

## AREAS FOR REACHING OUT TO EACH OTHER - 24 Min.

### OBJECTIVE:

To help the participants become aware that sensitive areas of their lives can be opened to each other; rather than rejecting one another or taking each other for granted, to accept their spouses with their feelings.

### GENERAL FORMAT:

**To know:** that they can respond to each other's feelings with acceptance rather than reacting with rejection or toleration; that dialoguing in difficult areas is important because of the intimacy that can result in their relationship; that non-verbal communication contributes to their awareness of each other.

**To do:** accept each other when there are difficult feelings; dialogue in a sensitive area of their relationship; use non-verbal communication in their dialogue.

**To experience:** greater intimacy as a result of dialoguing in a difficult area in their relationship.

### WHERE ARE THE COUPLES?

Second talk after lunch; participants are sleepy and want a break.

#### I. Introduction *(CL or CS: 0.5 min.)*

**“The title of this presentation is ‘Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other.’ You’ll find it on page 30 of the workbook. The key concept for this talk is that we all avoid communicating in sensitive areas. In the last talk we learned how to listen and how that can affect our communication. In this presentation we will discover that sharing in sensitive areas can make our relationship even more intimate.”**

#### II. Three typical ways we might react to each other’s feelings *(3 min. total)*

*(CL or CS: A. & B., 1.5 min.)*

*Use some examples of rejection and toleration that are relatable to the couples so they can grasp what is being said. Try to avoid a "preachy" tone. It is a good idea to present and explain each reaction first, then follow with personal examples. Use your own words, not the mentality.*

##### A. Rejection

*Sometimes rejection is outright: “That’s really a dumb feeling.” (This says, in essence, “You are dumb.”) “Why do you feel that way?” (Sometimes we ask our spouses to defend themselves or to justify their feelings rather than share them.) Sometimes rejection is subtle: “Honey, I’m sorry you feel that way.” (This says you are not acceptable with this feeling.) There is also indifference. (Letting your spouse talk but not attaching any importance to what he or she says.) Sometimes we try to soothe the person or take their feeling away. Teach that all forms of rejection result in hurt, emptiness and shutting off intimacy.*

##### B. Toleration

*Personal examples of toleration need to show that it gives a false sense of getting along but doesn’t allow for much depth or fulfillment. We listen and try to understand but do not get personally involved or let ourselves be affected by what the person is feeling and experiencing. We remain at the level of intellectually understanding the words our spouses say or focus our attention on the topic being discussed rather than on the person. The result in the sharer is a sense of isolation and loneliness.*

*Be careful not to give the impression that toleration is bad. Most of our daily conversations are in the area of toleration. However, the point we need to make is that for real intimacy, toleration is not enough. There is more available!*

### **C. Acceptance**

*(CS or CL: 1.5 min.)*

*Spouse not doing A & B shares personal examples of your acceptance of the other's feeling. This may be in dialogue or in everyday life. Acceptance is an embracing of the feeling and the person who has the feeling. The effects of acceptance through dialogue are intimacy, belonging and being loved. It brings a time of closeness and celebration. In acceptance we allow ourselves to be filled by our awareness of who our spouses really are right now. We empty ourselves of all criticism and distracting thoughts and judgments in our efforts to really know, be with and take inside of us the person we love. It's a time that says, "I know you deeply and I love you right here, right now, just as you are." The result of this in the sharer is a real sense of personal worth, of being valued and cared about.*

*Areas to consider here would be those in which your positions were 180° apart; you rarely communicated in this area before because it brought up conflict. This time, you tried to focus on just the feeling and not the issue, and the difference was like night and day. The **result** of this in the person sharing is a real sense of personal worth and being valued and cared about. I was listening objectively like a friend would listen, caring for the person rather than defending, protecting or worrying about who was going to get their way this time. Acceptance is an "embracing" of the feeling and the person who has the feeling.*

## **III. Reasons we avoid communicating in sensitive areas and effects on our relationship**

*(LH or LW: 1.5 min. total)*

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

*This section begins with the statement that we all have sensitive areas in which we avoid communicating. Give personal examples. It may also be helpful to give examples that are not personally difficult but may be relatable to the participants.*

### **B. Why and effects**

#### **1. Because of the type of person I am in this area**

*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. Choose one area and explain what it is **about me in this area** that perpetuates the avoidance. It is important to bring in your personality style from "Self" when describing why you avoid sharing in this area – but don't blame it on your Personality Style. (Don't choose finances or sex or death.)*

*For example, an organizer may find it difficult to talk about failure. A thinker may want to avoid talking about being wrong, a helper about a failed relationship, and a catalyst about impatience with other people's slower actions. You need to concentrate on what it is about you that makes you want to avoid it.*

#### **2. Describe effects on our relationship.**

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

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

*(LH & LW: 3 min. each)*

*One lay spouse shares about their sexual relationship, the other about finances.*

*In your dialogue sharing for Section IV, it is critically important to understand why sexuality, finances (and later death) are singled out as areas in which it is particularly urgent that couples reach out to each other in dialogue. These are areas very likely associated with strong feelings, and **strong feelings generally reveal our true selves like nothing else can.** In other words, if we really want someone else to understand us, we can best achieve this by describing our feelings and helping the other to grasp those feelings.*

*Furthermore, our strongest worries about being fully accepted arise from sensitive areas. Inwardly we may be saying to ourselves, "I am afraid that my spouse will not fully accept me if I share how I really feel in this area." This talk is about accepting our spouses without reservations, no matter what feelings are shared, and the acceptance that follows this kind of sharing. It opens greater possibilities for exceptional intimacy. **Without stating it, this is what the couples need to hear in our dialogue sharings.***

*In the previous section we showed that there are many reasons we are reluctant to share our feelings. In our dialogue sharings in IV, we need to be very specific about why we are reluctant to share feelings in these areas.*

**Workshopping Note:** *Many people need to tell the details of the story in order to get in touch with their feelings. That is probably how it will be written. In workshopping, we then need to cut down the story to just include the pertinent details and focus on the feelings and why it is difficult to share them.*

##### A. Name the area and describe how and why you avoid talking about this area.

*Each presenter develops all of section IV. State the area and describe briefly how and why you avoid talking about this area. What is it **about me in this area** that perpetuates the avoidance? Why did I decide to dialogue on it?*

*We need to be very specific about the reasons why we are reluctant to share feelings in the area chosen. These reasons will vary from person to person. As we write, we need to look at what factors were at work in us during the writing and dialogue. Include any fears, cultural barriers, upbringing, beliefs, hang-ups, family experiences, past experiences of shared feelings not being accepted but tolerated and/or rejected.*

##### B. Name the feeling and describe it in detail.

*Share the feeling from your dialogue letter and describe it fully.*

*The dialogue question used in the letter does not have to be repeated in the sharing, but it must be a question on an aspect of this area that we avoid talking about or sharing on, and the feeling(s) brought out in the letter must be very strong. It is best to share only one feeling, but no more than two in our letter, and only one in the verbal dialogue. The presenting couples need to remember these are teaching examples as well as deep sharings.*

*We do not read our letters in this section, only talk about the letter and the feeling that we shared with our spouses. We should share and describe our feeling in different ways (the way we did in our letter) so that the couples on the weekend can understand and hopefully feel the feeling that we had at that time.*

**C. Briefly summarize your verbal dialogue, focusing on the acceptance and the resulting intimacy.**

*Be sure to include the non-verbal communication mentioned in your verbal dialogue so the clergy can refer to it in V. A. (It is helpful to jot down some of the non-verbals you use and give them to clergy before this talk begins.)*

*Describe the impact of being accepted by your spouse in the face of sharing feelings that were difficult to share.*

**V. Non-verbal communication - Define and expand. (CL or CS: 1.5 min. total)**

**A. Convey that non-verbal communication is 58% of our communication.**

*Address the importance of being aware of non-verbal communication in dialogue. Non-verbal communication accounts for about 58% of our total communication. Our tone of voice or the way that we say things accounts for 35% of the message. The words we say only comprise 7% of the actual message. (Ref: Couples Devotional Bible, NIV, Zondervan Corp., 1994).*

**B. Non-verbals don't lie, but they can be misunderstood, so check them out.**

*Teach and share an example.*

*This points out that as you are communicating, the person with whom you are communicating does not always receive or interpret correctly what you want to say, whether you send the message verbally or non-verbally. Therefore, it is important to ask about your interpretation of non-verbal communication and make sure what you received was what was sent. You can't claim that what you perceived was exactly what your spouse meant. Use examples.*

**C. Intensity is better expressed with non-verbals.**

*Teach and share an example.*

*Emphasize that some things just can't be fully or adequately expressed with words. A warm hug or a loving look says more than words. A red face and clenched fists clarifies the intensity of the feeling that may have been communicated in words. With non-verbal communication you can "see" the intensity of the feeling more clearly. Generally, the non-verbal communication allows the intensity of our feelings to be more readily understood.*

**D. Refer to non-verbals talked about in couple's dialogue sharings in IV. above in developing examples.**

*Develop examples by referring to non-verbals that couples have used in their dialogues.*

**VI. Tell the story of our journey to accept one another in our feelings about being separated by death. (LH & LW: 9 min. total)**

*In developing this section, the couple can **each** do A and B together, husband or wife going first. Then each reads his/her love letter. D is developed as an interplay, but not a complete, word-for-word sharing of the verbal dialogue.*

**A. State the area, and then describe how and why you avoid talking about death.**

*Why do I avoid communicating in the area of death (what is it about me)? In describing how and why we avoid dialoguing in this area, include any fears, cultural, moral, family hang-ups, etc.*

*The reason we avoid talking about death should be different for the husband and wife, especially if they are different personality styles. In writing this section of the talk, it is important for us to*

relate to what we fear in the separation caused by death. For example, the helper might fear loss of relationship - his/her soul mate, the organizer might fear loss of security, the catalyst might fear loss of acceptance (she's the only one who will put up with my free spirit), and the thinker might fear the loss of the one who takes care of and supports him/her.

There are many dialogue questions at the end of the outline that can be used. Or possibly a dialogue question could be: "Losing you, my biggest fear is... What are my feelings about that?" In writing the first draft, we may write a lot about our thoughts to get to our feelings. Rather than taking all those thoughts out of the talk, read them before reading the loveletter in C. These thoughts help the participants get in touch with their own feelings about being separated from their spouses, but are not part of the letter. This way we stay true to our purpose of modeling dialogue in this section. (For example - As I sat ready to write my love letter, I thought about... the empty chair at the kitchen table, raising the children alone, the lonely Christmas, etc.) However, the first two or three sentences in the love letter would be our thoughts about the question with the remainder of the letter naming and describing the feelings.

## **B. Tell why you decided to dialogue on death.**

Describe the interior wrestling that led up to your decision and share why you decided to dialogue on death.

## **C. Read your love letters.**

Read only the portions of the love letters that focus on the feelings. Strong dialoguing couples often focus themselves when they write their love letters by writing a prayer and/or sharing the spouse's most endearing quality. These and other techniques are encouraged in dialogue **after** the weekend. **On** the weekend they become burdensome and distracting for many of the couples experiencing dialogue for the first time and should be eliminated when reading the love letters. This editing process will not diminish the impact of the love letters shared in this section; it will help clarify what we want the couples to do as they search out areas for reaching out to each other and build their trust by focusing on sharing their feelings. This doesn't mean that every sentence that isn't a feeling has to be edited out. This is a very difficult topic and it would be natural to say things like "I can't imagine life without you," etc.

## **D. Share your verbal dialogue and its effects.**

We explain how we decided who was the person with the feeling for the subject of the verbal dialogue. From this point on, husband and wife recap the verbal dialogue capturing the listening, the trust, and the non-verbal communication that took place as well as the verbal interplay of the dialogue. Share your part, then other spouse shares, continuing in a back and forth sharing of the verbal dialogue. Remember that the emphasis here is on sharing the feeling, drawing it out, exploring the feeling. In sharing the effects, focus more on the acceptance and resulting intimacy in your relationship.

Each spouse, through a conversational interplay, should tell some of the recap rather than one sharing half followed by the other sharing half. **It is important that there not be an impression of problem solving as a result of the dialogue.** However, it is crucial for the couples listening that they know this dialogue helped the presenting couple towards greater intimacy. We need to share the effects of this dialogue on us.

## **E. Point out how important it is to live and love more now, before it is too late.**

Share the importance of sharing love each day to nurture your relationship. There are no guarantees of our time together.

Be sure to not miss this closing point of the outline. This is one of the reasons the topic of death is used. We want the participants to have an urgency to work on their relationship today.

**VII. Reinforce elements of dialogue.** *(CL or CS: 2.5 min. total)*

**A. Briefly share how the dialogue of VI. has touched you.**

*In order to bridge into VII. B., be sure to include that the acceptance and resulting intimacy is because of the use of the dialogue technique.*

**B. Reinforce the dialogue process.**

**1. Writing - self-disclosure through feelings**

*This is a very brief overview of what you have already told them in other presentations. Keep the love letter personal, focus on feelings rather than simply dealing with facts and communicating information. Be as clear as possible in describing your feelings.*

**2. Exchange**

*The love letter is a very special gift. Exchange it with that in mind. We are speaking about the way in which you hand your notebook to your spouse.*

**3. Dialogue - reinforce acceptance**

*Dialogue on one of the feelings from your love letters to get in touch with and experience the feeling that is shared. Reinforce that acceptance of the spouse with the feeling is the key.*

**C. “Following the 30-minute verbal portion of your dialogue, you will have a 50-minute break. Use this time to do whatever is necessary to strengthen your relationship. We will call you back to the conference room at the end of the break. Turn to page 32 of your workbook for your dialogue question. Follow the instructions at the top of the page. Remember to focus your love letter on your feelings. The husbands will stay in the conference room to write.”**

**Question: Reference worksheet in workbook**

**Writing time: 20 minutes      Dialogue time: 30 minutes**

**(Husbands stay in the conference room to write)**

**Remind husbands when they leave at the end of the writing time that the break follows their dialogue.**

**DIALOGUE QUESTIONS TO HELP DEVELOP THIS TALK:**

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