



Stage A– ALLEVIATING:

We slow down and can access ourselves in the painful cycle with our partner, we can start to understand our partner better and start to alleviate some of the conflict and disconnection. A sign that we have completed the Alleviation stage is that we can notice ourselves being drawn into our painful pattern and we can step out of it some of the time.

- Step 1: Finding hope and identifying the destination (goals) of therapy. Staying attuned and adjusting the destination as needed.
- Step 2: Describing my partner and I's painful cycle: Identifying my typical actions in the pattern and being able to notice and describe my partners typical responses at times of disconnection and conflict. Describing our reactive outside emotions (secondary emotions) and vulnerable inside emotions (primary emotions) as well as our thoughts about ourselves, our partner and our relationship.
- Step 3: Expanding on step 2's identification of my emotions, in step 3 we began to talk about our vulnerable inside emotions while we feel them, instead of hiding them under our protective outside emotions.
- Step 4: Hearing about my partners experience in the painful pattern, and also believing them and starting to remember that their actions mean something about themselves not somethings about me. Noticing the signs that we are disconnected and being pulled into our painful cycle, we sometimes step out of it together.

Some couples who have had major relationship injuries like a betrayal, will need to go through a process of healing and repair of that/those injuries before or during Stage B.

Stage B-BOND RESTRUCTURING:

Now that we can notice our pattern and step out of it, we are ready to begin experiencing new ways to reach to our partner for protection or connection and discover new ways to hear and respond to our partner's reaches.

- Step 5: In step five I experience my deepest relationship fears and can turn to my partner and share them while I'm feeling them. (This is different from step 3 where I reported vulnerable emotion from a few moments ago). These fears might be related to the fear of being abandoned, rejected, or something similar.
- Step 6: As my partner is sharing their step 5 experience, I am able to listen, take in their new sharing in a way that feels supportive and caring to my partner.
- Step 7: After sharing my deepest fears, I can turn to my partner and request what I need in that moment (while feeling the fear) to experience her/his contact, comfort, and care. This may include words of reassurance, eye contact, physical touch or all three. This does not include asking your partner to do/not do something in the future so that you don't get triggered into fear. When my partner asks for what he/she needs, I can freely respond, not out of obligation or felt coercion, but empathy and desire to give them comfort, care, and contact.

Stage C-CONSOLIDATING:

Now that I have experience asking for and receiving reassurance for my deepest fears my partner and I can find our way back here on our own and are ready to consolidate what we have experienced and prepare for graduation from therapy.

- Step 8: We have revisited the topics that we could not resolve before we started therapy (sex, parenting, finances, family, health and medical, etc) and found resolution. Even if we still disagree or have not found a solution, we are able to feel emotionally connected and safe and know that that we are heard, valued understood, connected, and accepted.
- Step 9: We have created a new story about our relationships that includes the rocky moments that have been resolved and ways we can now overcome future hurts in the relationship. We have made a plan for maintaining and growing our relationship and passing on what we have experienced to our family and friends.
- Step 10: We can share our new story with our children, and they can share how our painful cycle has affected them in the past and/or how it is currently affecting them.