TWO WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP ISSUE

Here are two different ways of thinking about a relationship issue. Take a mild issue (4 on a scale of 10 in intensity) and view it through these two different frameworks.

BLAME GAME ("Siberia")

❒ **What's a problem in your relationship?**

❒ **How does this problem distress you?**

❒ **Whose fault is it?**

SOLUTION PATH ("Bali")

❒ **What do you really want in your relationship?**

❒ **Be as specific as you can. What might you see, hear or feel if you got it?**

❒ **What could be your first step towards having it?**

What is the difference between these two lines of thinking?

1. Which gives you hope or somewhere new to go?
2. What is more useful:
   - ❒ Find who to blame for a "problem"
   - ❒ Explore how you can shift things to better meet your needs?

FEELINGS WHEN THERE IS DISTRESS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Below are four categories of emotional distress. The feelings listed in each box are similar to each other, varying in intensity. Circle which feelings you experience in any box. Then check off how often you have those feelings (Often, Sometimes, Seldom). Then write in what you do, how you act or behave, when you feel it. Use the list of reactive behaviors that runs down the right side of the page as example behaviors.

DISTRESS STATE	How often do you feel it?	How do you behave when you feel it?	List of reactive behaviors
ANGRY Irritated Frustrated Infuriated Resentful Annoyed Enraged	❒ **Often** ❒ **Sometimes** ❒ **Seldom**		prod attack pursue complain lecture criticize pressure blow up yell provoke move away withdraw shut down get paralyzed hide out space out cry get sarcastic try to fix things stay in head try to push feelings away
AFRAID Scared Anxious Worried Insecure Frightened Nervous	❒ **Often** ❒ **Sometimes** ❒ **Seldom**		
HURT Sad Despair Pained Dejected Tearful Grief	❒ **Often** ❒ **Sometimes** ❒ **Seldom**		
STUCK Numb Confused Hopeless Paralyzed Shame Blank	❒ **Often** ❒ **Sometimes** ❒ **Seldom**		

BEHAVIORS WHEN THERE IS DISTRESS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

1. Check off any behaviors you do, especially when there is distress, bad feelings or difficulties in your relationship, where either you and/or your partner is upset.

2. Double-check the 6 most typical behaviors you tend to do. Synonyms are okay.

- ❒ **Solve the problem**
- ❒ **Try to fix things**
- ❒ **Be rational, use logic**
- ❒ **Try to reason**
- ❒ **Defend yourself**
- ❒ **Intellectualize**
- ❒ **Lecture, teach & preach**
- ❒ **Ridicule**
- ❒ **Get sarcastic**
- ❒ **Make a joke of it**
- ❒ **Distance yourself**
- ❒ **Push your feelings away**
- ❒ **Space out**
- ❒ **Ignore**
- ❒ **Avoid the situation**
- ❒ **Try not to rock the boat**
- ❒ **Leave**
- ❒ **Withdraw**
- ❒ **Hide out**
- ❒ **Shut down**
- ❒ **Go numb**
- ❒ **Get confused**
- ❒ **Freeze up**
- ❒ **Distract other person**
- ❒ **Talk about something else**
- ❒ **Label or name-call**
- ❒ **Judge negatively**
- ❒ **Criticize**
- ❒ **Complain**
- ❒ **Pressure**
- ❒ **Prod**
- ❒ **Provoke**
- ❒ **Get angry**
- ❒ **Be right**
- ❒ **Attack**
- ❒ **Blow up**
- ❒ **Blame or counter-blame**
- ❒ **React with fear, anger, hurt**
- ❒ **Yell**
- ❒ **Cry**
- ❒ **Guilt trip**
- ❒ **Argue the point**
- ❒ **Correct other person**
- ❒ **Make other person wrong**
- ❒ **Provoke a response**
- ❒ **Support other's victim stance**
- ❒ **See yourself as the victim of other's reactivity and behavior**
- ❒ **Take on other person's feelings**
- ❒ **Feel guilty**

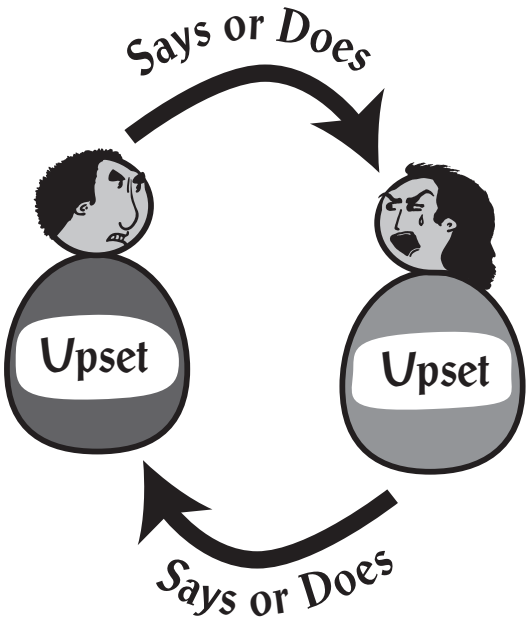
3. Now circle the top 6 behaviors your partner does that will upset you the most.

On the next page you will figure out where there are cyclic patterns of these behaviors — where if your partner does one, you do another, and vice-versa.

REACTIVE CYCLE WHEN THERE IS DISTRESS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

When distress occurs, it becomes a circular pattern. When one person gets triggered, they start to act in ways that distress their partner. It's a vicious circle. But we rarely see this full picture. There are two people involved in whatever is happening.

The figure below represents the reactive cycle that can take over a relationship. Both partners play a part in this cycle. The more one does what they do, then the more the other will do their behavior. Each has an impact on the other.



1. What's a cycle of upset in your relationship? Fill in each sentence below with one of your top 6 behaviors and one of your partner's top 6 behaviors that upset you:

"The more my partner _____, then the more I _____."

"The more my partner _____, then the more I _____."

"The more my partner _____, then the more I _____."

2. Now see if reversing each sentence above makes equal sense:

"The more I _____, then the more my partner _____."

"The more I _____, then the more my partner _____."

"The more I _____, then the more my partner _____."

3. Which of the above seems the most common core cycle in your relationship?

"The more my partner _____, then the more I _____."

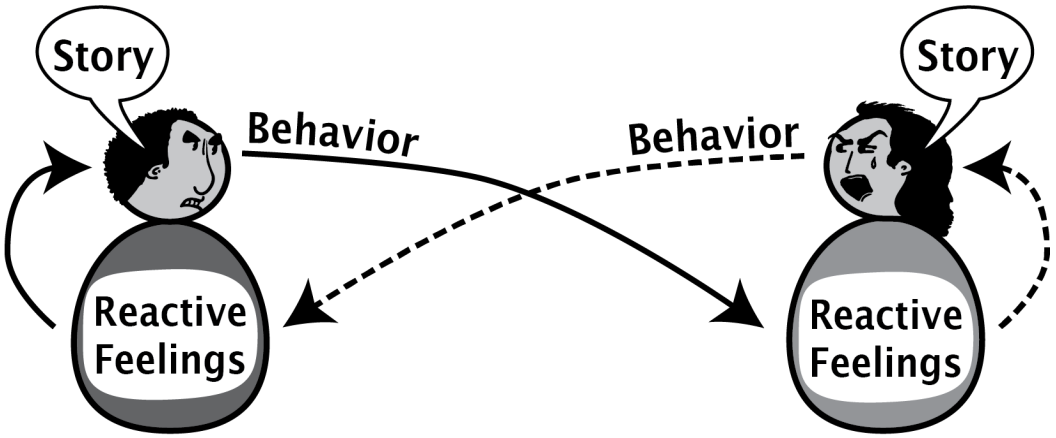
STORIES WHEN THERE IS DISTRESS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Check off any of the ways of thinking below you tend to believe, especially when there is distress in your relationship. These would be typical stories you have about what you think is going on in your relationship.

- ❒ **"I feel so alone, so shut out."**
- ❒ **"They're so distant."**
- ❒ **"They just don't seem to care."**
- ❒ **"I am way down on the list."**
- ❒ **"I come after the kids, the house, and the dog."**
- ❒ **"My feelings don't matter."**
- ❒ **"I always come last."**
- ❒ **"We never seem to be close anymore."**
- ❒ **"I am just not sure I matter."**
- ❒ **"It's like they don't see me."**
- ❒ **"I don't know how to reach them."**
- ❒ **"If I didn't push we would never be close."**
- ❒ **"I can never get it right, so I just give up."**
- ❒ **"It all seems hopeless."**
- ❒ **"I feel numb."**
- ❒ **"Don't know how I feel."**
- ❒ **"I just freeze up and space out."**
- ❒ **"I get that I am flawed somehow."**
- ❒ **"I feel like a failure as a mate."**
- ❒ **"I shut down and wait for them to calm down."**
- ❒ **"I try to keep everything calm, not rock the boat."**
- ❒ **"I go into my shell where it's safe."**
- ❒ **"I go behind my wall."**
- ❒ **"I try to shut the door on all their anger."**
- ❒ **"I am just not as needy."**
- ❒ **"I try to handle things on my own."**
- ❒ **"I don't know what they are talking about. We are fine."**
- ❒ **"I try to solve the problem. Try to fix it."**
- ❒ **"I don't know what they want."**

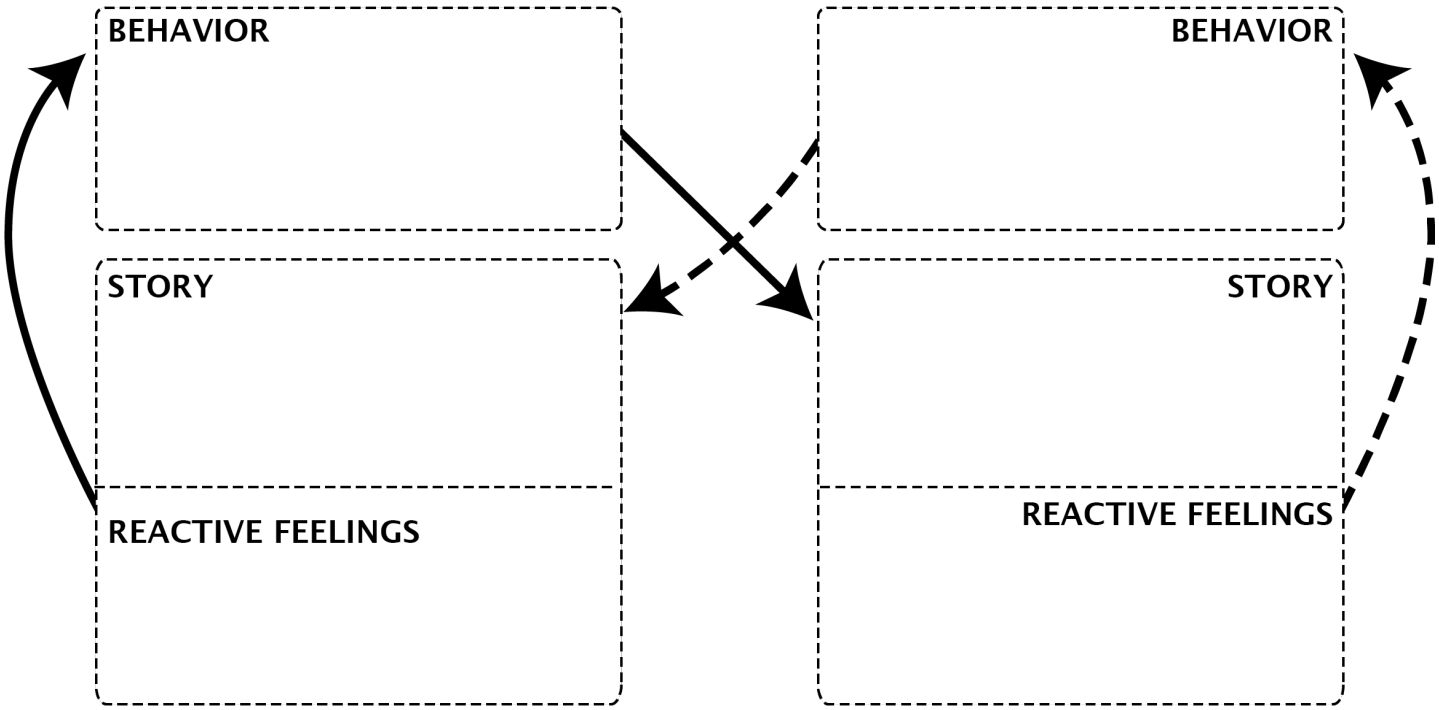
REACTIVE CYCLE ANALYSIS

The figure below shows six interactive pieces of a Reactive Cycle:



In the boxes below, analyze pieces of a common Reactive Cycle in your relationship.

Start by filling in your three pieces in the appropriate column. Enter one Behavior you do when triggered, from the bottom of Page 4. Next, add in your partner's column the Behavior they do in that same cycle (as you would name it).

Then go ahead and enter the best-fitting Story you have from Page 5 that fits into this cycle. Next, add one of the Feelings from Page 2 that you experience in the cycle.

If you can, guess your partner's Story and Reactive Feelings. If you are working on these prep work pages with your partner, you could next cross-check with each other and update this analysis based on what you tell each other.