

2.16 Talk About What's Happening Now

Use the present moment to deepen conversations.

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We all have surface conversations with certain people. We may feel comfortable discussing relatively inconsequential topics, such as the weather, sports, or work, but we fail to take the interaction into deeper, more meaningful territory.

If we continue to relate only on this level, we will never acquire a true understanding of these people or forge a closer relationship. In some cases, this may be acceptable—cordiality may be sufficient for us. Should we wish to connect more deeply, however, a great way to do so is by tapping into what's alive in us at a given moment and using it to guide the conversation to a deeper place.

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- Liven up conversations with fresh energy.
- Forges deeper, more meaningful connections.
- Can clear the air of unspoken tension, contributing to a healthier relationship.

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- Shifting a conversation in real time requires a high degree of emotional and situational awareness.
- Touching on deeper subjects can feel very uncomfortable or even scary.

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Deeper talks are a necessary component of discussing more important topics. Indeed, therapy works on this concept. When you see a therapist (see Chapter 3), you are expected not only to skim the surface of topics but also to dive deeper and discuss your true thoughts and emotions. In any context, one excellent way to cultivate depth is to focus on what feelings are alive in you right now.

Before you can talk about what you're experiencing in the present, you need to identify what it is that you're noticing. Perhaps your mind keeps slipping to a disturbing thought or emotion, or you're having trouble fully connecting to the conversation. One option is to ignore these feelings and make an effort to force yourself back to the existing interaction. Alternatively, you could choose to bring what's going on inside you to the surface of your awareness, then potentially into the conversation itself.

One occasion when you may find this conversational style especially useful is when you feel like there's an elephant in the room. A (metaphorical) elephant in the room is something large, unmissable, and important that, for one reason or another, is not being openly acknowledged. The fact that nobody's talking about it affects everybody and can cause numerous problems. Actively pointing out an undiscussed topic you see is a great way to bring it to conscious awareness and direct energy toward working on the issues it creates. This process won't necessarily be easy, but creating a shared reality is an essential first step.

At other times, you may be aware of something that's happening in your head and heart while the conversation moves around you. For example, a friend might be discussing a subject you have no interest in, and you can feel yourself starting to zone out. You might be curious about some aspect of a story but unsure whether to ask about it because you're worried it might embarrass someone—or simply lack tact. Maybe you're angry about something unrelated, and it's affecting your capacity to be present. Whatever the case, you can make a practice of beginning to notice your internal state and—when appropriate—giving voice to it.

Utilizing this tool doesn't mean you need to automatically share everything that's on your mind. Once you notice a thought or emotion, you have a choice: You can consider possible outcomes and make an informed decision (see Tool 1.10: Default to Openness).

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1. Tool 2.6: Radical Honesty
 2. Tool 2.1: Nonviolent Communication
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