

# Understanding the background - How did we get here?



## Objective

It is to encourage active listening, reflection, and self-awareness. This will enable you understand how you got here – communication misunderstanding – and how you can get the balance back in your relationship.

The practicing of this worksheet should provide you with valuable insights and promote meaningful discussions between you and your partner, leading to change that brings meaning and happiness in your relationship.

## How to use this Worksheet

This is a practical and easy-to-use worksheet designed to help couples in intercultural marriages understand the context of the communication breakdown. It can also be used for any marriage. The worksheet includes exercises, reflection questions, and actionable strategies to help understand how it all went wrong and how to rectify it.

Let me state how you will go through this exercise. One of you will talk while the other is listening. They are not to talk unless asked to. This is not the time to defend oneself. Afterwards, the other partner will also be given a chance to talk while the one who was talking before will take the turn to listen. The conversation must not be a back and forth.

Focus on a recent conversation that you had where you felt misunderstood or didn't fully understand your partner. This is a better place to start from rather than some very old issue. Going way back might give the impression that you are keeping scores. Those can be dealt with at some other points and not when trying to understand your context. Your goal is not to cause further turmoil, but to resolve the one you presently have.

**1**

**What was the topic of the conversation?**

Both of you should be asked to confirm whether that is a correct presentation of the account. This is not to see if one is telling the truth, rather, it is to establish that you are both talking about the same incidence or account of events.

**2**

**What specific part of the conversation led to misunderstanding?**

Here too, you get the views of both parties. You don't discuss it yet. Only hear each other out.

**3**

**What specific background information did you or your partner bring into the conversation that wasn't explicitly shared?**

Again, both parties are given the opportunity to do so. Write them all down here.

**4**

**Identify what cultural context might have influenced the conversation.**

Be specific in naming the cultural context. For instance, you may say that changing nappies is the work of the wife.

**5**

**Did you have enough background information to understand the context?**

Go beyond simply saying yes or no. Use the information from above (point 3) to explain your yes or no.

**6**

**How might your cultural background have influenced your interpretation?**

Discuss and reflect on how this may have played a role.

**7**

## **How might different cultural expectations have shaped the understanding of the conversation?**

Here you look at the issue through the eyes of your partner. This is to help understand the other person's perspective. You don't have to agree with them.

**8**

## **What could you do differently next time to gain better context?**

Discuss and write it down for future reference. This is for your personal learning or revision and not record keeping.

### **Actionable strategy**

The actionable strategies are to be incorporated in the process of doing the exercises. They must fit the exercise. I will give you some that you can use.

- 1.** Make it a habit to ask for or provide more context during discussions. You must not dispute the account your partner is giving but simply ask for context to better understand what you don't. This strategy can be used throughout the process. For instance, you could ask, "can you please tell me more about why you feel that way?" or "can you give me more background information?"
- 2.** Use the "I" statement when explaining how you felt.
- 3.** Check if you understood what the other has been saying by summarising what they said.
- 4.** Create an activity that you can use to introduce your cultural perspective and explain its significance. This is more like a cultural exchange. This is meant to create as well as deepen mutual understanding and appreciation. The activity may be a story, a meal, or tradition. You decide on what to but be cautious to not cause further misunderstanding by it.

**All the best in understanding your context and improving on your communication!**