure her that you are going to treat her appropriately and are still committed to the relationship.

You will in a roundabout way be teaching her how to ask for reassurance which she cannot yet do on her own. Once she truly believes that she can get assurance when she asks for it, she will heal from her insecurity and no longer need excessive reassurance from you. At this point, the negative behaviors will stop, and she will

become respectful towards you and be able to function in a healthy way in her relationship. You will accomplish all of this by using phrases that allow her to get assurance from you without having to admit that she's feeling insecure. They will also allow you to give her the reassurance she needs without getting punished or having to admit to any wrongdoing.

To get started with your third set of tools which will allow you to reestablish the trust you had in the beginning of your relationship, it is necessary to look at the foundation of all relationships and at the components that make up a lifelong romantic partnership.

## **PARTNERSHIP CONFLICT**

Romantic partnerships, just like business partnerships, have certain agreements built into them that are understood by both parties before the commitment is finalized. These agreements must be honored throughout the life of the partnership. If partners stop honoring them, just like in business, the partnership is no longer valid. In other words, you have to honor these promises or the deal is off. Small breaches can be repaired if there is good will by reestablishing that from that point on the agreements will be followed.

If you have always thought that the real issues behind couples conflict were based on childhood pain or negative past experiences, think again. You are about to find that the issues partners face in marriages more often resemble those of business partnerships with a little bit of human rights issues thrown in as well.

## **ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**

When you enter a romantic relationship, there are certain fears that come up for even the most secure people, insecurities that do not exist in other types of relationships. In a traditional lifelong partnership, you are agreeing to share your finances, your free time, and the decisions you make about how you choose to live your life in the future with your partner. Being in a permanent partnership of this type means that you are going to have to let go of the way you would like to do things in many areas of your life.

Business partnerships have extensive contracts that spell out exactly what is expected and the consequences of one partner not fulfilling their promises. One would think that when people are asked to give up this much control over their future that there would be some clear rules on how to guarantee they won't be taken advantage of, similar to a business. Instead, we are asked to rely on good faith alone to guarantee the word of a partner who we usually have known less than two years before committing our entire life to.

All we can do is hope that our partner plays fair when we throw our precious resources into a pot in the middle of the table. It would be easier if we picked our relationship partners in the careful way we choose our business partners. Instead, we use the capricious whims of romantic love to determine who we will entrust with the safekeeping of all of our worldly and spiritual possessions. Let's say you happen to fall in love with a very exciting and fun partner, but she isn't really the most ethically scrupulous and she is somewhat lacking in the ability to control her emotional impulses. You can very easily find yourself in a dictatorship before you know it.

What most people don't realize is that there are unspoken universal relationship agreements that almost all people enter into that can protect your individual rights and personal freedoms as well as your finances and choices of how you want to live your life. In order to apply these unspoken agreements to protect your relationship rights, you must first become aware of them and then learn how to talk about them with your partner. There are many unspoken agreements that can protect your relationship rights, but to make it easier to learn about them, we will sort these agreements into five general categories. You will find that each of your relationship issues falls within at least one of these five categories.

These agreements could be called principles because we are human and can't follow them perfectly. You could also call them promises because they are agreements that are informally made and can't be enforced. For the purposes of this method, they will be called relationship promises because this is how your partner sees them. She feels that when you break one of these agreements, you have broken a personal promise, and she thinks she has every right to be upset. Let's take a look at these unspoken promises that you each agreed to when you entered into your relationship commitment:

## **THE FIVE RELATIONSHIP PROMISES**

### **1. We will make an emotionally secure environment for our partner.**

2. **We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own.**
3. **We will not take more than our fair share and we will share decision-making power with our partner.**
4. **We will not impose our personal beliefs on our partner.**
5. **We will act in a socially-acceptable manner according to our peers, culture, community or spiritual beliefs.**

Take a quick look at these five promises to make sure you agree with them. Here is a more formal presentation of the same relationship promises with the names of the category of agreements that we will be using in this workbook to make it easier for you to remember which is which.

#### **1. THE SECURITY PROMISE:**

We will make an emotionally secure environment for our partner.

#### **2. THE MUTUAL SUPPORT PROMISE:**

We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own.

#### **3. THE FAIRNESS PROMISE:**

We will not take more than our fair share and we will share decision-making power with our partner.

#### **4. THE CONTROL PROMISE:**

We will not impose our personal beliefs on our partner.

#### **5. THE ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR PROMISE:**

We will act in a socially-acceptable manner according to our peers, culture, community or spiritual beliefs.

These aren't just promises made to keep one partner from taking more than their share of the resources in a relationship. They also protect our individuality so we can maintain our own beliefs, values, thoughts and feelings. In addition, these

promises protect our privacy so we can have some money, time, and space for ourselves. Let's test the observation that all relationship issues stem from the belief that a partner has broken one of these five promises:

When your partner is angry because she says you don't care about her, it is not because she needs care at that very moment. It is because you have broken your promise to always keep her feeling safe and secure that you will stay committed to her. Promise number one.

When your partner is angry because you left your gear in the hallway, it's not because she doesn't like how the gear looks. It is because you broke the promise to mutually support her. Instead, you are expecting her to clean up after you. Promise number two.

When she is angry because you are spending all the extra money on your hobby, it's not because she needed to spend it on her hobby. It is because you broke your promise to share things equally in the relationship. Promise number three.

When she is angry because she says you are controlling her, it is not because she doesn't like what you want her to do. It is because you have broken the promise to let her do things she believes in and not change her beliefs according to what you want. Promise number four.

When she is angry because you want to wear your exercise clothes to lunch with her friends, it is not because she dislikes your clothes. It is because you broke your promise to behave in a socially-acceptable way. Promise number five.

She may want special care, money for her hobby, a clean hallway or dislike how you want to do things. She may hate your exercise clothes. However, the reason she is angry is because you broke a promise. These promises are very emotionally charged because they are directly connected to our sense of personal freedom which is a universal need that all humans seem to share.

When someone acts like they don't care about our needs, when they want to take more than their share, when they won't let us have our own thoughts and feelings, when they make us uncomfortable by their social habits, or when they threaten to end our relationship, we get spooked. It reminds us that our partners could abandon us or take advantage of us and we could lose control over our life.

Let's now test out how your partner fares at keeping her relationship promises to you. To do this you can ask yourself these questions:

**Is my partner making a safe emotional environment for me as opposed to**

**making me feel like she might leave the relationship?**

**Is she making sure that my needs are treated with as much importance as hers?**

**Is she being fair and not taking more than her share of the decision-making power?**

**Is she being careful to not impose her personal beliefs on me?**

**Is she careful about making sure she is behaving in a way that people we both respect would view as acceptable?**

What you may discover as you go down this list is that the high-conflict partner is notoriously bad at keeping her relationship promises. In order to not break one of these promises you need to be emotionally mature and able to override your emotional impulses and keep others' needs in mind. The high-conflict person is often too highly emotional to honor these five promises even if she wants to. The low self-esteem created by her inability to treat you well can also contribute to her cycle of destructive negative behavior in your relationship.

## **THE LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLISM**

You have found out that many women speak in the language of emotions, but you may not realize that they also read the language of emotions by reading behind your words and interpreting your behavior to find the hidden meaning. Most men have a lower emotionality and they don't speak in the language of emotions. They use words in a more literal way to communicate. When women try to read behind the lines when there is no hidden meaning, a great deal of miscommunication can occur.

Because your high-conflict partner has very high emotionality, she reads the language of emotions exclusively. She interprets almost all of your behaviors in a symbolic way. She continually judges how committed you are to the relationship based on symbolism she reads into the actions you take. Because she is insecure, she will be worried and therefore looking for the negative symbolism behind your behaviors instead of recognizing the positive symbolism. To understand this in a clearer way let's take a look at the differences between negative symbolic gestures and positive symbolic gestures.

## **POSITIVE SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP GESTURES**

What are these symbolic actions that women tend to watch for in order to assure themselves their relationship is secure? It's all of the little acts of kindness that partners do for each other, from getting her flowers to surprising her with something she wanted for her birthday. These positive symbolic gestures may include saying, "I love you," telling her she is attractive, complimenting her, hugs, kisses, fixing her car or computer, and doing favors and kind gestures of all kinds. Each of these acts of positive symbolism assures your partner you are still committed to the relationship and that her bond with you is secure.

## **NEGATIVE SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP GESTURES**

Because your partner is exceptionally insecure in her relationship, when she gets unjustifiably angry at you it is because instead of recognizing the positive symbolism behind your actions toward her, she is reading negative symbolism into your behavior which she believes proves you broke one of the five relationship promises and you no longer care about the relationship. Because her relationship connection with you has heightened importance to her, any negative interpretation of the symbolism behind your actions can leave her feeling that her relationship connection is being threatened.

When you begin to look at your behavior through the eyes of your partner, you will begin to see the negative symbolism she is reading into your actions. If you don't call her soon enough she reads this as you no longer love her. If you pause too long before answering a question she will read it as you are guilty about something.

When you look at your own behavior through negative symbolism, you will be able to see how any innocent comment you might make can be taken in a negatively symbolic way to show you really don't care about her. If you could see it through her eyes, you would probably be able to say, "I get why what I said upset you. I can see how it looked like I was blowing you off. Keeping your needs in mind is very important to me, and I can promise I won't do that to you."

This assurance is really all your partner wants to hear when she becomes suspicious of the meaning behind your actions. When she is insecure, she wants assurance that you didn't break the promise after all, which tells her that you still care and her suspicions were unfounded. Saying these few sentences is literally all your

partner needs to hear from you in order for you to resolve her real issue which you will find has very little to do with the original complaint. As you learn to address her real concern by figuring out which of the five relationship promises she is afraid you broke and simply assuring her you plan to honor it, you will find you can resolve most issues without having to talk about or change any of your behaviors.

Each relationship promise has a set of phrases that you can use to overcome her insecurity. Because you will need to figure out which promise your partner thinks you broke when she is angry at you so you know the right phrases to use, let's take a look at a chart that can help you identify which of the five promises she thought you broke according to the kind of complaint your partner makes about you.

### **1. THE SECURITY PROMISE:**

We will make an emotionally secure environment for our partner.

The complaints that clue you in to the possibility that she thinks you have broken the security promise are all complaints having to do with her emotional security and questions about whether or not you plan to stay in the relationship. These will be complaints that have to do with whether you love her enough, care about her enough, and are committed, whether you listen to her, are nice to her, mean to her, or generally anything that has to do with romance.

### **2. THE MUTUAL SUPPORT PROMISE**

We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own.

The complaints that clue you in to the possibility that she thinks you have broken the mutual support promise are all complaints having to do with you being selfish or not on her side. They will have to do with whether you are thinking about her needs as much as your own and whether you feel that you have more rights in the relationship or that you think you are more important than her. They also include complaints having to do with loyalty or you taking sides with someone against her as well as you not respecting her opinions or not placing as much importance on her ways of doing things.

### **3. THE FAIRNESS PROMISE**

We will not take more than our fair share and we will share decision-making power with our partner.

The complaints that clue you in to the possibility that she thinks you have broken the fairness promise are all complaints having to do with dividing things equally. These consist of sharing chores and responsibilities, sharing of money and decisions around money, and general questions around equality in decision-making power.

#### **4. THE CONTROL PROMISE**

We will not impose our personal beliefs on our partner.

The complaints that clue you in to the possibility that she thinks you have broken the control promise are all complaints having to do with you telling her what to do. She will often use the word “control” within her complaint, as in, “You are being controlling.”

#### **5. THE ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR PROMISE**

We will act in a socially-acceptable manner according to our peers, culture, community or spiritual beliefs.

The complaints that clue you in to the possibility that she thinks you have broken the acceptable behavior promise are all complaints having to do with you not behaving appropriately. These are usually complaints connected to how you dress and how you present yourself to others or how you interact socially.

It can be very helpful to take a moment to go through this chart and see if you can figure out your partner's most common insecurity area based on her past complaints about you. Most high-conflict partners have the greatest degree of insecurity in the first and second areas, the security promise and the mutual support promise.

### **THE HIGH-CONFLICT PARTNER PROFILE**

To help you further with this process you will be given all of the phrases that were designed to help you overcome your partner's insecurity in each of these five areas on reference sheets called Partner Profiles that you will find at the end of this workbook. At the top of the profile you will find some common high-conflict partner complaints. Then you will see the insecurity area that complaint relates to followed by the promise your partner thinks you broke when she makes that kind of complaint. Underneath that will be a series of phrases that you can choose from to use to overcome her insecurity each time she makes that complaint. The profile will also tell you when to use the sentences and may include a few notes about that particular promise that will help you resolve her insecurity in that area.

On the next page you will find one of the Partner Profiles so you can see what they look like. This one is to be used with high-conflict women who complain about their partner not being on their side. This example is only to give you an idea of what the profiles look like. Don't worry if the sheet seems too complex to follow. It will make more sense after we go through each part of the process in more detail.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You aren't on my side. You only care about yourself. You are selfish. You don't listen to what I want. You don't listen to me. I never get what I want. You always do what you want to do. My opinions don't matter.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid you do not see her as an equal partner and you are going to take advantage of her and take everything for yourself and leave her with nothing.

**Promise Broken:** We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own. Mutual Support Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the mutual support promise that she thinks you broke:**  
"Are you feeling that I haven't been on your side?"  
"It sounds like you feel that I haven't been thinking about your needs."  
"Does it seem like I am not taking your needs into account?"  
"Have you been feeling like I haven't been thinking about what you want and what you need?"
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should be on each others' side:**  
"I know how bad it feels when someone isn't on your side. I would feel the same way."  
"I'm really glad you told me. It's not okay for us to forget about each others' needs."  
"It's not okay for us to be against each other like that."  
"No one should have to feel like their thoughts and feelings don't count."
3. **Assure her that you are on her side:**  
"If anything I have done has made it seem like I'm not on your side, I want you to know that is the last thing I wanted you to be feeling."  
"It is really important that you know that I care about your thoughts and opinions."  
"We need to always feel like we are there for each other. I hope you understand I was not meaning to make you feel like I wasn't."  
"I would feel awful if I realized I was only thinking about myself."
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
"The next time you feel that I am not on your side, please come to me right away."  
"I don't want you feeling that way, so please tell me right away if it seems like I am not supporting you the way I should be."  
"I hope you feel comfortable telling me any time you feel that way so I can make sure you know how important your needs are to me."

The next time the complaint about mutual support comes up, begin the process again.

If she is resistant to you telling her that you are on her side using words and says she wants you to show her in actions, let her know that your actions may not always come out the way you mean them, so it is important that you tell her directly any time she feels like you are not on her side.

## **A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROMISES**

Let's now look more informally at the language of the promises in these reference sheets so you can see why they work. Once you identify which of these promises your partner thought you broke, you will simply be telling your partner you understand what you did that made her feel like you may have broken that promise. You will then tell her that you understand her concern, you share it yourself as a partner, and you plan on sticking with your commitment to uphold that particular promise to her.

Your partner will feel as though you understood her symbolic language, you appropriately read past her emotions and are not going to embarrass her by pointing out that she got out of control. She will be relieved that you realized that she was having a minor concern that she wanted you to address. You figured out she was having a little bit of insecurity, and you assured her that her fears were unfounded.

She will realize she can trust you after all, and she will go on as though nothing happened until the next time her insecurity overwhelms her. You may have to repeat this process many, many times before she gains the kind of security she needs to abandon her defense mechanisms. However, each time you overcome her insecurity it will add another piece of the foundation necessary for her to return to the respectful person she was when you first met her.

It is important to remember that you will not be using this set of tools when your partner is emotionally dysregulated. She needs to be in a calm state first. You can always use the anger-regulation or the put-down sentence to calm her down or choose to wait for another time. For your protection, the only response you should be making to outbursts of anger or aggression should be the use of one of the first two tools. It can be helpful to memorize the anger-regulation sentence and get in the habit of using it each time she acts angry towards you. In the beginning of this process, you will be creating a low-conflict relationship one episode at a time. Eventually she will piece together all of the smaller proof-of-trust events into a consistent belief that she can trust you after all.

## **CONFIRMING YOU ARE HONORING THE PROMISES**

Before you start to use the tools you have learned in this section, it may be a good idea for you to go through a quick checklist just to ensure that you are following the promises yourself. It is important to note that no one can always follow these rules. Even the most conscientious partners break them at times in small ways. What you are looking for is simply evidence that you care about these principles and that you can control yourself enough to honor them most of the time. When you don't, you must be willing to apologize or make for up for it.

There is, however, an exception to this suggestion. If your relationship with your partner has deteriorated to the extent that you do not feel comfortable performing the niceties expected in a relationship, do not worry about honoring these promises for now. Simply focus on regulating your partner's anger by using the anger-regulation sentence and the put-down sentence.

One way to confirm that you are honoring the five promises is to turn the promises into questions. You can ask yourself if you are:

**Making a safe emotional environment for your partner as opposed to making her feel like you might leave the relationship.**

**Making sure that you are consistently thinking of your partner's needs as well as your own.**

**Being fair and not taking more than your share of the decision-making power.**

**Making sure you aren't imposing your personal beliefs on your partner.**

**Checking to see you that you are behaving in a way that people you both respect would view as acceptable.**

If you do find that you are lacking in one of these promises and your behavior doesn't live up to your own standards, it might be a good idea to shore up those areas. By doing extra duty in your weak areas before you begin the next phase of the method you will be more prepared to move forward with this process.

## HOW IT WORKS

To illustrate what it might feel like for your partner as you go through the steps of regulating her emotions and then overcoming her insecurity by using this method, we will turn the tables and use a scenario where you are angry at your partner to show how it might feel if someone used the method on you. This way you can get an inside view of how natural this process really is.

In this scenario you will be the one who is angry because your partner treated you like your needs were not important. This will be because she failed to pick you up to take you to your son's game. She knew you would miss the game if she didn't pick you up, and now she is acting like she did nothing wrong.

First we can take a moment to apply the rules of anger which your tools are based on. If you are angry with your partner it means you think she did something wrong. That one should be easy to verify. She didn't pick you up when she said she would. Now you can check to see if you believe that she knew she did something wrong. Yes. She knew you wanted to see your son play. The third verification is did she care. Clearly if she is acting like she did nothing wrong, then she does not care. At this point you will feel justified in being angry.

Now let's check and see what relationship promise she broke. Here are the five relationship promises. See if you can pick the one that you might think she broke if she didn't pick you up.

1. We will make an emotionally safe environment for our partner.
2. We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own.
3. We will act fairly and share decision-making power.
4. We will not impose our personal beliefs on our partner.
5. We will act in a socially-acceptable manner according our peers, culture, community or spiritual beliefs.

You can probably determine that it is number two since that one makes the most sense in context. She did not think about your needs as being as important as her own.

Let's set the scene. You are feeling pretty angry now. She comes into the room and you tell her you want to talk to her. She says, "When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong." This is a relief to hear. You thought she didn't care, but at least she cares enough to address it.

"Well, you did. You know that I told Ian I would be there."

Now imagine she says, "Of course. I know you are probably feeling like I am only thinking about myself."

Again, you would be feeling some relief. She knows what she did that made you mad. She adds, "Look, I am really sorry it came off that way. I really do care about your relationship with Ian."

You decide to let her off the hook. "It's okay."

She adds, "I hate the idea of you thinking that I am not caring about you that way, so if it happens again, please tell me."

This imagined scenario allows you to see how soothing it feels when this kind of language is applied to any situation involving anger. It also allows you to see that even without apologizing or admitting to any guilt, it is possible to address another person's real concerns and resolve their true issue which is always more important than whatever lapse in judgment you may have had.

Although the partners portrayed in this scenario were a low-conflict couple, this method will work equally well with your high-conflict partner. The language can be tricky, so stick to the general structure of the language in your Partner Profile, which is designed to be used with a high-conflict partner. As you get more comfortable with the method, you can improvise using the general idea of the phrases.

## **APPLYING THE METHOD TO YOUR PARTNER**

The scenario with your partner should go the same way as the previous scenario we just looked at. Let's say she is acting very angry and you don't know why.

You say, "When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong."

She replies, "You didn't do anything wrong, but every time we have a conversation it feels like you are steam-rolling over what I have to say. It's always all

about you.”

You recognize this as a complaint about you not caring about her needs as much as yours, which is promise number two, the mutual support promise. You have been practicing your sentences from the Partner Profile that have to do with you breaking the mutual support promise and not caring about her needs as much as your own.

You say, “Does it seem like I am not taking your needs into account?”

She says, “Yes. It really makes me feel like you only think about yourself and my opinions don't count.”

You use the sentences from your Partner Profile that you have been practicing:

“No one should have to feel like their thoughts and feelings don't count. I would feel awful if I realized I was only thinking about myself. It is really important that you know that I care about your thoughts and opinions.”

“Thanks for saying that. I might have been a little oversensitive. You speak really fast and I guess it makes me feel stupid sometimes.”

You will always be doing a little bit of improvising here and there. All of the sentences except the anger-regulation sentences can be improvised as long as you communicate that it is very important to you that you are not breaking that particular promise.

In case you find in this process that your partner is correct and you may have broken a promise, you can just say that you realize you weren't either making it safe or thinking of her needs or being fair or you were trying to make her do something she doesn't believe in or you were acting unacceptably. You can then say how important that concern is to you and tell her you are sorry.

## **ENDING THE DISCUSSION**

You will be using one final tool that will help you get permission to intervene every time you sense that she has an insecurity that you can use to head off any conflict before it erupts. When you end a scenario where you use your phrases to overcome her insecurity about you breaking a promise, you can always tell her to let you know if she feels this way again.

Although the high-conflict partner will be too highly-emotional to identify a promise you broke in the beginning stages of the use of this method, telling her to let you know will give you permission to bring it up in the future. That way you can simply check in with her at any time and assure her you are not breaking a promise. When she notices that you sense her insecurity and are able to shore it up without her expressing it to you, it will also shorten the time necessary for her to work through these issues and learn to assure herself that you are a caring partner who would not betray your promises.

Here is a scenario that will give you an idea of how you might end a discussion. These phrases vary from the Partner Profiles. You will find that as you become familiar with using the sentences in a certain area, you will be able to come up with your own that accomplish the same thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

YOU: I don't want you feeling that way, so please tell me right away if it seems like I am not supporting you the way I should be.

HER: Okay. I will.

\* \* \* \* \*

At a future time, if you notice she is sulking or acting angry and you sense it might be because she thinks you broke the mutual support promise again, you can say:

YOU: Are you feeling like I haven't been on your side again?

HER: Yes.

YOU: I'm really glad you told me. It's not okay for us to forget about each others' needs.

\* \* \* \* \*

The reason that this final set of tools uses words instead of actions is because a high-conflict partner can easily misinterpret the normal symbolic acts of kindness that partners do for each other to make sure their loved one feels secure in their relationship. Therefore it is very important that instead of symbolic demonstrations, you learn to provide her direct verbal assurance. This doesn't mean you should abandon all niceties. It simply ensures that any time you sense she is insecure, you

can directly remind her you are not planning to break that promise. This can help you head off conflict before it starts.

## **PROTECTING YOURSELF**

You have now learned how to lower the conflict in your relationship. Let's focus on how to put together a program that spells out the way you will use your tools. Your emotional well-being is the most important part of this program. The first two tool sets, the anger-regulation and put-down sentence, have been designed to protect you from your partner's negative behaviors by re-routing her emotions away from you and towards what is really bothering her.

The third tool set, the phrases from the Partner Profiles, do not have the same construction. They do not protect you. They are only meant to be used when your partner is in a regulated emotional state. It is fine to use these phrases when your partner is a little bit upset, irritated or unhappy. Do not, however, use them if she is putting you down or expressing any strong display of anger towards you. Instead use the anger-regulation or the put-down sentences to make sure that you are putting your emotional safety first.

There are two approaches you can use to apply your third set of tools which work to overcome your partner's insecurity using the Partner Profiles. You can schedule a sit-down discussion with your partner and discuss a particular complaint she has had about you. These discussions can happen when she has had a general complaint about your behavior, such as, "You don't care about me." "You are never on my side." "You are always controlling." "You don't love me." "I can't trust you." These are complaints about your behavior in general as opposed to a single behavior that bothered her.

If the general complaint has come up many times before you can study the Partner Profile that corresponds to that type of complaint in advance, and the next time she makes a complaint in that area tell her that you want to have a discussion to try to resolve that complaint. Schedule a time and then in private choose and then practice the sentences from your Partner Profile that you feel comfortable saying. Practice them in your head until you feel confident enough to say them out loud, and then use the phrases to overcome her insecurity around you breaking that relationship promise at the sit-down discussion. Make sure that you listen to anything she says in response to your sentences, and try to respond in a normal and casual way before using the next sentence.

The second way that you can use your Partner Profiles is after you use the anger-regulation or put-down sentence to direct her focus to her real concern. Often her response to these phrases will be to tell you she is just generally frustrated. However, sometimes her response will be in the form of a complaint delivered in a respectful manner which will give you clues or in some cases tell you which promise she is concerned about. This can set the stage for you to use the Partner Profile sentences that correspond to that complaint to resolve her concern on the spot. Using your partner's history of complaints to locate which rule your partner is likely to think you broke and learning those sentences in advance is a good way to prepare for times when you use the Partner Profile phrases on the spot.

To give you an idea how this second approach might work, let's take a look at a real-life scenario:

\* \* \* \* \*

YOU: When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.

HER: You didn't do anything wrong. It's just that I feel like you always talk to me like that and it makes me feel like you don't care about me.

YOU: It sounds like you feel that I haven't been making a very safe place for you in the relationship.

HER: Yes, I do feel like that.

YOU: I get why you are upset and I would be too if I felt like you didn't care about me any more.

HER: Thanks. It can feel really bad.

YOU: It's really important to me that you know how much I care about you.

HER: I guess I just needed to hear you say that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Her response to the anger-regulation sentence set up a good opportunity for this partner to overcome the real issue. Because the partner in this scenario had already learned the phrases from the Partner Profile sentences that matched her complaint about him caring, he was ready to use the phrases.

It is best to proceed one issue at a time and at a pace that feels comfortable for you. In case you don't use the method correctly or if you forget the sentences, mix them up, or you feel the need to express your true feelings, you don't need to worry that it will set you back. It may not be comfortable because it can lead to conflict, but you will not lose any ground. Simply go back to using the method the next time there is conflict.

Most partner insecurities have to do with only one or two of the promises, so you may only need to learn those two sets of phrases. The most common are the security promise having to do with love and romance and the mutual support promise having to do with you being on her side. In order for you to feel even more comfortable with the five promises, here are a few more helpful hints about each promise that will make it easier for you to identify them.

### **SECURITY PROMISE:**

A partner who has worries and concerns that cause insecurity in the area of the security promise will most often complain that you don't care about her. Common high-conflict complaints are that you don't really love her or you are not taking care of her emotions. She may say that you don't know how to communicate your feelings or know how to take care of her feelings.

She will usually believe that when she is feeling bad it is your job to make her feel good. She may believe that your role is to be the caretaker of her emotional state. She might confuse your role as a partner with the expectation that you should fix her emotionally every time she feels bad. When you don't pay attention to her uncomfortable or negative feelings and make her feel better, she may believe you are not being a good partner. She may want continual assurance that you are still committed and might expect many symbolic gestures from you throughout the day that prove you still care. When this display is not provided her insecurity may kick in and she may believe that if you were doing your job correctly as a partner she would not be feeling insecure.

Now let's take a look at the high-conflict partner who feels insecure believing you are not going to honor the mutual support promise:

### **MUTUAL SUPPORT PROMISE:**

Partners who have fear around you breaking your promise to mutually support them feel like you are not on their side. They will often confuse the fact that you don't support every thought, feeling or belief they have with you not supporting them as a

person. Your partner may be acutely aware of any differences in perspective and feel threatened if you express anything that does not go along with her thinking.

She may expect you to always tell her that her thought, feeling or belief is valid before you respond with your own thought, feeling or belief. If you don't follow this code of behavior that is practiced by most emotionally-sensitive women you may be labeled a bad partner. When she feels threatened that you are going against her, she may deliver a preemptive strike against you to make sure she doesn't get hurt.

Partners who have insecurity in the area of mutual support often wage cold wars where they take offense to an action that they read as you not thinking about their needs as importantly as yours. Your partner will then take a stand against you without telling you what you did wrong. She will be cold towards you and act as though she is harboring a grudge. Unless you figure out exactly what you did to cause this cold war, her behavior can go on indefinitely.

This is where the anger-regulation sentence can be very helpful. You can use this sentence any time you sense she is waging a cold war by saying, "When you did that it seemed as though you thought I did something wrong." This will allow her to focus her thoughts on what you did even if the event that made her feel like you weren't on her side happened months earlier.

This can be a good opportunity to use your Partner Profile sentences relating to mutual support. After using the anger-regulation sentence, if she responds with clues that tell you she thinks you did something that shows you weren't on her side, you can use the phrases on the corresponding Partner Profile. Follow the formula that tells her, one, you know she is feeling like you aren't on her side, and, two, that you agree with her assessment that if you had been against her in some way it would be something anyone would be upset about. Once you have moved past step one and two, you can now tell her, with the phrases from your Partner Profile, that you had no intention of going against her and you are committed to being on her side.

Now let's take a look at high-conflict partners who fear that the promise to behave fairly may be broken.

## **FAIRNESS PROMISE:**

A partner who worries that the promises about sharing will not be honored may assume that you experience emotions as she does. She may believe that you have strong desires for things to go your way and that you are not skilled at controlling your wish for more of what you want. She may feel helpless not to take more than her share and may assume you are having the same experience. These women generally

do not have particularly strong moral beliefs about fairness within a relationship. They assume that it is normal for partners to try to get more than their fair share. They may even use an accusation of unfairness to push back against what they believe will be your attempt in the future to try to take more than your share.

Let's now move on to describe a partner who has fears that her partner will not honor the promise to respect her personal beliefs.

### **CONTROL PROMISE:**

The partner who is afraid that you are going to control her may be afraid of losing her sense of identity through merging with you. She may worry that you are going to make her an extension of you. These women often have a very weak sense of themselves in relationship to the world, not necessarily because of childhood issues but because constant high emotions tend to put people into a mental state that makes it very difficult to look at things from a clear perspective. This can keep them from seeing themselves from the outside. They often cannot form a picture of their identity as separate from others.

Without a strong sense of self, your partner may be vulnerable to the fear that you will overshadow her and not recognize her for who she really is. She may confuse her feeling of being overshadowed by you with the belief that you are dominating her. She may feel you are a bad partner because you are not hiding the fact that your personality is stronger and more secure than hers. This is part of the code of behavior that women with high emotionality use with each other so no one feels less than. When you don't turn down your sense of self around her, she may experience you as dominating or controlling her and believe you are not letting her express her true self.

Another reason your partner may be hypersensitive to controlling behavior is because of her fear of not getting what she wants. The high-conflict partner has strong emotional impulses that she will not be skilled at controlling. Your attempt to block her from her inappropriate impulses can be experienced by her as feeling controlled. Because she may believe that you have as little control over your impulses as she does, she might feel as though she has to be in a continual battle with you just to stay even.

Now let's move on to the partner who is insecure in the area of acceptable behavior.

### **THE ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR PROMISE:**

The fear that you have broken your promise to behave in an acceptable way is usually triggered or brought on by fear of social judgment from your partner's friends or

people in her community. Most high-conflict women suffer from fear of social rejection or negative judgment from others. They will often confuse this fear of social judgment with your inability to act appropriately in public.

This fear may be expressed in the form of complaints about your grooming habits, clothing choices and social etiquette. It can cause your partner to impose unreachable standards on you that she feels will guarantee no negative judgment from others. She may then decide that you are being a bad partner when you cannot or will not conform to them.

## **LEARNING THE FORMULA**

To overcome relationship insecurity with a high-conflict partner, you only need to follow this simple formula, preferably using the phrases provided in your Partner Profiles until you feel comfortable using your own language.

1. Let her know you understand exactly why she is really upset. You will need to figure out which promise she thinks you broke first and then tell her you understand that she believes you went against your agreement to be a good partner.
2. Let her know that you agree with her that partners should not break these agreements and that you would be upset with yourself if you found out you broke it.
3. Let her know that was not your intention, that the agreement to be a good partner is very important to you and you are committed to honoring it.

If you do not convince your partner that you, number one, understand why she is upset and, number two, that you feel if a partner breaks that promise there is reason for upset, you will not be able to convince her that it was not your intention to break the promise. And unless you convince her you didn't break the promise, she will remain insecure. If you remember the rules of anger that we went through at the very beginning of this workbook, you will see that these phrases in the Partner Profile follow the natural rules of anger. When someone is angry at you, they think you did something wrong, they think you knew it, and they think you did it anyway because you didn't care that it was wrong.

To stay within the rules of anger you must convince your partner that you know that she thinks you did something wrong and that you agree that it would have been wrong to do it. Only then can you convince her that, step three, the belief that you did it anyway because you don't care about the promises is not true after all. Following the

formula set out in the Partner Profiles allows you to get under all of her defenses. You will be giving her the reassurance she needs about her real concern, which has to do with her relationship insecurity, not your behavior. You will be able to accomplish this without having to admit to any wrongdoing. You will simply be stating that you believe in the relationship promises and that you are still committed to honoring them.

## **THE NICOLA METHOD REVIEW**

You have now seen how the entire process works from regulating your partner's emotions to overcoming her insecurity so you can regain her trust in you. Let's now do a brief recap of the tools you have learned.

### **Tool 1: Anger-Regulation Sentence:**

“When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong.”

Use this sentence every time your partner seems more upset with you than the situation calls for.

### **Third-Person Anger-Regulation Sentence:**

“When you said that it seemed like you thought Mary did something wrong.”

Use this variation when she is overly angry at another person.

### **Tool 2: Put-down Sentence:**

“When you said that it seemed like you thought...” (Fill in what you think the insulter was implying)

Use this every time your partner is insulting you in any way.

Don't forget to use the variation, “When you DID that it seemed like you thought...” when the anger or insult is non-verbal.

### **Part 2: Dismantling the Insecurity Defense Mechanism:**

Locate the Partner Profiles at the back of this workbook that seem to best fit your partner's complaints. Choose the sentences that feel comfortable for you and learn the sequence for a complaint about you that comes up frequently. Practice this complaint until you feel comfortable with the language. When you are confident about using the phrases, wait until you sense a natural place to use them, but only do so if your partner is in an emotionally regulated state. If your relationship is so filled with conflict that your partner cannot be civil with you at least some of the time, use the anger-regulation sentence and put-down sentences until the conflict is lower and then move on to the Partner Profile phrases.

### ***Part 3***

## **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

You now have all of the tools that you need to lower the conflict in your relationship. Let's look at a day in the life of someone who is using the Nicola Method to transform their high-conflict relationship to one with low conflict so you can get a big-picture sense of how it works.

### **THE NICOLA METHOD: A DAY IN THE LIFE**

The sample day you will be reading about will portray an average day in the life of a partner of a high-conflict woman who is using this method to lower conflict. In this scenario our husband, Steve, would have spent about a week getting acquainted with his reference sheets, and he has now been using the tools with his wife, Janine, for about two weeks, fairly consistently. He is using a mixture of sentences he memorized and ones he came up with himself now that he is familiar with his wife's insecurity areas.

\* \* \* \* \*

Steve is in the kitchen eating breakfast while getting ready for work. Janine walks in and slams down the newspaper on the table in front of him. She glares at him and folds her arms.

"What's this about?" He asks her.

"Am I your little puppy dog? Do you want me to fetch your slippers next?"

"I'm not sure what you mean. Is this about the paper?"

"You know very well I just did my hair. I can't believe you made me go out in the rain to get the paper. Now I either have to look like this at work or I'm going to be late if I have to redo it. I can't believe you are just sitting there after what I just went through."

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I did something wrong."

"Well, do you think I should have had to go out in the rain?"

"Why don't you let me know what I did wrong."

"Okay. You should have known it was raining and thought about me. Instead you thought about yourself."

"All right. Now that makes sense. It sounds like you are feeling like I am just thinking about me and not caring that you have just as many challenges getting out the door as I do this morning."

"Exactly. You are just not thinking about me."

"It probably seemed like I was just thinking of me and wasn't even aware of how the rain might affect your hair because that's not one of my worries."

"That's right."

"I just want to say that I take your needs very seriously. It may look like I am in my own world, but I promise you it is very important to me that I pay attention to what you are going through as well."

"Well, at least you care. Sometimes I swear it looks like you don't."

"Hey, I am really sorry that it didn't come through this time. I hope you let me know the next time you are feeling that. I don't want to let these things go so far that you are thinking I am not caring about what you need."

"Okay. Thanks." Well, I guess it's too late to read the paper anyway. See you later."

Steve goes to the office. He reminds himself that even though his wife will probably insist that he answer her many daily texts and calls, he does not have to respond to her demands the way he used to. Knowing that he can calm her down if necessary, he sticks by his new resolution to turn his cell phone on vibrate while he is at work. At about 11:30 he notices a phone call from his wife. He purposefully ignores the message for another fifteen minutes. When he takes a break, he checks the message. Janine is angry at her co-worker. By her voice on the message he can tell

she is outside letting off some steam.

He recognizes her emotions are out of control. He texts her back saying that he is in the middle of things, but he is sorry she is having problems with the co-worker. He tells her he will have time to talk about this tonight when they get home. He suggests they get take-out and talk about it over dinner.

She immediately texts him back and says she really needs to talk now. She texts that it's completely unfair that he can't talk during lunch break. He texts her back saying he can't risk his job for personal talk. He says he will be all ears at dinner. She texts him back throughout the day telling him she is too upset to wait and she wants him to call her anyway. He does not respond and instead tries to focus on his work.

He picks up the take-out food on the way home and meets Janine at the door. Her face is red and she is breathing hard. She begins venting about her co-worker before he puts his briefcase down. She follows him from room to room. He changes and puts on his sweat clothes and sits down at the table. She sits and continues complaining about her situation. He says, "It sounds like you think she did something wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that it seems like you think she must have done something wrong."

"Well, I guess I just felt like she talked so much in the meeting that people might not have seen it was my project too."

"Well, that is a real concern. People do take credit for others' work a lot. Do you want to talk to her about it?"

"No. But it really hurts that she didn't think about me."

Steve says, "That makes sense." At this point Janine relaxes and drops the subject.

They eat dinner and the subject of picking up their daughter at the airport comes up. Steve reminds her that she needs to pick Elsa up.

She responds, "I'm busy tomorrow. I am having a spa day. You have to pick up Elsa."

"Janine, I told you I am on deadline and I have to go into the office. We already agreed you would pick her up."

Janine storms off to the bedroom. Steve hears her throwing things. He walks in and says, "When you walked out that way it seemed like you thought I was doing something wrong."

"Well, I really need the spa days or else I don't feel like I can face my week. You aren't supporting me in what I need."

Steve recognizes that this is a mutual support issue. He responds by saying, "It sounds like you are feeling like I am not on your side."

Janine sighs and says, "Yes. Exactly."

Steve responds, "Look, I know how bad it feels when someone isn't on your side, so I'm glad you told me."

Janine says, "Thanks. It's okay. I guess I was just upset."

"Even though I recognize that you don't want to, will you cancel your spa day so you can pick up Elsa?"

"I guess I can do that. I'll bring her with me to the spa on Sunday instead."

"That sounds like a good solution."

They settle down to watch a drama show on television before they go to bed. Steve remarks about one of the show's technical inaccuracies since he is in the profession that the drama depicts.

Janine bristles at his comment. "You think you are so superior just because of your job. You think you are better than the rest of us, don't you?"

"When you said that it seemed like you thought I was being arrogant."

Janine pauses and thinks about it. "No, you aren't. It's just that when you talk that way it makes me feel like you are judging me." Janine turns off the light.

\* \* \* \* \*

The last section of this workbook contains your Partner Profiles. You now have all of the tools you will need to lower the conflict in your relationship using the Nicola Method.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You don't care about me. You never cared. You never liked me. I don't mean anything to you. You don't pay attention to me. You don't care about my feelings. I don't matter to you.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid you will leave the relationship because you don't care about her.

**Promise Broken:** We will make an emotionally secure environment for our partner. Security Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

**1. Confirm that it was the security promise that she thinks you broke:**

"Are you feeling that I am not showing you I care enough?"

"It sounds like you feel that I haven't been making a very safe place for you in the relationship."

"Does it seem like I am not showing you how important you are to me?"

**2. Let her know that you agree that partners should care about each other:**

"It is not okay for you to feel like I don't care about you."

"I understand how bad it would feel if you didn't think I cared."

"It's important that you feel safe in this relationship."

"It is very important that we let each other know that we care."

"I get why you are upset, and I would be too if I felt like you didn't care about me any more."

**3. Assure her that you do care for her:**

"Making sure you know I care about you is a very important priority for me."

"I would be very concerned if you thought that I no longer cared."

"It's really important to me that you know how much I care about you."

"If I have done anything that has made you feel like I don't care about you, I want you to know that's the last thing I meant to do."

**4. Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**

"I hope you will tell me any time you feel that I am not caring about you."

"I want you to let me know if you are ever having any doubts about how much I care."

"You need to tell me the next time you are feeling like I don't care about you so I can let you know how I really feel."

The next time a complaint about you not caring comes up, begin the process again.

If she is resistant to you telling her that you care using words and says she wants you to show her in actions, let her know that your actions may not always come out the way you mean them, so it is important that you tell her directly any time she feels like you might not care.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You don't love me. You never loved me. You don't show me you love me. You aren't in love with me any more. You aren't romantic. You never give me presents anymore. You don't show me how you feel. You don't care about my feelings.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid you will leave the relationship because you no longer love her.

**Promise Broken:** We will make an emotionally safe environment for our partner. Security Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the security promise that she thinks you broke:**  
"Are you feeling that I haven't been showing you that I love you?"  
"It sounds like you feel that I haven't been making a very safe place for you in the relationship."  
"It seems like you are having doubts about how important you are to me."
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should show they love each other:**  
"I get why you are upset, and I would be too if I felt like you didn't love me any more."  
"You have every right to be upset if you were thinking I no longer loved you."  
"I'm really glad you told me. It's important that you feel secure in our relationship."  
"It is very important that we don't let each other feel like we don't care."
3. **Assure her that you do still love her:**  
"I really need you to know how important you are to me."  
"I would be very upset if you thought that I no longer loved you."  
"It's really important to me that you know that I still love you."  
"If I have done anything that has made you feel like I don't love you, I want you to know that's the last thing I meant to do."
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
"I hope you will tell me any time that you feel like I might not love you any more."  
"I want you to let me know if you are ever having any doubts about how much I love you."  
"You need to let me know the next time you are feeling like I don't love you so I can make sure you know how I really feel."

The next time a complaint about you not loving her comes up, begin the process again.

If she is resistant to you telling her that you still love her using words and says she wants you to show her in actions, let her know that your actions may not always come out the way you mean them, so it is important that you tell her directly any time she feels like you might not still love her.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You are mean to me. You don't listen to me. You don't treat me right. You make me feel bad. You make me feel stupid. You always criticize me. You act like I'm worthless. You never let me have my own thoughts. You think I'm no good. You wish you had never married me.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid she is not worthy of being in a relationship and that you will leave her.

**Promise Broken:** We will make an emotionally safe environment for our partner. Security Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the security promise that she thinks you broke:**  
"It seems like you feel I have broken your trust."  
"It sounds like you don't think I am treating you the way I should be."  
"It seems like you have lost faith in me as a partner."
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should not make each other feel bad:**  
"The way you are feeling makes sense. I would be very upset if I felt like you were not treating me well."  
"You have every right to want to be treated in a way that lets you feel good about yourself."  
"I would be upset too. You have a right to feel safe in this relationship."
3. **Assure her that you intend to treat her well:**  
"If there is anything that I have done to make you feel that way, I want you to know that was the last thing I wanted to do."  
"You need to know that treating you well is a very important priority for me."  
"It is very important to me that you feel safe in this relationship."  
"The last thing I ever meant to do was to make you feel bad."
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
"I need you to tell me the next time that you are feeling bad or unsafe in any way."  
"If you ever feel that way again, just tell me. I don't want you going around feeling like I don't care about you."  
"Please come to me the next time you feel like I might not be treating you right. I don't want you to have to feel that way again."

The next time a complaint about how you are treating her comes up, begin the process again.

If she is resistant to you telling her that you will treat her well using words and says she wants you to show her in actions, let her know that your actions may not always come out the way you mean them, so it is important that you can clear up any misunderstandings directly so she doesn't have to feel bad.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You aren't on my side. You only care about yourself. You are selfish. You don't listen to what I want. You don't listen to me. I never get what I want. You always do what you want to do. My opinions don't matter.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid you do not see her as an equal partner and you are going to take advantage of her and take everything for yourself and leave her with nothing.

**Promise Broken:** We will treat our partner's needs as importantly as we do our own. Mutual Support Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the mutual support promise that she thinks you broke:**  
"Are you feeling that I haven't been on your side?"  
"It sounds like you feel that I haven't been thinking about your needs."  
"Does it seem like I am not taking your needs into account?"  
"Have you been feeling like I haven't been thinking about what you want and what you need?"
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should be on each others' side:**  
"I know how bad it feels when someone isn't on your side. I would feel the same way."  
"I'm really glad you told me. It's not okay for us to forget about each others' needs."  
"It's not okay for us to be against each other like that."  
"No one should have to feel like their thoughts and feelings don't count."
3. **Assure her that you are on her side:**  
"If anything I have done has made it seem like I'm not on your side, I want you to know that is the last thing I wanted you to be feeling."  
"It is really important that you know that I care about your thoughts and opinions."  
"We need to always feel like we are there for each other. I hope you understand I was not meaning to make you feel like I wasn't."  
"I would feel awful if I realized I was only thinking about myself."
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
"The next time you feel that I am not on your side, please come to me right away."  
"I don't want you feeling that way, so please tell me right away if it seems like I am not supporting you the way I should be."  
"I hope you feel comfortable telling me any time you feel that way so I can make sure you know how important your needs are to me."

The next time the complaint about mutual support comes up, begin the process again.

If she is resistant to you telling her that you are on her side using words and says she wants you to show her in actions, let her know that your actions may not always come out the way you mean them, so it is important that you tell her directly any time she feels like you are not on her side.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You aren't fair. You aren't treating me fairly. I deserve to have more. I am not getting what I should have. You take everything. You are stingy. You are greedy. You never give me anything.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid she will not get enough and that you will take everything from her.

**Promise Broken:** We will act fairly and share decision-making power. Fairness Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the fairness promise that she thinks you broke:**  
“Are you feeling that I haven't been fair with you?”  
“It sounds like you feel that I haven't been dividing things fairly.”  
“It seems like you are feeling like you haven't been getting your fair share.”
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should act fairly:**  
“You are right to feel upset. Fairness is extremely important to me as well.”  
“I would be very upset too if I thought you were being unfair with me.”  
“I'm really glad you told me. It's not okay for things to be unfair between us.”
3. **Assure her that you are committed to being fair in the relationship:**  
“If anything I have done has felt unfair to you, I need to know so we can work it out right away.”  
“I take fairness in our relationship very seriously. It is really important that both of us agree that things are fair.”  
“Fairness is really important to me. I never want you feeling like I might take advantage of you in any way.”
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
“Things need to be fair between us, so make sure you tell me next time you feel this way.”  
“I want you to come to me if you are feeling this way again.”  
“If things feel unfair again, I need you to let me know.”

The next time a complaint about fairness comes up, begin the process again.

When she has a specific complaint about fairness, you may need to address it directly with her in a face-to-face discussion. Make sure you use the anger-regulation and the put-down sentence to keep the conflict at a low level while discussing specific complaints.

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You always try to control me. You are being controlling. You aren't my father. Stop telling me what to do. You can't tell me what to do.

**Promise broken:** We will not impose our personal beliefs on our partner. Control Promise.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid you will take her identity away. She has a fear of not existing to you or being ignored. She is also fearful of being dominated and oppressed by you.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the control promise that she thinks you broke:**  
"Are you feeling like I am trying to make you do something you shouldn't have to do?"  
"Does it feel like I am trying to get you to do something you don't believe in?"  
"It sounds like you are feeling like I have been trying to boss you around."
2. **Let her know you agree that partners should not try to control each other:**  
"I totally get why you are upset, and I would be too if I felt like someone was trying to control me."  
"You have every right to be upset if you thought I was trying to make you go against your beliefs."  
"It makes sense that you're upset. No one wants to be bossed around."
3. **Assure her that you do not want to try to control her:**  
"I would be very concerned if you thought that I was trying to make you do things that you don't agree with."  
"It's really important that I don't try to make you do things you don't believe in."  
"If what I did in any way looked like I was trying to control you, I promise you that was the last thing I wanted to do."
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
"I hope you will tell me any time that you feel like I am trying to control you in any way."  
"Next time tell me right away. I don't ever want you to think I am trying to control you."  
"You can come to me any time it seems like I am being controlling. It's really important that we don't treat each other that way."

The next time a complaint about you being controlling comes up, begin the process again.

When she has a specific complaint about you controlling her, you may need to address it directly with her in a face-to-face discussion. Make sure you use the anger-regulation and the put-down sentence to keep the conflict at a low level while discussing specific complaints. Always use the definition of controlling behavior as "one of you trying to make the other do something they don't believe in".

## PARTNER PROFILE

**Criticism:** You are behaving inappropriately. You don't know how to dress. You don't know how to handle yourself in public. I don't want to be seen with you. You don't know how to talk to people. I am embarrassed to be seen with you. You don't treat me the right way in public.

**Insecurity:** She is afraid your behavior will bring negative judgment on her from others.

**Promise Broken:** We will act in a socially-acceptable manner according to our peers, culture, community or spiritual beliefs. Acceptable Behavior Promise.

**Instructions:** Choose one or more of the sentences in each category. Allow her to talk and try to respond naturally in between sentences. Make sure each of the four areas is covered with at least one sentence.

1. **Confirm that it was the acceptable behavior promise that she thinks you broke:**  
“Are you feeling like I haven't been acting appropriately around you?”  
“Are you feeling like I haven't been acting in a way people would respect?”  
“It seems like you don't feel like I am acting in a respectful way in public.”
2. **Let her know that you agree that partners should act appropriately:**  
“I understand why you are upset if you feel like I acted in a way that made others judge us.”  
“You have a right to be upset if you think I am going to act in a way that is going to bring judgment from the people we respect.”  
“I agree that it is very important that neither of us act inappropriately.”
3. **Assure her that you have no intention of acting inappropriately:**  
“I am glad you told me. It's really important that I act in a way that the people we care about respect.”  
“I don't want to embarrass you by acting in a way that the people that are important to us wouldn't respect.”  
“It is really important to me that I am acting in an appropriate way.”
4. **Ask her to let you know the next time she feels this way:**  
“I hope you will tell me any time that you feel like I am acting in a way that you don't think is respectful to others.”  
“Next time you feel this way, I need you to let me know.”  
“I hope you will tell me if you feel this way again.”

The next time the complaint about unacceptable behavior comes up, begin the process again.

if your partner has specific complaints about acceptable behavior, you may need to address them in a sit-down discussion. Remember to use the anger-regulation sentence and the put-down sentence any time you feel she is not being respectful towards you during these discussions. Always use the standards of acceptable behavior held by your peers, culture, community or your spiritual beliefs to judge whether behavior is acceptable. Do not use either of your personal standards to define acceptable behavior for the other.