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# MEET ME HALFWAY

THE ART OF THINKING INDEPENDENTLY TOGETHER

Vesna Lorenc, Anna Kawalska  
Dasanthila Hoxha, Vittorio Lannutti,  
Oscar Argumosa

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# INTRODUCTION



***“He had explained once that to be born into a strong tradition was to know the steps to an intricate dance which started at birth and ended with death. “When you know all the steps by heart, you don’t have to think anymore – you are the dancer and the dance,” he said, and she had loved the mystery, the poetry of it. It hadn’t occurred to her to ask him what happened when a dancer found himself alone on the floor of a different tradition. Could the steps of one dance fit the music of another?”***

***Manjula Padmanabhan, “Stains”<sup>1</sup>***

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Dear reader, if you are keeping this study in your hands, quite probably you are in an intercultural relationship or for any other reason, the topic of interculturality is close to you. The practical Meet Me Halfway guide was created out of a personal need - the need of heart. Just the same way as multicultural relationships are born, giving people numerous extraordinary experiences.

Being a part of a culturally mixed relationship is great and gives many benefits. Researchers at the University of Edinburgh conducted a study on 350,000 people in the entire world and have noticed that intellectual and physical changes are following demographic change: children from mixed relationships are taller, smarter, have better-developed cognitive skills and learn better. Maybe that is why it is not surprising that in Poland already every 11th marriage is intercultural (data from 2012) and this number is growing year by year.<sup>2</sup>

This is only official data regarding marriages. It does not contain information about informal relationships. A similar trend is also observed in other European countries. Only after the Erasmus programme, over one million children from culturally mixed relationships were born.<sup>3</sup>

Together with the benefits, such relationships also carry a higher risk of separation. Some sources say that culturally mixed relationships are seven times more exposed to separation and divorce than monocultural relationships. At the same time, research shows that the durability of these relationships depends on the ability to adapt and integrate the differences that arise between partners as a result of their origin.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from: Romano, D. (1988). Intercultural marriage: Promises and pitfalls. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

<sup>2</sup> Data from professor Antoni Rajkiewicz and Emilia Jaroszewska PhD from the University of Warsaw

<sup>3</sup> Data of European Commission [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-1025\\_pl.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_pl.htm)

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We hope that thanks to the practical approach and exercises contained in this book, it will be easier for you to face challenges and make diversity your asset and the strength of your relationship. This is a manual for individual work, prevention, strengthening, solving difficult or conflict situations - simply, for everyday use. Our intention was and is not only to convey intercultural knowledge, but to embed it in practical realities and translate it into real exercises and individual practice. Our ambition has always been to make this publication common reading in every home where more than one culture meets. This is the first publication to capture the topic of culturally mixed couples in such a lively, practical and comprehensive way.

We also encourage educators, social workers, coaches, trainers and mediators working in culturally diverse environments to use this guide. The practical approach, proven exercises and variety of methods to support adults in their development will allow you to build intercultural competence and proficiency in working with this target group.

The Meet Me Halfway publication is the result of an over two-year international Erasmus+ project cooperation, led by Vesna Lorenc from Atalaya Foundation (Poland).

Her several years of interest in the intercultural issues set a solid foundation for the international project, to which we invited partners: Permacultura Cantabria from Spain and Submeet from Italy. Nearly 50 culturally mixed pairs in three countries participated in our research. They were representatives of various countries and cultures from four continents.

You can meet a few of them and watch their testimonials, listen to what they are saying about being in an intercultural relationship and about our project.

**Norma i Daniel**

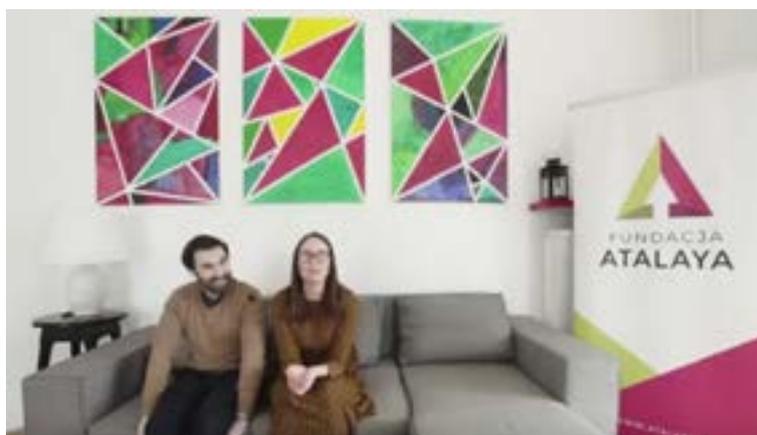
**Agnieszka i Jeffrey**



**Vanessa i Danin**



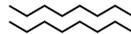
**Anastasia i Rafael**



We have conducted a number of workshops and individual meetings. Within the meetings, we were working with various methods to support the development and education of adults. We have defined the most common barriers appearing in mixed relationships and within the guide, we will try to respond to each of them.

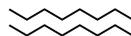
**(Un)awareness of cultural differences**

behaviours, norms and cultural values that often appear in the female and male roles and in the areas of faith and religion.



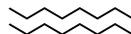
**Identity**

issues related to the presence of a new, different culture, values, cultural norms, place of residence, language, etc. Growing stronger when faced with starting a family and raising children together.



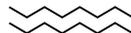
**Communication**

when the language of communication is often a foreign language for each of the parties in a relationship. In addition, there is the issue of context and norms (to what extent frankly and to what extent directly) and symbolism used in communication in various cultural circles (verbal and non-verbal communication).



**Place of residence and adaptive stress**

intercultural relationship is associated with changes in life (work, circle of friends, place of residence and others), which causes various emotional reactions.



**Public pressure and discrimination**

many couples emphasise the influence of the environment, social pressure and pressure in relationships with family members. Discrimination and prejudice arise in the context of children's education, in the labour market, among neighbours.

The scale of these problems depends on how far apart are the cultures of the partners - in terms of religion, custom, gender role in society. The result or potential „conflict of interest” is conditioned by the degree of assumption of the partner's similarity, the degree of language barrier, acceptance of a different culture and religion of the partner and their separate views.

Conflicts most often concern the basic spheres of living together, which is, ways of expressing love and closeness, the nature and level of involvement in the relationship, attitude towards marriage, approach to raising children and perception of the role of man and woman. Communication problems often arise due to improper reading of non-verbal messages, such as the tone of voice, the quantity and quality of eye contact, or gesticulation.

John Berry, based on two criteria - preservation of the cultural heritage of one's own group as well as contact and participation in the life of culturally different groups - distinguished four strategies: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalisation. Research on mixed families shows that such families develop their own strategies to protect marital stability from the negative impact of cultural differences.

Marriages use different ways of dealing with the situation of multiculturalism: from the total abandonment of one of the cultures, through incorporating elements of both cultures into a whole that is coherent and non-problematic for the family members, to consciously selecting elements of these cultures and using them to build specific identities.<sup>4</sup>

We want to show that apart from the strategies described by Berry, there are other solutions and strategies supporting intercultural relationships. Here, we encourage you to go through the guide and consciously select such strategies.

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**Within the practices, we draw on the knowledge and foundations of therapeutic and developmental methods, such as:**

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- Building intercultural competences
- Conflict resolution and NVC (Nonviolent Communication) mediation in the spirit of Nonviolent Communication
- Gestalt therapeutic approach
- Developmental contact-building approach - Emotional Management

The team working in the Meet Me Halfway project and on the content of this textbook includes intercultural trainers and psychologists, coaches, therapists and mediators. People with vast experience and work achievements in multicultural environments. Combining knowledge, different approaches and methods of work, empirically tested tools, we give the result of this work to you. On this occasion, we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the creation of this project and the book. The representatives of couples, who shared a piece of themselves and their life stories with us, deserve special acknowledgement.

**Have a great read and many amazing moments on your path together!  
From the Meet Me Halfway team.**

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<sup>4</sup> Based on materials prepared for the Meet Me Halfway project by Kinga Białek

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

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You have the practical guide in your hands. You can use it as you are used to go through practical publications - from the beginning to the end or any other way that will serve you. What you need to know is how to look up for the information and what is the order and structure of the chapters.

### 5 stages of MEET ME HALFWAY JOURNEY

The chapters are following the **PROCESS** - we called it a journey. Just like the process in adult development and learning. It starts from the preparation phase which symbolises call to adventure - "Packing for the trip". It then follows next phases, each one offering step by step, deeper experiences and exercises that will foster the relationship, way of communication, trust and openness. So, be prepared that within each chapter, the level gets more advanced.

#### 01

##### "Packing for the trip"

**Phase of:** identity, getting to know each other, collecting resources

**Type of experiences:** opening, working on strengths, introductory, active listening, self-connection, awareness

#### 02

##### "Approaching the river"

**Phase of:** deepening, empathy, needs

**Type of experiences:** more serious, deepening, maybe some first smaller challenges, easier to overcome, deeper exercises on active listening, awareness

#### 03

##### "Crossing the river"

**Phase of:** conflict, differences, challenges

**Type of experiences:** addressing conflicts and/or differences inside the relationship

## 04

### “Climbing the mountain”

**Phase of:** settling new norms, agreements, empowerment. Now, after “crossing the river” together and overcoming our conflicts, we are ready to face the outside world

**Type of experiences:** Using common experience to empower one another and get more confidence in future challenges

## 05

### “Campfire and celebration”

**Phase of:** cooperation, celebration, future

**Type of experiences:** for common celebration, wrapping up, summarising, incorporating.

## 2 parts of MEET ME HALFWAY JOURNEY

We have used different methods to offer you the best support and mutual couple experience within the guide. ‘EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT’ (EM) journey is offered as a separate way (second part of the guide). So, you could go on the journey in a row. Or make a break and come back to EM later on. What is truly important is to treat the ‘EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT’ part as a whole and follow the 5 parts of the journey chronologically.

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## #HASHTAGS and HYPERLINKS

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We wanted this publication to be user friendly and very practical. So, here are 2 tips, that will make this journey easier to navigate:

- 1.** Each exercise follows the same instruction structure, including #hashtag’s which mirrors the cross cultural couples problems and issues addressed in the Guide. So you can search for the answers following specific hashtags.
- 2.** Another navigation facilitation are hyperlinks leading to the relevant topic related to the given issue.

**Enjoy!**

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## **CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS THAT INTERCULTURAL COUPLES MIGHT FACE**

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### **Problems that mixed marriages/couples are facing**

The scale of the problem depends on how far apart the partners' cultures are - in terms of religion, customs and gender roles in society. According to the research conducted by Monika Walczak, the result depends on the degree of similarity of partners, degree of language barrier, as well as acceptance of the partner's different culture, and their individual opinions.

While a multicultural marriage gives an opportunity to overcome one's personal stereotypes and prejudices, it can be enriching and brings many advantages; the durability of such marriage (relationship) depends on skilful integration of different customs, values, attitudes and behaviours.

Mixed relationship means constant confrontation with differences. In addition - language barrier does not facilitate full expression of oneself (as it is in one's mother tongue), which may cause additional stress and growing tensions. Solving problems is more difficult due to language differences and communication problems.

Conflicts in such relations most often concern basic spheres of life in marriage, i.e. ways of expressing love and intimacy, character and degree of involvement in a relationship, attitude towards marriage, upbringing children, as well as perception of the role of man and woman. Communication problems often occur due to incorrect interpretation of non-verbal messages, such as tone of voice, quantity and quality of eye contact, or gestures.



## **Challenges and problems that intercultural couples might face**

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Studies conducted on mixed families indicate that such families develop their own strategies allowing them to protect marriage stability from negative impacts of cultural differences.

Marriages use various ways to deal with the multicultural situation: from the complete abandonment of one of the cultures, through incorporation of the elements of both cultures in a coherent and non-problematic way for the family members whole, to conscious selection of elements of these cultures and using them to build specific identities.

Sometimes also, partners adapt to each other. They can change their habits, customs, manners of behaviour, opinions, and even values. In intercultural psychology such a phenomenon is called a cultural compromise. Partners jointly develop a system that is a combination of two cultures. This doesn't mean that both cultures must be equally important. Place of residence, interest in the culture of the other person, knowledge of foreign languages can have an impact on it.

This was confirmed by couples in the study preceding the project in Poland, as well as by those who participated later in individual and group meetings. They emphasised the importance of building their own patterns, language, which is developed using their common experience, new family rules, taking into account cultural differences. What is important - supporting elements our couples mentioned in interviews, most often, were sense of humour and intimacy, as well as closeness in a relationship.

It can also be easier for those couples that have greater tolerance for ambiguity - key competence when it comes to differences in opinions or values. "In a multicultural context, rapid judgement and over-interpretation distort relations, whereas the perception of different points of view, sometimes contradictory, with the suspension at the same time of what is well known and safe, can lead to constructive dialogue and adequate actions.

Full immersion in intercultural reality is often a necessity to negate the obviousness, learn truths and rules, as well as to learn completely different approaches to life and everyday life. Lack of unambiguous, stable support points and a large dose of uncertainty, these are typical frameworks for intercultural professional or private relations."

Strategies for a successful multicultural relationship are numerous. The technical term in psychology for such scale is spectrum. On this spectrum, there can exist various models, which works for some couples, but not necessary for all of them. That is why we write this guide having in mind its practical dimension, citing theory and research, but focusing on practice and exercises leading to the development of one's own recipe for the quality of a relationship.

Within the Meet Me Halfway project, there were conducted a number of workshops and group meetings in Poland, Spain and Italy. During one of such workshops in Poland, attended by the representatives of 12 nationalities, we conducted an exercise consisting in defining advantages and challenges of living in an intercultural relationship. What is important, the participants appreciated the opportunity to talk about challenges in such a diverse group. This gave them a sense of belonging. It is worth remembering about the need for community and belonging. The fact that „we're not alone" and "others experience similar things" cause greater peace and well-being in the current situation.

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Belonging and being a part of the relationship is one of the basic and most important human needs. Living together, sharing experiences, supporting each other, makes life easier and more meaningful. However, being in a relationship also provokes some challenges. Couples need to find a way to strengthen the bond between partners and build closeness in long-term relationships.

Crises and conflicts are natural in every relationship, but if they are not handled constructively, they might lead to the feeling of disconnection and even result in a separation of the couple.

Being in an intercultural relationship might bring some added values as well as additional challenges.

**Based on literature and our interviews, we identified 5 main challenges and possible sources of difficulties that might encounter intercultural couples:**

### **1. Identity**

Building a relationship and living together with other human beings is a **challenge for one's identity**. Partners negotiate how they will live, what values will be important in their relationship, and how their everyday life will look like. Some aspects of a person's identity will remain the same and some might change. Being with a person that was brought up in another culture, the need to change the place of residency, to use another language etc. might be even a bigger challenge and might require bigger changes in a person's life and influence their identity.

In intercultural couples, the challenges around one's identity are especially important when the couples have children. Partners might have different approaches to how to bring up children, how to build the children's sense of belonging, for example what religion they should be members of, which language they should speak etc.

Exploring one's identity and finding a way to harmonise different aspects of it is an important task for partners.

### **2. Communication problems**

Some people say that, if you love someone, you can understand each other without words, you can almost read each other's minds. In reality, this false belief causes a lot of couples facing **communication** problems. Effective communication is even a bigger challenge for intercultural couples, where at least one, sometimes both partners, are using language that is not their mother tongue.



But not only **language** is a problem. Intercultural couples are more prone to some conflicts that might be caused by miscommunication due to the differences in how we speak in different cultures, how direct or indirect they express their thoughts and feelings, different patterns of what is polite in communication and what is not, or the intensity and differences in meaning of nonverbal communication that they use.

### 3.

#### **Cultural differences and cultural unconsciousness**

**Cultural differences** often constitute a challenge for intercultural couples. The differences in patterns of behaviours, norms and, especially, values might be the source of possible misunderstandings and conflicts. They might occur in many aspects of life, but they are especially important in relationship or family aspects, such as the understanding of gender roles and expectations towards men and women, fathers and mothers.

More than due to the differences themselves, the conflicts may arise out of **cultural unconsciousness**. Without the knowledge about the manner in which the behaviour is based on culture, one might underestimate the importance of some things for their partner or the fact that some things might be difficult to accept by them.

Some challenges might especially appear in couples that are **diverse in terms of religion**. This issue might be a substantial fundament for moral values as well as significantly influence everyday life, in terms of holidays, eating rituals, sexual relations and so on.

Cultural and religious differences must be acknowledged and addressed especially when the children are born, because then a couple has to decide in which religion/religions their children will be brought up.

### 4.

#### **Living in a new culture and adaptation stress**

Another important characteristic of intercultural couples is the fact that at least one of the partners has to move and **live in a new environment** and new culture. The need to adapt to a new reality causes a lot of stress. The stress is even bigger, as moving to a new place of residence means also **leaving one's homeland**, which includes leaving everything that a person has achieved so far, such as for example job, social position, as well as leaving family of origin, friends, social network.

It is worth mentioning that also a partner who remains in their culture is facing some acculturation stress due to the challenges related to being exposed to the culture of the partner. So partners need to learn how to handle stress, regulate emotions and give support to each other.



## 5.

### **Pressure and discrimination from family members and society**

A lot of intercultural couples say that the biggest difficulties they are facing are not caused by the differences within their relationship, but by the pressure and attitude of people surrounding them.

Many couples have difficulties in **reconciling the expectations of partners with the expectations of family members**, especially those from extended families. Sometimes intercultural couples feel rejected by the family members who do not accept their relationship.

Unfortunately, a lot of couples mentioned that at least one of partners or both of them, or even children are exposed to **discrimination in many aspects of life**: in schools, in the labour market or from neighbours. It causes a lot of stress and partners might feel hopeless. Knowledge of ones rights and where to find help in the situation of discrimination, how to build a support network is helpful in minimising the negative impact of discrimination.

However, some couples mentioned that they face stress caused by the pressure from social or educational services due to their prejudice and cultural unawareness.

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## **DEFINITIONS**

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In our manual, we used several terms from the field of intercultural psychology. In this subsection you will find their short definitions and explanations.

### **Inclusion**

These are practices, policies and strategies consisting in creation of an environment that all individuals feel a part of, regardless of which social groups they come from. A special emphasis is put on the inclusion of people from minority groups with less power (e.g. foreigners, religious minorities, people from sexual minorities, people with disabilities)

### **Cultural Diversity**

It refers to the perception of the diversity in a given community (e.g. in terms of culture, sex, age or styles of thinking), in contrast to perceiving it as a homogeneous whole.

The diversity is the understanding of the fact that people are different, they can have different needs and they require various approaches.

Diversity management should be understood as the application in a given community (company, city, state) of practices, strategies that consist in the perception of diversity, respect for differences and the use of the diversity to build a new, enriching quality.



### **Culture**

Is understood here as a system of values, norms and scripts of behaviours characteristic for particular cultural groups, passed down from generation to generation. All members of a given group understand and can recognise these values, norms and behaviours, but not all must identify or behave in accordance with them.



### **Ethnocentrism**

most often understood as an attitude, characterised by propensity to perceive the world in the context of one's own cultural filters, i.e., norms and values of one's group.

Literally, it means putting one's own nation, ethnic group in the centre of attention. The term can be also understood as elevating one's own group, one's own cultural norms as universal and only legitimate, and the representatives of other groups as inferior, immoral ones etc. Ethnocentrism can be individual as well as corporate, institutional.



### **Ethnorelativism**

is the attitude of openness to cultural differences and readiness to learn about them. This means the perception, interpretation and possible evaluation of cultures (behaviours, norms, values) only in the context in which each of them functions, in deviation from absolutism and universality.

In the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), Milton Bennett distinguishes six stages of growing sensitivity to cultural differences. First three stages are ethnocentric stages, such as denying the existence of differences, defending against differences, and minimising differences.

Next three stages are the manifestation of the ethnorelativism attitude and these are: acceptance of differences, adaptation to differences and integration of cultural differences.

## **Culture Dimensions**

is a manner of describing cultures and their mutual comparisons, most often by measuring the acceptance and meaning of different values in different societies.

Culture dimension is most often presented as a straight line, at the two ends of which there are opposite characteristics of a given culture, for example related to the principles of social life. In this idea, each country can be placed closer or further to the ends of this dimension. This allows us to compare cultures with each other and make it easier to organise knowledge about them.

An example of a culture dimension can be the dimension of individualism - collectivism, where on the one extreme of the dimension the most important are rights, needs of an individual, and on the second one the most important are rights, needs of a group. Learning about the culture dimensions, verifying where our culture is located on a given dimension, and where the culture of our interlocutors is, can be useful, as it is impossible to know in detail all cultures of the world.

However, one should remember that using culture dimensions could only be a guideline, because it does not explain the specific, complex context of each culture. It is important to remember that culture dimensions are a certain generalisation and representatives of a given culture, with whom we have contact, do not have to behave in accordance with mainstream standards of their culture of origin.

Many researchers have developed their models of culture dimensions and conducted comparative studies concerning cultures of different countries. In this manual, we will most often refer to the dimensions of Erin Meyer, Gert Hofstede, it is worth mentioning also Fons Trompenaars, Richard Gesteland, and the Globe research project.



## **Cultural Shock**

otherwise called adaptive/acclimation stress is a process that can be experienced by a person changing cultural environment, e.g. due to migration to another country. This is a process in which one can distinguish at least four stages/phases: honeymoon, negotiation, accommodation and adaptation to a new culture/cultural competence. One can distinguish also return shock, i.e. the stress experienced by a person who must again adapt to life in their culture of origin.

As a result of the cultural differences encountered and difficulties in the host culture, a person can experience (temporary) deterioration of general well-being and life satisfaction. Knowledge about the dynamics of acculturative stress and effective coping with stress strategies helps in effective adaptation to a new culture.

### **Cross-cultural partnership**

is the relationship between people of different cultures of origin. Partners can come from different countries, use different languages as their first language and also believe in different religions.



### **Third Culture Kids (TCKs)**

are people who were raised in a culture other than the culture of their parents. Third Culture Kids are characterised by the fact that they are associated with all these cultures, but they do not fully identify with any of them. They have the sense of belonging rather to other people with similar experience.

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## **METHODS DESCRIPTION**

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### **Atalaya Foundation (Poland)**

#### **NVC Mediations and Cross cultural communication**

A method firstly founded by Marshall Rosenberg – an American psychologist, who developed and shared Nonviolent Communication (NVC), called also ‘a language of a heart’ or ‘giraffe language’. It’s a four step model of communication focused on naming facts, emotions, needs and requests.

Based on that, Ike Lasater and John Kinyon from the USA, under M. Rosenberg’s mentoring, have integrated and developed a new methodology of conflict resolving process, named NVC Mediations. Ike Lasater is an attorney and he uses his background and skills to resolve different cases, no matter if they concern inner or external conflict, how hard they are, or which field of life they are connected with.

NVC Mediations are about listening to—and really hearing—ourselves and others. It is about becoming fluent in the “language of needs” and increasing our capacity for empathy so that, out of conflict, a true dialogue and new possibilities can emerge.



What is unique about using NVC Mediations, also in diverse and multicultural environment is:

- approach every conflict as an opportunity



- conflict leads to connection



- self-connection is crucial to achieve relation with others



- understand and communicate our needs with clarity, and with empathy for the universality of those needs



- we mediate all kinds of conflicts: internal, interpersonal, and external



- NVC Mediation helps navigate difficult situations



- this method is universal to work with different individuals and groups, including children

## **Cross-Cultural Competence**

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**CCC is a soft-skill competence, which consist of 3 parts:**

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### **1.**

Knowledge about other cultures and about the relations between people from different cultures.

### **2.**

Skills and abilities to build relations with people from different cultures, to cooperate with different people with ethnic backgrounds. Important cross-cultural skill is the ability to communicate in a way that is competent in a particular country, especially, when your culture of origin is other than the culture of a host country.

### 3.

Attitudes towards other cultures and people from other cultures:

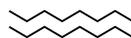
- a)** Cognitive part of the cross-cultural attitude: stereotypes about other cultures and how we deal with them
- b)** Behavioural part of the cross-cultural attitude: the way we react to cultural differences, the ability to act as a culturally competent person.
- c)** Emotional part of c-c attitude: the awareness of prejudices and hidden unconscious bias towards other cultures

Cross-cultural competence is all we need to know and act, to be well understood and accepted in other cultures.

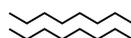
It can be developed through intercultural sensitivity trainings and methods from this training are going to be implement in the project (methods such as: group support for people with intercultural backgrounds, role-plays to strengthen culturally competent behaviours, simulation games to deepen the understanding, the influence of the culture, etc.).

The development of cross-cultural competence can support cross-cultural couples in better interpersonal communication with sensitivity towards cross-cultural differences. After the development of CCC, cross-cultural couples can be strengthened and supported in the following ways:

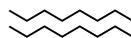
- Broaden understanding of the influence of the culture on personal, daily life - Developed methods of cross-cultural, adequate communication



- The abilities to minimise stress in cross-cultural relationship, which is an outcome of cross-cultural clashes



- Developed knowledge about most important cross-cultural psychology theories (such concepts as the cultural dimensions, ethnocentrism, culture shock, etc) and their practical implications on a daily life behaviours people living in cross-cultural relationships



- Deeper understanding of cross-cultural relations in a way of dealing with cultural clashes, building culturally aware relations, creating culturally responsible homes.

## **Gestalt Counselling and Therapy**

### **Submeet (Italy) - Gestalt Counselling and Therapy**

The most important goal of Gestalt Therapy (GT) is to assist in developing our own self-awareness of how we are in the present moment. This will therefore allow us to rectify issues affecting our life.

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These are some of the key concepts GT is based upon:

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**1.**

Holisms and Integration

**2.**

Awareness and Experience

**3.**

Emotional Expression (particularly anger)

**4.**

Growth Disorders / Unfinished Business

## **Gestalt Counselling**

Counselling is an activity in which you listen to someone asking for help. Counselling has among its priorities the attention to the body and the messages that this sends.

---

The counselling functions are:

---

**1.**

To focus on a problem, to highlight it, so that the user knows what he has to face and whether it is better to do it alone or with the help of someone.

## **2.**

Strengthening individual awareness of problems, which is one of the main ways through which prevention works, alongside the promotion of social, environmental and economic conditions that promote health and encouraging the use of psychosocial support in services.

## **3.**

To help each individual to define goals, make decisions and solve problems in relation to personal, social, educational or work difficulties.

The term „Gestalt“ is German and it means: figure, structure, whole form, configuration; it denotes the structural entity that is different and greater than the sum of its parts. The purpose of Gestalt is the integration of all the disparate parts; so people can afford to become what they already are and what they can potentially become. This fullness of experience can be available to them both during one's life and in the experience of the individual moment.

The cognitive and experiential totality of each person, of every moment, of every event is equally central to the Gestalt approach to counselling. The modern Gestalt integrates body, feelings and intellect by inserting most of the basic needs of people within the context of the social environment. Gestalt has an integral approach to counselling, because it combines psychoanalytic knowledge with inventiveness in the process, through the use of three tools:

### **relationship/awareness/experimentation**

A Gestalt-oriented counselling approach is based on the absolute and inseparable unity of bodily experience, of language, of thought and behaviour; according to its basic modality, body/mind reacts as a totality.

The focal point of the counsellor/user relationship is the moment by moment, in which the goal is a genuine and complete meeting between these two people, in which the counsellor uses himself actively and authentically in the encounter with the other person and invites the user to autonomy, to self-possession, to integration.

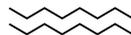
## **The work of the GC with mixed couples**

The counselling necessarily takes into account the context in which their users move, so that the changes that the family is experiencing in recent decades and in particular, those that are migrating and those made up of mixed couples will be taken into consideration.

The Gestalt counsellor helps mixed couples to formulate new points of view on their problems and their relationships, in a flexible way, through the search for the production of awareness, which guarantees greater effectiveness in terms of change and comparison of cultural differences. In the meetings, the counsellor helps to identify the representations and the cultural resistances that create adaptive difficulties and which disrupt interpersonal relationships. The counsellor helps couples with clarifying their emotional components and acts as a facilitator of communication, so that the partners find or retrieve the effective way to get in touch and to solve moments of impasse in communication. The counsellor's work also aims to make sure that the partners become aware of the possibility that their insecurities due to the failure of a romantic relationship could be passed on to the children.

## **Main Methodology**

- Group meetings with brainstorming, problem sharing and experiential moments



- couple interviews

## **Emotional Management**

### **Permacultura Cantabria (Spain)**

The method developed by Permacultura Cantabria, during more than 14 years, has proven to be efficient to prevent conflicts, release tension and reduce stress among couples, families and adults in general. It is based on two pillars: deep listening and favouring emotional discharges (crying, yawning, laughter and trembling).

Every person accumulates different abuses throughout life, which our minds were not able to process properly. In order to help adults to process that neuronal information, it is necessary to understand, and to know how to support emotional discharges.

We have to bear in mind that everybody receives mistreatment, systematically, due to the colour of their skin (racism), their age (ageism), their genre (sexism), their financial capacity (classism), their physical appearance, etc. Therefore, a foreign person belonging to a minority culture will be more vulnerable to being abused than others who belong to the dominant culture groups.

If both partners in a cross-cultural couple (and society in general) become aware of these issues and have the tools to better manage potential problems connected with cultural diversity, they could better support this kind of relationships and facilitate the integration of the partner facing greater risk of exclusion.

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**EM**, apart from offering tools, which allow us to work on our own conditioning and the abuse received due to our identity, it also aims to make visible these social oppressions, so that we can organise ourselves to stop them. Besides this, Emotional Management will allow cross-cultural couples to better solve their daily conflicts between the partners and also with their kids.

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## **Packing for the trip**

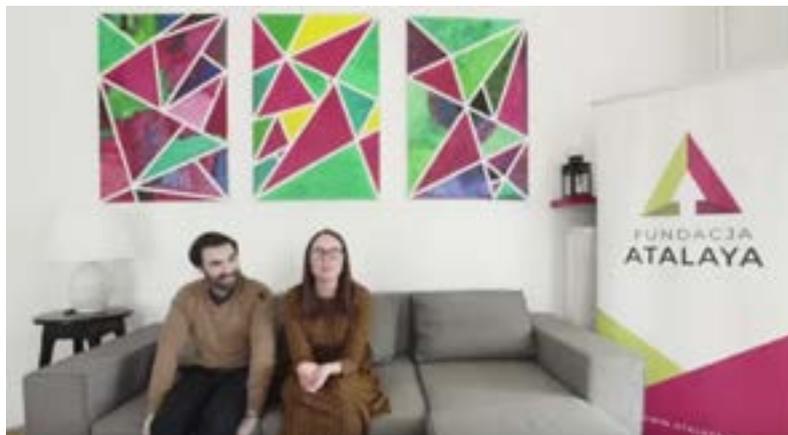
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# 01.

Let's begin our trip and take the first steps together. We assume that this what bonded you and made you decide to go through life together is love. In this chapter, we invite you to reflect on love: what messages about love are transmitted in your cultures, what does it mean to you personally, how do you express it. You will also have a chance to explore and immerse into each other's cultures: behaviours, norms and values. The last exercise we prepared gives you the possibility to reflect on your listening style, as it is a crucial competence to give each other empathy and support.

You can watch what about Love says our couples: Agnieszka and Jeffrey, Anastasia and Rafael

**Chapter 1.1**  
**What is love for you?**



**Chapter 1.2**  
**How do You recognise that You being loved?**



# Chapter 1a: Let's talk about love

---

## LOVE IS ALL AROUND US

### I love you, Ti amo, Je t'aime

---

- we probably know what it means, even if we do not know English, Italian or French very well. The word **LOVE** is probably one of the best-known words in foreign languages. When we want to learn a foreign language, the question, „*and how do you say: I love you*” is one of the first ones we ask (right after: *good morning; how are you?; I'm sorry; thank you*; and a few bad words).

Love is a universal emotion experienced by most people, in different historical periods and in all cultures. Love manifests itself, because culture affects the manner people understand love/define love, and how they feel, think and behave in romantic relationships.

Love can be expressed not only in words, but also in actions and in other ways. Every couple creates its unique, intimate language of expressing love.

We can look at love not only as a feeling, but also as a universal need that can be expressed not only in a relationship, but in everything we do.

**We invite you to look at what love means to you, how you express it, and how you know that you receive it.**

## Exercise

**Title**

**LOVE PROVERBS**

**Time needed for exercise:**

10 minutes per person, about 20 minutes (it may be longer)

**Goal(s):**

reflection on cultural messages about love, reflection on one's beliefs about love, building intimacy with a partner

**Methods used:**

proverbs, conversation

**Problem/challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #culturalunconsciousness

**Key words:**

#love #proverbs #reflection

**Space:** any**Materials:**

LOVE PROVERBS spreadsheets, possibly something to write with

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

**Instruction:**

We invite you to reflect on cultural messages about love. Read proverbs coming from different cultures. Let each of you think by yourself about the proverbs read. Select at least two proverbs that resonate in you, e.g. those that are close to you, that stimulate you to reflect, and those that you do not agree with.

”

*“Love itself is calm, turbulence arrives  
from individuals.”*

**Chinese**

”

*“Where there is love there is  
no darkness.”*

**Burundian**

”

*„Love sickness hurts but  
does not kill.”*

**Mexican**

”

*„You can't tell the cost of food and fuel  
without being the head of a house-  
hold; you can't appreciate the love of  
your parents without having children  
of your own.”*

**Chinese**

”

*„Lover's hearts are linked together  
and always beat as one.”*

**Chinese**

”

*„One thread for the needle, one love  
for the heart.”*

**Sudanese**

”

*„In love, beggar and king are equal.”*

**Indian**

”

*„It is love that makes the impossible, pos-  
sible.”*

**Indian**

”

*„He who treads the path of love  
walks a thousand meters as if it  
were only one.”*

**Japanese**

”

*„Love has to be shown by deeds not  
words.”*

**Swahili**

”

*“A day lasts until it's chased away  
but love lasts until the grave.”*

**Irish**

”

*“There is no cure for love other than mar-  
riage.”*

**Irish**

”

*“Love is a despot who spares  
no one”*

**Namibian**

”

*„Love understands all languages.”*

**Romanian**

”

*„The heart that loves is always young.”*

**Greek**

”

*„There is no love like the first love.”*

**Italian**

”

*„Nothing is impossible for a willing heart.”*

**French**

”

*„Love is blind so you have to feel your way.”*

**Brazilian**

”

*„All men have three ears, one on the left of his head, one on the right, and one in his heart.”*

**Armenian**

”

*„A life without love is like a year without summer.”*

**Lithuanian**

”

*„Try to reason about love and you will lose your reason.”*

**French**

”

*„Love lives in cottages as well as in court.”*

**English**

”

*„Love makes a man both blind and deaf.”*

**Arabian**

”

*„The one who loves you will make you weep.”*

**Argentinian**

## REFLECTIONS/OBSERVATIONS

Talk to each other about the proverbs you've selected. Tell your partner which proverbs you have selected and tell him/her about your thoughts. Then ask your partner to tell you about their thoughts.

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

Proverbs constitute an important element of culture. If you want to learn more about how love is understood in different cultures and what are the differences in expressing feelings in various regions of the world read theory "[Love is all around us- what is universal and what is cultural](#)".

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE

We invite you now to do the next exercise: attitude do love, in which you will look at your beliefs about love and how you express your feelings.

### Exercise

---

**Title:**

**ATTITUDE TO LOVE<sup>5</sup>**

---

**Time:**

10 minutes per person, about 20 minutes (it may be longer)

---

**Goal(s):**

reflection on cultural messages about love, reflection on one's beliefs about love, building intimacy with a partner

---

**Method:**

conversation

---

**Problem/Challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #communication

---

**Keywords:**

#love #believes #expression

---

**Space:**

any

---

**Materials:**

printout of an exercise sheet or piece of paper and something to write with

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<sup>5</sup> based on: Fraser-Smith, Janet. Love Across Latitudes: A Workbook on Cross-cultural Marriage (pp. 25-26). Gilead Books Publishing. Kindle Edition.

## Experience / Exercise:

### Instruction:

We invite you to reflect on how you express love. At the beginning, let each of you think about and answer the following questions. We encourage you to write your answers down on a piece of paper. Then share your answers.

**1.**

Is it easy for me to express my love?

**2.**

How do I express love?

**3.**

In what ways is it acceptable in my culture to express LOVE? (example: a gift of roses, being kind and encouraging, going out for a meal, making love, non-sexual physical tenderness, the giving of responsibility)

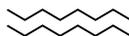
**4.**

What is my perception of my partner's ways to express LOVE?

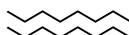
## REFLECTIONS/OBSERVATIONS

After the discussion, we invite you to self-reflect and to answer the following questions:

- What have I found out about myself/you?



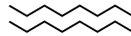
- What have I realised?



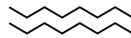
- What are you grateful for to your partner?



- How can you cultivate what you are happy with?



- In what areas do you need/would you like some changes?



- When you realise what you care about, try to formulate a request in the spirit of empathy (NVC request practise)

## **LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE (THEORY)**

Each person expresses love in a unique manner, each relationship creates a unique language of love and intimacy.

***In literature, we can encounter the attempts to systematize the ways of expressing love. One of such proposals was created by Gary Chapman, who described 5 languages of love, both its expression and preferences regarding receiving/reading it. These are: physical contact, words, giving time, giving and receiving gifts, devotional activities. We encourage you to read about this idea; it may be helpful to you. If you want to learn more about this topic, please read about [“languages of love”](#)).***

Excerpt from the book „Alfabet empatii” („Alphabet of Empathy”) by Vesna Lorenc, Joanna Berendt, Burda Media, 2019, pp. 159-165:

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*There are many ways to express love. In 1995, Gary Chapman called them five languages of love. He described them, taking into account both the way of expressing love and receiving it. He distinguished:*

### **1.**

#### **Physical touch**

*One of the oldest and easiest languages of love because it does not require any words. It is usually enjoyed by children and people who have a strong need for touch, intimacy, corporality or sex. Interestingly, Chapman also refers to the topic of sports that are strongly associated with physical contact, such as martial arts. People using this language will care about the need for physical contact through various strategies. They can often hug, hold hands, touch each other, undergo caresses, massages.*

## 2.

### **Words of affirmation**

*This is an important love language for those who need to be appreciated, taken into account and noticed. Such people derive joy and motivation from listening to nice words. This way of expressing love includes love letters, poems, lyrics and songs.*

## 3.

### **Quality time**

*Devoting time to people who are important to us, finding a moment in a busy schedule for intimacy with those we love. No matter what, important with whom - according to Chapman, this is the strategy for those who prefer this love language.*

## 4.

### **Giving and receiving gifts**

*This is the language of those who like to surprise and be surprised by someone's creativity. It is not necessarily about material gifts, but thoughtful gifts with a specific intention: a hand-made gift, a symbolic pebble found on a beach important for us, a framed ticket from a concert where we spent our first date.*

## 5.

### **Acts of service**

*You probably know the saying that actions speak louder than words. This love language is about everyday activities that express feelings. Probably each of us had a grandmother who was showing us how much she loved us by feeding us with her goodies. These are simple acts that mean love.*

*We are curious if you find yourself in any of the strategies described above for showing and receiving love. In my long-term relationship (Vesna), we have accumulated some of these gestures: acts of care, words - for example: „Sleep, don't get up" (for a baby crying at night) - warm meals waiting for me after returning from a tiring training, purchase of painkillers on the market in Kazimierz after one mention of a headache during the trip or repair of a upholstery burnt with a cigarette, in a professional car service.*

*But what to do when we can't read this language? We don't understand it, is it different from the one we need? I can accept that a warm soup will be a sign of my grandmother's care and affection. However, if my partner does the same, without showing emotion in any other way, it can be hard for me. These are the collisions of mountains, which we wrote about at the beginning of the chapter. The solution to this situation is not to look for meanings hidden under the surface. Nathaniel Branden writes about this:*

*Nathaniel Branden writes that for men and women who are not afraid to love, the greatest pleasure of being loved is to make the partners see themselves better, be more aware of themselves and appreciate who they are. Leading partners towards a deeper and deeper discovery of themselves can be a source of great pleasure. This is because the other person fascinates us, we want to see and understand him or her. We can see better through love - love isn't blind at all.*

*It is good to immerse yourself and look for a deeper meaning not only in the words you heard (e.g.: „Have you eaten something?“), but also in what is hidden behind this message (e.g.: „I care about you and your health, you are important to me“). „When we find only one solution, it means that we did not examine the problem well enough“ – that is what Rosenberg wrote about win-lose strategy. WE is more than just ME and YOU in this approach. He also added that everything that people say could be classified into two categories: please and thank you. Is it hard to believe? We hear for example: „You are mean“, „I have to always take care of everything“, „Children must be good“, „You can rely only on her“, „He is so cute“, „This is what they call fun!“ Where in these statements is there a please or thank you?*

**Let's look for them together:**

**„You are mean.“**

*Explanation: I want everyone to feel perceived, taken into account and safe in our conversations. Please, let's take care of common safety, perceiving and taking each other into account.*

**„I have to always take care of everything.“**

*Explanation: I care about cooperation, sharing responsibility, I want what I give to be noticed and appreciated by others. Please, let's take care together of cooperation, appreciation of our actions, sharing tasks and responsibilities.*

**„Children must be good.”**

*Explanation: I care about calm, I value space and time for contact with myself, I care about safety provided to me by compliance with social norms, I want to equip children with everything that they will need in the future. Please, let's make sure together that everyone in our family has time for things that are important to them, that everyone plays their roles the best they can, to help children achieve safety and happiness in adult life, and to share responsibility for our existence and financial security - please help me meet my needs.*

**„You can rely only on her”.**

*Explanation: last month I asked you for support, and although you had a lot on your plate, you helped me. It satisfied my need for community, support and being seen. Thank you for helping me take care of these needs.*

**„He's so cute.”**

*Explanation: when we are close, we hug more than with other people, he smiles and offers various games. It satisfies my need for intimacy, comfort and joy of being together. Thank you for helping me take care of these needs.*

**„This is what they call fun.”**

*Explanation: we have loud music the way I like it, my friends are next to me, food and wine that I like are close at hand, I feel joy, I relax, my needs of fun, spontaneity, contacts, being here and now are satisfied. Thank you for helping me take care of these needs.*

*We are the ones who decide what we hear in the words of others. Finding out the needs - these universal qualities that connect us as people - is our choice. Why is it worth choosing this path? Because it not only helps us see the other person and take care of the relationship, but also gives us more calm, contentment and satisfaction.*

*When we leave fight and flight mode, when we stop playing the game about who is right and who is guilty, we can enjoy life. Our bodies are calmer, we have better access to our internal resources, better contact with each other and it seems that life tastes fuller. It is not about losing alertness in danger situations, not defending ourselves or running away when we are in danger.*

*Our proposal is about the fact that the real threat to life happens to us less frequently than our nervous system tells us, switching us to fight and flight mode.<sup>6</sup>*

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## **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

### **1.**

What do you want to do, now having access to new knowledge?

### **2.**

What do you want to take care of and at what times?

### **3.**

Plan one small thing that you will do differently starting today.

## **LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY) :**

### **Love is all around us - what is universal and what is cultural**

About love - intercultural perspective

Research shows that love is a universal emotion experienced by most people, in different periods and in all cultures. Cultural differences are manifested in how people understand love and how they behave in romantic relationships.

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from the book „Alfabet empatii” („Alphabet of Empathy”) by Vesna Lorenc, Joanna Berendt, Burda Media, 2019, pp. 159-165:

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## **INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON EXPERIENCE OF ROMANTIC LOVE**

Culture has a big impact on how people combine passionate love and sexual desire.

In individualistic cultures, the ideal is a marriage based on love. In individualistic cultures, people have a need for independence that can be in opposition to the need to be in a romantic, intimate relationship.

Research (Karen and Kenneth Dion, 1991) shows that more individualistic people tend to see their relationships as less satisfying and deep. For people from individualistic cultures who see themselves as separate individuals, loving someone is a chance to build bridges between borders and escape from loneliness. For individualists one of the basic values is freedom, so if a relationship does not meet their expectations, they can leave it.

In collectivism, love is more often perceived in a pragmatic manner, based on friendship and characterised by altruism.

## **EXPRESSION OF LOVE**

There are cultural differences in the way we express love. Love can be expressed directly, mainly in words, and indirectly through actions.

For example, American (US) culture places an emphasis on verbal expression of love. Americans use the phrase „I love you” every day. The couple can tell these words to each other even several times a day, in the morning, evening, at the end of every telephone conversation. Indirect expression of love is characteristic, for example, of Philippine culture.

For Filipinos, expressing love with words is less important, and the phrase „I love you” is for special occasions only. Every day, Filipinos express their MAHAL (love in Tagalog language) through actions, such as laughing together, listening to someone in a non-judgmental way, mutual help at difficult times and keeping one’s word. Love is everywhere, it is obvious, and you don’t have to talk about it.

Generally, it can be said that a more direct way of expressing love is characteristic of more individualistic cultures, and an indirect way is characteristic of collective cultures. (you can read more about cultural dimensions in the chapter entitled [cultural differences](#)).

# Chapter 1b:

## Explore your culture: meet the culture Iceberg

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### Exercise

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**Title:**

**MEET THE CULTURE - CULTURE AS ICEBERG**

---

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

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**Goal(s):**

- The purpose of this exercise is to raise cross-cultural awareness
  - Foster sense of belonging
  - Have fun and joy together getting to know each other better
- 

**Methods used:**

NVC, CCC

---

**Problem/challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #culturalunconsciousness  
#livinginnewculture #adaptationstress #TCK

---

**Key words:**

#values #understanding #connection #mutuality

---

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

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**Materials:**

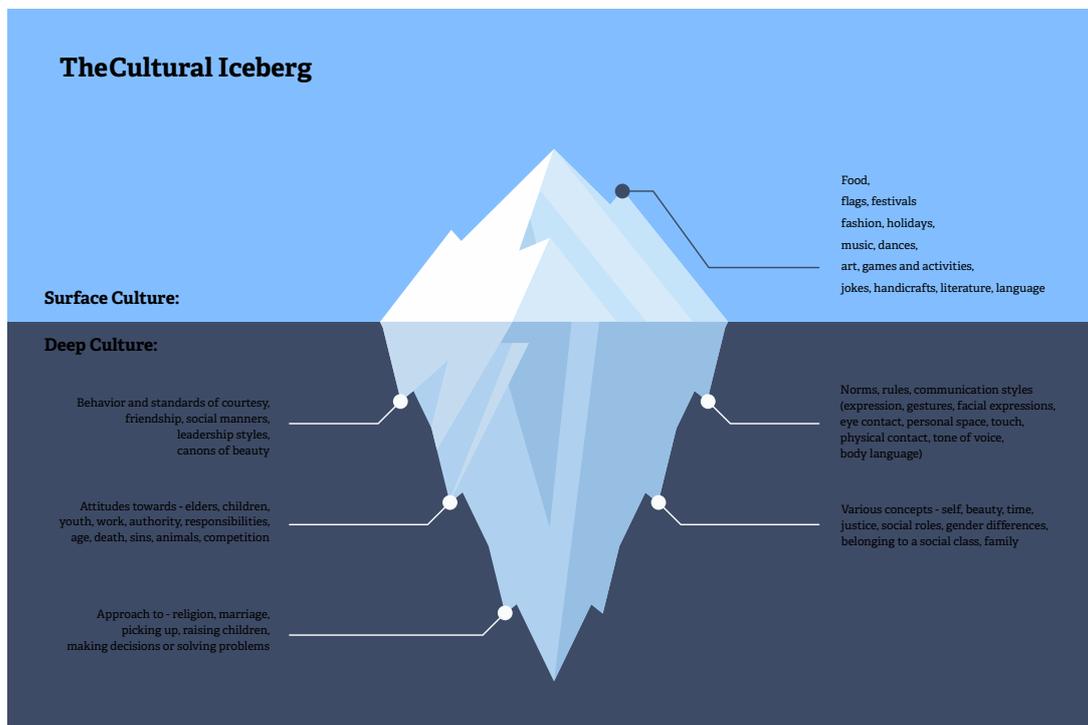
Handouts, something to write and draw (be creative!), you can use bigger A1 or A2 sheets of paper to draw the iceberg

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**Alternations:**

- You could engage children to draw and prepare their own iceberg maps. It might be interesting to see their perspective as well. And it would allow you to talk to your child about important matters through the game.
  - This exercise might be useful to teach kids about own culture (drawing self-cultural Iceberg together), enrich their knowledge about both - mothers' and fathers' culture (two different icebergs) and then drawing one mutual Iceberg (the identity of this family - core values) where each member of the family might express what is important for themselves
- 



**EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

**About Iceberg model (E.Hall):**

When we see an **iceberg**, the part visible above water is, in reality, only a small piece (10%) of a much larger whole. Similarly, people often think of **culture** as the numerous observable characteristics of a group that we can \*see\* with our eyes, be it their food, dancing, music, arts, or greeting rituals. Difficulties arise when the rules of one **culture** are used to interpret the behaviour of another **culture** with a different set of cultural rules.

**Instructions:**

**1.**

**First step**

- think of your own culture and try to define those expressions for yourself first:

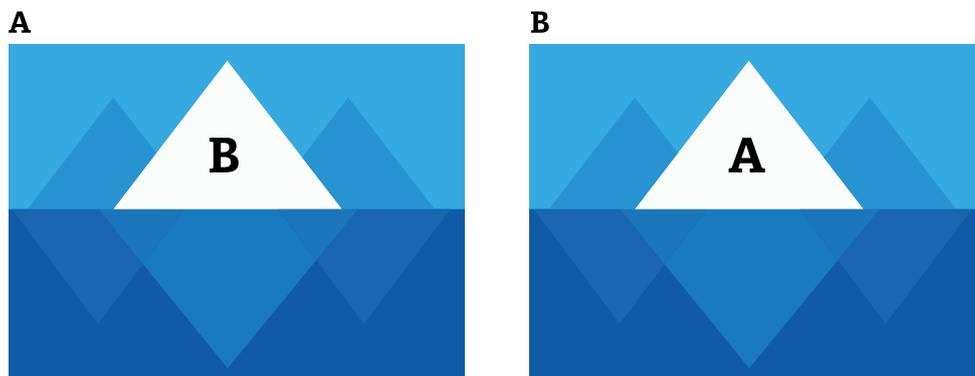
1. Culture is
2. Value is

**2.**

**Second step**

- think of the culture of your partner. To make it interesting and a bit spicy - person A fills an iceberg (only visible part above the water surface) model to person B. Person B fills it in for person A. You can draw your own icebergs at A3 page to make it visible, and to use it for the next steps.

How do you perceive it? What is visible for you? Name it with the language of facts and observations (first step in NVC model)



**3.**

**Third step**

Exchange your icebergs again, and each one of you fills what's under the water.

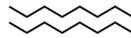
Values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, economic and historical milestones, jargon, whatever seems important to you and your cultural identity and might not be so obvious or clear to someone who was raised somewhere else (you can read more in the chapter about Cultural differences)

## 4.

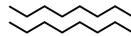
### Fourth step

Whenever both of you are ready, talk to your partner about what you have discovered on your own and thanks to the perspective of another person.

- a) Say what do you value and appreciate in your partner culture? And what parts might cause difficulties and emotions?



- b) What needs are hidden underneath those emotions?



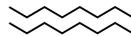
- c) How would both of you like to take care of those needs?

## 5.

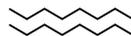
### Fifth step

When the conversation is complete, move on to the phase of common dreaming about “Perfect culture to live in” for two of you / your family. Prepare a new iceberg.

- a) Choose at least one item above water from person A and person B.



- b) Then, at least one item underneath water from person A and person B to include those into inventing the new culture.



- c) Use your mediations skills and steps to achieve win-win situation (described in chapter: **Managing the conflict in cross cultural relationship**)



## REFLECTIONS

1. What have you discovered about yourself / partner / family?
2. What have you learned?
3. What would you like to remember after this experience?

Answer those questions first individually and then exchange opinions and insights with your partner.

### **A short glance at the theory behind the experience**

**#culturaliceberg #model #theory #Hall**

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

Currently, just as this guide is being created, we have almost 200 functioning countries in the entire world. There are many more nations and ethnic groups. In the context of the analysis of norms, behaviours, social values associated with a given culture, it is worth reaching for one of the first and basic models describing the comprehensiveness of the concept of “culture”.

The Cultural Iceberg model was developed by Edward T. Hall in 1973/1976). The metaphor perfectly illustrates the visible part of the culture - iceberg tip visible above water, presenting everything that is easy to observe. These are usually rituals, followed by beliefs (in the place where the iceberg meets water): clothes, food, drinks, symbols, folklore, law, customs, rituals, gestures, manners of greeting. The part that is not visible is more difficult to recognise at first glance - these are values (in a given cultural field, shared by the majority of the inhabitants of a given country) that we follow as a part of a given culture and thinking patterns.

What this model teaches us is, first of all, the fact that in order to know and understand a given culture it is worth to give yourself time to dive under the water surface.

We can acquire most values in our childhood unknowingly (e.g. that we spend Christmas with family, even in non-religious families). That is why they are stable and change very rarely. This course of things provides some kind of continuity and allows us to perceive culture as a whole.

In our Guide, we refer to the iceberg model during the exercise, encouraging us to “dive” under the water and learn more about your partner’s culture. Let yourself be surprised and discover something that you haven’t known yet, and it may turn out to be enriching for your relationship and relation.

## **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

**1.**

Now, when you know what you know, how would it change your reality?

**2.**

What would you like to implement in your everyday routine?

**3.**

What would you avoid doing?

**4.**

How would you like to remember that?

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# **Chapter 1c: Communication and empathy in a relationship**

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## **Exercise**

**Title:**  
**COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIP<sup>7</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

**Goal(s)**

- To become aware of your body communication
  - To be able to communicate in the appropriate way, connecting the body with the word and with the tone of voice
  - To maintain openness and availability in the couple / relationship
- 

<sup>7</sup> Menditto, M. (2008). Comunicazione e relazione, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, p. 106.

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**Methods used:**

GC

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**Problem/ challenge:**

#communication

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**Keywords:**

#body #awareness #communication #emotions

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**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

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**Materials:**

None

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## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

Some emblematic gestures are also linked to an emotional state and can give us indications to capture the emotion of the person we are talking to. They are only signals, which must be taken as hypotheses, but which open a gap to the interest that we can express to the interlocutor, reinforcing what we are expressing at that moment with words.

For example, scratching one's head or face may indicate a feeling of perplexity; not looking at someone talking to us could signal a veiled form of passive and aggressive hostility, or if I talk to a person whose body is always projected towards the door, I should realise that they don't want to listen to me, but that they want to go away.

In this case how do you feel? How do you manage your feelings and frustration?

### **Instructions**

#### **1.**

**First step:**

read carefully the objectives and instructions.

#### **2.**

**Second step:**

think about an unpleasant episode that happened to you recently

### 3.

#### Third step:

Choose a role A or B;

**For A:** tell the unpleasant episode to your partner and while talking, lower your voice up to remove it, (as singers do in playback) and slowly begin to communicate with your body, with expressions and gestures.

### 4.

#### Fourth step:

**For B:** report to your partner what you understood by their body communication

### 5.

#### Fifth step:

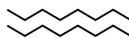
Change your roles and do the exercise again.

This time B is telling and A is listening and reporting.

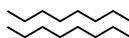
## REFLECTIONS

Discuss together and answer to the following questions:

- When I talk, am I aware of my non-verbal language?



- How did I feel in the experience, while listening to what I saw of the other?



- What emotions did I feel?

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

**Becoming aware of what your body communicates is very important in order to establish good contact with your partner. In fact, awareness is characterised by contact, by sensing, by excitement, so in order to achieve a good rate of awareness of yourself, it is indispensable knowing how your body communicates with reality, accordingly with your partner. Awareness is heightened by the arousal of interest and emotion, towards excitement.**

**So it is very important that you focus your attention inside the couple keeping your eyes on both your body language and what it arouses in your partner.**

## **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

Now you can repeat the exercise, but in this case the episode is pleasant and the partners have to try to actively listen to both the partner and what happens inside them during the exercise, the partner should ask themselves what they are feeling.

### **Some tips to support empathic relationships:**

Empathy is the basis for human contact - it is a healthy identification which involves: participation, authenticity, acceptance, boundaries, inclusion, listening, respect, flexibility, relaxation, time, message, emotion, action and alliance.

The term empathy indicates the ability to identify oneself with another person to understand their thoughts and moods. It is „an effective response appropriate to the situation of another person rather than one’s own”<sup>8</sup>.

Empathy is an affective state of apprehension congruent with the state or mental condition experienced by another person<sup>9</sup>.

Empathy therefore seems to be the ability that allows the understanding of the emotional, mental and intentional states of others, thus allowing the self to relate to others and to regulate its behaviour in the social world<sup>10</sup>.

In empathy there is the simultaneous presence of affective and cognitive aspects. Recognising feelings and being able to take the other’s point of view are cognitive abilities, while the emotional response that leads to act on the other’s needs falls in the affective sphere. In fact, empathy requires knowing how to perceive and infer inner states, such as emotions, from another person and to maintain the distinction between the self and the other<sup>11</sup>.

Next to affective aspects of sharing and concern for the other, there are cognitive aspects of identification and assumption of the perspective of others.

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<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, M. L. (1981). Foundations of family therapy. New York, Basic Books, p. 44

<sup>9</sup> Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P. A. (1987). “The relation of empathy to prosocial and related behaviours” in Psychological Bulletin, 101, pp. 91 -119.

<sup>10</sup> Pantaleo, G. & Canessa, N. (2011). Prospettive multiple, comportamento prosociale e altruismo: oltre la Civiltà dell’empatia. In Boca, S. and Scaffidi Abbate C. (eds.), Altruismo e comportamento prosociale: Temi e prospettive a confronto (pp. 186-240). Milano. Franco Angeli.

<sup>11</sup> Voci, A. (2014). Essere altruisti. Aiutare gli altri e stare meglio. Bologna, Il Mulino.

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### 1. Assumption of perspective

**Definition:** It allows to make the point of view of your partner take on spontaneously

**Explanation:** When you listen your partner who tell about a situation in which they felt some emotions (both pleasant and unpleasant) and you feel the same kind of emotions

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### 2. Fantasy

**Definition::** It is the ability to imagine oneself in the role of characters in books, films, or theatrical representations, imagining their thoughts and feelings

**Explanation:** When you are moved during a movie or when you listen to a song

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### 3. Empathic concern

**Definition:**It is an emotion oriented towards your partner, which arises in reaction to their situation.

**Explanation:** When your emotional state is focused on what your partner is feeling, so you prove positive emotional states, for example of tenderness and sympathy, as negative states of worry, sadness and sorrow.

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### 4. Empathic concern

**Definition:** It is an emotion oriented towards your partner, which arises in reaction to their situation.

**Explanation** When your emotional state is focused on what your partner is feeling, so you prove positive emotional states, for example of tenderness and sympathy, as negative states of worry, sadness and sorrow.

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**Empathy** is therefore certainly a capacity that allows us to get in touch with the emotional states of others, in a fast and easy way, thus allowing us an adequate individual functioning and the regulation of social interactions and cooperation between human beings<sup>12</sup>. The ability, in fact, to be able to easily infer the emotional and cognitive states of the people around us, plays a very important role not only for the relational but also individual well-being of the person<sup>13</sup>.

**Empathy towards the other is composed of prosocial thoughts, traits and emotions. The following dimensions are part of these factors:**

- Assumption of Perspective, or the tendency to take the point of view of others in a spontaneous way (I believe that there are at least two different points of view in each story and I try to take both into consideration). Do you consider it possible to put yourself in the shoes of a partner, and consider their point of the view even if they have thoughts opposite to yours?

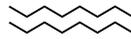
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<sup>12</sup> de Waal, F. B. M. (2008). "Putting altruism back into altruism: The evolution of empathy" in Annual Review of Psychology, 59, 279-300.

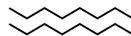
<sup>13</sup> Hein, G. & Singer T. (2008). "I feel how you feel but not always: the empathic brain and its modulation" in Current Opinion in Neurobiology, 18, 2, pp. 153-158.

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- Empathic concern, understood as the tendency to feel the feelings of tenderness and concern towards those who are less fortunate (I am often very much touched by what I see happening) What do you feel when you see or experience a situation characterized by people less fortunate than you?



- Moral reasoning, or the tendency to also take into account the interests of others when you make a choice or take a decision (Usually my decisions are based on the concerns I have for other people) Are you always able to take into account the interests of your partner when you take a decision concerning important situations such as your job for example?



- Social responsibility, understood as the tendency to take responsibility for the consequences, on others, of one's own actions (No matter what people may have done to deserve it, there is no excuse for taking advantage of them) Are you always able to consider the consequences of your actions on your partner before taking a decision?

## **Approaching the river**

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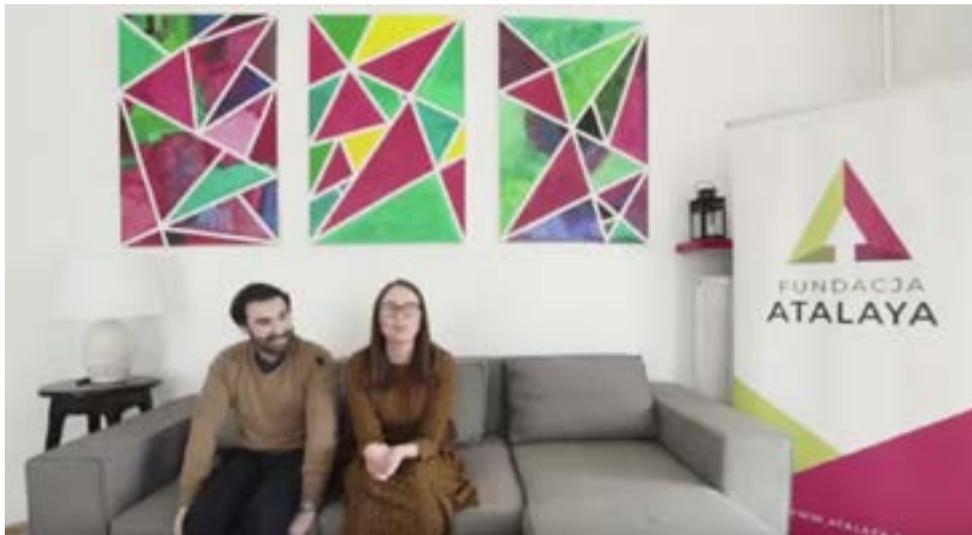
02.

Building a close relationship with another person makes you richer with beautiful experiences, as well as brings some challenges. Intercultural couples face universal advantages and problems, but also those that are specific, caused by living in two different cultures. In this chapter you will have the chance to reflect, to share with each other what changes brought to your life your intercultural relationship. We hope you will find it supportive to read about what other intercultural couples are facing and what psychology says about adaptation stress and dealing with it.

In the exercises about communication, you will have a chance to get more awareness about barriers in communication. You will identify what to avoid while listening to each other to be able to give more support to each other and to build a closer connection for your further journey together. Watch what Anastasia and Rafael say about challenges and opportunities in an intercultural relationship.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What would You like to say to other intercultural couples**



## Chapter 2a:

# Advantages and challenges in cross cultural relationship

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### Exercise

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**Title:**

**ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES  
IN CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIP**

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**Time needed for exercise:**

20 min

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**Goal(s):**

- Raise cross-cultural awareness
  - Foster sense of belonging
  - Develop better understanding of different perspectives
  - Have fun and joy together getting to know each other better
- 

**Methods used:**

NVC, CCC

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**Problem/ challenge:**

#culturalunconsciousness #culturaldifferences  
#livinginacrossculture #adaptationstress #TCK

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**Key words:**

#understanding #belonging #mutuality #communication  
#differentperspectives

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**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

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**Materials:**

Handouts

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**Alternations:**

You could also talk to children, what is their opinion and how they perceive being a part of a cross-cultural family, what supports them and what is challenging? And then share your results and our group results to those questions

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## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

### Instructions:

Everyone ends sentences or thoughts on their own:

Challenge/the biggest challenge in an intercultural relationship for me is/was

The biggest advantage of being in an intercultural relationship for me is

Talk about what you've written. Read together the results from the table below. Check whether there is something else that is close to you?

Advantages and challenges of being in a culturally mixed relationship based on workshops carried out in the Meet Me Halfway project in Poland:

Advantages	Challenges
No conflicts with partner's family members, which is usually far away	Language barrier
Curiosity	Religion
Situation that causes learning a new language	History in which we grew up - experience a partner from another country will never know
Making the approach more flexible / Broadening the horizons	Background in which we grew up
Improving communication - need for verification, asking for meaning, clarification	Communication - learning in difficult conditions
Personal development - going beyond comfort zone	Issue of place of residence
Exchange of the "genetic code" in the family	Weather in the new place of residence
Higher flexibility in acquisition of new knowledge	Finding one's place on the job market in a foreign country
Discovering new flavours in the kitchen	Discovering new flavours in the kitchen
Raising children	Raising children
Learning how to achieve compromise	Bureaucracy in the new place of residence
Discovering one's own culture in more conscious manner	Different values
Perception of cultural differences and global diversity in a more positive manner	

## REFLECTIONS

1. What have you discovered about yourself / partner / family?
2. What have you learned?
3. What would you like to remember after this experience?

Answer those questions first individually and then exchange opinions and insights with your partner.

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

If you are interested you can read more about advantages and challenges in intercultural couples in the introduction ([Challenges and problems that might face intercultural couples](#))

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE

- Now when you know what You know, how would it change your reality?
  - What would you like to implement in your everyday routine?
    - What would you avoid doing?
- How would you like to remember that?

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## Chapter 2b: Adaptation to changes and new culture

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***“The only thing that is constant is change” - Heraclitus of Ephesus***

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“Changes in our lives are inevitable, natural and good”. It is much easier to say that when we are sitting comfortably on a couch in a new apartment, than while moving in, packing and unpacking a pile of boxes or facing the necessity to move out, but without yet a place to go to... In movies, changing apartments, job or recovering after a break up takes a couple of minutes.

It is often shown in accelerated editing during one song. In real life, every change is a process (extended in time) and it requires effort. Adaptation to a new life situation takes weeks, months, and sometimes even years during which we will experience the entire range of emotions: joy, energy, hope for something new, but also fear, sense of loss, discouragement, anger.

Every life change involves more or less stress. In the table below you can find items selected from the list of the most common and most important life events causing stress.

### **Life events and stress:**

A list of selected life events causing stress, prepared by two psychiatrists Holmes and Rahe. Higher number of points means that a given life event is more stress-inducing:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Points</b>
Death of spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation from mate	65
Marriage	50
Being fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation with mate	45
Pregnancy	40
Gaining a new family member	39
Major business readjustment	39
Changing to a different line of work	36
Major change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29

---

<b>Event</b>	<b>Points</b>
Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
Major change in living condition	25
Major changes in working hours or conditions	20
Changes in residence	20
Changing to a new schoolk	20
Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19

When we look at the table, the most stress-inducing events are connected with the loss of: loved ones, health, job etc. What is important, stress is induced not only by negative events, but also by the long-awaited positive ones, such as marriage or a child in the family.

This is because they involve major changes in our lives. Every change induces stress, and the greater the change, the greater the level of stress.

In the chapter containing definitions, we wrote about adaptive stress, also known as culture shock, which is experienced by a person migrating to another country.

Normally, culture shock is associated with a strong, sudden reaction to some clear cultural difference. In fact, acculturative stress is long-term and is of cumulative nature. It is the result of the need to adapt to many changes on various levels: physical, social, mental ones.

### **Adaptation stress**

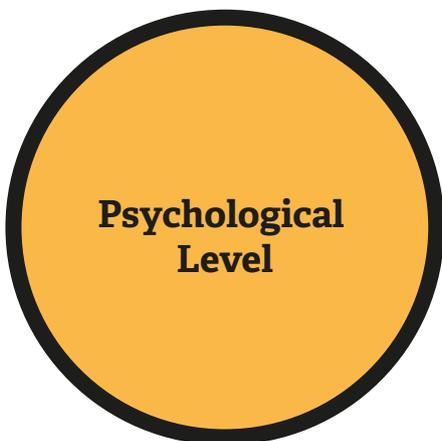
Examples of changes to which a person who has decided to live for a longer time in another country must adapt:



- different climate
- different temperature
- air humidity
- light intensity
- different food
- different meal times



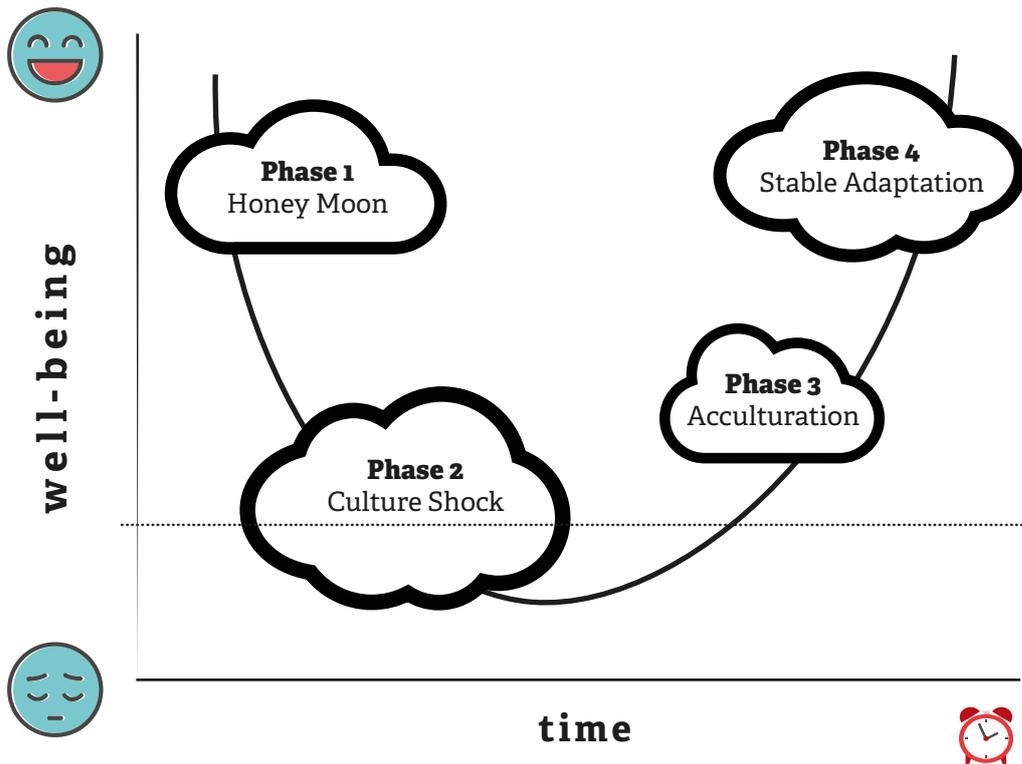
- new job
- new friends (building new relationships)
- change in social status (e.g. employment below qualifications)
- different system, new unknown rules and regulations
- different language
- new culture (confrontation with the fact that we are not culturally competent, we need to ask about things, as if we were a child)



- more negative emotions:
  - longing (e.g. for family, friends)
  - shame (due to the fact that I don't know how something works, I make mistakes, e.g. language mistakes),
- lack of availability of existing forms of coping with stress (e.g. talking to a friend, relaxing in your favourite café)

Adaptation process has its own dynamics, it runs in a curvilinear manner and several phases can be distinguished.

### Adaptation stress curve



It is important to remember that each person experiences acculturation stress in an individual manner, at their own pace and severity of various reactions. It is natural and often that during the process of adaptation to a new culture temporary deterioration in functioning and mood decline.

We know from the professional literature and from the account of workshop participants that the knowledge about this process helps to cope with it. When you know that your mood declines, difficulties you experience are temporary and natural, it is easier to approach them in a calm way and look for constructive methods of coping.

In the table below You can read the description of each phase and examples of sentences of people who are facing each phase.

## Phases of adaptation stress

Phase	Characteristic Dominant feelings	Sample Statements
<b>Honeymoon</b>	<p>This phase is called a futuristic phase. Differences between the new culture and the culture of origin seen in a romantic light: new flavours, views, customs. .</p> <p>Dominant feelings: curiosity, fascination</p> <p>In the case of involuntary migration, this phase can be very short or non-existent; negative feelings may occur from the beginning: fears, anxiety etc</p>	<p><b><i>“First two weeks in Warsaw were great. I liked that there were a lot of green spots, that it was clean, and that the city offers a wide range of free events: exhibitions, concerts.”</i></b></p>
<b>Culture Shock</b>	<p>Necessity of functioning in everyday life in a new culture, makes the encountered difficulties start to be disturbing. Misunderstandings, mistakes resulting from ignorance of the culture cease to cause amusement and begin to be associated with negative consequences.</p> <p>The following feelings appear in this phase: anxiety, anger, frustration.</p> <p>Due to the encountered difficulties, temporary deterioration in functioning and mood, as well as physical exhaustion may occur.</p> <p>There may be a crisis, which usually takes place in two stages. In the first stage of culture shock, people experience anger at themselves. In the second phase of culture shock, anger can be directed at the representatives of the host culture. In this phase some people isolate themselves, they withdraw from social life. Sometimes body weakness occurs, e.g. more frequent colds, sleep problems.</p> <p>One might want to leave the new country and come back to the country of origin.</p>	<p>first phase of shock:</p> <p><b><i>“I’m not good enough, I’m hopeless. I will never learn Polish. How could I say something that foolish”</i></b></p> <p><b><i>“I don’t know what’s happening with me, sometimes I’m not able to get out of bed, I have trouble sleeping.”</i></b></p> <p>second phase of shock:</p> <p><b><i>“What a terrible country. Such a big European country, and many people don’t speak English. Do they think that I will learn their language? I have enough excuses about history, communism, they should get to work. And this bureaucracy, you can’t live a normal life here”</i></b></p>

Phase	Characteristic Dominant feelings	Sample Statements
<b>Acculturation</b>	<p>In this phase, adaptation to life in a new culture begins. New culture begins to seem to have more sense, the number of negative reactions to the differences encountered decreases. The person begins to understand what behaviour is expected from them in most situations. The sense of “normality” returns. The person uses more constructive strategies to deal with encountered situations, and cultural differences evoke more positive reactions.</p> <p>The sense of competence and ability to do things, as well as energy for action return.</p>	<p><b><i>“At the beginning it was hard for me to accept that Poles don’t smile much on the street, to strangers. I thought they were cold. Over time, I saw that they were warm when we got to know each other better. I understood their mentality better. I don’t take it personally that someone doesn’t smile at me, as it is in my country, when we meet. It is easier for me to make friends”</i></b></p>
<b>Stable Adaptation/ Mastery</b>	<p>Reaching this phase means that the person adapted to life in the new culture, they have competence allowing them to comfortably participate fully in the new culture.</p> <p>This phase is also called a biculturalism phase.</p> <p>Dominant feelings: calm, sense of stability, sense of competence</p>	<p><b><i>“I understand and I know how to establish relationships in Poland and in the US. I don’t feel that any way is better or worse. I don’t think about it in everyday life, I do it automatically, without thinking. I’m glad that I have the opportunity to conduct adaptation classes for new employees of the company coming to Poland and explain to them what life looks like here. Maybe it will make it easier for them to adapt to life here.”</i></b></p> <p><b><i>“I have many friends and acquaintances. I appreciate the fact that I managed to build relationships and that I have people I can count on, and ask them for help in different situations”.</i></b></p>

One of the most important methods of coping with stress is looking for emotional support, sharing one's own experience. People participating in classes notice the great value of being able to tell about their experiences and feelings to their partners, as well as to share them with other couples during classes.

Now, we invite you to do exercises where you will have the opportunity to reflect on your own adaptation process and share your experiences and feelings with your partner.

## Exercise

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**Title:****MY ADAPTATION CURVE**

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**Time needed:**

approx. 30 minutes per person ( plus additional time for preparatory phase in Version 2)

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**Goal(s):**

- Reflect on one's adaptation process
  - Sharing, building closeness with a partner
  - Supporting a partner
  - Practice NVC
- 

**Methods used:**

CCC, art therapy

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**Problem/ Challenge:**

#adaptationstress #livinginanewculture

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**Key words:**

#stress #resources #challenges #sharing #adaptationprocess

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**Space:**

Any calm, peaceful

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**Materials:**

**Version 1:** paper and something to draw

**Version 2:** ribbon/string, different objects: stones, seashells, toys etc. (more detailed description and inspiration in the description of the Version 2 of the exercise)

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You can do this exercise in two ways, depending on your preferences and time possibilities. We encourage both people in the couple to share their experiences. If at the moment only one of you has a need to talk about themselves, and the other person prefers to listen, then do it in harmony with yourself. This exercise may concern your adaptation to life in another country, culture, but you may also want to share another important moment in your life that is connected with change.

## **EXERCISE/ EXPERIENCE**

(this exercise is based on a exercise created by Dominika Cieřlikowska and Ela Kielak)

### **Instruction:**

#### **Step 1:**

Read Kasia's story and see the graph showing [the curve of Kasia's adaptation process](#) to life in the US. You may finish drawing it and mark her milestones. Then read both versions of the exercises and decide, which one you want to do.

#### **Kasia's story**

***My name is Kasia, I'm 43 years old, and I've been living in Chicago for eight years. I came here with my husband John. We had met in Poland, when John had come to Warsaw to open a new branch of the international corporation he had been working in. In Poland, I worked in a big pharmaceutical company, as a manager.***

***We got married after a year. After two years John had been promoted and it had involved coming back to the US. We had decided to move to the US. Never before had I planned to live abroad. It had been difficult for me to leave my family and friends. I was also worried that I would have to quit my job. We had decided, however, that this could be an opportunity for us. John had also reassured me that I had a lot of professional experience, and that I knew English very well, so I had thought it would be fine. I'd been to Chicago twice before and I liked the city.***

***I had begun to feel excited that it could be interesting. The process of moving isn't pleasant, and certainly not when you are moving overseas. Giving away, selling unnecessary things, packing, arranging transport.***

***This had been a large logistic undertaking. First two weeks in Chicago were nice. John still had some time off work, so we were spending a lot of time together, we were visiting the city, meeting his friends, going to restaurants with delicious food from around the world.***

**I really liked the museums there. Already in Poland I had started looking for a job. I had prepared my resume and had sent it to several companies, but I hadn't received any reply. In Chicago, John arranged for me an appointment with a career counsellor, who helped me to prepare a new resume and send it to companies where I could work. Looking for a job turned out, however, to be more difficult than I thought.**

**I had the impression that I did not do well during the interviews, sometimes I experienced language barriers. It was difficult for me to express myself as I would like to do it. Recruiters were speaking quickly, sometimes I couldn't understand everything, some jokes, and then I was angry with myself. I began to think that I wouldn't make it and I would never be independent again, and I would only be "my husband's wife".**

**John didn't have much time for me, as he was busy getting into his new, responsible job position. I was feeling lonely and I began to miss home, family and friends. His friends were very nice to me, but it was hard for me to feel a real, deeper bond with them. Also interviews with officials who were checking whether we were not a fictitious marriage were difficult for me. Uncomfortable questions, whether my husband sleeps in his pyjamas or naked and visits without notice. It was stressful and was making me angry. I thought, what a disgusting, dehumanising system. After six months, I got a job. It was below my qualifications, in a lower position than in Warsaw, but I was satisfied that I had some occupation. Life became more optimistic.**

**After a year, I got pregnant. John and I were very happy for this baby. We went to antenatal classes, where I met Liz and we became friends. This wasn't, however, such friendship as it had been with my friends from Poland, with whom we understood each other without words. But I was glad that I managed to meet someone closer here. When our first daughter was born, it was very difficult for me. I missed my mother, her advice, her help at home and my friends. It is normal in Poland that family and friends help. When I had lived in Warsaw, I had been babysitting my sister's daughter when I had been asked to do it, so that they could go out on a date with her husband, relax, or do some official stuff. Here, everyone has their own lives and they mind mostly their own business. Fortunately, we had already repaid part of our loan, and we could afford a nanny who was coming several times a week. After six months I returned to work. It was hard for me to reconcile work and taking care of the baby.**

**Over time, I managed to get promoted and work began to give me more satisfaction. After three years I got pregnant again.**

---

***It was easier than the first time, I had more friends here, including two really close ones. One of them gave birth more or at the same time as I did, so we could go for walks together. I still miss my friends from Poland and my family, their support, presence and willingness to help, even in the last moment when needed.***

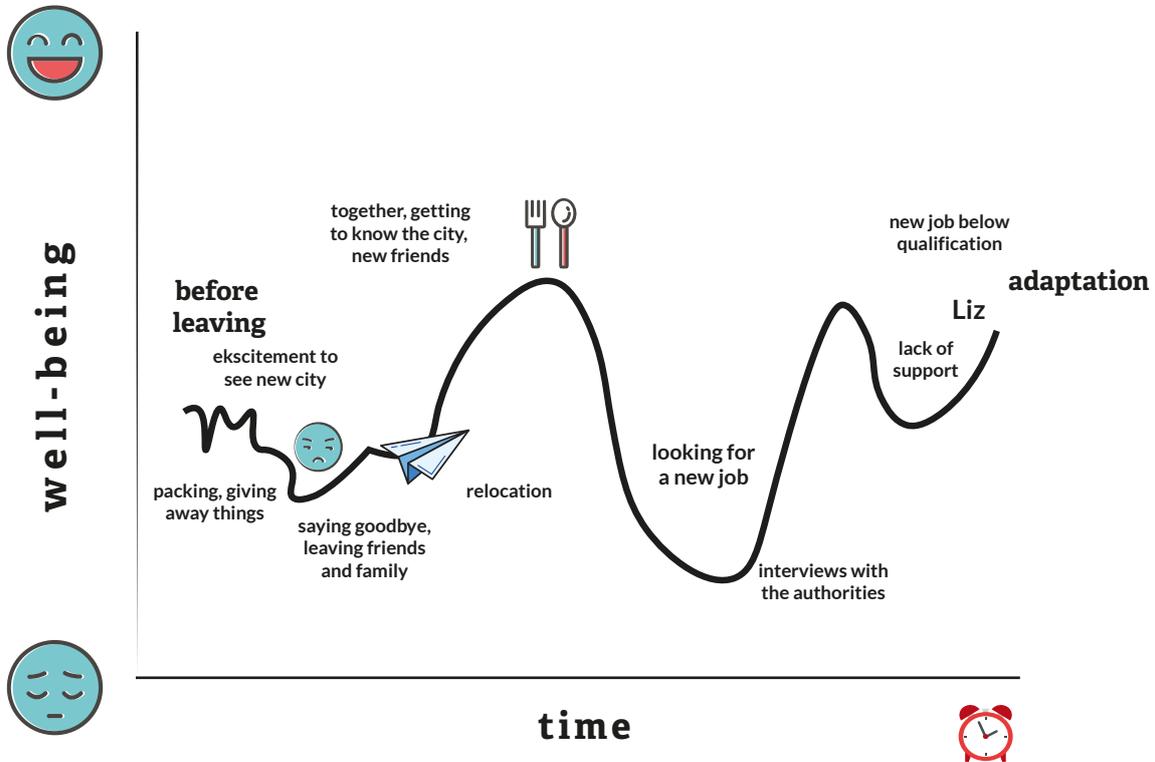
***I learned, however, to better plan and organise our family and professional reality here. I like the diversity here, that in kindergarten my children are playing with other children of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.***

***It is normal for them that people have different religions, celebrate different holidays. I would like Warsaw to be more and more multicultural too.***

***I think that the Poles could also learn from the Americans' kind attitude towards strangers. When I come to Poland, somehow I miss the fact that people are smiling at each other, that they appreciate that you did something great.***

***Sometimes I miss Poland, but for the moment being I'm glad that I live in Chicago.***

## Kasia's adaptation curve



### VERSION 1:

#### Phase 2:

Sit comfortably and think about some important period of your life that involved changes and the need to adapt to them. Draw the process of your adaptation using a curve on two axes, where the horizontal axis means time and the vertical axis your mood (as in the Kasia graph).

Using schematic drawings, mark moments important to you. After preparing the graph, tell your partner about it, share the events important to you and what you felt then.

The other person's task is to listen actively and emphatically: ask open questions, reflect emotions, and give support. Then, switch roles.

## **VERSION 2:**

### **Phase 2:**

Second version of the exercise requires some more preparation than the first one. The advantage of such work is that you use not only your head, but you also stimulate the senses and use the entire body. This can be a facilitation for memory and help in discussing experiences and feelings. We encourage you to experiment, to be creative and have some fun.

### **PREPARATORY PHASE**

In this task you will arrange the line of the selected fragment of your life on the floor or on the ground, using the materials prepared before. To do this exercise, you need a string/ribbon/cord to arrange the line of life and various items that will symbolise your difficult and good experiences. Preparing materials you will use in the exercise, e.g. going together for a walk to collect leaves, chestnuts, stones, is a good practice building contact with yourself and with each other. You can also use “family totems”, various important items you have at home, e.g. shells collected during some trip and other items that you associate with important moments in your life. These can be also other items you have around you, e.g. colourful scarves, figurines, screws, toys, kitchen products such as for example sweets. All ideas are good, it is important to prepare a lot of items from which you will be able to choose. Once you have your items ready, set a time when you can do this exercise, so that nobody disturbs you, turn off your phones :).

### **EXERCISE GUIDELINES:**

Determine who will arrange the line and tell about their experiences first.

#### **Guidelines for the first person:**

Think about a moment in your life that involved the process of change, which was important to you and about which you would like to tell your partner. Imagine that you see on the floor two axes: first one is a timeline, and second one is a well-being line. Using a ribbon, string arrange a line illustrating how your mood has changed, mark the important events, turning points using the items (one item for one event important for you). When you are ready, invite your partner to listen to you. Go through your line together, tell about every event and describe your feelings at the moment. The task of the person who listens is to do it in an attentive, emphatic manner, ask open questions, reflect emotions, and give support. Then switch roles.

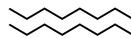
## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE

You can read about adaptation stress in the introduction of this chapter, its phases and reflects how it refers to your adaptation curve ([On adaptation to changes and new culture...](#)).

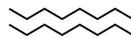
### REFLECTION/ OBSERVATION:

Consider the following questions and share your thoughts after the exercise:

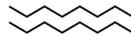
- How did I feel doing the exercise?



- What did I realise?



- What did help me do this exercise in contact with you?



- What do I want to thank you for?

### ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION

Reflect on your adaptation and the resources that helped you to overcome the challenges you were facing. Which of the resources you consider as helpful for the future?

---

## Chapter 2c:

# Communication barriers and active listening

---

### Exercise

**Title:**

**THE NUANCES OF COMMUNICATION**<sup>14</sup>

**Time needed:**

60 min

**Goal(s):**

- Understanding that if I have more ways to communicate, I can be more effective and targeted in the communication;
- Understanding that there are many ways to express own emotional state without feeling excessively exposed;
- Understanding that being flexible and ready for change makes me more confident because
- I am able to use multiple communication styles based on circumstances
- Learning to use feedback, through verbal or non-verbal communication, appropriately

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#communication

**Key words:**

#personalpower #feedback #interaction #mutuality  
#nonverbalcommunication

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

None

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<sup>14</sup> Menditto, M. (2008). Comunicazione e relazione, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 69-70.

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

The exercise helps to understand how it is important to pay attention to the process of gathering the signals of others that allow you to be able to correct your communication during the communication flow. Therefore with this exercise you can understand that in the communication you can use the nuances.

It is not necessary to say,

**„I feel the last wheel of the cart in this relationship”,** I can instead say, **„I feel like a third wheel in this relationship”,** I can say instead, **„I would like you to listen to what I have to say”**. So it is very important that if I am not comfortable in the communication with my partner, because I understand by their non-verbal communication that they don't want to listen to me, I should express my frustration and feelings.

### Instructions

#### 1.

**First step:**

Chose a role A or B

#### 2.

**Second step:**

**For A:** tell an episode to your partner using the voice.

**For B:** try to disqualify what A is saying and do it without words, just using non-verbal communication. Try to focus on the ways you can use to disqualify what your partner is saying (looks, gestures, mimicry etc.). You can be rude, indifferent, etc.

#### 3.

**Third step:**

Once the experience is completed, change your roles and do the exercise from the beginning.

## REFLECTIONS

1. Sometimes we discover that the disqualifying gestures are familiar or completely different from one culture to another.
2. Having to be silent when the other is not listening or being distracted makes us understand that words are a powerful tool.
3. What happens when you feel disqualified by your partner?
4. How do you feel when you disqualify your partner?
5. When you were A, did you feel disqualified more as a person or more as a representative of a culture other than your partner's?

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

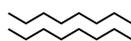
To achieve a targeted and non-stop sensible communication, one must never take anything for granted. Seeing the other always in the same way makes us enter the perverse mechanisms of stereotype, of interpretation. We are led to interpret the facts that happen to us, rather than describe them. Interpretation is a human phenomenon that belongs to us.

Being limited in knowledge, we need patterns, automatisms, routine behaviours that reassure us. Every time we enter into communication with the environment we must respond quickly and automatically and we must set our behaviours in motion. This is why we connect to our reference framework which helps us to quickly interpret what we are experiencing.

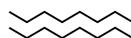
This modus operandi becomes a problem when we use it, without realising it, in the relationship with our partner, so as not to grasp the nuances of communication<sup>15</sup>.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE

- What do you think has changed in the communication with your partner?



- Are you available to listen to them better?



- Do you think you are able to focus on your body language when your partner talks to you?

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<sup>15</sup> Menditto, M. (2008). Comunicazione e relazione, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 69-70.

## Exercise

**Title:**  
**CONTROLLED DIALOGUE<sup>16</sup>**

**Time needed:**

80 min

**Goal(s):**

- To raise awareness of the difficulties of a careful and faithful reception of the issuer's messages, in particular when one is emotionally involved in the issue;
- To practice listening to the other's point of view through the practice of reformulation techniques

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#communication

**Key words**

#listening #empathy #feedback

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

None

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

Listening is an important factor for the success of communicative interaction. Since listening is complex behaviour, it is important that you experiment yourself with reformulation techniques. In this exercise we will focus on the fact that you become aware of the difficulties inherent in the role of listening and that you experiment with the techniques of reformulation. This exercise is very important regarding the reformulation (to use the same words of our partner), that is the best way to show that we listened to them.

<sup>16</sup> Franta H., Salonia G. (1981), La comunicazione interpersonale, LAS, Roma, pp. 78-79.

The use of the same language by the couple is one of the main indicators of the strength of it. So if both inside the couple you and your partner use the same language can educate your children more easily, because it is less probable that they send opposite messages to your children.

## Instructions

The dialogue between you and your partner should be recorded.

### 1.

#### First step:

Please choose a topic, possibly about cultural differences of your origins on which you disagree for example, so as to be able to experience the difficulty of fully understanding the other's point of view.

### 2.

#### Second step:

Person A starts talking about the topic chosen by formulating a sentence.

### 3.

#### Third step:

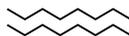
Person B reformulates the content of the assertion of A, using their exact words

### 4.

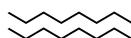
#### Fourth step:

Person A gives their feedback on the accuracy of the reformulation according to the following scale:

**a)** I felt you didn't understand me



**b)** I felt you understood me partially



**c)** I felt you understood me well

## 5.

### Fifth step:

After the feedback from Person A, Person B can decide whether to continue with their own statement, or whether to request Person A give their thoughts again

## 6.

### Sixth step:

Person B assumes the role of issuer, and presents their reply to the assertion of A

## 7.

### Seventh step:

Person A plays the role of listener and repeats the methodology described for B

## 8.

### Eighth step:

The partners listen to the recording and discuss what kind of steps they didn't feel heard and why they were not able to listen to their partner.

## REFLECTIONS

Thanks to the recordings, you can discuss what kind of steps you didn't feel heard and why you were not able to listen to your partner. Moreover, you could reflect about your difficulty to address the role of the partner when you had to reformulate the sentence.

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

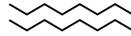
The communications you receive do not remain without consequences in life. In order not to be exposed to any unwanted consequences, it is necessary to examine the communication from the point of view of validity, assuming an evaluative and critical behaviour towards the continuous flow of information to which you are exposed<sup>17</sup>.

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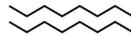
<sup>17</sup> Franta H., Salonia G. (1981), La comunicazione interpersonale, LAS, Roma.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE

- Do you want to try to rephrase your partner's messages at least ten times in the coming week?



- Could you try using language similar to that of your partner?



- You and your partner may find a moment during the day when you analyse the words you both use the most frequently, and among these the ones you both use the most.

## THE 12 BARRIERS OF COMMUNICATION

When we have some kind of difficulty in a relationship we often raise barriers in communication. In many cases we are not aware that we use this communicational modality.

The main causes of our need to raise the barriers often have cultural, familiar and educational origins. The 12 barriers are mistakes that we all make, more or less consciously, and that can seriously compromise our interpersonal relationships. A couple who makes these mistakes will almost certainly leave each other painfully

### **The 12 barriers of communication summed up as:**

**1.** To give orders, to direct, to command

***(I do not care what others do, behave properly...)***

**2.** To warn, to threaten

***(If you do such a thing you will regret it...)***

**3.** To exhort, to moralise, to preach

***(You should not do so...)***

**4.** To advise, to offer solutions, to suggest

***(It would be appropriate for you ...)***

**5.** To teach, to argue, to persuade

***(Children must learn to agree among themselves...)***

**6.** To judge, to criticise, to blame

***(Speaking without thinking...)***

**7.** To praise, to indulge

***(I believe you are right...)***

**8.** To label, to humiliate, to ridicule

***(Here is the wise man..!)***

**9.** To interpret, to analyse, to diagnose

***(You're saying it to annoy me...)***

**10.** To reassure, to console, to support

***(Tomorrow you will feel differently...)***

**11.** To ask questions, to investigate

***(Who put these ideas in your head..?)***

**12.** To minimise, to change the subject, to joke

***(Come on! Let's talk about more pleasant topics...! While you're there, why don't you break everything..?)***

The 12 barriers of communication can be divided in 3 categories, as they are schematised in the following graph:

### **1. Judgement**

is about imposing your own values on other people and formulating someone else's solutions to problems;

### **2. Deciding for others**

this feature can hinder communication even when dictated by care. When we decide for someone, we make the person dependent on us and deprive them of independence. In addition, we make it clear that their problems do not matter;

### **3. Running away from other people's problems**

we are not willing to deal with the problems of others.

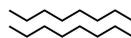
Judgement	Deciding for others	Running away from other people's problems
To teach, to argue, to persuade (Children must learn to agree among themselves...)	To give orders, to direct, to command (I do not care what others do, behave properly...)	To advise, to offer solutions, to suggest (It would be appropriate for you ...)
To judge, to criticise, to blame (to speak without thinking...)	To warn, to threaten (If you do such a thing you will regret it...)	To interpret, to analyse, to diagnose (you're saying it to annoy me...)
To praise, to indulge (I believe you are right...)	To exhort, to moralise, to preach (You should not do so...)	To reassure, to console, to support (Tomorrow you will feel differently...)
To label, to humiliate, to ridicule (Here is the wise man...!)	To ask questions, to investigate (Who put these ideas in your head..?)	To minimise, to change the subject, to joke (Come on! Let's talk about more pleasant topics! While you're there, why don't you break everything..?)

Empathy is very close to unconditional respect.

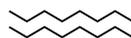
These 12 modes of communication are an obstacle only when the other is in a problematic emotional situation. When there is no emotional burden the barriers lose that negativity to become even supportive and productive. To make it real, there are several conditions to be covered.

Effective communication in the relationship implies:

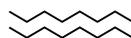
- Real acceptance of the other



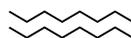
- Confidence



- Empathy



- Active listening



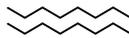
- Authenticity

## Active listening

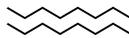
Active listening is a communicative way of connecting the sender with the receiver, where the receiver becomes as active as the sender. The recipient does not send a message on their own, that is an evaluation, an opinion, a suggestion, an analysis or a question. They only send their own decoding of the sender's message without adding or removing anything from it.

Active listening can help partners:

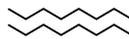
- To become aware of their feelings;



- To have less fear of negative emotions;



- To facilitate the autonomous process of problem solving;



- To be more receptive to the ideas and opinions of others.

The attitudes required by active listening are:

- 1. Willingness to listen:** be willing to take the time to do it
- 2. Willingness to help:** if you do not feel it, wait for the right moment
- 3. Feeling able to accept the mood of the other:** whatever it is
- 4. Trusting your ability to manage your feelings:**
- 5. Remembering that moods are transitory, so they will not leave an indelible impression on your soul.**

To correctly understand the feelings and thoughts of another person, to put oneself in their shoes at the same time (Empathy), to see the world with their eyes implies the risk of seeing their own opinions and attitudes change.

Authentic understanding produces changes in people, because it helps the:

- 1.** Couple becomes aware of the main dynamics of their relationship.
- 2.** Partners understand what their verbal and non-verbal communication methods are.
- 3.** Partners in a blood relationship, giving them tools to learn to understand the other.

## **5 Behaviours to be avoided if empathic listening is to be activated**

The behaviours to be avoided if you want to practice relational listening are:

### **Moralisation**

With moralisation, try to make a person think and to make them understand what is good and what is bad. To the disappointed partner for a professional situation gone wrong you can demoralise them saying, „***you could commit yourself more, and it wouldn't end this way!***”

### **The clichés, the generalisations**

Using commonplace expressions often leads to generalisation, for example to the disappointed partner you say, „***it happens to everyone what happened to you!***”

### **Watch me!**

Turn the subject of communication upside down and talk about yourself instead of listening to the disappointed partner, „***look at me, I have been the victim of so many scams, too!***”

### **Identification**

If the disappointed partner says, „... ***and yes, I understand you, it happened to me just like you!***” You identify so much more with them by stating everything they say happened to you too!

### **Ask questions**

Asking questions when a person experiences a strong emotional state can make them feel worse if not approached correctly. You must strive to find the correct moment to demonstrate that you are listening, so wait for answers to your question. Good questions are of value and interest, if asked at the right time. If you can't do without questioning, try to ask your partner questions phrased like this, „***did I understand ..?***”

### **Interpretation**

The interpretation makes the listener the one who holds the truth about the other, such as telling the partner, „***you are disappointed because you have little trust in people!***”

### **Blame**

This morality consists in attributing the responsibility of one event or one communication to the other, making it feel inadequate. Those who blame often avoid taking their share of responsibility in the relationship and sometimes project unacceptable parts of themselves onto the other.

**Crossing the river**

---

03.

It is quite common that in the first phase of any relationship people are more focused on seeing the similarities. Later on they start to see the differences and face the challenge to stay close to each other despite them.

Differences are natural, you and your partner can have different personalities, temperaments, ways of perceiving things, differences in the way you behave. Some of the differences might also be due to culture.

In this chapter you will explore the process of building ethno relativistic approaches to cultural differences. You will also have a chance to get more aware of your attitudes in your relationship. We hope it will help you to have more understanding of each other and to build more empathy and unconditional respect.

Watch Anastasia talking about how being in an intercultural relationship has changed her.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **How did being in an intercultural relationship change You?**



## **Chapter 3a: Ethnocentrism to relativism Where are you?**

---

We defined the concept of [ethnocentrism](#) at the beginning, in a glossary of terms. We come back to it, because an attitude in a culturally mixed relationship is of great importance for building relations and understanding or lack thereof. In intercultural psychology, there is the concept of intercultural sensitivity, i.e. the way in which we address culturally different people.

These patterns can be more or less conscious at the social and individual level; for example - hearing from a child the message that our country is an empire, what attitude can we assume as adults?

In the context of working on our own development and building, deepening awareness so as to derive value from diversity, it is worth stopping for a moment and thinking about how it is with us.

How to measure such sensitivity? Milton Bennett can help us here - the man who created and, since the 1980s, has been developing the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).

The model assumes a scale of 6 stages, from denying cultural differences, to their integration, which shows a growing increase in competence in intercultural relations.

### **Exercise**

**Title:**  
**ETHNOCENTRISM VS ETHNORELATIVISM  
WHERE ARE YOU?**

**Time needed for exercise:**  
30 min

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**Goal(s):**

- Self-assessment
- Better understanding of oneself and one another
- CC awareness and skills

---

**Methods used:**

CCC

---

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #livinginnewculture #adaptationstress

---

**Key words:**

#ethnocentrism #ethnorelativism #understanding #connection

---

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful environment

---

**Materials:**

no materials required

---

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

We invite you to read the chart below, presenting the phases of continuum, starting from ethnocentrism divided in 3 phases (grey part of a scale):

### Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity - Milton Bennett



### 1. Denial

experiencing one's own culture as the central and most important one (my culture is the most important, the only right one, I'm not interested in cultural differences, I prefer to stick to "**my own**").

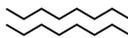
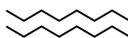
### 2. Defence

I already notice them, but I defend myself against differences (my culture is better, I divide the world into better "**my people**" and worse "**foreigners**").

### 3. Minimisation

**"oh well, we are all the same"; "this behaviour is not due to cultural differences, he's just like this."**

Further 3 phases of ethnorelativism are perceived in the context of challenge and not threat. What is supporting in moving on this axis is:

- Knowledge  

- Awareness  

- Ambiguity tolerance

Ethnorelativism is presented as a yellow part of a scale, where we also experience three phases:

### 1. Acceptance

differences between cultures are noticed and recognised here, which doesn't mean that we agree with them, but we are interested in and we respect them.

### 2. Adaptation

since we write a lot about empathy in this guide, this is where it works in practice; we want to understand and we can be able to empathise with a perspective different from ours, to the extent that we sometimes choose other patterns that suit us and adapt them to our own way of being.

### 3. Integration

is the highest level of cultural competence, where we combine all experiences, knowledge and skills with the context, and we are able to manage intercultural relations in a very conscious manner. This is not one pattern, but a process and constant movement in the field of diversity.

What is important, when we develop and broaden horizons, we usually move on this scale towards integration. It doesn't have to be a steady movement. If we experience something negative in the context of a representative of a given culture (e.g. a situation threatening health or life on the street), we can go back again on this scale to the place that gives us a sense of security.

It is also worth remembering that the very knowledge of a culture doesn't itself increase intercultural sensitivity, but affects the development of competences, which in effect can support relationship management in the context of any culture.

**As a part of the exercise, talk to your partner about their perception of themselves and you on this scale, and answer the following questions together:**

- 1.** What surprised you?
- 2.** What made you place yourself in this place on the scale?
- 3.** What does this mean for you? And what does this mean for people around you?
- 4.** Where would you like to be on this scale?
- 5.** What can you do to move in the context of our cultures on this scale towards integration? Name one thing - action, from which you will start changing your attitude.

## Chapter 3b: Behaviours and attitudes in a relationship

---

### Exercise

**Title:**

**YOU AND AN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP<sup>18</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

90 min

**Goal(s):**

The purpose of this exercise is to help you share how you feel and how you behave in the relationship

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#identity

**Key words:**

#role #relationship #awareness #awarenessofyourroleinside  
thecouple

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

Illustrated sheets, pens, pencils, colours

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<sup>18</sup> Sunderland M. (1997), Disegnare le emozioni, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 114-115.

## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

This exercise, through the expression of emotions, can clarify what are the behaviours that you activate inside the couple and what are the main feelings that emerge. By increasing awareness of your behaviours, you are able to choose to represent them in your relationship. This exercise can help you consider different ways of dealing with the partner.

When your partner asks you to buy food and you forget to buy something, when you come back home and your partner reproaches you that you never listen to them. This is a daily dynamic, so your partner doesn't trust you when you have to shop. Accordingly, you feel angry towards your partner, but you should be aware that you don't listen to them.

This exercise can help you to clarify which are the roles that you commonly assume in the relationship. Do you tend to play more often as a leader or you prefer to follow, do you feel strong or powerless, insignificant or important?

By increasing the awareness of the roles that you choose to represent in your relationships, the exercise can help you to consider different ways of dealing with your partner.

### **Instructions**

Steps 2 and 3 should be done individually.

#### **1.**

##### **First step:**

You are in an important relationship. Think of your relationship as a couple. Mark all the cartoons in the illustration that represent how you feel when you are with your partner. You could also choose various vignettes to represent different aspects of the relationship. Then colour or highlight in some way the person drawn in the chosen cartoons that you think you look like. Use another colour to show the role that the other person tends to take.

#### **2.**

##### **Second step:**

How do you generally behave in a relationship? Think about how you behave or generally tend to behave in a relationship. Colour those roles represented in the illustration that you tend to habitually assume. Under what circumstances do you think you have learned or decided to behave in that way? Do you think that you learnt that behaviour in your family of origin, in the field of job, in the relationship with your friends or inside the couple?

### 3.

#### Third step:

Work in a pair. Compare yourself with your partner, explaining the characters or the character of the cartoon you have chosen, explaining the reasons.

## REFLECTIONS

Reflect on how relationships between adults can be profoundly influenced by relational experiences at the time of childhood and by parenting / cultural models of relationship styles.

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

This exercise could lead you to achieve or even recover the empathy towards your partner meant as unconditional respect (knowing how to appreciate the others' points of view). The theoretical presuppositions of this exercise are two; sociological and Gestalt Counselling.

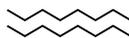
The first one is taken by the dramaturgical perspective that Erving Goffman presented in the 1959 book „The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life“<sup>19</sup>. In it, Goffman uses the metaphor of theatrical production to offer a way of understanding human interaction and behaviour.

He argues that social life is a „performance“ carried out by „teams“ of participants in three places: „front stage,“ „back stage,“ and „off stage.“ The dramaturgical perspective also emphasises the importance of the „setting,“ or context, in shaping the performance, the role of a person's „appearance“ in social interaction, and the effect the „manner“ of a person's behaviour has on the overall performance..

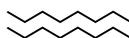
The second is taken by the Gestalt counselling literature. According to this approach, the first step in order to improve yourself and the relationship with your partner, is that you should become aware of the role you play inside the couple<sup>20</sup>.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE

- How could you change your behaviour in order to change and improve this situation / state?



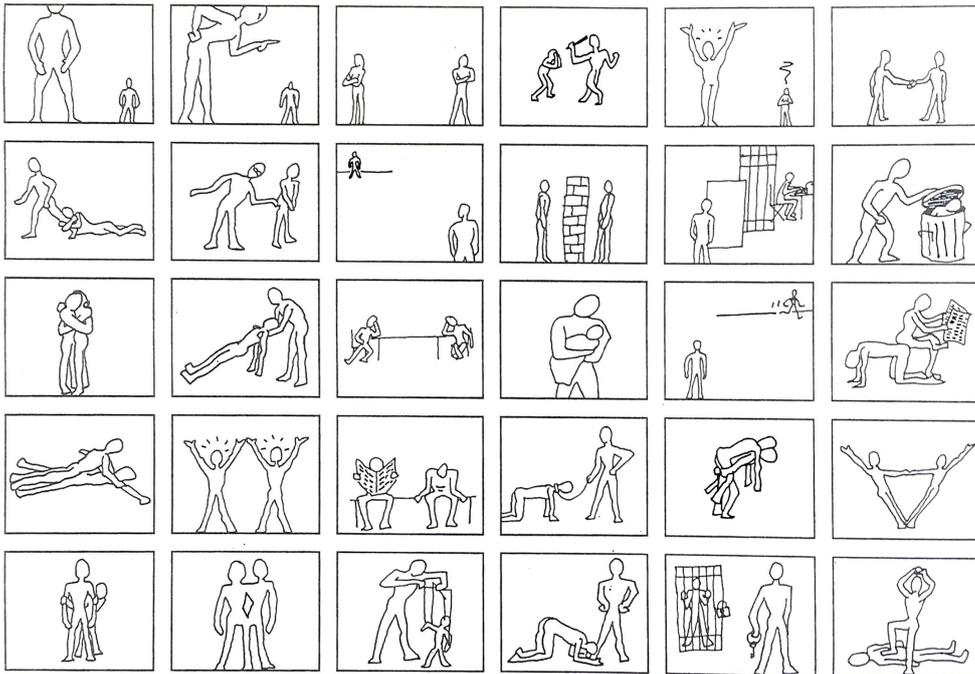
- Which image represents the change you would like to introduce in the couple?



- You could share with your partner the change that you would make in the couple. Can your partner help you in this challenge of change? Discuss it with your partner.

<sup>19</sup> Goffman E. (1959), Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, The Overlook Press, New York.

<sup>20</sup> Clarkson, P. (1992). Gestalt – Counselling, Roma, Sovera Multimedia; Yontef, G. (2012). The Four Relationships of Gestalt Therapy Couples Work. In Bar-Joseph Levine, T. (Ed). Gestalt Therapy: Advances in Theory & Practice, Routledge London, pp. 123-135.



## Exercise

### Title:

### FILM EXPERIENCE<sup>21</sup>

### Time needed for exercise:

170 min

### Goal(s):

- To sensitise participants to the fact that, in front of the same stimuli (a film), everyone perceives only some aspects, and in a personal way;
- To make the participants aware of the fact that their experiences guide them in the „selection” and „perceptive organisation” of reality;
- To acknowledge the limits of personal perception in order to pay more attention and respect to the perceptions of others.

### Methods used:

GC

### Problem/ Challenge:

#culturaldifferences #culturalunconsciousness

<sup>21</sup> Franta H., Salonia G. (1981), La comunicazione interpersonale, LAS, Roma, pp. 49 – 51.

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**Key words:**

#respect #differences #perceptions #perceptiveorganisation

---

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

---

**Materials:**

technical means required for the screening of a film;  
a movie, sheets, pens

---

## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

Cultural differences that characterise mixed couples can be a challenge both inside the couples and for their families. In this exercise you will have a chance to see how problems that intercultural couples face are pictured in the movies and to share with each other how you perceive it.

### **Instructions:**

#### **1.**

##### **First step:**

Watch together a movie relevant to the topic of mixed couples. We recommend the following films:

„A passionate kiss” (A fond kiss) by Ken Loach

„Jungle fever” by Spike Lee

„Black and White” by C. Comencini

„Do not marry my daughters” (Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au Bon Dieu?)

By Philippe de Chauveron

#### **2.**

##### **Second step:**

After the screening, we encourage each of you to firstly answer the following questions in a written form (each person writes down her/his answers):

- Which theme did the director intend to develop?
  - Who is the protagonist? And how does the protagonist experience and interpret life and the world?
  - What goals is he trying to achieve? And with what kind of behaviour?
  - Regarding the other characters, which ones do you prefer and which to refuse? And in what aspect of the personality or in what behavioural situation?
  - Which scene impressed you the most? And for what meaning?
-

- In your opinion, which scene or action has not been developed?
- Did you like the movie ending?
- If it was up to you, how would you have structured the ending?

### 3.

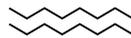
#### Third step:

Read your answers to each other. After listening to each other share what were the similarities and what were the differences in the way you perceived the themes shown in the movie.

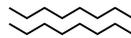
## REFLECTIONS

The experiences of the past influence our perception of reality:

- Which situations of the film have particularly affected you?



- Have these situations evoked your personal experiences?



- How close or far did you feel from the protagonists and why?

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

The efficiency of communication, as regards reciprocal relations and the treatment of themes, also depends on the extent to which you and your partner, in the individual relational sequences, refer, time after time, to the previous contribution of the other. It is not easy to ignore our personal way of dealing with the different communication issues to understand the contributions of the other. In a social situation, in which each member has the prevalent function of making their own contributions to communication, serious communication disturbances may arise.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE.

1. Tell your partner what surprised you in their report. What was a new thing you have learnt about them?
2. Reflect with your partner about the different ways to perceive the relationship in the couple and among the couple and the families.
3. Choose to watch another movie together (you can go back and check the prior list) in the near future (set a date!). Talk to each other after the movie, answering the questions again.
4. According to your belief - how would your partner answer the questions?

## **Climbing the mountain**

---

**04.**

Climbing a mountain is not easy, it requires preparation, knowledge, and skills. Once you made an effort you knew that it was worth it. You can enjoy the satisfaction and the beautiful view on the top.

To have a meaningful and mutually satisfactory relationship it is very important to have a competence of handling conflicts. In intercultural relationships some of the conflicts occur because of cultural differences and cultural unconsciousness.

In this chapter you will have a chance to explore what cultural conflicts may appear in your relationship. We hope that the knowledge about cultural dimensions will be helpful to you. We also invite you to approach conflict using the non-violent approach ([NVC methodology](#)), understand and respect each other's needs and feelings. You will also have a chance to learn and practise how to ask for what you need and want.

In the last exercise you will have a chance to support each other in defining what kind of defence mechanisms you might have in difficult situations and how you might disarm to be closer to other people.

Watch what Jeffrey says about the power of communication in a successful intercultural relationship.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The recipe for a successful intercultural relationship**



## Chapter 4a: Cultural differences

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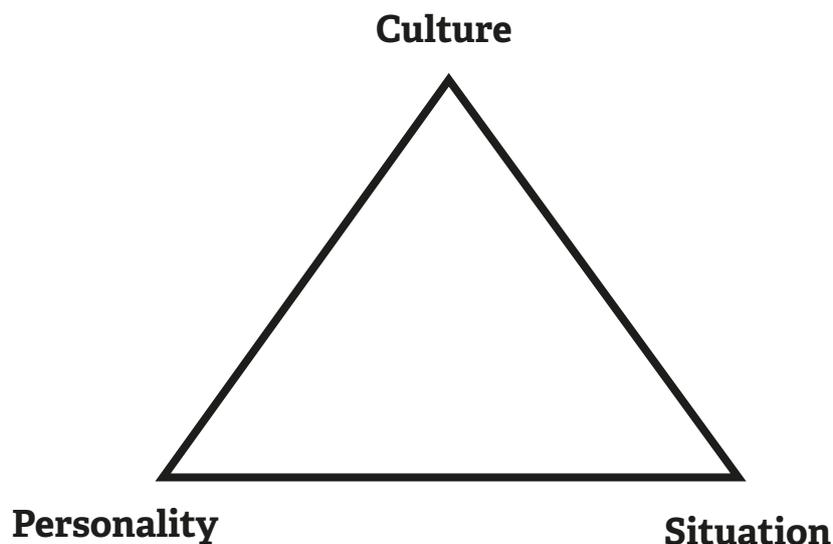
In this chapter we will focus on exploring intercultural differences. At the beginning, as people dealing with multiculturalism for many years, we want to emphasise that people all over the world have the same universal needs: love, respect, safety.

As intercultural research all over the world shows, regardless of the culture, people experience and are able to recognise the same basic emotions. In all cultures, interpersonal relationships: family and community are important. Intercultural differences arise in the matter of, for example, what emotions and how you can express them, what factors play a role in the selection of life partners, what is the dynamics of the relationship.

In different cultures, the word ,family' is understood differently and there are differences in what relationships and mutual relations do to connect family members.

In this chapter we will focus on cultural conditioning of behaviours. It is worth remembering, however, that each behaviour (ours and of others) is also influenced by situational factors and individual differences, as illustrated by the behavioural triangle shown in the GRAPH: What influences our behaviour.

### What influences our behaviour



While interpreting different behaviours, we often underestimate the role of cultural factors.

Participants to the workshops within the Meet Me Halfway project said that the classes had allowed them to see and understand better the impact of culture on their own and their partner's behaviour. Understanding the differences was the first step to deal with them and get closer to each other.

We invite you to familiarise yourself with the cultural differences that may appear in the intercultural relationship. We will describe them using the dimensions of culture defined in the introduction to our guide ([cultural dimensions](#)). We will use selected dimensions from the typology of Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall.

Each dimension is illustrated by a short story showing what misunderstandings can occur between people who come from cultures located at the opposite ends of a given dimension.

## **Social structure**

### **What comes first: an individual or a group?**

*Ahmad and Lena have been married for several years and they live in Berlin. Lena is German, and Ahmad has lived in Germany for fifteen years, he comes from Syria. One day Ahmad came home and said he had been just talking to his cousin, who would come to them tomorrow with his wife and stay in their house for a while. The last time Ahmad had seen his cousin was several years earlier in Syria when they had been both teenagers. After two weeks of living together with her husband's cousin and his wife, Lena began to get nervous. She had enough of spending all the evenings together. She felt that she could not relax at her own home and that she lacked privacy. She didn't understand why Ahmad was so indulgent to his cousin, whom she thought he barely knew. She asked Ahmad to talk to his cousin and ask when he would move out and find something on his own. Ahmad said he would try to help his cousin find something, but he didn't know how long it would take. He added that he didn't want to bring disgrace to his parents. He didn't want relatives to tell them that they had an inhospitable and unhelpful son.*

The described situation shows differences in how relations between family members are perceived in collectivist and individualistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, people see themselves as independent individuals. In collectivist cultures, people are seen primarily through the prism of a group, e.g. the family to which they belong. You can read more about the dimension of individualism-collectivism in the table below.



## Collectivistic cultures

- The most important is the group, strong belonging to one's own group
- Family often perceived in broad manner, many generations, often with many children
- Strong family support, care, in exchange for loyalty
- The entire family, and even neighbours and other adults, take part in raising children
- Children stay with their parents until they start their own families
- Group harmony is important, open confrontation, which is perceived as a threat to relationships, is avoided
- SAVING FACE/ SHAME are important. Inappropriate behaviour of one family member brings disgrace to the entire family

## Individualistic cultures

- The most important is an individual, people belong to many groups
- Often a nuclear family (parents and children)
- The value is independence
- Raising children is a matter of parents
- Young people move out of family homes and live independently before starting their own families
- Conflicts are something natural, open confrontation is allowed
- People are responsible for themselves. Inappropriate behaviour of a person causes guilt at this person, but it does not bring disgrace to other people in the family.

## Role of the hierarchy

*Sasha-Russian and Michael-Canadian, living in Moscow, went to the parents' meeting at the school of their ten-year-old daughter Emma. The teacher complained that Emma was learning well and was talented, but she was causing educational problems.*

*After finishing the task, she began to disturb other children. The teacher also said that Emma often engaged in discussions with her, questioning her instructions. Sasha apologised for her daughter and told that she would talk to her at home.*

*Michael began to defend his daughter and criticise the teacher's behaviour. He asked how the children had been taught and what the teacher suggested to his daughter after she finished the task earlier. He didn't understand well what was the teacher's problem with the fact that his daughter had been arguing with her. In his opinion it was good that his daughter defended her opinion.*

*There was a quarrel between the spouses in the car. Sasha complained to Michael that he allowed Emma to do too much. In her opinion, the daughter didn't know how to respect elders and acted like a know-it-all. Michael said that they had made the mistake of sending their daughter to a Russian school and that it was better for their daughter to study at an American school.*

Sasha looks at her daughter's upbringing in a way characteristic of more hierarchical cultures, in which respect for the elderly is very important. John is guided by the values of egalitarian culture and he wants his daughter to have a more partner-like relationship with her teacher and that she can express her opinion freely.

---

## Hierarchic cultures, great power distance

- Big differences in social status (hierarchy is natural)
- Differences in rights, treatment, obligations depending on social status, which often depends on such factors as: age, gender, origin
- Parent has authority, obedience, respect (also in relation to adult children), respect for older siblings are important
- Teacher has authority, their initiative, parents have respect for the teacher
- Decisions are taken by the head of the family

## Egalitarian cultures, low power distance

- Small differences in social status (necessity of hierarchy)
  - Equal treatment irrespective of social status; status largely based on one's own achievements
  - The child has the right to their own opinion, partner relations with parents
  - Teacher is a partner, student initiative is important
  - Decisions taken jointly by all family members
- 

## Social roles of men and women

*Giorgi from Georgia started working in an international company. During the integration lunch, he was introduced to Sven, the husband of his Swedish colleague Ingrid. Giorgi asked Sven what he did at the moment. The Swede said with joy that he was the father of a one-year-old girl, and he wasn't currently working because he was on parental leave. Georgian felt uncomfortable. It was hard for him to understand that Sven talked about it so calmly. He would be ashamed if he couldn't support his family and he was on his working wife's dime.*

The situation described illustrates the differences between Sven and Giorgi in how they perceive their social role as a man. In different cultures, there are different standards about what kind of behaviours are expected of men and women. Talking about it is important for every couple.

---

## Fixed roles/"masculine" culture

- Specific social roles are assigned to men and women
- The man responsible for providing for the family, the woman for bringing up children and for home
- Different upbringing of boys and girls

## Interchange roles "femimine" culture

- The social roles of men and women are interchangeable
  - The spouses decide among themselves who will do what, partner relations
  - Minimising differences in the upbringing of boys and girls
-

## **The importance of relationships - task and relational cultures**

*Young marriage: Antonio of Portuguese origin and Mervi from Estonia went to the bank to apply for a loan. In a conversation with a credit advisor Antonio began to vividly tell about how he had met Mervi. He also talked about the importance of credit for them because they planned to enlarge their family.*

*Mervi felt embarrassed. She felt angry with her husband for telling a strange man about their private affairs. She began to have concerns that the man is slowly losing patience, because instead of talking about facts and their creditworthiness, they were talking about insignificant matters. When Antonio began to ask the advisor about his family situation, whether he had a wife and children, Mervi kicked him under the table and tried to make him stop doing it. Antonio didn't understand what she meant.*

Applying for a loan showed the differences between Antonio and Mervi in how they tried to build trust with their adviser. For Antonio, in accordance with the principles of more relational cultures, it was necessary to build relationships. Mervi, in accordance with the norms of a more task-oriented culture, wanted to get to the merits of the case as soon as possible.

---

### **Task oriented/pro-transactional culturest**

- The most important is transaction / interest / task
- One is happy to do business with strangers
- One should quickly get to the heart of the matter

### **Relational/pro-partner cultures**

- The most important are interpersonal relationships/ social network
  - One is reluctant to do business with strangers
  - One need time to establish a relationship
- 

## **Differences in non-verbal communication and expression of emotions**

*Mateo and Amelia met in Prague, Czech Republic, where they both had come for a six-month exchange programme for young professionals organised as part of the Erasmus program. Mateo was Spanish and Amelia was born in London. On Fridays they used to work side by side in a café, because according to the programme it was a "home office" day. One day there was a misunderstanding between them.*

*Mateo was speaking in Spanish to his colleague on the phone. Amelia felt embarrassed because several people in the café started to look at them. Mateo, in her opinion, was speaking very loudly, he was even yelling. She began to feel uneasy and thought that maybe he was not such a nice man as it seemed. She thought about how he would behave when there were misunderstandings between them.*

---

After Mateo finished the conversation she pointed out: „How can you behave in that way? In a public place, you shouldn't argue, and certainly not shout." Mateo interrupted her in the middle of the sentence, saying that he hadn't been arguing at all, that it had been a bit of an emotional conversation, but everything was OK. He felt the girl was criticising and picking on him. He started to doubt whether she would not lose interest in him.

All in all, he didn't notice that she had been somehow enthusiastic about his virtues or rarely saw the delight on her face when he told her different stories.

Non-verbal language, our body, distance that we keep to another person is a very important part of communication. The situation described illustrates the misunderstandings that may occur between people from expressive cultures and people from reserved cultures.

---

### Expressive culture

### Reserved culture

- Louder

- Quieter

- Interrupting each other is OK, silence is embarrassing

- Interrupting another person is uncivil, silence is OK

- You can touch the other person during a conversation

- One shouldn't touch the person one is talking to

- Smaller physical distance

- Greater physical distance

- Eye contact, more frequent, more intense

- Avoiding eye-contact

- Intense gesticulation

- Minimal number of gestures

- Rich facial expressions

- Minimal facial expression

---

## Differences in manner of communication.

### Direct or indirect?

Sayaka and Alicja have been dating for some time. They both live in Warsaw, Alicja was born here and Sayaka has been living here for ten years. They went together for dinner with Aiko - Sayaka's sister, who came to visit him from Japan. Alicja liked Aiko very much and she thought that it would be very nice if Aiko and her husband went with them on a planned ski trip in a month.

Aiko said that she and her husband both liked this sport. When she asked Aiko if they would go with her and Sayaka for the winter holidays, Aiko replied that she would like it very much, that there wasn't not much time left before the trip, but she would try to go on this trip together with them.

---

After the meeting, Alicja was so excited to tell Sayaka that she was very happy that Aiko would go with them and that they had to call the organizers of the trip and book a room for his cousin. Sayaka explained to Alicja that Aiko refused to go on a trip and wouldn't go skiing with them. Alicja felt disappointed and asked Sayaka why his cousin had misled her and she couldn't just honestly say she wouldn't go.

Sayaka explained to Alicja that in Japan it is uncivil to say „no” so directly and that his cousin wanted to ensure a good relationship with them. He shared with Alicja that despite the fact that he had lived in Poland for ten years, he sometimes felt offended when at his request someone simply answered „I won't do it”, „I won't help you”.

Japanese culture is a high-context culture in which it is important to understand the entire context of expression, which is difficult for outsiders. In low-context cultures, verbal utterance is the most important thing.

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<b>Low context cultures</b>	<b>High context cultures</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct communication</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indirect communication</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The most important are words spoken at loud</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The importance of non-verbal communication and context/ circumstances</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is allowed to express criticism directly and to say “no” directly.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Criticism is expressed indirectly, refusal in indirect manner</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A friend always tells the truth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A friend is always willing to help</li></ul>

---

### **Approach to time**

Marta and Ali have been married for several years. Together with their two-year-old son they went to visit Ali's family in Sudan. They both used almost all their annual leave for this trip. It was important to them so that Ali's parents saw their grandson. Marta was also glad to see Sudan, the country where the story of „In Desert and Wilderness” takes place. She was glad to see the pyramids, as apparently there were more of them in Sudan than in Egypt. Upon arrival, Ali talked to his parents and they planned to stay in Khartoum during the first week to meet all relatives, and in the second week they would go out on a small trip with Ali's parents. Marta was very excited about the planned trip. Meeting Ali's family and friends was nice, but also tiring for her. Different people appeared unannounced, she felt that during half the day she was drinking tea and the other half of it she was spending eating or helping with cooking. She was also tired of several formalities they had to settle. Officials, in her opinion, worked chaotically, served several people at the same time, which she felt was not effective.

On Sunday evening they agreed that they would leave the next day early in the morning. Marta got up in the morning, packed her bags and she was ready to go at 8 a.m. When she entered the kitchen, she saw that Ali's mother was just preparing food for the road.

---

After an hour, a neighbour came with good news. Her son just came to town. Ali's mother invited them both to dinner. Marta felt disregarded and angered her that they would lose another half of the day. She tried to explain it to Ali, but he said it was natural that they had to postpone the trip, because their good neighbour had arrived, whom they had not seen for a long time.

As you can see in the cited situation, between Marta and Ali and his family there are differences in the approach to time and planning. Marta was guided by the values of more monochrome culture norms. Ali and his family in Sudan looked at the situation from the perspective of polychronic culture

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### Monochronic cultures

### Polychronic cultures

---

- The most important is the set deadline, punctuality

- Relationships are the most important thing

---

- One time for everyone, measured with a watch

- Time is determined by activities

---

- A linear approach to time

- Synchronous approach to time

---

- One action is performed at a time and then the next one

- One can do several things at once, e.g. meet several people at the same time

---

- The plans are made in detail

- Plans are set in a general manner and they are only guidelines

---

- The schedule is important, deadlines and set time limits must be observed

- The schedule can be changed, the deadline can be moved depending on the circumstances

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### Exercise

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**Title:**  
**CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN OUR  
RELATIONSHIP**

**Time needed:**  
30- 40 minutes

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---

**Goals:**

- better understanding of potential cultural differences in a relationship
- facilitating the process of talking about cultural differences without using stereotypes and judgments
- better understanding of values and norms underlying yours and your partner's behaviour
- identifying potential conflicts

---

**Methods used:**

CCC

---

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #culturalunconsciousness  
#livinginnewculture #adaptationstress #identity

---

**Key words:**

#culturaldimensions #conflict

---

**Space:**

Any space

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**Materials:**

The descriptions of the dimensions from this chapter,

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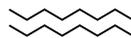
## EXERCISE/ EXPERIENCE

Read again the descriptions of cultural dimensions and stories of couples that illustrate differences in each of them with the intention to see how it reflects cultural differences in your relationship.

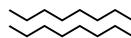
### REFLECTIONS:

After reading each of the dimensions, answer and share with each other the following questions:

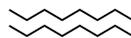
What behaviours and norms are closer to me?



What behaviours and norms are closer to my partner?



Are there differences between us in a given dimension?



Are the observed differences a challenge in our relationship and the area worth talking about more?

## **LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)**

If you think that knowledge about dimensions is useful for you, we encourage you to explore this subject further.

On the website of one of the most famous researchers in the subject Geert Hofstede you can compare national cultures you come from

<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>

It is worth remembering that the result is an average value for a given country, there can occur regional and gap generation differences. You also don't have to share the values and norms that characterise your country.

There are also more online paid tools available online that give the possibility to compare cultures, as well as to check your personal results such as [Culture Map by Erin Meyer](#) or [GlobeSmart®](#).

## **EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

In the next exercise ([NVC and Cultures -practise exercise](#)) you will be able to practice the ability to talk about differences, speaking in a language of feelings and needs that are universal.

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# **Chapter 4b:**

## **Understanding each other better**

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***“All violence is the result of people tricking themselves into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished.”***

***Marshall B. Rosenberg***

## Exercise

---

**Title:**

**NVC AND CULTURES - PRACTICE EXERCISE**

---

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

---

**Goal(s):**

- Improve communication skills
  - Practice and raise NVC and CC skills
  - Learn and understand each other's needs better
- 

**Methods used:**

NVC, CCC

---

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#communication

---

**Key words:**

#understanding #connection #mutuality #collaboration #winwin  
#corevalues #needs

---

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful environment

---

**Materials:**

something to write on

---

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

### I

Read carefully and follow steps described below chronologically, please. Don't hurry, stay connected – both to your own feelings and needs and your partner's ones. Take time to think, feel, discover needs. Start to complete this task individually. Use feelings and needs decks ([appendix to the Guide at the end of the book](#)).

### II

In the second phase, please reflect on your real-life experiences - It's about your couple now.

### III

In a third phase, discuss them with your partner. You are ready to do it, when you complete the first 9 points. We wish you a mindful conversation for the two of you.

## Ready?

## Let's start!

### PHASE I

Read accurately and think about what could happen in the described situation? Marta and Phuck are a young couple, she is Polish and he is Vietnamese. They got married two years ago and live together in Warsaw. They both work hard. As the summer holidays would start in 2 months they started to talk about their vacation destination.

Phuck said that he hoped it was obvious that they would go to Vietnam to visit his family since last week he talked to his parents and they said they would like to see him. Marta said:

***„Please let's not do it again, we visited them last summer”.***

And she explained that she preferred they go somewhere where they could spend some romantic time, just the two of them, relaxing and doing some diving.

Analyse the case and check what's going on? Where is a potential conflict? Write down your first thoughts.

Now think of the situation again. Which person (from the case) you feel closer to and why?

Check it up with the cultural dimension you recognised and you identify with. (use basic cultural dimensions we discussed at the workshops and you have in your handbook).

Now draw attention to the emotional level. Which person do you empathise with? What does this person feel? Label those emotions and write them down. (use a deck of feelings, you might also use your own words to express it).

What kind of needs (probably unfulfilled, although try to search for both perspectives – fulfilled and unfulfilled) stand behind those feelings? ([use a deck of needs](#), you might also use your own words to express it).

## PHASE II

Have you ever faced a similar situation within your couple? What is your similar situation where you face challenges to resolve a situation in a win-win manner?

Now, focus on your emotions and needs. Use a path of giraffe (NVC metaphor for self-empathy)? (4 steps – observations, feelings, needs, requests, use the handout for constructive communication and a deck of feelings / needs).

### **Construction of 4 steps:**

When I (see, observe, hear, imagine, notice)

I feel (emotions, body sensations, name them / label)

and my needs (fulfilled / unfulfilled) are

I would like to (request which is specific, doable, settled positively, might be in a form of a question).

### **Example:**

When I hear the sentence „***Please not again, we visited them last summer***”, I’m irritated and sad. I need clarity, understanding and partnership. Could you please tell me how it is for you to hear about what’s important for me?

Answer this question – What can I do to answer / take into consideration both needs - mine and yours? (take responsibility for your needs and actions).

## **PHASE II OF THE EXERCISE**

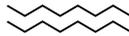
Talk to your partner about your and his learnings. What have you recognised? What do you want to remember about resolving a potential conflict situation?

The same situation can be seen much differently - we do have different needs and feelings and in order to have a good relationship we have to share them and work on them together.

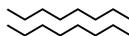
Cultural background is enriching but also poses challenges in communication and life decisions. Key is to stay open and listen to what the other person has to say. To adopt constructive communication rather than use judgement that can and often is incorrect.

## REFLECTIONS

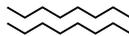
1. What have you discovered about yourself / partner / family?



2. What have you learned?



3. What would you like to remember after this experience?



4. Answer those questions first individually and then exchange opinions and insights with your partner.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION / PRACTICE

1. Now when you know what you know, how would it change your reality?
2. What would you like to implement in your everyday routine?
3. What would you avoid doing?
4. How would you like to remember that?

## **Chapter 4c: Managing the conflict in cross cultural relationship**

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### **Is the conflict to be the only one opportunity to improve a relationship?**

Conflicts are an unavoidable part of our everyday lives. And this is understandable to us as people. The difficult part starts when we try to avoid it at any cost, be nice, and pretend that nothing happens when emotions arise in us, and the atmosphere thickens. In the context of a relationship, this is a risky strategy as it leads to absurd situations when we can explode in the least adequate moment.

And especially in the context of culturally mixed relationships, when lack of understanding of cultural codes is an additional layer that can lead to conflicts or their escalation.

Suppose that a baby appeared in a culturally mixed relationship. Father from Egypt (collective culture), extremely attached to his family (family ties as a cultural value) insists on meeting with his parents and siblings every day.

The baby belongs to the family, so there is no need even to arrange it in advance - everyone is welcome at any time of the day. Mother who comes from the Netherlands (individualistic culture, more egalitarian - where mutual understanding and freedom of choice is very important) wants peace for herself and the baby.

It is important to her to have privacy, organise herself in a new role, and have impact on when and who visits her, and what they do with her baby. These situations are common in a complicated everyday life of relationships. When additional cultural context appears, without appropriate knowledge, curiosity to get to know a new area, sensitivity and empathy for each other - it can be hard.

Let's assume that no one in this couple starts dialogue. Days pass in a similar rhythm. Wife has less and less patience and speaks directly about it (directness in communication, resulting from her native culture). Husband, shocked, tries to calm the situation, that everything is alright and that he will prepare her favourite dish to calm things down (expressing concern through food, a highly contextual way of communication).

Wife lets him calm her down, but as nothing changes, during one of the visits of her parents-in-law, she explodes in their presence and locks herself with the baby in a room for the rest of the day. Husband is ashamed and feels that he lost face in front of his family.



Miki Kashtan, one of the well-known certified trainers spreading knowledge about Nonviolent Communication (NVC) in the world claims that conflicts are feedback given too late. What the couple should do is to spot symptoms and talk about it. But what is simple, is not always easy to implement in action.

NVC, created by Marshall B. Rosenberg, is one of the ways of communication we offer within our Guide, and which increases chances of building peace based on universal human needs.

**“Language of peace”, as sometimes NVC is called to “manner of communication with people that makes our natural, innate compassion for others flourish. All over the world - from antagonised families, through dysfunctional bureaucracies, to war-shaken countries, I haven’t found more effective means of achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict.”<sup>22</sup>**

Based on many years of practice and experience of Rosenberg, a particular approach towards resolution of conflicts was created, promoted worldwide by Ike Lasater and John Kynion.

### **What distinguishes this approach towards conflict from other forms of mediation, negotiation or mitigation of disputes?**

The main difference consists in the fact that most methods deal with searching for solutions. There is nothing wrong in it, but according to the NVC method - the most important is interpersonal contact. When we establish an emphatic relation, full of compassion and curiosity, there can occur such solutions that can surprise us. The greatest barrier in reaching agreement in conflict is a lowered level of trust. That is why, let’s deal with trust first, and only then let’s search for solutions.

This approach derives from the common paradigm of rewarding the good ones and punishing the bad ones. Here, we focus on needs - universal human qualities, which are the same regardless of age, race, religion, gender, origin. And taking these needs into account in the dialogue.

If we assume that these are strategies - i.e. the ways we use to take care of our own needs - that enter into conflict, and not people, completely new perspectives open up. In such a case, a conflict may turn out to be a benign release of tension, an opportunity to establish together new rules and norms for the relationship, and an option to strengthen bonds.

So why not perceive conflict from this perspective? NVC gives an opportunity to unlearn the hurtful thought patterns that have accompanied us since childhood (judging, comparing, obligations, orders, punishing, rewarding etc.) and choose the other path that enriches us and the lives of others.



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<sup>22</sup> Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You Say Next Will Change Your World, Marshall B. Rosenberg, Czarna Owca Publishing, pp. 21-22.

Let's get back to our Egyptian and Dutch couple - how this situation could look like with the application of 4 steps of empathic communication according to NVC?

### 1. Observations

(facts, what we see without judging and giving meaning)

### 2. Feelings

(language allowing to determine, what is happening with us in terms of emotions - happy, sad, angry; not to be confused with false feelings i.e. Thoughts expressed in the form of feelings - hurt, betrayed, disappointed, all formulations that assume the influence of another person).

### 3. Needs

(universal qualities for all people, regardless of race, gender, views; what we need is perceived by our emotions and non-verbal system; based on this we know whether our needs are met or not)

### 4. Requests

(clearly defined, specific, feasible, set in a time frame, the clearer and simpler they are, the easier it is to hear them and respond to them).

We've mentioned before that not people but strategies to satisfy (very often the same ones) needs enter in conflict. If we wanted to write down their voices in accordance with empathic path, it could look like this:

---

**She:** *"When your parents are coming over unannounced (observation), I'm angry and frustrated (feelings), because I've told you about it 5 times (observation) and I'd like to be heard and noticed (needs). I need rest, time together, intimacy and support (needs). Can we talk about rules, based on which we want to host your parents at our home (request)?"*

---

**He:** *"When my parents came to us, and you went with the baby in the room (observation), I was sad and ashamed (feelings), because common participation in family life is important to me and I want to respect family values (needs). At the same time, I hear that this is difficult for you in this form (empathy for the other party). Can you think about it and tell me how it sounds to you? (request)"*

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**She:** *"Yes, it is difficult for me and at the same time I would like us to find a solution that will satisfy both sides. (empathy for the other party) Can we talk about it for a moment now? (request)"*

---

Such forms of dialogue may seem artificial and unnatural at the beginning. We know that feeling. It's similar to learning a new language. Therefore, we recommend frequent and regular exercises, to start with an easy situation (maybe not necessarily with members of the household) and in a safe environment.

For example - when you're in a traffic jam and someone beeps at you - instead of reacting violently, think about the possible unmet needs of this driver. When you are in the queue in the store and you hear the irritated voices of a discussing couple - guess what needs each party may have. And also in positive situations - when a mother in a playground smiles at her child doing acrobatic tricks in the jungle gym - what fulfilled needs can she have?

Below we enclose an exercise table, which gives structure for empathy for ourselves and for the other party. Print it in many copies and use it while exercising in writing down difficult situations. Don't wait for a big conflict, and don't try to place something here that accumulated over the years.

At the beginning, focus on small matters of everyday life, e.g. Wife was supposed to pick up the child from the kindergarten, and she called at the last minute that she would not make it, and you've already scheduled the entire afternoon; Husband was supposed to buy bread on his way home from work and he forgot; Child was supposed to come back home at 3:00pm, and it's 3:20pm.

**Remember that practice makes perfect and trains your empathy muscle.**

**Good luck!**

## Exercise

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**Title:**  
**4 STEPS OF CONSTRUCTIVE  
COMMUNICATION**

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**Time needed for exercise:**

30 min practice each time you are in a challenging situation or you'd like to understand better the perspective of another person, we strongly recommend the advantage of it and to make it a daily practice routine

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**Goal(s):**

- Raising communication skills
  - Conflict prevention / conflict resolving
  - Compassion practice
  - Better understanding practice
- 

**Methods used:**

NVC, NVC Mediations

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**Problem/ Challenge:**

#communication

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**Key words:**

#understanding #conflictresolving #mutuality #partnership  
#empathy #differentperspectives

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**Space:**

Any space is convenient, you could always make it as a silent check in list when you become fluent in recognising different phases of the way you communicate

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**Materials:**

Handouts (for the beginners).

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## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

There are four phases (called steps) in the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) process. In this exercise you are guided, how to go through each of them, supported by a range of examples and questions.

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Make sure you go through the COLUMN 1 first and understand oneself before trying to step into someone's shoes at the beginning. Referring to Marshall B. Rosenberg, No one is able to give empathy if they don't receive it themselves. So if you finish the process going through COLUMN 1 and still have a lot of judgments, try to get back and name all the feelings and needs.

### 4 steps of constructive communication

PROCESS	COLUMN 1 (self-perspective)	COLUMN 2 (stepping into shoes of other party)
4 STEPS	ME - my perspective	YOU - how do I experience from the perspective of another person
OBSERVATION	<p>What can I hear/see/observe without judging and interpreting? Pure facts!</p> <p><u>Example:</u>                      Today is wonderful weather. - it's an opinion                      Today the sun shines and the sky is blue. - these are facts</p>	How can the other person hear/see a given situation?
FEELING	<p>What feeling does this observation bring me? I could recognise it by sensations in my body - ache, itching, goose skin, pain, breath.</p> <p><u>Example:</u>                      I feel sad about what I hear. - named feeling                       I feel this is wrong. - expression starts with "I feel" and actually it is a judgement, not feeling. For better practice in naming feelings, please use the deck of feelings from the Guide.</p>	How can the other person feel based on this observation?



**NEED**

Which one of my needs isn't sufficiently met? Which one is met? Sometimes it's hard to label them at first. At the beginning, practice with the deck of emotions and needs to catch the vocabulary and easiness in labelling feelings and needs.

Example:

When I'm sad, hearing that, I need clarity and understanding. - named needs  
When I hear that, I need you to change the tone of voice.  
- in this example you already give ready solutions. It might be heard as a demand and make the situation even harder.

What is the need that the other person can have?

---

**Golden rules of solving conflicts  
using NVC:**

- First of all, give yourself, to be able to offer it to the other person. We mean understanding ourselves, our motivations, intentions, including our emotions and needs. The clearer they will be for us, the easier it will be for us to express and make requests in a way that they can be heard. In order to do it, practice naming feelings and needs using the list of feelings and needs enclosed in the book.



- Speak about yourself and from yourself (What I see, observe, feel, need)



- Take the responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, actions, needs (Instead of saying ***"You always take your family's side"***, think about what is happening to you then and reveal it ***"when you support your parents standpoint, I feel sadness and anger, because I need understanding, support and partnership. Can we talk about it first, just the two of us, before you arrange something with them?"***)



- Remember that the strategy of a given person for meeting their needs may not suit you, don't judge a person on this basis. Instead, try to find out, talk about needs and find together a way for a strategy taking into account both parties in the relationship. For example, when you are planning holidays, and you both need rest, maybe there is an idea that will include needs of a partner that wants to go and visit family, and your needs that include exploring the world?



- Practice guessing needs at times of peace, to be an effective mediator during the war. To achieve mastery in translating the language of judgement into the language of needs, practice on simple everyday situations, even quietly guessing what the "author" had in mind. Then, during conflict, it will be much easier to hear the other party and meet their needs. For example, when the partner says: "I had to get up for the baby again at night", you can try to name what she needs - support, help, being seen and appreciated for her effort, recognition, care, trust.

Inspiration<sup>23</sup>

I want to connect more than I want to be right and more than I want to win!

Mary Mackenzie

***Do you get into "right fights"? You know you're in one when you're arguing with somebody in order to be right or because you want to win. In these arguments, we are rarely trying to connect. Being right is the name of the game.***

***Why do we do this? For many, it is an attempt to meet needs for safety, acceptance and understanding. What we usually receive, though, is discontentment, discord and hopelessness.***

***What would happen if we wanted to connect more than we wanted to be right or win arguments? This theme is actually my personal mantra. In charged conversations, it can be easy to forget our goal to connect because we are so experienced in right fights.***

***Consider trying to centre yourself in these moments by asking yourself, "What do I want? What needs do I hope to meet from winning or being right?" No matter what the situation is, try this answer: "To connect!" And ask, "Am I likely to be successful if I say what is on the tip of my tongue?" Invariably, the answer is no.***

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<sup>23</sup> Connection, Connection, Connection  
(from Marie Mackenzie 365 Daily Peaceful Meditations)

***By simply grounding yourself with these questions and considering other strategies you could use to meet your needs, you will be more able to empathise with the other and to express your feelings compassionately.***

***As a result, you will enjoy deeper, more meaningful relationships while reducing the frequency of judgements you have of yourself and others.***

***Notice if you enter into a right fight today and shift your focus on connecting with the other person.***

## **REFLECTIONS**

- 1.** What have you discovered about yourself / partner / family?



- 2.** What have you learned?



- 3.** What would you like to remember after this experience?



- 4.** Answer those questions first individually and then exchange opinions and insights with your partner

## **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

- 1.** Now when you know what you know, how would it change your reality?
- 2.** What would you like to implement in your everyday routine?
- 3.** What would you avoid doing?
- 4.** How would you like to remember that?

# Chapter 4d: Request for what you need and want

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## Exercise

**Title:**  
**NVC REQUESTS PRACTICE**

**Time needed for exercise:**  
30 min

**Goal(s):**

- Improve communication skills
- Formulate clear requests
- Practice NVC

**Methods used:**  
NVC

**Problems/Challenge:**  
#communication

**Key words:**  
#understanding #connection #trust #clarity #misunderstandings  
#verbalexpression #empathy #compassion

**Space:**  
Any calm, peaceful

**Materials:**  
Handouts, something to write, lists of emotions and needs

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help you express yourself in a calm, empathetic and considering needs of both sides. It's about formulating requests, also a request for fulfilling the need of love.

What's unique and supportive in the proposed way of communicating - you focus on yourself, on understanding the meaning, not only the context of words. It takes away an attacking and judgemental / punitive way of communication and brings the quality of shown intentions, understanding, compassion, will and collaboration.

At the beginning of the exercise, we invite you to analyse proposed expressions and sentences in terms of their correctness - are they real requests or not? And why?

Then, you will be given the rules on how to make clear requests in place of demands.

And finally, you'll have time and space to formulate your own requests based on real life examples.

### Instructions:

Examples of not clear requests:

- I would like you to be kind to me.
- I would like you to love me.
- I would like you to treat me as a woman.
- I want you to respect me as a man.
- I'm so lucky to have you.
- Oh, you are so cute.

What does it mean?

What need stays behind each of these statements?

What do I want to ask from another person?

>>> Now read how to be more precise and clear in making requests.

### Here are several rules to be followed:

1. It's worth being more precise and accurate with self-expression.
2. Rules of forming a clear request:
3. Being aware of a need standing behind the request (naming a need for oneself or state it loudly)



- 4. Doable (realistic, specific acts, behaviours)
- 5. Positively stated (not what you don't want, it's what you want instead)  
In a present form (here and now perspective)
- 6. Timely oriented (pace of it, when it should take place specifically)
- 7. Giving a space to choose in freedom and also say NO (capacity to search for the meaning and needs standing behind 'no')

### Examples of clear requests:

- I'd like to receive flowers from you once a week. How is it for you?
- I want you to stay with me during that meeting and speak up when I'm stuck.
- Could you ask me first next time, would I participate in the meeting, before you schedule it in the calendar?

Now it's time to practice new skills of making clear requests. Look at the examples of fulfilled needs and how you could appreciate those in the language of compassion.

In the column on the right - you have the same path of expressing clear empathetic requests when your needs are not fulfilled.

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#### Fulfilled needs:

**Intimacy, comfort, mutuality**

*If you want to appreciate it, have more of it, celebrate it, practice gratitude, embrace and empower it >>>*

#### Unfulfilled needs:

**Ease, flow, space, quality**

*If you'd like to express yourself clearly and take care of important needs, that are calling for attention >>>*

---

### Transform it into a request:

*I really like our Saturday dinners spent together, cause I appreciate the time we share together. Could we continue and have at least three Saturday dinners together monthly?*

*I need space and time to unwind and land after the working hours. Would it be ok for you to give me 15 minutes time only for myself after getting back home on working days?*

---

Try it yourself with following needs given as examples in the table below:

---

**Fulfilled needs:**

**Unfulfilled needs:**

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*Community, support, help, stimulation, collaboration, predictability*

Recognition, efficacy, consideration, gratitude

---

**Transform it into a request:**

---

Now think of LOVE as a need and formulate the requests to your partner both when you have this need fulfilled and unfulfilled. Try to remember or get back to all the rules in formulating request first:

---

**Fulfilled need:**

**Unfulfilled need:**

---

LOVE

LOVE

---

**Transform it into a request:**

Think of the real life situation in your couple where you'd like to express yourself more accurately, to be understood better, to be heard with your needs. Explore it through naming fulfilled and unfulfilled needs. Transform the need into the request and repeat this path within each need that emerges.

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**Fulfilled needs:**

**Unfulfilled needs:**

---

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**Transform it into a request:**

---

Are you ready to share your request with your partner now?  
Don't be shy to try and make this practice a common routine of yours.

Practicing requests and language of needs is like learning a new foreign language. At the beginning it might sound artificial or strange. You might be afraid of not doing it correctly. It's fine and completely normal in the process of learning new skills.

Try to be open and make space for an open discussion and practice inside your couple. Get back to this exercise at least once a week to work out your muscle of empathy and compassion both for yourself and the people around.

Now you already know a lot about formulating proper requests. **In NVC we differentiate them from demands**, which are harmful ways of communication and could kill any sign of empathy or compassion.

This is how Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. (a book which we strongly recommend: *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*) described the differentiation of requests and demands.

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## Requests Versus Demands<sup>24</sup>

Of course, when we make a request, we would like our listener to comply. But if compliance is our only goal in making that request, what we have said is likely to be received as a demand. When people hear demands, they are likely to respond out of fear, guilt, or shame rather than giving from the heart.

So how do we know when we are requesting and when we are demanding? The biggest difference is in our own response to noncompliance. If we are willing to hear noncompliance as an expression of feelings and needs, and then are willing to empathise with them, we are more likely to achieve our goals of openness and connection.

### Characteristics of Requests and Demands.

Request	Demand
Speaker only wants compliance if the listener is willing.	Listener will either submit or rebel
Speaker empathizes with what the person is wanting instead of hearing it as rejection	Speaker interprets noncompliance with rejection
Response to noncompliance expresses recognition of listener's feelings and needs	If the request is not complied with, the speaker will criticize, judge or guilt trip

Empathy, when making requests, supports cooperation. If we are aware of and open to what is alive in ourselves and in others, we will continue to connect, and our needs are more likely to be met in ways that will be mutually satisfying.

This does not mean that we do not want our request to be met. It just means that our most important objective is to be present with the connection at hand and to create a "relationship based on honesty and empathy", making sure that everyone's needs are being addressed.

<sup>24</sup> NVC Instruction Guide, CNVC, p. 24-25 [https://www.cnvc.org/sites/default/files/NVCInstructionGuide\\_Jiva\\_.pdf](https://www.cnvc.org/sites/default/files/NVCInstructionGuide_Jiva_.pdf)

## **MAKING REQUESTS<sup>25</sup>**

We all like to give to others when we can do it willingly<sup>25</sup> we hate to give when we do it out of coercion, to avoid guilt, fear or shame.

\* Two Questions Clarify My Motivation \*

1. What do I want the other person to do?
2. What do I want their reasons to be for doing it?

### **I KNOW IT'S A REQUEST WHEN:**

1. The other person's needs are as important as mine.
2. I want them to do it only if they can do it willingly.
3. I can hear behind their „no” their needs that conflict with my request.

### **I'm aware there are 5 possible reasons for meeting requests:**

1. Because I see how life will be enriched and I want to do it willingly.
2. Because I fear the other person will be hurt = GUILT.
3. Because I fear rejection = BUYING LOVE.
4. Because I fear being perceived as „bad”, „selfish”, etc. = SHAME.
5. To avoid punishment.

I know that I will pay for it later if the other person responds to my request out of any motivation other than (number 1) to enrich life.

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Mia Mukte (former Rysenbry)- Lasting Love – The Magic and Mechanics, The NVC Academy, [nvc.academy](http://nvc.academy)

## MAKING DEMANDS

When we become more interested in the end result than in the connection with the other person, we are tempted to make a demand. When we do this, we give the other person Just two choices: to submit or to rebel. We all pay dearly for these responses.

The difference between a request and a demand, is only clearly seen, when the other person says „no”.

## REFLECTIONS/ OBSERVATIONS

1. What have you discovered about yourself?



2. What have you learned?



3. What would you like to remember after this experience?

Answer those questions first individually and then exchange opinions and insights with your partner.

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

If you feel the need you can go back and read again about the non violent approach to [managing the conflict in cross cultural relationships](#).

## PLANNING / TRYING WHAT ONE HAS LEARNED

1. Now when you know what you know, how would it change your reality?



2. What would you like to implement in your everyday routine?



3. What would you avoid doing?



4. How would you like to remember that?

## Chapter 4e: Defence mechanisms in difficult situations

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### Exercise

**Title:**  
**WHEN BEING WITH OTHERS  
CAN BE SCARY<sup>26</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

75 min

**Goal:**

The objective of this exercise is to help partners to be more aware of their defence mechanisms and to determine whether they are correct and ensure an adequate level of self-protection. Or, if they are inappropriate and are limiting and harmful when they feel attacked by the partner for cultural reasons.

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#culturaldifferences #culturalunconsciousness #identity

**Key words:**

# defencemechanisms #self-protection #connection  
#reaction #defense #scare

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

Illustrated sheets, pens, pencils, colours

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<sup>26</sup> Sunderland M. (1997), Disegnare le emozioni, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 126-127.

## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

The difficulties and obstacles that we faced in life made us stronger or more fearful. In that last case the main consequence is the tendency to try to protect ourselves from new suffering by raising walls around us called „defences”. It is something that looks like armour, and has the function of protecting us from possible injury.

For example, if a person does not feel comfortable inside a new group they often need to protect themselves with various modalities, avoiding the glances of others, speaking little, trying not to get noticed. Aggression is another way to express the defence mechanism. Some people who feel threatened can be aggressive towards others with words or even with physical violence.

### **Instructions:**

#### **Steps from 1 to 4: Alone**

#### **1.**

##### **First step:**

Write on the illustration the kind of defence most similar to the one you use when you are wary of your partner for cultural reasons.

#### **2.**

##### **Second step:**

Think about what you do or how you feel when you are about to confront your partner; especially when you do not feel a positive feeling at that moment due to strong differences of view with respect to the education of children, religion, relationship between the sexes etc.

#### **3.**

##### **Third step:**

If none of the defences depicted match yours, draw the appropriate one in the available space.

#### **4.**

##### **Fourth step:**

Evaluate if you feel satisfied with the defences you have chosen, if they are useful in your life as a couple, or if you would prefer to try other ways to face the situations in which you are in difficulty with your partner.

#### **5.**

##### **Fifth step:**

Confront with your partner on your defence mechanisms, specifying whether those ‘fortifications’ are also against the values of the culture of the other.

## REFLECTIONS

How did you feel during the confrontation with your partner?

### LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

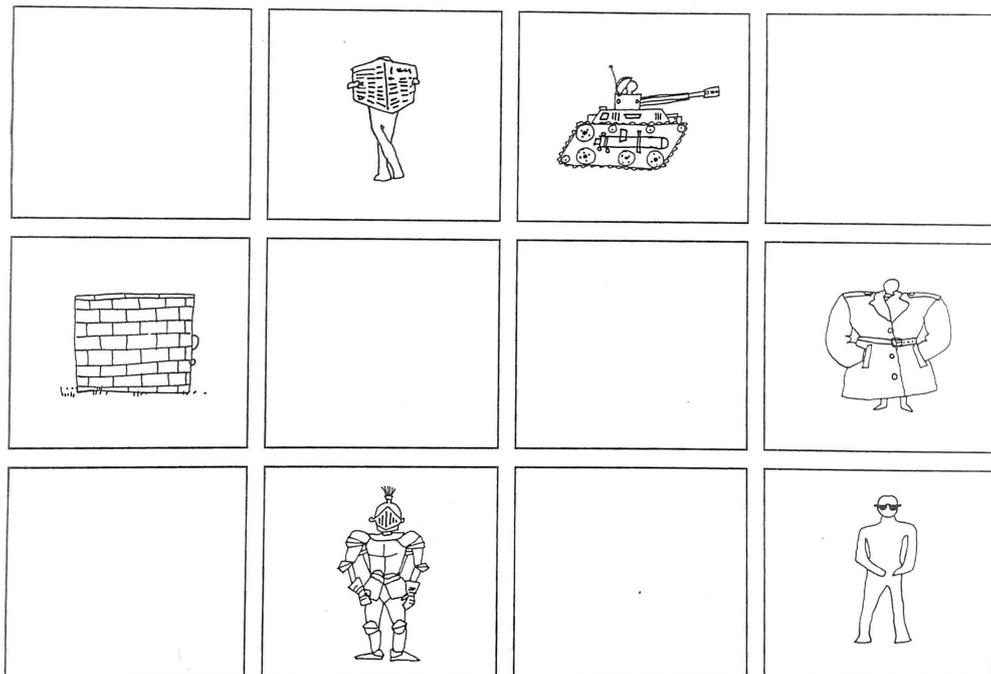
Defence mechanisms are behaviours you use to separate yourself from unpleasant events, actions, or thoughts. These psychological strategies may help you put distance between yourself and threats or unwanted feelings such as guilt or shame.

First proposed by Sigmund Freud, this theory has evolved over time and contends that behaviours like defence mechanisms are not under a person's conscious control. In fact, most people do them without realising the strategy.

In close relationships, where your deepest emotions are often aroused, it's even more likely that you'll rely on your defences to help you manage those emotions. As it turns out, some of the most common defence mechanisms may make you even more anxious by getting in the way of your relationship and happiness.

### ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION / PRACTICE

- At work and if you feel threatened - how do you behave?
- How would you behave if a bully threatens your child?



## Exercise

**Title:**

**YOU IN THE GROUPS (YOU CAN MAKE THIS EXERCISES WITH OTHER COUPLES AND FRIENDS)<sup>27</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

80 min

**Goal(s):**

Become awareness of roles that you adopt when you are in a group

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#pressure  
#identity

**Key words:**

#roles #groups #scapegoat #belonging

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

Illustrated sheets, pens, pencils, colours

## EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

In the roles that we commonly play we adopt them when we are in a family group (parents, grandparents, brothers, grandchildren, etc.). In the case of limiting or non-adaptive roles (e.g. if the family members normally feel like scapegoats or tend to be outside the group, or exclusively with the partner) you can try to discuss how to identify and change behaviour which causes you to take on these roles.

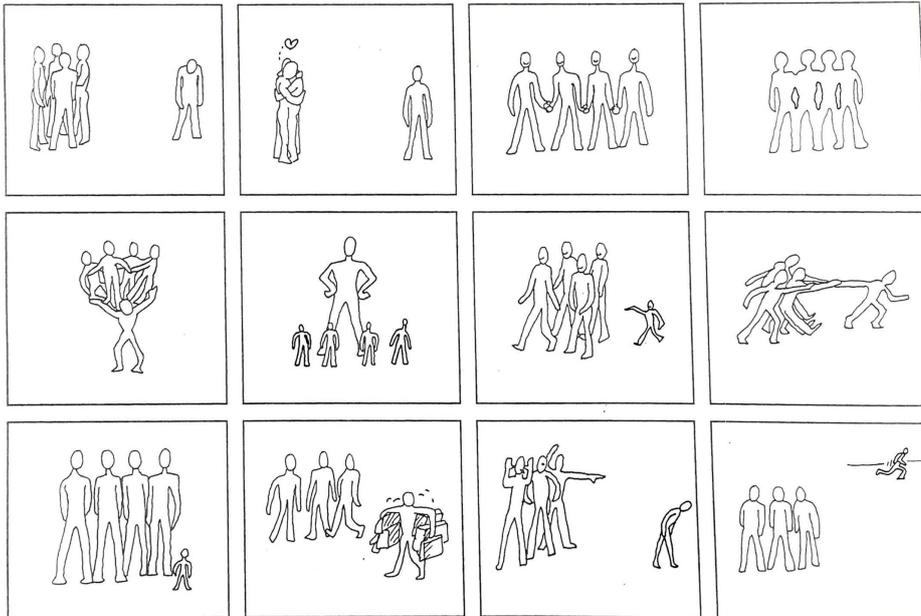
<sup>27</sup> Sunderland M. (1997), Disegnare le emozioni, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 122-123.

## Instructions:

### 1

#### First step:

Mark all the cartoons that make you think of how you normally fit into your partner's family in this particular period of your life.



### 2.

#### Second step:

Colour the person who in your chosen cartoons represents your way of behaving.

### 3.

#### Third step:

If you don't like to continue taking on these roles, think about what you could do to change the situation.

### 4.

#### Fourth step:

Reflect on your behaviour in your partner's family.

### 5.

#### Fifth step:

Compare yourself with your partner, by showing to each other the illustrations and characters You have chosen.

## REFLECTIONS

Discuss with each other the differences and similarities in your choices and in the roles You undertake.

### LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

The theoretical presuppositions of this exercise are two; sociological and GC.

The first one is taken by the dramaturgical perspective that Erving Goffman presented in the 1959 book „**The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life**”<sup>28</sup>. In it, Goffman uses the metaphor of theatrical production to offer a way of understanding human interaction and behaviour. He argues that social life is a „performance” carried out by „teams” of participants in three places: „**front stage,**” „**back stage,**” and „**off stage.**” The dramaturgical perspective also emphasizes the importance of the „**setting,**” or context, in shaping the performance, the role of a person’s „**appearance**” in social interaction, and the effect the „**manner**” of a person’s behaviour has on the overall performance.

The second is taken by the Gestalt counselling literature. According to this approach, the first step in order to improve yourself and the relationship with the other inside the groups, is that you should become aware of what role you act inside the groups<sup>29</sup>.

Example: within the family, on the basis of how the couple’s dynamics are established, different roles can be played: the excluded, who always takes care of the problems of all the components or be all on the same level. How do you feel based on how you are configured in the family group?

### ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION / PRACTICE

Using the same illustrations, you can choose, describe, and talk about other types of „defenses” you use in other contexts in your life, such as:

How can you help your partner to change their bad behaviour  
inside the family?



How can you be helped by your partner to change your bad behaviour  
inside the family?

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<sup>28</sup> Goffman E. (1959), *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, The Overlook Press, New York.

<sup>29</sup> Clarkson, P. (1992). *Gestalt – Counselling*, Roma, Sovera Multimedia; Yontef, G. (2012). *The Four Relationships of Gestalt Therapy Couples Work*. In Bar-Joseph Levine, T. (Ed). *Gestalt Therapy: Advances in Theory & Practice*, Routledge London, pp. 123-135.

## **Campfire and celebration**

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05.

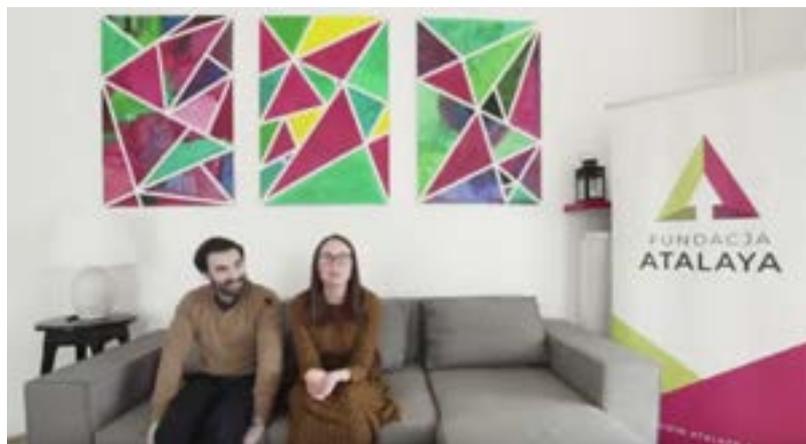
After your whole journey together, getting more awareness, knowledge, competences, overcoming challenges it is time to celebrate together:). In this chapter we invite you to experiment with creative ways of expressing your feelings and needs.

You will also have a chance to reflect on how much you already achieved, express when in your relationship you feel welcome and open for each other and also talk about the things you still want to work on.

We encourage you to appreciate both all the paths you came so far as well as your bravery and authenticity in identifying the things you still want to improve. So put all the experiences in your treasure chest but remember to leave space for much more valuable moments in the future. Be generous to yourself and to each other, you both deserve it.

See what benefits from participating in the Meet Me Halfway project did get  
Anastasia and Rafael, Agnieszka and Jeffrey.

### **Chapter 5.1** **Benefits from participating in the Meet Me Halfway project**



### **Chapter 5.2** **Benefits from participating in the Meet Me Halfway project**



## **Chapter 5a:**

# **Connect to and express your feelings and needs**

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### **Exercise**

**Title:**  
**IMAGES FOR BETTER CONNECTION**  
***“ AN IMAGE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS”***

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

**Goal(s):**

- Contact one's feelings and needs
- Sharing feeling and needs
- Facilitating self-expression
- Building contact
- Giving oneself empathy
- Enhance creativity

**Methods used:**

NVC, empathetic listening

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#identity #communication #TCK

**Key words:**

#feeling #needs #connection #mutuality #expression

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment



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**Materials:**

You can use [DIXIT cards](#) to do this exercise. This is a storytelling game published by Libellud. It consists of a deck of cards with fairy-tale illustrations. You can find more details about the game here . You can also use other images, photos, drawings from albums, newspapers or the Internet.

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**Alternations:**

You can adjust the exercise to do it together with kids, as well.

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**EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE:**

We invite you to the exercise, in which you will have an opportunity to talk about your feelings and needs in a slightly different way than usual. You will express yourself through images.

You can use this manner in everyday conversations. It can be also useful in a conversation about a specific situation, e.g. a conversation about holidays you plan together or place of residence etc.

**Instructions.**

**Determine whose feelings and needs you will talk about first (person A), and whose second (person B).**

**Instructions for person A:**

- 1.** Sit down comfortably, take a few deep breaths and concentrate on what you feel at the moment. Look at the prepared cards and choose an image that illustrates your feelings in the best manner. Don't think about it too much. Let yourself follow your own intuition. Look at your card.
- 2.** And now focus your attention on your needs, what do you need at this moment. Look at the cards again and choose one that illustrates your need at the moment.
- 3.** Show your cards to your partner. Listen to what your partner has to tell you about your cards, needs and feelings. Listen carefully, don't interrupt, don't discuss what she/he has to tell you.
- 4.** When your partner finishes, tell her/him, what the cards you have chosen express for you. Share what you feel and need now.

**Instructions for person B:**

1. Look carefully at the cards your partner shows you and think about what they may feel and need.
2. Tell them about your hypotheses. Don't judge. You can finish the following sentences: "***I can see on your card...***", "***I think that you feel now...***", "***I can see on the second card...***", "***I think that you need...***"
3. Then listen to what your partner has to tell you about her/his cards, needs and feelings.

Switch roles and repeat the exercise.

**REFLECTIONS**

Reflect on and talk about the exercise you've just done. Answer the following questions:

- What have I realised about my feelings and needs?



- What have I realised about your feelings and needs?



- How did I feel during this exercise?



- Was using images helpful in contacting my feelings and expressing them?



- What helped me in conversation with you?



- Is there anything I would like to ask you?



- Do you want us to repeat this kind of conversation about what we feel?

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## Chapter 5b: To be invited and seen

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### Exercise

**Title:**  
**INVITED OR EXCLUDED<sup>30</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

**Goal(s):**

- Improve awareness of both positive and negative relationships,
- Focus on the feelings that come from feeling loved, desired or, on the contrary, being unloved, unwanted, excluded.
- With the acquisition of this awareness, you should find the strength to commit yourself to improve, if possible, the relationships that live in a negative way.

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**

#communication

**Key words:**

#improverelationships #feelings

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

Illustrated sheets, pens, pencils, colours

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<sup>30</sup> Sunderland M. (1997), Disegnare le emozioni, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 122-123.

## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

Too often we adapt to relationships that do not do us much good, sometimes thinking that such situations are the norm, sometimes even adapting passively.

It can be extremely painful to be with someone who does not want to stay with us, spend time or live with a partner who keeps the „door closed” for cultural reasons. On the contrary, being with an „open door” and feeling really wanted can be wonderful.

**Example:** when you come home do you feel welcomed or supported by your partner? Think about how you are with your partner on the weekend or when you don't both work. If your partner avoids you or tries to always be with you.

### **Instructions:**

The steps from 1 to 2 must be carried out individually.

#### **1.**

##### **First step:**

Observe the illustration.

#### **2.**

##### **Second step:**

Think of two situations in your couple relationship; the first one should be a negative situation; the second one is a positive situation. For both you should choose a door / gate that would represent it. Work in pairs.

#### **3.**

##### **Third step:**

Share your situations with your partner.

## REFLECTIONS

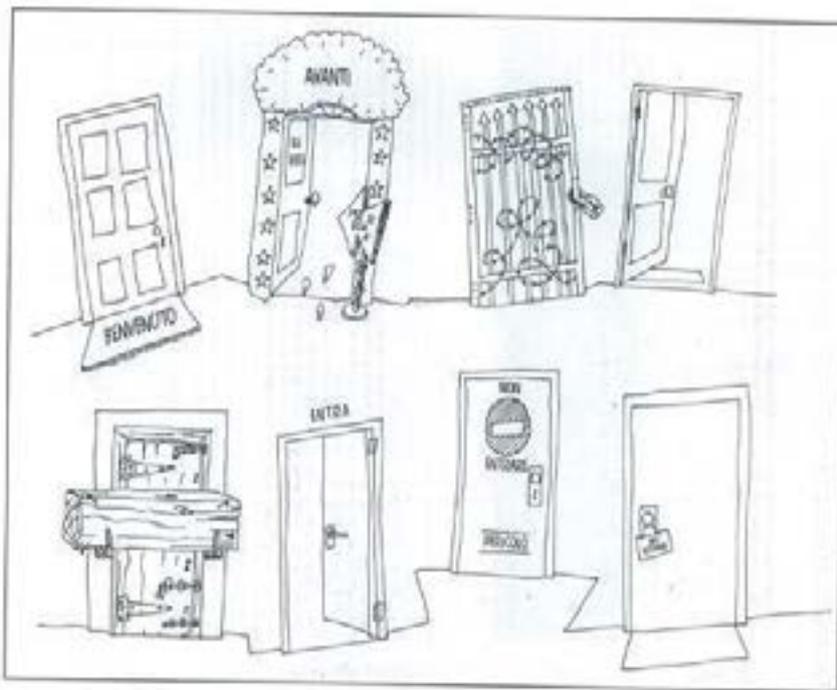
Share with your partner how you feel in the situation represented by the door / gate chosen.

### LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

A rather common problem for many is that we adapt easily to certain situations that are not very good for us, so sometimes we believe that certain situations are the norm. One way to share the pain of exclusion is to talk about past negative experiences together. If you have had unconstituted or unbalanced relationships for years, this type of pain can be very strong.

### ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION / PRACTICE

Compare with your partner on how to avoid situations in which you exclude yourself? What are the points of disappointment that distance you from your partner?



## Exercise

**Title:**

**I SEE YOU ... I FEEL<sup>31</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**

60 min

**Goal(s):**

- To foster the bond of the couple, the sense of indivisibility
- To let people savour the sense of fullness and wholeness

**Methods used:**

GC

**Problem/ Challenge:** #communication

**Key words:**

#emotions

#empathy

**Space:**

Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**

None

## EXPERIENCE/EXERCISE

The verbalisation of emotions is a communicative tool that, if used sensibly and contextually, makes us slip into the other's shoes for a few moments, thus raising us from our need for self-centeredness and protagonism.

### Instructions:

In pairs.

#### 1.

##### First step:

Each of the two partners expresses a descriptive communication to which they add their feelings, possibly positive, towards their partner, for example: „***This morning I see you laughing and this fills me with joy***”.

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<sup>31</sup> Menditto, M. (2008). Comunicazione e relazione, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, p. 150.

## 2.

### Second step:

Each of the two partners expresses their impressions

### **REFLECTIONS**

- How communication has changed



- How did I feel with my partner, closer or further away?

### **LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)**

The communication problems that you could find ‘inside’ a couple, could often hinder the expression of feelings to a partner. In this way one risks losing the skill to empathise with them. Empathy involves; participation, authenticity, acceptance, boundaries, inclusion, listening, respect, flexibility, relaxation, time, message, emotion, action and alliance.

The term empathy also indicates the ability to identify oneself with another person to understand their thoughts and moods, as an “affective response appropriate to the situation of another person rather than one’s own” (Hoffman, 1981, p. 44).

With this exercise we want to help you back to empathising with your partner to allow you to recognise your feelings and be able to consider a partner’s point of view.

### **ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION/ PRACTICE**

You could talk in pairs how you felt during this exercise.

Decide for an agreed time during the coming days (for example during supper?) when you exchange at least one sentence to each other such as, “what I see and what I feel, while I am with my partner”.

You can practice this exercise at least three times per week.

## Exercise

**Title:**  
**UNRESOLVED ISSUES<sup>32</sup>**

**Time needed for exercise:**  
90 min

**Goals:**

- To raise awareness of the unexpressed feelings
- To help partners improve their communication

**Methods used:**  
GC

**Problem/ Challenge:**  
#communication

**Key words:**  
#feelings #awareness #channelingemotionalenergy

**Space:**  
Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**  
Illustrated sheets, pens, pencils, colours

### EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE

Repressed feelings, not communicated or not dealt with („unresolved questions”) that can be sensed by a partner, can be very difficult to bear. These are feelings that do not disappear by themselves and can cause a constant state of anxiety.

Unexpressed pain, anger, resentment, guilt, etc. or even positive unexpressed feelings, such as love or affection, can absorb a considerable amount of time and energy which we need to cope with other things or to experience other emotional situations. Furthermore, the tension deriving from unexpressed feelings can be manifested through the body.

Therefore in many cases the repressed feelings hide underlying needs that the partners are rarely aware of.

**Example:** In a mixed relationship there are examples where the partners have culturally different habits, such as mealtimes. For example where an Italian partner had rigid eating habits, while their Bulgarian partner ate whenever they were hungry.

<sup>32</sup> Sunderland M. (1997), Disegnare le emozioni, Gardolo (Tn), Erickson, pp. 130-131.

This dynamic provoked tensions caused by unexpressed feelings, because the Italian partner dismissed the habits of the other partner as a lack of respect. Fortunately, the couple later discussed and reached an agreement, because the partners expressed to each other how they lived in that situation and the cultural motivations that pushed them to have those attitudes.

### **Instructions:**

#### **1.**

##### **First step:**

Think of all the unexpressed feelings you have towards your partner and that oppresses you. These are feelings that you have never communicated directly to your partner, but which you have always repressed or complained of to someone else. For example: A sense of guilt or anger, or a pain. In contrast, you may also have held back positive feelings, such as love or admiration.

Steps 2 to 4 must be taken individually (use the list of Reframing „Faux-Feelings”).

#### **2.**

##### **Second step:**

In the illustration sheet, write down what feelings are involved.

#### **3.**

##### **Third step:**

Try to free some of these feelings

#### **4.**

##### **Fourth step:**

Ask yourself: What do you need to do or tell your partner to alleviate this burden?

#### **5.**

##### **Fifth step:**

You work in pairs - communicate to your partner what you wrote, explaining it to them.

## REFLECTIONS

Discuss together how it went, trying to answer the following questions:

- Have you written the ,unresolved questions’ on the paper with difficulty or very easily?  
In both cases the reason for the possible difficulty or simplicity should be investigated.



- How did you feel while illustrating the paper and your feelings to your partner?



- What were your fears?



- While you illustrated on the paper and the feelings to your partner how did you feel?



- What was your partner’s reaction?

## LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE (THEORY)

The communication problems that you could have inside your ‘couple’ could often hinder you expressing your feelings to your partner. In this way you risk losing the skills to empathise with them. Empathy involves; participation, authenticity, acceptance, boundaries, inclusion, listening, respect, flexibility, relaxation, time, message, emotion, action and alliance.

The term empathy indicates the ability to identify oneself with another person to understand their thoughts and moods, is an “affective response appropriate to the situation of another person rather than one’s own”<sup>33</sup>. With this exercise we want to help you to go back to empathise with your partner to allow you to recognise your feelings and be able to take your partner’s point of view.

## ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION / PRACTICE

Now that you have achieved the awareness of your feelings, do you want to express to your partner feelings of anger and affection at least 5 times this week?

- How do you think you can implement this skill in your family life?
  - What would you avoid doing?
  - What would you like to remember about that?

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<sup>33</sup> Hoffman, M. L. (1981). Foundations of family therapy. New York, Basic Books, p. 44.

## Chapter 5c: Thrive together

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Do you remember the moment you reached out for the Meet Me Halfway Guide? What was the reason, true motive for that? Can you awake the memories, what were your feelings and what were you thinking starting this trip together. Were you hoping for more connectedness, mutual understanding, sense of belonging and sharing the love which brought you two together?

Were you honest enough to go through the steps and accomplish the proposed 5 steps journey?

Even though the journey of the two of you lasts much longer. Each journey starts with a first step and it's always a step ahead. So, let's wrap up this experience and see what are the treasures you have collected on the way.

In this chapter we'd focus on the gratitude to oneself and upon one another. Why? Because "Gratitude is literally one of the few things that can measurably change people's lives," as researcher Robert Emmons writes in his book Thanks! His studies suggest that gratitude can improve our health and relationships—making it one of the most well-studied and effective ways to increase our well-being in life.

It is important to emphasise that those studies are the result of exploring western mostly individualistic American culture. And by now, you are more, then aware, culture influences our behaviours, expressing gratitude and well-being connected to expressing it. More straightforward and verbal gratitude you could expect in the USA, Italy and more connective gratitude in China or Korea.

But after all, gratitude is one of the human universal needs. It doesn't matter how expressed, as it is a way to celebrate and acknowledge efforts and successes in the common path.



***"If our gratitude relates to other people in our lives, our body also secretes oxytocin (known as the love hormone). "It may seem easy to be thankful when someone feels happy, but it's actually the other way around. It is gratitude that can result in a feeling of happiness"***

***(Liv Larsson).***

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Gratitude helps us to enjoy and appreciate good moments, and it has a positive effect on our self-confidence and self-esteem. Thanks to her, we contact the inner power. We have greater access to our resources, including agency and willingness to act, thanks to which we more often notice how many different ways we can enrich the lives of others and our own.

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Thanks to gratitude, it is easier for us to look at ourselves, others and the world around us with favour and kindness. Thanks to it, it is also easier for us to get along with others and build a sense of belonging and bonds.”<sup>34</sup>

## Exercise

**Title:**  
**TREASURE CHEST**

**Time needed for exercise:**  
60 min

**Goals:**

- The purpose of this exercise is to evaluate all journey and acknowledge gratitude and appreciation both to oneself and each other for the effort and benefits picked up being on the road
- Celebrate successes (new knowledge, attitude, change)
- Fostering sense of belonging and love

**Methods used:**  
NVC, CCC

**Problem/ Challenge:**  
#communication

**Key words:**  
#values #connection #gratitude

**Space:**  
Calm, peaceful, home environment

**Materials:**  
no materials needed

Might be an outdoor activity in natural environment embracing the experience, for instance having a gratitude walk in the forest

If you want to anchor this experience, you may write down things you discovered in the exercise you want to celebrate and remember and make the common treasure chest – a beautiful box, which could be filled each time you experience something you want to thank yourself or your partner for in the context of sharing love and life together.

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<sup>34</sup> Alfabet empatii, Vesna Lorenc, Joanna Berendt, p. 94

## Instructions:

**1.** 5 minutes - Take time to reconnect to yourself. We have different needs, so It might take a different form for each person. Just to inspire you, you could do a breathing exercise with counting up and down inhaling and exhaling; you could make a short guided meditation or maybe you could just stay in present silence for 5 minutes to become more aware of what you think, feel and need.

**2.** 10 minutes – Take time to recall the most significant memories and key learnings from our common journey. Think both about bright and dark moments – In the end, you learn from each experience. If it's hard to recall the memories, this part of the exercise might be done together as a dialogue and practice of speaking and listening. So if choosing this option, pay attention that each partner has the half of the time.

**3.** 20 minutes each partner, 40 minutes in total.

Decide who goes first. The role of the listener is to support and listen actively ([active listening](#)). The first speaker starts to speak. Don't rush, take your time, even if it means you might be silent for a while. Start to name what you are grateful for in this specific learning process, both to yourself, to your partner, to others.

We encourage you to use the language of feelings and needs and speak in present tense, i.e. I'm grateful for connectedness, even if it describes the past activities which you would refer to ([Appendix Deck of feelings and needs](#)).

Example:

***“I realised that having a quarrel, I tend to freeze and shut down, not expressing myself enough. It was bringing some misunderstandings and miscommunication, which was painful for me. Now I take my time to reflect and I'm ready to speak up for myself. I appreciate my openness and trust both to myself and to you, that I could do it in a safe way.”***

***“I celebrate the time we spent on the exercises. It gives me hope and a sense of connection and quality of communication and mutual understanding. I also like the collaboration we have.”***

Then, swap in the pair and do step 3, once more.

**4.** Now, when you are done with the exchange of gratitude, think of having a one step further celebration process, going for the date together. It might be a favourite restaurant, picnic, road trip or any kind of activities that would nourish both sides.

### **REFLECTIONS:**

This is the end of the Meet Me Halfway journey, but it doesn't mean the journey ends for you. It might be the new beginning of the more conscious, aware and mindful way of being and sharing life with someone.

Take advantage of it. And take your time to reflect on how you would like to remember about all your findings and reflections. May the force of this treasure stay with you as long as it serves you.

There is still one part of the Guide ahead. You could do it in the row or take a break and come back to it in a while. It takes you through an Emotional Management 5 steps journey. Enjoy!

## **Emotional Management (EM)**

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06.

You have accomplished a 5 step journey. There is one more trip we would like to offer you, which is mostly about managing emotions and the ability to discharge them, in a safe way.

Take your advantage and use the guidelines from this chapter. There are also reference audio materials from the real live sessions with our couples. You can listen to them and get inspired.



## **THE 5 STEPS TRIP**

### **Introduction**

Relationships have always been a big challenge for people. We want to live in harmony and connection with other human beings, and when we take the step of living, as a couple, we find both precious moments and these that are not so pleasant.

Conflicts and difficulties soon appear. Differences become visible and are often a source of conflict.

In our lives, we often find conflicts of interest. Most of them are simple communication problems that can be solved just by offering some information. This is possible because when we do not have emotional internal conflicts, our minds are flexible, understanding and seek for cooperation.

Even so, when we talk about conflicts, we don't usually refer to these everyday situations, but to those situations in which conflicts are prolonged in time, they get stuck and generate uncomfortable feelings, such as irritation, frustration, grief, etc.

Understanding how the mind works will help us to have a better perspective on the origins of the conflicts within ourselves and with the people around us.

When our mind is immersed in deep feelings, the limbic area kidnaps the prefrontal part of our brain, preventing it from performing many of its functions.

When this happens, we lose the ability to be flexible and to think fresh. During the conflicts in which we are affected by this effect (called „re-stimulation”), we run into bad results again and again.

Understanding our mind will help us to diagnose, more efficiently, the root of the problems and be able to provide more adequate solutions to the conflicts we have in our relationships.

Emotional management helps us to become aware that we need and can discharge, that we can take the initiative and be in charge of the situations, so that the relationships go as we want.

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## **SOME IMPORTANT IDEAS ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT:**

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### ***\*Our minds work like a five-star restaurant.***

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The mind is like a restaurant and it is busy ‘cooking’, throughout our lives. Everything is processed in our minds: our life experiences, the orders sent to the body, what we live in the present, remember the past or project the future. It is a vital organ that works 24 hours a day, throughout all of our lives, whether we are aware of it or not.

The mind’s restaurant has everything it needs to cook and it is designed to work perfectly. It has cabinets and drawers to store experiences in, areas to mix ingredients and create delicious dishes, detergents and soaps to clean different types of stains, cooks and assistants to receive orders and waiters to deliver them.

We could say that, when we come into this world, we have a five-star restaurant, eager to do the best job it can and fully ready to do so.

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### ***\*We are told not to trust our minds.***

---

From very early in our lives, we are told (in several ways) not to trust our team of chefs (our thoughts) and to do things in a certain way (the way we are told). Of course, no one directly tells us to distrust our minds, although sometimes our intelligence can be insulted and belittled. In many societies, we grow up in environments where we are told what to do and what is and is not good for us.

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We are surrounded by constant messages, telling us that we 'don't know what is the best and that our behaviours are inadequate and need to be changed. This becomes especially severe when we show our feelings.

From a very young age, when we get angry, sad or excited with joy, people around us try to downplay our feelings, correcting them or even directly oppressing them with force, so that we change our way of feeling, perceiving things and behaving.

Broadly speaking, when we talk about "being told to distrust our minds", we refer to all the subtle (and not so subtle) mistreatments that we receive when we are young, due to the unique and special way that we see life.

In particular, when we are kids, we are pressured into **cooking a lot** in our restaurants (doing too much) and **cleaning up little** (not showing our feelings). Every time we try to clean our counter (freely discharge our feelings), we are distracted and given something else to deal with or pressured into calming down, preventing us from cleaning our internal kitchen. As we don't clean, the kitchen is dirty and both new ingredients (internal desires) and new orders (information from the outside) become contaminated with dirt from the past (emotional wounds that have not been processed).

So, little by little, we accumulate more and more dirt (distressing feelings); the way in which we function becomes more laborious, rigid and clumsy; we lack joy in our relationships, in our work; things go from bad to worse; accidents happen, actions get out of control; and our whole organism, the people and the environment that surrounds us are affected by the bad running of our restaurants (minds).

We go from having five-star restaurants, to having mediocre bars. With the passage of time and the accumulation of dirt (distresses), the kitchen gets worse, we stop cooking (chronic discouragement) and start living on fast food (repetitive and monotonous actions), which is processed and bland.

Many of us have spent years without cleaning (freely discharging our feelings) our dirty restaurants (our minds). We refrained from cleaning and now we find we have 30 or 40 years of accumulated dirt. Our restaurants are not what they once were.

They may be in better or worse states and maybe we will even eat some good meals and work well, in many areas, but they are no longer the five-star restaurants we once had, and this profoundly affects our lives.



***\*We need to analyse the state of our minds and pay attention to two important areas.***

---

Firstly, as we are working without cleaning up, we get used to cooking in a small part of the kitchen, because everywhere else is dirty. We have stopped making certain desserts, because the cooking utensils we need are dirty and, every time we use them, they don't make their function right.

Secondly, apart from working in dirty kitchens (accumulation of damages) and that we are using unsatisfactory ingredients (confused information), we are dealing with very complex orders (external daily situations that are difficult to manage) and a very tired staff (exhaustion and stress).

Still, we do an amazing job. We are able to make good decisions most of the time, we can hold back a lot, we can get up every day and try to do our best, we can take care of the people around us, as much as possible, and we can keep fighting to improve our lives.

We know that our lives are far from perfect and that we don't see difficulties in our lives as challenges that can be enjoyed (as we did in childhood). Our restaurants and kitchens are still working, they are not completely broken. They are just rusted and stained and have run out of supplies, due to lack of care and the abuse that they have received.

This is really important to remember, because it is easy to fall into negativity about all of the work that needs to be done to recover the health of our minds or we may just feel bad generally, because we are not fit.

The reality is that the original restaurant is still perfect, it is intact and willing to function and give its best. What we need is a new way of working, organising, breaking old habits and spending more time "cleaning".

The fact is that we are going to spend more time cleaning up than we would like to.

The kitchen is not going to stop working whilst we do so, meaning that it will still continue accumulating dirty spots, in the meantime. But perhaps, once we become aware that the kitchen does get dirty, we may try to be cleaner and not expose it to so many incidents, dirt and bad habits. Even so, whenever we cook, we will need to scrub and clean (discharge our feelings) a little.

Although we may not like it, the mind does need to process the information we receive, regardless if it is good quality information or full of pain and distress.

So, we will need to clean as we cook (as we experience), but at the same time, we also want to recover those Michelin stars we had when the restaurant started up. We will need to clean up old stains (early memories), check knots (distressing patterns) and see the state of the ingredients that we have been given (inherited beliefs).

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We will examine carefully which ones are in good condition and which ones can contaminate our dishes.

All of this may seem like a lot of work and not worth doing. It may seem more important to continue doing what we have been told since childhood: that we should keep looking forward, stay strong, keep working and producing without stopping and that we should continue ignoring and not giving importance to those things that affect us, emotionally.

The implications and repercussions of not cleaning properly or just cleaning the surface are obvious, in our everyday living.

Just as there are people who do not want to spend time repairing and cleaning up the consequences of many years of distress, there are others that forget that life continues and that they have to cook and clean, at the same time. We need to find a good balance and accept that cleanliness is important and that it will accompany us for life, while we continue cooking and enjoying everyday activities.

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***\*We can recover from any kind of damage***

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If people are allowed and encouraged to tell the stories of their lives, in detail, and show their feelings about it, while being listened to, by other people with full attention and respect, they will begin to recover from their past experiences, will remember their strengths and feel the good areas of their life, that sometimes might be difficult to recognise.

When this happens, they also recover the hidden thoughts and feelings that lay underneath the conditioning of the damage. When people are able to feel and show what it has been like for them, personally, to feel and express any kind of past anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, connection, etc., they will recover more quickly from the damage, becoming more and more restored and connected to themselves and human nature.

The simple fact of talking about an oppressive situation is a powerful antidote to the unconscious and confusing feelings that we had to internalise, in the past, in order to face the unjust situation that we were living through, at the time.

All the effects of an abusive situation can be cured if the person has enough time, attention and understanding.

Without this recovery, any kind of anger, grief or fear from the past will continue to affect the quality and the course of the person's life in the present, both in conscious and unconscious ways.



Recovering from an abusive situation is not a quick or easy job. Many of us resist it. We may feel that we have been able to endure this life fine, up until now, whilst hiding these stories. It may seem unbearable to look at and feel those situations again, perhaps, because for a long time, we have not had the opportunity to tell our stories.

We survived by not allowing ourselves to feel what happened again, by ‘anesthetizing’ ourselves in the face of the damage, and accepting that the only thing we could do was to try to secretly control those feelings inside of us.

We now know that emotional discharge is good, it is possible and recommended. Now we know that everyone can be free from the effects of bad past experiences and that those unbearable feelings do not persist, once the recovery process begins.

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### ***\*Doing Sessions - What to expect?***

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This tool can be used by any person/couple, to free themselves from the effects of distresses and oppressions, and recover their full intelligence, flexibility and humanity again.

While these sessions are effective addressing a full range of oppressions and other experiences of abuse and / or emotional distress, this document focuses on addressing issues of sexism and male domination. Men have also found that this method is effective in getting rid of the mistreatment that hurts them and makes them act as agents of sexism.

Sessions also work well when a small group of women (or men) gather together and take turns listening to each other, on certain specific topics that affect them directly just due to their identity. We call this a “support group”. Four to eight people seems to be the optimal size for a group. Groups can meet as often or as many times as the group members want.

In support groups, someone acts as a group facilitator, to help decide how much time each person has, who will go first, and so on. Each person has the same amount of time to participate, while the rest of the group just listens. Using a timer can be useful to make sure everyone has the same amount of time.

The facilitator can actively support each member and encourage the discharge of painful feelings. The facilitator can also remind the group about the importance of confidentiality, help the group to plan their next meeting and, generally, make sure that everything is working well.

People from any similar origins/identities can use a support group, to work on different issues concerning their identity (for example, what they like about being a woman, what is difficult, what they want others to understand about their situation, and so on).

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When each person has had their turn to be heard, the meeting can end with each person sharing what they liked the most about being in the group meeting, or something they are willing to do, in the next few hours or days.

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***\*Twenty ideas to start sessions.***

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A session is the exercise of, at least, two people trying to help, support and listen to each other, exchanging the same amount of time, in each role (participant - listener).

Many times, when we start exchanging time to listen to each other, we feel like talking and telling things. Other times, due to the intensity of having someone offering us full attention, it happens that we are left blank and it does not come to us what to talk about.

Therefore, we propose a series of questions or topics that can stimulate important areas of our lives and/or emotional discharges.

The next proposals should be used just as a stimulus to interrupt the blockages that sometimes prevent us from starting to show ourselves and share our feelings. Once the person who is dealing with these questions begins to participate and speak, the most important thing is that the listener should just accompany their process and let their mind go wherever it needs to go, even if it is deviating from the initial question.

**Questions to stimulate the mind and feelings:**

1. Tell the story of your life.
2. Tell your life's most beautiful moments.
3. Tell one of the experiences that marked your life intensively.
4. Tell one thing that has already been worth living for.
5. What did you dream about today?
6. Tell an addiction you have and how you started with it.
7. How is your family and your relationships with each family member?
8. Talk about someone important that you have lost in your life.  
What did you like about that person?
9. A dream you had when you were little. Did you give up on your dream?  
What did people say about it?
10. What happened to the dream?
11. What would you like to do today?
12. What would you like your life to be like 20 years from now?  
What do you need to do today to go in that direction?



13. How were your first love relationships?
14. What would be the conditions necessary to make your life go better?
15. How is your relationship with violence?
16. What things do you like about yourself and what things you don't like?
17. What kind of things you can't stand or they irritate you?
18. Have you ever had an accident?
19. Which cultural events do you like the most?
20. What's your connection to religion?

### **\*More detailed description about the sessions:**

#### **Basic structure of a session or a support group**

A session consists of two or more people, taking turns to listen to each other. It's very easy to start, only two people are needed. Find a friend, your partner or someone close with whom you can practice. Agree on the equal amount of time for the turns that each person will use to listen to the other, without interruptions.

Once the main agreements are made, agree on who will participate first, about whatever they want to work on. We call this person the '**participant**' and the other one the '**listener**'.

The function of the listener is simply to listen with attention and interest, to understand as much as possible about the situation without interruptions, advice, comments or questions and without offering solutions or talking about how they feel regarding the topic that the participant is working about.

After the agreed time is over, the participant becomes the listener and the listener becomes the participant, having the opportunity to work on what they want.

It is important to remember that everything that is said in a session, does not get out of the session. We call this Confidentiality. Having this type of security allows us to work and express much more.

This process becomes more effective, the more often it is practiced. The sessions can last as long as you like. Even a few minutes of sharing can make a big difference in our ability to think and function.

Using a timer will help us to manage the times equally and be unconcerned about whether we are managing it properly.

## **The role of the listener**

The attitude that we have, as listeners in our sessions, will make a difference on how secure the participant feels and will, therefore, impact their ability to have deeper reflections, to feel more and to be able to show themselves, completely.

If we can listen and enjoy the presence of the person who participates, assuming that this person is intelligent, powerful and caring, we will create a helpful environment and facilitate their emotional expression. Make sure to keep the focus on the participant.

Try not to share similar experiences you had or any of your own memories that pop into your head. Be aware of your emotional reactions and try to keep them to the side.

This is time to pay attention to the other person's issues, not to yours. Try not to analyse, judge, advise or solve their problems. It is more efficient to trust in the mind of the participant and give them space to process. Trust in the possibilities and in the session that is taking place.

We have all been deeply conditioned to try to 'solve' people's problems, when they show us their difficulties. Therefore, we must compensate for this tendency, by saying little or even nothing, during the session.

It is very possible that after the initial discomfort, you are surprised by the good use that a person makes of being listened to, for a long time, with attention, in a relaxed way.

Listening to someone with complete attention and respect, while showing that everything they say, show or share is important, is a profound contradiction to the oppressive messages and abuse they experienced, since childhood.

Often, it is possible that the participant will begin to laugh, cry, yawn, tremble or sweat. These are natural ways in which we discharge accumulated tensions. It's a good symptom and it means that we are listening very well. When these emotional discharges do occur, it means that we are recovering from the received damages. We need these forms of emotional discharge to occur, to complete the recovering processes.

In the beginning, we will feel very uncomfortable, but it's a sign of progress, both for the listener (in creating the necessary environment so that this can happen) and for the participant (as they are discharging old accumulated tensions).

When these emotional discharges occur, it means that the participant feels fear, shame, grief, anger, etc., that they suffered and accumulated previously (since they were not able to discharge, in the past, for any reason), and the body is now beginning to recover and process those old feelings.

The listener should continue paying attention, listening in a relaxed, calm way, without interrupting the emotional discharge process.

### **Steps to being a good listener:**

Listeners should:

- Remember and reflect on the reality of how good the participant is.
- Make the re-emergence of the participant one of your objectives.
- Remind themselves over and over again that the person in front is important, has a great intelligence, has great decision-making capacity and in addition to being strong, also needs support to get out of their distress.
- Notice and point out what that person is already capable of doing, how precious this is and in which areas they are already functioning elegantly well (or very close to doing so).
- Pay enough attention to identify the participant's distress.
- Think about how to contradict the distress.
- Contradict the distress sufficiently and stimulate the emotional discharge.

(A contradiction to a distressing memory is something that allows the participant to see the distress and separate it from reality).

**Help the participant to sustain the emotional discharge. Keep redirecting the attention of the participant to their emotional discharge and make them remember that when we discharge, we are recovering from the past damages.**

Your role as a listener is to fight, together with your participants, against the distress they have. You don't do the work of the participant, but you simply do not leave that person alone in their process.

When you go to a session, as a listener, it will help if you show delight, approval, respect, trust, high (and relaxed) expectations, commitment and affection. If you can, think about that person and design possible contradictions. As a listener, try to put aside anything that could interfere with your listening ability, keep your attention on the person and listen, by displaying all of the previous attitudes.

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**“90% of being a good listener is simply paying good attention to those who share their stories”.**

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## **How do we act in the role of a participant**

When it's our turn to be a participant, we can start by sharing good things that have happened to us, even though they were big or small. This could be a beautiful sunset, meeting with a friend, solving a problem or something that you are happy with.

Starting this way helps us realise that not everything is horrible or goes wrong. Things usually go much better than we are able to appreciate, under the traction and influence that distresses have on our lives.

Focusing only on 'bad news' and the disinformation that surrounds us makes people feel a profound discouragement and helplessness. These painful feelings try to paralyse us, or make us apathetic or frantic. None of these feelings help us to eliminate oppression and they make it difficult for us to enjoy life, as we deserve.

Sessions are also a good moment to talk about recent events that have irritated us. You will see how being listened to about these incidents, by someone who pays attention without trying to give advice or interrupt, allows you to have a better perspective of what happened and how to react, in future similar situations.

You will, usually, find good solutions or, at least, something new that you want to put to the test. The only thing needed is someone who trusts our ability to think and the ability of our brains to find fresh and new solutions, when we are allowed to express ourselves, with freedom and space.

For many people it is useful to ask themselves what this incident reminds us of; when was the first time that we remember having a similar feeling to the one being experienced now.

If we do this regularly, instead of placing all our attention on our present situation, we will soon realise that most of the things we presently feel have very old roots. Going to what we call "early memories" is very useful and it speeds up our recovery processes.

You can also use your sessions to tell the story of your life, from many different perspectives (the friends I have had, the accidents suffered, achievements made, difficult times, my relationship with money, etc.).

One of the strategies that also accelerates the liberation processes is to use part of our session to value and appreciate ourselves, as well as to set objectives in the short, medium and long term.

As you can see, the possibilities of how to use your time are endless and although in the beginning, it seems difficult to know what to say or how to make use of someone's attention, with time, you will know very well how to follow what your mind brings up and you will begin to trust in your own process.



In general, because of the dynamics of social oppressions, when we want to work on a specific area, such as sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, etc., it is better to do it with someone who shares this identity with us.

During the sessions, everyone gains attention and the ability to listen and be heard, even the people who live in oppressive roles (everyone inhabits, at least, one of these roles).

At the end of the session, especially if you have been working on something difficult for you, take a moment to redirect your attention to something you want to do next, to some object in the room or any other topic, such as your favourite food.

This will help you move your mind away from the hard work done and bring your attention back into the present moment.

This process is simple but it is not easy. It's up to each person to try it and see if it makes sense for them or not.

When you go to a session, as a participant, you have thought and reflected about what you want to work on and how to make the session go well, committing to openly sharing your thoughts and feelings, trying to connect and follow your listener's proposals, while trying to favour emotional discharges.

### **\*How to organise your process?**

To help your process, we recommend trying to do, at least, one or two sessions per week.

Sometimes, when we begin, we can find it difficult and we do less. Congratulations! Keep fighting and don't feel bad if you don't succeed, in the beginning. Many experienced listeners take more than two or three years to start having continuity in their sessions. It takes time and it can be a struggle for our minds.

Before deciding to support and listen to your partner, it may be helpful to have some clarifications. But, we have found that when a couple is encouraged to support each other, using these listening tools, one of the most common mistakes is to use the sessions to communicate to the other person, things that we, normally, do not dare to communicate.

The purpose of these kinds of sessions is not to communicate ideas to our partner or to try to resolve daily conflicts.

The real objective of these sessions is to take responsibility for those feelings that do not allow us to function well and use the attention and affection of our partner, to help us navigate through the memories and incidents of our memory. This way, we will be able to discharge the distresses that are preventing us from thinking and functioning with flexibility and freshness, in the present.

## **EXPERIENCE / EXERCISE**

### **Context for the exercises:**

Among intercultural couples, it has been observed a very usual pattern of „hiding” part of our cultural heritage and identity. It allows us to better „fit in”, both in the social environment around us, with family and even with our own partner.

The reality is that each person is unique, has their own language, culture, social traits and qualities that make them special and different. Each person has their own way of understanding and reacts emotionally to the world around them. Sometimes, communicating how we feel can be difficult, especially in contexts where there are great cultural and social differences, such as among intercultural couples.

Adapting and fitting into the new social environments, in which we live, is very important in order to socialise and maintain quality relationships, but sometimes it has a strong emotional price that can affect us, both personally and as a couple.

The following dynamic is designed to support intercultural couples, in these emotional areas, using the tools of deep listening (sessions) that we have described in previous chapters, and that we will review again. This proposal consists of sharing a process of mutual support, based on 5 phases, using the analogy of a metaphorical journey, as an excuse to support each other, in areas that are sometimes difficult, due to the amount of feelings that they generate.

The five phases that we will go through will be:

- 1. „Packing for the trip”.**
- 2. „Approaching the river”.**
- 3. „Crossing the river”.**
- 4. „Climbing the mountain”.**
- 5. „Campfire and celebration”.**

We present these five phases, to be carried out, continuously. However, each couple can choose how to use these proposals and modify them, based on their needs.

## Exercise

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**Title:****DEEP LISTENING SESSIONS**

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**Time needed for the exercises:**

between 90 and 120 min.

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**Goals:**

- Connect and learn more about the other person's reality.
  - Discharge accumulated feelings and distresses.
  - Build a relationship of mutual support, based on respect and responsibility.
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**Methods used:**

Deep listening sessions.

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**Problem/ Challenge:**

#Identity #communication #cultural differences  
#culturalunconsciousness #livinginaculture  
#adaptatiostress  
#pressure

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**Key words:**

#connection #listening #support #family

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**Space:**

An intimate space, without distractions, private, secure from noise (both to have privacy and not to disturb neighbours or other people).  
A calm, peaceful, home environment.

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**Materials:**

Comfortable clothes, paper and pencil, in case it is needed to take notes, water, tissues and a countdown timer (almost all mobile phones already have this function in the clock).

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**Alternations:**

The time for each turn is split equally, for both partners.  
With experience, you can suggest as many variations as the couple needs.

This methodology can be used to work on any topic you want.  
The only thing you need to do is, in Phase 1 („Packing for the trip”), negotiate with the partner and agree on the methodology to be used.

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## **Chapter 6a: Packing for the trip**

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### **Each couple partner has 5 minutes of “Think and listen”, to think about the whole process**

For a trip to be successful, it is necessary to make a good preparation and, in this first phase („**Packing for the trip**”), we will work to lay the foundations of the process we want to carry out, with our partner. The main objective is to communicate, to the other person, in which areas we want to work, during this process, what things we hope to achieve and also to organise all the practical aspects, such as the amount of time we will dedicate to each of the phases, etc. The methodology is the same, in all phases, it consists of exchanging time to work/participate, or what we call „sessions”.

In this first phase, we will do what we call a “Mini”, which is a session that lasts for a short time. This will help us to warm up and gain connection and attention.

The first thing we have to do is to agree on how much time we are going to spend on it. Our proposal is to do about 5 minutes, for each person. This means that, during five minutes, one person will take the role of participant and the other one the role of listener. Then, the roles are interchanged, and the person who was participating listens to the other, for 5 minutes.

Sometimes, it happens that 5 minutes are too short for all the things we need to communicate. In those cases, once the round is over (both people have listened and participated), another extra round can be done, adjusting the time to what is deemed necessary.

It is important to remember that each person can have very different work objectives, and that, in no case, it is a problem, since what is pursued with this dynamic is to explore and communicate those areas of our life that are affecting us and making life difficult, due to interculturality or to our identities.

It is usual that, when we start with this dynamic, we try to use the time to solve couple conflicts, to reach agreements on the practical life or to ask the other person things that otherwise we do not usually dare.

It is important to remember that none of these things is what we aim for by exchanging time, and in the case that it is indeed what we want to do, it has to be clearly agreed, at the beginning, so that both parties are aware and ready for it.

During these sessions, we are not trying to come to any agreement, nor giving advice to the other person about how to solve their problems. What we are doing is supporting this person's process, so that they can have a clearer perspective of the difficulties they are having and discharge the tensions caused by these problems.

In general, what we are going to do, in these sessions, is just to listen and help the other person to think about their life and to create an environment of security and trust, that may allow the person to explore how they feel and show it, through an emotional discharge. When this happens, our neural and hormonal systems are regulated and we are able to think and act, with much more freshness, attention and connection.

If this policy of mutual support, where each person treats the other with respect, while each one takes responsibility for their own process, is well followed, what usually happens is that the connection and trust between two people increases, facilitating their relationship and life.

Therefore, in this first mini-session, we will exchange five minutes with each person, to share what areas we want to work on and what we want to achieve, during this process.

We should keep in mind that this process can be done, as many times as necessary, so it is more effective to try to be precise and look for one or two specific ideas.

If you are blank, at the beginning, here are some inspiring questions that you can try to answer, during your time:

- What is affecting me lately in my life?
- What area would I like to work on with you?
- How much time would I like to spend on this today?

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## **Chapter 6b: Approaching the river**

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### **5 minutes for each person, to reconnect and strengthen the bond.**

This second "Mini" session aims to generate a strong connection between two individuals, so as to face the „road" ahead.

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Our minds tend to focus on problems, on things that are affecting us, that need a “**solution**” or that are not going well. This is because it is our body’s natural way of trying to solve anything that gets in the way of our health, whether it concerns us physically, emotionally or mentally.

The reality is that, whenever we want to carry out any „**healing**” process, it is advisable to be loaded with strength, to be able to face the process that the body will have to endure in that path.

Therefore, before jumping over difficult or deep areas, we recommend taking a little time for what we call “**reconnecting**”, both with ourselves and with our partner.

This work consists of paying attention to things that are going well right now, and we call it „Goods and News” or „Paying attention to the Present”.

As we have done, in the first phase, we will exchange five minutes with each person, trying to access those feelings that make the person in front of us important in our lives.

For those who do not know how to answer or start with this topic, we leave some inspiring questions that can help with it:

What do you mean to me?

One of the most beautiful memories I have had in my life with you?

If I die tomorrow... Why was it worth having you in my life?

This last question is the one we like the most, but if it is answered honestly, usually it opens up strong emotional processes (such as crying or light trembling). In the case that this happens, you just have to let yourself go and feel and show what you are feeling. The person who is listening should stay calm and remind the person who is discharging that this is part of the process and that everything is fine.

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## **Chapter 6c: Crossing the river**

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**10 minutes for each person, to work on the  
“EARLY MEMORIES” that separate us**

This phase is the most delicate and difficult to work on, since it means to work on or listen to the other person working on personal conflicts that you both may have.

That is why we share a very particular proposal and a very specific methodology.

Session of 10 minutes for each person.

The participant can use the first two minutes to talk about what irritates them, in the relationship, what makes it difficult or what issues bring so many feelings. In this phase, it is important for the listener to ask the question:

***„What do I need to know so that you can be closer to me?“***

The next 2 minutes, the participant will make visible that those feelings are not new and in fact they are very old... It is time to take responsibility and realise that our feelings are our own, and the anger, disappointments, hopes, expectations, etc. are related to our oldest memories and experiences (“early memories”).

During these two minutes, the participant tries to give voice to this reflection and, little by little, she or he should make the decision, out loud, that the most efficient and meaningful thing to do is to work on those “early memories”.

The remaining six minutes will be used to work on the early memories (childhood memories) that comes to mind, whatever form it takes, it does not matter if the memory may seem to have something to do with it or not... our work, as participants, will be to tell, in detail, what happened to us as children that we could not discharge.

The listener just listens and accompanies, with attention and reassurance.

At the beginning of the session, the person participating can ask the listener to be guided by this sequence of questions and times, but it is the participant’s decision to follow their own process and rhythms.

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## **Chapter 6d: Climbing the mountain**

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**7 minutes for each person, to work on the social oppressions  
of the national identities**

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In this phase, the idea is to work on difficult aspects of your lives that have NOT to do with your partner, but with your „foreign” identity, while living in a country different from your national origin.

In the case that you are the person who lives in your home country and it is your partner who lives outside of their country, you can work on the feelings you have when you have been in your partner’s country or on how it would be like for you to live abroad, away from your roots.

For this phase, we can set 7 minutes for each person. Here are some inspiring proposals to work on:

- What do I like about living in... (country where you are living) ?
  - What is the hardest thing for me?
  - What do I miss most from my country?

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## **Chapter 6e: Campfire and celebration**

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### **5 minutes for each person, to evaluate and appreciate the process and the work done**

Finally, the idea is to focus on reality, through a system of evaluation and mutual appreciation. In this case, we are going to carry out the evaluation, through a mini-session.

5 minutes per each person, to answer and discharge about the following inspiring questions:

- What was useful for me from having you as a listener?
- What did I like about myself as a participant?
- What did I like about myself as a listener?
- What have I learned from you while you were the participant?
- What did I like most about this „journey together”?
- In what areas would I like to continue working with you?

If you have time left, you can dedicate it, to appreciate the other person and discharge the feelings that might arise.

## **CONTINUE WITH THE WORK**

Emotional management tools to improve intercultural relationships.

- 1.** The importance of relationships.
- 2.** The feelings generated by cultural differences.
- 3.** Knowing the problems and their causes can help us to solve them.
- 4.** The main forms of discharging.
- 5.** Emotional management tools.
- 6.** Mutual support networks.

In this chapter, we intend to make a brief summary of certain information and resources that you can find in the Emotional Management work and how some of these tools can help, in all types of relationships, including cross-cultural relationships. To do this, we will develop 6 ideas, as an introduction.

### **1. The importance of relationships.**

Relationships are essential for human beings. Thanks to them, we can survive, in our first days of life, we can grow, develop, learn, enjoy and fill our lives with meaning.

All people need to have hundreds of relationships of different intensities, from superficial to intimate, spontaneous or lasting relationships, without or with commitment, family relationships, friendships, romantic or work relations, etc. Having a great variety of different relationships will help us to have more tools to manage our lives, in a more enriching way.

One kind of relationship where many of us have difficulties is in couple relationships. In this kind of relationship, we share life projects, intimacy, families are developed and a large part of our life is shared. In these kinds of intense relationships is where it is easier for conflicts to happen, which sometimes are not easy to manage.

Normally, any couple relationship already has enough ingredients for conflicts to happen.

There are always cultural, economic and social aspects, ideals, beliefs, gender roles, etc., that make the relationship difficult, but when we are talking about intercultural couples, all these criteria are accentuated much more, since the differences are usually greater, such as language, customs, different religions, cultural habits, etc.

## **2. Feelings generated by cultural differences.**

All these differences are precious. In fact, we usually find them very attractive, in our first steps of the relationship.

Then, as we deepen the relationship and try to collaborate together, the rigidities that come from these cultural identities appear. Power struggles, mistreatment, cultural differences, anxieties and personal rigidities, in each part of the relationship, make everything more difficult.

In addition to the difficulties that each person brings to the couple, we must add the social oppression added by society. Unfortunately, we live in racist, sexist, classist, adult societies that increase the difficulty in people's lives, making everything more difficult to manage.

All this can generate deep feelings to people and, when this happens, conflicts appear within couples.

## **3. Knowing the problems and their causes can help us to solve them.**

The most normal part of a conflict is for people to blame each other or even themselves.

This approach usually does not help to solve problems and much less to reconnect with the person we love so much.

Emotional management tools help us to understand that the cause of the problem is not about people, but the social environment that harms us. It also teaches us that, although it is not our fault, now we have to take responsibility for those damages we have internalised and that, luckily, the neuronal plasticity with which human beings are endowed, allows us to recover from any painful effect we have experienced.

In this way, we can recover our humanity, our habitual freshness, the innate desire to be close to people and, in general, those human characteristics that are the motor of relationships.

## **4. Main forms of discharging.**

To know the difference between feelings and emotions is a key factor. Keep in mind that emotions are the physical expressions (crying, laughing, yawning and trembling) of what we are feeling inside (sadness, fear, tension, shame, etc).

When we have feelings, our head cannot think or function freshly. Our behaviours become rigid and largely oppressive. When we have feelings, we cannot function well. Our mind is collapsed and enveloped in a small or large emotional conflict.

The organism brings mechanisms that allow us to digest these difficulties and to be able to, successfully, overcome these difficult moments. These mechanisms are the emotional discharges or emotions. Since we are born, human beings (and most mammals) come into the world with the ability to cry, laugh, yawn and shake. These four reactions are the main kind of discharges/emotions humans have. Each of them has a strong impact on our hormonal system and the neuronal functioning of our mind.

## **5. Emotional management tools.**

Emotional management, besides offering us a basic knowledge of how the human mind works and its connection with the neuronal system, offers us different strategies that can help us to solve personal and relational difficulties.

But, before talking about the tools, it is important to remember that we live in oppressive societies.

One of the system's oppressions is that of mental health. This social oppression is characterised by making people feel bad, when they try to show how they feel. In other words, crying, uncontrolled laughter, yawning or tremors are frowned upon, in this society.

When someone shows any of these emotions, they are considered sick, crazy, depressive, etc. The consequences of all this oppression is that people have lost a great capacity to show themselves and their feelings, and we have internalised that it is better to shut up and try to handle difficult situations, alone and in secret.

With this in mind, emotional management tries to create safe environments, where people can explore their feelings and are able to process the damages that make it difficult to feel better and think well.

Some of the tools that can help us solve these problems are:

- Think and listen
- Special time
- Mini sessions and sessions
- Support groups
- Interest groups
- Topic panels
- Physical sessions
- Connective games

To sum up, all these tools share the same essence: to create spaces where people can exchange quality time and attention, to take care of themselves, listen to each other and attend to feelings that we, normally, do not know how to handle.

## **6. Mutual support networks.**

Over time, those of us involved in emotional management have discovered that the most important thing is to create networks of mutual support.

At first, it is very revolutionary and, to a great extent, a relief, to know how the human mind works and to see that we live in societies that have made things difficult for us.

This helps us feel that we are not to blame for everything and that despite having damages, we are not completely broken and we can still do something to change things.

Emotional management offers us clear and simple tools and strategies; things that we can do, easily, that allow us to work on all the difficulties we need to face.

Still, step by step, and based on meeting people and working with the tools that emotional management offers us, we have discovered that the most important thing is to be able to build a close network of people, who share these knowledge and tools with us.

In this way, we can support each other and advance in our personal processes.

## **Bibliography and appendix**

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07.

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## Deck of feelings and needs

<b>Fauxy feelings</b>	<b>Primary feelings</b>	<b>Possible underlying needs</b>
Attacked	Scared, Angry	Safety, Respect
Belittled	Indignant, Distressed, Tense, Embarrassed, Outraged	Respect, Autonomy, To Be Seen, Acknowledgement, Appreciation
Blamed	Angry, Scared, Antagonistic, Bewildered, Hurt	Fairness, Justice, Understanding
Betrayed	Stunned, Outraged, Hurt, Disappointed	Trust, Dependability, Honesty, Commitment, Clarity
Boxed in	Frustrated, Scared, Anxious	Autonomy, Choice, Freedom, Self-Efficacy
Coerced	Angry, Frustrated, Scared, Anxious	Autonomy, Choice, Freedom, Self-Efficacy
Criticized	Humiliated, Irritated, Scared, Anxious, Embarrassed	Understanding, Acknowledgement, Recognition
Disrespected	Furious, Hurt, Embarrassed, Frustrated	Respect, Trust, Acknowledgement
Distrusted	Hurt, Sad, Frustrated	Honesty, Authenticity, Integrity, Trust
Harassed	Angry, Aggravated, Pressured, Frightened, Exasperated	Respect, Consideration, Ease
Hassled	Irritated, Iried, Distressed, Frustrated	Autonomy, Ease, Calm, Space
Insulted	Angry, Embarrassed, Incensed	Respect, Consideration, Acknowledgement, Recognition
Interrupted	Irritated, Hurt, Resentful	Respect, Consideration, To Be Heard

Intimidated	Frightened, Scared, Vulnerable	Safety, Power, Self-Efficacy Independence
Left out	Sad, Lonely, Anxious	Belonging, Community, Connection, To Be Seen
Manipulated	Resentful, Vulnerable, Sad, Angry	Autonomy, Consideration, Choice, Power
Misanderstood	Upset, Dismayed, Frustrated	Understanding, To Be Heard, Clarity
Overworked	Angry, Tired, Frustrated, Resentful	Respect, Consideration, Rest, Caring, Ease
Pressured	Overwhelmed, Anxious, Resentful	Relaxation, Ease, Clarity, Space, Consideration
Rejected	Hurt, Scared, Angry, Defiant	Belonging, Connection, Acknowledgement
Taken Advantage Of	Angry, Powerless, Frustrated	Autonomy, Power, Trust, Choice, Connection, Acknowledgement
Taken For Granted	Hurt, Disappointed, Angry	Appreciation, Acknowledgement, Recognition, Consideration
Tricked	Indignant, Embarrassed, Furious	Integrity, Honesty, Trust
Unappreciated	Sad, Hurt, Frustrated, Irritated	Appreciation, Respect, Acknowledgement
Unsupported	Sad, Hurt, Resentful	Support, Understanding
Violated	Outraged, Agitated, Anxious, Sad	Safety, Trust, Space, Resect

## About the authors



### **Vesna Lorenc**

Bicultural, Polish and Serbian rooted in supporting individuals and teams locally and globally. Works also in English and Russian. Diversity and inclusion are the fields of core interest privately and professionally. Works in the field of leadership, compassion and empathy, conflict resolutions and well being. Initiator and merit leader of Meet Me Halfway project. Leads Intercultural and compassion facilitating sessions and restorative circles in small and big communities.

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### **Anna Kawalska**

An intercultural psychologist, trainer of intercultural competence, diversity and inclusion and psychological skills, art therapist and psychotraumatologist. She supports on a daily basis migrants and refugees in their integration and cultural adaptation. She designs workshops, courses, educational materials for diverse groups- NGO, public administration, education and business sector. Her mission is to facilitate dialog and enhance mutual understanding between people, acknowledging the beauty of diversity.

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### **DASANTILA HOXHA**

Bicultural, Albanian and Italian. 19 years of experience in the public sector, coordinating projects and services focused on integration of migrants. Counsellor and trainer of cultural mediators and social operators working with migrants. From 2003 to 2018 she has been a member of the Territorial Council for Immigration of the Prefecture of Chieti, coordinating the research team and the Task Force G2 (elected experts on youth policies and second generation of migrants). Since 2015, she is also collaborating with ANCI Abruzzo – the regional representative of the National Association of Italian Municipalities, designing and coordinating surveys on immigration and social policies, managing national and EU projects. Author of many papers and books on public policies for integration of migrants.

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### **Vittorio Lannutti**

Italian sociologist and counsellor, works mainly in two fields: mental health and migration issues as researcher and trainer. He is contract professor at the Polytechnic University of Marche in General Sociology, collaborates with the 'Carlo Bo' University of Urbino, the 'G. D'Annunzio' University of Chieti-Pescara, the Belgian Ong ECEPAA and Italian association EDERA. With these last two organisations he worked in many European and Italian projects about the integration of adult and youth migrants. Contact person for the Marche region of the Immigration Statistical Dossier drawn up annually by the IDOS Study Centre.

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### **Oscar Argumosa**

Oscar Argumosa: President of Permacultura Cantabria. Oscar is an entrepreneur, founder of the NGO Permacultura Cantabria, among other initiatives. He has designed and implemented a Master in Emotional Management; and has coordinated more than 30 European projects. In addition, he is a regular speaker, at various universities, and collaborates in the development of social development programs with Cantabrian institutions. He holds a certification in Permaculture and Emotional Management Training. For more information, consult his profile at LinkedIn <http://bit.ly/2mvQOEu>

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### **Anna Ejme**

Atalaya Foundation's founder and president, psychologist, trainer and admirer of performative methods such as psychodrama, improv, drama, Forum Theatre, Playback Theater. With a sense of humour, she co-creates an organization based on trust, personal commitment and freedom.



### **Paulina Woźniak**

Psychologist, specialist in youth empowerment and image building. She works in Atalaya Foundation, conducts developmental workshops and she is a caretaker in a supported housing program for young adults from foster care.

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## About the organizations



### **Atalaya Foundation**

[www.atalaya.pl](http://www.atalaya.pl)

We are a non-profit, educational organization, mainly focused around education and supporting youth and young adults in their quest for designing and fulfilling their plans for self-development. We base our methodology of work on Non Violent Communication. We dedicate our projects predominantly towards foster care, running a Center for Youth Empowerment, as well as a supported housing program. But in order to share our philosophy we also have educational and self-development projects open to the public both in Poland and around Europe which are rooted in alternative and innovative methods of teaching and learning.

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### **Submeet - Incontrarsi per Crescere**

[www.submeet.eu](http://www.submeet.eu)

A non-profit organization established to promote transnational mobility in the areas of education and vocational training. Our organization is located/positioned between the school and the labour market, mainly working through the new European program Erasmus+.

Among our aims are supporting learners in the acquisition of competences with a view to improving their personal development and employability in the European Labour Market and supporting the professional development of those who work in education, training and youth with a view to innovating and improving the quality of teaching, training and youth work around Europe.

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## **Permacultura Cantabria**

<http://www.permaculturacantabria.com>

a non-profit organisation, composed of around 40 people, whose aim it is to offer new alternatives to improve society and to recover the values and benchmarks of a naturally balanced way of life. The main goal of the group is to continually investigate different alternatives of achieving a sustainable culture, to take care of people and the earth and enjoy what they do. The two main lines of work followed are related to sustainability and natural balance (permacultura, bioconstruction, organic agriculture, and the proper use of water and other natural resources) and also to human development (education, diversity, inclusion, personal growth, emotional intelligence, etc.).

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