Sike & Spirit Counseling
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After a Fight or Regrettable Incident

A structured process for understanding what happened, repairing connection, and planning for next time

Before You Begin

Use this process **after both people are calm enough to reflect**. The goal is not to decide whose version is "the truth" or restart the argument. The goal is greater understanding: what each person felt, how each person experienced the interaction, what got activated, what each person contributed, and what can be done differently next time.

1. Name and Accept the Feelings

Start with the emotional experience rather than the facts of the argument. Each person identifies what they felt during the incident. More than one feeling can be true at the same time.

Possible feelings

defensive • unheard • hurt • flooded • angry • sad • unloved • misunderstood • criticized • worried • afraid • unsafe • tense • out of control • frustrated • unappreciated • disliked • overwhelmed • powerless • trapped • ashamed • guilty • abandoned • disloyal • exhausted • shocked • lonely • remorseful

Try: "During that interaction, I felt _____. I am not saying that was your intention; I am describing my experience."

2. Share Your Subjective Reality — Then Validate

Take turns describing your perception of what happened. Speak from your own point of view and avoid attacking, blaming, or telling your partner what they intended. Think of yourself as a reporter describing your internal experience.

Speaker

Describe what you noticed, thought, felt, and needed. Stay with **your** experience.

Listener

Summarize what you heard before responding. Find at least one part that makes sense from your partner's perspective. **Validation is understanding, not necessarily agreement.**

Useful prompts: "What I hear you saying is…" "It makes sense to me that you felt…" "Did I get it?" "What am I missing?"

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3. Identify Triggers and the Story Behind Them

Ask whether something about this incident connected to an older experience, vulnerability, fear, or familiar pattern. The purpose is not to excuse behavior. It is to help your partner understand why the moment carried so much emotional weight.

Possible trigger themes

Feeling excluded • powerless • unheard • judged • blamed • disrespected • unsafe • uncared for • lonely • unable to ask for what I need • like the "bad guy" • controlled • manipulated • trapped • unloved • as though my feelings were too much • as though I did not matter

Try: "This touched something older for me. The story my nervous system started telling me was _____. What I was afraid of was _____."

4. Take Responsibility for Your Part

Repair becomes easier when each person looks at what they brought into the interaction. Consider both your behavior during the conflict and the conditions that may have made you more vulnerable beforehand.

What may have set me up	What I may regret / own
Stress, irritability, exhaustion, preoccupation	Overreacting or escalating
Not expressing appreciation or affection	Becoming defensive
Taking the relationship for granted	Criticizing, attacking, or speaking disrespectfully
Being emotionally unavailable or not listening well	Not listening or dismissing your partner
Not asking clearly for what you needed	Being unreasonable, negative, or rigid
Feeling depressed, insecure, or easily upset	Other: _____

A useful apology names the specific behavior and its impact rather than defending the intention: "I'm sorry that I _____. I can see how that affected you."

If your partner apologizes, you can accept it if you are ready. If you are not ready, name what you still need rather than forcing closure.

5. Make a Constructive Plan

Each person identifies **one realistic change** that could make a future conversation about this issue go better. Ask what you need from one another and what you will each do differently.

6. Write Down the Repair Plan

Keep the plan brief enough that you can remember and use it. The goal is not a conflict-free relationship; it is a more skillful repair process.

Our repair plan

Next time, it would help me if you: _____
Next time, I will work on: _____
If either of us becomes too activated, we will: _____
What I still need in order to move forward: _____

Adapted from the Gottman Institute's "The Aftermath of a Fight/Regrettable Incident" exercise. This resource is a simplified psychoeducational adaptation and is not a reproduction of the original worksheet.