



A LEAD MAGNET FROM BARAKA

The Couples Communication Toolkit

An EFT-informed guide to the conversation underneath every fight.

BARAKA Ontology & Clinical Counselling

West Vancouver, BC · Bilingual: English & Farsi

Mental Health · Naturopathic Medicine · Coaching · Community

barakaocc.com

A note before you begin

Most fights in long relationships aren't really about what they seem to be about. They're about a deeper conversation that hasn't been able to happen safely.

This toolkit draws on Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) — developed by Drs. Sue Johnson and Leslie Greenberg — and on attachment-based and Satir systemic approaches we use in couples work at Baraka. It will not replace therapy. What it will do is help you map the specific pattern your relationship gets stuck in, recognize the deeper attachment-level conversation underneath your fights, and give you concrete language for repair after rupture.

Read it together with your partner if you can. The shared map is part of what changes the dance.

Part 1 — The negative cycle

When long-term partners get stuck in a recurring fight, what looks like a content disagreement is almost always two attachment systems in alarm. One partner pursues (often louder, sharper, more accusatory). The other withdraws (often quieter, distant, shut down). Both are trying to protect themselves. Both believe the problem is the other one. Both are wrong.

The most common pattern

Pursuer: "We don't talk anymore. I feel alone."

Withdrawer hears criticism, goes quiet.

Pursuer reads the silence as "he doesn't care" and turns up the volume.

Withdrawer shuts down further. Pursuer escalates. Withdrawer disappears.

Map your cycle

Think about the last three significant fights. Don't focus on the content — focus on the dance. Use the questions below to map your specific pattern.

Reflection:

- When something starts to feel wrong between us, who notices first? What does that partner usually do?
- How does the other partner usually respond? What does their face/body/voice do?
- What does it look like when the cycle is at its worst — what is each partner doing?
- What is each partner most afraid of in those moments? (Not what they're saying — what they're afraid of.)
- How does the cycle usually end? Who reaches out first, if anyone?

Part 2 — Bids for connection

Drawn from Dr. John Gottman's research: every long relationship is built (or eroded) by thousands of small moments where one partner reaches toward the other — a comment, a touch, a sigh, a question — and the other partner either turns toward, turns away, or turns against. Couples whose relationships thrive turn toward each other roughly 86% of the time. Couples who eventually divorce turn toward each other about 33% of the time.

What bids actually look like

Bids are usually small and easy to miss. Examples:

- "Look at this article I found..." (*bid: connection through shared interest*)
- "I had a hard day." (*bid: emotional support*)
- A long sigh on the couch (*bid: noticing, attunement*)
- A hand reaching for yours in bed (*bid: physical connection*)
- "What are you thinking about?" (*bid: being known*)
- A laugh, looking to see if you'll laugh too (*bid: shared experience*)

Three responses to a bid

Turning toward: Engaging, even minimally. Eye contact. A response. A small acknowledgement.

Turning away: Missing the bid — through phone, distraction, fatigue, or absent-minded non-response.

Turning against: Responding with irritation, criticism, or contempt.

The audit

For 48 hours, notice the bids your partner makes (and the ones you make). Don't try to fix anything. Just count. Most couples are stunned by how many bids they've been missing — and equally stunned that the bids are still being made.

Part 3 — Repair after rupture

All couples rupture. Healthy couples repair. Repair is not about who was right; it's about restoring the connection that the rupture broke. Below is a structured repair script you can adapt.

The four-part repair script

1. Name the rupture without blame.

"Something happened between us last night and I want to come back to it. I don't want it to just sit there."

2. Take your share.

"Looking back, I think when I [specific action — raised my voice / shut down / rolled my eyes / walked out], that was hard for you. I'm sorry for that part." *(Take your share even if you think they have more share to take. Modeling repair is more important than balancing the ledger.)*

3. Name what was underneath.

"What was actually happening for me underneath was [I felt unimportant / I felt like I was failing you / I was scared / I was overwhelmed]. I didn't know how to say that, so it came out as [the surface behavior]."

4. Reach.

"Can we be okay? Is there anything you need from me?" *(Then listen. Receive whatever they say. Don't defend.)*

What if they aren't ready to repair?

Some partners need 24–48 hours after a rupture before they can engage in repair. This is especially common for the withdrawer in the cycle. Don't push. Send the bid ("I'd like to talk about last night when you're ready") and then wait. The space to come back is itself part of the repair.

Part 4 — The deeper conversation

Underneath every recurring fight is an attachment-level question that hasn't been able to be asked directly. The questions below help that conversation begin. They are not a replacement for therapy — they're an entry point.

Try these in a calm moment, not a fight

Sit somewhere comfortable. Phones away. Take turns. Each partner answers one question fully before moving on. The listener does not respond, defend, or fix — only listens, and reflects back what they heard before answering themselves.

- When you're feeling distant from me, what does it actually feel like inside?
- What's the moment from our recent history when you felt most alone in this relationship?
- When I [specific behavior in our cycle], what story does some part of you tell about what it means?
- What's something you've been afraid to ask me for?
- What would it look like for you to feel really seen by me right now? Specifically.
- When you imagine our relationship ten years from now at its best, what does it look like?
- What's something I do that lands as love for you, even if it seems small?
- What's a part of you you've been keeping from me — not because you don't trust me, but because you don't know how to share it?

Reflection:

- What surprised you in your partner's answers?

- What softened in you when you heard them?

- What's one small thing you could do this week, based on what you heard?

Part 5 — When to come in for couples therapy

The toolkit is foundation, not cure. Couples therapy is the right next step when:

- You can map the cycle but cannot get out of it on your own
- There has been a rupture (affair, betrayal, major disclosure) you can't move past
- Communication has so deteriorated that even the conversations in this toolkit feel impossible
- You're considering separation but are uncertain
- You want to do the deeper attachment work that requires a skilled third party
- You are at a major life transition (new baby, illness, retirement, immigration) and the relationship is straining

Couples therapy at Baraka

Sessions are 90 minutes at \$180 — long enough to actually do the work. Our approach is EFT-informed (Elham trained directly with Dr. Leslie Greenberg's team in Canada), integrative, and culturally fluent. Available in English and Farsi, in person at our Ambleside office or by secure video across BC.

If there is intimate-partner violence in your relationship, please do not pursue couples therapy as the first step. Individual safety planning comes first. VictimLink BC is available 24/7 at 1-800-563-0808.

When you're ready to do this work with someone.

Baraka offers depth-oriented therapy, naturopathic medicine, integrative coaching, and community in West Vancouver — in English and Farsi, in person at our Ambleside office or online across British Columbia. Our practice is built around the belief that healing happens at the intersection of clinical rigour, cultural fluency, and the deeper questions of meaning, identity, and being.

What a first step looks like

- **Free 15-minute consultation** — a no-pressure conversation by phone or video to ask questions and explore fit.
- **First session** — 50 to 90 minutes depending on the service. Mostly listening; we go where the work goes.
- **Ongoing therapy or care** — only if it's the right fit, at a cadence that works for your life.

Book a free 15-minute consult → barakaocc.com | (236) 455-6306

This guide is educational and is not a substitute for clinical care. If you are in crisis, please call 9-8-8 (Canada Suicide Crisis Helpline, 24/7) or go to your nearest emergency department.

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