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LOVE EMPOWERMENT CLINIC

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM SASKIA

COUPLE'S THERAPIST · SEXOLOGIST · COMMUNICATION COACH

Hi and welcome,

I'm so grateful you're here.

My name is Saskia Kalwinek, and I've created this workbook as a deeply personal offering—born from years of working as a couple's therapist, sexologist, and communication coach, and from my heartfelt desire to see more conscious couples and families in the world.

In my practice, I see every day how profoundly relationships impact our emotional, physical, and even spiritual well-being. The quality of our partnership is one of the strongest predictors of our overall life satisfaction. In the right relationship, we grow, heal, and thrive. In the wrong one—or even in one that's simply neglected—we can lose our sense of self just as quickly.

And yet... we structure our work. We schedule our fitness, our holidays, our career goals. But we often leave love, connection, and communication to chance—hoping it will all just flow naturally. It's no surprise that many couples feel stuck, disconnected, or overwhelmed.

The truth is: relationships require intention, structure, and consistent care. They need both individual growth and teamwork to keep the spark alive.

This workbook is designed to help you do exactly that. Whether you're here on your own or with a partner, you'll find practical exercises, deep reflections, and powerful communication tools to help you become more connected to yourself—and more present and attuned in your relationship.

I also believe we should have been taught these things much earlier in life. Relationship skills and emotional awareness should be part of every school curriculum. Since they're not, it's up to us to learn and lead by example—for ourselves, our partners, our children, and the generations to come.

Thank you for choosing to grow with intention. I'm so honored to be part of your journey.

With love and purpose,
Saskia
Founder, Love Empowerment Clinic

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

EMOTIONAL BALANCE WORKSHEETS

DAILY PRACTICE IDENTIFYING THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

For the purposes of self-awareness and clarity of communication, I'd like to invite you to practice identifying thoughts and feelings and keep the two categories separate in a deliberate manner. For example:

- Several times a day, as a regular practice, ask yourself, "What do I feel right now?" Jot down a few notes. Just make sure the words you write down are feeling words. Examples include happy, sad, excited, worried, fearful, etc.
- Then write down some thoughts you are thinking that enhance those feelings, for better or worse. For instance, if you identified a feeling of worry, look for the thoughts that enhance your worry for you right now. Examples might include thoughts like, "I'll never get this project done" or "my partner doesn't love me like they used to." Whatever the thoughts are that match the emotion, write them down.
- Start noticing the difference between thoughts and feelings. Notice how the thoughts strengthen the feelings and the feelings invite thoughts that support them. But thoughts and feelings are not the same things; noticing the difference is very important.
- Once you can tell the difference between a thought and a feeling, you can start playing with these ideas, and if you do, I suspect you will notice you have more control than you think you do when it comes to emotional experience. For instance, if you would prefer to feel a different feeling, practice writing down the thoughts that go with the new feeling and see if you can shift your emotional state deliberately. This takes some practice but is extremely liberating. For example, if you would like to experience a feeling of happiness, ask yourself what thoughts would create happiness for you. Lying doesn't work, so you will need to look for happy-making thoughts that are also true. Here are some thoughts that support happy feelings for me to give you the idea: I love the feeling of sunshine on my face. When I look around me, I notice beauty (list the beautiful things) and take joy in that beauty. I love the feeling of my cat's fur and his purring. I love cooking some yummy food and then eating it. You get the idea; find things that bring up happy feelings and focus on them. Notice your ability to generate happy feelings on purpose.

- If you have difficulty thinking up thoughts that generate emotions you would like to experience, ask someone else what they think about to generate that emotion in themselves. Then see if you can do it the way they do. Another way to investigate this is to imagine or remember a time when you felt the emotion and ask yourself what you were thinking in that scenario. You might also imagine watching a movie in which someone is experiencing the emotion you would like to experience; what are they thinking?
- Ask yourself, "What would I enjoy right now? What sounds like fun to me?" These questions will get you in touch with your unique preferences, which are an important aspect of yourself. Another way to do this is to identify a choice you have between two options and ask yourself which would be more enjoyable. Then choose the more enjoyable one, if possible. This will give you practice noticing what you prefer and, ideally, also some practice acting on your preference.
- Some people find it easiest to check in with themselves and get grounded first thing in the morning, before tackling the day. The following are some writing prompts that are designed to help you get grounded in your unique self before the day gets complicated.

Experiment with some of them and see if you like them.

I am grateful for_____.

I am looking forward to _____.

The kind of person I want to be today is _____.

Thoughts I want to think today are _____.

Five enjoyable, beautiful, or pleasant things around me right now are _____.

The sensations I'm experiencing in my body right now are _____.

The emotions or feelings I'm experiencing right now are _____.

I would like to feel_____, and some thoughts that bring that feeling up are _____.

NEEDS VERSUS DESIRES

We often use the word need to communicate that something is important to us. Unfortunately, the word need can feel a little bit like an ultimatum to the listener. It can invite defensiveness or a guarded response, which is the last thing you want when something is important to you.

Hard conversations with your partner will go better if you figure out how to discuss desires and preferences rather than needs, even when it comes to things that feel important to you. This exercise is intended to help you practice reframing statements in terms of desires and preferences rather than needs.

1. Write down a list of the things you strongly desire. Anything you have told someone you "need" should go on this list.
2. Rewrite each item on your list in a sentence that expresses something about desire, preference, and hopes. For example, you might write, "I would really love to experience (fill in the blank)."
3. Add a phrase that addresses the importance of the issue or how strong your feelings are about the topic and why it feels important to you. Using the example, you might continue, "I feel strongly about this because (describe why it feels important to you)."
4. Any time you notice yourself thinking or saying, "I need," challenge yourself to figure out a way to express your desire and preference. Make sure you also express the importance of the issue to you. The point isn't to minimize the importance or remove a sense of urgency, but rather to express your preferences and add emphasis in ways that aren't as likely to result in defensiveness.

HOLDING STEADY SELF-COACHING WORKSHEET

Thoughts lead to feelings, which is why self-talk, or, in other words, careful management of thoughts, is such a powerful tool for staying steady in a difficult situation or conversation. Imagine you have an internal coach who can give you just the right pep talks for any given situation. That internal coach might have to interrupt your internal heckler to get a word in edgewise, but the effort will pay off because good coaching really makes a difference in how well we perform.

Imagine being at the gym, lifting weights. Your internal heckler starts up: "You're so weak, you can't lift anything. I don't even know why you try. You'll never amount to anything. You don't look as good as all these other people at the gym either. You shouldn't have even bothered coming." Obviously, with coaching like that, you will have to work 10 times as hard to make any progress at all.

Okay, now imagine replacing your heckler with a good coach, someone who inspires you to keep going, compliments your effort, and supports your growth: "Look at you go! You're amazing! You've got this. Everyone feels tired sometimes; just focus and see if you can do one more rep. You're making a strong, healthy, beautiful body with perfect muscles!"

Now imagine you're in a different type of challenging situation. You're having a hard conversation with your partner. The two of you disagree, and you're trying to manage your emotional responses and really understand what your partner is telling you without getting angry and defensive or shutting down. What kind of coaching do you want to provide for yourself in this situation?

Write down a list of things your internal coach might say that would help you stay with the conversation a little longer and a little stronger.

Here are a few examples for you to consider. Feel free to rewrite them to fit your circumstances and eliminate any that don't fit you. Add your own if you can. The only requirement is that your internal coaching should help you stay steady, inspired, and focused on being your best self, even when it is hard.

- "I will make up my own mind in the end, but until then I'm going to explore everything I can."
- "I can do this. I am strong enough to hear the truth from my partner. I am strong enough to stay with the conversation and show up with my true self, and my true opinions."
- "No one is forcing me to do anything I don't want to. Thinking, talking, and imagining are not the same as acting."
- "I can run an experiment and see how it goes, and then I can revise the plan until we come up with something that works for all of us."
- "My vote is the deciding vote in my own life and decisions."
- "If the relationship doesn't work out, I want to know I explored all possibilities and really deeply came to understand my partner's perspective."

See if you can distill your self-coaching to two or three powerful statements. Put them somewhere prominent; write them on your hand for the day or week or put them in your notes on your phone or on an index card in your wallet. Look at these powerful coaching statements any time you feel wobbly. Don't let the heckler get too far out front; get the compassionate coach in there to help you!

CHALLENGING THE THOUGHT/FEELING/MEANING SPIRAL

You are having feelings. That's okay, it happens to everyone from time to time. Thoughts and feelings are intimately intertwined. Thoughts lead to feelings, and when feelings are uncomfortable, we create an entire story about why we are experiencing something uncomfortable. You can think thoughts that make your feelings stronger, bring different feelings, or reduce the intensity of your feelings. This is crucial when you are experiencing painful feelings. Getting some control of your thoughts, so you can experience less suffering, is extremely important to happiness. Making any decisions about actions to take in your relationship is another subject and should be kept separate from managing thoughts and feelings.

Let's consider the topic of jealousy in a polyamorous relationship. Imagine Mary's partner goes on a date with Rosie and Mary experiences jealousy, along with anger, resentment, fear, or any other uncomfortable emotion. Mary might have such thoughts as, "My partner is probably going to leave me for Rosie," or "Rosie is more attractive than I am," "Rosie wants to break up my relationship with my partner," or "My partner doesn't care about my feelings." Any of these thoughts reinforce the uncomfortable feelings Mary is experiencing.

Use these steps to identify your feelings, expand your thinking, and calm yourself. Remember, this is not a decision-making process, it is a process of managing the thought/feeling/meaning spiral. Any decision you need to make will be better made at a time when you can think more clearly.

1. What emotions are you experiencing? (Examples include jealousy, fear, anger, resentment, envy, and many more, but it is important to know this worksheet is relevant to any thought/feeling/meaning spiral, not just those having to do with jealousy.)
2. What thoughts are you thinking that lead to those feelings? Write down the thoughts that strengthen the feelings you are experiencing. (See the examples if you are having trouble identifying your thoughts.)
3. Now flip these thoughts or stories upside-down. You might ask yourself, for one thought at a time, "Am I 100% sure this is true?" Whatever your answer is to that question, next write down a few statements that are opposite your initial thought/story. For instance, if your first thought was, "My partner likes their new lover better than they like me," some opposite statements would include, "My partner likes me better than their new lover" and "My partner doesn't like their new lover better than they like me."

4 Now that you have a list of opposite statements, make a list of the other possible stories you can think of that might explain the current circumstances. For instance, if your partner is late coming home, "They are in a ditch dying" isn't going to help you function well, feel good, or help in an emergency. It would be helpful to think, "I'm sure they just lost track of time," or "Maybe they stopped at the store," or "Their phone might have run out of battery, and that's why they haven't called yet." The truth of the matter is not important right now; what is important is letting your self-protective brain know there are options other than the catastrophic thoughts you have been thinking. For any given situation, think up as many alternative stories as you can. These alternative stories are what I refer to as "meanings," as in "this is the meaning I make of that."

Next, take a break from thinking about this. Do your best to take gentle care of yourself. What would feel pleasant right now? What would be a good distraction for you? A hot bath? Making a nice soup? Putting on some peppy music? Doing an art project? Going to the gym? Whatever you choose, make sure it is enjoyable. This might be easier if you give yourself a time-related plan for your mini-vacation, for instance, "I'm not going to worry until 7 a.m." or "I'm not going to make a decision about my relationship's future for at least a week."

When you are ready, sleep on it. If you have trouble winding down, use guided meditation to help you relax, listen to a story, or read a pleasant but boring book so you can think about something else.

In the morning, revisit this exercise and decide if there are any questions you have for your partner, assumptions you want to check out, or aspects of your experience you want to share with anyone.

Give yourself some positive strokes for your hard work. You might also ask your partner or a support person for positive strokes. It is a big deal to challenge your own negative thinking, and you are a rock star for doing it.

POSITIVE TRAITS

From the list below find the traits that are important to you in a partner, compare if both you and your partner are displaying them

- Kind
- Intelligent
- Hardworking
- Loyal
- Attractive
- Down-to-Earth
- Goofy
- Creative
- Accepting
- Strong
- Friendly
- Flexible
- Nurturing
- Thoughtful
- Confident
- Optimistic
- Respectful
- Determined
- Skilled
- Helpful
- Motivated
- Insightful
- Funny
- Patient
- Realistic
- Honest
- Generous
- Modest
- Serious
- Independent
- Trusting
- Resilient
- Cheerful
- Self-Directed
- Reliable
- Relaxed
- Listener
- Brave
- Decisive
- Enthusiastic
- Forgiving
- Humble
- Sensitive
- Organized
- Selfless
- Practical
- Mature
- Focused
- Courteous
- Grateful
- Open-Minded
- Positive
- Responsible
- Cooperative
- Frugal
- Tolerant
- Innovative
- Balanced

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING MY PARTNER'S QUALITIES

The qualities that initially attracted me to my partner were:

1

2

3

My favorite memories with my partner have been:

1

2

3

My partner shows me appreciation by:

1

2

3

I value my partner because:

1

2

3

THE FIVE LANGUAGES OF LOVE

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Aside from verbal compliments, another way to communicate through "Words of Affirmation" is to offer encouragement. Here are some examples: reinforcing a difficult decision; calling attention to progress made on a current project; acknowledging a person's unique perspective on an important topic. If a loved one listens for "Words of Affirmation," offering encouragement will help him or her to overcome insecurities and develop greater confidence.

HOW Do I feel about giving AND receiving this Love language?

QUALITY TIME

Quality time is more than mere proximity. It's about focusing all your energy on your mate. A husband watching sports while talking to his wife is NOT quality time. Unless all of your attention is focused on your mate, even an intimate dinner for two can come and go without a minute of quality time being shared.

Quality conversation is very important in a healthy relationship. It involves sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context. A good mate will not only listen, but offer advice and respond to assure their mate they are truly listening.

HOW Do I feel about giving AND receiving this Love language?

RECEIVING GIFTS

Some mates respond well to visual symbols of love. If you speak this love language, you are more likely to treasure any gift as an expression of love and devotion. People who speak this love language often feel that a lack of gifts represents a lack of love from their mate. Luckily, this love language is one of the easiest to learn.

These gifts need not to come every day, or even every week. They don't even need to cost a lot of money. Free, frequent, expensive, or rare, if your mate relates to the language of receiving gifts, any visible sign of your love will leave them feeling happy and secure in your relationship.

HOW Do I feel about giving AND receiving this Love language?

ACTS OF SERVICE

Sometimes simple chores around the house can be an undeniable expression of love. Even simple things like laundry and taking out the trash require some form of planning, time, effort, and energy.

It is important to do these acts of service out of love and not obligation. A mate who does chores and helps out around the house out of guilt or fear will inevitably not be speaking a language of love, but a language of resentment. It's important to perform these acts out of the kindness of your heart.

HOW Do I feel about giving AND receiving this Love language?

PHYSICAL TOUCH

Many mates feel the most loved when they receive physical contact from their partner. For a mate who speaks this love language loudly, physical touch can make or break the relationship.

Sexual intercourse makes many mates feel secure and loved in a marriage. However, it is only one dialect of physical touch. Many parts of the body are extremely sensitive to stimulation. It is important to discover how your partner not only physically responds but also psychologically responds to these touches.

It is important to learn how your mate speaks the physical touch language. Some touches are irritating and uncomfortable for your mate. Take the time to learn the touches your mate likes. They can be big acts, such as back massages or lovemaking, or little acts such as touches on the cheek or a hand on the shoulder. It's important to learn how your mate responds to touch. That is how you will make the most of this love language.

HOW Do I feel about giving AND receiving this Love language?

5 LOVE LANGUAGES

Words of affirmation

Hearing the words, "I love you," are important - hearing the reasons behind that love sends your spirits skyward.

Physical Touch

Touching one another shows signs of love, concern or excitement. Physically prescene is crucial.

Receiving gifts

There's a lot of online apps available where you can book a driver any time of the day. They offer both the convenience and the accessibility especially during rush hours.

Quality time

Nothing says, "I LOVE YOU", like full, undivided attention, being there for this type of person is critical. Failure to listen can be especially hurtful

Acts of service

The words he or she most want to hear: Let me do that for you.

Laziness, broken commitments tell speakers of this language their feelings don't matter.

BASIC RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

THE ACADEMY FOR COUPLES THERAPISTS

Engaging in basic relationship maintenance means that couples are prioritizing their relationship over other activities and that they are paying attention.

Successful couples do basic couples' maintenance on a regular basis to keep their relationship strong and healthy.

Sometimes, partners start taking the relationship for granted and stop doing the things they used to do during the courtship and romantic period.

4 BASIC RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

Here is a list of what successful couples do to maintain their relationship. These activities are simple, don't take up a lot of time, and the research shows that they have a positive effect on intimate relationships.

1 | GREETINGS

Greet each morning and each night before going to bed. This simple activity takes about 30 seconds. Research shows that this activity lowers stress hormones and calms the brain.

Suggestion: Whoever gets up later and whoever goes to bed first has to be the initiator of this activity.

Look at your partner in the eye, say good morning (or good night), and give a full body hug.

2 | VERBAL APPRECIATION

Verbally appreciate each other on a daily basis. Research shows that verbal appreciations given or received lower negative thinking about your partner.

Suggestion: Complete at least one of the following sentences:

"I really liked it when you...",
"I appreciate that you...",
"It was really nice of you to....",
"It felt good to see you do X...";
"It was very helpful when you did Y..."

3 | NO-SCREEN MEETINGS

Meet for at least 10 minutes on most days without looking at phones, computer screens, TV, or other interruptions.

Research shows that doing this on a regular basis increases relationship satisfaction dramatically.

Suggestion: Sit on the couch or at the kitchen/dining room table. Take turns asking some of the following questions.

Of course, you can also talk about something else or ask other questions. What you should not talk about are relationship problems. This isn't a "state of the relationship" meeting.

Whoever asks gets to pick the question. Try to go for at least 5–6 questions each.

In response to your partner's answer, you can just say "thank you" and move on to the next question.

If your partner's answer sparks another question, don't hesitate to go for it, but remember, do not react to the answers, particularly if you disagree with them.

- What is one thing you are worried about in the coming month?
- What are you most looking forward to in the coming week/month?
- What is one thing you are most proud of that you did today/last week/month?
- What is one thing you are least proud of that you did today/last week/month?
- Is there someone who has been irritating you lately?
- What is your idea of a relaxing weekend nowadays?
- What are two of your favorite childhood memories?
- What is your favorite memory of a good time in our relationship?
- Where do you like to go these days when you need a place to think?
- What things in your life bring you the greatest pleasure?
- What things do you look forward to each day?
- What excites you about the future?
- In what settings are you the happiest and most comfortable?
- On your drive to work, what consumes your mind the majority of the time?
- In a regular day, what do you find yourself thinking about the most in addition to work?
- If you could change one or two things in your life, what would they be, and why?
- What accomplishments do you value most in your life so far?

4 | PLAN SOMETHING NEW

Plan a new and fun activity to do together.

This doesn't have to cost a lot of money. It can be as simple as playing a new card game at home or as elaborate as planning a trip to a new place.

The important thing is it should be something new.

Keep in mind that planning a trip does not count if you've already done that together (even if it's to a new place). It has to be something new you have not done before.

Take turns planning something new at least twice a year. Research shows that diversification of activities rewires the brain in a positive way.

Provided by
Dr Sara Schwarzbaum
L.M.F.T & L.C.P.C.
Founder of The Academy for Couples
Therapists and Couples Counseling Associates

FIVE STAGES OF RELATIONSHIPS

1 THE ROMANCE STAGE: FALLING IN LOVE

After you meet someone interesting, you spend time getting to know them.

You consider first impressions, gather preliminary information, and are somewhat cautious. Overtime, you develop a level of comfort with the person and begin to let your guard down.

When you fall in love, your brain releases a cocktail of chemicals (including Oxytocin, Phenylethylamine and Dopamine) designed to set your heart thumping and light a fire in your loins.

You see all the things that make you feel good and similar to your lover.

You have a tendency to ignore what makes you feel bad, hiding you partner's flaws and making you say and do anything to get along and please each other.

TIP: Hollywood has glamorized this stage, making it out as the pinnacle of romantic achievement, when it is just the beginning and is fairly effortless.

As a result, when our relationship hits the Power Struggle stage, we panic and incorrectly assume that because our relationship doesn't look all starry-eyed like in the movies, it must be flawed.) When the high wears off, which can take anywhere from 2 months to 2 years, couples break up and look for more compatible mates, only to discover that the same thing happens in their next relationship.

At this point, your brain stops or slows production of the love chemicals and you wake up with what I call a "Love Hangover", lying next to the most incompatible person in the world.

2 THE POWER STRUGGLE STAGE: THE LOVE HANGOVER

The highest percentage of first marriage divorces happen here – around the 3 to 4 - year mark.

This is such a painful time as the illusion that 'romantic love will last forever' falls away and is replaced with feelings of disappointment and anger.

You begin focusing on your differences and your partner's flaws.

So, you get to work trying to change your partner back into the person you thought they were, or punish them for not being that way, or both.

Often one partner pulls away and withdraws, needing space... and the other partner needily chases them, feeling emotionally deserted.

The goal of this stage of the relationship is to establish your autonomy inside your relationship, without destroying the love connection between you.

This stage can last anywhere from a few months to years, depending on the support and guidance you have and your willingness to grow.

TIP: Without the skills to navigate this stage and resolve your differences, you'll keep returning to it.)

There are 2 ways most couples deal with the Power Struggle stage.

- **THEY BREAK UP:** Very often these people are serial daters, never fully committing, always looking for love, but finding disappointment instead.
- **THEY SURVIVE:** They suffer in but do not leave a relationship that is stuck in the past and no longer growing. Their relationship eventually emotionally flatlines, along with their sex life.

The other alternative is that you OVERCOME the Power Struggle, either on your own, or with professional guidance.

Getting through the power struggle stage is not an easy ride for most couples.

It's all too easy for one person to quit halfway along the journey and end the relationship because it feels like too much hard work.

In reality, they're usually unwilling to face aspects of themselves that feel too scary to confront.

You graduate from the Power Struggle stage when you:

- accept and appreciate each other's differences
- learn to share power, and realize that using force will never get you what you want in love
- realize who you are and what you have (as a couple)
- give up your fantasies of harmony without struggle
- surrender to life just the way it is

3 THE STABILITY STAGE

Once you've learned how to fight in a way that both of you win, you move to the Stability stage.

The thrill of being in love returns and if you've completed the Power Struggle stage, it returns to an even deeper, more mature form than in the Romance stage.

In this stage, it finally becomes very clear that you're never ever going to succeed in changing your partner and you've given up the desire to.

You're OK with your partner being different from you.

You both have clear boundaries and learn mutual respect.

If you don't, you go back to the Power Struggle.

TIP: You can get stuck in this stage if you get too attached to the peace and stability that comes with it. Remember that all growth requires change and getting outside your comfort zone.)

4 THE COMMITMENT STAGE

In the commitment stage, you fully surrender to the reality that you and your partner are human and that your relationship has shortcomings as a result.

You have learned to love each other by having to like each other and you choose each other consciously. You can honestly say to your partner, "I don't need you. I choose you knowing all I know about you, good and bad."

You begin to experience a beautiful balance of love, belonging, fun, power, and freedom.

The trap in this stage is thinking that all your work is done. While this may be somewhat true on an individual level, your work in the world as a couple is just beginning.

TIP: This is the only stage where you're actually ready to be married. However, being married does not mean that you're in the Commitment stage. Most people get married in the Romance stage before they have learned to navigate conflict.)

5 THE BLISS / CO-CREATION STAGE

In this stage you become two people who have chosen to be a team moving out into the world.

Often, couples in this stage work on a project together – some kind of shared creative work that is intended to contribute to the world in some way e.g. a business, a charity or a family.

TIP: If you've been together many years and are in the Bliss stage, be careful not to invest so much energy into the outside world that you forget to nurture your relationship.)

These stages are not a linear process; they are more like a spiral, circling upwards.

You retain the lessons you learned at each stage and bring them forward as you grow – you are in one stage or another at any given time with bits of the others thrown in for good measure.

You'll keep coming back to the Power Struggle stage until you learn to love each other's differences and fight in a way that deepens your intimacy and connection instead of eroding it.

(adapted from "The 5 stages of relationships: Which relationship stage is yours at?" by Bruce Muzik)

Provided by
Dr. Susan Campbell
during a study of hundreds of couples)

THE MAGIC 5 HOURS

Studies of couples whose relationships improve over time and can go the distance show that they all spent an extra 5 hours a week on their relationship. Some clear patterns emerged.

1 Partings

Before you say goodbye in the morning make sure you know at least one thing about your partner's day ahead.

2mins per day × 5 days = **10mins**

2 Reunions

Have a de-briefing, stress relieving conversation at the end of each workday. This does not need to be immediately when you get home but before you go to bed.

20mins per day × 5 days = **1hr 40mins**

3 Admiration & appreciation:

Find some way every day to communicate appreciation and respect toward your partner (remember the love languages here).

5mins per day × 7 days = **35mins**

4 Affection

Make sure you spend time showing affection to each other when you are together—hug, holding hands, kiss, a touch. Let go of minor irritations from the day, forgive if necessary.

5mins per day × 7 days = **35mins**

5 Weekly "Date":

Make time to chat or do something together, make this time pleasurable when starting out.

1–2 hours once a week = **2hrs**

The amount of time here is minimal but adding these 5 hours will help a great deal in keeping your relationship on track.

REMEMBER: *Strong relationships don't just take care of themselves, they require consistent "exercise" and a good relationship will do more for your health and wellbeing than working out at a gym!*

FEAR OF INTIMACY

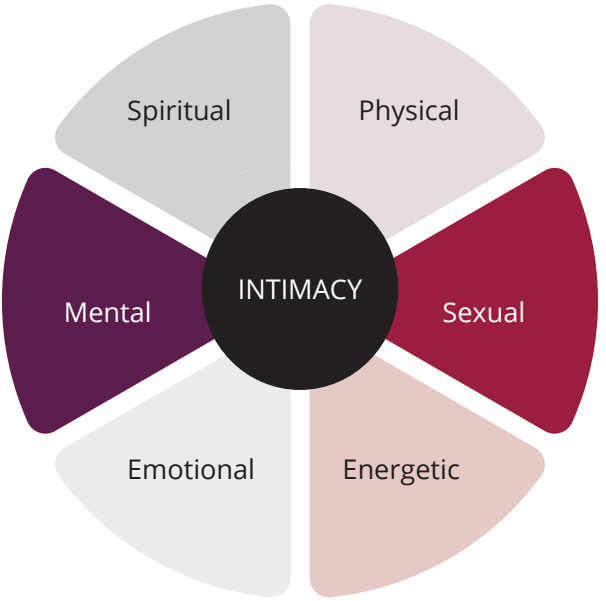
What is a fear of intimacy?

A fear of intimacy means you experiences discomfort and difficulty in getting close to someone and letting others get to know who you truly are. It is a fear of getting both physically and emotionally close, which can of course make a romantic relationship difficult as you fear taking your relationship to the next level.

In order to get close with someone you must trust that person and feel comfortable with them knowing all of you, the good and bad parts of yourself. To be able to do this, you must first be able to understand and be comfortable with who you are. Unfortunately those that suffer from a fear of intimacy often struggle to accept and love themselves, and therefore they fear that no one can love them too.

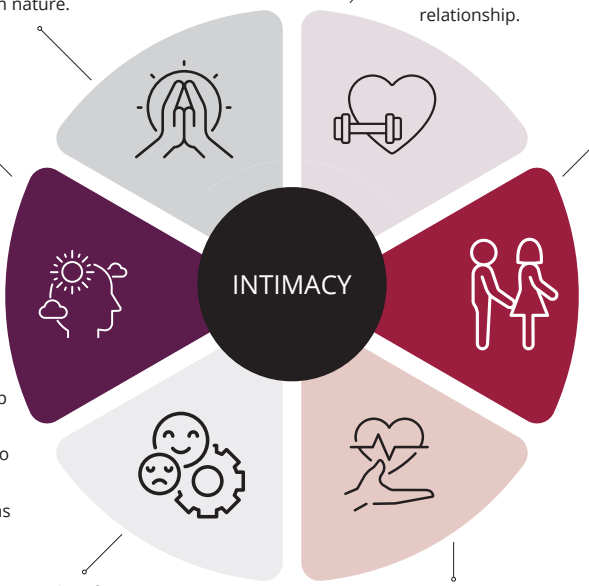
Although people with a fear of intimacy often subconsciously push others away and avoid getting too close with people to begin with, it does not mean that they don't want to be loved or be in a loving romantic relationship, often they want nothing more than to be close with others, they just have something holding them back and don't know how to overcome it.

Types of intimacy?



Spiritual
Spiritual intimacy can mean something different for everyone, it can involve sharing the same religious views, engaging in rituals, mindfulness activities, yoga, personal growth, or just connecting with nature.

Physical
This is the form of intimacy most people are familiar with, it involves, touching, kissing, holding hands, hugging, sex, etc. Although physical intimacy can be overwhelming for some people, it is a crucial part of maintaining a healthy relationship.



Mental
Mental intimacy (also intellectual intimacy) involves sharing your ideas, opinions, life perspectives and intellectually challenging each other. In a relationship you should feel comfortable enough to have respectful stimulating discussions about many topics.

Sexual
Many healthy relationships depend on a romantic sex life. Sexual intimacy should come from a positive place, a place of trust, pleasure and generosity between sexual partners, it involves vulnerability and trust.

Emotional
Emotional intimacy is all about vulnerability, communication, and expression. Emotional intimacy fosters trust and a profound sense of security within your relationship. It is important to figure out how you are feeling, what you need and want within your relationship, so that those needs can be met by your partner.

Energetic
Energetic intimacy is all about sharing experiences. Experiences make up your life and it's important to figure out what experiences are meaningful to you and how they fuel your energy. Some couples love trying new things together and sharing the same feelings throughout those new experiences.

PHYSICAL INTIMACY

This is the form of intimacy most people are familiar with, it involves, touching, kissing, holding hands, hugging, sex, etc. Although physical intimacy can be overwhelming for some people, it is a crucial part of maintaining a healthy relationship.

Physical intimacy is often achieved through sensual touching, which always requires respecting your partners personal boundaries, make sure you both know where each of you stand on physical touch before entering another's personal space.

Do you think that physical intimacy is important in a relationship?

How can a lack of physical intimacy affect your relationship?

What form of physical intimacy do you feel comfortable with?

What physical intimacy do you feel uncomfortable with?
How can you improve on this?

SEXUAL INTIMACY

Many healthy relationships depend on a romantic sex life. Sexual intimacy should come from a positive place, a place of trust, pleasure and generosity between sexual partners, it involves vulnerability and trust. Building sexual intimacy can have several benefits, such as connection, boosted self esteem, release of endorphins and better mental health. However, closing yourself off can make it harder to foster romantic connections, and this isolation can impact your relationship and overall mental health.

Do you think that sexual intimacy is important in a relationship?

How can a lack of sexual intimacy affect your relationship?

Do you feel comfortable with sexual intimacy?

Is there any part of sexual intimacy that makes you feel uncomfortable?

ENERGETIC INTIMACY

Energetic intimacy is all about sharing experiences. Experiences make up your life and it's important to figure out what experiences are meaningful to you and how they fuel your energy. Some couples love trying new things together and sharing the same feelings throughout those new experiences. It's about creating meaningful memories, such as going to a concert, hiking, going on an adventure, taking a holiday to a new place or just simply going for a peaceful walk together.

What types of experiences fulfill you?

What does your partner like to do?

What experiences do you like to do together?

What would you like to try together?

EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

Emotional intimacy is all about vulnerability, communication, and expression. Emotional intimacy fosters trust and a profound sense of security within your relationship, but how can you express and communicate your needs if you are not in touch of your own emotional needs? It is important to figure out how you are feeling, what you need and want within your relationship, so that those needs can be met by your partner. If you re struggling with emotional intimacy within your relationship, you are more likely to feel lonely or resentful, and less likely to feel trust, love, safety, or support.

Are you in touch with your emotions and do you communicate them with your partner?

Does your partner communicate their needs, and how could you help them communicate more effectively?

Do you feel emotionally supported?

How could you improve your emotional intimacy?

MENTAL INTIMACY

Mental intimacy (also intellectual intimacy) involves sharing your ideas, opinions, life perspectives and intellectually challenging each other. In a relationship you should feel comfortable enough to have respectful stimulating discussions about many topics, even if you share different opinions and feel safe about expressing your own views. Sharing ideas, making plans together, watching documentaries are all examples of stimulating the mental level of intimacy.

What stimulates your brain?

What kinds of discussions and conversations do I like to participate in?

What stimulating things do you have in common with your partner?

How could you improve your mental intimacy with your partner?

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Spiritual intimacy can mean something different for everyone, it can involve sharing the same religious views, engaging in rituals, mindfulness activities, yoga, personal growth, or just connecting with nature. Spiritual intimacy can help deepen your connections to the world and people around you. Some examples may include, watching the sun rise (or set) together, taking a walk through the park while holding hands, enjoying the beauty of nature, seeing sacredness in everyday things and sharing them with each other.

What does spirituality mean to you?

How does spiritual intimacy deepen your connection with your partner?

How do you connect spiritually together?

How could you improve your spiritual intimacy?

FEAR OF INTIMACY

To be intimate with someone is to share close emotional or physical ties. If you fear intimacy, you often have a subconscious fear of closeness or fear of becoming too close to others. You may unknowingly avoid intimacy and make excuses so that you don't get too close with anyone romantically. It is also possible, that you though you may long for intimacy, you never seem to allow yourself to get vulnerable.

FEAR OF INTIMACY RED FLAGS

You have trust issues or have been hurt in your past relationships.

You suffer from low self-esteem.

You Feel uncomfortable with physical contact.

You have difficulty expressing your needs.

You are a perfectionist.

FEAR OF INTIMACY QUIZ

Read each statement carefully and rate it as either 3 (very true), 2 (somewhat true) or 1 (not true at all).

	STATEMENT	3 2 1
1	I feel uncomfortable telling my partner about things in the past that I am ashamed of.	
2	I feel uncomfortable talking with my partner about a past situation that really hurt me.	
3	I find it hard expressing myself and my feelings to my partner.	
4	There has been times when my partner was upset and I found it difficult to show them that I care about them.	
5	I am afraid to confide my true feelings to my partner.	
6	I get anxious just thinking about telling my partner that I love them.	
7	At times I feel uncomfortable with my partner for no reason at all.	
8	I feel discomfort when I express my feelings to my partner.	
9	I feel afraid to make any long term commitments with my partner.	
10	I feel very uncomfortable sharing my past experiences to my partner, even the happy ones.	

FEAR OF INTIMACY QUIZ

	STATEMENT	3 2 1
11	I get nervous when I show physical affection to my partner.	
12	I find it difficult to be truly open to my partner.	
13	I don't like it when my partner emotionally depends on me.	
14	I am afraid to share with my partner what I dislike about myself.	
15	I am afraid to get closer with my partner as there is a risk that I could get hurt.	
16	I feel more comfortable keeping private information to myself.	
17	I feel don't comfortable being spontaneous with my partner.	
18	I am a closed book, I am a very private person.	
19	I often have moments of unexplainable frustration, coldness, or indifference towards your partner?	
20	I feel uncomfortable when my partner shares their personal feelings and experiences with me.	

FEAR OF INTIMACY QUIZ

	STATEMENT	3 2 1
21	I am afraid of sharing my person thoughts and feelings with my partner.	
22	I find it difficult to trust my partner.	
23	I feel comfortable telling my partner what my needs are.	
24	Sometimes I just shut down when I am around my partner, for no reason at all.	
25	I feel stuck at a certain point in my relationships and find it hard to move to the next stage in my relationships.	
26	I feel uncomfortable showing physical affection, even though I want to receive it.	
27	In my past I have had too many or too few unstable relationships.	
28	I fear being rejected or hurt by your partner.	
29	I have low self esteem and often devalue myself.	
30	I have been told in the past by my ex partners that I always keep them at arms length.	

FEAR OF INTIMACY RESULTS

Add up your results. You should have a score between 30–90.

SCORE BETWEEN 70–90

You have a high score on the 'Fear of Intimacy' quiz, which means it is most likely that you struggle to get emotionally and physically with your partner. You may or may not be doing this deliberately.

Having a fear of intimacy in your relationship can cause stress in your relationship which could lead to a break down in your relationship, even before any real intimacy begins.

Going forward, you may need to understand why you have developed such a fear of intimacy and try and work on opening up to your next partner in order to maintain any future relationships.

SCORE BETWEEN 50–70

You have a middle score on the 'Fear of Intimacy' quiz, which means that although you are not completely closed off to your partner, you still have a lot of areas in your relationship that you need to work on within yourself.

Try to understand what are of intimacy you struggle with the most, is it emotionally, physically, spiritual or intellectually.

To be truly intimate with someone means Intimacy means you are able to honestly reveal your true self to your partner and connect on a deep level.

Going forward try to grow from your past relationships and learn from where you held yourself back and move forward.

SCORE BETWEEN 30–50

You have a low score on the 'Fear of Intimacy' quiz, which means that you do not have a fear of intimacy in your relationships. This is great as you feel very secure and confident within yourself. You are able to express yourself clearly and comfortably with your partner.

Going forward in your future relationships remember that there is always growing and learning to be done, keep being honest with yourself and don't let anyone take advantage of you not being fearful in your relationships.

Even if you do get your heart broken, "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

WAYS TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF INTIMACY

1. Start by addressing the problem and reflect back to when they began.
2. Practice self validation. You need to be comfortable with who you are and value yourself as a person.
3. Communicate and respect each others values and opinions
4. Accept Uncertainty. You may already be fearing that your relationship wont work and you are scared of getting hurt. There is uncertainty with every relationship, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't give it a go.
5. Look at Your Goals

   What do you really want in life? Do you want a long-term intimate relationship?
6. Challenge your inner critic. Try to stop listening to that little voice inside your head that feeds you information like, "He doesn't really love you.
7. Don't be afraid to feel your feelings. Being in love is a great feeling and one you shouldn't hold in. If you feel like screaming "I'm in love", then do it.
8. Be vulnerable and open. Don't play games such as, I'll wait three days before calling.
9. Take a look at your history, where has your fear of intimacy come from? Figuring out things from your past can help you view your relationships from an entirely different perspective.
10. Relax, if you have trouble with intimacy it can often cause stress and anxiety Relaxation activities can help you to relieve this stress and make it easier to get intimate.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS TO BUILD INTIMACY

Create a nice atmosphere and have a date with your partner, during that date you can ask each other those questions and take time to think and respond

REFLECTION

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

PREPARATION FOR COMMUNICATION WORKSHEETS

These worksheets are designed to help with the steps that come before actually starting a conversation about something that is important to you. If it is hard for you to get clear on what you want to say, say it clearly, stay with it, stay calm, or stay on track and warm when someone else reacts emotionally to something you say, these worksheets will help. Included are the following:

Preparing to Communicate: Helps you get clear on what you want to express and start the conversation with a step-by-step guide, complete with examples.

Rehearsing Tough Conversations: Addresses the anxiety you may feel related to an upcoming hard conversation and prepares you to respond well to any reaction, response, or rebuttal.

PREPARING TO COMMUNICATE

Are you considering communicating with someone about your thoughts and feelings? If so, that's great. If you sometimes find it difficult to gather your thoughts, stay steady if your partner starts to feel distressed, or fully express what you want to say it will help to prepare for the conversation ahead of time. The following are some questions to help you sort out your thoughts, followed by some suggestions for how to express yourself in ways that make it more likely you will feel heard and understood. Read through all the steps before you start the conversation with your partner, because there are a lot of ways you can prepare, particularly if it is a conversation, you are worried about. Even if you don't do all the steps, it will be helpful to read them.

STEP 1: GET CLEAR

It is helpful if you can be clear about your topic, as well as your thoughts and feelings about it before you begin talking with your partner. I recommend working through this on your own in writing, to get clear about what your topic is and what you think, feel, believe, perceive, desire, etc., about that topic. Ask yourself these questions, and write down the answers:

- What is the most pressing topic? (If there are several, write them down and pick just one for now. You have a lifetime to communicate, so bite off just one topic at a time.)
- What do I think about this topic?
- What feelings come up for me about this?
- On a scale of 1–10, with 1 being hardly any and 10 being a lot, how important is the topic for me?
- What beliefs are coming into this issue for me?
- What assumptions am I making about my partner or my partner's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs?
- What is my goal in having this conversation (e.g., my partner hears me, my partner understands me, my partner and I can come to a decision that works for both of us, etc.)?
- What are my desires about this topic? What do I want to have happen, and why do I want that?
- What stories or meanings am I making up about this topic? In other words, what does it mean to me that we are talking about this? What would it mean if we agreed? What would it mean if we didn't agree?
- Do I have perceptions about this that my partner might not share? What does my partner need to know about my perceptions of events to understand what's going on for me?

STEP 2: SHARE YOUR GOAL

Start by telling your partner your goal in having the conversation. Do you want them to just listen? Do you want them to show you that they understand what you're saying? Do you want help thinking something through? Are you hoping to decide for yourself? Are you hoping the two of you can decide together about something that affects both of you? Telling your partner up front what you are hoping to get out of having this discussion will help them understand where you're coming from and make it more likely that the conversation will be productive.

If you have just started talking about an issue, I recommend that you do not attempt to come to a resolution or decide yet. An early step would be to express your perspective as clearly as you can, ask your partner to hear you, help you clarify your thoughts, and hopefully understand you better. Then ask your partner to do the same: Help them get clear and express themselves more fully and show that you understand them. Decision-making is a much later step, so don't confuse things by asking for a decision in the early stages.

STEP 3: STICK TO YOUR TOPIC

When you communicate, it is often helpful to separate what you are expressing about your perceptions from your feelings and the meanings you are making. It is also helpful to stick with just one thought at a time. Remember, during a long-term relationship, you have ample time to explore and re-explore topics; you can say more or go off on a tangent later. For now, figure out what you want to express to your partner about one concise topic. Regarding that topic, what do you want your partner to understand about your perceptions, feelings, and the meanings you are making? Writing this down now will help you be concise later, during the actual conversation.

Here's an example: "Yesterday morning, when I came into the bathroom and there were towels on the floor, I assumed you had left them there, and I felt angry and frustrated. The meaning I made was that you take me for granted and think it is my job to pick up after you." Here's another example: "The other day, I had a conversation with George about his open relationship. I felt excited about what he was saying because he seems happy, and it sounds like he and his wife are doing really well and having a lot of fun. I think I would like to explore whether we could have an open relationship, but I'm concerned that you might not like that idea."

STEP 4: ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Make sure you have taken responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and preferences, and acknowledged that your partner might be in a different place, without making them feel bad about it. You will have a much easier time talking about deep topics with high levels of grace and low levels of drama if you frame beliefs, perceptions, and opinions as such, rather than if everyone agrees with you (or should agree with you) about universal truths. In fact, for the purposes of having tough conversations about charged topics with people you care about, I recommend striking the word truth from the vocabulary and instead talking about theories, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, preferences or desires, and perceptions.

The following are some examples of how this shift might look in real life:

- Version 1: We must go to church.
- Version 2: I believe in God, and I hold the opinion that it is important that we go to church. I have a strong preference that I, at least, attend church, even if you don't. My perception is that many positive things come from going to church. My hope is that if we go together, we will grow together in some important ways because of having shared experiences. I imagine us discussing things that happen at church during dinner, and in my imagination, sometimes we disagree; however, when I think about those discussions, even if we disagree in them, I imagine feeling cozy, connected, and curious.

- Version 1: Polyamory is a sin, that causes harm, and destroys relationships.
- Version 2: I believe polyamory is a sin, and I have an opinion that polyamory can cause harm, but that might be more of a fear than an opinion. Also, it is my perception that Bob and Sally's open relationship has been bad for both. My theory is that if they hadn't opened their relationship, they would still be together now. When I think about opening our relationship, a lot of feelings come up, including fear of losing the connection we have. I am afraid that the fact that you are interested in exploring polyamory means that you don't find me attractive anymore or are tired of our relationship

- Version 1: We need to talk about opening our relationship.
- Version 2: I believe I am a person who experiences frequent attractions; historically, it has been true. I predict that at some point in the future I will develop a crush on someone other than you, and because I might want to act on it, I'd like to discuss that possibility with you now, so I understand your thoughts about it and how you would like me, and us, to handle it when that happens. To me, discussing polyamory doesn't mean we have to act on it. First, I would like to think about it, ideally with you, so we are on the same page, and I'm not having a lot of private fantasy-type thoughts about it that you aren't aware of.

- Version 1: What did I do to make you angry yesterday morning?
- Version 2: My perception is that yesterday morning you were angry with me. As I remember it, you threw the dish towel on the floor and slammed the door as you were leaving, which to me suggests you were angry with me. My point in bringing this up is to find out what was happening for you. Were you angry with me, and, if so, why?

- Version 1: I need to stay home tonight.
- Version 2: My preference would be to stay in tonight and have a quiet evening at home. My perception is that I haven't done that for a long time, and I miss it. It feels important to me because I've been stressed and anxious all week. I would love to relax and not have to think about anything tonight.

Now it's your turn. Write down some things you might want to express to someone else and review each statement carefully. Make sure you are acknowledging that your perceptions are yours alone, rather than the truth. Identify your preferences, rather than calling them needs. If something feels important, see if you can figure out what emotion or feeling goes with it, and figure out a way to express that without upping the emotional ante by raising your voice, issuing an ultimatum, or describing something as a need.

REHEARSING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

Do you anticipate a difficult conversation? If so, you can work through a lot of it on your own, using a method involving two chairs. Here's how it works.

Set up two chairs facing one another. Sit in one chair, facing the other, and pretend you're looking at your partner (or the person you want to have the conversation with) in the other chair. Express what's on your mind to the best of your ability. Don't worry about perfection, just spit it out as best you can, but do try to say it as if you were talking to the other person and bringing your best self to the project. Now switch chairs. Be your partner and respond in the way you think they will respond. Switch back to your own chair and respond back to your partner from a grounded, warm, empathic place. Switch chairs again, and be your partner again, responding to what you just said to them.

As this exercise continues, make sure you respond from your partner's chair in the ways you are most worried they might respond, so you can have the experience of figuring out how to handle your own worst-case scenarios. Continue with this exercise until you have prepared a balanced and values-informed response to the things you are afraid they will say. If you get stuck and can't think of a way to respond that will be helpful, get some ideas from a wise friend, coach, or therapist. This exercise should result in you feeling prepared for any response and much less anxious about how the conversation will go.

CO-CREATING A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP

Turn off your inner censor and generate ideas as fast as you can. Write down each idea as it comes to mind, even if it seems ridiculous or illogical. Don't stop to consider whether it's practical, affordable, or in compliance with how you think the world works. If you are on a team of idea-generators, so much the better, but you can also do this alone. If you have partners, take turns generating ideas. No cross-talk; don't shoot down one another's ideas or even your own. Instead, use every idea as a jumping-off place for even better—or even more silly—ideas. No idea is too ridiculous. This is a creative expansion exercise, not a list for narrowing your focus or settling on a decision. Your goal is to get past what you thought was or wasn't possible with your previous limited thinking.

ACTION STEPS

- Any time you are thinking of telling a loving lie, consider whether that well-intentioned untruth will strengthen your intimate connection or damage it. Ask yourself if your partner would agree with you.
- Initiate a conversation with your partner about this. One person's loving lie will be another person's trust-breaker, so get clear with one another about the topics and situations for which you each prefer total honesty.

Another type of lie is a conflict-avoidant lie. Every small child learns how to craft or spin a story to avoid getting in trouble and then hones that skill throughout the span of many years. No one is immune, so you can let go of the idea that lying makes you, or your partner, a bad person; however, lies that are intended to avoid a negative consequence can easily undermine trust.

ACTION STEPS

- Take a good look at how you handle conflict. When you and your partner disagree, do you feel comfortable speaking up? If not, why not? What are you afraid will happen? Be honest with yourself, and identify if you have a tendency to avoid conflict by telling lies, hiding the truth, or avoiding tough conversations.
- Initiate a conversation with your partner about managing disagreements between the two of you. Do you both agree it would be good to be able to disagree without creating a lot of drama or tension? Do you need some help with this? If so, agree to find a coach or therapist to help you.
- Start growing your muscle for truth-telling. Some people think that if they are going, to be honest, they will have to give up a lot of things they don't want to give up. In truth, all you have to give up is lying. Instead of lying, tell your partner what you think, feel, believe, or prefer. Let the disagreement happen and prove to yourself and one another that having a difference of opinion won't kill you.
- For some, disagreeing and staying connected is hard. If you and your partner are unable to do it despite your best efforts, get some help from a therapist or coach. This is a learnable skill. It will make you happier and your relationship stronger.

Learning to invite truth-telling is just as important as learning to tell the truth. Just as many of us have learned to lie from childhood onward, many of us have learned to discourage truth-telling in our interactions. When we respond badly to something we're not comfortable hearing, we make it harder for people to come to us with uncomfortable truths in the future.

ACTION STEPS

- Take a good look at how you respond when someone tells you something you don't want to hear. Do you cry, yell, run away, shut down, or leave the house in a huff? Have you ever heard yourself say, "Don't ever talk to me about that again!"? If any of this describes you on a bad day, you could get better at inviting your partner to be honest with you.
- Trust yourself. You can handle some hard stuff. You'll be okay. Learn to trust that you will live through getting bad news, learning something uncomfortable about your partner, and considering new ideas. Develop some grit.
- Identify your goals. How will it benefit you to hear more truth from your partner? Certainly, you will then know them better and be better able to figure out if you like them. Are there other benefits? You are learning to get some control of your emotional reactions so your partner can more easily talk honestly to you; it will help if you keep your reasons for doing so at the front of your mind, because it won't always feel comfortable. Know why you're doing it.

Learning to co-create a comfortable environment for discussing, potentially disagreeing about, and certainly disclosing uncomfortable truths is the best thing you can do to strengthen trust in your relationship. Partners must work together to do this.

The following are some discussion points to get you started in creating a relationship based on trust. As you discuss these items, ask one another questions until you can accurately say back what your partner is expressing but using your own words.

- How important is honesty to you and why?
- How comfortable are you telling untruths? What types of things have you lied about (for instance, in previous relationships or your childhood)? What types of things have motivated you to lie?
- Give your partner examples of the kinds of things that feel important to you to know and the kinds of things that don't feel important to you to know. Maybe there are even some things you don't want to know. Discuss this with enough examples that you both feel confident that you understand one another's preferences, which might be very different from one another. Do not assume your partner wants to know (and not know) the same types of things you do. Ask. Tell. Be specific.
- What do you do to actively create an environment of trust and honesty in your relationship? What does your partner do?
- What do you do to create a soft-landing place for your partner to make difficult, honest, and vulnerable disclosures? Check with them to see if your efforts are helpful to them or find out what strategies might work better for them.
- When you have a choice to make that you know will affect your partner, and you suspect you and your partner will disagree about what you should choose, what feelings do you experience, and what is your thought process? Discuss how you want to show compassion for one another in situations like this.
- When you make a mistake that affects your partner, or when your partner feels hurt by something you have done, what emotions do you experience? How do you handle those emotions? How would you like to handle them? Discuss how you each would like to show compassion for one another in situations like this.

COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS

Communication might come hard even though we love and or are in love with that special someone. It does not mean that your love story is over when you discover that your communication patterns are not the best. It is the beginning of the journey to better yourself and your relationship. Are you a withdrawer? Pursuer? Screamer? Before going on a journey of better communication you need to discover your communication style. When you do that, here are some useful tips and exercises which can widen your communicative horizons.

TIPS

1

Saying to your partner 'You should', 'You need to' can go sideways quickly, especially in the midst of an argument. Instead, try:

> "It would mean a lot to me if you did"

You are coming from a place of your own feelings rather than focusing on demanding something.

2

Catching your partner on a lie can be difficult and confronting. Very often people might want some satisfaction from the situation and the right to 'be in their face' by 'displaying the lie' for their partner to feel guilty about lying. However, this is not the best course of action, and it builds up resentment. If your partner loves you and cares about you, the likelihood is that they already are feeling guilty. The way to express your feelings and get some more information on the matter from your partner is different from 'in your face' approach. Try:

> "I felt hurt by your lie. What kept you from telling the truth?"

You are coming from a place of your own feelings rather than focusing on demanding something.

3

Using words like 'Never' and 'Always'.
Having a feeling that your partner is always/never doing or not doing something is most of the time different from reality. There is a high likelihood that when you say that your partner with think of this one example when that was not the case and the circle closes. Setting a more realistic timeline could be a way to go. Try:

> "I feel hurt when I come back home and see that dishes are not done, you rarely remember to clean up."

4

It has been proven by studies that people feel more disconnected in a presence of a mobile phone. Give your partner your undivided attention by putting it down! In the era of constant Internet connection and new options appearing it is harder to get emotionally linked with another person. Be fully present for yourself and for your significant other. Be more mindful during the day by changing your phone habits.

TRY

- Doing one thing at a time. When you scroll through social media just scroll through nothing else. When you watch TV, just watch TV with no distractions. When you talk to somebody just talk to them without checking your phone.
- Not filling in the 'boring' bits of your day with your phone and socials, be present regardless of the boredom. Look around, have a conversation with somebody.
- Prolonging your intervals for checking your phone. If you are checking it every 10 minutes, make it 20!
- Not carrying your phone around, keep it in one spot.
- Shutting down your phone before you go to sleep. (It is also healthy, the waves and radiation from your phone can impact our brain, especially when we sleep as our brain is in a rest mode)

EXERCISES

1 Think of 3 times when you've had an argument with your partner

What was your main reaction/pattern in each of those situations?

What was the outcome of each argument? What emotions were you left with? Was the outcome positive, negative, or neutral?

2 Think of a situation where your argument was resolved in a positive and amicable manner. It can be the smallest disagreement or difference of opinions. (It's OK if you can't think of anything, you can skip that exercise, the therapy is a journey to this amicable resolution in the future!)

What kind of pattern was present then? What did you do/say? What mood were you in?

What was the aftermath? What types of feelings were you left with? What was the outcome?

3 Practicing Forgiveness

Lack of forgiveness especially in a relationship can lead to resentment, coldness, and lack of trust which are not the pillars of a happy union. Many can say that 'forgiving is weak' but is it a sign of strength and a message to yourself that you are strong enough to not to let a certain person or a situation affect your life with bitterness and resentment. It is not easy because we might harbor a lot of negative feelings and forgiving would mean that those feelings do not matter and that a certain betrayal was 'OK'. It is not the case! Forgiving does not entail that transgression didn't happen or that it was 'OK', it is an acknowledgment of the transgression and your feelings + the will to let go of the pain despite the transgression. It releases you from the burden and lets you enjoy your life instead of putting more energy into that situation. That is why forgiveness is so important but also difficult and takes courage.

Think of a time when you forgave someone for something, can be a small transgression. What was the situation? The process of forgiving? And the final accountability? Was the apology involved? What got in the way of an apology? What helped you

How did you feel before and after forgiving?

Please, write down 3 ideas about forgiveness that were taught to you

Please, write down 3 ideas about forgiveness that you observed

"I" STATEMENTS

When a person feels that they are being blamed - whether rightly or wrongly - it is common that they respond in a defensive manner. "I" statements are a simple way of speaking that will help you avoid this trap by reducing feeling of blame. A good "I" statement takes responsibility for one's own feelings, while tactfully describing a problem.

> **I feel** emotion word **when** explanation.

- "I feel " must be followed by an emotion word, such as "angry", "hurt", or "worried".
- Careful wording won't help if your voice still sounds blaming. Use a soft and even tone.
- In your explanation, gently describe how the other person's actions affect you.

Examples

Blaming	"You can't keep coming home so late! It's so inconsiderate."
"I" Statement	"I feel worried when you come home late. I can't even sleep."

Blaming	"You never call me. I guess we just won't talk anymore."
"I" Statement	"I feel hurt when you go so long without calling. I'm afraid you don't care."

Practice

Scenario	A friend always cancels plans at the last minute. Recently, you were waiting for them at a restaurant, when they called to say they couldn't make it.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	You are working on a group project, and one member is not completing their portion. You have repeatedly had to finish their work.
"I" Statement	

Scenario	Your boss keeps dumping new work on you, with little instructions, and not enough time. Despite working overtime, you're behind.
"I" Statement	

SOFT STARTUPS COMMUNICATION SKILL

When bringing up a problem to your partner, the first three minutes are crucial. A soft startup sets a positive tone and helps resolve conflict. By starting a conversation calmly and respectfully, you and your partner are more likely to focus on the problem, rather than who's to blame.

Save the conversation for a calm moment.

- Wait for a time when you and your partner are alone, without distractions or interruptions.
- Make sure you and your partner are relaxed, and not tired, hungry, or stressed.

Use gentle body language and tone of voice.

- Take an attitude of teamwork and problem-solving, rather than arguing or blaming.
- Speak calmly, without raising your voice.
- Avoid hurtful body language, such as eye rolling, scowling, or mocking.

Use "I" statements to express how you feel.

- Focus on how a problem is affecting you, rather than assigning blame.
- Say: "I feel [emotion] when [situation]."

Example

Without "I" statement: "You're so closed off. We need to talk more."
With "I" statement: "I feel lonely when we don't talk."

Describe the problem clearly.

- Discuss only one problem at a time.
- Be specific. Broad complaints like "the house is a mess" may be misunderstood.

Be respectful.

- Make a polite request, rather than a demand.
- Thank your partner for listening and addressing a problem.

Example

"Could you please..."
"I would appreciate if..."
"Thank you for..."

THE FOUR STEPS OF NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

STEP 1: MAKE OBSERVATIONS

Describe what you observed as factually as possible

- What happened?
- What did someone say or do?

Talk about what a camera would record and avoid making any interpretations or judgements and stick to a simple observation. We do this so we can avoid the other person hearing blame or accusation.

OBSERVATION = When I was talking to you about my day you were scrolling through Facebook.

VS

JUDGEMENT = You would rather be on Facebook than listen to me tell you about my day, obviously you do not care about my life.

STEP 2: SHARE FEELINGS

- What do you feel?
- Speak for the feeling not from the feeling.

Name the feelings that are connected to the described situation. Do not confuse how you feel with what you think others are doing to you or think about you. Do not share descriptions of your thoughts.

FEELING = I felt frustrated and lonely OR I feel irritated.

VS

FALSE FEELING = I feel humiliate OR I feel as if you think I am stupid.

STEP 3: STATE YOUR NEEDS

- What needs are important to you?
- What do you value?

Needs are at the centre of our focus. When our needs are met we feel positive feelings and when they are not we are motivated towards actions that meet them.

Do not confuse needs with plans to have needs met.

NEED = connection

PLAN spend more time with you

NEED = creative expression

PLAN = paint a picture, cook a new recipe

STEP 4: MAKE A REQUEST

Ask for what you would like the other person to do

- Be specific and clear
- Don't ask for something impossible to fulfill
- Express the request in the positive

CLEAR & SPECIFIC REQUESTS = Could you please have a cup of tea with me after dinner?
Can you please empty the dishwasher at night?

VS

UNCLEAR = "Can you show me more respect?"

IMPOSSIBLE = "Would you call me every day from work at 9.00am"

DEMAND = "You have to empty the dishwasher or I am not cooking dinner"

Describe a situation that you want to discuss. Focus on behaviours, specific words, or sentences. Try to be a 'fly on a wall' and be as objective as possible.

Describe in 'I sentences' what did that situation and behaviours of your partner made you feel like. Don't use blaming phrases. Focus on your deep and primary feelings like sadness, fear, anger (dig deeper with this one), feeling hurt, loneliness.

Come up with ways in which your partner could support you next time you are faced with a similar situation. Or ways in which this can be avoided next time. Think about specific behaviours that can have intervals and are doable. Do not describe broad ideas like 'be more connected'. Think: 'What actions can make me feel more connected to you?'. E.g., 'I would like for you to give me kiss every day after work.'

FEELINGS VS. NEEDS

LIST OF COMMON NEEDS

Having and communicating your needs is a normal communication practice, but needs to be done with compassion and good communication strategy.

- Freedom
- Space
- Choice
- Acceptance
- Closeness
- Connection
- Compassion
- Consistency
- Co-operation
- Closeness
- Security
- Stability
- Support
- Respect
- Sexual intimacy
- Affection
- Companionship
- Consideration
- Kindness
- Honesty
- Trust
- Conversation
- To be understood
- To be heard
- Peace
- Appreciation
- To be trusted
- Order
- To feel calm
- Encouragement
- Openness
- Adventure
- Play
- Humour
- Touch
- Help
- Stimulation
- Time
- Independance
- Friendship
- Creativity
- Beauty
- Laughter
- To belong
- Warmth
- To feel safe
- Patience
- Recognition

WORDS TO AVOID

The following words are often confused as feelings when, in fact, they are interpretations of the actions of others. Using these words may make it challenging for the other person to hear without feeling blamed or misunderstood.

- Abandoned
- Abused
- Attacked
- Betrayed
- Blamed
- Bullied
- Controlled
- Cheated
- Criticised
- Dismissed
- Humiliated
- Ignored
- Insulted
- Intimidated
- Invalidated
- Judged
- Letdown
- Manipulated
- Neglected
- Offended
- Put down
- Rejected
- Ridiculed
- Shamed
- Threatened
- Unappreciated
- Wronged
- Provoked
- Rejected
- Ridiculed
- Shamed
- Taken for granted
- Threatened
- Unappreciated
- Unheard
- Unloved,
- Unsupported,
- Unwanted
- Used
- Violated

SAFE DISCUSSIONS SCRIPT

Telling the story

Use a maximum 6–8 sentences to explain what has happened without putting the blame on your partner. Don't use extreme words such as "always" or "never". Don't say what partner "should" or "shouldn't" do. Talk about what events transpired and remove your partner from the equation as much as possible.

E.g. "Milk was left at the counter yesterday, even though we have spoken about not leaving it there because it goes bad."

And not:

"You have left the milk out of the fridge yet again, you will never learn!"

Talking about Feelings

Name feelings that you experienced during that situation. Focus on simple and deep feelings such as "sad", "afraid", "lonely", "in pain", "hurt", "angry", "and disappointed". Use "I statements" to exclude your partner from the equation, you are speaking about your internal experience of this situation without blaming or shaming your partner.

E.g. "When I see things like this repeated it makes me feel sad and angry because I start to make up a story that you don't care about this relationship. I know it's not true, but my mind goes in that direction."

And not:

"You always do this so you must not care about me at all."

Use start-ups such as "I love you but..." or "I'm making up a story that..."

Allow both partners to share their perspective and feelings connected to that event.

Acknowledging Feelings

Allow the time to share your respective feelings and to give each other reassurance and understanding for them by saying things like:

“I can see that you are feeling sad and angry, I understand how this came about.”

Even if your partner’s feelings don’t make sense to you and you would feel differently that is not the point. You are putting yourself in their shoes is what counts. Put your ego aside and say “I understand how this made you feel”.

Solutions:

After each person shares their feelings and acknowledges the feelings of the other partner you can focus on creating solutions. Solutions should be specific, doable, and timely. It’s OK to set up specific tasks on a specific day and at a specific time to fit your schedules. Even if the task is as simple as giving a kiss or initiating a chat. Solutions should be formed as invitations and favors instead of demands.

E.g. “It would be nice if you could give me a kiss after you come back from work, please. It will make me feel loved and closer to you.”

And not:

“You should me giving ma a kiss, you are not affectionate enough.”

Granting or Rejecting the Request

It’s OK to not feel capable emotionally or practically to grant every request. If you grant it, it creates a contract between you that can be renegotiated but should not be broken until it’s renegotiated. If you reject the request, you go back to the “Solutions” section. It’s nice if the person who rejects comes up with a similar alternative and both of you can brainstorm again. Needs can be met in multiple different ways.

CYCLE OF FEEDBACK

Describe a situation that you want to discuss. Focus on behaviours, specific words, or sentences. Try to be a 'fly on a wall' and be as objective as possible.

Describe in 'I sentences' what did that situation and behaviours of your partner made you feel like. Don't use blaming phrases. Focus on your deep and primary feelings like sadness, fear, anger (dig deeper with this one), feeling hurt, loneliness.

Come up with ways in which your partner could support you next time you are faced with a similar situation. Or ways in which this can be avoided next time. Think about specific behaviours that can have intervals and are doable. Do not describe broad ideas like 'be more connected'. Think: 'What actions can make me feel more connected to you?'. E.g., 'I would like for you to give me kiss every day after work.'

30 IDEAS, NO MATTER HOW SILLY: BRAINSTORMING PROCESS

This process can be used for many situations. Maybe you're trying to come to a decision on a course of action, sort out a household system, find more ways to connect with one another or think of things you'd enjoy doing on your own while your partner is away. Most things in life would benefit from a brainstorming list. We often allow ourselves to be limited by what we can imagine, because we imagine only what we already assume is possible. This is your opportunity to imagine what is possible from an unlimited, creative, even silly place.

STEP 1

Access a sense of vast possibility. The sky's the limit. Encourage yourself to feel playful and creative. You might even get stilly, and that's good. This is a creative process; it should feel like fun instead of hard work.

STEP 2

Get a piece of paper and get ready to generate a lot of ideas. You might number your page 1–30, because you will be brainstorming your way to at least 30 ideas, if not more.

STEP 3

Identify the problem you want to solve and write it in the blank in this heading at the top of the page: "Thirty Ideas, No Matter How Silly, for _____."

STEP 4

Turn off your inner censor and generate ideas as fast as you can. Write down each idea as it comes to mind, even if it seems ridiculous or illogical. Don't stop to consider whether it's practical, affordable, or in compliance with how you think the world works. If you are on a team of idea-generators, so much the better, but you can also do this alone. If you have partners, take turns generating ideas. No cross-talk; don't shoot down one another's ideas or even your own. Instead, use every idea as a jumping-off place for even better—or even more silly—ideas. No idea is too ridiculous. This is a creative expansion exercise, not a list for narrowing your focus or settling on a decision. Your goal is to get past what you thought was or wasn't possible with your previous limited thinking.

STEP 5

Go through your list and do some refining. Everything on the list was important for idea-generating, but some items may not need to stay on the list. For each idea, you cross off, make sure there are several ideas still on the list that address the kernel of what was attractive about the thing.

- Remove any items that are not in accordance with your values. For instance, if you put "go to bed and never get up again," consider what it points to that is missing in your current life. For this example, you might add, "Take more naps, learn stress-reduction strategies, take a meditation class, and take a day off in the next week."
- Remove anything that is totally unrealistic, but again, makes sure you address what it points to that you might benefit from adding to your life. For instance, if you put "join a circus" and given your age or circumstance you know for sure you won't be doing that, think about the feeling it generates and add it to your list. Ideas might include taking a dance class, wearing playful clothing, learning to juggle, or seeking out opportunities to perform. Have respect for your desires.

STEP 6

Now that you have a list, you can post it somewhere prominent. Is it a list of fun things you could do together? Put it on the fridge. Is it a list of fun things you could do alone? Post it by your bedside or on your mirror. Is it a list of ways you might handle a household dilemma? Put it in your Household Matters Monthly Meeting Notes book.

STEP 7

If you made your brainstorming list as a step toward decision-making, the next step is to use it to come up with experiment 1. Remember not to get too serious about it, just pick something that feels like a good starting place for everyone involved and give it a try for a limited amount of time. Schedule a date to revisit and evaluate the experiment.

FAIR FIGHTING RULES

Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.

Are you truly angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you upset because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

Discuss one issue at a time.

"You shouldn't be spending so much money without talking to me" can quickly turn into "You don't care about our family". Now you need to resolve two problems instead of one. Plus, when an argument starts to get off topic, it can easily become about everything a person has ever done wrong. We've all done a lot wrong, so this can be especially cumbersome.

No degrading language.

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure your partner feels just as bad. This will just lead to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

Express your feelings with words and take responsibility for them.

"I feel angry." "I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." These are good ways to express how you feel. Starting with "I" is a good technique to help you take responsibility for your feelings (no, you can't say whatever you want as long as it starts with "I").

Take turns talking.

This can be tough, but be careful not to interrupt. If this rule is difficult to follow, try setting a timer allowing 1 minute for each person to speak without interruption. Don't spend your partner's minute thinking about what you want to say. Listen!

No stonewalling.

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This refusal to communicate is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you absolutely cannot go on, tell your partner you need to take a time-out. Agree to resume the discussion later.

No yelling.

Sometimes arguments are "won" by being the loudest, but the problem only gets worse.

Take a time-out if things get too heated.

In a perfect world we would all follow these rules 100% of the time, but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, take a time-out. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is just too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this will mean some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, merely understanding can help soothe negative feelings.

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5 LOSING STRATEGIES

1. **NEEDING TO BE RIGHT**

   Arguing about the "facts" and who is right Causes frustration & indignation Damages connection

2. **CONTROLLING YOUR PARTNER**

   Direct or indirect manipulation - criticism; my way is the only way; bossiness No one likes to be controlled

3. **UNCONTROLLED SELF EXPRESSION**

   Saying whatever you want with no respect or kindness Lashing out with no self control

4. **RETALIATION**

   Attacking from the victim position I will make you feel as bad as I do

5. **WITHDRAWAL**

   Stonewalling or shutting down Giving up Getting back at Different from an agreed Time Out

Provided by
Terry Real

INITIATOR AND ENQUIRER STRATEGY

ENVISIONING YOUR FUTURE RELATIONSHIP (EXERCISE 1)

Take some time to reflect, and then answer these questions:

- What kind of relationship do you want to create? Think about what your relationship might feel like when you are deeply happy in it. Imagine you are coming home at the end of a long day and feeling pure joy and anticipation when you park and enter the house. You are looking forward to your time with your partner. Now here's the question: What are the features of the relationship that you are excited to come home to? What does that relationship look and feel like, from your perspective?

- When you imagine yourself in that amazing, fulfilling relationship, how are you showing up? What kind of a partner are you being, in your fantasy of a deeply happy relationship?

- How far are you from that ideal right now? Be honest: How are you currently showing up that isn't your best self? How would you like to be showing up, in accordance with your values and congruent with the relationship that you want to create?

Putting Relational Therapy and the Change Process in Perspective

In my experience, the difference between effective and ineffective relationship therapy is whether each partner can identify meaningful goals for themselves (not for their partner). What is a meaningful goal? Goals that move therapy forward effectively have several key qualities:

1. These goals represent how you want to be as a person. They are in alignment with your values and feel important to you because they represent steps toward your own personal growth objectives.

2. Achieving these goals will benefit not only you, but also your partner and your relationship. The best goals have a clear payoff directly to you, the person who holds the goal. These goals will also benefit the relationship and make a difference to your partner.

3. These goals are quite specific and actionable. If you can't picture a person in a movie performing the goal activity, it isn't specific enough.

Here is an example of a goal that meets the criteria: "I want to listen to my partner without interrupting. This is in alignment with my values because I believe being a good listener is an important quality in a partner, and I aspire to be a good partner. It will also benefit me to listen without interrupting because then I will get to know my partner, which I would love; after all, I often wonder what they think and feel. I would feel good about myself, and them, if they told me what they think and feel, even if I didn't agree with everything they say. I also think it will benefit my relationship when I reach this goal because sometimes my partner tells me they don't feel heard. When I become good at listening, my partner will feel more emotionally safe, and that will benefit our relationship."

Here's another example: "I want to stop being defensive when my partner is telling me something. I don't feel good about myself when I'm defensive, so it is in accordance with my values to stop that behavior. It will benefit me directly to stop being defensive because then my partner will be able to speak freely without getting distracted by my perspective; I will get to know them better. Our relationship will benefit because defensiveness often leads to a fight. When I stop being defensive, we will certainly fight less."

Notice that these goals do not require that you know how to achieve them. That is where therapy and coaching come in. Your job is to get clear on what you want to change about yourself, and my job is to help you get there.

SETTING MEANINGFUL GOALS FOR PERSONAL CHANGE (EXERCISE 2)

Now it's your turn. Think about what you would like to change about how you show up in your relationship. What might you want to change about yourself that will make a difference to you and in your relationship, and be in alignment with your values?

Make a list of things you would like to change about yourself. It could be one or two things, or 10. Put a star by the two that you think will make the biggest difference in the quality of your relationship. For extra credit, write down how you will feel after you have achieved those changes. What emotions will you experience when you are showing up in the new way you aspire to?

INITIATOR: REVEALING ONESELF

Focus on One Issue Only

Before you begin, get clear on your main concern. Check your partner's readiness.

Stay on track with this one issue. Describe what you want.

Express Your Feelings and Thoughts

Feelings are often complex and can even be contradictory. Are you sad, scared, angry, or happy?

Go beyond simply expressing one feeling.

Look for the vulnerability that may be underneath your initial feeling, e.g., sadness, fear, jealousy, hurt, guilt, etc.

Remind Yourself

This is my problem. It's an expression of who I am. It's about me revealing myself and being willing to express my own thoughts and feelings.

Avoid Blaming, Accusing, or Name-Calling

Blaming stops you from knowing yourself. You have a role to play in being heard. You may wish to acknowledge some positive aspects of the situation.

Be Open to Self-Discovery

Explore your personal, inner experience. Keep going deeper into how you feel. What does this tell you about yourself? How do you respond? How do you think and feel? Remind Yourself that this process is about my willingness to take a risk to speak or discover my truth and increasing my ability to tolerate the expression of our differences.

INQUIRER: THE EFFECTIVE LISTENER

Listen Calmly

Don't defend yourself, argue, or cross-complain. Remind yourself that you don't have to take what's said so personally. Hold on to the "big picture."

Ask Questions

Develop an interested and curious state of mind.

The questions you ask are designed to understand your partner's experience.

Can you come up with any examples on your own that will let your partner know you really understand?

Remind Yourself

Am I in a place to listen with openness? I do not own this problem.

I do not need to get upset.

It's up to me to manage my reactions.

Recap

Repeat back to your partner, as accurately and completely as you are able, what you've understood.

Check it out with your partner to see if it's complete and accurate.

Empathize

Do your best to put yourself in your partner's shoes. Respond with empathy. Keep making empathetic statements until a soothing moment occurs.

You can hold onto yourself and still imagine what it's like for the other person.

Remind Yourself

My partner is a separate person with their own feelings, thoughts, personality, and family history. I only need to listen, not look for solutions

GOTTMAN'S ISLAND EXERCISE

Imagine that your cruise ship just sank in the Caribbean and you awaken to find yourselves on a tropical desert island. The two of you are the only survivors. You have no idea where you are. A storm appears to be on the way. You decide that you need to prepare to survive on this island for some time and also to make sure you will be spotted by a rescue party. There are a lot of items from the ship on the beach that could help you, but you can only carry ten items.

STEP 1: Each of you writes down on a separate piece of paper what you consider to be the ten most important items to keep from the inventory list below. Then rank-order these items based on their importance to you. Give the most crucial item a 1, the next most important item a 2, and so on.

Ships Inventory:

- Two changes of clothing
- Ten gallons of water
- Matches
- Backpack
- Two tents
- Knife
- Sunblock lotion
- Long rope
- One change of clothing
- Flares
- Regional aerial maps
- Fifty packages of condoms
- Oxygen tanks
- AM-FM and short-wave radio receiver
- Pots and pans
- Shovel
- Toilet paper
- Two sleeping bags
- Small life raft, with sail
- Cookstove and lantern
- Two walkie-talkie sender-receiver units
- One fifth of whiskey
- Compass
- Gun with six bullets
- First-aid kit with penicillin
- Freeze-dried food for seven days

STEP 2: Share your list with your partner. Together come up with a consensus list of ten items. This means talking it over and working as a team to solve the problem. Both of you need to be influential in discussing your viewpoint and in making the final decisions.

STEP 3: Once you have compromised on a third list, it's time to evaluate how the game went. Think about how effective you were at influencing your partner and how effective they were at influencing you. Did either of you try to dominate the other, or were you competitive with each other? Ask yourself if you had fun. Did you work well as a team and both felt included or did you sulk, withdrawal, express irritability, and anger? Acknowledge any problem areas and agree to work together on these issues with your partner. Changing bad habits does not happen overnight, but you can move forward if you take responsibility for the part you play in marital troubles caused by issues of compromise.

Accepting Influence Questionnaire

1	I am really interested in my partner's opinions on our basic issues.	**T**	**F**
2	I usually learn a lot from my partner even when we disagree.	**T**	**F**
3	I want my partner to feel that what he or she says really counts with me.	**T**	**F**
4	I generally want my partner to feel influential in this relationship.	**T**	**F**
5	I can listen to my partner, but only up to a point.	**T**	**F**
6	My partner has a lot of basic common sense.	**T**	**F**
7	I try to communicate respect even during our disagreements.	**T**	**F**
8	If I keep trying to convince my partner, I will eventually win out.	**T**	**F**
9	I don't reject my partner's opinions out of hand.	**T**	**F**
10	My partner is not rational enough to take seriously when we discuss our issues.	**T**	**F**
11	I believe in lots of give and take in our discussions.	**T**	**F**
12	I am very persuasive and usually can win arguments with my partner.	**T**	**F**
13	I feel I have an important say when we make decisions.	**T**	**F**
14	My partner usually has good ideas.	**T**	**F**

15 My partner is basically a great help as a problem solver. **T F**

16 I try to listen respectfully, even when I disagree. **T F**

17 My ideas for solutions are usually much better than my partner's. **T F**

18 I can usually find something to agree with in my partner's position. **T F**

19 My partner is usually too emotional. **T F**

20 I am the one who needs to make the major decisions in this relationship. **T F**

Scoring: Give yourself one point for each True answer, except for questions 5, 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 20. Subtract one point for each True answer to questions 5, 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 20.

6 or above: This is an area of strength in your relationship. You willingly share power with your partner, a hallmark of an emotion-ally intelligent relationship.

Below 6: Your relationship could stand some improvement in this

Provided by
The Gottman Institute

RESOLVING A DILEMMA USING TWO CHAIRS

A dilemma is a situation in which you have choices but don't yet know which direction to go. One part of you wants to do (fill in the blank), and another part of you isn't so sure that's a good idea. Everyone has a dilemma from time to time, and, in fact, when you're stewing about a problem and feeling stuck, you might try asking yourself what your dilemma is. This can help you get to something less tangled. Are there internal parts of you that want different things? Are you having an internal dialogue or battle between those viewpoints? If so, you can get a deeper understanding of what is going on for you by using this exercise, which is an extremely useful and effective way to work with any two-part dilemma. You can do it with the help of a therapist or coach, or you can do it as a self-help exercise. This exercise has its roots in Gestalt therapy.

The following are some examples of dilemmas you might use the two-chairs technique to resolve:

- One part of me wants to stay in this relationship, and another part wants to leave.
- One part of me wants to agree to what my partner wants, and another part of me doesn't.
- One part of me wants to open the relationship, and another part is not so sure.
- A part of me wants to follow through on my agreement with my partner, but another part of me wants to do my own thing.
- One part of me thinks it would be a good idea to come out to my mother, and another part of me thinks that is not such a good idea.
- One part of me wants to buy a house, and another part is not quite ready.
- One part of me wants to have another baby, and another part is not so sure.

You get the idea. The point of the exercise is to allow yourself to give voice to both sides of your internal dilemma, listening fully to what each part of you has to say. Usually, this is done by setting up two chairs. One chair represents the part of you that holds position A, and the other represents the part of you that holds position B. Any two chairs will do. Set them up facing one another. State your dilemma in terms of, "One part of me (this) and another part of me (that)." Choose which you want to start with and sit in one of the chairs. Take a deep breath and allow yourself to get fully in touch with the emotions and thoughts of this viewpoint. When you're in touch with that part, fully express that part of yourself, and only that part of yourself. When you feel the other part wanting to interrupt, just tell it to wait a minute and it will get its turn. Why do you, from this part of you, want what you want? Why does it feel important? What is at stake? What does it mean to you? When you feel like you've expressed that part fully, switch chairs.

Now take a breath and get in touch with the alternate opinion within yourself. This is the part that wanted to butt in a few minutes ago. In this chair, you might start by saying, "I disagree. From my perspective, you missed a few important points . . ." Let the other part know what this part of you thinks, feels, and wants. Why does this issue feel so important to this part of you? What is at stake?

When this part has said its piece, switch chairs again. Before you start talking, make sure you are in touch with the thoughts and feelings of the first part again. Look right at the other chair and talk to it. What did that other part miss? Help the other part see this through your eyes when you are sitting in this part of yourself.

Continue moving back and forth, staying in each perspective for long enough to carry the conversation a little deeper than before. Don't just switch at the first impulse to do so, or you'll end up with a somewhat superficial argument between two dueling parts, and you won't make much progress.

When things start to wind down, take a minute to take stock. It might help to respond to these points:

- Restate the dilemma. Sometimes moving between chairs reveals that the dilemma is exactly what you thought it was, and other times it turns out that it is a little different than you originally thought. "A part of me thinks _____, and another part of me thinks_____."

- Sometimes things become confusing because a third viewpoint arises. Give it its own chair and see what emerges.

Sometimes a third (or fourth!) part is a subset of one of the other parts. In that case, as you continue moving between chairs exploring your dilemma, they might reintegrate.

Sometimes they belong to a tangential dilemma. In that case, let them know you are focusing on just one dilemma at a time. They will get their turn next time.

Other times, a third part is entirely different. For instance, sometimes a critical, semi-self-abusive part may emerge. If a scolding, shaming, or punitive side appears, you will need to figure out a way to deal with the critical part, so you can take a deep breath and start to feel some freedom of choice again. That might be a project you can undertake on your own, if you are good at assessing and making changes in your life in the direction of self-love and self-care. Otherwise, a therapist can certainly help you with this project.

- Can you identify a part that aspires to grow, change, or stretch in a positive way, and another part that is frightened, cautious, or reluctant to make that change, or rebellious, pissed off, and resentful about considering making a change?

If so, the next step is to facilitate a conversation between those two parts. From your aspirational part, ask the worried, rebellious, or resentful part about its feelings and concerns, until you are quite clear what that part is protecting you from. What kind of negative outcome is it trying to prevent by getting in the aspirational part's way?

From the aspirational part, thank the protective part for doing its job of protection. The protective part came about some time ago, possibly when you were very young, for the purpose of preventing something bad from happening. Thank goodness, it has been on board, helping you out all this time. Don't make the mistake of suggesting that this part must go. You would never have made it this far without all the protective parts you have. Thank them and honor them. Then make some decisions about how they are needed today, on a case-by-case basis, with the understanding that now you have adult resources and capabilities.

Assess whether there is still a clear and present danger, or if the perception of danger is being blown out of proportion. Most protective parts (but not all) are acting on old information, based on past experiences in which we were much less powerful or much more dependent than we usually are as adults.

If your adult self is not in real danger, see if you can come up with a short-term experiment the aspirational part could run to explore the territory. This experiment would allow you to investigate whether you, adult person, might have some effective strategies for keeping yourself safe, so that the protective part can take a step back and relax for a minute.

- When you start to see a possible action-based experiment emerging, frame it as such, and use your two chairs to explore how both parts could agree to collaborate to run that experiment. To succeed, you will have to honor both parts, meet their needs, address their concerns, and follow through on any agreement you make to reassess after a period. For example, let's say you're working with a dilemma about whether to stay in a relationship or leave. One experiment might be to speak up in your relationship about things that are important to you that you didn't use to speak up about, for a month just to try it. You would have to figure out how to handle your discomfort and any fears you have about consequences so your protective part can relax enough to allow the experiment, but if your other option is to leave, it makes sense to try this or another meaningful experiment first.

Any time you feel confused or uncertain about a course of action or it turns out that you didn't follow through on something in the way you hoped or thought you would, or you are ambivalent about making an agreement with a partner, it is worth delving into what internal dilemma might be right under the surface. This exercise is often used by therapists but can just as easily be done at home. If you think you might get into some challenging material and want a therapist for support, do it for the first few times in a therapy room. But if you feel confident you will be able to manage whatever comes up, go ahead and try it on your own.

Variations:

- You can do this exercise without moving between chairs by referring to something like, "On one hand . . . and on the other hand."
- You can do this quietly, and without chairs, using a journal. Write the different viewpoints on separate pages or with different colored ink, but don't skimp on getting in touch with the feelings of the parts of the dilemma.
- Play with it and see if other variations emerge and feel useful to you.

MAKING A GOOD REPAIR

There are many situations when a repair is needed. Maybe you said something you regret, told a lie or caused harm in some way. Maybe you made a choice your partner didn't agree with or did something your partner feels is a betrayal. Perhaps there is something in your shared past that keeps coming up again and again. Learning to make an effective repair can help in any of these situations, but a good repair goes far beyond "I'm sorry." This document will guide you through the process of making a good repair. I direct this handout to the person who is initiating a repair for something they did that was hurtful to their partner, but the steps for getting ready are just as applicable to the other partner. A repair takes grit, grace, and stamina for everyone concerned. Don't rush it and take breaks if you need to.

ACTION STEPS FOR GETTING READY TO REPAIR:

- Get grounded. How will you benefit from a good repair? It will take some time and energy, so get clear on why you think it is important and what you will get out of it.

- Trust yourself. You're strong enough to admit your mistakes and live through it.

- Forgive yourself, but don't let yourself off the hook. Everyone makes mistakes. And all actions have consequences. You are a fabulous human being—and even more so when you take responsibility for your actions, make a good repair, and build a safe and trusting connection that gets stronger throughout time.

- Prepare for some discomfort. It is not reasonable to expect trust to grow if you don't have the grit to really hear your partner's point of view. For many people, that is very difficult, particularly if you caused discomfort or harm. Some people prepare for discomfort by bracing themselves, but I think it is more effective to get in touch with your highest and best intention, your very best self, and do whatever it takes to stay in touch with that part of you.

- While you are in touch with your best self, it should be easy to find generosity in your heart. You will need it for this process to work. If you are not feeling loving and generous, get a therapist, coach, or friend to help you get there first. Making a pseudo-repair from a resentful or cranky place will not build trust or any meaningful connection.

- Get comfortable. The best repair takes some time and focus, and that focus should initially be on the injured party or the most distressed person. Prepare to focus on your partner without explaining your perspective for quite some time.

ACTION STEPS FOR MAKING THE REPAIR:

- Get curious about what your partner's experience was. What hurt? What was hard? How did your partner perceive events? What interpretation did they put on those events? Make sure you stay with this process until you are very clear and able to say back what went wrong from your partner's perspective. How would they prefer for you to have handled the situation and why? You need to know it all, and ending this process too soon won't benefit you, difficult as it may be. Stay with it and show genuine curiosity until you have a feeling of, "Oh! I get it!" Then make sure you can say it back and your partner agrees that you got it.

- Express empathy. Once you understand what happened from your partner's point of view, you can express empathy. That means indicating that you understand how they felt, and it makes sense to you. When it goes well, this is what it sounds like: "I now understand that when I did (x), this is what happened for you (description of your partner's internal experience). I see how you felt (x), and it makes total sense to me that you would feel that way, given the combination of what I did and what it meant to you."

- Apologize. Explain to your partner why you are sorry. Continue to focus on your partner and resist the impulse to explain your perspective. It will be much better if you save your point of view for later.

- Explain what you plan to do differently in the future (if anything). This should go beyond, "It was a mistake, and it won't happen again." Your new understanding of the situation will inform your future choices; however, think this through carefully because you must not agree to something you can't or don't want to follow through on. The following are some ideas:

What exactly would you do differently if you had it to do over again? Think about the choices you made and the choice points as the situation evolved.

Would you want to think about things differently, take responsibility, check in more, and/or communicate more fully?

Maybe there is a way you would like to prevent this situation from occurring again. This should go beyond, "This situation is not likely to recur so let's move on." If a similar situation did happen, how would you want it to go?

Are there emotions you would like to deal with differently, to prevent a similar situation from coming up again? Sometimes such emotions as boredom, anxiety, anger, dissatisfaction, or depression can be involved in the choices we later regret.

Acknowledge that your partner might have some doubts about your ability to follow through effectively with your plan. This is particularly important if there have been major or recurring breaches of trust in the past. For instance, this might be an acknowledgment that years have gone by with many lies and that it would be a lot to expect a partner to suddenly trust in change just because of one heartfelt conversation. While certainly difficult, this level of repair is respectful of the reality of particularly difficult situations. It is extremely challenging to stick with someone while they do battle with their inner conflict-avoidant demons or tendency toward abundant untruths. Acknowledging that you are asking something big from your partner in the way of newfound trust is a very respectful thing to do. (Thank you to Pete Pearson from the Couples Institute for this concept.)

CREATING CHANGE WORKSHEET SET

GETTING CLEAR ON YOUR GOALS

Getting clear on your goals and framing your desires and aspirations for yourself and your relationship in a form you can make headway with is crucial. Then begins the process of change. There are several steps you can take that will help you achieve the necessary clarity so you can make change happen and start to notice some results.

1. Make a list of goals you have for yourself. These might start with, "I want to . . ." or something similar. Really consider how you want to show up in your life and your relationship, and what you want to create for yourself. Examples include, "I want to be more creative," "I want to feel more emotionally balanced," "I want to feel grounded and patient in discussions with my partner," "I want to be more vulnerable and less guarded in tough discussions," etc.

2. Make a list of desires you have for your partner. These might start with, "I would like it if my partner would. . ." or something similar. It is important to distinguish between things you want to change in yourself (question 1) and things you would like your partner to change (question 2). Examples of desires you have for a change in your partner might include the following: "I want my partner to listen to me when I'm upset," "I want my partner to admit how they hurt me and apologize," "I want my partner to feel more empowered and happier," etc.

Now let's revisit your first list. For each item on your list of things, you would like to create in your life, write down any ideas you have about what might be blocking you. For instance, if you wrote, "I want to be more creative," you might write down such things as the following:

- One block to being more creative is poor time management.
- I also tend to minimize the importance of creative pursuits and don't prioritise them.

Still considering the first list, generate some action steps for each item, based on what you learned from the list of blocks. Using the example of being more creative, what you write down might be as follows:

- I could be more creative in how I go about some mundane tasks.
- I could spend 15 minutes less on social media and use that time to do something that feels creative.

Now let's revisit your list of desires for your partner. Since you can't actually make your partner do these things (or any things), you will have to think about this list differently from the list of goals for yourself.

First, consider each item on the list and decide if there is something about it you want to tell your partner. This might be telling them that something is important to you. Or it might be telling them that you are hoping they will do a particular thing. Put a mark by any of the things on this list that you would like to communicate with your partner about. Communicating about these things is an important step and ideally should be done without blaming or making them feel badly; you just want to let them know what is important to you and why, and what you are hoping they will do in your future together.

Next, you will have to figure out what you might be doing, or not doing, which is making it difficult for your partner to give you want in terms of the things on this list. We all can make it difficult for other people to give us what we want, and, similarly, we also can make it easier. For each item on your list of things, you would like your partner to do, write down a sub list of things you do, have done, or don't do that make it harder for your partner to accommodate your wishes with regard to those things. For instance, if you put something like, "I would like my partner to own how he has hurt me," you would ask yourself, "What have I done or said that makes it hard for him to own how he has hurt me?" Some possible examples might be as follows:

- I lose my temper or break down crying when we talk about hard things, which makes it hard for my partner to hold up well in those conversations.
- I feel resentful but haven't communicated that to him in a direct and calm way that describes my feelings without shaming or blaming him.
- I haven't really taken the time to think about what would facilitate a repair, so I haven't really made a concrete request that he could respond to.

Now consider some positive steps you could take that might make it easier for your partner to do what you would like them to do. Look at my examples from earlier and notice how they point to some slight pivots that would probably make a difference in the outcome. In the first example, I might decide to manage my emotions, so I don't break down crying. In the second, I might give some thought to how to describe my own emotions without shaming or blaming my partner for them. In the third example, I might think about what a good repair would feel like and have a specific discussion about why that would feel important to me and ask how my partner would feel about doing those things.

If you have no ideas about what you could do that might make a difference to your partner in some of these areas, your action step would be to ask them. For instance, "I really wish you would clean up the kitchen after you cook. I wonder if there is anything I could do that would help you feel willing or able to do that?" Of course, your partner might not have any interest in doing it, but if they do have at least a little interest in the project, and can give you some feedback, it will be very helpful for making progress in that area.

Now that you have worked your way through these exercises, you may have identified a lot of possible goals for yourself. It won't help if you get flooded, and it won't help to divide your attention in too many ways, because then you won't have the amount of focus you need to create change.

MAKING THE RUBBER MEET THE ROAD

Look at your lists and see if you notice any themes. For instance, you might see a theme that has to do with managing your emotions in a variety of circumstances. Or you might see a theme that has to do with sharing things about your thoughts, feelings, or desires with your partner more openly or without blame. Or you might notice that you haven't communicated many of your desires to your partner, in which case just doing that may be a sufficient first step. If there are any themes, write them down.

Select one thing or theme that you plan to focus on first. This should be something that, when it shifts, will make a big difference in your life and, ideally, also your relationship. Write down the one thing you will focus on first and commit to it. Write at least one positive statement, a mission statement, that includes the goal, the reason the goal is important to you, and the benefit you will experience when the shift is complete: "I commit to focusing on . . ." or "This is important to me because . . . and when I have achieved this change, it will have been so worth the effort because . . ."

My mission statement is:

Keep that statement of commitment front and center while you are working on it so you don't forget. To keep it on your radar, you could put post-its throughout your house, tell an accountability partner or other friend, make it into a mantra, or write it on your arm.

CREATING PERSONAL CHANGE

Thoughts, actions, and emotions are closely linked. Thoughts create emotions. Emotions lead to meaning-making or thinking about the meaning of the emotions. Actions can spring from thoughts and feelings but also result in thoughts and feelings. Shifting one of these factors will shift the rest. If you want to create change in your life, putting a thought together with action, and then feeling a feeling, is the way to go. Or you could feel the feeling you aspire to experience, and then it will be easier to choose an action and think thoughts that go with the positive emotion. Whichever way you go, all three parts are important and intertwined with one another.

This worksheet is designed to increase awareness of which thoughts, emotions, and actions are linked to you and what outcome they support. Getting clear on an outcome you want (a goal) and then stretching to identify the thoughts, actions, and emotions that support that outcome is a very powerful step. I use this format frequently on a whiteboard in my therapy room and learned it from Vann Joines, Ph.D. It also makes a powerful self-help project.

CREATING PERSONAL CHANGE	
One change I would like to make in myself, that will make a big difference in my life:	
Currently, regarding this issue the feelings I experience are:	When the change is complete the feelings I will experience are:
Currently, the thoughts I think that bring these feelings are:	Things I would rather think include:
Things I do when I think these thoughts and feel these feelings are:	Actions that go with the new thoughts and feelings are:
I will have to give up:	I will gain:
If I really wanted to sabotage the project. I would:	

ACCESSING MOTIVATION

Finding motivation involves being able to see how the change you are considering making would benefit you. Let's imagine you would like to become able to manage automatic emotional responses so you can respond to your partner calmly and without defensiveness or anger. How will your life be better when you have figured out how to do this? Imagine yourself in a tough conversation, and you are being an empathetic, openhearted, calm, curious listener and participant in the conversation. How does this benefit you? If this sounds like a selfish perspective, it is, but in the best possible way. This is about your stake in the situation. Yes, it would probably also benefit your partner and your relationship, but finding your own motivation, separate from any benefit to anyone else, is crucial to success with any change you might want to make. The more difficult the change, the more in touch with your own motivation you will need to be.

First, envision the rewards you might reap if you were able to do the thing you are considering. Using the example of managing your automatic emotional responses, make a list of every benefit you can think of, small and large. How would it benefit you to stay calm enough to fully understand your partner's perspective on something you disagree about?

Now, consider your list. Refine it. If there are things on the list that are benefits to your partner, see if you can figure out a way that those things also benefit you directly. It is fine for there to be benefits to others, but when the rubber meets the road, you're the one who's going to be facing the challenge, so make sure you are clear in your mind about why it is important to you.

Look over your list of motivations for change. Can you distill or refine the list into an image or a single word or short phrase that symbolizes why this is important to you? Maybe the things on your list conjure up a fictional figure or a word that describes how you feel when you embody the traits you are cultivating. You will need to be able to call up your motivation when you need it or your automatic responses will take over in a split second. In that split second, it will help if you have a mantra, an image, or an emblem that can remind you to take a deep breath and respond in the way you planned.

- My word, phrase, or image is _____.
- My plan for keeping my word, phrase, or image at the top of my awareness at all times is __ _____.

CREATING A CHANGE ACTION PLAN

To make a change in your life, you will need concrete goals that are about you, as well as clarity regarding your thoughts, feelings, and actions that you are now engaging in, and those that better match the goal you aspire to. Once you have done that foundational work, you are ready to make the rubber meet the road with a concrete action plan comprised of what I would describe as a series of experiments.

Your first action-based experiment might be to change a habitual thought that isn't serving you into one that serves you better. Or it might be engaging in a regular mindfulness practice of intentionally shifting toward such emotions as appreciation, love, and gratitude. It might be doing a particular action repeatedly to build a new habit while also creating a shift in thoughts and feelings. My point is, that your experiment requires you to do something different, but it might be a thought experiment, a feeling experiment, or a purely action-based experiment. It might also be an experiment that has action, accompanied by an intentional shift of emotion, or thought. For instance, imagine you have decided to run an experiment that involves listening when your partner is talking, and instead of interrupting or responding defensively, you plan to get curious and ask some good questions. It will be easier to do that if you are aware of the thoughts, you think when your partner starts talking which often results in you interrupting and defending yourself. With that self-awareness, you can coach yourself to think different thoughts when your partner is talking, which will set you up to have more success managing the automatic response of interrupting.

Once you have identified your experiment, write it down in detail. If your experiment is to not interrupt, make sure to write down what you will do instead so you have positive action steps. That might be, "Instead of interrupting, I will take three deep breaths and remember that I want to know what my partner thinks. I will ask at least one follow-up question to what my partner is saying." Don't overcomplicate this; keep it to just one concise experiment so you can really focus on it and succeed.

Now, write down why this is important to you and how your life will be improved when you have mastered this skill (refer to your mission statement in the "Getting Clear on Your Goals" worksheet or, for a deeper dive, use the "Accessing Motivation" worksheet). This might be something like, "It is important to me to listen well and get curious because I want to know what my partner thinks on deeper levels than we usually discuss, so I can understand my partner more fully. I think knowing my partner better will lead to me loving and respecting them more fully, which would be wonderful and will lead to me feeling more energetic and positive about myself, my life, and my relationship.

"My first experiment is to _____.

This is important to me because _____ _____.

My life will be better in the following ways when I'm good at this: _____

_____

The next challenge is to keep your attention on this project so you can succeed. Remember, repetition and consistency are key. This action plan must become a daily practice that involves honoring your desire and motivation to change. With your attention on the project, you can give yourself good support and self-coaching for the effort.

Some experiments require total focus for weeks. Others evolve more quickly and can be tweaked every day depending on circumstance. The most important thing is to keep your goal on your radar and stay focused on one primary goal at a time, so you don't become confused or overwhelmed.

Every morning when you start your day, ask yourself (either on paper or in your mind), "What am I going to do today that will move that goal forward and why?" This might look exactly like it did on the first day you did it, or it might evolve a little throughout time.

Each day's action step should feel completely manageable. Be realistic: If it's the busiest day of the year, don't put down something that will take an hour; instead, put down something that will take less than a minute. You must create manageable action steps if you want to succeed at change. Every day is different, so assess your day. What feels manageable today? Might it even feel fun?

Now, be a good coach for yourself and imagine the entire sequence, including your success and positive emotions. Get the goal clear in your mind, and picture yourself doing the action step that day. Imagine feeling empowered, happy, effective, or any other positive emotion during and after the action. Get clear about what amazing benefits will come of your effort, and feel the gratitude and appreciation for those amazing benefits. This is you, being a positive, motivating coach for yourself. If you can make the entire process fun, that's even better.

Review each night, perhaps right before you fall asleep or in a notebook where you track your intentions, follow-through, and gratitude each day. Did you meet your goal? What went well? Give yourself positive feedback for doing what you intended to do: "I am a total rock star! I decided to send a loving text at lunchtime, and I did it! This is me taking charge of change in my life, and I'm proud of myself for it!" If you fell short of what you had hoped to do, compliment yourself for what you were able to do and acknowledge a desire to improve the next day. Be specific about what you plan to do differently and why it is important to you. Remember to be a cheerful, uplifting, inspiring coach, not a punitive, punishing one.

If it is proving to be challenging to follow through on your action plans, you might tweak them to feel more manageable. Or you might work on increasing how fun it is, add more positive feedback from your inner coach, or add a reward of some sort. I often write myself a pep-talk note for the following morning in a journal beside my bed. Then I read it when I wake up. This might be something like, "You've totally got this for today! Here's why this is fun and important, and I know you can do it. Also, right after you do it, you get to go buy yourself your favorite coffee drink or go for a walk in your favorite place, or both!" The important part is to lift your mood and start off with a strong vote of confidence, a positive attitude, and an expectation of success combined with fun.

"Before you sit down to have a discussion with your partner, make some notes and come prepared. Those are one of the most difficult conversations that you will have in your life because they involve the person you love so much. Filling out this table with help you every time you want to get more clarity on which ones of your partner's behaviours trigger you, what underlying emotions you are feeling because of it and what do you need from yourself and your partner in the future so you don't have to face the same issue again."

COMPATIBILITY CHECK

AGREE VS. DISAGREE FOR COUPLES WORKSHEET

Most people have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item.

	Always agree (5)	Almost Always Agree (4)	Occasionally Agree (3)	Frequently Disagree (2)	Almost Always Disagree (1)	Always Disagree (0)
1. Religious matters						
2. Demonstrations of affections						
3. Making major decisions						
4. Sex relations						
5. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)						
6. Career decisions						

	All the time (0)	Most of the Time (1)	More often than not (2)	Occasionally (3)	Rarely (4)	Never (5)
7. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?						
8. How often do you and your partner quarrel?						
9. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?						
10. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves"?						

	Every day (4)	Almost every day (3)	Occasionally (2)	Rarely (1)	Never (0)
11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?					

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never (0)	Less than once a month (1)	Once or twice a month (2)	Once or twice a week (3)	Once a day (4)	More often (5)
12. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas						
13. Work together on a project						
14. Calmly discuss something						

a) For each spouse, score their RDAS according to the values given above (lower = more distressed).

b) Add items 1–6: _____ (*Consensus*: 22 = the cutoff score to discriminate between distress/nondistress)

c) Add items 7–10: _____ (*Satisfaction*: 14 = the cutoff score)

d) Add items 11–14: _____ (*Cohesion*: 11 = the cutoff score)

e) Add all items: _____ (*Total*: 48 = the cutoff score)

f) List scores in appropriate box on each partner's copy.

For additional information on each of the scales/subscales, the questions related to each are listed below:

- ***Consensus:*** Items 3 & 6 : decision making, 1 & 5 = values, 2 & 4 = affection
- ***Satisfaction:*** Items 7 & 9 = stability, 8 & 10 = conflict
- ***Cohesion:*** Items 11 & 13 = activities, 12 & 14 = discussion

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

Objective: To establish what are your relationship wants and desires

You Should Know:

You might be able to describe what you don't like or want in your relationship, but are you aware of what you need and want from it? We are often able to focus on what is wrong but not want is or could be good. As a result, we might end up complaining more and display dissatisfaction.

What to Do:

Make a copy of the sheet for each partner and complete the questions. Go through the answers together without judging or criticising.

The list includes wants and desires which people often identify as important for the relationship. Read the statements and rate them on a scale from 1–10, where 1 = not at all important and 10 = extremely important. Once you have reviewed each item, rank your top 10 most important wants and desires.

I have a desire to:

Feel connected through talking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Feel connected through sharing recreation/fun times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Experience touch in a non-sexual way.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Have sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive verbal tenderness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive physical tenderness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported as I live by society's laws and rules.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported as I live by rules or tenets of my religion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Know we'll stay together and feel secure in love.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Know we'll stay together and feel financially secure.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Feel accepted and valued for who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Feel accepted and valued for what I do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Feel safe when I feel vulnerable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be included in decisions that affect my life or relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Experience agreement and harmony in decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Know that my partner needs me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported in my desire to give money away.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported in my desire to give gifted to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported in my desire to serve others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive genuine praise and validation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported in my desire to have alone time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be physically attracted to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Know that my partner is honest and trustworthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be supported when I help younger people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive gifts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive help when I need it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Receive genuine appreciation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I have a desire for my partner to:

Develop a future for our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be faithful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Be emotionally healthy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Maintain a mutually vibrant spiritual relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Apologise and seek forgiveness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Resolve differences/conflicts/arguments with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Engage in mutually satisfying communication.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Effectively cope with crisis and stress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understand me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Demonstrate a will to change. (flexibility)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Work as a team to raise our children. (if applicable)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Be passionate and romantic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Socially connect with others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

What are your top 10 desires?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Did any of your partner's answers surprise you? Explain.

Reflection on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise from 1 to 5? ____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Objective:

To improve your relationship by becoming aware of the areas of strength you each bring to it.

You Should Know:

Research indicates that if you understand your own strengths, you are better able to cope with stress and meet the demands of daily life. When you are aware of your abilities, you experience a boost in confidence and an increase in positive emotion - qualities that can better your relationship.

Identifying your partner's strengths can also benefit your relationship. When you and your partner are aware of what you are bringing to the relationship, it will be easier to build a foundation for open communication and effective conflict resolution.

What to Do:

Make a copy of the sheet for each partner and complete the questions. Go through the answers together without judging or criticising.

Rate yourself and your partner on your areas of strength on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = needs work, and 5 = very strong. Add strengths you or your partner have that are not on the sheet.

When you are done, identify strengths you both possess and discuss how you might use your individual strengths to enhance your relationship.

Area of Strength	Me	My Partner
Expresses feelings openly.		
Listens without judging.		
Manages conflict effectively.		
Budgets and manages money well.		
Easily expresses affection.		
Makes decisions effectively.		
Willing to find solutions to problems.		
Works hard and/or is employed.		
Maintains relationships with family and friends.		
Willing to grow and evolve together.		
Has parenting skills. (if applicable)		
Has strong spiritual/religious beliefs.		
Is involved in community activities or hobbies		
Is thoughtful and considerate of others.		
Is playful and/or has a sense of humor.		
Trustworthy.		
Willing to be vulnerable.		
Optimistic.		
Deals effectively with stress.		
Organised.		
Flexible and open to change.		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		
Other:		

What are your 5 main strengths?

1

2

3

4

5

What are your partner's five main strengths?

1

2

3

4

5

What five strengths do you think your partner would say you possess?

1

2

3

4

5

What are your five main strengths as a couple?

1

2

3

4

5

Looking at strengths that you have identified for yourself, are there any areas where you can improve?

1

2

3

4

5

Are there areas where you can improve as a couple?

1

2

3

4

5

What, if anything, surprised you about your partner's responses?

1

2

3

4

5

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise from 1 to 10? ____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

DISCUSSION TOPICS FOR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

The first two topics on this list, fidelity, and connection, will help any partners clarify their feelings about important material. The lack of discussion of these topics has led to all sorts of relationship misunderstandings, so please roll up your sleeves and have some talks. You don't have to be planning to open your relationship to have these discussions.

Safety; primacy; visibility; time, money, and other resources; disclosures; and negotiation are all topics that are relevant to any form of open relationship. Discussing these topics can help you figure out what type of open relationship might serve you if any. These conversations will surface some issues that can blindside you if not discussed, and it is better to see them coming.

If you would benefit from having some structure for your discussions, use the initiator/inquirer process.

FIDELITY:

- What does fidelity mean to you?
- When do you feel secure emotionally?
- What do you do to make yourself feel emotionally secure?
- What does your partner do that results in you feeling emotionally secure?

There are many aspects of sexuality, and your feelings about all of them may not be the same. Your feelings might also be situational or specific to a particular person or gender. Here are some topics that commonly come up when discussing fidelity, or perceiving infidelity:

- Fantasy about other people
- Fantasy about particular activities we don't do together
- Watching pornography
- Reading erotic stories
- Self-pleasure when alone
- Self-pleasure with your partner present Sexting, Flirting, Connecting emotionally
- Connecting emotionally or socially on social media, or sexually with an ex, or with another specific person
- Discussing your relationship with someone else/another friend or partner
- Erotic connection using technology

CONNECTION:

- What does your partner do that really lights you up?
- What do you do that lights your partner up?
- What do you do that lights you up?
- Who else is in your life that contributes to you feeling whole and amazing?
- Who do you have special connections with that you don't want to lose? What is special about those connections? What do they bring to you and your relationships with others?
- Do you have any special connections with others that make you nervous in any way?
- Does your partner have any special connections that make you nervous?
- Regarding connections that make you nervous, what are you nervous or fearful about?
- What type of connections would you like to have more of in your life?
- What people or activities do you think would add to your experience of connection?
- What types of outside connections do you think strengthen your relationship(s) with others?
- What types of outside connections do you think weaken your relationship(s)?

SAFETY:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about physical safety when dating others?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about sexual safety when dating others?
- Do you know what you need to know about sexually transmitted infections to make good decisions and strong agreements?
- If not, what do you need to know?
- The American Sexual Health Association is a great resource, as is Planned Parenthood.
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the safety of your children, housemates, or other family members when dating others?
- Do you have fears about any of your shared resources or any other safety concern to discuss?

PRIMACY:

- Do you imagine having a primary/secondary relationship structure if you decided to try polyamory? If not, what do you imagine instead?
- What is it about primary/secondary that you like and are drawn to?
- What is it about primary/secondary that worries you or that you think could be problematic?
- Are there things you do with your partner that you would like to reserve for doing just with them? (This could be anything from kissing to going on international trips.)
- What is it about those things that feel special?
- What are some ways you could keep those things special?

- How do you imagine handling a difference of opinion with a partner about doing certain activities with others?
- Are there some things that are particularly difficult for you to think about your partner doing with other people or another person?
- What is it about those things that feel special, important, or unique?
- What are some ways you could keep your relationship feeling special and unique? (Think of some ways that don't limit activities and some that do.)
- How do you feel when you imagine having your activities with another person curtailed by your partner's preferences? Are there some activities you have stronger feelings about than others?
- How do you feel when you imagine requesting that your partner curtail their activities to match your comfort level or preference? Again, are there certain activities you have stronger feelings about than others?

VISIBILITY:

- What are your feelings about other people, family, friends, or coworkers knowing about your (some form of open) relationship?
- How do you feel when you think about telling other people? (Your feelings might vary from person to person; discuss any that feel relevant.)
- How do you feel when you think about not telling others and keeping it private?
- What are the pros and cons of telling/not telling important people?
- What are your thoughts about telling your children about your open relationship?
- How do you feel about public displays of affection with another partner?
- Do you care if your partner has PDAs with others?
- What constitutes a PDA?
- How do you want to handle questions or judgments someone might have about, for instance, perception of some infidelity as a result of not knowing about your relationship agreements?
- Is there at least one person you can agree would be a safe person to discuss opening your relationship with?

If there is more than one person, make a list. It can backfire if you don't have sufficient support, so see if you can find at least one person to agree on, or else find a therapist or coach to meet that need.

TIME:

- When you imagine opening your relationship, what challenges do you imagine arising regarding allocation of time?
- How much time do you imagine spending with other partners?
- How much time do you imagine your partner(s) spending with other partners?
- Do you feel relaxed and secure about the amount of time you spend with your current partner(s)? If not, why not?
- Does time feel like a limited commodity?
- Do you know where your time goes? If not, write it down for a week and see where you might be able to reallocate some time from less important things to more important things.
- Do you feel connected when you are with your partner? If not, what could increase the feeling of connection you get with the time you have together?
- Do you feel relaxed and connected to yourself? If you aren't getting high-quality time alone and you need it, the lack will undermine multiple aspects of your life.
- What do you most love to do alone? Make a list of things you love to do alone. Keep it handy. This can help you find something enjoyable to do if you ever find yourself alone with nothing to do.
- What do you love to do with your partner? Make a list and keep it handy, too. This will help you choose high-reward activities when you can make a conscious choice.
- Are there times you and your partner particularly love being together and times you don't so much? What activities do you enjoy together, and what things don't you like to do together? If so, that information might help you plan how and when to spend time with others. For instance, maybe that other date is your yardwork buddy, or is amazing at helping with the kids, or really enjoys batch-cooking meals for the week.

MONEY AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- Does money feel like a limited commodity to you? To your partner?
- Do you have concerns about financial resources in your current relationship situation? What are your concerns?
- Do you have concerns about financial resources related to opening your relationship? What are your concerns?
- Are there resources other than time and money that you have concerns about related to opening your relationship? What are your concerns?
- How comfortable are you talking about money?
- What are some ways you can imagine handling money matters regarding opening up your relationship that would feel comfortable to you?

DISCLOSURES:

- When do you want to know that your partner(s) is interested in someone new?
- When do you want to tell your partner(s) that you are interested in someone new?
- How much do you want to know about what your partner does with other people?
- How much do you want to share about your activities with other people?
- How comfortable are you with either of you discussing your relationship, challenges, struggles, or issues with another partner? Are there circumstances or topics where your feelings about this vary?
- How much do you want to hear about struggles your partner(s) might be having with another partner?
- How much would you like to tell your partner(s) about struggles you might be having with another partner?
- If you are considering don't ask/don't tell, how would you like to handle emergencies that might require sharing information?

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- If you are considering don't ask/don't tell, how would you like to handle emergencies that might require sharing information?

NEGOTIATION:

- How much advance notice do you like to have for changes in plans? Does it matter whose plans?
- Are there exceptions? How would you like to handle emergencies that result in changes in plans or exceptions to agreements you have in place?
- When do you want to hear about your partner's desire to renegotiate some aspect of your relationship agreements? (Tip: Don't wait until it's time sensitive.)
- How do you plan to make it easy for your partner to share something uncomfortable with you?
- How willing are you to bring up something that your partner might have trouble hearing?
- How confident are you that you and your partner(s) can be honest with one another and discuss the hidden assumptions and particulars of any given agreement? This is important, because if you are not confident about that or you have a partner who is not confident about it, that would be a reason to get to know a therapist or coach who can help you every now and then.
- How comfortable are you discussing the particulars of your relationship agreements? How comfortable is your partner?
- Do you tend toward oversharing or under sharing? Do you tend to avoid conflict or thrive on a spirited exchange of views? How about your partner(s)? Discuss your different unique styles of conversation and what might be challenging topics, so you know how to help one another and make sure you cover the ground with important discussions. For instance, if vacations are a hot-button issue for one of you, the other(s) should not wait until the last minute if they want to discuss something about vacation or renegotiate an agreement. A difficult topic will benefit from especially careful communication and lots of positive feedback for the struggling partner(s).

INTIMACY GUIDE

DEVELOP YOUR COUPLE SEXUAL STYLE

Common Relationship and Sexual Styles:

Read through the common styles and try to establish which one could be yours. This decision should be made as a couple. You are looking for similarities is terms of the amount of emotional intimacy and the value which you put on sex and eroticism. Obviously, every couple is different and can be a mix of different styles. But think about your approach to the relationship, your needs in terms of emotional connection and sexual satisfaction. When you will read through the types, please answer the questions below together to make sure you have made the right choice.

1 The Complementary Couple Style

This style is the most common. It is a style where people display moderate intimacy and a firm sense of autonomy in the relationship. Those couples usually work through their issues in a good manner. Both partners can feel a sense of belonging and respect while facing difficulties. Both partners have well-established roles in the relationship and support each other in their areas of expertise. For example, one of the partners may be the one who keeps a lively atmosphere when the other will be better at organising the house life. They both 'fill each other's gaps'. However, the issue which they can face sexually can be a sense of routine. As much as this type is good at being life partners, they can also lack intimacy, passion, and a sense of specialness. The sex after some time can become mechanic, less fun, and playful. Even though the atmosphere in the relationship is reaffirming, positive, and secure the sex life can be more focused on the intercourse itself rather than satisfaction. Which can contribute to issues like erectile dysfunction.

Ideally, both partners should be comfortable with initiating the intercourse and declining the offer. But also offering alternatives if they chose not to have intercourse. Increasing intimacy and the sense of the specialness of the relationship is very important for this style.

2 The Conflict-Minimising Couple Style

This style is the most stable and usually organised along traditional gender roles. Where man is a primary resource provider and woman is a caregiver and works around the house. Partners usually avoid emotional exchanges especially involving anger. The intimacy is limited, and the relationship focuses on the family, values, and religion. The emotional and practical rules of the relationship are straightforward and respected by both partners. In this type of couple stability and family is veiled more than intimacy and coupleness. Security and predictability are what run the relationship.

Initiating sex and establishing its' frequency is a man's role. Any sexual issues are minimised. Sexual scenarios focus on intercourse, and it is usually one-way foreplay rather than mutual pleasuring. It is expected that a woman will function as a man so that she will have a single orgasm without additional stimulation. This is usually not the case, but it also is minimised. Sex is a male's domain when affection is females'.

There are several possible sexual traps that can affect such a relationship. Sole focus on intercourse can make a man vulnerable to erectile dysfunction. Because partners are not sexual friends, which in turn can lead to a decrease or absence in sexual contact. If the man can start experiencing performance anxiety it may lead to a decrease in performance. Without additional sexual scripts not involving intercourse, the couple is left with decreased satisfaction in their sex life.

Conflict-minimising couples miss the opportunity to deepen their intimacy through resolving conflicts and getting to know their differences. They also underestimate the impact of sexuality and pleasure on the relationship. If you have this type of marital pattern, be sure that successful erections and intercourses are only in 15–20% contributing to sexual and relationship satisfaction.

3 The Best Friend Couple Style

This style is characterised by the highest degree of intimacy, acceptance, and sharing; equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities; and commitment to a close, vital marriage. Although the cultural ideal, this marital style runs the risk of leading to disappointment and alienation when emotional and sexual expectations are not met or there are irresolvable conflicts.

When both individuals choose this relationship style and devote the time and psychological energy to make it successful, they can be a very impressive couple. However, best friend couples have a high-rate divorce rate, based on disappointment and resentment towards the partner and relationship.

For the best friend couple sex energises the relationship and makes it special. They enjoy touching inside and outside the bedroom. Intimacy, pleasure, and eroticism are valued by both people. Their sexual style is flexible and responsive to the feelings and performances of both partners.

The biggest emotional trap is that they often sacrifice their autonomy and individuality for the sake of their relationship. When things do not work out, they regress to hurt, blaming, and resentment. Disappointment and disillusion rob a couple of vitality. These couples usually lack conflict resolution skills and become bitter over thwarted hopes and expectations.

The biggest sexual trap is inhibited sexual desire. Intimacy and couple time serve as bridges to sexual desire, but too much intimacy can stifle erotic feelings. Best friend couples are not assertive in dealing with sexual problems. They expect each should know what the other is thinking and what the other wants without having to ask or articulate. When there is sexual dysfunction, especially erectile dysfunction, love and communication are not enough. Warm feelings and conversation are needed but there is more to be done to overcome such problems. Taking personal responsibility and working as an intimate team is very important if this style is supposed to create a functional relationship.

3 The Emotionally Expressive Couple Style

The emotionally expressive couple's style is the most volatile and unstable but also the most engaging, fun, and erotic. They have the highest intensity of feelings, both loving and angry. When this style works well, it can be a framework for a vibrant and exciting relationship. Those couples value sexuality that is spontaneous, adventurous, playful, and energising.

Unfortunately, it is also the most unstable couple style and has the highest divorce rate. The conflicts are frequent and intense. Emotionally expressive couples can deal with disappointment, anger, and conflict, but if they cross the line into personal put-downs, contempt, and disrespect, this breaks the bond.

There is a number of potential sexual issues, including using sex to make up after an abusive fight. It is poisonous for physical and emotional fights to serve as foreplay. Another problem is that a gradual, step-by-step process of dealing with sexual problems is challenging for them because they expect spontaneity. If the sexual problem is not resolved quickly, they may become bitter and blaming.

To achieve success this, type of couple needs to respect personal and sexual boundaries, and approach issues as an intimate team.

Read and answer those questions individually. Write down your responses and share them with your partner. Together try to establish your couple style. Do not be 'politically correct' or try to second guess your partner. Be honest and explicit. Do not feel apologetic because of your responses. It is not the point to match your partner but to understand each other.

QUESTIONS:

1. How much emotional intimacy do you want in your life and relationship?
2. What are the most important emotions you want to share in your relationship?
3. What is your preferred way to deal with differences and conflict?
4. Which style do you think you have in your relationship?
5. What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of the style you've chosen?
6. How important is sex in your life? What role do you want it to play in our relationship?
7. How much do you enjoy cuddling? How important is it to you?
8. How do you distinguish affectionate touch from seductive touch?
9. How much do you enjoy sensual touch? Do you prefer taking turns or simultaneously giving and receiving?
10. What is the meaning and value of playful touch? How comfortable are you with affectionate or silly nicknames for your genitals and sexual activities?
11. How much do you enjoy erotic scenarios and techniques? Do you enjoy erotic sex as a route to orgasm or only as a pleasuring experience?
12. Do you prefer single or multiple stimulations? Do you enjoy external stimuli or not?
13. What is your preferred intercourse position? Man on top, woman on top, rear entry, side to side? What type of thrusting do you prefer? In and out? Circular? Deep inside? Shallow? Fast or slow?
14. How much do you value after play as a part of your lovemaking style?

Divide your answers into three categories:

1. Areas you agree on
2. Areas you can reach agreement on (Identify differences which you can accept or even enjoy)
3. Differences to accept or adapt to (Differences in which partners are complete opposites and are not willing to incorporate. Differences should be acknowledged and accepted but it does not mean that all of them can be incorporated and satisfied. The couple should work around them and make compromises to reach a successful relationship and sex life.)

EROTIC STYLES

There are different sexual styles that people may have. Here are some common ones that you might find yourself promoting in your life.

ROMANTIC

The hallmark of a romantic is that "they're turned on by space, anticipation, and tease," Jewel says. "Often, [energetics] want to have that safety, like 'I need to know that I'm safe, and I can feel your energy from across the room. I can feel the energy in my body. We can have non-penetrating, non-touch orgasms just through energy moving through our body alone," says Jewel, who is primarily an energetic.

SENSORY

"The sensual is turned on by all the senses. They might be that friend that you walk into the bakery with and they're like, 'Oh my God, can you smell that!?'
Similar to energetics, sensuals can feel orgasm throughout their body and senses—like touch orgasms, ear orgasms, and oral orgasms. "They like that soft, sensual touch and the kiss," Jewel says. "They love full-body sensations."

KINKY

Fast, straight to the point turn ons. Simply seeing someone who you're attracted to, watching porn, or seeing wetness can all do the trick.
For the sexual, the area of their body that turns them on the quickest is their genitals.

VISUAL

The kinky style is turned on by anything that's taboo for them, says Jewel, which is hyper-personalized in effect. For example, "if somebody...only had missionary sex all of their life, and then they go and they do something that's different for them—doggy-style, whatever it is for them—that can be considered taboo."

PSYCHOLOGICAL

The use of the mind to trigger eroticism. It may be words, promises, teasing, or themes of the forbidden and other deep psychological turn ons. It may not every appear sexual initially, but for those people, it definitely is (i.e. flirting).

ALL IN ONE

People with this style are happy with any type of a sexual prompting.

TREATING MISMATCHED LIBIDO IN COUPLES

1 Differentiation of self

According to Bowen therapy, the differentiation of self is important. (Autonomy/ Freedom VS dependence/Connection)

In healthy families; DoS is clear. There is no threat about differences. These couples would manage mismatched libido better.

Positive DoS:

- ☑ Healthy emotional distance
- ☑ Slight tension
- ☑ Curiosity and interest in partner

Negative DoS:

- ☑ Fused
- ☑ Overly concerned with each other
- ☑ Too familiar
- ☑ Rarely fight
- ☑ Lack of sexual tension

2 Attachment in mismatched libido

Secure attachment = Satisfaction

Poor attachment = sexual issues including

a) Avoidant numbing (sex for stress relief, Sex to impress or less sex)

b) Anxious pursuit (sex for reassurance, sex for validation, sexual dysfunction, angry sex or difficulty getting turned on)

Lower drive is not equal to loss of interest in healthy couples. It is temperament.

Higher driver may show lack of empathy and entitlement; Lower drive may show guilt and shame = lack of acknowledgement and wrong assumptions.

3 Circular model of desire

Not in the mood → yet sexual encounter doesn't feel so bad → Getting aroused despite initial ambivalence → Maybe less "anti" sex next time.

4 Pursuer and distancer dynamics

Pursuer notices distance and points it out → Distancer responds defensively (more distance) → Pursuer escalates and pressures → Distancer angry and shuts down → Pursuer pulls back/Attitude/gives up.

5 Assessment Questions (Sexological ecosystem)

Microsystem
What did you learn about X (sexual Q, gender roles etc.)
How were your parents regarding sex
What influence did you peers play regarding sex

Mesosystem
Experience with systems (i.e.: doctor, midwife, pastor etc.)

Macrosystem
Media, religion, community, society etc.

Exosystem

Gender roles, laws, myths

- Who has lower drive
- What feels right for each partner
- When did you notice a discrepancy
- Is this just about sex or discrepancy on other things lately too
- How have you tried to problem solve

6 Treatment

- ☑ Higher drive partner to stop guessing
- ☑ Lower drive partner to take responsibility for their needs and communicate them
- ☑ Remove pressure to have orgasm (can be enjoyable without climax)
- ☑ Remove personalisation
- ☑ Identify and discuss DoF and attachment patterns
- ☑ Des-escalate negative patterns
- ☑ Changing the interactions
- ☑ Integrate new patterns.

SEXUALITY CONVERSATION STARTERS

- When you think of sex, what comes to mind? (Jot down any words, images, and associations that come to mind).
- What does sex mean to you?
- What is important to know about you sexually?
- What aspects of your sexual life do you value and would you like to keep? To hold on to?
- What aspects of your sexual life would you still like to experience?
- Think of your most intense (best) sexual experience, has it happened or is it still to come?
- When do you feel most erotic?
- When do you feel most free in your relationship?
- Is there something sexual you long for?
- What's a sexual dilemma for you?
- How do you experience love and sex, love without sex, and sex without love?
- When do you feel most attractive?
- In which situation do you feel most tense?
- A person that strongly influenced you sexually is...?
- What is an event in your sexual history that stands out?
- What was your first sexual experience, and how different is it today?
- What's the best compliment you like to receive?
- Do you ever introduce new ideas in your sexual relationship?
- Do you initiate sex?
- Do you expect to initiate sex?
- Do you like make-up sex?
- Do you seek out information about new love making techniques?
- How comfortable are you with nudity?
- Do you take pleasure in all your senses when you make love?
- When you are bored sexually, what do you do to change that?
- Do you have spontaneous thoughts, images, or daydreams?
- Do you like to look at your partner and be seen when you make love?
- Do you want sexual exclusiveness in your relationships?
- Are you comfortable discussing the topic of sexual boundaries and monogamy with your partner?
- When was the first time you masturbated? How did you feel?

- Do you masturbate and what is the experience like?
- Is there anything, physical or emotional, that you feel during masturbation that you wish you felt during sex?
- What is the role of sex in your life?
- Do you prefer sex or chocolate?
- How do you like to be touched? (Do you know how you like to be touched?)
- Where do you like to be touched?
- Do you like to talk during sex? If so, do you prefer sweet talk or dirty talk?
- What's forbidden for you sexually?
- Do you use online dating sites?
- Do you think of other sexual partners when you're with your partner?
- Do you sometimes feel daring in sex?
- What is more difficult for you: to think and talk about sex or to do it?
- What do you want most erotically with your partner?
- What turns you off sexually?
- What turns you on sexually?
- When is sex most pleasurable?
- When do you think of being naughty?
- Do you ever fantasize of same sex partners?
- What is a vulnerability around your sexuality that you struggle with?
- What is a vulnerability around sex you think your partner struggles with?
- Do you have a sexual memory that you don't like?
- When do you feel most beautiful?
- Are there things in your sexuality that scare you?
- When do you feel most shame?
- Is there a barrier you'd like to cross?
- When do you feel most untouchable?
- What's your favourite pose?
- When do you feel most dull?
- What are the rules of sex in your life?
- Do you sometimes pretend?
- How comfortable are you communicating your sexual wants or dislikes?
- Do you feel confident exploring your sexuality?
- Do you like fulfilling your partner's wants?
- What are your guilty pleasures?
- Something I'd like to change in relationship to my sexuality is...?
- How has your sexuality changed over time?
- What is your relation to your body?
- When is sex most pleasurable?
- Who are you as a lover?
- How does your partner experience you as a sexual partner?
- Do you sometimes wish you wanted to be more sexual?
- Do you sometimes wish you were less sexual?

- What was the attitude toward sex in your family growing up? Comfortable? Positive? Natural? Awkward? Repressive? Shameful? Guilt inducing? Abusive?
- Was sex openly talked about in your family growing up?
- Did your parent(s) provide sexual education?
- Which, if any parent spoke and taught you about sex?
- What was the attitude about pre-marital sex?
- What was the attitude about contraception?
- Were your parents affectionate with each other?
- How much physical affection was there among the family members?
- What were the messages about boys/men, girls/women in your family?
- Was sex talked about? Hinted at? Joked about? Hushed?
- Do you watch porn?
- What kind of porn turns you on?
- How do you feel about being a man/ women?
- Do you fantasize about domination and submission?
- Do you need intimacy in sex?
- How soon after you come do you withdraw?
- Ever fantasize transgressive sex?
- Ever engage in transgressive sex (off-limits)?
- Do you play with BDSM?
- How do you turn yourself on?
- Are you affected by the menstrual cycles?
- Are there changes in your sexuality due to health concerns and medication?
- How has age changed your sexuality?
- Do you like watching porn alone or with your partner?
- When your partner watches porn what does it do to you?
- What do you want most erotically with your partner?
- Do you read erotic literature? If yes, could you give names of your favourite ones?
- Do you touch yourself when you have sex with your partner?
- Do you make a distinction between making love and having sex?
- What were the prevalent messages about gender in your family?
- What were the dominant messages in your culture about boys and girls, men and women?
- What is the role of religion in your life, and how does it influence your sexuality (beliefs, attitudes, behaviours?)
- Do you like to talk when you make love? Do you make noises?
- Among the five senses, which one is the most sexual for you? Seeing? Smelling? Hearing? Touching? Tasting?
- Do you engage in sexually compulsive behaviours?
- What is your favourite temperature of the water?
- What kind of music do you like to listen to?
- Do you like to cook?

- What is your preferred time of the day to make love?
- What do you enjoy most when you make love?
- What do you like to experience in sex? (Feel free to check more than one) Tenderness? Softness? Closeness? Intensity? Aggression? A state of transcendence? To possess? A spiritual connection? Rebellious? A release? Surrender? Dominance? Abandon? Unboundedness? Freedom? Free from responsibility? Ruthlessness? Timelessness? Giving? Receiving? To be taken?
- Do you practice tantra? Yoga? Any Sport?
- Do you like sex toys? Do you use them? Alone or with your partner?
- When you love someone/thing, how do you feel?
- When you desire someone/thing how do you feel?
- Have you been hurt in love?
- Have you ever hurt someone in love?
- Have you ever been hurt sexually?
- Has anyone ever touched you or asked you to touch them the way you didn't like?
- Have you ever been loved the way you wish?
- How comfortable are you communicating your wants to your partner(s)?
- When you partner tells you about his/her sexual preferences what does it do to you?
- What is a metaphor that best describes your sexuality?
- If you were the author of a book on sex, what would its title be?

INFIDELITY

WHY UNDERSTANDING AFFAIR TYPES MATTERS

When infidelity is discovered in a relationship, the emotional impact can feel overwhelming—shattering trust, security, and intimacy. Yet not all affairs are the same, and treating them as though they are can miss the deeper truth of what's really happening beneath the surface.

RecognAccidental Affair—and the therapist—understand the why behind the betrayal. Is the affair a wake-up call about unspoken needs? A symptom of emotional avoidance? An expression of entitlement or addiction? Each affair tells a different story and carries a different message.

By identifying the underlying dynamics behind the infidelity, couples can:

- Avoid mislabeling or over-pathologizing the behavior,
- Understand what needs to change in the relationship (and individually),
- Create a healing process that is targeted, compassionate, and effective.

This section outlines the seven main types of affairs, how to recognize them, and which treatment strategies work best for each. Whether the goal is reconciliation or respectful closure, this clarity can be the first step toward genuine healing—for both partners.

TYPES OF AFFAIRS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND TREATMENT OPTIONS

1 ACCIDENTAL AFFAIR

Also Known As: One-Night Stand

Characteristics:

- Unplanned, impulsive, typically one-time encounter.
- No emotional involvement; often triggered by alcohol or opportunity.
- Infidel feels guilt and shame; betrayed partner is angry.

Recognition: Often framed as a "mistake"; minimal pre-existing marital problems.

Treatment:

- Use a structured 7-step program.
- Address guilt, reinforce boundaries.
- Focus on communication and preventing recurrence.
- Good prognosis if addressed early.

2 AVOIDANCE AFFAIRS

Subtypes: Intimacy Avoidance & Conflict Avoidance

Characteristics:

- Develop gradually; driven by emotional distance or suppressed conflict.
- Cheaters may seem emotionally starved or disconnected.
- Often both partners are avoidant.

Recognition:

- Either intense conflict (Intimacy Avoidance) or excessive niceness (Conflict Avoidance).
- Affairs used to avoid emotional engagement.

Treatment:

- Rebuild honest communication and conflict-resolution skills.
- Close the affair with direct conversation.
- Address family-of-origin patterns and unexpressed needs.
- Joint therapy essential; prognosis varies.

3 PHILANDERER AFFAIRS

Also Known As: Casanova, Serial Cheater

Characteristics:

- Pattern of multiple affairs; driven by conquest and thrill.

- No emotional attachment to partners.
- Often narcissistic, manipulative; typically male.

Recognition:

- Long affair history; infidel shows little remorse.
- Sees monogamy as restrictive; may be charming or high-status.

Treatment:

- Very challenging; change only possible if the person truly wants it.
- Focus on deep personal change, rituals, honesty.
- Couple's therapy + individual therapy; support groups like SLAA.
- Prognosis poor unless radical behavior change occurs.

4 ENTITLEMENT AFFAIRS

Also Known As: Celebrity/Revenge Affairs

Characteristics:

- Infidel feels they "deserve" the affair due to status, effort, or deprivation.
- Often in power roles or emotionally neglected marriages.
- Emotional or sexual needs justified by success.

Recognition:

- Lives may be compartmentalized; affair partner admires infidel's status.
- The marriage often emotionally distant.

Treatment:

- Couple must work on friendship, vulnerability, shared values.
- Use structured rituals and communication tools.
- May overlap with avoidance or split-self dynamics.
- Moderate prognosis if entitlement is addressed.

5 SPLIT-SELF AFFAIRS

Also Known As: Romantic Affair, Midlife Crisis

Characteristics:

- Long-term, emotionally intense relationships outside marriage.
- Infidel feels torn between two lives (e.g., family vs. passion).
- Often "model" spouses/families externally.

Recognition:

- Usually discovered after long-term detachment or crisis.
- Infidel may express being "in love" with the affair partner.

Treatment:

- Address emotional deprivation and family-of-origin patterns.
- Help infidel reintegrate emotional and rational selves.
- Explore if marriage can be redefined with more emotional intimacy.
- Prognosis varies; many do not divorce, but quality may remain low.

6 EXIT AFFAIRS

Characteristics:

- Affair used to emotionally or logistically exit the marriage.
- Infidel has often already mentally/emotionally left the relationship.
- May be brief but intense.

Recognition:

- Cheater may want to leave but can't communicate openly.
- Betrayed partner feels abandoned or blindsided.

Treatment:

- Support closure and respectful separation if reconciliation isn't viable.

- Address emotional avoidance and decision-making patterns.
- Use coaching to minimize trauma and promote growth post-separation.
- High divorce likelihood; goal is healthy closure.

7 SEXUAL ADDICTION AFFAIRS

Characteristics:

- Pattern of compulsive sexual behavior (porn, affairs, etc.).
- Often rooted in trauma, low self-worth, or past abuse.
- Affairs are symptoms of a larger addiction.

Recognition:

- Multiple or anonymous partners, secrecy, possible substance use.
- Cheater feels shame but struggles to stop.

Treatment:

- Requires specialized addiction therapy + couple support.
- Use 12-step programs (SLAA, SAA), trauma-informed care.
- Prognosis depends on addiction recovery and partner support.
- Couples therapy can aid, but individual healing is primary.

AFFAIR TYPE QUIZ

This quiz will help you do a quick analysis on the type of affair which occurred in your relationship. After deciding which affair type/s occurred, ensure you pay extra attention to the suggestions for recovery.

ACCIDENTAL AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Is this your (or your partner's) first affair?		
2	Do you (does your partner) feel guilty about the affair?		
3	Do you (does your partner) feel shame about the affair?		
4	Did the affair last less than 4 months?		
5	Did the affair happen only once?		
6	Do you and your partner usually have a happy relationship?		
7	Do you believe in monogamy?		
8	Do both of you want your marriage to continue?		
9	Was there emotional involvement with the affair partner?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably an **Accidental Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 8 and no to question 9.

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Is this your (or your partner's) first or second affair?		
2	Do you (does your partner) feel guilty about the affair?		
3	Have you been married less than 12 years?		
4	Did the affair last less than 4 months?		
5	Do you and your partner avoid talking about issues that might lead to disagreement or conflict?		
6	Do you and your partner usually try to avoid hurting each other's feelings?		
7	Do you believe that you are regarded by friends and acquaintances as the model couple?		
8	Do both of you want your marriage to continue?		
9	Are you (is your partner) having a hard time ending the affair?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably a **Conflict Avoidance Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 8 and no to question 9.

INTIMACY AVOIDANCE AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Have both of you had affairs in the last year or so?		
2	Did the affair(s) last less than 4 months?		
3	Do you get into a lot of fights with each other?		
4	Do you find that every disagreement turns into a battle?		
5	Are your fights the most emotionally intense moments in your relationship?		
6	Do both of you want your marriage to continue?		
7	Are you (is your partner) having a hard time ending the affair?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably an **Intimacy Avoidance** Affair if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 6 and no to question 7.

SEXUAL ADDICTION AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Are you addicted to alcohol, drugs, food or any other substance?		
2	Do you (or does your spouse) engage in other compulsive sexual behavior, such as porno, or cybersex?		
3	Do you (or does your spouse) engage in numerous one-night stands or brief affairs?		
4	Have you (or your spouse) had affairs throughout your relationship?		
5	Was either of your parents sexually addicted?		
6	Were you sexually abused as a child?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably a **Sexual Addiction Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 6.

SPLIT SELF AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Has your affair (or your spouse's affair) lasted more than 2 years?		
2	Do you and your spouse live separate lives?		
3	Have you (or your spouse) had fewer than 5 affairs?		
4	If the affair has ended, are you (or is your spouse) tempted to resume it?		
5	Do you believe that marriage and family are important?		
6	Has much of your marriage been devoted to parenting?		
7	Are you troubled by your inability to choose between your spouse and your affair partner?		
8	If you answered yes to #7, do you find yourself changing your mind about which one to choose?		
9	Do you typically put a lot of energy into making things work the way you think they should?		
10	Is your affair partner ten or more years younger than you are?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably a **Split Self Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 10.

EXIT AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Do you (does your spouse) want to end your marriage to be with the affair partner?		
2	Have you (or your spouse) already cut your emotional ties to the marriage?		
3	Have you (or your spouse) decided to end your marriage?		
4	If yes to #3, do you believe that you can move ahead with your plans to separate?		
5	Was the duration of your affair (or your spouse's) from 10 months to less than 2 years?		
6	Is your affair partner fifteen or more years younger than you are?		
7	Are endings hard for you?		
8	Do you have ambivalent feelings that make it difficult for you to act on your decision to end your marriage?		

Your affair or your partner's affair is probably an **Exit Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 7 and no to question 8.

ENTITLEMENT AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Are you focused on achievement and success?		
2	Do you compartmentalize the different aspects of your life?		
3	Do you take risks, believing that somehow it will all work out – it always has in the past?		
4	Were you brought up to be the “star child” or to fulfill a parent’s unfulfilled dreams?		
5	Do you sometimes lie to avoid unpleasant outcomes?		
6	Are you consciously aware of your emotions?		
7	When you want something, do you expect to get it?		
8	Do you actively participate with your spouse and your children?		

Your affair or your partner’s affair is probably a **Entitlement Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 7 and no to question 8.

PHILANDERER AFFAIR

	STATEMENT	YES	NO
1	Have you always had affairs or cheating on your partner?		
2	Did the affair(s) last less than 4 months?		
3	Have you lost count of the number of affairs you have had?		
4	Do you believe monogamy is a myth?		
5	Are you highly competitive?		
6	Have you “seduced” ex-partners?		
7	Would you like to stay married?		
8	8Do you believe Men & Woman’s role are equal?		
9	Do you want to stop having affairs?		

Your affair or your partner’s affair is probably an **Philanderer Affair** if you answer yes to most of the questions from 1 to 7 and no to question 8 to 9.