

You're Both Hurting

Take a few minutes to write about the major issues in your relationship. Do this with nonjudgmental description rather than with harsh judgment and criticism. For example, write, "Greg does not often help out with the housework" instead of "Greg is a lazy bastard." If you notice a harsh judgment slipped past you, just make a mental note of it. Silently say to yourself, "Aha! There goes a judgment!" or "There's judging!" Then cross it out and write something nonjudgmental instead.

Write about the painful emotions you have experienced as a result of these issues. What painful thoughts and feelings have you struggled with? If the main feelings you notice are anger, fury, resentment, rage, or frustration, then see if you can "go deeper." These are typically surface emotions. Beneath the angry exterior, you will usually find something like hurt, sadness, guilt, shame, fear, rejection, loneliness,

Acknowledge, openly and honestly, that this relationship has been painful. You have suffered. It has not been easy. Given what you have been through, it's completely natural to feel the way you do.

Now this is the most challenging part: take a few minutes to reflect on how your partner has also suffered. He or she may never have spoken about this to you, so you may have to use your imagination here. Think about what it must be like for your partner to be on the receiving end of your complaints and criticisms. If she tends to cut off, go quiet, and withdraw, then what must that be like for her—hiding away and closing down in order to cope? If she tends to brood, dwell, and rehash the past, how painful must that be for her—suffering again and again by replaying old events that can never be undone? If he gets angry and yells, then how unpleasant must that feel for him to be eaten up with anger and resentment? Surely there is no joy or pleasure involved; how much must he suffer, lost in his rage?