

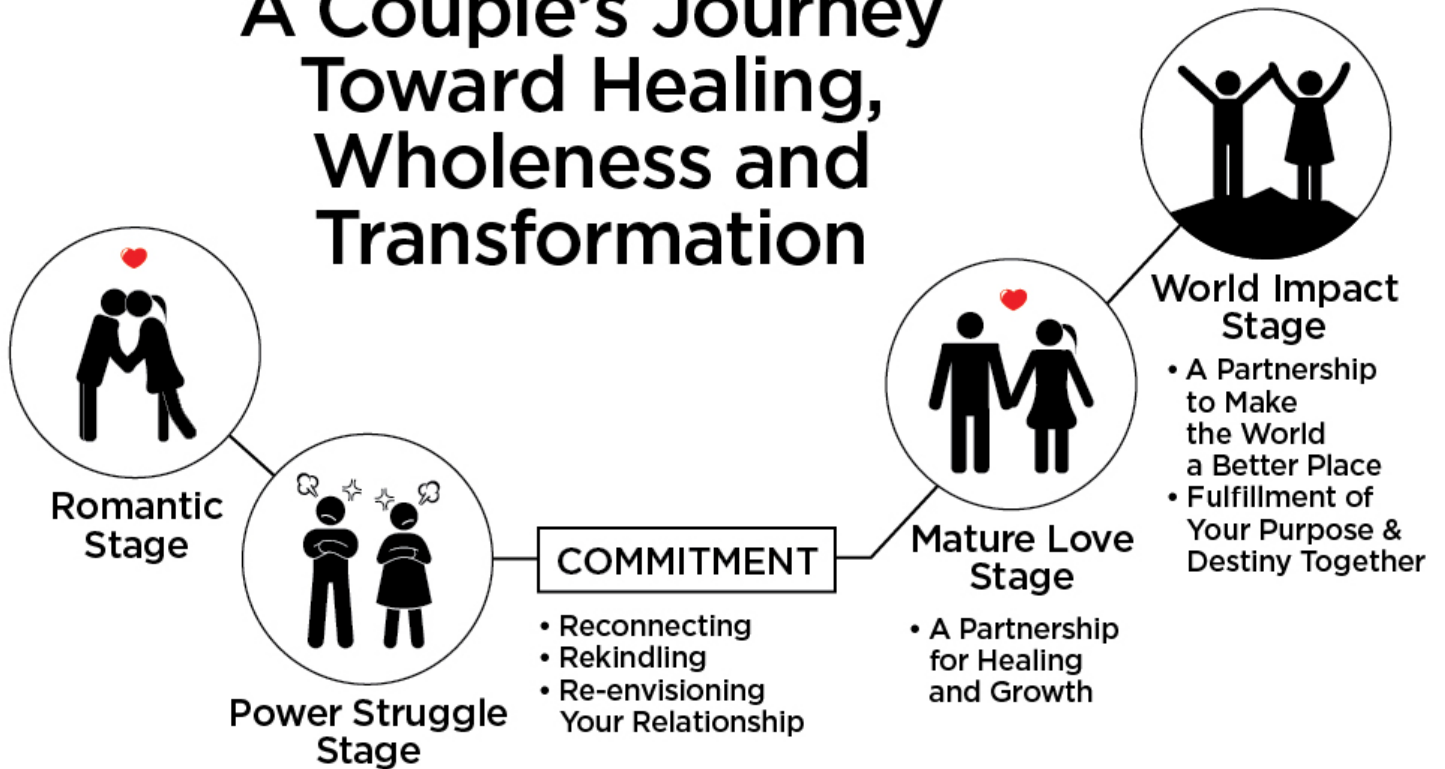
COUPLE'S TOOLBOX

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Compiled by Chuck Starnes

A Couple's Journey Toward Healing, Wholeness and Transformation



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RELATIONSHIP VISION

Envision your marriage how you would like it to be. Make a list of positive statements beginning with the word “We” that describe the kind of relationship you would like to have. State them in the present tense as if the future were already here. Example: “We enjoy each other’s company; We spend time together doing things we both enjoy; We are financially secure; We have a stable, intimate relationship both emotionally and physically; We are a great team parenting our children; We serve our community together by _____ ; etc.”

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

Share your sentences. Underline the items you have in common. If your partner has written sentences you agree with but didn’t think of, add them to your list. For now just ignore the ones not shared.

Take your expanded list and rank them in importance with “A” being most important, “B” important and “C” least important.

Work together to design a mutual relationship vision listing each sentence in order of importance.

Post this list where you can visualize it and recite it daily. Once a week read it out loud to each other. Soon you will begin to experience this marriage that you are visualizing and declaring.

www.chuckstarnes.com

APPRECIATION DIALOGUE

SENDER

Ask for appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

THEN SAY...

- *"One thing I appreciate about you is..."*
- *"And what that makes me feel is..."*
- *"What that reminds me of when I was little is..."*

RECEIVER

Grant appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

LISTEN, THEN SAY...(after each statement)

- *"Let me see if I got you. You said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*

SUMMARIZE

- *"Let me see if I got all that. In summary you are saying..." "Did I get it all?"*
- *"You got it."*
- *"Thanks for sharing that."*
- *"Thanks for listening."*

END WITH APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT
(couples: 1 min. full body hug)

THE COUPLE'S DIALOGUE

SENDER

Ask for appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

ALWAYS START WITH APPRECIATION

- *"One thing I appreciate about you is..."*
- *"And what that makes me feel is..."*

THEN SHARE FRUSTRATION

- *"It was frustrating when..."*
- *"When that happened, I felt..."*
- *"That reminds me of when I was little and..."*
- *"What I'm really afraid of is..."*
- *"What I did in reaction was..."*

- Yes or no. If no, try again.

- Yes or no. If no, try again.

END WITH 1 MIN. FULL-BODY HUG

RECEIVER

Grant appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

MIRROR

- *"Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*

"Thanks for sharing that."

MIRROR

- *"Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*

- **Summarize** *"To summarize what I heard you say..."*

VALIDATE

- *"You make sense, and what makes sense is..."*
- *"Is that the validation you need?"*

EMPATHIZE

- *"I can imagine your feel..."*
- *"Did I empathize with you?"*

FOUR POWERFUL APPRECIATIONS EACH DAY

This is a tool to help you you rekindle romantic love and create a safety zone in your relationship for further growth and healing.

It has to do with four critical moments that occur each day:

1. The first four minutes you both are awake in the morning

2. Saying “Goodbye”

3. The first four minutes you are home in the evening

4. Saying “Good night”

According to Dr. Gary Brainerd, what you do during these times each day has 5 times the impact on your relationship than other times.

The goal is to use these four critical moments to say or do things that make your partner feel loved. Start by doing the following during these four times each day:

1. Give a 60-second full-body hug.

In about 20 seconds you both will begin to feel pleasurable sensations all over your body as oxytocin and other super-healthy pleasure chemicals are released into your system. Continue for one full minute to get the full effect.

But don't just count the seconds. Use the time to share an appreciation.

2. Share an appreciation...“One thing I appreciate about you is...”

Look into each other's eyes, and one at a time, finish this statement:

“One thing I appreciate about you is...”

It should be whatever comes to your mind that you genuinely appreciate. It could be *“I appreciate you wearing that shirt today. You make it look good, and it makes me feel proud to be with you.”* Or it could be something like *“One thing I appreciate about you is the way you give of yourself so unselfishly to take care of our children.”*

Get the idea? Now try it.

A 30-second appreciation one way. Then a 30-second appreciation the other way.

Giving one. Receiving one. All while embracing in a 60-second full body hug.

3. Do this four times a day over the next six weeks.

BRIEF RELATIONSHIP WORKUP

Think back to when you were 0-18 years old...

1. In the columns below write the POSTIVE TRAITS of your primary caretakers. Use words like *warm, loving, always there, nurturing, sense of humor, intelligent, hard-working, playful, spiritual*, etc. (Circle the 5 most significant)

MOTHER

FATHER

OTHER

2. In the columns below right the NEGATIVE TRAITS of your primary care takers. Use words like *never there, critical, anxious, angry, controlling, cold, distant, preoccupied, depressed, hard to please*, etc. (Circle the 5 most significant)

MOTHER

FATHER

OTHER

3. In the section below write THREE THINGS YOU NEEDED MOST and did not get from your caretakers. Use words like more time, acceptance of who I was, encouragement, affection, understanding, respect, a peaceful home, etc.

1)

2)

3)

4. List THREE CHILDHOOD FRUSTRATIONS, what you felt, and what you did in response to them. Use words like *argued back, stayed away, kept on until I got my way, went to my room, locked myself in the closet, avoid contact*, etc.

FRUSTRATION

WHAT YOU FELT

WHAT YOU DID TO COPE

1)

2)

3)

Relationship Resources
ChuckStarnes.com

MY UNCONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIP AGENDA

Follow the instructions to transfer information from the Relationship Work up. Imagine this is your unconscious speaking when you were in the meat selection process, and when you are being “automatic” in your relationship.

1. I am trying to find a life partner who will be... (Insert circled positive traits from section 1 of the Relationship Workup).

2. But I won't really fall in love unless he or she also has at least some of these traits... (Insert circled negative traits from section 2 of the work up).

When I find someone with a blend of these positive and negative traits, I will get really interested in him or her and may fall in love and form an intimate, committed to love relationship.

3. In my relationship I will struggle to get my partner to stop exhibiting negative traits, so I can finally get what I am longing for in a relationship – an adult version of this...(Insert unmet needs from section 3 in the Workup).

1)

2)

3)

4. In my relationship I will sometimes do things that are self limiting, things that actually keep me from getting what I'm longing for. This will tend to happen when I do an adult version of these behaviors... (Insert past coping responses to frustrations from section 4 of the Workup).

1)

2)

3)

THE ZERO NEGATIVITY PLEDGE

Nothing can happen in a relationship that is not safe. No relationship can be safe if there is negativity in the form of criticism, blaming and defensiveness.

1. We understand that “negativity” is any transaction that ruptures our connection – whether intentional or accidental. This includes negativity under the guise of “constructive criticism” and non-verbal communication such as a glare, an eye-roll, etc.
2. We pledge to make our relationship a Zone of Zero Negativity for the next 30 days by omitting from all our interactions with each other any words, tones, or body language that could be experienced as a “putdown,” thus rupturing our connection.
3. We will make requests when we have a problem and ask for what we want in a way that does not put our partner down.
4. We will express our concerns using “I” statements rather than “You” statements.
5. If we experience a rupture, we will send a gentle signal (bing, ouch, wow, oops!) immediately to communicate that we have experienced a “put-down,” and then use the repair process to restore safety and connecting.
6. We pledge to give three appreciations daily to each other, no matter what!
7. Will chart our progress on a calendar for the next 30 days, recording when we succeed, when we fail, and when we repair it and reconnect (see next page).

By signing below I agree to the following zero negativity pledge:

Signed Date

Signed Date

THE ZERO NEGATIVITY REPAIR PROCESS

What if you experience negativity?

Say, "Ouch." (or whatever word you agree on that signals you hear or feel negativity)

And now, it's time to repair and reconnect using ONE of the following ways:

1. Be curious rather than negative. Ask for a dialogue to learn what produced the "ouch." Was it a word, tone of voice, look in the eye, gesture, etc.?
2. Ask your partner to say what they said in a way that doesn't feel so negative to you. You can model it for them.
3. Take a time out. Ask for a RE-DO. You can simply start over and redo the transaction.
4. Science says it takes 5 positives to repair 1 negative. Give 5 appreciations to your partner.
5. Have a dialogue with your partner about what repairs an "ouch" for each of you. It can include apologies, laughing, a back rub, dancing with each other, etc.
6. When you repair and restore connection, put a "reset" sticker over the frowning face and CELEBRATE. This is a moment of triumph. The sign of a healthy relationship is how quickly you can repair.

Created by:
Harville Hendrix
Helen LaKelly Hunt

CARING BEHAVIORS

OBJECTIVE: To share with each other specifics about what you want, what pleases you, what your partner could do that will make you feel loved and valued. Then to commit to do these things for each other randomly at least three times a day over the next two months.

PURPOSE: To rekindle feelings of romance and to create a safety zone in the relationship where bonding can occur.

INSTRUCTIONS: Make a list as you think about three areas: (1) what your partner is already doing that pleases you, (2) what your partner used to do that pleased you and (3) what have always wanted but never asked for. These may be very private fantasies but should not be a present source of conflict.

With each item complete the sentence, “I feel loved and cared about when you...” (Examples: make me coffee in the morning, call me from work just to check in, tell me I’m doing a good job, help me with my chores around the house, spend quality time talking with me, take a shower with me, compliment me on how I look, give me a back rub, want to have sex with me, bring me an unexpected gift, cuddle without having to have sex)

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Indicate the importance of each item with an A, B or C, with A being most important.

Now exchange lists. On your partner’s list put an X by any items you are not willing to do at this time, making the rest of the list conflict free. Then beginning tomorrow, do at least two of these behaviors each day for two months. Start with the easier ones first and then move to the more difficult ones. These acts are to be GIFTS, NOT OBLIGATIONS. However, do them whether you feel like it or not. The act of doing these things will begin to ignite your desire, rekindle the romance and create a safety zone that will allow deeper connection and bonding. If either of you experience some resistance with this exercise, keep on doing these caring behaviors until the resistance is overcome. Do it even if you don’t feel it. Your feelings will follow.

Relationship Resources
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CARING BEHAVIORS DIALOGUE

SENDER

Ask for appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

RECEIVER

Grant appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

MIRROR

- *"One thing that makes me feel loved and cared about is..."*
- *"When that happens, I feel..."*
- *"That reminds me of when I was little and..."*
- *"Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*
- **Summarize** *"To summarize what I heard you say..."*

VALIDATE

- *"You make sense, and what makes sense is..."*
- *"Is that the validation you need?"*

EMPATHIZE

- *"I can imagine your feel..."*
- *"Did I empathize with you?"*

"Yes."

"Yes."

END WITH ONE-MINUTE FULL BODY HUG

PARENT/CHILD DIALOGUE

This dialogue is a role-play. One partner will play the role of a parent and the other will remember a time when young – 5 to 8 years old. Use present tense language in your dialogue.

PARENT

1. Say to your child: **"I am your mom/dad, what is it like living with me?"**
3. Mirror: **"I'm your mom/dad, you said living with me is ..."**
- "Did I get it?"**
- "Is there more?"**
5. **"What is your deepest hurt with me?"**
7. Mirror: **"Your deepest hurt with me is ..."**
8. **"I am your mom/dad, What do you need from me that I don't give you?"**
10. **"I am your mom/dad, What you need from me is ..." when accurate say, "I wish I could give that to you, you deserve to have it"**

DEROLE

12. I am now your partner, **"What behavior could I DO that will begin to touch that childhood wound?"**
14. **"I can do that."**

CHILD

2. **"Living with you, dad/mom is ..."**
4. Continue until... **"There is no more."**
6. **"My deepest hurt with you, mom / dad is ..."**
- (Sentence stems may help deepen: "What hurts me about that is..." "I am sad about that because ..." What I'm afraid of is ...")
9. **"What I need from you, mom/dad, is ..."**
11. **"Thank you for Listening."**

DEROLE

13. **"The behavior I want that will touch my childhood wound of _____ is ..."**
15. **"Thank you for your commitment to that behavior."**

MY EARLY CHALLENGE AND NEED

First: Identify the "early challenge" that may be affecting your marriage.

Study the ten items in the two columns below. Circle the ONE (and only one) that most represents your greatest early challenge.

MY EARLY CHALLENGE

INTRUSIVE I wanted:	NEGLECTFUL I wanted:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get free from feeling controlled by others. • To express my own thoughts rather than what I should think. • To express what I felt rather than what I should feel. • To experience my thoughts and feelings as important. • To do what I wanted to do rather than what I ought to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To experience feeling seen and valued rather than invisible. • To be approached by others rather than feel alone or abandoned. • To feel appreciated as a person. • To get support for what I think or feel. • To have someone interested in what I want and like.
OTHER:	OTHER:

Second: Identify the "early need" that may be affecting your marriage.

Just as you did with your early challenge, study the ten items in the two columns below. Circle the ONE (and only one) that most represents your greatest early need.

MY EARLY NEED

INTRUSIVE I needed:	NEGLECTFUL I needed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have space and time to myself on a regular basis • To experience trust from others in my thinking and my decisions. • To be asked what I feel and what I want. • To experience genuine and reliable warmth when I need it. • To experience what I do and want is valued by others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To experience a show of interest in me when I am talking. • To be responded to when I asked for it. • To ask me what I want, feel and think and then respond. • To show curiosity about my experiences in life. • To get love and a gentle touch frequently and without having to ask.
OTHER:	OTHER:

Third: Communicate this challenge and need to your partner using The Couple's Dialogue

YOU: *"When I was a child, I lived with caretakers who were generally _____ (Neglectful or Intrusive), and my relational challenge with them was to _____ (the challenge you wrote down)."*

PARTNER: (Mirrors)

YOU: *"And when I remember that, I feel _____."*

PARTNER: (Mirrors)

YOU: *"What I needed most from them was _____ (the need you wrote down)."*

PARTNER: (Mirrors)

PARTNER: (Summarizes) *"Let me see if I got all of that. In summary, your caretakers were generally _____ and the relationship challenge you had with them was to _____. When you remember that, you feel _____. What you needed from them was _____, and not getting that from them, you brought _____ to our relationship. Did I get it all?"*

PARTNER: (Validates) *"You make sense, and what makes sense is that if your caretakers were _____, then your challenge would have been _____, and that your relationship need would be _____. It also makes sense that not getting that in your early years, you would bring it to our relationship. Is that an accurate validation?"*

PARTNER: (Empathizes) *"And given that, I can imagine that if you're relationship need to _____ was met by me, you would feel _____ (glad, relieved, happy, connected, heard, etc.). Is that your feeling? Are there other feelings?"*

PARTNER: *"Thank you for sharing with me your unmet need caused by your childhood challenges. I want very much for you to have your needs met in our relationship."*

YOU: *"Thank you for listening and for wanting to understand this about me, and for helping me with it."*

Give each other a one-minute, full body hug.

THEN SWITCH ROLES AND REPEAT THE PROCESS.

WHAT IS YOUR “FIGHTING STYLE”?

The Hailstorm or The Turtle



MAXIMIZER



MINIMIZER

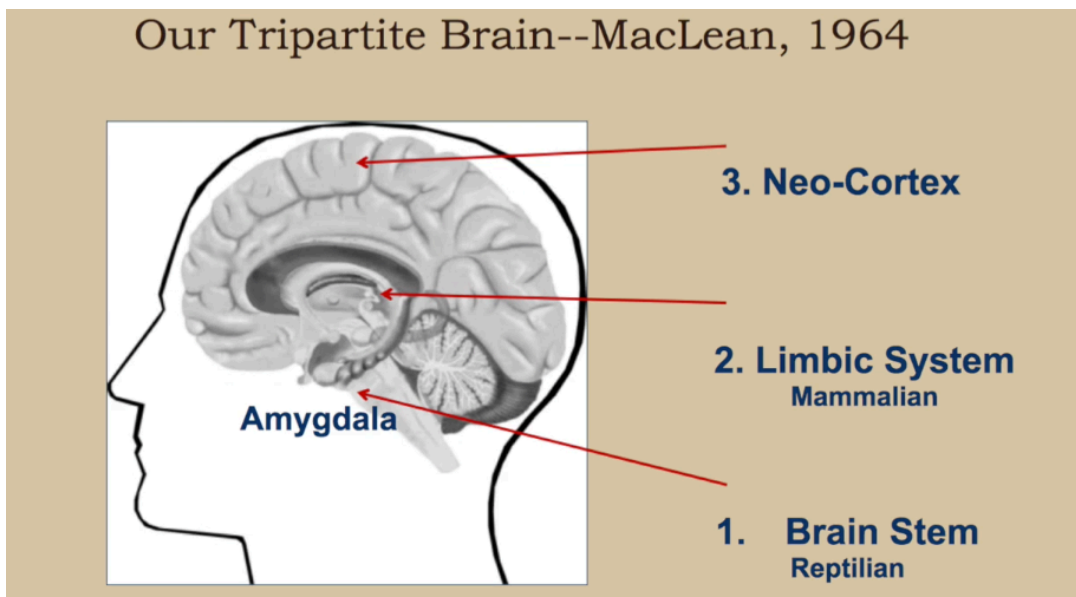
Our defenses are what make a conversation unsafe. There are two ways that we go into a defense mode. We either conserve our feelings by drawing them into ourselves (Minimizer), or we explode them outward toward our partner and the world (Maximizer). Either mode can put safety in jeopardy and lead to a failed conversation.

THE 90/10 PRINCIPLE

90% of my upset is based on the past.

10% is based on the present.

My partner's words and actions can trigger unconscious emotional reactions based on childhood wounds, frustrations and unmet needs.



When our lower brain senses danger it activates our defenses. Adrenaline and cortisol are released and our blood rushes from the “thinking” part of our brain into our muscles for flight or fight. In this “drugged up” and “dumbed down” state we tend to mishandle communications by either disengaging or becoming aggressive. The prescribed sentence stems disrupts this process and enables you to stay present and curious. You can’t be curious and critical at the same time.

CHANGE REQUEST DIALOGUE

SENDER

Ask for appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync
(Begin with an appreciation)

RECEIVER

Grant appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

MIRRORING

“One thing that is happening that is frustrating to me is...”

Mirrors: “What I hear you saying is...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

“Yes. When this happens I feel...”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

“Yes. What I’m afraid of is...”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

“Yes. What that reminds me of from my childhood is...”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

“No, there is no more.”

Summarizes: “To summarize what you said...”

VALIDATION

Validates: “What you said makes sense, and what makes sense about it is...”

“Did I understand you?”

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

EMPATHY

Empathizes: “I can see that you feel...” or “I can imagine that you feel...”

“Do I have that right?”

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

CHANGE REQUEST

“One thing that would help me next time is...”

“I will do that.”

(Ask for it “the next time”, not “from now on”.
Make it a SMART request - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based).

COMMITMENT DIALOGUE

SENDER

Ask for appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

RECEIVER

Grant appointment
Make eye contact
Take a few deep breaths in sync

MIRRORING

"One activity I use to avoid connecting with you is..."

Mirrors: "What I hear you saying is...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?"

"Yes. And I do this when I feel..."

Mirrors: "You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?"

"Yes. And what I'm afraid of is..."

Mirrors: "You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?"

"Yes. And what that reminds me of from my childhood is..."

Mirrors: "You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?"

"No, there is no more."

Summarizes: "To summarize what you said..."

VALIDATION

Validates: "It makes sense that you...and what makes sense about it is..."

"Did I understand you?"

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

EMPATHY

Empathizes: "I can see that you feel..." or "I can imagine that you feel..."

"Do I have that right?"

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

COMMITMENT

"I intend to keep talking with words rather than taking this exit from our relationship and acting out in this way, because I want to deepen my connection with you."

"Thank you."

