



integrative psychology, inc.

ORGANIC LIFE-SKILLS
for INDIVIDUALS & COUPLES

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INTRODUCTION

- A. Therapeutic experiences should include more than just thinking and talking. Therapy should also introduce us to directly feel our EMOTIONS and ANXIETY, without using avoidance related DEFENSES. As we will see, there are multiple benefits in doing so.
- B. The HUMAN QUALITIES we need to allow this process are: KINDNESS, SINCERITY, SPONTANEITY, VULNERABILITY, SURRENDER, FLEXIBILITY, HUMILITY, and most importantly SELF-ACCEPTANCE. These qualities reside within our nature, waiting to be cultivated. Now is the time.
- C. We must deeply understand and accept the EXISTENTIAL REALITIES because they trigger our emotions, anxiety, and defenses: change, impermanent, losses, loneliness, suffering, trauma, death, illness, accidents, randomness, human imperfection, imperfection within relationships, meaninglessness, incomplete knowing, lack of control, aging, injustice, danger, risk, etc. Consider with of these realities affects you to most and try to address it with Dr. Bentson.
- D. We must understand what I call the TRIANGLE of emotions, anxiety, and defenses, how the trigger each other automatically. This document will introduce you to ORGANIC LIFE-SKILLS to help you become aware of how connected these biological forces are. What follows is an introduction to the TRIANGLE OF EMOTIONS, ANXIETY & DEFENSES.
- E. The EMOTIONS we want to incrementally FEEL in our body are: JOY, PEACE, SADNESS, SHAME, GUILT, and ANGER. This document you will offer skills to help you feel these emotions, to label them, to take responsibility over them, to self-soothe, and to process them accordingly. Remember this important concept: when we allow ourselves to FEEL our emotions, it means that we are already disengaging from superficial defenses. SHAME may be the most difficult emotion to connect with and is perhaps the most important one.
- F. When EMOTIONS increase in intensity, beyond our comfort zone, our biology creates ANXIETY. Simply stated, anxiety consists of an increased activation in our autonomous nervous system (sympathetic and parasympathetic). This reactivity is felt somatically as: MUSCULAR TENSION, HEADACHES, GASTROINTESTINAL SYMPTOMS, SHORTNESS OR SHALLOW BREATH, INCREASED THINKING, DIFFICULTY THINKING, INCREASED HEART RATE, etc. Remember this again: when we allow ourselves to feel our anxiety symptoms directly we are already disengaging from our defenses.
- G. When anxiety increases beyond our comfort, our biology creates DEFENSES to temporarily “protect us” by detaching us from our anxiety, and mainly for our difficult emotions. Defensive tactics are useful during childhood and in trauma cases. Beyond that they mostly inhibit our healing, aliveness,

sexuality, growth, and enjoyment. Therefore, they no longer protect us. They keep us in the status quo, and likely, in a place of suffering. Furthermore, they do not allow us to live authentically, with vulnerability which is required for genuine intimacy. The most common defenses are: AVOIDANCE, DISTRACTION, OVER THINKING and TALKING, DETACHING FROM DEEPER EMOTIONS, STAYING BUSY, OVER IDENTIFICATION WITH AN IMAGE OR STATUS, DENIAL, VAGUENESS, RIGID BELIEFS, MINIMIZATION, SUPERFICIALITY, RATIONALIZATION, SPIRITUALIZATION, PROJECTIONS, SPECIFIC TYPES OF ANGER and DEPRESSION, ADDICTIONS, INFLEXIBILITY, DISTANCE FROM OTHERS, etc.

- H. Our BREATH is the ORGANIC pathway to directly FEEL our emotions and anxiety (vs thinking about them). Consider the breath as a BRIDGE. from thinking to feeling. When done gently, softly, and consciously, our breath can bring us to our senses, and to the PRESENT moment. It can open our body and facilitate FEELING out emotions and anxiety. Once this is consciously accomplished many therapeutic options are available to help us soothe, process, and to express what we are feeling.
- I. TRAUMA, GRIEVING, FIXED THOUGHTS, BELIEFS & JUDGMENTS (towards self, life & others) must also be processed. They are frequently the UNDERLYING triggers of difficult emotions and anxiety. This signifies deeper work. Consider exploring these issues in therapy with Dr. Bentson.
- J. Suggestion: go on-line and find a summary of the “*Transtheoretical Model for Change Readiness*”. Identify in which state of change you are right now: Pre-Contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance. Acknowledging where you in the process of change will help.

Exercise: 1- Explain what you understood regarding the Triangle of Emotions, Anxiety and Defenses. 2- List the main emotions you struggle with. 3- How do you feel your anxiety somatically. 3-List the defenses you tend to use. 4-Explain how awareness of your breath can help you to stay connected. 5- What are the main existential realities that affect you today? 6- Which of these affect you: past trauma, grief, fixed beliefs, and or self-judgement? Attempt to incorporate the therapeutic language that has been highlighte.

ORGANIC LIFE-SKILLS
for INDIVIDUALS

LIFE-SKILL # 1: "100 % RESPONSIBLE"

Rather than focusing on BLAME on self and others, and VICTIMIZATION, which lead to HOPELESSNESS, consider taking 100% responsibility for the emotions and anxiety YOU are experiencing. Do not waste time trying to change other people. You are in therapy, not them. Even if you were triggered by an outside behavior, you are still responsible for your reactions and only you can address them internally (trauma or abuse cases are a different issue). For now, only on your growth, independently of the behaviors of others. If you are ready for change and action practice this skill consciously. It will accelerate healing and change. Repeat this mantra: *"I ACCEPT THAT I AM 100% RESPONSIBLE FOR MY EMOTIONS, ANXIETY, and DEFENSES"*.

Note: Please consult with Dr. Bentson if you have experienced trauma or abuse.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 2: "I'M FEELING FRAGMENTATED"

Our BIOLOGY frequently experiences STATES OF FRAGMENTATION. Please incorporate this language. When this occurs, we do not feel present, calm, or grounded. It is important to NOTICE when we BEGIN to experience this condition by noticing increased mental activity, worry, fear, anger, shame, muscular tension, shallow breathing, headaches, abdominal tension, negative self-talk patterns, etc. Biologically, this all means that your central nervous system is "acting up." It is a biological phenomenon that we all experience. You are not defected. Some cases however are chronic.

When you feel you are starting to get FRAGMENTED say this: *"I AM STARTING TO FEEL FRAGMENTED IN MY BODY."* When you are experiencing this, a change in BEHAVIOR is required oriented towards SELF-CARE that is biologically oriented. Do not try to distract yourself from this experience nor avoid it. I suggest accepting and feeling the discomfort directly in your body, consciously, without judgement. You will soon learn why. Separate yourself from others. Try to lie on your bed, with a pillow under your knees for increased

relaxation. Engage in all the LIFE-SKILLS detailed in this document. Start by asking yourself this: “WHAT AM I AM FEELING IN MY BODY NOW, AND WHERE?” Noticing when you are starting to get fragmented and engaging in direct self-care modes demonstrates growth, awareness, and maturity. Consider using therapy sessions with Dr. Bentson to explore issues related to your biological fragmentations, to past and current losses, trauma, etc.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 3: “WHAT AM FEELING IN MY BODY NOW, AND WHERE?”

Once you start to detect your biological fragmentations by connecting to your sensations, emotions, and anxiety, ask yourself this important EXPLORATORY question: “*What am I feeling in my body now, and where?*”? Scan your body and determine WHAT and WHERE you are feeling more energy or sensations. Gently apply a hand to that area to connect deeper with the experience, as you also practice the skill that follows called “SELF-SOOTHING BREATHING”. Even if you are feeling UNCOMFORTABLE try to ACCEPT the experience by allowing yourself to FEEL your sensations, emotions, and anxiety. For at LEAST 15-20 SECONDS, without detaching from the experience. Try to not think or label the experience. Know that if you keep breathing and feeling your experience directly in your body, you are STARTING to let go of superficial DEFENSES. Congratulations! Gradually increase the time you can feel your inner experiences.

After 15-20 SECONDS, say things like this as you continue with gentle breaths: “*I AM EXPERIENCING SHAME, SADNESS, ANGER, ANXIETY, ETC.*” Also say, “*I ACCEPT MY SHAME, SADNESS, ETC.* .” Be PRECISE in naming your emotions or mixed emotions. Accept your human experience.

For TRAUMA related emotions please consult with Dr. Bentson prior to practicing this Life-Skill.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 4: “SELF-SOOTHING BREATHING”

Breathing is a core biological experience with important connections with our central nervous system and our emotional life. There are many ways to self soothe. Here is the way I suggest. Breathe-in SMALL amounts of oxygen, as if smelling a rose, using only your NOSE. If your intake is too large, you will likely increase your anxiety or tension. Introduce the oxygen GENTLY and SLOWLY through both nostrils. You can also experiment by breathing through one nostril by gently pressing the outside of the other nostril. Choose which way increases the FEELING experience. To release thinking, you must FOCUS only on the sensory experiences occurring in your nose area, feeling each sensation, resisting the temptation to think.

If we allow small portions of air to arrive to the BOTTOM of our lungs, our chest should NOT expand, rather, our BELLY should gently EXPAND. Like a peaceful baby. This experience is important to trigger a soothing effect in our body, activating the parasympathetic nervous system which helps us experience calmness. Gently apply a hand on your belly and feel the expansion.

Now hold your breath for 3-7 seconds. It does not have to be exact. Relax. Enjoy. Now GENTLY release the air through your MOUTH, relaxing your jaw, with a sense of relief. FEEL the air as it goes through your mouth. ENJOY the LETTING GO experience. As you do this slowly SIGH or say words such as: YES, PEACE, CALM, I ACCEPT, IT’S OK, etc. Be brave. Add SOUNDS and WORDS to increase the sense of relief.

Be aware that as you practice “Self-Soothing Breathing” you are also being KIND to yourself. You are developing an indispensable alliance with yourself at a more intimate level.

It is all about engaging the senses. About releasing thinking patterns, control, self-judgments, and about enjoying the sensory moment that integrates us with all areas of our body.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 5: "SELF-SOOTHING TOUCH"

Bodies need to be SOOTHED frequently. We are all vulnerable creatures, just like babies. It is that simple. It is our responsibility to find ways to SELF-SOOTHE our bodies DIRECTLY, without using distracting superficial defenses. Besides calming ourselves with "SELF-SOOTHING BREATHING" we can add our TOUCH to achieve increased sensory relief. Make sure your touch is GENTLE, LOVING AND KIND. Using touch in this manner is a healthy starting point for those that have difficulty with self-love. Explore what areas of your body feel better. Our head, face, chest, hands, and arms are our most sensitive areas. Try covering both ears and feel the sensations. Are you being present, kind, and intimate with yourself? At the beginning this may feel unnatural, but you will get used to it.

Remember that if you are engaging in this skill you are no longer relying on old superficial defenses and self-judgments. *Congratulations!*

This practice is better accomplished in a lying position, with a pillow under your knees.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 6: "POSITIVE SELF-TALK" / "GOOD PARENT MESSAGES"

Our most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves. Therefore we must find ways to nurture it in our psyche by repeatedly sending positive and affirmative statements to it, until they are INTERNALIZED and CONSOLIDATED in the architecture of our brains.

Remember that the quality of the relationship we have with ourselves began in childhood and much depended on how we were accepted by our caregivers. None of us had perfect parents. Most of us had "GOOD ENOUGH PARENTS."

Here are MESSAGES that we may have MISSED during childhood that our psyche may still need to internalize. As adults we need to parent ourselves. As you engage in "Positive Self-Talk" consider internalizing the following "GENERAL MESSAGES" and "GOOD PARENT MESSAGES" by repeating them to yourself in conjunction with "Self-Soothing Breathing" and "Self-Soothing Touch". This accelerates the

process because it engages our SENSES. State the phrase slowly, breath gently in and out, and FEEL the emotions that arise from the experience. Repeat several times to allow your central nervous system (this obviously includes our brain) to absorb these truths.

General Messages:

"I acknowledge myself" (vs self-judgments)
"I am good enough" (vs "I am not good enough")
"I accept my human imperfection" (vs Perfectionism)
"I forgive myself" (vs. Self-harshness)
"I have good intentions, I am learning, and intend to improve" (vs. Unhealthy Guilt and Shame)
"I am connecting with myself" (vs Disconnecting, numbness, and distracting behaviors)
"I can feel my experiences" (vs disconnecting from body and self)
"This too shall pass" (vs fatalistic thinking and worst-case thinking)
"I am not alone" (vs. I am alone)

Good Parent Messages:

I like you.
I love you.
I want you.
I acknowledge you.
You are special to me.
I see you and I hear you.
I accept and celebrate your sensitivity.
It is okay to make mistakes.
Feel and move your body freely, as you please.
It's good to feel and to express your emotions.
You will derive wisdom from your emotions.
Life will happen to you.
You have internal resources to care for yourself.
We are always learning.
You have inner wisdom.
You can take care of yourself.
You can take care of others.
You can take risks and fail.
I will take care of you.
You can trust your wisdom.
You do not have to be alone anymore.
You can trust me.
You can trust your inner voice.
You do not have to be afraid anymore.
My love will make you well.
I welcome and cherish you.
If you experience loss or trauma, you can heal.
I am proud of you.
I have confidence in you.
It's okay to not know everything nor control everything.
It is not what you do but who you are that I love.

You can forgive yourself for your mistakes.
 There is no need to feel shame if you did not hurt anyone.
 You can be happy and express your joy in any way you want.
 You need not try to be perfect nor the best in all you do.
 I love you and give you permission to be different from me.
 I will be there for you; I will be there even when you die.
 Sometimes I will tell you “no”, and that is okay because I love you.
 You are beautiful in your own human imperfection.
 I give you permission to enjoy your sexuality, with a partner of your choice and not lose me.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help. List which GOOD PARENT MESSAGES you will focus on. If you are a parent, list 5-10 messages that you intend your children to hear more frequently from you.

LIFE-SKILL # 7 “IDENTIFYING MY BASIC-FAULT”

Each of us has a familiar destabilizing, emotional, embodied theme that has followed us throughout our life. What is the thought or feeling you usually have when you are feeling hurt, when you are down or blue, when you are upset?

Like an earthquake fault, our personalities also have “faults”. A place where our brains go to almost automatically because of the frequent use since childhood, when we were feeling fragmented. It is crucial to diagnose what our basic fault is, and to engage in therapeutic work to heal and transform it, with the tools listed here. Among the most common messages we send ourselves, as our “Basic-Faults” are:

- “I’M NOT GOOD ENOUGH”
- “I’M ALL ALONE”
- “I AM NOT SEEN”
- “I AM NOT HEARD”
- “NO ONE UNDERSTANDS ME”
- “NO ONE IS THERE FOR ME”
- “I’M BAD AND HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG”
- “I’M NOT ENOUGH”

“I’M TOO MUCH”
“IT’S NOT FAIR”

These themes arise in childhood, during preverbal times. As a result, they are an old feeling, difficult to explain verbally, and they are pervasive in nature. They may be hidden beneath every thought and feeling, or just show up when we are emotional. We accept it as undeniable truth. They keep us feeling that the same old sensations and feelings keep happening to us. Our basic fault undermines our interior sense of inner constancy.

What is the most common theme that shows up when you are upset? How does it define your life? The basic fault is our primary frailty, a mostly unconscious, underlying repetitive theme of finding fault within ourselves and / or others. It is a body-mind experience that can leave us with a haunting feeling of being bad, flawed, or unworthy. It is rather universal in nature. It is important to note that the basic fault promotes a feeling in our body or emptiness, annihilation, a sense of non-entity that we carry as human beings into life. This fault is an injury to our sense of self and underlies all other emotional injuries. Like an earthquake’s fault or fissure in the earth, the basic fault leaves us open to insecurity, harm to our own interior sense of self, and intimate relationships. When we can see that our basic fault is self-perpetuated, and more about our history, that the people and situations, we project them upon. By healing our basic-self, we are more apt to sustain our own internal sense of well-being and constancy. Michael Balint introduced this concept in his book, “The Basic Fault”, in 1968.

Exercise: Identify your “Basic Fault” and write it down. Explain how you think it shows up in your life. Try to identify the mind-body feeling of your basic fault, which is similar to what you feel when you begin to feel fragmented. Write what you think you can do when you’re in your “Basic -Fault” by considering the LIFE-SKILLS outlined in this document.

LIFE-SKILL # 8: “I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY SENSUALITY AND ORGASM”

Getting in touch with and enjoying our body and its sensations is a key human experience for which we are responsible. Do not only depend on others to awaken your sensations, desire, and sensuality. Understand that it is normal to not always have an orgasm, or to sometimes experience premature ejaculation, or retarded ejaculations. If this happens pay attention if you start to experience shame, fear, and anxiety. Let go of social pressures to be a sexual superstar or a Don Juan. You are a human being, and your body is affected by emotions and mental states. Do not treat your body as a machine. Have an emotional relationship with it based on empathy and understanding. Consider the wisdom of incorporating some of the above-mentioned practices during intimate sensual experiences with yourself. Especially connect with your breath, and then with your body sensations. Take your time. Enjoy. Explore. Learn to tolerate increased states of sexual aliveness, without aiming for rapid orgasms. At times stop and just feel your energy, then

start again. This may build energy gradually, to higher levels, allowing our body to gradually tolerate more intense sensations. Enjoy your breath, never let go of it. Touch, smell, sounds, rhythmic movements of the pelvis are key experiences. Experiment by varying speeds and amount of breath intakes. As you reach increased states of excitement, and if you decide to move towards orgasms (which is not the goal of this practice) change your breathing patterns. Begin to breathe in and out only through your mouth. Increase intensity and speed if you reach climax. Let the body take over. Let go of thinking and make sure you continue breathing and bring some joy into the experience. Let go. Practicing this skill will undoubtedly prepare you for higher levels of enjoyment with a partner.

KEY ISSUE: Focus on being KIND to yourself during this process.

If you have difficulty feeling enjoyment and orgasms, consider consulting with Dr Bentson.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 9: “FEELING AND FOCUSING ON MY BREATH & FIVE SENSES”

This Life-Skill helps us to train our brain to FOCUS and to enjoy the PRESENT MOMENT by simply FEELING our breath and five senses. There is no faster way to get us back in the present moment, than by feeling and paying close attention to our senses. This experience can help us to stop fixating on anxious and fear related thoughts, to us move out of states of fragmentation, lack of presence and enjoyment. As we repeat this practice, we will begin to re-program our brain to obsess less with thinking processes and to engage more with FEELING process based on the present moment. This matters because in the present moment we experience increased states of acceptance, calmness, and joy. If we feel the positive experiences of our senses, our bodies should feel increased enjoyment, relaxation, and presence. The more we practice this exercise, the more we program our brain to do this as second nature.

Before you begin this practice make sure you have the INTENTION to enjoy and to relax your body. Read this exercise thoroughly and decide which items you will use for each sense. Then prepare your surroundings to make sure you are in a peaceful environment. Practice this skill daily for 8 weeks to notice change.

Step 1: Enjoying the Moment through BREATH.

ORGANIC LIFE-SKILLS
for RELATIONSHIPS

LIFE SKILL # 10: "CO-SOOTHING"

We must find ways to SELF-SOOTHE as the foundation of our lives. However, those in intimate relationships can also enjoy the benefits of CO-SOOTHING practices as well. This NON-VERBAL and non-sexual experience can soothe your partner and nurture the relationship in CONCRETE and DIRECT ways. This Life-Skill also allows us to express empathy, vulnerability, and sensitivity in physical and non-sexual as the primordial goal. I encourage couples to experiment with this practice, to make it their own, adapting it with creativity. O

Choose who will be the GIVING PARTNER and who will be the RECEIVING PARTNER. Have the receiving partner sit or lay comfortably in bed, with pillows under his or her knees. Mutually engage in the "Self-Soothing Breathing" skill and with occasional EYE CONTACT. The giving partner will engage in SOFT & GENTLE ways to SOOTHE the body, emotions, and anxiety of the receiving partner (touch, massage, tickle, etc.). The giving partner can use short verbal statements such as "I understand how you are feeling," "I am carrying for you," "I love you," "What are you feeling in your body now?" The goal is to help the receiving partner be soothed, to feel your love, nurturance, and to remain intimately and compassionately connected with you. If you are not sure what to do ask your partner what soothes them, how and where. Accept detailed instructions with grace.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 11: "LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN"

Listening deeply to intimate others is one of the most difficult yet rewarding experiences in life. However, it is difficult to master, and is frequently an emotional minefield. With techniques and practice we can improve our listening skills.

This is how this Life-Skill works: start by deciding who will be the SHARING PARTNER and who will be the LISTENING PARTNER. One person at a time gets to share, one issue at a time, until he or she feels satisfied.

We need to comprehend and accept that each person is wired differently, and that the nature of our brain is SUBJECTIVE. Especially when emotions, pain, and trauma related memories are being triggered (consciously or unconsciously). Therefore, deep listening is a difficult process, but it is necessary within relationships that want to grow and remain close.

We must train ourselves to listen to the words, the emotions, and the body language. This takes time to master. We must also remind ourselves that listening is primarily about FEELING what the other person is feeling, and about THINKING about how the other person may be feeling. This is EMPATHY as it integrates both feeling and thinking processes. We do this regardless of how WE think or feel about the subject being shared.

Deep listening does not imply agreeing. It is only an attempt to UNDERSTAND how the other person thinks and feels. Give up the expectation that to be happy you must agree on every issue. This is not realistic. It will never happen. Have in mind that certain conflicts and tension are normal within human relationships. However, it is important to note the difference between conflict and antagonism. Antagonism is not a healthy part of a relationship.

Recommendations for the SHARING PERSON: Since it is difficult to engage in deep listening, make it short and direct. Focus on one topic. Take a risk and go deeper. Another important recommendation is to use “ I language”, not accusatory phrases. Start with statements such as, “I feel,” I think,” etc. Not “ You...this or that.”

The Three Levels of Listening:

Listen Level #1: Start by having a clear INTENTION to listen deeply to the other person. Then remember that listening is not about you. It is not about your thoughts, memories, or your feelings. Stop being egocentric and narcissistic. If you are listening, your thoughts are of no concern, for now. Your task is to provide a SAFE SPACE, without judgment, so the other person can share from the heart. Demonstrate a caring attitude and be curious about the other person’s experiences. What matters most is your genuine INTENTION to feel their emotions and to understand the other person.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about Listening Level # 1 and explain how you think it can help.

Listen Level # 2: What the other person shares will AUTOMATICALLY trigger your thoughts and memories. Since we have something called memory this happens automatically. Accept this about your imperfect biology and master this second level of listening. How? By RESISTING the temptation to think or talk about what comes to your memory. If you start to do so, say you are sorry. Then bring your focus back to the other person and ask them to continue. Track their words, emotions, meanings, and body language. Try to remember the different PARTS of what they are sharing, the words, the emotions. Attempt to UNDERSTAND what they are trying to convey, in their imperfect way. Let go of control and judgments. Again, it is your job to create a SAFE SPACE to encourage sharing from the heart. Be ready to repeat what you think you heard and understood, to check if your understanding is correct, or if you missed something.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about Listening Level # 2 and explain how this skill can help.

Listen Level # 3: If the person shares something difficult or negative about you, your emotions, anxiety, and defenses will be triggered AUTOMATICALLY. Accept this because this is how we are wired for survival. Every human is sensitive, and so are you. Breathe and self-soothe. This next level of listening is the highest gift you can give to the other. Try to not get defensive, shutdown, leave, or numb yourself. You can certainly feel your own emotions but train yourself to do so without disconnecting from the experience of the other. Do not abandon the sharing person during this critical moment, where he or she is likely sharing their pain. Remember, it's all about them, not about you. Even if you think that they are incorrect in some ways, remain focused on the other person's emotions and suffering, with compassion. Keep listening and trying to understand what they are communicating. Access all the empathy and love you have and apply it NOW.

Consider that it is likely that much or some of what the other person is saying about you is TRUE. This is an opportunity for you. They know you intimately. Allow yourself to take it in. Breathe and open your mind. Do not focus on what may be incorrect, focus only on the part that is correct. Breathe that truth in and let go of old and boring defenses. Be genuine and vulnerable. This is a sign of strength and maturity.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about Listening Level # 3 and explain how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL # 12: “IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU NEED TO SHARE?”

When the SHARING person is done sharing, ask them this key question: *“Is there anything more you want to share?”* This demonstrates genuine interest in what the other person has to say. If something additional needs to be shared, this is the opportunity to do so. The point is to say everything you need to say NOW.

A tip to go deep: Share when and how YOU experience shame, fear, and sadness. Be vulnerable. It is not that difficult once you let go of useless fears. Vulnerability begets vulnerability and fosters intimacy.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.

LIFE SKILL # 13: “PERCEPTION CHECKING”

We rarely fully understand what the other person is attempting to communicate. Therefore, we must check our understanding of what was shared. Ask something like this: *“Is it okay if we practice Perception Checking? I want to make sure I understand what you are trying to communicate. What you said seems*

important. I will tell you what I understood, and you tell me what part I got right, what part I got wrong, and what parts I missed. Is this okay with you?"

First, repeat the words that you heard the other person communicate. After, communicate your interpretation of what they were trying to convey. Name the emotions that you felt them experiencing, with empathy. Humans want to be heard, understood and validated in their reasoning and emotions.

Both parties need to be patient during this practice. It may be necessary to go back and forth until ALL PARTS are understood. If the listener omitted an important part, the sharing person should alert them to this and repeat what was shared until the other party understands it completely. Do this especially for sensitive topics. Make it fun when appropriate. Do not expect perfection, we are all learning.

Exercise: *Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and explain how you think it can help.*

LIFE-SKILL # 14: “YOU LISTENED, THANK YOU”

Deep listening is not an easy task, as we now know. Therefore, GRATITUDE for the attempt must be expressed. Be EXPLICIT and GENEROUS in your verbal expressions.

WITHHOLDING positive emotions is one of the most destructive relationship issues. This is your chance to not withhold and to be generous. This creates positive emotions that can lead to further expressions of love, trust, and bonding.

Remember that each conversation is an opportunity to BUILD the relationship in nurturing ways.

Exercise: *Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and explain how you think it can help.*

LIFE-SKILL # 15: "REPAIRING THE BOND"

Couples often damage the emotional bond between them by engaging in insensitive behaviors, verbalization, microaggressions, micro-omissions, or not being present or showing up. Of course, there are more significant ways of hurting the emotional bond but those are not within the scope of this document.

The party that caused the damage has the RESPONSIBILITY to initiate the REPAIR of the bond. This must be done EXPLICITLY, with verbalization, and acknowledgment of the error. With a request for forgiveness. True contrition must be expressed, felt, and communicated.

Without "Repair Work," the bond will be undermined. With repetitive damages it will ultimately be destroyed, even if there is love within the relationship. The aliveness and attraction will be undermined. Both partners must engage in this exercise in a mutual manner. This requires work but if guided with empathy and kindness in our hearts, it can become a positive and loving ritual.

Understand that part of repairing the bond includes confronting our STUBBORN patterns with the intention to gradually change them. This is required to enjoy lasting relationships. Remember that a healthy brain is one which is open to change. And relationships require change and flexibility.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and explain how you think it can help.

LIFE-SKILL #16: BREATHWORK, SENSUALITY & SEXUALITY"

Connect with your sensations, and emotions, and be candid about your anxiety. Remember that the other person is also a human being with emotions and relate to them as such, with care. Accept that it is normal

to experience anxiety during sexual experiences. Attempt to feel your experiences, and the experiences of the other person. Consider practicing "Co-Soothing". Remain connected to yourself and to the other, emotionally, and through eye-contact. Take your time. Enjoy. Release self-judgments and fears. Express how attractive his or her body is. Be genuine and generous.

Learn to tolerate increased states of sexual aliveness, without aiming for rapid orgasms. Feel and enjoy each other's breath, touch, smell, sounds, rhythmic movements, etc. Experiment by varying the speeds and amount of breath intakes. As you reach increased states of excitement, and move towards orgasms, change your breathing patterns. Begin to breathe in and out, only through your mouth. Increase intensity and speed as you reach your climax. You will soon realize how natural this is. Once you reach climax, continue breathing naturally. Let go and express your emotions with generosity. Do not withhold.

After climax do not think this is the end of lovemaking. Other experiences may happen. Let go of any expectation. Just stay in the moment. Continue breathing, feeling sensations, and allow emotions to be released and expressed. It is common to feel joy, sadness, longing, etc. Some people occasionally cry.

This is a good opportunity to verbalize your deepest appreciation, wonder, and gratitude towards your partner. If possible, consider remaining in bed, continuing with playful and nurturing behaviors, without getting into divisive conversations. After 30-60 minutes you may want to repeat all the above. Remember, being multi-orgasmic is not the goal, rather, it is about enjoyment, relaxation, and connection. But multi-orgasms are natural and sometimes available to us if we maintain the physical and EMOTIONAL connection. Women frequently have easier time with additional orgasms, but with proper timing, emotional connection, and with increased EXPRESSION of sexual energy by the female, the male can also often enjoy the experience, with orgasm or not. Experiment. Always accept what is natural for your body.

Exercise: Explain what you understood about this Life-Skill and how you think it can help.
