

The Dance of Connection

"Once again Lerner does a remarkable job teaching us new steps in the complicated, mysterious, painful, and beautiful dance that we call family life."
—MELISSA PETER, Ph.D., author of *BEYOND CRITICISM*

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.
Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller
The Dance of Anger

How to Talk to Someone
When You're Mad, Hurt,
Scared, Frustrated,
Insulted, Betrayed,
or Desperate



The
Dance of
Connection

By Harriet Lerner
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Introduction

In her most groundbreaking book to date, Dr. Harriet Lerner takes us beyond *The Dance of Anger* and shows us how to "find our voice" with the people in our lives who matter the most. *The Dance of Connection* tackles the most difficult problems we face with people who hurt us. Drawing on her own experiences and those of some of the many clients that she counsels privately, Lerner illumines the most pervasive and profound relationship issues, including how to cope with feelings of rejection; how to embrace emotional vulnerability, how to take positive steps to deflect criticism or negativity from a family member or friend; and how to reinforce the positive in all of our relationships. Lerner reveals a startling new definition of what it means to have an "authentic voice" -- one that runs counter to the automatic ways we try to speak our truths. *The Dance of Connection* goes beyond "communication techniques" to provide bold and innovative "voice lessons." Lerner tells us when to lighten up and let things go, and when we need to take specific steps to heal betrayals, inequalities, and broken connections. With wit and wisdom, Lerner shows us how to "set things right," how to pay attention to and trust our "inner" selves, and how to heal the most painful disconnections with others. **Discussion**

Questions

1. Harriet Lerner writes that "we all seek to control the flow of personal information about ourselves" (Chapter 4). How do you feel about being emotionally vulnerable -- is it something you prefer to avoid, or something that you actively seek? Are there situations where you are more comfortable with your vulnerability than others?
2. In *The Dance of Connection*, Harriet Lerner talks about putting her family on "the hot seat," and she describes confrontations with her parents in which she openly acknowledges differences of opinion (Chapter 6). Do you find you are able to address sources of conflict with your parents or your children? Did any of her remarks ring especially true for you?
3. Lerner argues that we rarely evaluate prospective partners "with the same objectivity and clarity" that we bring to making major purchases (Chapter 7). Can you relate to this idea? Have you ignored important differences with a partner in order to continue a relationship that was ultimately doomed?
4. Harriet Lerner talks about establishing a "bottom line" -- a point from which you won't retreat -- to help a partner to realize that you are serious about a problem in your relationship (Chapter 9). Do you think this is realistic? Can you articulate your bottom line in your relationship with your partner?
5. Harriet Lerner writes that "there is no expert who knows what warms your partner's heart the way you do." (Chapter 10) Do you think this is true? What specific actions could you take to improve your relationship with your partner? What actions could your partner take?
6. Review Harriet Lerner's list of ten "do's and don'ts" in coping with criticism (Chapter 12). Do you agree with all of her suggestions? Are there any other strategies that you have learned over time that you think belong on her list?
7. In the anecdote about Joan and Corrine, Lerner describes a friendship that -- literally -- falls apart. Have you experienced any total breakdown of communication? How did you deal with it? Did your relationship recover? Were you able to get closure on the relationship?
8. Were there any individuals in *The Dance of Connection* whose stories you found especially poignant or relevant to your life, or whose experiences spoke to you? Who were they? What about their experiences did you find compelling?

About the Author: Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., is one of our nation's most respected relationship experts. A renowned scholar on the psychology of women and family relationships, she served as a staff psychologist at the Menninger Clinic for more than two decades. Her popular trilogy, *The Dance of Anger* (1985), *The Dance of Intimacy* (1989), and *The Dance of Deception* (1993) has been published in more than 30 foreign editions, and has sold more than three million copies. Born in Brooklyn, NY, Harriet Lerner graduated from the University of Wisconsin, where she majored in psychology and Indian studies. Lerner received an M.A. in educational psychology from Teachers' College of Columbia University and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the City University of New York. It was there that she met and later married Steve Lerner, also a clinical psychologist. After a postdoctoral internship at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco, the couple moved to Topeka, Kansas, for a two-year postdoctoral training program at the Menninger Foundation. Harriet Lerner and her husband reside in Lawrence, Kansas, and have two sons. In addition to her private practice, Dr. Lerner tours the country to lecture, consult, and present workshops on her findings. She has coauthored several children's books with her sister.