

How to Have Close Relationships: An Experiential Primer

Jonathan Kanter

Center for the Science of Social Connection

University of Washington

Educational Objectives

- Define 8 core processes fundamental to close relationships
- Practice relational skills in real-time with other workshop participants
- Apply core exercises to use with clients or others in your life

Informed consent

Participants will work in groups of 2 (or 3 if necessary). You will be invited to look into each others' eyes, share personal, vulnerable details of your lives with each other, respond to each other's disclosures, and give feedback to each other on your responses.

The handout contains some of the questions you will be asked.

This workshop is not focused on therapy techniques (although hopefully it will be useful for therapy relationships).

Background to this work

- Functional Analytic Psychotherapy (awareness, courage, and love)
- Approximately 7 years of review of literature from social psychological and relationship science (my “manifesto”).
- Experimental and applied research from my and other’s labs (about 10 studies now).
- Clinical and life experiences.

Intimacy is an *interpersonal process* involving two individuals engaging in repeated, reciprocal exchanges of **vulnerability** and **responsiveness**.

Not defined by specific relationship types: Romantic partners, friends, family members, co-workers, etc.

Vulnerable
self-disclosure

The diagram illustrates a communication process between two individuals, represented by silhouettes on the left and right. In the center, there are two columns of speech bubbles. The top row contains two identical bubbles, each containing the text 'Vulnerable self-disclosure'. The bottom row contains two identical bubbles, each containing the text 'Response'. Below these four bubbles is a large, light-yellow oval containing the text 'Perceived responsiveness: Understanding, validation, and care'. At the bottom of the page, there is a citation: 'Reis & Shaver, 1988; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000'.

Vulnerable
self-disclosure

Response

Response

Perceived responsiveness:
Understanding, validation, and
care

The “Fast Friends” Procedure

To Fall in Love With Anyone, Do This

JAN. 9, 2015



More than 20 years ago, the psychologist Arthur Aron succeeded in making two strangers fall in love in his laboratory. Last summer, I applied his technique in my own life, which is how I found myself standing on a bridge at midnight, staring into a man's eyes for exactly four minutes.

36 QUESTIONS

How to fall in love

The New York Times lists *36 questions* you can ask someone if you want to fall in love. (Or make your love even stronger.) This site provides the ideal experience for exploring these questions, so grab some wine, sit down with someone you want to love & let's get started.

[CLICK HERE TO START](#)

The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings

Arthur Aron

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Edward Melinat

California Graduate School of Family Psychology

Elaine N. Aron

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Robert Darrin Vallone

University of California, Santa Cruz

Renee J. Bator

Arizona State University

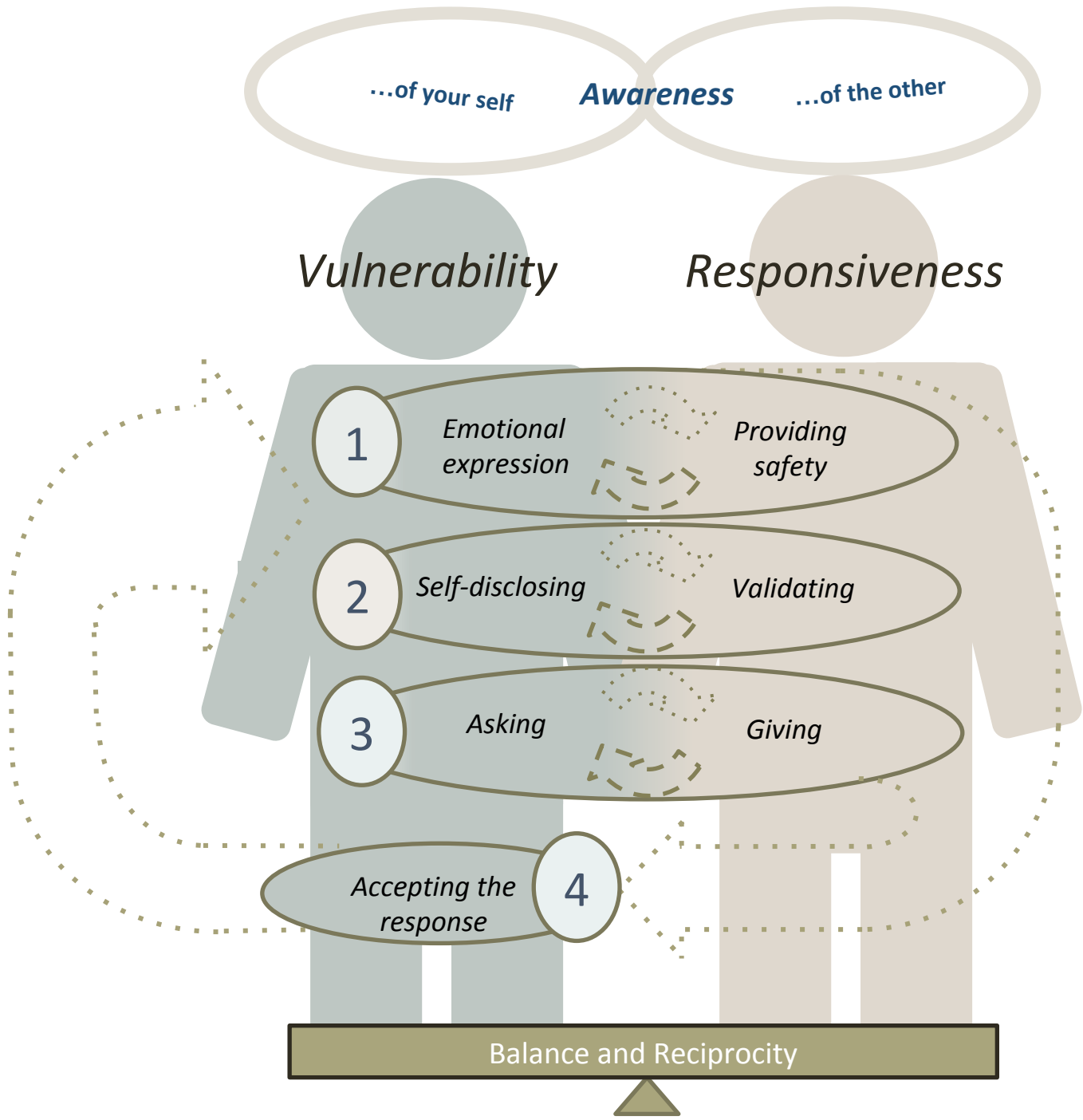
PSPB, Vol. 23 No. 4, April 1997 363-377

Exercise 1: Fast Friends

Review handout with 36 questions.

Partners pick one question.

1. Partner A: Respond to question (2 minutes)
2. Partner B: Respond to response (1 minute)
3. Partner B: Respond to question (2 minutes)
4. Partner A: Respond to response (1 minute)



Awareness

Engaging in gentle, non-judgmental, present-moment (mindful) awareness of one's self (feelings, needs, values), the other (empathic accuracy), and the context in which the interaction is taking place

Emotional expression

Authentic vulnerable
emotional expression

Providing safety

Providing non-verbal
(eye-contact, facial mimicry,
nodding, responsive touch)
and verbal indicators of
synchrony, interest, care and
affiliative intent, including
reciprocal vulnerable
expressions

Obstacles: Dysregulation and suppression

Exercise 2: Eye contact and mimicry

The vulnerability of eye contact

The bridge of discomfort

The intimacy of synchrony

Suppression is particularly problematic.

Practicing shifting your awareness from your body to your face.

Exercise 3: Eye contact with identity disclosure.

Vulnerable self-disclosure

Emotionally congruent, authentic self-disclosures, including disclosures of:

- Autobiographical memories
- Negative emotions/events
- Identity/values
- Positive emotions/events
- Gratitude, affection, and appreciation toward partner

Validation

Unambiguously conveying that your partner's self-disclosures make sense and are valid, verifying underlying emotional experiences and aspects of self and identity

Vulnerable self-disclosure

Validation

Disclosures of negative events lead to improved intimacy and connectedness but do not generally help the person “get over” the event

Obstacles:

- Lack of congruence between verbals and non-verbals
- Ruminative or excessively negative disclosures
- The impulse to respond with problem-solving (confusing this relation with the next)
- The impulse to respond with praise or correctives, rather than self-verification

Exercise 4: Negative Event Disclosures

Review handout with 36 questions.

Partners pick an N question, or choose their own content.

1. Partner A: Respond to question (2 minutes)
2. Partner B: Respond to response (1 minute)
3. Partner B: Respond to question (2 minutes)
4. Partner A: Respond to response (1 minute)

Vulnerable self-disclosure

Validation

Responsiveness to positive disclosures more predictive of intimacy than responsiveness to negative disclosures

Obstacles to “capitalization” on positive disclosures:

- Shame in disclosing
- Not recognizing the vulnerability of positive disclosures when responding
- Anxiety, jealousy interfering with full responsiveness

Exercise 5: Positive Event Disclosures

Review handout with 36 questions.

Partners pick a P question, or choose their own content.

1. Partner A: Respond to question (2 minutes)
2. Partner B: Respond to response (1 minute)
3. Partner B: Respond to question (2 minutes)
4. Partner A: Respond to response (1 minute)

Asking

Asking for and negotiating specifically what one wants and needs, including instrumental support for relational and non-relational goal pursuits, saying “no”, and setting limits

Giving

Responding to your partner’s specific wants and needs in ways that are experienced as genuine and supportive of their autonomy and competence as appropriate, including offering apologies and forgiveness for transgressions

Obstacles:

- Asking either too directly (aggressively), indirectly (such that the request is not clear), or without emotional congruence
- Giving in ways that undermine the partner's autonomy, confidence, self-efficacy
- Giving without empathic accuracy
- When giving what is asked for threatens own autonomy and needs

Accepting the response

Willingly experiencing the totality of a partner's responsiveness and genuinely, vulnerably expressing appreciation and gratitude to the partner

Providing safety

Providing non-verbal (eye-contact, facial mimicry, nodding, responsive touch) and verbal indicators of synchrony, interest, care and affiliative intent, including reciprocal vulnerable expressions

Accepting the response

Providing safety

Obstacles:

- Fear of intimacy, insecurity, shame, self-esteem, etc.
- Lack of awareness of vulnerability of partner and need for safety
- Lack of reciprocity, in both the gratitude and the fear/shame

Exercise 6: Gratitude Disclosures

Review handout with 36 questions.

Partners pick a G question, or choose their own content.

1. Partner A: Respond to question (2 minutes)
2. Partner B: Respond to response (1 minute)
3. Partner B: Respond to question (2 minutes)
4. Partner A: Respond to response (1 minute)

Putting it all together



Thank you

Contact me for questions, slides, references,
materials:

jonkan@uw.edu