

COURSE 200: BASIC CLINICAL TRAINING IN IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY

Module 1 – Trainees’ Toolbox
December 2007 edition

Module 1B – Toolbox

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**IMAGO CONSULTATION PROCESS –
Format for Module 1-B**

What I felt in my body as I worked/watched your work was...

What I liked about my/your work as a therapist was...

A technical suggestion is... *or* something I might have done differently is...

My growth gift is (re defensive character structure or lost self that would help me/you be more fully present and connected)...

What that will look like in my/your work and on my/your tape is...

An Initial Imago Protocol (Sophie Slade)

THE OPENING:

Introductions, welcome and greetings, getting seated, session plan

For example, 'I would like to start by taking some information, then I would like to hear from each of you why you are here and what you would like to get out of coming, then we will do some work together'.

Basic information gathering for the file

A series of standard questions including names, addresses, phone numbers, dates of birth, relationship status (dating, engaged, married, co-habiting, etc.), how long together, children with genders, ages and whether residing with them, whether they have had previous therapy, whether they are on any medications and what, who is the prescribing doctor if they are on psychiatric meds. This gives them some relatively easy questions that they know the answers to without too much difficulty and gives them a few minutes to settle down, look around the office, etc.

What brings you here and what would you like to get out of coming? Who would like to begin?

The therapist mirrors the responses and by gentle shaping encourages one person to complete their send before the other begins. It allows the therapist to gauge their capacity to stay present and listen while the other is talking and their curiosity and interest in what the partner is saying. It is helpful not to spend too much time on one person's 'island' before inviting the other to express why they are there. You can do some light shaping of the Sender through the mirroring e.g. by mirroring back 'my partner is ...' as 'I'm hearing that you experience your partner as...' or 'perceive your partner as...' Use sentence stems to invite them to bring it back to themselves, e.g. if they have been talking about their partner, feed them 'and so given all of that the reason that I am here is...' If they have focused primarily on why they are there in terms of past conflicts, after hearing from both, ask them again what they would like to get out of coming to focus them on what they want rather than what they don't want.

THE CORE:

Moving them into connection

A primary goal is to get them into safe connection with each other as quickly as possible. There are several tools the therapist can use to start to introduce them to Imago Dialogue and get them into connection with each other, depending on what they present with and the sense of what they feel is essential to address immediately. This gives the therapist a sense of their current capacity to be in connection with each other. If there is too much reactivity you may need to step back in and take the role of the receiver, or you may move in and do some coaching with the sender or the receiver.

Tools

Appreciations

Focus also on the positive energy that brought them here. To introduce some of the basic concepts of Imago Dialogue have them turn to each other and ask them to express to what they value about the partner or the relationship that brings them into therapy. Have them decide who will be the first to speak and the first to listen and have the first speaker check if the other is available to listen. A little coaching can be done here about the Receiver bringing all their attention to what the other is saying, putting themselves aside and mirroring without distortion - see Appreciations protocol.

Frustrations List

If they are bringing in a lot of dissatisfaction or frustration and need it to be addressed immediately, which is usually the situation, ask them to write a list of things they do which they believe trigger hurt or frustration in their partner - see Frustrations protocol below. Adapt the language to match theirs e.g. 'I believe I contribute to the deadness in our relationship when I...'

Relationship Vision

Occasionally couples come in wanting to look at where they are going in their relationship, or something else in their initial presentation suggests that this would be a good place to begin - see vision protocol.

Other

If the couple comes in with a specific agenda, e.g. they are separating and want to talk about how to tell the children, or one partner has had an affair, then in order for them to feel that the therapy is empathically attuned to them and their needs address that specific issue, again with the intention of moving them into Imago Dialogue and empathic connection with each other. If there is a lot of emotional energy, this can be balanced by some didactic pieces that start to give them a different way to frame their issue and some hope they will get through.

THE CLOSING:

Give them an opportunity to share their experience of the session and/or of the exercise, what was the 'pearl' that they are taking away from the session. Mirror their responses. If they express that they would like to make another appointment do that. Alternatively the therapist can suggest they share their experience of the session and call if they would like to make some appointments to continue. Suggest they read 'Getting...' if they haven't already (have copies available for purchase). Give them any appropriate handouts about Imago Relationship Therapy and Imago Dialogue. You can also end by inviting a quick appreciation, e.g. 'Something I appreciated about you during our time here together today was...'

Payment, etc.

Inform them of terms of therapy, including any cancellation fees for missed sessions, in writing.

FRUSTRATIONS/CHANGE LISTS and DIALOGUE

Most couples present with a focus on the pain and frustration in their relationship that they want to find better ways of dealing with. This exercise helps them address these immediately in a different way than at home and begins to give them some skills and concepts. One way to introduce the exercise is:

“Often when couples are experiencing a lot of pain and frustration in their relationship they feel disconnected and defensive. They don’t feel very safe with each other. According to Imago theory where there is conflict, that is exactly where growth and healing are trying to happen in the relationship. However safety is needed to work through the pain and reconnect. I’d like us to look at the areas of frustration in a different way. Most of us are very aware of what our partners do that causes us pain and frustration - for survival reasons our brains are wired in such a way that we are aware of what causes us pain. However, I believe that if I asked you to talk about what your partner does that hurts or frustrates you, it would decrease the safety and increase the defensiveness. So I am going to ask you to turn things around - to use a different part of your brain (the frontal lobe - very small - about the size of 5 peas) which gives us the capacity to look at ourselves and what we do that triggers pain or frustration in our partner. This is often a lot harder to see without going to shame, but can also be very empowering. After all, the only person we can really change is ourselves and that’s hard enough.”

Invite both partners to write at the top of a sheet of paper:

“I believe that I trigger hurt or frustration in you when I...” or “What I believe my partner wishes I would change is...” and then make a list of these things. Suggest they begin with just a few items and then invite them to use the list as an ongoing tool to become researchers into their own relationship. Give them about 5 minutes to write a few things. Then ask them to rate on a scale of 1-10 (1 = low, 10 = high) how much they believe this behavior upsets their partner or the importance of this change to the partner. Coach the person who would be willing to share the list first to ask the other if they are available to listen. Coach the other partner to be available to receive and then mirror the partner’s list. After one partner’s list is complete the other partner shares their list in the same way, starting by asking the other to be available to listen. After both lists have been shared, quickly go over the lists again with the Receiver now sharing their own rating (on the scale of 1-10). Compare this with what the Sender imagined. This gives them a sense of knowing each other and communicating well or an awareness of where there are surprises and miscommunications, which can be underlined in a validating and honoring way.

If there is more time, invite them to choose one of the lowest scoring items to start working with. Ask who would be willing to be first to “share your thoughts and feelings about this topic”. This person becomes the “Sender”. Invite the Sender to ask if the partner is available to listen. Coach the Receiver to go into listening mode so as to receive with openness and curiosity. Coach the Sender to talk about the self, their own thoughts and feelings about this issue rather than talking about the partner and to keep the “sends” short.

Move back and forth between the two, usually having each send for a maximum of about 5 minutes at a time, offering the Sender sentence stems if necessary to move them from content to affect. These may include:

I feel..., My fear is..., I interpret your behavior to mean..., The way I protect myself from that pain or fear is..., My desire is.../ I need...

The Imago therapist focuses on the process rather than the content. This means guiding the Sender to send short messages about the self rather than about the partner and to deepen their self-awareness. It also means helping the receiver to mirror accurately and neutrally, stay present to their partner and then do a summary. Model and coach to the degree that seems necessary which varies a great deal from couple to couple.

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Bruce Crapuchettes)

1. Have George and Mary face each other with you forming a triangle with them. Make sure they are not touching each other.
2. Begin by saying: **All the couples I see seem to want the same thing - SAFETY & PASSION !**
#1 is SAFETY - you just want to come home and feel safe. You want to be accepted for who you are.
#2 is PASSION – This is the full expression of who you are and your life's energy . Its more than just sexual passion - it's fun to be alive - it's wonderful being with you – we make a great team!
When couples come to me, passion is usually diminished and neither partner feels safe. My work with you will be to re-establish and develop safety first and then passion will emerge automatically.
Because safety is so important I want my office to be a safe place for both of you. This session is the most potentially unsafe session because you both want me to get to know your issues but it would not feel safe for you to "tell on each other" and on top of that neither of you know me. So I have a structure I would like to use to help you both feel safe. Would that be okay?
3. To the partner that called and made the appointment say:
 - A. **Mary, since you're the one who called and made the appointment, I would like to start with you. Tell me what George would say upsets him about you. I will take notes and will check with you if I have it right. Start by saying: "George would say that I . . . "**
 - B. Write each item on a list starting with the word "I." The first few items may appear as follows:
 - **I nag him too much about doing house chores.**
 - **I spend too much time on the phone with my mother.**
 - **I don't want sex with him enough.**
 - C. On a scale of 1-10 (10 high) have Mary make a guess as to how disruptive this item is to the relationship from George's perspective. Have her give a rating number that she thinks George would give.
4. Now do the same procedure with George.
5. Now stay with George and go through Mary's list and check with him if these items do, in fact, bother him and then ask for his ratings.
George, Mary's first guess was: " I nag him too much about doing house chores." Do you get upset about that?
 - If "Yes" say: **On a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest), how disruptive is this to your relationship from your viewpoint? 6, that's interesting, Mary thought you might give it a 9. Turn to Mary and tell her why you are giving it a 6 rather than a 9.**
Use this opportunity to teach Mary mirroring. If he gave it a 9, say to him: **"Tell Mary why this is so important to you."** Have Mary mirror.
 - If "No" or "Well, not exactly that" say: **Okay, clarify this item with Mary, and I'll ask her to mirror you back to make sure she got it correctly.** Again, this is the time to teach Mary mirroring. Then move ahead and have him rate it.
6. Now check George's ratings out with Mary.
7. Now have them "dialogue" about one item each using only Mirroring.
Have them put both feet flat of the floor, close their eyes, and think about what they might want to bring up in a dialogue that will now be coached by you. When one has a topic, have them open their eyes and ask for an appointment: **"I'd like to have a Couples Dialogue, is now okay?"**
Have them do word for word mirroring and then summarize in their own words.
8. In between session assignment: For example: Read the pamphlet, "Preparation for Couples Therapy." Or, read Harville's book, or, listen to a tape of Harville's.

Comments from other faculty members on the Initial Session

Gene Shelly

First sessions for me are important. Harville taught me many years ago that he wanted the couple to leave the first session with an "experience." So I have tried many different ways of beginning and have always tried to help the couple have an "experience."

I believe that most couples when they arrive, have a sense of their issue(s) and we serve that well if we begin where they are, where their energy is focused. So, in many ways, the way one does the first interview isn't as important when the focus is on the couple and follows their energy.

A current way of conducting the initial interview that I am experimenting with and liking is:

After welcoming the couple to my office I begin with this sentence/question to each partner: Do you know two needs/desires your partner has, that if they were fulfilled or satisfied, you would not be here today? (this "you would not be here can be said differently - if these needs were satisfied, the complaint and pain in relationship would disappear) Then I check it out with the partner. So far, amazingly, most partners seem to know.

What I like about this question is that it is an attempt to go under the pain, anger and frustration that they come with in the relationship and for me it is an attempt to identify "unmet needs" that may already be known to each other. I also get to know what they know about each other and their needs. Then I can teach the dialogue around needs/desires instead of pain and hurt. I think this sets that standard and direction for the process.

Rebecca Sears

What I do and what I emphasize with trainees;

1. Warm neutral attunement
2. A different experience
 - ..of hope
 - ..of safe connection
 - ..of normalizing their relationship and /or disconnect
 - ..of therapist as facilitator not guru/opinion giver
 - ..of personal empowerment (individually and as a couple)

I always invite couples right into the Imago setup and say;

-Have you been in couples work before?...if so was it helpful?...Mirror

-I work a bit differently and would like you to have an experience of how I work and what it feels like and then at the end of our session I'd like you to share what you liked or found challenging to see if this may be helpful to you as a couple...and I'll also be glad to answer questions at that time'

-Reading

-Start doing the teaching thru inviting one person (I always make up a silly thing each week about who will go first....ex. the person who drank the most coffee this morning)...you'll talk first...called the Sender

-to other..You'll be the 'good Listener' first and will indicate your fabulous listening skills by repeating back.....

Appreciations...lots of positive stuff...

What I imagine you would like us to work on...

Practice and end with one more positive then I ask each to share what they liked and what they found challenging and I mirror that...say a bit about how this Dialogue process continues to evolve.. my recommendations/workshop and answer a few questions with lots of encouragement to keep learning....I will help them.

**Imago Couples Therapy Forms
Initial Session – Information Form**

Name of Therapist _____ **Date:** _____

Clients' Names _____

Address(es) _____

Tel: Home _____

Work _____

Mobile _____

Fax _____

E-mail _____

D.O.B. _____ **Age** _____

Marital Status _____

Children _____

Referred by: _____

Previous therapy: _____

Medications: _____

Prescribed by: _____

Contact info: _____

Imago Couples Therapy
Initial Session – Reasons and Goals for Therapy

Presenting Problem and Goals for Therapy:

Partner A:

Partner B:

What like/appreciate/fell in love with
Partner B:

Partner A:

Taping Consent Form

Consultation – for client and therapist benefit. Therapists regularly require consultation of their work for their own ongoing professional development and to enhance their work with their clients. It is very useful to use tapes for consultation with a qualified training professional. Tapes and discussions are treated with the utmost confidentiality and are never to be used for other purposes, such as presentations or publicity, without the express prior consent of the client(s). Consultation is sometimes held individually or in a consultation group.

We authorize _____
(Name of therapist)

to video and/or audio tape our therapy sessions for the purpose of enhancing our work together by using the tape for consultation as stated above in the introduction. All tapes will be used only within the context of professional consultation and will never be used in a public setting.

Client signature _____

Client signature _____

Therapist signature _____

Date _____

Guidelines for financial policy handout (Maureen Brine)

Name and address of therapist

Financial Policy

Office Visits : Fee payment for each session is due at the time of service unless arrangements are made. Fees are payable by credit card, check or cash.

The current fee is _____ per hour and _____ for a 1 ½ hour couple session.

Cancellations : Appointments must be cancelled at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled appointment time. Failure to provide 48 hours' notice will result in a "missed appointment" charge of the full fee for the time scheduled which will be charged to your credit card. Late cancellations due to medical or other emergencies will not be considered as "missed appointments".

Credit card # _____ Exp. _____

Name on card _____

Telephone Conversations: Fees for brief conversations between the therapist and client are included in the fees paid for routine office visits. If frequent or prolonged telephone conversations are required (especially those of a therapeutic nature) a fee of ___ per minute will be charged unless other arrangements have been made. This fee also applies to frequent or prolonged messages left on the therapist's voicemail.

Private Insurance and Extended Health Benefits: Unless other arrangements are made, clients must pay the therapist and then claim repayments from the insurance provider.

Income Tax Deductions: Fees for therapy are deductible under medical expenses on your income tax return depending on your income and other deductions.

Receipts: Receipts will be given for all payments.

Increases in Fees: Clients will be given ___ months notice of any increase in fees.

You are encouraged to discuss the above financial matters with the therapist at any time. The payment of fees for counseling is part of the client/therapist relationship. As such it is as open for discussion as any other concern.

Agreement

We agree to pay a fee of _____ per hour in full at the end of each session unless other arrangements have been made.

Date: _____ Signature _____
Name

Guidelines for Privacy of Information Handout (Maureen Brine)

**Name of therapist
Address of Therapist**

Privacy of Information

All aspects of your involvement as a client of _____ will be held in utmost confidence. Personally identifiable information regarding clients is not discussed or disclosed to outside parties without prior written permission of the client.

However, therapists and counselors are ethically and/or legally required to disclose confidential information to the appropriate authorities in four kinds of circumstances:

1. If a client indicates that s/he or another person may be a danger to his/herself or others.
2. In the case of apparent, suspected or potential child abuse or neglect.
3. If clients report sexual abuse by a Regulated Health Care Professional.
4. When a court issues a summons for records or testimony.

It is standard practice that from time to time your therapist may consult another colleague in order to improve the quality of the service provided to you. If video-tapes of your sessions are used for the purpose of consultation your written consent will be required. All efforts are made to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of client information.

Client records are maintained for a period of ____ years from the date of last contact. Records are then destroyed.

General - Informed Consent

Other than the circumstances listed above, your therapist can not converse, write or give any information about you or your circumstance without your written informed consent to do so.

Although the goal of your therapy is to improve your circumstance(s), at times clients can feel worse as they confront the issues that are troubling them. If this is your experience, please discuss it with your therapist.

Clients are free to discontinue counseling at any time, although it is highly advisable to discuss the reason for considering discontinuation with your therapist prior to acting on the decision.

Please sign below to affirm that you have read this policy statement

Signature _____

Therapist signature _____

Date _____

RELATIONSHIP VISION

Adapted from Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.

Invite the couple to write at the top of a page “**In my ideal relationship with you**” and then to write a series of short, descriptive sentences starting with “**We**” which cover different aspects of the relationship (emotional, sexual, financial, recreational, social, parenting, etc.), starting with things they already experience in their relationship that they value and including others which they do not currently have but which are part of their ideal. Ask them to word it in the present tense as if they experienced those things now and in the positive. Give examples.

Get them to share their whole list to date, emphasizing this is an ongoing work in process, using mirroring. Ask one to make an appointment, i.e. see if their partner is available, and then share one of their sentences and elaborate on it, paint a picture of what that looks like for them in their ideal.

e.g. We respect each other. Partner A describes what this looks like for them and Partner B mirrors until they have completed their thought about respect. Partner B summarizes.

Check with Partner B if this (i.e. We respect each other) is part of their ideal relationship whether or not they had written it on their list. If they say yes then ask them to paint the picture for their partner of what that looks like to them while Partner A mirrors and eventually summarizes. Then ask them to come up with a sentence or sentences that integrate the contributions of both and if necessary model this so that the product is an integration of both. They then write the sentence(s) on a fresh page entitled “**In our ideal relationship**”. (If the partner says “No”, this is not part of their vision, suggest that they put this item aside to deal with as a frustration at a later time and move on to an item on Partner B’s list).

Repeat with Partner B starting by sharing a sentence from their list. If they are able to do the task well in the session ask them if they would be willing to continue to work on this at home.

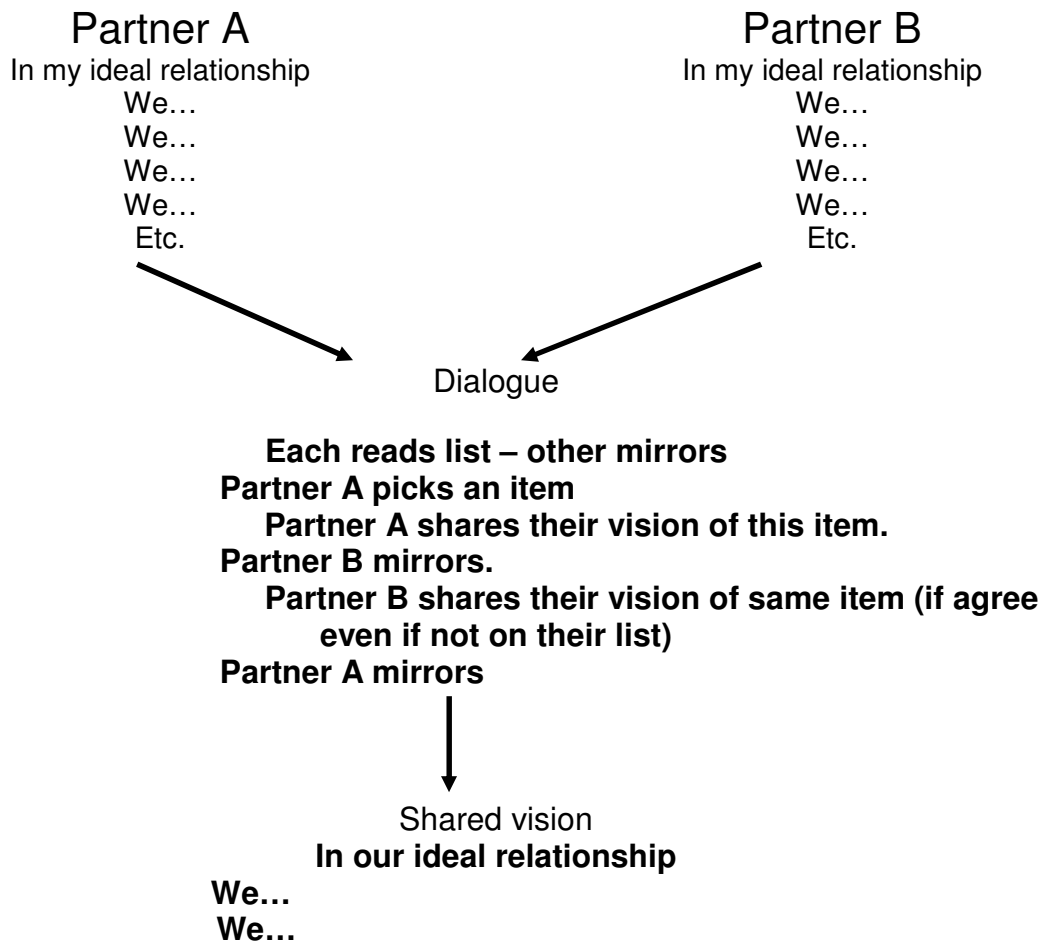
Pointers: Keep them in the ideal and out of comparisons with the present.

Keep them in the present tense as if they had it now.

Keep them in the positive – how it is rather than how it isn’t.

This is not a good exercise to use with very “hope wounded” couples who have been disappointed too many times by too many broken promises and dare not risk hoping again at present. You will need to do a lot of other work first.

Relationship Vision – Summary



Repeat with each item until all shared items are completed

Make a nice copy

Read together daily alternating sentences for 90 days.
Can also be read at beginning of each session.

MY RELATIONSHIP VISION

In my ideal relationship

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

OUR RELATIONSHIP VISION

In our ideal relationship

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

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We _____

We _____

We _____

We _____

SENTENCE STEMS for DEEPENING

An effective way to move the Sender in a dialogue from blame to “I” statements or from content to affect, is through the use of sentence stems. Nathaniel Brandon wrote many books on the use of sentence stems to by-pass cognitive resistance and move into deeper experiencing. It is a respectful tool, because it allows clients to decide where they want to take the stem. It also sends the message that they know best about their own internal experience. Unlike questions that move people into their cognition, stems invite people into their inner knowing. You feed the stem in a quiet voice and encourage the client to repeat the stem and then finish it. The sentence stems to choose, of course, depend on what the client is saying, and yet there are some stems that work frequently. For those of you starting out, here are some stems to help, remembering the most important thing is to attune to the clients.

When you did that/said that, I interpreted it to mean...
And then I felt...
What I am afraid of...
What hurts...
What that reminds me of...
How I protected myself in childhood was...
How that affects the way I behave today...
What I long for is...
How I imagine my behavior affects you is...
A new decision I might make given that I am no longer a child is...
And out of that decision, a new way I might behave is...
What makes it hard to take in your love is...
When I get scared, how I try to protect myself is...
Underneath my anger, what I am experiencing is...
If I reclaim my (feeling, lost part, etc.), what I am afraid will happen is...
One unspeakable that I want to tell you about me is...
What I am experiencing in my body is...
What makes it hard for me to give you what you need is...
How giving you what you need will help me is...
The story I make up about your behavior is...
The image I put on your face that has me make up that story about you...
How that image keeps me safe is...
How it keeps me from getting what I want is...
A new image I could hold of you is...
If I could hold that image, how I might respond differently is...

To practice creating sentence stems, make a list of questions you can imagine you might want to ask a particular client, and turn your questions into stems, i.e. “What do you want to accomplish when you say that?” to “What I am trying to accomplish by saying that is...”.

Summary for the Full Dialogue with Possible Stems to Deepen

SENDER

RECEIVER

I want to talk to you about (topic). Are you available to listen?

Yes, or ASAP

What I am concerned about is...

Mirror, Did I get it?
Is there more?

When that happens what I am afraid of is...

Mirror, Did I get it?
Is there more?

What hurts me is...

Mirror, Did I get it?
Is there more?

(When complete)

So in summary...
Is that a good summary?

You make sense to me because...

I imagine you feel... Is that what you feel?

(Switch Roles)

NEW SENDER

NEW RECEIVER

What touched me about what you said was...

Mirror, Did I get it?
Is there more?

And what I want to share with you about myself is...

Mirror, Did I get it?
Is there more?

And what goes on inside of me is...

Mirror. Did I get it?
Is there more?

(Continue until have fully expressed that piece)
(When complete)

So, in summary...Is that a good summary?

You make sense to me because...
I imagine you feel...

NEW SENDER

NEW RECEIVER

What I appreciated about you during our time together... Mirror
(or A pearl for me from our time together is...)

(Continue switching roles back and forth until complete)

Guided Meditation of Transition and Connection for Starting a Session

Let's take a few minutes to be fully present here in this time together today, to make the transition from whatever we have been doing before being here, and to be more connected with ourselves as we move into connection with each other. I invite you to put down any books or papers, and to find a position that is comfortable.

Letting yourself go inwards and focus on your **breath**. Breathing slowly and deeply. Letting your body find its own natural rhythm. Noticing. Noticing the breath in and the breath out. With the breath in, noticing the experience of taking in, of receiving, filling up, expanding. With the breath out, noticing the experience of breathing out, expressing, of letting go, releasing, emptying. Slowly and deeply.

Letting yourself connect with your **thoughts**, preoccupations, worries, concerns, whatever is going on in your head. Noticing. Noticing the energy flow to your thoughts. And with the breath out letting go of any thoughts or concerns that you don't need to hold onto right now. Releasing. Breathing in quietness.

Letting yourself connect with your **feelings**. Being aware of your emotions. Noticing the energy to your feelings, the intensity. And with the breath out, letting go of any emotions that you don't need to hold onto in this time and place, that don't belong to now. Releasing, emptying. Breathing in calmness.

Letting yourself connect with your **body**. Scanning your body. Noticing any places in your body where you may be holding pain or tension. Noticing the energy flowing to your muscles. And again with the breath out, letting go of any pain or tension that you don't need to be aware of right now. Scanning your body again and noticing any places in your body where you may be feeling calm or energized. Noticing. As you breathe in, letting the breath fill those parts of you and letting the calm or the energy spread through your body. Noticing.

Letting yourself connect with your **sensory** experience in this moment – noticing the energy flow to your senses. Noticing the colors, the movement, noticing the sounds, the smells, the taste in your mouth, the touch of the air and your clothing on your skin. Noticing. Then releasing that awareness.

Letting yourself connect with your **core energy**, your life force pulsating within you and radiating around you. Noticing the quality of that energy.

Now I invite you to connect with your **intentions**: what are your intentions for your relationship What are your intentions for your time here together this day. Letting an image come into your mind now of how you need to be and to behave to be consistent with your intentions. Letting yourself be that in your imagination. Noticing how it feels in your body to be that way.

Now expanding your awareness to include the **presence of** your partner. Being aware that s/he is having an experience of this moment that is different from your own. Letting yourself experience curiosity. Letting yourself know that each of you is a human being with a history of pain and hurt, each of you learnt how to survive and protect yourselves as children, each is on a journey to greater consciousness and each can contribute to creating the safety for both to more deeply explore and risk new possibilities. Opening your eyes now slowly and gently. Looking into each other's eyes and connecting without words.

Alternative Meditation for Beginning a Session

Therapist: I am going to ask you to close your eyes and take a deep breath. Notice what you are feeling in your body. Try as your breathing becomes more rhythmic, to let all the tensions and cares of the day fade away.

Let yourself know that the person sitting across from you is not your enemy but your friend, one who holds the blueprint for your ongoing growth. Let yourself remember that there are no mean people here, just hurt people trying to do their best to survive in the ways they learnt to do that.

Keep the focus of your attention on yourself as much as possible. Remember that the only person you can really change is yourself and that you can work on yourself to make positive change happen in your relationship. We all contribute to the problems in our relationship especially when we are not aware of it. Therefore we can also help to make things right in our relationship by becoming more aware and changing our own behavior.

Remember that the universe has provided you with the perfect person to invite you into your growth. There are no mistakes here just opportunities for more learning and growth.

Go inside and right next to whatever the frustration or upset is that you may have with your partner, find an appreciation that you can give him/her, either in general or in specific terms. When you have found one, open your eyes. Take as much time as you need.

You can also have them share what they most appreciated this week or how they have contributed to the relationship this week.

Imago Relationship Theory - a Brief Outline

One Way of Perceiving Relationships

Childhood

- Most of us come into the world with our full potential relatively intact and with genetic predispositions.
- During childhood in our relationships we experience pleasure and pain.
- Pain results when we do not get some of our basic needs adequately met.
- Our primitive survival drive equates pain with the threat of death.
- We learn to adapt to get more of the pleasure and less of the pain.
- These adaptations help us to survive and they limit our full potential.
- We get messages about how we can and cannot be and behave to be accepted by our social group.
- To get this acceptance we give up some of our capacity to function fully in areas of thinking, feeling, acting, sensing and our very being.
- We emerge from childhood with some basic needs insufficiently fulfilled, with our adaptive styles firmly established, with some areas of our functioning repressed or undeveloped, and with an internalized image (the Imago) of the people who have been most important to us in our experiences of love and pain.

Some Premises of Imago Theory

- All things in nature have an impulse towards healing and wholeness.
- We were wounded in relationship; it is through relationship that we must heal.
- The unconscious purpose of adult intimate relationships is to finish childhood so we can reach our fullest potential and regain our natural energetic pulsation.

Adulthood - Unconscious Relating

- We are attracted to people who match our Imago, i.e. who have the best and the worst traits of the people who have been most significant to us, and they evoke in us similar primal feelings.
- We are attracted to people who function fully and sometimes excessively in the areas where we have shut down our functioning in order to be accepted.
- If we get into relationship with them we initially see only the positives. We are blind to the negative traits or find them attractive, endearing or easily changed.
- The “Romantic Stage” gives us a taste of the fullest potential of the self, the other and of relationship. Paradoxically we are in relationship with the reality of the partner’s most loved and loving self, and also with the illusion of who they are, based on our own idealized Imago which we project onto them like a movie onto a screen.
- The “Romantic Stage” does not last. Researchers believe that our brains habituate to the neuro-chemicals which produce the feelings and side effects of Romantic Love: euphoria, high energy and libido, decreased appetite, etc..
- The “Power Struggle” follows when we are both trying to get our unfulfilled needs from childhood met by a person who cannot meet them because of their own survival adaptations, which resemble the worst traits of our caregivers. These trigger in us the rage or fear with which we reacted when our primitive survival drives were threatened in childhood. More and more we project our negative Imago onto the screen of the other.
- The survival adaptations of one partner cause pain to the other, who defends him/herself and the defense causes pain to the partner, who defends ..., thus establishing a vicious cycle of re_wounding and defense, re_wounding and defense.
- In addition, when we see in the other the capacities we repressed in order to be accepted, they trigger anxiety in us and we try to repress them in the partner.
- To get out of the pain of the “Power Struggle” many of us end the relationship or turn to other people and activities (e.g. lovers, children, work, addictions) to try to get our unfulfilled needs met.
- The conflict of the “Power Struggle” is an indication that growth is trying to happen. This stage is meant to be and is not meant to last.
-

Adulthood - Conscious Relating

- We become conscious of our own unfulfilled needs from childhood and our unconscious relationship agenda.

- We become conscious of our own disowned and denied areas of functioning.
- We become conscious of our own survival adaptations and how these trigger pain in our partners.
- We develop and implement a Personal Growth Plan to re-integrate lost capacities to think, feel, do, sense and be.
- We learn and use skills to relate in ways that are consistent with our intentions rather than our primitive survival directives. We exercise greater choice.
- We let go of old relationship hurts and old reactive ways of being in relationship.
- We learn to be safe and healing partners.
- We learn to empathically understand and accept others as they are, while inviting them to grow back into their fullest potential.
- We grow back into our full potential to meet our partners' unfulfilled needs.
- We work through our resistance to receiving the love we want.

Imago Consultation Feedback Form – for Session 2 Assignment

What I felt in my body as I worked/watched my work was...

What I liked about my work as a therapist was...

A technical suggestion is... *or* Something I might have done differently is...

My growth gift is (re defensive character structure or lost self that would help me be more fully present and connected)...

What that will look like in my work and on my tape is...

Ask yourself the following questions based on the tape:

a) What do you imagine is the wound displayed by each of the partners (e.g. abandonment, smothering, etc.)

b) Which partner do you perceive as maximizing/minimizing

c) What might be the unmet developmental need of each partner (e.g. consistent availability, attunement, mirroring)

d) What do you make up is the primary character defense of each (e.g. clinging, distancing, diffuseness)

**Scoring System For Imago Therapy Certification
The Imago Dialogue**

(Revised May 13, 2008)

Name of Trainee: _____ Date of evaluation: _____

Name of Observer _____

Instructions: Below are general and specific clinical skills to look for during an Imago Dialogue. Score each item from 0 to the amount allotted and put your score in the "Points Scored" column. Make sure your comments are very specific in Sections D, E, and F (ok to use additional paper). Sign your name at the top of this form.

Couple Session # _____

70-79 Basic Clinical Training level / 80-89 passes at Advanced Clinician level / 90-100 passes at CI level

<u>Section A: The evaluator's general experience of the tape – 20 points</u>	Value	Points Scored	<u>Section D: What I liked</u>	
1. My general impression of this work.	0 to 20			
<u>Section B: Therapist Qualities - 15 Possible Points</u>				
1. The clinician is warm, present, at ease and looks professional	0 to 5			
2. The clinician is neutral for the good of the relationship and does not take sides	0 to 5			
3. The clinician is in control as a coach, but is not controlling	0 to 5			
<u>Section C: Establishing and maintaining the structure of the dialogue - 39 Possible Points</u>				
1. Couples face each other and are coached to dialogue with each other.	0 to 2			
2. An Appointment is made.	0 to 2			
3. The clinician has the couple deal with specifics (topic is not vague)	0 to 2			
4. The receiver is invitational in style. (This may include: "Did I get it?" and/or "Is there more about that?", but only when needed.)	0 to 2			
5. The clinician intervenes appropriately	0 to 5			
5. The clinician coaches a back and forth flow between the couple, where both have a chance to send and receive.	0 to 2			
6. 90% of the session is between the couple.	0 to 2			
7. Any talking by the clinician to the couple or an individual is to be in the service of enhancing connection between the couple.	0 to 2			
8. Mirror - the clinician coaches the receiver to contain reactivity	0 to 5			
9. Mirror - the clinician coaches the summaries to be accurate and not interpretive.	0 to 5			
10. Validation	0 to 5			
11. Empathy	0 to 5			
<u>Section D: Therapist facilitation of deepening - 26 Possible Points</u>				
1. In order to achieve good results in deepening, the clinician uses the skills of attuned listening and good tracking.	0 to 4			
2. The clinician deepens the work through the use of lead lines, doubling, instructions (such as "Tell him more about that."), and appropriate silences to help clients get in touch with their emotions (e.g.: pain, sadness, joy), vulnerability and needs.	0 to 4			
3. The clinician facilitates the sender to transform all blaming, shaming and criticism into self disclosure and vulnerability.	0 to 6			
4. The clinician is coaching the couple in a way that will create an empathic connection.	0 to 4			
5. The clinician coaches the receiver to respond in a way that owns "their stuff", deepens connection, and enhances differentiation.	0 to 4			
6. The clinician coaches the receiver to decrease reactivity, increase presence, attunement and curiosity about/toward the sender.	0 to 4			

Section E: Technical suggestions

Section E: Technical suggestions cont:

Section F: Growth gift