

Episode 66

## **Reactive vs Relational Communication | Why Your Partner Still Doesn't Get You | Ep. 66**

You spoke up. After all your therapist told you to. Markella it, but halfway through you could already see it's not going well. Your Partner started to shut down, get defensive, or began talking over you. And instead of feeling closer, you ended up on opposite sides of the emotional battlefield.

You practiced what say. You were calm. You had a point. So why are you still here? Why do you feel misunderstood, again? Today we're talking about that exact dynamic; about we can shift from reactive to relational communication because it's not about saying the right words.

It's about speaking from the right place inside of you.

Hi there! If this is your first time here, welcome to The Parenthood and Relationship Podcast.

I'm your host, Markella Kaplani, a Psychologist, a Parenthood and Relationship Coach, and a parent myself.

Together we explore the transformative journey of Parenthood and its profound impact on our relationship with ourselves, our partners, and our children, so that we can be present and show up as we envision without having to do more.

Let's get into today's episode!

Welcome back to the Parenthood and Relationship Podcast.

As a psychologist and as a relationship coach for parents, I am here support those who want more than just surviving the day to day. Those of you who want to feel close again.

If you missed episode 64 and 65, I want note that this episode number 66 is the third in this July series on communication. So may wanna pause and go listen to those first. They lay the groundwork for what we're diving into today.

Meanwhile, if you have been listening and nodding along to these episodes and you want something tangible keep on growing, don't forget to grab my free guide Intimacy in five Minutes, designed parents who know what it's like to be trying to connect between the juggling of parenting, housework, and career to name only a few of the things that take our energy and attention away from one another.

If you would like quick ways to make sure you're not losing touch, or even if already feel a gap, this guide positively surprise you. So go ahead, download it. It's linked in the show notes below. Once do, you also sign up my weekly

love-letter the Reconnect. It's kind of like your weekly relationship warmup, one insight, one exclusive tool, and one three minute reset. So with that said, let's get to the heart of this.

Allow me to take you to a moment with a couple I worked with. We'll call them Alex and Nia. Alex brought up that he felt everything in the house become hers ever since the baby arrived. Her routines, her rules, her rhythms. He said it as gently as he could, trying to focus on how he felt left out.

Nia, however, understandably heard that he was calling her controlling and a bad partner. I mean, many of us would make this interpretation, right? So it's not surprise that within minutes her tone changed. She started cutting him off, and then obviously he got very defensive. 10 minutes in, they were arguing about who loaded the dishwasher last week. So what happened? Good question.

What happened is that something old got triggered, something that wasn't fully processed. Her system went into protective mode, and that's not because she didn't love him, but because she didn't feel emotionally safe. And that is how we feel when we have unresolved issues between us. We may love each other, but the hurt hasn't left, and so we feel threatened. We don't necessarily feel safe.

Reactive communication is when we speak from the hurt part, from the protector. And protectors- those of us that are there to guard us from pain- speak in one of three voices.

They could blame. "You always blah, blah, blah."

They withdraw using silence, sarcasm, or dismissiveness.

Or they over rationalize going into logic to avoid uncomfortable feelings.

If you see yourself in any of this, I want to stress that the problem isn't that you get triggered.

That's human. The problem is when the protector speaks on behalf of the whole self of the central self.

So that's reactionary communication: when we get triggered and speak or withdraw from a place of reactivity to a perceived threat. Relational communication, on the other hand, happens when we speak from a regulated place. And that doesn't entail being perfectly calm, but being self-aware and confident enough to be able to withstand some feedback or or even some criticism.

In other words, is when we communicate with the goal of connection, not control. Because a lot of times that's what we do. When we get hurt, we try to control the narrative or the way we are perceived, or how the person should act and think. We try to remain in control to salvage our ego.

Let's go back to Alex and Nia. Imagine if after noticing tension rise, Nia had said, "Wait, I myself going into defense mode. Let me slow down a second. Can you please say that part again? I want to hear it without reacting. Or what would've happened if Alex said, "I think I'm not explaining this well. What trying to say is I miss feeling like this is ours, not just yours to carry." Now we're in a whole different conversation. Relational communication is slower. It's softer, it's more curious. And yes, it often requires you to tolerate discomfort without fixing it instantly.

Some signs you're communicating relationally are that you are saying fewer words, but more meaningful ones.

You're checking in with your body while you speak. You're willing to pause even mid-sentence. You are listening in for what the other person feels and not just what they say.

So how do we get there? Can we get there? There is a simple model I use couples that I call Trigger to Truth.

The first step is to notice the protector. Ask yourself, "Am I trying to connect with my partner or defend my ego?"

Step two is name the need beneath. Under every reaction there is something tender.

Maybe you need appreciation or reassurance, or maybe you need to feel like a team.

Step three is to share from the self, not from the part use language that reveals instead of attacks. For example, saying, "You don't help," you could say, "I am feeling little bit overwhelmed the daily stuff. I don't wanna feel this far from you."

Finally, step four is to slow the cycle. If either of you starts speeding up or raising tone of the conversation, pause. Physical pacing affects emotional tone.

Think like playing catch versus dodgeball. In reactive communication, we're hurling emotional dodge balls at each other. In relational communication, we are tossing a ball that we both want keep in the air. It's not about avoiding conversations. It's about making them safe enough to actually have.

Okay then, so how can we make this actionable? Here is your take home practice. This week pick a moment where you usually react- maybe it's around chores or bedtime, maybe feel triggered when you feel dismissed.

Before you speak, run this inner script. Is this my protector speaking or is this coming from my center, my core self?

What do I really need right now? How can I share more gently and honestly?

And if you notice that you're already triggered, and that's a real valid concern- it can happen and it will- what you can do is to pause and say, " I want to have this conversation, but feel I'm not able to do it well right now. Can we come back to it when I can be more present?" That alone has saved more relationships than I can count.

Good communication is about being articulate. If this episode gave you clarity or language you want to remember, share it with your partner, or better yet, sit down together and download the guide I created intimacy in five minutes. It has prompts and rituals you can start trying tonight, taking into account how busy you are and how it may feel like to even start tackling the gap in your communication and it's free.

And don't forget your weekly dose of communication through my Love letter, the Sunday Reconnect. It's a great way to turn what you just heard into something more personalized, more actionable, more connected, because I'm always a reply away.

Next week we have a guest expert coming on, so stay tuned for that. It's going to be good. until then, speak not just to be right, but to be received. Take care and I'll see Sunday. Bye-bye.