

'I NOTICE...' 'I IMAGINE...' 'I FEEL...'

Excerpt from, *Your Life Matters – The Power of Living Now* by Petrea King

The formula of 'I notice...' 'I imagine...' 'I feel...' explained below, can be a very useful one for dealing with challenging conversations. When we use this formula - perhaps not with the exact words - we're endeavouring firstly, to describe the behavior or the situation that we see is happening. Secondly, we're endeavouring to compassionately understand how it might be for the other person, and thirdly, we're letting the person know how we're feeling about the situation. This formula conveys that the other person is not the problem. It's as if we stand hand-in-hand together looking at the problem rather than seeing each other as the problem. Here are some examples of how this formula might be used:

'I notice that your room is a mess and I've asked you three times this week to clean it up.' (Perhaps this is better directed at your children rather than your partner!)

'I imagine it is not a priority for you, however, it is for me.'

'I feel angry and upset that what I've asked you to do hasn't been done. Can we talk about this, please?'

This approach is very different from screaming at the kids and telling them how hopeless and feral they are, and can work well on the really difficult conversations that we often avoid such as:

Example 1

'I notice that whenever I want to talk to you about what happened to me when I was a child you change the subject...walk out of the room...go to the fridge...tell me not to be silly...tell me it's all past history'...or whatever the behavior is.

'I imagine you don't want to talk about it because it's in the past...it's a painful subject...you think I'm blaming you...' or whatever you feel compassionately might be the root cause of their dismissal.

'I feel sad...alone...humiliated...angry...estranged from you...because we don't seem able to communicate about this subject. Can we please talk about it together?'

Example 2

'I notice whenever I want to talk to you about driving more slowly you become angry...speed up...go quiet...get moody...laugh it off.'

'I imagine that driving fast is something you enjoy...you don't realize that you're speeding...that it's just the way you drive.'

'I feel really frightened when you drive that way and I'm wondering how we can talk about it together.'

Example 3

'I notice that when I try to talk to you about the fact that I might die from this disease you change the subject...try and cheer me up...tell me to be positive...tell me I've got colour in my cheeks...pour a Scotch...stop me.'

'I imagine that you might be as frightened of the future as I am...might find it as difficult as I do...are as sad about the possibility as I am...it might be your worst nightmare too...you don't have words for it either.'

'I'm feeling more and more alone with my thoughts because you only seem able to hear the "positive" or cheerful parts of me and I need to talk to you because you're my best friend...I'm sad and lost and want to share my thoughts with you...I'm isolated by my fears and need to talk them through with you...I can't make arrangements and let you know what I want in the future and I feel anxious about that.'

Example 4

'I notice that when I've mentioned your driving in the past nothing changes...you become angry...you laugh at me and tell me I'm a scaredy cat...you ignore me.'

'I imagine that my thoughts and feelings on the subject are of little interest to you...an aggravation for you...of no consequence to you.'

'I feel angry and upset that you ignore my pleas for you to drive more slowly and I'm letting you know that I'll be making other arrangements to arrive at the destination...I won't travel with you in the future...I'll be driving from here on in.'

Sometimes this simple formula is best presented in the form of a letter. If the subject that you want to discuss is considered a thorny one and conversation about it seems impossible, then putting it in writing can have real benefits - it enables the other person to read your thoughts and react to them privately; they can throw the letter on the floor, re-read it and weep, ignore it or mull over it and come back to you later for a discussion.

Sometimes it is enough to have conveyed the information about how you feel and things begin to change automatically. And sometimes it's not even about the other person at all but communicating the feelings fulfils our need to understand and heal our emotional self. Don't expect a response from the other person. If they choose to ignore what you've written, then you know more about that person and their ability to respond. Their response might equally come in the form of a hug, a gesture, a kiss on the cheek or a flower on your pillow.

The important part is that you have fulfilled your responsibility, which is to acknowledge and express yourself in a way that was never intended to wound - our intention is very important. If there is any intention to wound the other person, there will be hidden barb in your words. Make sure your intention is honourable and that it is an honest communication based on the need to share your thoughts and feelings.

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