

Communicating Emotional Needs

Breaking Reactive Patterns
In Relationships

*Moving from
Hard to Heartfelt
Communications*

By TARA DIAMOND

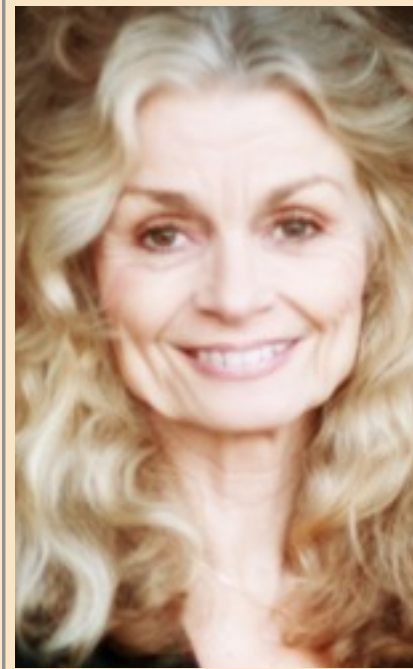


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Preface

Of all the challenges I find with myself and others, the most frequent and troublesome is communication in emotionally charged situations, both professionally and personally. The question I hear repeatedly is “How do I let someone know how I feel without upsetting them?”

Regardless of how much work we do on ourselves, organizing our inner experience into desired outcome is constant, and it’s the key to harmonious relationships and truly getting what you want out of life.

Over the decades, my passion for self expression has been challenged by many things, but most often by judgment of my feelings, confusion over what they indicate, and the over-consideration of other people’s feelings or reactions. We all have experienced this to some degree, but taken too far, or for too long, it becomes a life lived for what other people might think, say, or do, which ultimately leads to forms of control and less freedom of expression for everyone.

I’m not talking about keeping negative thoughts or feelings to yourself that could be cruel to another or inhibiting the development of a social conscience so necessary in this world. I’m speaking of reactions we have to what others might do or say, and fears of honest expression that affect our lives to the point of disfunction, illness which comes from dis-ease, and, ultimately, unhappiness.

**Wouldn't it be wonderful
to live from choice rather
than reaction?**

It would be wonderful to always come from choice rather than reaction, wouldn't it? We can do this by being clear about why we're reacting and what is needed to

take care of it. An "inner solution" can then transfer to outer experience and break long-standing patterns of reactions.

We have to get straight with ourselves about what we need before we can receive it from the outer world. What happens in the inner world, our inner experience, is reflected in the outer world, whether we know it or not. Inner solutions empowered by clarity are then exchanged for outer solutions that are cooperative and satisfying for everyone.

The key to this and to getting what you want in life is through empowered *asking* that is clear, direct, and responsible. Within these pages, I'm sharing a simple formula that can truly deepen your relationship with yourself and others, help you communicate clearly and responsibly to others, and empower your ability to create the life you want to live.

**Success truly
depends on an
inner and outer
exchange of
empowered
solutions.**

Enjoy the process, and accept the challenge of creating solutions for your inner and outer world.

With love and appreciation,
Tara

Communicating Emotional Needs: Breaking Reactive Patterns in Relationships

One of our most common and frustrating problems is an inability to effectively communicate our needs and desires in a way that gets us what we want in life. The frustration often comes from not knowing what our needs are to begin with and is most evident in our personal and professional relationships.

Emotional needs can be the most difficult to identify. Their presence is made known when people or events “push our buttons” or trigger reactive patterns of behaviors. For example, we may react with anger, shut down and avoid contact, or say things that we later regret. Eventually, it becomes combustible in one way or another. Often we don’t know why we act this way or what the feeling is we are defending. *If we don’t know what our feeling is, we don’t know what our need is, and we cannot communicate it.* Even when we do know, we may feel bad about having a need or not want to upset or burden others. When we do communicate it, we may do so in a way that makes another person wrong, and we either regret, avoid, or enjoy doing so.

By nature, we defend ourselves and generally do the best we can to satisfy a situation. We like knowing what to do to help others and dislike upsetting them. We avoid not being able to please them or being blamed for not doing the “right” thing. If we only knew exactly

what needs to happen and if this were communicated in a responsible way, wouldn't it be much easier to get along?

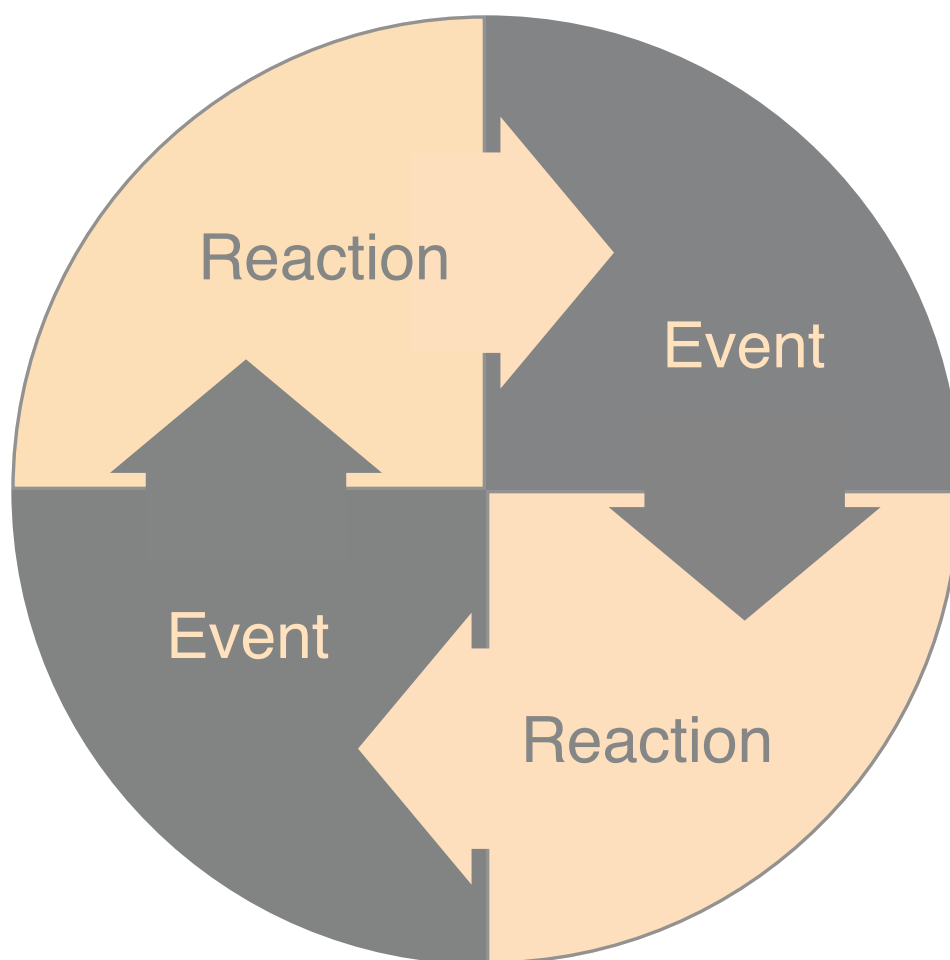
There is a simple way to break reactive patterns and communicate our needs in a responsible way. The four elements that play into these patterns are events, reactions, feelings, and needs.

- First, an event occurs, and something happens that triggers us.
- Second, we react with frustration, anger, or passive behavior.
- Third, a feeling is present that caused the reaction and may or may not be identified.
- Fourth, a need is longing to be met that frustrates us and maintains the reaction.

When something happens that causes anger, for example, it is difficult for us to move below the anger and know what feeling within ourselves has been triggered. Perhaps something made us feel unimportant or less than another, and we defend ourselves by getting angry. We make the people wrong by referring to what they did to make us angry. They, in turn, get angry and defensive, and we can easily have an argument or retreat from each other until things cool down. Then we feel wrong or right, but either way, the need to feel important and equal is not being met and will only be satisfied by the ego's win/lose scenario. We end up holding something against each other instead of honoring the truth about how we really feel in a way that meets our emotional needs.

Vicious Cycle

The chart below represents the vicious cycle of a reactive pattern of relating with others without clear communication of needs or desires. Something happens, an event, that brings up a reaction that causes another event that is reacted to with yet another event that is reacted to, and so on, and so forth.



Vicious Cycle of Reactive Patterns

Three Step Formula

We can honor what's true for us and take care of our feelings by using a three-step formula to communicate it. It's as simple as saying, "*when I saw this..., I felt that..., and what I need is this....*" Although challenging when we're upset, presenting our thoughts in this way can break a pattern and move a relationship forward. The order of thoughts is important. Speak of the event first, the feeling second, and the need third.

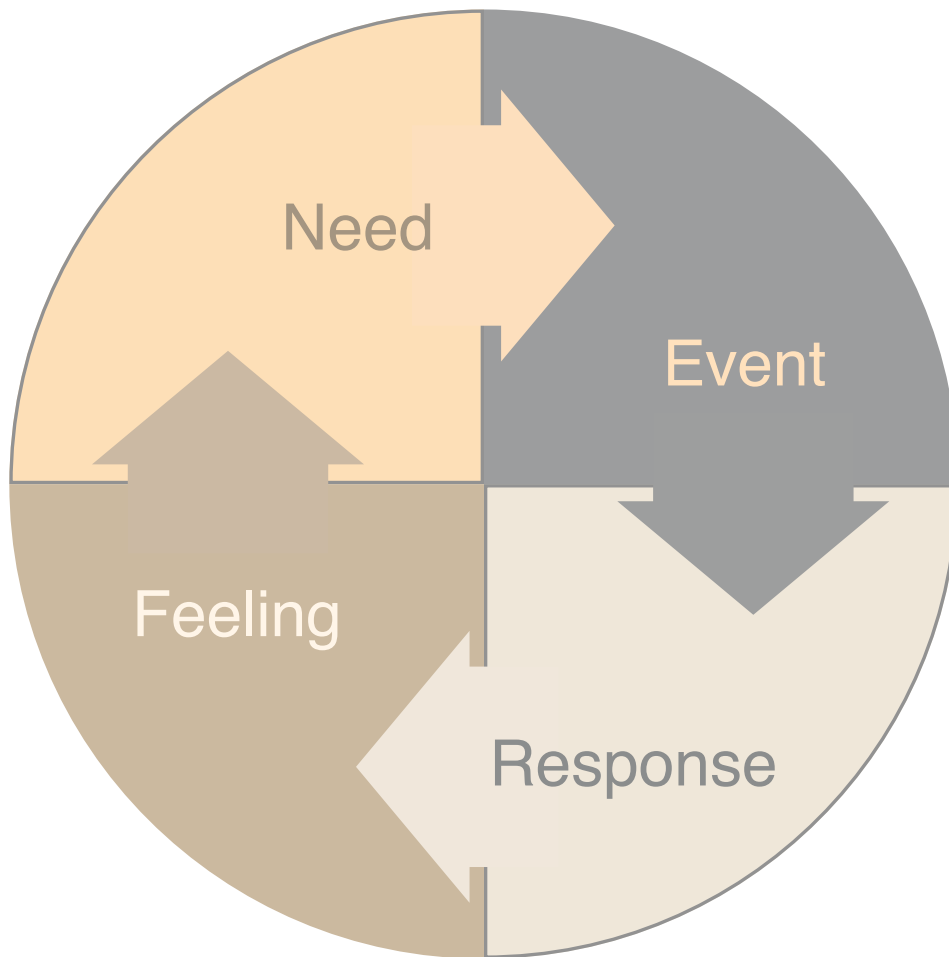
1. **"When I saw this...,**
2. **I felt that...,**
3. **and what I need is this..."**

"When I saw this..." refer to the *event or situation* that triggered the reaction, *not the person*. We immediately get the person's attention when we speak of something that occurred instead of something *he or she did*. ***Presenting a situation invites a solution***, and we feel good when we can solve problems. For example, beginning a request by saying "*when I saw the bike lying by the road...,*" instead of "you left your bike out there again," draws attention to the bike - not the person. Referring to the person at this point will most likely get a defensive reaction and some form of resistance that can interfere with his or her willingness to listen, much less help us with what we need.

“I felt that...” refers to the feeling underneath the anger that defended it. This **requires self reflection, honesty, and courage** to admit what we feel and a mature willingness to take care of it ourselves in a responsible way. “When I saw your bike lying by the road, *I felt helpless and panicked from fear at the thought that something terrible might have happened to you.*” (A personal reference here is more loving than accusing.)

“And what I need is this...” refers to **the solution**, what we need to do or experience so that the feeling doesn’t arise and compromise our life. It answers the question about what could happen in order for us to take care of the feeling we are having. It requests acknowledgement, respect, and cooperation from another in a benign way that doesn’t compromise anyone. It’s the magic act of “asking” for what we want in a direct, clear, deserving way that others want to support. For example, “*...and what I need is for the bike to be put away when it’s not being used, so that I don’t have to worry*” calls for an action that comes from choice instead of something that has to be done.

“When I saw this, I felt that, and what I need is this” becomes a **responsible communication** instead of a reaction that can make others wrong. Below is an example of how to respond to situations in a mature, responsible way. An *event* ignites our *response to feelings* that arise that tell us what we *need* to do or say in response to it. Our clear communication of this need becomes another event that is responded to from positive feelings that arise and can generate something even *more positive* for us to respond to. This can go on and on until feelings grow into events that are rich with meaning and happiness.



Cycle of Responsible Communication

Broken down even further, instead of reacting,

- An event occurs, and we respond to it.
- A response comes from feelings we have about it.
- The feeling indicates what needs to happen to take care of our feelings.
- The need is communicated in a responsible way that asks for a specific action.

- The communication becomes an event that is responded to in a *positive way* by another and then generates more positive feelings in us.

This cycle can bring fulfillment and there is no limit to how deep or nurturing it can be to a relationship.

Here responsibility is our ability to respond to situations in a way that honors both ourselves and others. It comes from understanding and accepting that how we feel about something reveals what is true for us, regardless of whether we like the feeling or not. ***By accepting -- not rejecting -- our feelings***, we can use them to alter our experience for the good all concerned.

It is difficult to go below the anger to find out what deeper feeling it's defending when we're in reaction. This requires a commitment to break the pattern and a willingness to control the reaction long enough to discover what feeling is causing the reaction. The feeling may be telling us that there is a need for feeling equal and respected by others. It is our right and our responsibility to communicate this in a clear, mature way. We do this by referring to the *event*, not the other person, when we make our needs known. This way, the other person does not get defensive and is open to clear communication about what we want. Most of the time, when we're not made wrong, we're comfortable with requests and directions and will gladly do what's asked of us. Simply put:

“Ask and ye shall receive.”

Summary

One of the most common problems we have is communicating in an effective way so that our needs are being met. Ultimately, it is up to us to take care of our needs and not the responsibility of others, although it may appear to be. Our greatest challenge is knowing what our needs are to begin with.

The way to take care of our needs is to know what they are. We often find ourselves in frustrating reactions to experiences with people or events, and we blame the other for how we feel. “They did this, or they did that...” is commonly heard and said and indicates that we are holding this energy against whoever is involved with the experience. We often want others to say or do things a certain way for our sake, and when this doesn’t happen, we get angry or feel unfulfilled in some way or the other. This triggers deeper feelings, and we get too caught up in the experience and our reaction to be able to determine what our real feelings are. There is something that we need to do to take care of these feelings, and it’s up to us to identify that first before we can communicate it to other people. When we do communicate, we can do so in a way that gains their support and doesn’t make them wrong or defensive. We can effectively do this by using a three step formula. We simply say, “When I saw this..., I felt that..., and what I need is this....” By arranging our thoughts in this way, we get what we need and make ourselves and others *right*. It’s a win/win for everyone.

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