

GUIDES FOR LIVING CONNECTED

THE ASSUMPTION TRAP: A 3 PART SERIES

PART 3: CHECKING THE MEANING WITHOUT ESCALATING



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WHEN THIS IS USEFUL

This guide is especially helpful when:

- You want to clarify something without starting a fight
- You feel misunderstood and want to explain yourself
- You and your partner argue about what someone “meant”
- Conversations become defensive quickly
- You want more understanding and less conflict

KEY CONCEPTS

Curiosity vs. Accusation

Questions open connection.

Accusations close it.

Meaning-Making Together

Understanding is co-created, not assumed.

Soft Startups

How you begin matters more than what you say.

A GENTLE NOTE

Sometimes a small exercise opens up something deeper. That’s not a sign you’re doing it wrong — it’s often a sign there’s more to understand or discover. If this feels connected to something deeper, support from a therapist can help.

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THE MAIN IDEA

Most conflict isn’t about what happened. It’s about what someone meant.

But meaning can’t be known in isolation. It has to be checked.

When you check meaning with curiosity instead of certainty, you shift the conversation from:

“You’re wrong”
to
“Help me understand.”

That shift alone can lower defensiveness and open the door to real connection.

SOMETHING TO TRY

Use one of these simple check-ins:

- “Can I check something with you?”
- “I might be making an assumption — what did you mean by that?”
- “Here’s the story my mind told — is that accurate?”

A helpful structure:

Observation → Feeling → Question

Example:

“When you said you were tired, I felt a little rejected and started thinking you didn’t want to spend time together. Is that what you meant?”

A SMALL SHIFT THAT MAKES A BIG

Instead of:

“Why are you always so distant?”

Try:

“I’m realizing I might be making an assumption. Can you help me understand what you were feeling just now?”

One version accuses.

The other invites.

And invitation is what makes understanding possible.

RECAP

- Assumptions create distance
- Curiosity invites connection
- Meaning is something to be checked, not guessed.
- How you start a conversation shapes how it ends

The 5-Minute Relationship Guides are for educational and informational purposes only and are not a substitute for professional counseling or mental health treatment. Reading or using these guides does not establish a therapist-client relationship. If you are experiencing significant distress or mental health concerns, we encourage you to seek support from a qualified mental health professional.