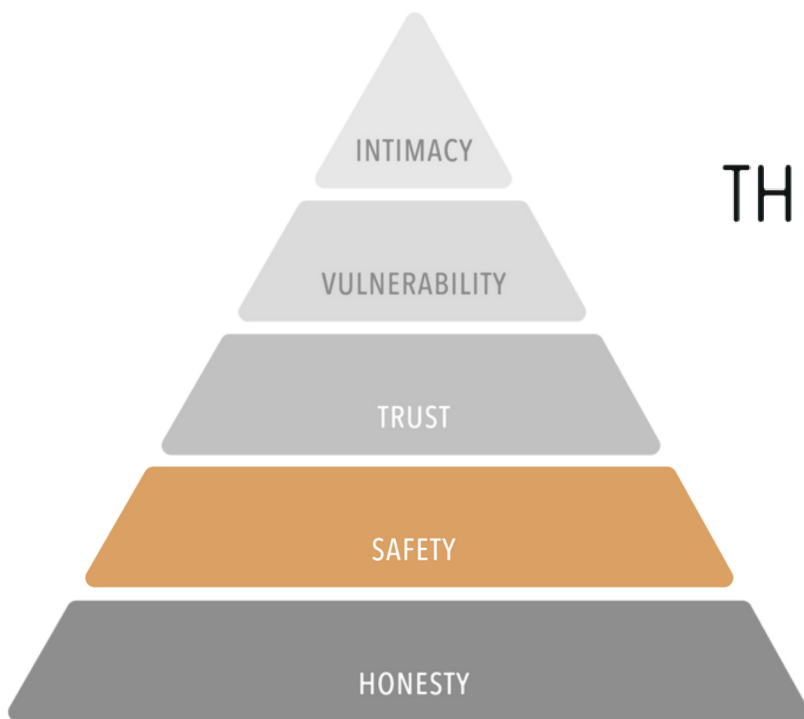


BUILDING SAFETY

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THE INTIMACY PYRAMID

As we move into relational recovery, an important dynamic is recognizing partners can become "triggered". This means that some event or stimulus will remind them of the betrayal and they will emotionally return to that traumatized space. This is an expected part of the healing process for the partner and the relationship. When we see this happening, it is the betrayer's opportunity to support their partner through this

process by how they respond to the emotional volatility. The ability to stay emotionally regulated and offer these four responses will help the partner and relationship heal that much more quickly. When your spouse gets triggered seek to respond in as many of the following ways that are appropriate.

To help you remember what to do -- memorize the initials V.A.S.E.

SAFETY

VALIDATE

We assure our spouse by doing two things. First, by re-stating our commitment to them and the relationship even in this difficult space. Second, by giving our partner the opportunity to ask for what they need. Assurance avoids getting defensive and instead is connecting. We do not assure our partner by minimizing them and saying “it is going to be okay” or “it is not that big of a deal.”

Example: “I want to do everything I can to help you to feel safe and hear what you need, I want to provide that to you in any way I can. Is there anything you want from me right now?”

ASSURE

We assure our spouse by doing two things. First, by re-stating our commitment to them and the relationship even in this difficult space. Second, by giving our partner the opportunity to ask for what they need. Assurance avoids getting defensive and instead is connecting. We do not assure our partner by minimizing them and saying “it is going to be okay” or “it is not that big of a deal.”

Example: “I want to do everything I can to help you to feel safe and hear what you need, I want to provide that to you in any way I can. Is there anything you want from me right now?”

SEEK UNDERSTANDING

We seek to understand by giving our spouse a chance to elaborate and process what is going on with their emotions. We do this best by asking curious questions that help our partner share with us what they are feeling, what was the source, and if there is something we can do that would help them feel safe. We do not say “I understand” or “I know why you are...” With this response it is good to use reflective listening to make sure you have heard your spouse accurately.

Example: “What does this feeling remind you of? What brought this up? What I can I do that is most helpful in this moment and the future?”

EMPATHIZE

Empathy is about joining with someone in their pain. It is about naming how hard these feeling can be to experience. It is about appreciating that person’s willingness to trust you with their vulnerability. Empathy is about our ability to sit with someone patiently in their crisis, rather than hurry them on to something else or even worse telling them that what they are going through isn’t that bad.

Example: “What you are feeling right now sounds really tough and painful. Thank you for sharing that with me. I am here for you as long as you need me to be.”