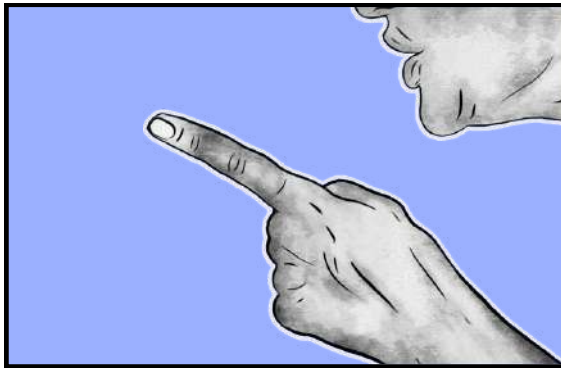


SHOW, DON'T TELL

Reaching into one
another's worlds
to resolve conflict

(Sometimes called Intersubjectivity)



When we are in conflict, we know exactly
what the problem is: **THE OTHER PERSON!**

We might feel indignant, self-righteous, cold
or rageful. We might feel the need to defend
ourselves from unfair accusations or blame.



Empathy could feel risky, or impossible, or
unwise. To accept the other person's point of
view as reasonable or genuine would feel like
we are losing the battle and admitting they are
right in their idiotic and wrongheaded ideas!



But later, sometimes we think
"Sheesh, did I really say that to
my father/ mother/ brother/
sister/ spouse/partner/
daughter or son?"



SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Losing the capacity to see ourselves from
the outside and others from the inside.

When we are upset or angry (or feeling other strong emotions), we may
stop seeing another as a person with a valid experience. We might lose
the capacity to see that, like us, they are motivated or driven by genuine
concerns, by emotions, by states of mind, or by strong body sensations
and urges. We might lose the capacity to see how we are coming across.

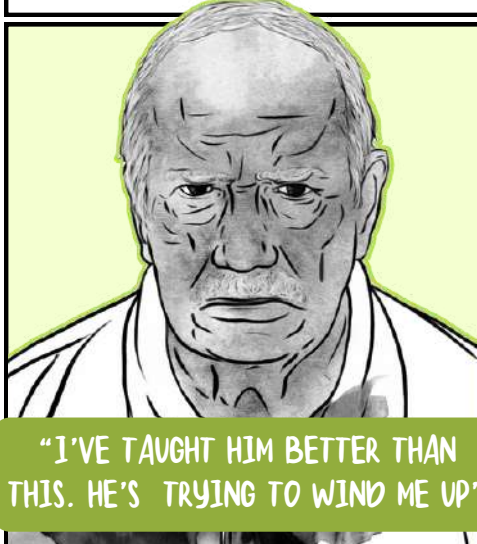
INSTEAD WE MIGHT:

Only believe that others care for us if
they meet our demands and desires.



"Don't be
disrespectful!
Do what I
say. I'm your
mum."

Believe that our thoughts and feelings
about others' motivations are facts.



"I'VE TAUGHT HIM BETTER THAN
THIS. HE'S TRYING TO WIND ME UP"

Lose the ability to accept or be curious
about another's thoughts and feelings.



"He's just jealous
and resentful
for no reason.
This is ridiculous."

We can sometimes become SO STUCK in our own view of the conflict that we become trapped in our own mind and are unable to see another's experience of us.

INSTEAD WE MIGHT:

Fiercely and with certainty believe our own story of what is motivating their actions

"She's just jealous. She has always hated me. She's just blaming me for her own mistakes - again! She always does this."



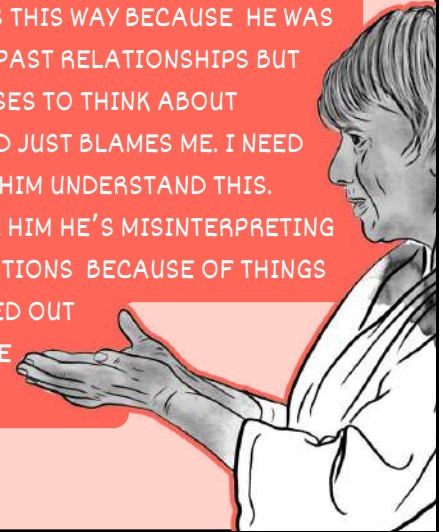
Be 100% sure we know another person better than they know themselves.

"I know exactly why he's acting this way, but he won't admit it, he's just in denial. Why won't he listen to me?"



Find ourselves explaining someone's motivations to them in elaborate ways that they can't understand or see as relevant.

"IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME. HE BEHAVES THIS WAY BECAUSE HE WAS HURT IN PAST RELATIONSHIPS BUT HE REFUSES TO THINK ABOUT THAT AND JUST BLAMES ME. I NEED TO HELP HIM UNDERSTAND THIS. I'LL TELL HIM HE'S MISINTERPRETING MY INTENTIONS BECAUSE OF THINGS HE MISSED OUT ON IN THE PAST."



SO WHAT MIGHT HELP?

Delaying our own actions to avoid escalation (Take 5 minutes or 20!)

"I know if I speak right now I'm going to make it worse, so I am going to walk away and come back to this in 20 minutes"



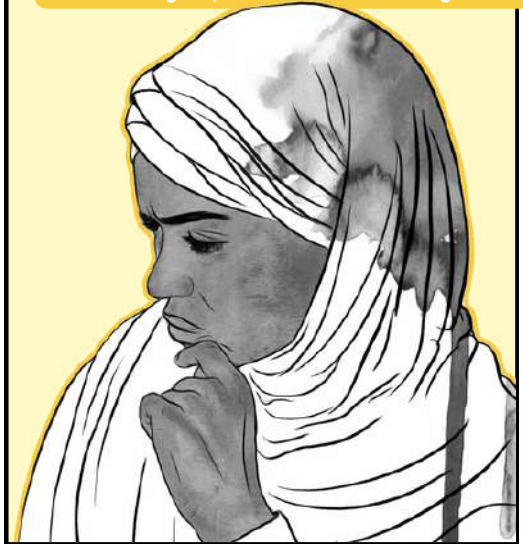
Try not to argue about EVERYTHING all at once

"AND ANOTHER THING!"



Be suspicious of our own certainty about the motivations of the other person

"I know this feeling. I'm completely certain they are deliberately winding me up. Have I been here before? Is that true? Does that fit with my experience of who they are?"



Doing our best to let go of the search for "who is to blame" or for "who is right"

Separate out who we are from how we are being seen – to be seen as having negative intentions doesn't need to be a threat to who we are

Accept that we are being received in a way that is different from our intentions

"Right now all I want to do is explain and tell him how wrong he is. I'm going to wait till later to deal with this."



"IT FEELS AWFUL TO BE SEEN IN THIS WAY, BUT IF I KEEP BEING ME, THEY WILL SEE THAT EVENTUALLY."



"Being seen as unfair is not a threat to me being a good parent or friend etc."



Be curious about how we are coming across (e.g. jealous, territorial, angry)

Imagine what that experience would be like and share these guesses with the other person in a genuine way

Speak to our own thoughts and feelings and what we need:

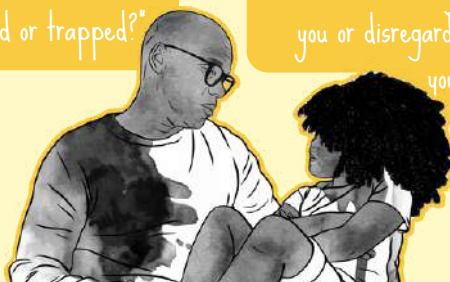
"TELL ME MORE ABOUT THIS, WHEN DID IT. START FEELING THIS WAY?"



"I asked to you to turn the TV off and brush your teeth. Does that make you feel like I don't care that you were really enjoying that programme? That I don't care about your feelings?"

"I think I hear that when I do 'x' it makes you feel suffocated or crowded or trapped?"

"I think I hear that when I do 'x' it makes you feel like I'm ignoring you or disregarding how you feel?"



"WHEN YOU DO OR SAY 'X', I FEEL 'Y'...IT WOULD HELP ME IF YOU COULD DO Z"



Be patient, this isn't a fairy tale process. It's messy and may take several attempts to find the right way back to the other person

Forgive yourself – this happens all the time in every relationship around the world. It becomes an opportunity to repair and re-connect and for the relationship to deepen and develop.

When necessary, get a third person (parent, friend, mentor, consultant, mediator, therapist) to help you hear one another. One role of a therapist may be to help you understand whether your part in current conflict is connected to old wounds.

"This isn't working. How can we work this out?"

"I think we are getting stuck. Let's take a break"



“But if I do this, they’ll never learn that they are wrong about me or this conflict!”

**IT TAKES EFFORT,
COURAGE AND
FAITH TO:**

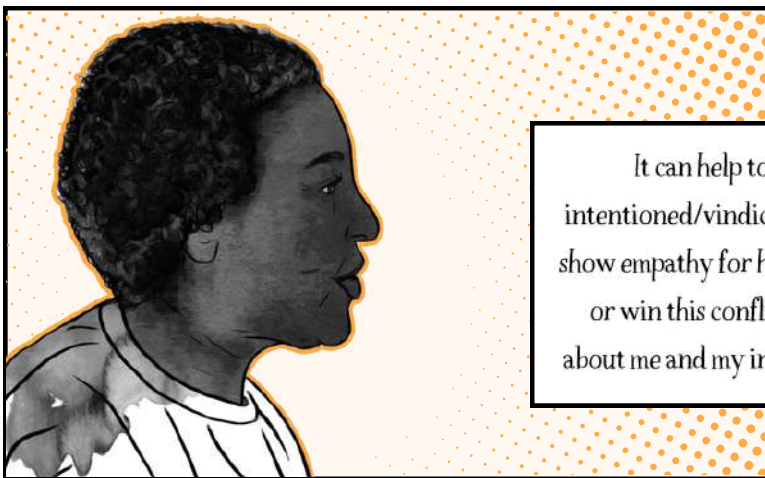
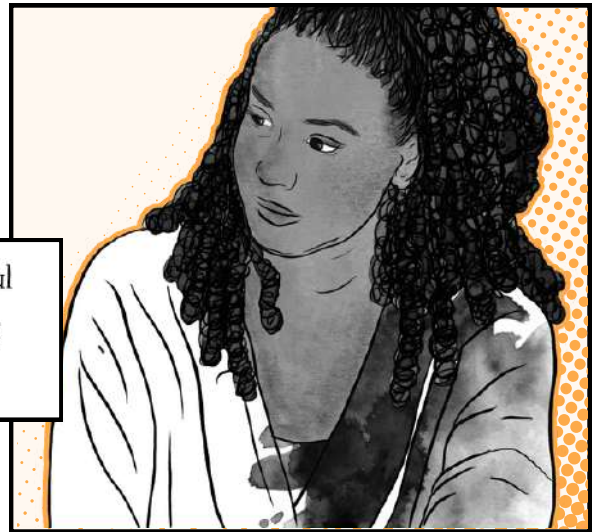
- Accept then let go of the urge to win
- Accept that we are being seen in a way that is different to our intentions
- Be curious and communicate empathy about another’s experience when we are feeling threatened, blamed or shut out

It can be painful or scary and sometimes it’s a long game.



It can be hard and often painful to show how to resolve conflict with our language and behaviour, rather than reacting with punishments, lectures, counter accusations or withdrawal.

It can be immensely difficult to slow down, reflect before we act, accept painful feelings and show curiosity about another’s experience, all the while staying aware of our own self, including our vulnerabilities and faults.



It can help to remember that “if I really was an arrogant/unfair/badly intentioned/vindictive/jealous person, I would be unlikely to accept, be curious or show empathy for how someone is experiencing me. I don’t have to prove I am right or win this conflict. I can **SHOW**, rather than **TELL** them, that they are wrong about me and my intentions and in time, they will come to know me in a new way.”

Acknowledgements

The ideas in this resource come from our therapeutic work with families and from two main therapy traditions.

In particular, we would like to acknowledge the work of colleagues working in the areas of Mentalization-Based Treatment (including, but not limited to, Peter Fonagy, Anthony Bateman, Sheila Redfern and Alistair Cooper) and Interpersonal Neurobiology (including but not limited to Bruce Perry, Dan Hughes, Stephen Porges, Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson).

Recommended Reads

- *Us: How Moving Relationships Beyond You and Me Creates More Love, Passion, and Understanding*, by Terry Real
- *Parenting a Child Who has Experienced Trauma*, by Dan Hughes
- *Reflective Parenting: A Guide to Understanding What’s Going on in Your Child’s Mind*, by Alistair Cooper and Sheila Redfern.