

Ingredients of an Interaction

(Adapted from *101 Intervention in Family Therapy*, by Nelson & Trepper)
Our interpretation of an interaction is based on both the external (e.g. the words and behaviours displayed) and internal stimuli (assumptions developed from past interactions). Often the internal processes of communication can distort your interpretation of the external stimuli. If the internal transactions are not acknowledged, or alternatively if they are misunderstood, they contribute to dysfunctional communication patterns.

Following is a description of the path of internal processes.

1. Sensory input

- The video...what is seen and heard.
- Although we may feel that we are an objective observer, we must acknowledge that we are always interpreting based on previous experiences.

2. Making meaning

- your background history distorts your interpretation of facts

3. Your feeling about the meaning

- Do you feel fear, worthlessness, anger, frustration...?

4. Your feeling about the feeling

- Often we react to the feeling by deciding whether it is acceptable to have.
- This is where you will observe your dysfunctional cognitions that need to be replaced with functional self-statements

5. Defense mechanisms

- These are our innate coping styles that are automatic psychological processes that protect yourself against anxiety and perceived dangers.

- Our reactions can consist of:
Humor; Self-assertion: Projecting – blaming;
Suppressing – repressing; rationalizing;
Withdrawal; Denying; passive aggressiveness

6. Rules about reacting

- Based on our upbringing we have internal rules of whether it is okay or not okay to respond or communicate our feelings.
- If the message you have always received is that you do not confront your superiors then you may ignore the feeling because you feel it is more important to not confront it with this particular person
- You may have also learned that the expression of anger is appropriate and therefore feel entitled to respond to this emotion in a volatile manner

Questions to ask you:

- a) What did you hear?
- b) What meaning did you give what you heard? Could you interpret the interaction (or criticism, or reaction, or question) differently?
- c) How did you feel?
- d) How did you feel about your emotional reaction?
- e) In what way did you deal with your feeling?
- f) What internal rules do you have about communicating your feelings? To express them or not to express them.

Two challenges:

- 1) Work at becoming aware of your feelings.
Say to yourself "I feel...what is this about?" "Is this feeling because of what is happening now, or is it based on the past?"
- 2) Work on becoming
 - a) Responsible for your internal processes and
 - b) Communicating the truth to the people you relate to.