

Bids for Connection: When a Cycle Starts With Pleasure

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [What Is Cycle Work in Couples Therapy? How Every Interaction Can Spiral Into Conflict or Connection](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which follows a cycle through the four stages and shows how a cycle can begin with pleasure as easily as with pain. Search “cycle work” on the site to find it. It pairs with the Mapping Our Cycle worksheets there.

A memory, a joke, or an excited bit of news is a bid for connection. How it gets answered builds the felt sense of mattering that hard conversations later draw on. This is maintenance before repair. Choose a small, recent bid, one that went well or one that drifted, and map it together. A few words per space is enough.

FIRST Our conversation preferences	We enjoy different kinds of conversation. Neither is the correct way to play. Trouble starts when two people bring different games to the same moment and each experiences the other as not showing up.
THE BID What was offered	What one of us brought, and which purpose it was serving: entertainment and play, strategy and logistics, relational connection, or existential meaning. A bid can carry more than one.
THE ANSWER How it was met	Joined, answered with a different purpose, declined, or declined the timing and not the person. A correction can be accurate and still interrupt the invitation.
STAGES ONE TO FOUR Activation to recataloging	The same four stages as the cycle worksheet, for the one who made the bid. Stage four records what each bid teaches: play is welcome here, or silliness is better kept private. <i>Given what I felt, what must I have believed was happening?</i>

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE BEACH

THE BID	“I saw a picture of the beach today, and it reminded me of how much fun we had the last time we were in Costa Rica.”
PURPOSE	An invitation to play and to shared meaning.
HOW IT WAS MET	Answered with a different purpose: “Yeah, that was nice. That was before we had all these kids and pets to take care of.”
ACTIVATION	Suddenly dropped. Then defensive.
INTERPRETATION	Worked backward: my pleasure has landed as a burden.
BEHAVIOR	“I am sorry the dog has been so difficult. I know it was originally my dog.” Soon the argument is about pets and whose choices built this life.
RECATALOGING	If it repeats: shared memories are better kept private.
REPLIES THAT KEEP IT	“God, that was good.” Later: “Remember the time it started raining in the distance and the rainbow came down toward the shoreline?” Nobody is solving anything.

Our conversation preferences

Each partner fills in a column. There is no right answer, only two people's games.

EACH OF US

The conversations
I enjoy most

Venting and drama, planning, trading impressions of a film or a song, dreaming out loud, riffing, debating.

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

EACH OF US

Where we talk
past each other

When I bring one purpose and get another back, it usually looks like...

PARTNER ONE

PARTNER TWO

The bid

One small moment, recent enough to remember the words.

WHAT WAS OFFERED

Who made the bid, and what did they say or show?

WHICH PURPOSE WAS IT SERVING?

Check any that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Entertainment and play: talking because it is fun | ☐ Strategy and logistics: talking so something happens |
| ☐ Relational connection: talking to stay connected | ☐ Existential meaning: talking to find what matters |

HOW WAS IT MET?

Check one, then write the reply as close to word for word as we can.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Joined: the reply matched the movement of the bid | ☐ Answered with a different purpose |
| ☐ Declined | ☐ Declined the timing, not the person |

THE REPLY

The four stages, for the one who made the bid

Start at stage one. Work backward from the feeling to find stage two.

STAGE ONE

Activation

What arrived in my body when the reply came? Pleasure, deflation, embarrassment, warmth. More than one feeling is common.

STAGE TWO

Interpretation

Working backward from stage one: what must I have believed was happening? What does this resemble?

STAGE THREE

Conscious thought and behavior

What did I tell myself, and what did I do?

THE THOUGHT

THE BEHAVIOR

STAGE FOUR

Return and recataloging

How did it settle, or not? What did I learn to expect the next time I bring this kind of thing?

WHAT GOT CATALOGED

Check the closest, or write our own.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Play is welcome here | ☐ Silliness is better kept private |
| ☐ Our futures can be spoken out loud | ☐ Dreams are safer kept private |
| ☐ We are good at this together | ☐ Planning predicts a fight |

A REPLY THAT KEEPS THE BID

One that joins the movement of the bid. If the timing was wrong, one that declines the timing and keeps the person: "That's funny. Give me ten minutes to finish this chapter."
