**The Couples Dialogue**

Effective communication is essential to a good relationship. Although good communication skills alone may not solve problems or resolve issues, no problems can be solved or issues resolved without it.

The Couples Dialogue consists of a three part process called **Mirroring**, **Validating**, and **Empathy**.

**Mirroring** is the process of accurately reflecting back the content of a message from your partner. A “paraphrase” is a statement in your own words of what the message your partner sent means to you. Mirroring indicates to your partner that you are willing to put your own thoughts/feelings on hold for the moment and attempt to understand your partner from his or her point of view. It does not mean you hold the same point of view only that you are *willing* to hear their point of view and realize for them it is how they feel/think. Any response made prior to mirroring is often an interpretation or response and may contain a misunderstanding. In the mirroring exercise, each partner has the opportunity to send his or her message again and to be paraphrased until it is clear that the message has been understood and accurately received.

**Validation** is a communication to the sending partner that the information being received and mirrored “makes sense.” We all want to feel like we make sense. It indicates that you can see the information from your partner’s point of view and can accept that it has validity for them. Validation is a temporary suspension of your own point of view which may or may not be the same as your partners. This allows your partner’s experience to have its own reality. Typical validating phrases are: “I can see that…”, “it makes sense to me that you would think…”, “I can understand that…” Such phrases convey to your partner that his or her subjective experience is not crazy, that it has its own logic and that it is a valid way of looking at things. To validate your partner’s message does not mean that you necessarily agree with his or her point of view or that it reflects your subjective experience. It merely recognizes the fact that in every situation, no “objective” view is really possible. In any communication between two people, there are always two points of view, and every report of any experience is an “interpretation” which is the “truth” for each person. The process of mirroring with validation increases trust, understanding and closeness between partners.

**Empathy** is the process in which the listening partner reflects or imagines the feelings/thoughts the sending partner is experiencing about the situation being discussed. In this level of communication, you attempt to recognize, reach into, and, on some level, experience the emotions/thoughts your partner is revealing. Empathy allows both partners to transcend, perhaps for a moment, their separateness and to experience a genuine “meeting/understanding.” Such an experience has remarkable healing power. Typical phrases for empathic communication include: “I can imagine that you must feel…”, “When you experience that, I hear/understand that you feel….”, and “That must feel awful.”

A complete dialogue transaction may sound as follow: “So, from what I understand you to be saying when I don’t look at you when are talking to me, you think I am uninterested in what you are saying. I can see that – it makes sense to me, and I can imagine that you would feel rejected, unimportant or angry. That must be a terrible feeling.”