

first step. Then you
your lover's needs.

of the other couples'
Tabitha's—resonated

Hold Me Tight con-
each of you made. In a
will probably find this
in many studies to retain
of emotional events than do
of physiological differences
of involvement in the relation-
assist the men a little here.
the two of you further clarify
and guide you in future Hold

is a positive bonding event
of disengagement and negative
the world together as a team.
u can create these moments of
between you grows stronger.
ns to connect and transform
exchanges have an impact on
as you'll see in the following

"Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea,
until they have something to forgive."

—C. S. Lewis

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

Conrad and his wife, Helen, are deep into the Hold Me Tight conversation, and the air is buzzing with emotional resonance. "Let me hold you," Conrad entreats. "Tell me what you need." Helen turns to him and smiles as if ready to respond to his request. But suddenly her face goes blank. She stares at the floor. And then in a detached voice, she says, "And I was there, I was sitting on the stairs and I said to you, 'The doctor thinks I probably have it. Breast cancer. I've been waiting all my life, knowing it was coming. My mother died of it. My grandmother, too. And now it's come for me.' "

Her voice changes; she sounds bewildered. "And you brushed past me as I sat there"—she touches her shoulder, as if still feeling the touch—"and you said, 'Get yourself together. There's no point in freaking out and getting all upset when you are not sure.'

Just calm down, and we can discuss what to do later.' You went upstairs to your office and closed the door. You didn't come down for the longest time. You left me sitting alone. You left me dying on the stairs."

Then her voice changes again. In a cheery businesslike tone, she tells me that she and Conrad have made great progress in therapy and no longer have the terrible fights that brought them in to see me. In fact, things are so much better that there probably isn't much more to discuss. Conrad is confused and puzzled by what has just happened. The stairway conversation occurred more than three years ago, and the doctor's suspicions were wrong—Helen did *not* have breast cancer. Eager not to stir up trouble, he quickly agrees with his wife's assessment that therapy is going fine and there is nothing to discuss.

SMALL EVENTS, BIG FALLOUT

I have seen this sort of abrupt disconnect occur before. Couples are making steady progress, tender feelings are flowing, and then . . . wham! One partner brings up an event, sometimes an apparently minor one, and it's as if all the oxygen has been sucked from the room. All at once, warm hope is exchanged for chill despair.

How can one small incident have this kind of overwhelming power? Well, clearly it's not a minor incident. To one partner at least, it is a *grievous* event.

Over the decades of research and therapy, I've discovered that certain incidents do more than just touch our raw spots or "hurt our feelings." They injure us so deeply that they overturn our world. They are relationship traumas. In the dictionary a trauma

is defined as a wound that challenges all our assumptions.

Traumatic wounds are usually caused by a man, professor of psychiatry, who says they involve a "violation of trust." Trauma is a greater trauma than the one we count on to support and protect us.

Helen and Conrad have experienced a traumatic event in their relationship. Even though the event was relatively minor, it has remained very prominent in Helen's mind. She has been irritable and wary ever since, recalling the incident to herself many times. Hypervigilance, flashbacks, and avoidance are common indicators of traumatic stress. Conrad tends to minimize and dismiss the event, trying to keep himself from getting upset. So now, when Conrad reaches for Helen's hand, she feels as if she was totally vulnerable with him again. It's as if the fuses to go there again. I can't help but wonder where the Hold Me Tight button is.

Lack of an emotionally safe environment can trigger attachment researchers Jeff Haden and Steven Rholes found. In hundreds of smaller positive interactions, the security of a love relationship lies in the searing negative interactions. "Are you there for me?" "Do you care about my pain?"

There isn't much room for intimacy when the other person

what to do later.' You went the door. You didn't come down alone. You left me dying

In a cheery businesslike tone, I have made great progress in terrible fights that brought them much better than there probably. Conrad is confused and puzzled. Stairway conversation occurred. The doctor's suspicions were at cancer. Eager not to stir up wife's assessment that therapy to discuss.

BIG FALLOUT

connect occur before. Couples' feelings are flowing, and as up an event, sometimes all the oxygen has been sucked. Hope is exchanged for chill

ve this kind of overwhelming incident. To one partner at

In therapy, I've discovered that touch our raw spots or "hurt deeply that they overturn our s. In the dictionary a trauma

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

is defined as a wound that plunges us into fear and helplessness, that challenges all our assumptions of predictability and control.

Traumatic wounds are especially severe, observes Judith Herman, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, when they involve a "violation of human connection." Indeed, there is no greater trauma than to be wounded by the very people we count on to support and protect us.

Helen and Conrad have come face-to-face with a relationship trauma. Even though the stairway encounter was three years back, it has remained very much alive, nixing any possibility of Helen reaching for her husband. In fact, since the incident, Helen has been irritable and wary with Conrad, swinging from vividly recalling the incident to numbing out and avoiding closeness. Hypervigilance, flashbacks, and avoidance are the established indicators of traumatic stress. When Helen did try to discuss her feelings, Conrad minimized the incident, leaving her even more upset. So now, when Conrad asks Helen to risk with him, to put herself in his hands, she instantly remembers the time when she was totally vulnerable with him. An alarm sounds, and she refuses to go there again. I call this the "Never Again" moment. No wonder the Hold Me Tight conversation hits a dead end.

Lack of an emotionally supportive response by a loved one at a moment of threat can color a whole relationship, observe attachment researchers Jeff Simpson of the University of Minnesota and Steven Rholes of Texas A&M University. It can eclipse hundreds of smaller positive events and, in one swipe, demolish the security of a love relationship. The power of such incidents lies in the searing negative answer they offer to the eternal questions "Are you there for me when I am most in need? Do you care about my pain?"

There isn't much room for compromise or ambiguity when

we feel this kind of urgent need for our loved one's support. The test is pass or fail. These moments can shatter all our positive assumptions about love itself and our loved one's dependability, beginning the fall into relationship distress or further fraying an already fragile bond. Until these incidents are confronted and resolved, true accessibility and emotional engagement are out of the question.

When I and my colleagues first started watching tapes of Hold Me Tight conversations, we thought that wounds that bleed the life out of a relationship were always betrayals. Except *betrayal* didn't seem to fit exactly when we listened to injured partners probe their pain. "There have been lots of hurts and hard times in our relationship," Francine explains to Joseph, who has had an affair with a colleague. "I can accept that you felt neglected after the twins were born and that you were sexually frustrated when you met this woman. I can even understand how your relationship with her kind of just unfolded, pulling you in. It's not the affair itself that is the big problem for me. What I can't get past is how you told me about it. I think about it all the time. You saw how devastated I was. I was literally on the floor. And when I was most down, what did you do? You blamed me for your affair. You listed all my bad qualities and went on and on discussing possibilities for how your life might take shape without me. It was as if I wasn't even there. You didn't take me into account at all. That is the piece I keep going back to. If you had ever loved me at all, then how could you do that?"

Plainly, Francine is distressed by more than Joseph's infidelity and disloyalty. I've come to see that although wounded partners often do feel betrayed, they primarily feel *abandoned* by their mate. Their cries are usually some version of "How could you leave me in that life-and-death moment?" Partners typically suf-

Mood. I'm
angry.
about
problems.
taxi and got an
in the
hospital. I don't
know what
to do.

Partners often feel abandoned or burying them. They feel dismissed and now split in Demon Dialogues between helplessness and fear they've lost all our survival resources. and discover there is no safety out the danger is real. This ability to risk deeper connection fester. The more Helen demands leaving her on the stairs, the rationalizations. That only confirms her anger.

Sometimes partners do sometimes, but this results in a barricade works only for a

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

our loved one's support. The ~~in~~ shatter all our positive as-
oved one's dependability, be-
stress or further fraying an
dents are confronted and re-
onal engagement are out of

I started watching tapes of
ught that wounds that bleed
ays betrayals. Except *betrayal*
listened to injured partners
lots of hurts and hard times
as to Joseph, who has had an
that you felt neglected after
re sexually frustrated when
derstand how your relation-
pulling you in. It's not the
me. What I can't get past is
about it all the time. You saw
on the floor. And when I was
amed me for your affair. You
on and on discussing possi-
hape without me. It was as if
e into account at all. That is
ou had ever loved me at all,

more than Joseph's infidelity
although wounded partners
ily feel abandoned by their
version of "How could you
ent?" Partners typically suf-

fer relationship trauma at times of intense emotional stress when attachment needs are naturally high, including the birth or miscarriage of a child, the death of a parent, the sudden loss of a job, the diagnosis and treatment of serious illness.

The mates who inflict these injuries are not being malicious or purposely insensitive. Indeed, they usually have the best of intentions. Most simply do not know how to tune in to their loved ones' attachment needs and offer the comfort of their emotional presence. Some, too, are absorbed by attempts to contain their own anxiety. As Sam sadly tells his wife, "When I saw all that blood, I just freaked out. I didn't even think of losing the baby. I thought you were going to die. I was going to lose you. I went into problem-solving mode. I left you alone in the back of the taxi and sat in front with the driver giving him directions to the hospital. I didn't understand what you needed from me."

Partners often try to handle relationship injuries by ignoring or burying them. That is a big mistake. Everyday hurts are easily dismissed and raw spots can fade away (if we stop rubbing them in Demon Dialogues), but unresolved traumas do not heal. The helplessness and fear they engender are almost indelible; they set off our survival instincts. It's wiser, in survival terms, to be wary and discover there is no real danger than to be trusting and find out the danger is real. This wariness will limit an injured partner's ability to risk deeper emotional engagement. And the traumas fester. The more Helen demands an apology from Conrad for leaving her on the stairs, the more Conrad offers dismissing rationalizations. That only confirms her sense of isolation and feeds her anger.

Sometimes partners do succeed in compartmentalizing traumas, but this results in a cool and distant relationship. And the barricade works only for a while. Injured feelings break out at

some point when attachment needs come to the fore. Larry, a high-powered executive, had neglected his wife, Susan, for years. Since retiring, he had been trying to "court" Susan. They had improved their relationship, but in the Hold Me Tight conversation, when Larry reached for his wife's comfort, she exploded. She told him that after his actions "in the kitchen on Morris Street," she had resolved to never again let him close enough to hurt her.

Larry does not have any idea what Susan is talking about, but he knows that they have not lived on Morris Street for seventeen years! Susan hasn't forgotten what happened on one hot afternoon. She had been depressed, physically ill from a car accident, and overwhelmed with caring for their three small children. Larry had come home to find her weeping on the kitchen floor. Although normally a very reserved woman, she had begged him to hold her. He had told her to pull herself together and had gone off to make phone calls. Susan tells Larry, "That afternoon, lying there, I came to the end of weeping. I went cold. I told myself I would never make the mistake of expecting that kind of caring from you again. I would rely on my sisters. And all these years, you never even noticed! And now, suddenly, you need me and want me to open up?"

The only way out of these attachment injuries is to confront them and heal them together. Preferably immediately. This was brought home to me when my then eight-year-old son came down with acute appendicitis at a summer lake party my husband, John, and I were hosting. I dashed off to the nearest hospital with instructions to John to shut down the party and follow us. The small local hospital could not operate, and we had to make a long and anxious trip into town. By the time we got there, things looked bad. A surgeon hurried in to look at my son and announced that he had to operate "now." I called my husband

About five years ago, I began to study the effects of forgiveness on relationships. I interviewed couples who had been through difficult times and found that those who forgave were more likely to stay together. Now, I am working with couples to help them learn how to forgive each other. Forgiveness is the key to a happy relationship.

Conversations

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

the fore. Larry, a wife, Susan, for years. Susan. They had Me Tight conversations, she exploded. kitchen on Morris him close enough to

is talking about, but Street for seventeen on one hot afternoon from a car accident, small children. Larry the kitchen floor. Al had begged him to together and had gone That afternoon, lying cold. I told myself I that kind of caring. And all these years, you need me and

Injuries is to confront immediately. This was year-old son came lake party my husband to the nearest hospital the party and follow up, and we had to the time we got there, look at my son and I called my husband

again, and he was still at the lake! Two hours later, as I was watching my son being wheeled into intensive care, my husband came waltzing breezily down the corridor. I ignited. He was horrified that I had been so scared and felt so alone. He tolerated my anger and distress, explained why he was late, and reassured me. Still, I needed to be very sure that he understood my hurt. We went over the incident quite a few times in the following weeks before this injury was fully healed.

For Conrad and Helen, the healing process begins in my office when he reveals that after he left her on the stairs, he had wept for an hour. He had thought that allowing his own fear and impotence to show would be letting her down. Until now, he has hidden his shame, while vainly trying to persuade his wife that she does not hurt.

The first goal for partners is *forgiveness*. Just as with love, forgiveness has only recently become a topic of study by social scientists. Most scholars speak of forgiveness as a moral decision. Letting go of resentment and absolving a person's bad conduct is the right and good thing to do. But this decision alone will not restore faith in the injuring person and the relationship. What partners need is a special type of healing conversation that fosters not just forgiveness but the willingness to trust again. Renewed trust is the ultimate goal.

About five years ago, I began mapping out the steps in the dance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Together with my students and colleagues, I watched tapes of counseling sessions and saw how some couples hit the Never Again moment and got stuck, and others worked through the injury. We learned that couples had to be able to manage Conversations 1 to 3 and create a basic safety in their relationship before they could engage in a Forgiving Injuries conversation.

A recent research project has further sharpened our under-

standing of relationship traumas. We've learned that they are not always obvious, that what's important is not the events themselves, but the vulnerabilities they arouse. For some partners at certain times, a flirtation may prove more wounding than an affair. We've also found that couples can suffer multiple traumas, and that the greater the number, the harder it is to renew trust. The overriding lesson is you have to take your partner's hurt seriously and hang in and ask questions until the meaning of an incident becomes clear, even if to you the event seems trivial or the hurt exaggerated.

Mary and Ralph have identified their Demon Dialogues and can talk about their raw spots and replay Rocky Moments, but Mary is balking at starting the Hold Me Tight conversation. Instead, she keeps harping on the racy photos of Ralph and secretaries in their underwear at an office party that he left in his desk drawer at home, which he knows she regularly tidies. Ralph apologizes, admits that the party got a little out of hand, and that the photos are inappropriate, but he is adamant that no hanky-panky went on. He doesn't really understand why she's so hurt. He keeps trying to tune in to Mary's story and finally picks up on the fact that Mary keeps repeating the phrase, "Right then, after 'that' time." "What's so important about the timing of all this?" he asks.

Mary bursts into tears. "How can you ask that? Do you not remember? It was after those terrible discussions where you told me that I just was too inhibited for you. You demanded that I go out and get some silky underwear and read some of those sex books. I grew up in such a strict home. I told you that I was just too shy to do this. But you insisted. You told me that unless I did this, we weren't going to make it as a couple. So I went and did it, for us. I did it all, but I was so ashamed, so mortified. And you

SIX STEPS**What are the steps in the F**

1. The hurt partner needs to speak as simply as possible. This means resisting making a case against the other person and focusing on describing the pain, the source of the pain, and how it affects your partner.
- When it is hard to capture the essence of your partner's pain, people plug into the emotional questions:

At a moment of urgent need, the hurt partner asks:

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

We've learned that they are not important is not the events themselves arouse. For some partners above more wounding than an affair can suffer multiple traumas, the harder it is to renew trust. to take your partner's hurt seriously until the meaning of an incident the event seems trivial or the

ed their Demon Dialogues and replay Rocky Moments, but told Me Tight conversation. Incendiary photos of Ralph and secret society party that he left in his desk he regularly tidies. Ralph apologetic little out of hand, and that the adamant that no hanky-panky and why she's so hurt. He keeps silent and finally picks up on the key phrase, "Right then, after about the timing of all this?"

can you ask that? Do you not have discussions where you told me. You demanded that I go and read some of those sex books. I told you that I was just curious. You told me that unless I did a couple. So I went and did it, I was ashamed, so mortified. And you

didn't seem to really notice. You never even said you were pleased! Not once. But you looked really pleased posing in those photos, and those girls looked like they were having fun. They weren't shy like me. I turned myself inside out to be like those girls in the photos, and it didn't matter. And the very last thing was that you knew I cleaned out your desk, and you never even thought how I would feel if I found the photos! I was just invisible to you!" Ralph now tunes in to his wife's pain. He reaches out to hold her hand and comfort her.

Both Mary and Ralph showed courage and determination here in sifting through an event until its import became evident. Sometimes we don't know what is so painful to us in a particular event until we can really explore it with our partner. And sometimes it is very hard to just come out and show the core of our hurt to the one who hurt us. But the pain always makes sense if we relate it to our attachment needs and fears.

SIX STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

What are the steps in the Forgiving Injuries conversation?

1. The hurt partner needs to speak his or her pain as openly and simply as possible. This is not always easy to do. It means resisting making a case against your partner, and staying focused on describing the pain, the specific situation in which it occurred, and how it affects your sense of safety with your partner. When it is hard to capture the essence of an injury, we try to help people plug into the emotions that arose by asking the following questions:

At a moment of urgent need, did I feel deprived of comfort?

Did I feel deserted and alone? Did I feel devalued by my partner when I desperately needed validation that I and my feelings were important? Did my partner suddenly appear to be a source of danger to me rather than the haven of safety that I needed? This speaks directly to the traumatic nature of attachment injuries.

Sorting through the emotional soup to find the essence of your hurt can be difficult. And it's just as hard for the "guilty" partner to hang in and try to hear the other's anguish. Having already explored your Demon Dialogues and your individual raw spots should help each of you tune in when the other is sharing, even if what's being said triggers your anxiety. Once the two of you are able to understand the underlying attachment hurts, needs, and fears that are being played out, you can slow down and help each other work through them.

After months of recriminations, Vera is finally able to tell Ted, "Never mind those times when it was hard for you to come with me to the chemotherapy. I know that this cancer thing sends you back to being twelve years old and watching your mom, the only person who ever cared for you, die of cancer. The image that just stops my breath is the day when I came home and cried and cried. I told you that I couldn't go on anymore. And you said nothing. You did nothing. But then my sister came over, remember? And she got all upset and burst into tears, and you leapt up out of your chair to comfort her. You held her, you whispered to her." Vera bursts into breathless sobs, then continues, "You did it, but not with me. Your comfort, your touch, wasn't for me. That night, I told myself, I'd rather die alone than ask you for that kind of caring again. But that pain is still here, and I am still all alone with it." Ted stares at Vera, suddenly comprehending her grief and rage. This is a terrible message, but at least it makes sense. Vera has pinpointed the wound. Ted has seen it. Now the healing can begin.

2. The injuring partner acknowledges the wound. Until injured partners are acknowledged, they will not be able to return again to their partner, physically or emotionally. This makes perfect sense. You do not see how you have been hurt until you feel safe with you?

In past discussions of this topic, we have retreated into shaming language. We have said that in love, mistakes are made. We have said that loved ones' calls for closeness are well-intended. We all get stuck in our ways. We all fall. We all fall as they fall. There is no shame in that. We are all stumbling around, learning to love.

Perhaps a partner has been sending messages and only now is she able to acknowledge the pain she has caused. It is important to remember that the incident happened in the past, but its effects are felt in the present. The injuring partner's response to the wound is staying emotionally present, but not in the same way as before. The pain is in a different way.

Ted says, "Now I'm not afraid to talk about this, I was able to tell her that I was like a 'deer in the headlights' when my mom was sick. But you know what? I'm not afraid to get up and give your sister a hug. Vera nods and weeps, at first she can't believe that it was unbearable for you to leave her alone, more than my freezing up. I'm not afraid to do that."

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

devalued by my partner I and my feelings were spear to be a source of fety that I needed? This attachment injuries.

to find the essence of as hard for the "guilty" other's anguish. Having ind your individual raw en the other is sharing, xiety. Once the two of ing attachment hurts, at, you can slow down

s finally able to tell Ted, d for you to come with cancer thing sends you ng your mom, the only ter. The image that just e home and cried and nymore. And you said ster came over, remem- ears, and you leapt up her, you whispered to continues, "You did it, wasn't for me. That ask you for that and I am still all mprehending her at least it makes it. Now the

2. The injuring partner stays emotionally present and acknowledges the wounded partner's pain and his/her part in it. Until injured partners see that this pain has been truly recognized, they will not be able to let it go. They will call again and again to their partner, preoccupied with protesting and demanding. This makes perfect sense if we understand attachment. If you do not see how you have hurt me, how can I depend on you or feel safe with you?

In past discussions of the trauma, the injuring partner may have retreated into shame and self-blame. It helps to remember that in love, mistakes are inevitable. We all sometimes miss our loved ones' calls for closeness. We all find ourselves distracted. We all get stuck in our own fear or anger and fail to catch loved ones as they fall. There is no perfect soul mate, no flawless lover. We are all stumbling around, treading on each other's toes as we are learning to love.

Perhaps a partner has never before tuned in to attachment messages and only now really begins to understand the pain he or she has caused. It is important to remember that, even though the incident happened in the past, an injuring partner can change how it affects the future. Helping the wounded lover understand the injuring partner's response helps to restore predictability. And staying emotionally present allows the hurt partner to deal with pain in a different way.

Ted says, "Now I'm getting it. The last few times we talked about this, I was able to tell you how your cancer made me freeze like a 'deer in the headlights.' It was like a replay of when my mom was sick. But you are right. That day you watched me just up and give your sister the support you were starving for . . ." Vera nods and weeps, and he sees this and his voice softens. "That was unbearable for you." She nods again. "That was worse even than my freezing up. I did not and still do not really offer com-

fort to you, even when I see you hurting. How come I don't do that? I guess it's the way I see you. You are so strong, stronger than I am, for sure. I know it's really stupid, but I think it was easier to reach for your sister right then just because every time I looked at you, all I saw was my own loss and helplessness. Because you are so important to me." Vera considers this for a moment and then lifts her mouth into a tentative smile.

3. Partners start reversing the "Never Again" dictum. I think of it as couples revising their script. Vera moves out from behind her protective wall and shares with Ted the depth of her loneliness, grief, and despair. She tells him, "The day after this incident, I decided that all this was too hard for you. I wasn't sure if you really cared if I made it through. So the battle with the cancer was suddenly pointless. I thought of just giving up." As she speaks, she watches Ted's face. He looks hurt too. He tells her, "I don't want you to feel this way, and I can't bear that you thought of giving up. Giving up because I couldn't comfort you. That's terrible."

4. Injuring partners now take ownership of how they inflicted this injury on their lover and express regret and remorse. This cannot take the form of an impersonal or defensive apology. Saying "Look, I'm sorry, okay?" in a cool tone doesn't signify regret, only dismissal of the partner's pain. If we want to be believed here, we have to listen to and engage with our lover's pain as expressed in step 3. We have to show that our lover's pain has an impact on us. When Ted turns to Vera and speaks, you can hear sadness and remorse in his voice and see it on his face. He tells her, "I really let you down, didn't I? I wasn't there for you. I am so sorry, Vera. I got all overwhelmed and left you to stare down your enemy by yourself. It's hard for me to admit this. I don't want to see myself as the kind of person, the kind of husband who would let you down like this. But I did it. You had a right to

get angry. I never saw my now that I hurt you very dithered and did nothing you will let me."

Vera is obviously very do that is so effective here he feels and cares about V that her hurt and her ang exactly what he did that shame. He tells his wife pointed by his behavior. I be there to help her heal.

Now that is one stella just half of what Ted incl after I had badly hurt her *ment of contrition, it is an*

5. A Hold Me Tight c ing around the attachmen they need right now to b directly ask for these nee respond differently from dent. This shapes a new s as an antidote to the terri cident precipitated. "I ne needed your touch. I ne feelings of being scared a think about the cancer co tance between us, I need t "I want you to feel that yc I will do whatever I have t in to people's feelings, bu alone and scared." This is

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

How come I don't do you are so strong, stronger stupid, but I think it was just because every time I loss and helplessness. Before considers this for a more negative smile.

"Again" dictum. I think moves out from behind the depth of her loneliness. The day after this incident for you. I wasn't sure if So the battle with the can't of just giving up." As she hurt too. He tells her, "I can't bear that you thought wouldn't comfort you. That's

ship of how they inflicted regret and remorse. This or defensive apology. Say tone doesn't signify regret. If we want to be believed with our lover's pain as excuse that our lover's pain has an era and speaks, you can hear and see it on his face. He tells I wasn't there for you. I am and left you to stare down or me to admit this. I don't person, the kind of husband I did it. You had a right to

get angry. I never saw my support as that important. But I know now that I hurt you very badly. I wasn't sure what to do, so I dithered and did nothing. I want to try to make this better. If you will let me."

Vera is obviously very moved by Ted's apology. What does he do that is so effective here? First, his manner makes it clear that he feels and cares about Vera's pain. Second, he explicitly tells her that her hurt and her anger are legitimate. Third, he owns up to exactly what he did that was so hurtful. Fourth, he expresses shame. He tells his wife that he too feels dismayed and disappointed by his behavior. Fifth, he reassures her that he will now be there to help her heal.

Now that is one stellar apology! It took me three tries to get just half of what Ted included into an apology to my daughter after I had badly hurt her feelings. *Ted's apology is not just a statement of contrition, it is an invitation to reconnect.*

5. A Hold Me Tight conversation can now take place, centering around the attachment injury. Injured partners identify what they need right now to bring closure to the trauma. They then directly ask for these needs to be met, that is, for their lovers to respond differently from the way they did in the original incident. This shapes a new sense of emotional connection that acts as an antidote to the terrifying isolation and separateness the incident precipitated. "I needed your comfort and support then. I needed your touch. I need it now!" Vera declares to Ted. "Those feelings of being scared and helpless are still with me. When I think about the cancer coming back, or even when I feel the distance between us, I need to have your reassurance." Ted responds, "I want you to feel that you can count on me and I will be there. I will do whatever I have to do. I am not always good at plugging in to people's feelings, but I am learning. I don't want you to feel alone and scared." This is now a healing A.R.E. conversation.

6. The couple now create a new story that captures the injuring event, how it happened, eroded trust and connection, and shaped Demon Dialogues. Most important, the story describes how they together confronted the trauma and began to heal it. This is like weaving all the threads together into a new tapestry. Now, as a team, they can discuss how to help each other learn from and continue to heal this injury and prevent further injuries. Continuing to heal might involve setting out rituals that reassure the hurt partner. For example, after an affair, a couple might agree that any contact with the old lover will be immediately disclosed to the wounded partner, or that the injuring partner will call during the day with his or her whereabouts. Ted tells his wife at one point in this conversation, "The crazy thing is that it was easier for me to comfort your sister just because she isn't as important to me as you are! I am not worried about messing up and making mistakes with her. I understand why, once this had happened, you would naturally not come to me at other times, like when you got scared about cancer coming back. I see how we got more and more emotionally distant. I know how much courage it must have taken to bring all this up again with me. And I didn't help you when you tried this before, did I? You were trying to send out a distress flare, and I saw you as burning the house down. It feels good to me when we can share like this and not get stuck in all the hurt around this." Vera, in her turn, tells Ted, "I liked when you suggested that I help you out by waving a flag signaling, 'It's a Hold Me Tight time, Ted.' It feels like you are really thinking about how to tune in and make sure this doesn't happen again."

Ted and Vera moved smoothly through these steps. But other couples may have more trouble. If Demon Dialogues are chronic

and trust and safety have dropped, Injuries conversation may have too, if there are multiple traumas; however, one injury usually still healed, the others topple like a

On the other hand, certain factors complicate the process of forgiving. Of distress. But here, too, there is a way to encapsulate the injury. Remember the way he told her about his unfaithfulness? That affair was brief. Affairs though are more thornier. Intentional long-term infidelity of our partner as familiar and cannot define our own reality and tell our children, "It is best not to do what they will do."

Injuries may be forgiven, but in the best outcome, they become stories as demonstrations.

PLAY AND PRACTICE

1. The first step in healing is to name and articulate it. Think of a time when you were very hurt by something your partner did. The trauma may be of less significance. What was the trigger, a remark, a specific action, or an interaction with another? In the incident above, when she realized that Ted could not be there for her during this stressful time, but not to

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

story that captures the intended trust and connection, it's important, the story defined the trauma and began to thread together into a narrative that discusses how to help each other heal this injury and prevent future healing. For example, that any contact with the partner might involve setting boundaries with the partner. For example, that any contact with the partner during the day with the wife at one point in this conversation was easier for me to commit than to the wounded partner. It was easier for me to commit as important to me as getting up and making mistakes. This had happened, you know, like when you see how we got more and more courage it must have been with me. And I didn't help? You were trying to send me a signal by waving a flag? It feels like you are really trying to make sure this doesn't happen through these steps. But other non Dialogues are chronic

and trust and safety have dropped to low levels, the Forgiving Injuries conversation may have to be repeated several times. So, too, if there are multiple traumatic events. Even in such cases, however, one injury usually stands out. And when that one is healed, the others topple like a house of cards.

On the other hand, certain events, most notably affairs, also complicate the process of forgiveness. There are so many points of distress. But here, too, there is usually one moment that encapsulates the injury. Remember Francine and Joseph? It was the way he told her about his unfaithfulness that broke her apart. That affair was brief. Affairs that go on for a long time are much more thornier. Intentional long-term deception undermines our sense of our partner as familiar and able to be known. As a result, we cannot define our own reality and be sure of what is "true." As we tell our children, "It is best not to trust strangers. You never know what they will do."

Injuries may be forgiven, but they never disappear. Instead, in the best outcome, they become integrated into couples' attachment stories as demonstrations of renewal and connection.

PLAY AND PRACTICE

1. The first step in healing an attachment injury is to recognize and articulate it. Think of a time, an incident, in the past when you were very hurt by someone important to you, but not your partner. The trauma may be one described above or a hurt of less significance. What was the main cue for that hurt? Was it a remark, a specific action, or a lack of action on the part of the other? In the incident above, Vera says the worst moment was when she realized that Ted could offer comfort to others during this stressful time, but not to her. In your own incident, what

alarming conclusion did you come to about this important person in your life? For example, did you decide that he or she just didn't care, that you weren't important and might be abandoned? What were you longing for when you were wounded? If this is hard to articulate, see if you can figure out what would have been the ideal response to you. What protective moves did you find yourself taking? For example, did you change the subject and walk out of the room? Or did you become aggressive and demand an explanation?

Ask yourself: Did I feel deprived of support? Did my pain or fear get dismissed? Did I feel deserted? Did I feel devalued? Did I suddenly see this person as a source of danger, as taking advantage of me, betraying me?

Once you have a sense of this past hurt, see if you can share it with your partner. Marcy tells her partner, Amy, about how her mother responded to the news that Marcy had broken off her engagement because she realized that she was gay. "I remember the whole thing," says Marcy. "My mom and I were in the kitchen. I almost whispered it, I was so scared of saying it. She turned, and her face was like stone. She said, 'I am going to pretend that you never said that. I don't want to know. How you live your stupid, crazy life is up to you.' I felt like I'd been punched in the chest. I think I felt all those Ds, but for sure I felt 'Devalued.' I left. That was what happened, and that was my decision about the relationship. I never shared anything personal with her again. She didn't want to know me. I just kept my wall up. I guess I was longing for her to accept me and comfort me. I was so lost back then. But I gave up on that. In fact, I didn't let anyone close enough to hurt me for a long time."

2. Reflect on how easy or how difficult it is for you to apologize, even in small things. Rate yourself from 1 to 10 on this ability. Ten means that you readily acknowledge that you have blind

spots and make mistakes; you voiced your regrets in:

- the four-second 'about that. What shall we do about that, but . . . ?'
- the minimizing 'that, but . . . ?'
- the forced apology 'say this, so . . . ?'

These are taken a small hurts, but generally they only increase.

3. Can you think of a time when they might have felt, even deserted by dangerous or rejecting

Can you imagine what might you say? edging the injury? Parents when they talk

- "I pulled away."
- "I didn't see you lost, afraid, angry, preoccupied."
- "I didn't know you were stupid and worrying."

Think of the five things he cares about her partner owns up to his hurtful behavior; and he reassures us that of Ted's actions would be helpful.

How do you think the injured party feel? He

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

bout this important per-
lecede that he or she just
nd might be abandoned?
were wounded? If this is
ut what would have been
ctive moves did you find
change the subject and
come aggressive and de-

support? Did my pain or
Did I feel devalued? Did I
danger, as taking advan-

urt, see if you can share it
ner, Amy, about how her
lancy had broken off her
he was gay. "I remember
nom and I were in the
o scared of saying it. She
said, 'I am going to pre-
nt to know. How you live
lt like I'd been punched in
for sure I felt 'Devalued.'
at was my decision about
g personal with her again.
t my wall up. I guess I was
ort me. I was so lost back
I didn't let anyone close

cult it is for you to apolo-
from 1 to 10 on this abil-
ledge that you have blind

spots and make mistakes. Can you remember a time when you voiced your regrets in any of the following ways:

- the four-second "where is the exit" apology. "Yes, well, sorry 'bout that. What shall we have for dinner?"
- the minimizing responsibility apology. "Well, maybe I did that, but . . ."
- the forced apology. "I guess I am supposed to say . . ."
- the instrumental apology. "Nothing is going to work till I say this, so . . ."

These are token apologies that can sometimes work for very small hurts, but generally in the kind of injuries we are talking about they only increase the wounded person's pain.

3. Can you think of a time when you hurt a loved one? A time when they might have felt deprived of your support or comfort, even deserted by you? Where you might even have seemed dangerous or rejecting to them?

Can you imagine sincerely acknowledging this to them? What might you say? What might be hard for you in acknowledging the injury? Partners often use the following simple statements when they talk about having hurt a lover:

- "I pulled away. I let you down."
- "I didn't see your pain and how you needed me. I was too lost, afraid, angry, preoccupied. I just shut down."
- "I didn't know what to do. I got all caught up in feeling stupid and worrying about doing the wrong thing."

Think of the five elements in Ted's apology to Vera. He says he cares about her pain; he tells her that her hurt is warranted; he owns up to his hurtful actions; he expresses shame for his behavior; and he reassures her that he will help her to heal. Which one of Ted's actions would be the hardest for you to pull off?

How do you think your acknowledgment might make the injured party feel? How might it help them?

4. Now turn to dealing with a specific injury in your current relationship. You can do this on your own or while your partner listens and tries to understand. If this sharing seems difficult, start with a relatively small recent hurt. Then if you wish, you can do the exercise again with a more significant hurt. Try to make it as specific as possible. Big, vague hurts are difficult to address. Perhaps you went through a difficult period when there were lots of hurt feelings. Was there one moment when that hurt crystallized? What was the trigger for the pain? What was the primary feeling? What decision did you make about the relationship, and what moves did you make to protect yourself?

"It was that time when I was just starting all those new courses and was so unsure of myself," Mary tells Jim. "One evening after supper, I gathered up my courage and asked you what you thought about all my struggles and what I had done so far. I really hoped that you'd say that you recognized how far I'd come and tell me that you believed in me. But you didn't seem to hear me, and I felt dismissed somehow. I didn't show you how sad I felt. How much I needed your encouragement. So I decided to just create my dream on my own. I keep that whole part of my life separate now, separate from us."

5. See if you can now tell your partner what you hoped for in that hurtful incident, and how it felt to not get that response. You might also share what it feels like right now to take the risk and express what you longed for. As you do this, try to avoid indicting your partner for causing you pain. That will only sabotage the conversation. As the listening partner, try to hear your lover's vulnerability and share what this evokes in you. Usually, when we really listen to someone we love express a need for us, we respond with caring.

6. If you are the partner who has hurt your lover, see if you

can help your partner understand what you did at the moment when you "discover" for yourself how vulnerable he or she is as a step in making you stronger. See if you can help your partner have a clearer picture of what the injured person needs.

7. As the partner who has hurt your partner, apologize. Admit that we are disappointing our loved ones by confessing that we can only apologize for our loved ones' hurts. By doing this, we are giving our love.

8. As the injured partner, accept the apology. It puts the two of you back together to grow again. You can consider that this injury occurred in the past, and try to respond sensitively to offer the love that went unoffered.

9. Finally, summarize the story about the past relationship, and how you can prevent that from happening again.

If you can't imagine how to begin this experiment by simply saying "I'm sorry," or difficult a forgiving conversation it may be to begin is to agree on a few sentences that you can say out loud in a few sentences.

Conversation 5: Forgiving Injuries

can help your partner understand why you responded the way you did at the moment of injury. You may have to dig deep and "discover" for yourself how this response evolved. Think of this as a step in making your actions more predictable to your partner. See if you can help your partner feel safe enough to reveal his or her vulnerable feelings to you so that you will have a complete picture of what the incident meant in terms of attachment needs.

7. As the partner who did the hurting, can you now recognize your partner's experience, own how you inflicted pain, and, the big A word, apologize? This is hard to do. It takes courage to admit that we are disappointed in our own behavior; it is humbling to confess that we have been insensitive or uncaring. Perhaps we can only apologize when we allow ourselves to be moved by our loved ones' hurts and fears. If we can do this with sincerity, we are giving our loved ones a great gift.

8. As the injured partner, can you accept the apology? If you can, it puts the two of you on a new footing. Trust can begin to grow again. You can comfortably seek reassurance when echoes of this injury occur in the future, knowing that your partner will try to respond sensitively. And your apologizing partner now can offer the love that went astray in the original event.

9. Finally, sum up this conversation with your partner in a short story about the painful event, the impact it had on your relationship, and how you both recovered and intend to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

If you can't imagine doing this Play and Practice, you can experiment by simply sharing with your partner how strange or difficult a forgiving conversation seems to you. Another way to begin is to agree on an injury that needs healing and write out in a few sentences how the conversation might sound if

it followed the steps outlined above. Then share this with each other.

Understanding attachment injuries and knowing that you can find and offer forgiveness if you need to gives you incredible power to create a resilient, lasting bond. There is no injury-proof relationship. But you can dance together with more verve and panache if you know you can recover when you step on each other's toes.

*Con
Bonding Thi*

"We waste time
instead of creatin

Passion comes easiest in most every word and gesture. Is it nature's way of capturing the most intense rush of desire? Besides pulling us together, passion is also a potent bonding force. Just as sex is the hors d'oeuvre, passion is the entrée.

But we don't typically think of passion as the primary force in love. We are conditioned by our culture to regard passion as more of a secondary force. We are told that passion is not the start of love inevitable.