

LEARNING TO SELF-SOOTHE IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT

We blame our partners when we feel discomfort, and this tends to create distance within an emotionally committed relationship. The distance, then, creates a feeling of further discomfort. The clue to dealing with this dilemma is to learn how to soothe your own emotional pain. This can open the way to more passion and closeness in your relationship. Schnarch offers several suggestions for helping people learn the art of self-soothing.

- ***Don't take your partner's behavior personally.***

Even if your partner doesn't make all the changes that you've made, it should not be taken personally. If you and your partner are having a conflict, try some inwardly focused relaxation techniques. Focus on your breathing. Stop talking and try to slow your heart rate. Lower the volume of your speech and work on relaxing your body.

- ***Put the current conflict into perspective.*** Think about past instances of the same type of conflict. What resources did you use in the past for dealing with the conflict? Think about how discomfort will surface again in the future – and if you learn now how to deal with it, you will be better off in these future instances.
- ***Control your behavior, even if you can't regulate your emotions.*** While we may have difficulty in

controlling our emotions, especially in the face of a conflict, we can have control over our behavior. Prevent yourself from saying and doing things that you will regret later. Tell yourself: "I don't have to take action on my feelings."

- ***Stop the negative thinking.*** Our thoughts drive our feelings and behavior. When you find yourself engaged in negative thinking, make the change to more positive thoughts. Accept what is happening and then calm down.
- ***You may have to break contact temporarily with your partner until things cool down.*** When you are engaged in a conflict, you may need some time to get in touch with your self again. Look on this as a time-out, not a separation. Tell your partner that you need some time alone to calm down and that you can discuss the issue better later, after both of you have had some space from each other.
- ***Self-soothing does not involve substance abuse, the abuse of food, or emotional regression.*** You need time to confront yourself and understand what your part in the conflict may be. This does not mean hiding out, sleeping, binge-eating, or the use of drugs or alcohol, which are all ways to avoid self-confrontation.

Carl S. Wells, Ph.D.

16168 Beach Boulevard, #241
Huntington Beach, CA 92647