

Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other – 28:00

Outline & Mentality - Common Protestant Outline

Objective

To look closely at sensitive areas of our relationship where we have difficulty sharing our feelings with each other, and to gain insights into why we avoid these areas.

Goals of this presentation

To know

- they can respond to each other's feelings with acceptance rather than reacting with rejection or toleration
- dialoguing in areas that bring out feelings that are difficult to share is important because of the intimacy that can result in their relationship
- non-verbal communication contributes to their awareness of each other

To do

- accept each other's feelings
- dialogue in a sensitive area of their relationship
- recognize the non-verbal communication in their dialogue

To experience

- greater intimacy as a result of dialoguing in a difficult area in their relationship

Flow of the presentation

Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other begins with one Lay spouse sharing a sensitive area in the marital relationship in which he/she avoids communicating, explaining what it is about himself/herself that perpetuates the avoidance. He/she describes the effects on their relationship when they avoid communicating in this area. Then CL and/or CS teach the three typical ways we react to each other's feelings: rejection, toleration, and acceptance. All presenters continue by describing their journey to reach out to accept each other through sharing feelings in dialogue. CL or CS teaches the importance of non-verbal communication. The Lay couple tells the story of their journey to accept one another as they share their feelings about being separated from each other by death. This section ends with the recognition that this dialogue is about life and the way we choose to live each day together. The elements of dialogue are then reinforced by the Clergy couple. The couples are directed to the Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other worksheet, which suggests specific areas in which they might avoid communicating in their marriage, such as money, sex, relationship to God, or death. After completing the worksheet, the couples are instructed to write a love letter about their feelings in one of the chosen areas, which will give them an opportunity to reach out and to accept each other's feelings in their dialogue.

Connection with other presentations

Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other connects to Encounter with Self in that who we are as persons, including our self-doubts, influences why we have difficulty reaching out to each other to share our feelings in sensitive areas. This presentation also builds on Marriage in Today's World because we make a decision to love our spouse when we decide to share our feelings about sensitive areas in our relationship. The Listening presentation prepared us to listen to our spouse with our heart in an area of our relationship in which it is difficult to listen. The couples' dialogue about their feelings in sensitive areas in their marriage prepares them for Risking to Trust in Dialogue.

Cautions

- The objective in the written and verbal dialogue presentations in Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other is to model the sharing and accepting of feelings; it is not about bringing the couples to tears by sharing traumatic stories.
- Sections III, V, and VII are very important but could lapse into being preachy. The Clergy couple should make a special effort to avoid this perception by using examples that are interesting and relatable to the couples. The judicious use of humor is acceptable if it helps to clarify the concepts and make them memorable for the participants.
- In order for the Clergy leader or spouse to bring in a good variety of examples of non-verbal communication, it is recommended that the Lay couple provide a list or copy of that section.

I. Introduction and optional opening prayer (CL or CS: 0:30)

State:

This presentation is titled "Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other." It can be found on page _____ of the Workbook.

Opening prayer (optional):

Suggested wording:

Gracious and loving God, help us to recognize that we can grow in love by opening ourselves to communicate with our spouse in sensitive areas. Help us to listen with our hearts and accept each other's feelings, so that our relationship can become even more intimate. Amen.

II. Reasons we avoid communicating in sensitive areas and effects on our relationship (LH or LW: 1:30)

II A. We all have sensitive areas in which we avoid communicating

Lay husband or wife begins with the statement that we all have sensitive areas in which we avoid communicating. List personal examples of areas and give reasons for avoiding them. Sensitive areas may be avoided for several reasons: we tried to discuss it in the past and ended up in conflict; we don't know how to talk about it; we are afraid of hurting or being hurt.

II B. Why and effects

II B 1. Because of who I am

Choose one area (not finances, sex, or death) in which you avoid communicating thoughts and feelings. Explain what it is about you that makes it difficult for you to communicate in this area and perpetuates avoidance. You may want to refer back to how you described your qualities, values, behaviors, past history, strengths, and weaknesses in Encounter with Self.

Be sure to name your feeling(s) about trying to communicate in this area.

II B 2. Describe effects on your relationship

Describe the specific effects on your relationship when you avoid communicating in sensitive areas. What happens when you keep certain areas off-limits? How does it affect the level of trust in your relationship? Consider: indifference, hurt, isolation, independence, withdrawal, loneliness, etc.

III. Three typical ways we might react to each other's feelings

(CL and/or CS: 3:00)

Suggested transition statement:

There are three typical ways we might react to our spouse when they share their feelings: rejection, toleration, and acceptance.

III A. Rejection

Rejection is dismissing, denying, or questioning why the other person has the feeling (as defined in the Workbook).

Give examples of how couples reject each other's feelings. Teach that all forms of rejection result in hurt, emptiness, and isolation. The illustration of rejection is probably more understandable for the couples when it is described by quoting the rejecting person's words, for example:

- **Outright rejection:** "That's a dumb feeling!" or "You have no right to feel that way!"
- **Questioning the feeling:** "Why do you feel that way?" or "Where did that feeling come from?"
- **Subtle rejection:** "I'm sorry you feel that way," or "Cheer up, you'll feel better tomorrow," or "What can I do to help you feel better?"

In each of these three examples, the effect is the same for the person who is sharing their feeling: a judgment of personal rejection and a breakdown of trust.

III B. Toleration

Toleration is acknowledging, but not accepting the other's feeling (as defined in the Workbook).

Give examples of how we tolerate each other's feelings. These examples should show that toleration has the appearance of getting along, and doesn't rock the boat, but doesn't allow for much depth or fulfillment. An example of toleration could be listening impassively while our spouse shares his/her feeling and not making an effort to be involved in his/her emotions. We may treat the other's sharing as "interesting," ("that's an interesting feeling") we may even understand it, but we don't invest ourselves. Because his/her feelings are not valued, the person judges that he/she is not valued.

III C. Acceptance

Acceptance is embracing both the feeling and the person who has the feeling (as defined in the Workbook).

Briefly share examples of acceptance of feelings in dialogue. The effects of acceptance through dialogue are intimacy and belonging. Acceptance is not simply understanding the other person's feeling, but a desire to be intimately involved in the emotion expressed. When we accept the

feelings of our spouse, we show they are valued and important to us and our spouse experiences a deep sense of personal worth.

Rejection of feelings happens when I focus on me; acceptance of feelings happens when I focus on you; toleration is somewhere in-between. Most of us respond with toleration when our spouse shares his or her feelings, believing that is good enough. But we need to strive for acceptance of our spouse's feelings. Making a decision to focus on the feelings rather than on the issue or circumstance promotes acceptance.

Be very clear that acceptance relates to our spouse's feelings. We may or may not accept our spouse's prejudices, opinions, beliefs (thoughts), and certainly not behaviors that have a negative impact on our relationship.

As each of the three ways of reacting to the other's feelings is illustrated, the effect of each should also be underscored. Examples of rejection and toleration of feelings that are especially relatable to married couples should be used. This will allow them to examine their own behaviors when their spouse shares feelings. Include subtle as well as overt behaviors of rejection and toleration in our reactions to feelings shared by our spouse, as well as meaningful examples of acceptance.

A very effective way to conclude this section is to summarize by using a visual image such as receiving a sweater as a gift and what that might look like using the three ways of reacting to each other's feelings. If we reject the gift, we may not even open it; we may give it back or express dislike at the pattern or the color. If we tolerate the gift, we may hold it up and exclaim how nice it is, but we don't try to put it on or wear it. If we accept the gift of the sweater, we put it on and experience its warmth and softness; we treasure the gift and affirm the one who gave it to us. Acceptance involves saying "Thank you for trusting me with your feeling. Tell me more."

IV. Tell the story of our journey where we reached out to accept each other through sharing our feelings about an area of our relationship where we felt vulnerable

(Total time: 9:00; LH & LW on sex and CL & CS on finances: 4:30 each couple)

These sharings need to be gut-level. Talk about reaching out to each other in the areas of sex (Lay couple) and finances (Clergy couple). LH does A and B, and then LW does A and B, before sharing C together. The Clergy couple repeats this pattern.

IV A. Name the area and describe how and why you avoid talking about this area (0:30)

Begin by stating the **area** (sex for Lay, finances for Clergy) in your relationship that you avoid talking about and then describe specifically how and why you avoid talking about it. You may need to refer back to your Encounter With Self (III B.) or other previous presentations to identify the qualities, self-doubts, fears, or past history that make it difficult for you to talk about this area.

You can refer back to traits of your Dominant Personality Style but in all things be specific. Finally, briefly indicate why you decided to dialogue on this area of your relationship.

Formation:

Our sexual relationship and our finances are identified as areas in which it is particularly urgent to reach out to each other as a couple. This is because we are very likely to have strong feelings in these areas, and strong feelings generally reveal our inmost selves as nothing else can. When we truly yearn for our spouse to know us, we can best achieve this by dialoguing in these sensitive areas and helping the other to grasp those feelings. Furthermore, our concern about our feelings being fully accepted often arises from sensitive areas of our relationship. Inwardly, we may say to ourselves, "I am afraid that my spouse will not fully accept me if I share my feelings in this area." This presentation is about responding to our spouse's feelings with acceptance, no matter what feelings are shared, which uniquely opens greater possibilities for exceptional intimacy. This is what the couples need to understand in your dialogue sharing, even though you do not specifically state that.

IV B. Name the feeling and describe it in detail (1:00)

Mention that you both wrote on the same question, given by the first speaker. Share the most intense feeling from your love letter in rich detail, but do not read the letter. It is helpful to the couples if you can use at least one of the methods for describing feelings that is listed in the Workbook. Avoid explaining the area or defending yourself. Remember you are modeling how to describe feelings in sensitive areas.

IV C. Briefly summarize your verbal dialogue, focusing on the acceptance and the resulting intimacy (1:30)

After Lay husband and wife do A and B, continue together by describing how you mutually decided on the strongest feeling from your love letters for your verbal dialogue. Focus on only one feeling as you summarize your verbal dialogue. Describe the specific impact of the acceptance of your feeling by your spouse and the resulting intimacy and unity between you. Do not generalize the impact of your spouse's acceptance with vague words such as "closer," "happier," "more intimate," or "more loving." Instead, mention specific changes in behavior and attitude that reflect your growing intimacy.

The couple should include many non-verbals throughout the dialogue sharing so they can be referred to in V D. Did you look into each other's eyes? Or turn away? Were your shoulders slumped? Your hands clenched? Did you reach out to hold the other person's hand? Put an arm around their shoulder? Cross your arms? [You can consult the Workbook for a useful list.]

Conclude your sharing with a positive statement about that area.

- The sharing on sex could conclude with this statement or something similar: *"Our sexual relationship can be the source of our deepest loneliness or our greatest intimacy. When we dialogue on our feelings in this area we greatly expand our capacity for love."*

- The sharing on finances could conclude with this statement or something similar: *“Money can be a source of conflict whether there is none or plenty, but when we dialogue on our feelings about finances we don’t let the issue come between us.”*

NOTE:

In order for CL or CS to provide a wide variety of examples of non-verbal communication below, it would be helpful for the Lay couple to provide them with a list or a copy of this sharing.

V. Non-verbal communication - Define and expand (CL or CS: 1:30)

V A. Non-verbal communication is 55% of our communication

Address the importance of being aware of non-verbal communication in dialogue. Non-verbal communication accounts for about 55% of our total communication. Our tone of voice or the way that we say things accounts for 38% of the message. The words we say only comprise 7% of our message. (The Power of Nonverbal Communication, Henry H. Calero, Silver Lake Publishing, 2005)

V B. Non-verbals don't lie, but they can be misunderstood

Indicate the importance of asking for clarification to be sure non-verbals are being interpreted correctly by both parties. It is important to confirm that the non-verbal message you are sending or receiving is the one intended. Teach by sharing an example.

V C. Intensity is often better expressed with non-verbals

Emphasize that some communication can't be fully or adequately expressed with words. Often a gentle hug or mischievous wink communicates better than words. A red face or clenched fists can demonstrate the intensity of a feeling that may (or may not) have been communicated in words. Use of non-verbal communication allows us to "see" the intensity of a feeling more clearly and this generally helps others, particularly our spouse, grasp the depth of our feeling.

V D. Give examples of non-verbal communication by referring to non-verbals talked about in the dialogue sharings in IV

Highlight specific examples of non-verbal communication by referring to the non-verbal communication shared in IV C, both from your own sharing and the Lay couple's.

VI. Tell the story of our journey to accept one another in our feelings about being separated by death

(Total time: 9:00: LH & LW: 8:30 for A-D; LH or LW: 0:30 for E)

In developing this section, one Lay spouse shares his/her A and B, and then the other Lay spouse shares A and B. Then each reads his/her love letter (C) followed by the interplay (D). Only one spouse shares E. Suggested times are for guidance only, per person.

VI A. State the area and describe how and why you avoid talking about being separated by death (1:00)

The first speaker begins with a transition statement.

Suggested wording:

Another area we avoid talking about is being separated by death.

What is it about you that leads you to avoid communicating in the area of being separated by death? Describe how and why you avoid dialoguing in this area, including any fears, cultural background, family hang-ups, etc. “How” points to our behaviors - do we change the subject, ignore our spouse, tell a joke to lighten the mood? “Why” we avoid talking about being separated by death generally reflects the kind of person we are – our values, character traits, beliefs, fears, self-image, attitudes, etc. How and why you avoid talking about being separated by death is generally different for the husband and wife. When you write this section, it is important for each of you to be aware of what you fear about being separated by death.

Remember, this is not a dialogue on feelings about death itself, but about being **separated** by death. You might preface your sharing with something like “The resurrection faith of Easter brings us hope of eternal life, but this doesn’t prevent us from experiencing powerful feelings when thinking about being separated by death.”

VI B. Why did you decide to dialogue on being separated by death? (0:45)

Describe the interior wrestling that led up to your decision and share why you decided to dialogue on being separated by death. Your reasons should be relatable and believable. You must give the couples a compelling reason why you ventured into such a sensitive area of your relationship. Be specific. Perhaps it was an event that triggered a desire to explore your feelings in this area.

VI C. Read your love letters (1:30)

One Lay spouse reads their love letter aloud and then the other spouse follows. Continue to “model” dialogue as we have taught it (no prayer, no endearing quality, etc., even though these may be your usual practice). The majority of your letter must be the rich description of your feeling. Do not go on about all the ways you will miss your spouse. Whatever thoughts you share should subtly point to VI E – how important it is to live and love your spouse now, before it is too late. It should be an intensely personal focus on the loss of the tender, intimate relationship with your beloved.

After you reveal your thoughts about being separated from your spouse by death, identify and then describe your strongest feeling. The focus of your love letter is to fully describe one feeling in extensive detail using many of the ways listed in the participants’ Workbook, such as intensity, taste, color, physical reaction, similar past experience, nature scene, etc. Note: This is not a complete “sample” dialogue as given Friday night; the verbal dialogue is a shared summary.

VI D. Share your verbal dialogue and its effects (LH & LW: 2:00)

After reading your love letters, follow with a shared narrative revealing how you chose the strongest feeling from your love letters for your verbal dialogue. Continue in a back-and-forth shared description of the verbal dialogue. Remember that the emphasis here is on sharing the feeling, drawing it out and exploring the feeling. Present your verbal dialogue in a balanced narrative, capturing the ways you listened with the heart and the importance of your non-verbal communication. This narrative of the dialogue should end with the statement by the spouse owning the feeling that the other spouse was experiencing his/her feeling. Be certain not to leave out this important step!

Share the specific effects of this dialogue on you and your relationship. Do not generalize the effect of your dialogue with words like “closer,” “happier,” “more intimate,” or “more loving.” In sharing the effects, focus more on the acceptance and resulting intimacy in your relationship. It is crucial for the couples to know that your love letter and verbal dialogue helped you create a mutual awareness of loving and being loved.

VI E. Point out how important it is to live and love more now, before it is too late (LH or LW: 0:30)

Tell the couples how important it is to live and love more now, before it's too late. You want to arouse in the couples a deep yearning and urgency to focus on their relationship now and to cherish every day together. This is an integral point in your sharing! One of the reasons we share on our feeling when we think about being separated from our spouse by death is to create awareness that we must live every moment together as if it were our last. We must love one another now, with all this implies.

VII. Reinforce elements of dialogue (CL and/or CS: 3:30)

VII A. Reflect on how the dialogue process was used to grow in intimacy and reach this depth of communication

Be mindful of the sacredness of the sharing just experienced. You might pause for a moment. Then transition from the high emotion in the room by pointing out that you and the Lay couple were able to share such deep feelings because the dialogue process gave a safe zone in which to explore sensitive areas. Reflect on how the dialogue process was used to grow in intimacy and reach this depth of communication. Continue with a brief summary of the concepts used in these dialogues, concepts that made such depth possible.

Suggested wording:

You have just experienced some powerful sharing in areas that are difficult to talk about – sex, finances, and death. Sharing feelings in these particularly difficult areas did not cause conflict or tension. In fact, it drew each couple closer.

Did you hear how vividly <Joe and Mary> and ____ and I shared our feelings with each other using the five senses? We did not try to justify or rationalize our feelings; we simply shared them and described them.

We did not judge each other's feelings; there was no defensiveness. Did you also notice how the dialogues stayed focused on the feelings being shared and not on the issues themselves? Perhaps it struck you, as it struck me, that in all of these dialogues the starting point was a decision to love. Even agreeing to dialogue on these questions was a decision to love! Those decisions were made in order to grow in intimacy, moving beyond any personal barriers to simply listen to the beloved. The acceptance and resulting intimacy happened because of the use of the dialogue technique. So I'd like to review that technique again briefly.

VII B. Briefly reinforce the dialogue process

VII B 1. Writing - self-disclosure through feelings

This is a very brief overview of what you have already told them in other presentations. Remind them to keep the love letter personal and to focus on feelings rather than simply dealing with facts and communicating information. Ask them to be as clear as possible in describing their feelings.

VII B 2. Exchange

The love letter is a very special gift. Ask the couples to exchange it with that in mind. Speak about the way in which they should hand their letters to their spouse.

VII B 3. Verbal Dialogue - reinforce acceptance

Remind the couples to dialogue on only one of the feelings from their love letters so they can get in touch with and experience in depth the feeling that is shared. Acceptance of their spouse with the feeling is the key. Ask the couples to be sensitive to each other's feelings and remember that no matter which feeling they dialogue on, neither feeling is right nor wrong.

Suggest that they use the Possible Questions for Verbal Dialogue on page ____ in their Workbook to enrich their verbal dialogue.

VII B 4. Review topics or behaviors that do not belong in dialogue

There are certain topics or behaviors that do not belong in dialogue. Briefly review them and remind the couples of the negative effects these could have on their dialogue:

- Revealing things that should be confessed only to clergy or professional counselors (confessional material)

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- Saying negative things about your spouse
- Making blunt/cruel comments, then excusing yourself by saying you are just being honest
- Garbage dumping: blaming your spouse, bringing up old stuff, unloading burdens
- Manipulating: sharing things in the hope that your spouse will change
- Problem-solving: working on problems rather than on your relationship

VII B 5. Worksheets for dialogue (in Workbook): Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other

CL or CS explains the question in the Workbook, including *reading the directions as printed*.

First you will separate to write, then . . .

1. *Review the list below and check all the areas where you think you have difficulty communicating with each other.*
2. *Choose an area in which you have strong feelings.*
3. *Write your love letter, briefly mentioning the area, but focusing on your feelings.*
4. *Describe your strongest feeling as fully as possible. Remember, the love letter is about you and your feeling and not about the area.*

VII B 6. Announce the break

Announce the break before the writing time begins. Encourage the couples to dialogue until they experience the feeling of the other before beginning their break. Remind them to stay together during the break and do whatever they need to do for the sake of their relationship. Tell them what time they should be back in the conference room for the next presentation.

Caution

The break is not typically an appropriate time for confession or counseling, since we want the couple to stay together. However, if someone approaches the Clergy during this time, it may be something that is needed for the sake of their relationship.

Writing time: 20 minutes

Dialogue time: 30 minutes

Husbands stay in the conference room to write (recommended).

How we live the concepts of this presentation:

Living out the concepts of Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other in our daily lives means we make a decision to share our feelings in dialogue in sensitive areas of our relationship that are difficult for us to talk about to one another. We strive to accept our spouse's feelings, rather than react with rejection or choose simply to tolerate our spouse's feelings. We acknowledge the value of non-verbal communication and try to be aware of our spouse's non-verbal communication to broaden our listening skills.

An assessment for us as a couple:

- How, specifically, do we reject, tolerate, or accept each other's feelings in our daily conversations outside of dialogue?
- How, specifically, do we reject, tolerate, or accept each other's feelings in our daily dialogue?
- What behaviors do we use when we strive to accept each other's feelings?
- Have we risked exploring our feelings about sensitive areas in our relationship to motivate us to stretch and grow? Or are we only coasting?
- When was the last time we shared our feelings in a dialogue about our sexual relationship, our finances, or being separated by death?

Dialogue questions to help the presenting team develop their presentation:

HDIF?	How do I feel?	HDIFAMA?	HDIFA my answer?
HDIFA?	HDIF about?	HDIFTYT?	HDIF telling you this?
HDIFAT?	HDIFA this (or that)?	DFILD.	Describe feeling in loving detail.

1. The barrier in me that keeps me from touching you more is _____. HDIFAMA?
2. The main barrier in me that prevents me from receiving your touch is _____. HDIFAMA?
3. The kind of touching that means most to me is _____. HDIFAMA?
4. When was the last time I really looked at you? HDIFAMA?
5. Do I look at you when you're talking to me? HDIFAMA?
6. Am I aware of my own body language? HDIFAMA?
7. When was the last time we traced each other's face with our fingertips? HDIFAMA?
8. In what areas do I avoid talking to you? HDIFAMA?
9. Describe my most common non-verbal reactions to (pick a series of events). HDIFAMA?
10. What feeling in the area of our finances most troubles me? DFILD.
11. If I had an extra \$500, what would I do? HDIFAMA?
12. If I were asked to donate \$500 now, would I do it? HDIFAMA?
13. Do I worry about money? HDIFAMA?
14. Have I thought about how much money we will need for retirement; for our child's education; for our child's wedding? HDIFAMA?
15. How do I see myself as a sexual partner? HDIFAMA?
16. HDIF when I want to make love but we don't?
17. What do I enjoy about sex? HDIFAMA?
18. What do I dislike about our sexual relationship? HDIFAMA?
19. What would I change in our sexual relationship? HDIFAMA?
20. How can I improve our sexual relationship? HDIFAMA?
21. Am I embarrassed by talking in public about our sexual relationship? HDIFAMA?
22. HDIFA my body?
23. What aspect of our sexual relationship do I have the most difficulty talking about to you? HDIFAT?
24. "Today is the last day we will have together." HDIF when I hear this statement?
25. HDIF recalling the death of (mother, father, brother, child, relative, friend, etc.)?
26. Recall a "close call," an accident or near accident, a serious illness, or injury. HDIF recalling this event?
27. Recall a time when I was worried about your life/health (illness, surgery, accident, war). HDIF recalling this time?
28. What are some of the things I would miss most if we were separated by death? HDIFAT?

AREAS FOR REACHING OUT TO EACH OTHER

Instructions:

1. Review the list below, and check all the areas where you think you have difficulty communicating with each other.
2. Choose an area in which you have strong feelings.
3. Write your love letter, briefly mentioning the area, but focusing on your feelings. Describe your strongest feeling as fully as you can. Remember, the love letter is about you and your feeling and not about the area.

Check all that apply.

Money

Health

Time

Job - Mine/Yours

Rest

Sex

Our communication with each other

Children (step-children)

Relatives

Relationship with God

Atmosphere in our home

Relationship with our adult children

Retirement

In-laws

Death

Other _____