

Happily Ever After

FOR COUPLES PREPARING TO MARRY

PROGRAM MATERIALS



CARING COUPLES, HAPPY LIVES

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INTRODUCTION

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HEA Book Introduction 0530201*

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Premarital counseling is a powerful, life-changing activity. It can help you and your partner create a strong, happy marriage that brings happiness, health, wealth and well-being not only to the two of you, but to your children, their children, and generations after them.

To orient you to the Happily Ever After (HEA) course and workbook, please take a moment to read through this Introduction, which will

- Give you an overview of the course
- Explain the RELATE online relationship inventory
- Orient you to this workbook
- Help you with motivation and planning
- Give you a place to record your initial goals for the course

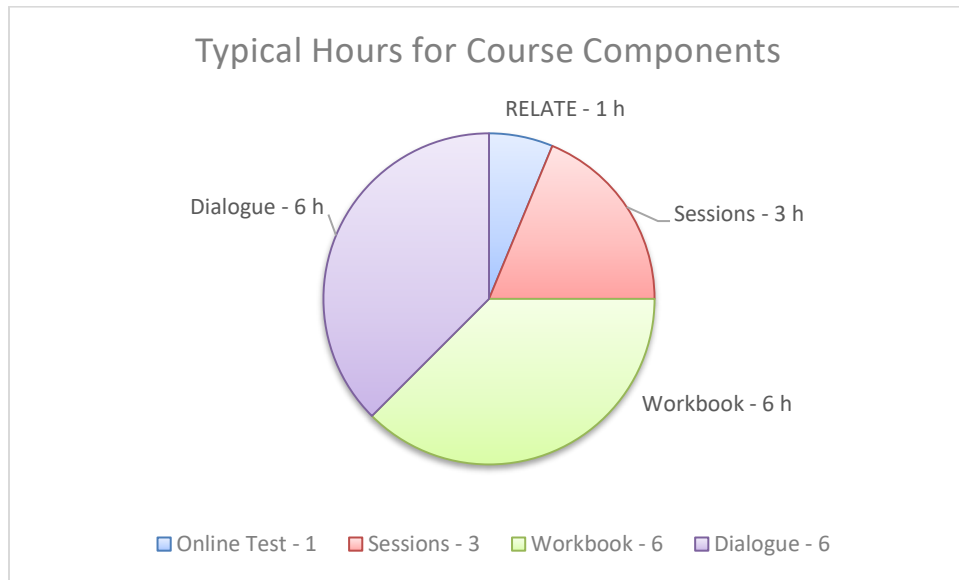
Course Overview

This course is organized into content areas that you can adapt to your needs and interests. It's not necessary to work on every content area. You can take extra time on the content you think is relevant for your situation. You can skip content areas that you don't think you need. For example, if you and your partner have discussed finances to your satisfaction, there is no need to spend time on it in this course.

You also can choose which content areas to work on at home and which to work on in your sessions. For example, you might choose to work on the Fun and Pleasure content at home, and use your sessions for content that is more of a challenge for you. Once you've looked through the content areas, discuss with your counselor which areas you believe you'd like to emphasize. Your counselor also will give you recommendations based on your RELATE results, but you and your partner have the final say on the content that's right for you.

To keep the course streamlined and cost-effective, it is designed so that you and your partner do most of it at home. Your counselor is available during your sessions as a facilitator, coach, and teacher. The hours that most people spend on the course components are shown below, but since you customize the course, your actual hours may look different.

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Online Test (One Hour)

We use the RELATE, an online relationship inventory, to give you a bird's-eye view of your strengths and challenges as individuals and as a couple. The RELATE is a precise and research-based assessment with a decades-long history of providing highly accurate feedback on relationships.

Most couples take the RELATE before the first HEA session. Taking it early in the program leaves you three sessions to discuss the relevant portions of your results. However, if it's not possible to take it between the first and second session, you'll still be able to address your results in the remaining sessions.

Please be sure to print out and read your RELATE report before your session so you can flag any areas to discuss with your counselor.

Sessions with Your Counselor (Three Hours)

We suggest a minimum of four, 45-minute sessions (for a total of three clock hours) with your counselor. These can be done either in our offices or, at your counselor's discretion, over the internet. Since this course is customizable, you can choose how often to attend sessions. Some couples like to do all four sessions in a month; others prefer to spread them out over time. Just let your counselor know what you think is best for you.

Workbook (Six Hours)

The HEA workbook contains a wealth of information we think is the best available given the current state of relationship research and theory. We have included much more information than we think you can cover in a four-session course and expect you to address part of the content during your course and

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part of the content at your leisure over time. Some of the content is designed to be used as a reference over the course of your marriage to address possible challenges in the future.

We have included exercises to give you a framework for learning and practicing good relationship skills. Worksheets, such as financial history and budget grids, give you ways to organize important information for discussion and planning.

The workbook also contains a number of questionnaires that we have adapted from among the vast literature on relationship enhancement. These are useful in augmenting the data in your RELATE report, allowing you to go deeper into your specific beliefs, values, expectations, and needs in a given area.

Couples Dialogue at Home (Six Hours)

We think the best place for you and your partner to learn about each other is in the privacy of your own home. So, throughout the workbook and at your counselor's suggestion, we will ask you to use the communication technique we'll teach you to discuss content that we think is relevant to your situation.

We will teach you good communication skills at the beginning of the course so you will find your conversations rewarding and productive.

Additional Sessions

If at the end of the course you believe you'd benefit from additional HEA sessions, we are happy to make more available to you.

Content Areas of the Course

Everything that touches your life touches your relationship. Therefore, the more comprehensive you are in covering important content areas before marriage, the better the chances you won't have unpleasant surprises down the road.

Keep in mind that you bring your own values, opinions, and history into a relationship, and they might not always match your partner's. In addition, many people go into marriage believing it will fulfill their social, financial, sexual and emotional needs — and that's not always the case. By discussing differences and expectations before marriage, you and your partner can better understand and support each other during marriage.



Food for Thought: To succeed in this course, and in your marriage, you must be completely, gut-wrenchingly honest. If you misrepresent yourself or avoid difficult issues now, it could work against you for a long time to come. Now is the time to come clean with yourself and your partner so when you walk down the aisle, you aren't holding anything back!

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Topics to Consider

We have included the topical areas that are known through research to contribute to marital longevity and satisfaction. Remember, however, that you can add content areas if you believe they are needed in your situation.

The workbook includes sections on the following content areas. Take a moment to reflect on which areas you want to be sure to address.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Communication | ☐ Finances |
| ☐ Conflict & Problem-Solving | ☐ Affection and sex |
| ☐ Personality Type | ☐ Children and parenting |
| ☐ Past Family and Relationships | ☐ Friends and Family |
| ☐ Shared Goals and Values | ☐ Fun and Recreation |
| ☐ Roles and Responsibilities | ☐ Religion and Spirituality |

You need to know what to expect after the wedding day, and to decide if you really want to spend the rest of your life with this person the way they are now. Chances are they (and you) won't change altogether that much, so now is the time to get your questions answered and make your needs known.

We hope you find this course useful, informative, and enjoyable!

Getting Started

Steven Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, recommends that we "begin with the end in mind." Unless we know our desired destination, we can't know when we've reached it.

Goals for the Course

Take a moment to think about your goals. What would you like to accomplish by the end of this course?

Perhaps you want to know more about yourself, your partner, or your relationship.

For example, you might want to discuss your or your partner's relationship, health, financial, or family history. You might be wondering if the two of you have given enough time to discussing these topics or found that one or both of you has avoided them.

Or, you might want to improve your relationship skills.

For example, the first year of marriage is a time when many areas of life are in flux as you adapt to each other and to the changes that marriage brings. Now is a good time to develop good relationship habits – or let go of bad ones – in the areas of communication, problem-solving, or physical and emotional intimacy.

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Or, you might want to be sure that you and your partner are heading in the same direction in life.

For example, you might want to discuss your and your partner's expectations in the areas of child-rearing, money, or sex. Or, you might want to create a mutual vision for your future. Or, you might want to discuss your own life dreams and ask for your partner's support as you pursue them.

Check off each of the goals below that applies to you.

- ☐ I want to learn and use good communication, conflict, and problem-solving skills.
- ☐ I want to understand how our life histories—family, friends, and past relationships—will influence our marriage.
- ☐ I want to identify our key personality differences and learn how to work with them.
- ☐ I want to compare our expectations in areas of life such as finances, sex, romance, and parenting.
- ☐ I want to form a common vision based on our values and priorities as individuals and as a couple.

Sometimes, people hope that premarital counseling will help them resolve a specific question or concern that, if left unresolved, could interfere with getting married.

The question or concern can be about yourself, or your partner.

For example, you might be wondering if you're ready to get married to your partner or to anyone at all. Or you might be wondering if your partner is ready to marry you. You might worry about your partner's contact with an ex-lover or ex-spouse, especially if there are children from that past relationship. You might have concerns about your partner's style of handling conflict, either blowing up or shutting down.

Take a moment to write down any questions or concerns that you would like to work on in this course.

- ☐ I have other, specific goals (list here):

1.

2.

3.

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Finding Time

As with anything else, the more you put into this course, the more you'll get out of it. We realize, however, that you probably live a pretty full life. Where are the two of you going to find the time and energy to read, reflect, and dialogue? Now is a good time to identify times when you can meet with your partner and then commit to doing so.



Exercise: Take a few minutes to discuss with your partner how you rearrange your usual routines to make time for this course. Set up a few appointments with each other for dialogue and reflection in the next few weeks. We suggest a minimum of two hours per week, either all at once or broken down into hour-long segments.

Agreement

We agree to meet at these days and times while we are in this course:

(when) _____ (e.g., Sunday nights @ 8 pm)

(on) _____ (dates) (e.g., June 1, 8, 15, and 22)

(for) _____ (amount of time) (e.g., 1 hour).

Refer back to your goals and agreement from time to time as you move through the course to make sure you're hitting your targets and keep you motivated if you get too tired, too busy, or too stressed to keep up with the work.



Sources

The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People. Steven Covey

The 7 Stages of Marriage. Sari Harrar and Rita DeMaria, Ph.D.

The 10 Conversations You Must Have before You Get Married. Guy Grenier, Ph.D.

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COMMUNICATION

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HEA COMMUNICATION 05302017

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We focus on communication right away because it is the single most important factor in a happy, stable relationship. We teach a communication technique to use during the rest of this course, since you'll discuss sensitive topics with your partner over the next few weeks and it's important that you handle yourself well.

This chapter

- Introduces you to **bids for connection**, which link communication skills to relationship longevity.
- Describes **attachment styles** and how they can fuel a negative cycle
- Shows you how to control the level of **conversational intimacy** in your relationship.
- Explores your attitudes toward **emotional intimacy** and how they affect your relationship.
- Introduces you to **mirroring and behavior change requests** for handling sensitive topics.
- Gives emotion-specific **communication tips** to use with feelings that are difficult for you.

Bids for Connection

A bid for connection is any behavior in which one person reaches out for another. Bids, together with bid responses, are the major driver of the success or failure in romantic relationships.

A bid can be as simple as saying "Hey!" or as complex as writing "I Love You" in big letters across the sky. The topic can be about anything. For example

- "Can you believe it's going to rain again?"
- "I heard from the contractor. He said we're looking at another 5 grand for the roof."
- "Just look at how much sugar is in this can of soup!"

The first way that bids affect couples is by frequency. In very happy couples, including those married for a long time, partners have been observed to exchange more than 100 bids in the course of a ten minute conversation. Partners in distressed relationships exchange maybe 20 to 30 bids per hour. In very unhappy couples, partners exchange fewer than 5 bids per hour, at which point the relationship is at imminent risk of ending.

The second way that bids affect couples is by the type of response. There are three main responses to bids for connection, turning away, turning against, and turning toward.

- In a "turning away" response, the partner responds with disinterest. For example

Bid: "What a day! It was a zoo at the office!"

Response: [without looking up from computer] "What did you bring for dinner?"

Chronic "turning away" responses create emotional distance in relationships and eventually lead to divorce when the bidding partner feels hopeless about getting emotional needs met. For example, husbands in marriages headed for divorce were observed ignoring their wives' bids 82% of the time, while husbands in stable marriages ignored them 19% of the time.

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- In a "turning against" response, the partner responds with hostility. For example

Bid: "What a day! It was a zoo at the office!"

Response: "Don't come to me for sympathy. I told you not to take that job!"

Chronic "turning against" responses give rise to a fight or flight response, leaving the bidder disgusted and deciding whether to escalate the conflict or leave the relationship. In fact, chronic "turning against" responses end relationships faster than "turning away" responses.

- In a "turning-toward" response, the partner responds with humor, concern, interest, or affection. For example

Bid: "What a day! It was a zoo at the office!"

Response: "You look exhausted. What happened?"

"Turning toward" responses build affection, goodwill, and trust, make us feel loved, add meaning to our sex lives, and improve our physical and psychological health. They build a surplus positive feeling that protects the relationship during times of conflict.



Exercise:

1. For a period of one hour, without telling your partner, observe how you two handle bids and responses. Record the following.
 - How many times in the hour did you each make bids?
 - I made _____ bids.
 - My partner made _____ bids.
 - When you made a bid, how often did your partner respond with each of the 3 response types?
 - My partner "turned away" _____ times.
 - My partner "turned against" _____ times.
 - My partner "turned toward" _____ times.
 - Was there anything about the way you made your bid that could have affected how your partner responded?
 - When your partner made a bid, how often did you respond with each of the 3 response types?
 - I "turned away" _____ times.
 - I "turned against" _____ times.
 - I "turned toward" _____ times.
 - Was there anything about the way your partner made the bid that could have affected how you responded?
2. Share your observations with your partner. How much are your observations similar or difference from your partner's?

Intimacy and Attachment

Bids and bid responses are powerful solely because they provide opportunities for building and maintaining intimacy. Our desire for intimacy has biological roots and, for most of us, is consistent from birth until death.

While there are many definitions for intimacy, some researchers define it as a special set of interactions in which we disclose something important about ourselves and the other person responds in a way that makes us feel validated, understood, and cared for.

Intimacy usually involves verbal self-disclosure. But intimate interactions can also involve non-verbal forms of self-expression such as touching, hugging, kissing, and sexual behavior.

People generally think that intimacy is comprised of

- Willingness to disclose one's true thoughts, feelings, wishes, and fears
- Willingness to rely on a partner for care and emotional support
- Willingness to engage in affectionate and sexual touch

Our willingness to self-disclose, rely on our partner, and engage in physical intimacy is largely dependent on our attachment style. Attachment is the term applied to the way we handle ourselves in a relationship, especially when we are feeling threatened.

People who have what is called a “secure attachment style” are highly capable of sustained, intimate relationships. About 60 percent of adults have a secure attachment style.

Securely attached adults tend to agree with the following statements.

- It is relatively easy for me to become emotionally close to others.
- I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me.
- I don't worry about being alone or others not accepting me.

People with a secure attachment style are able to strike a balance between being intimate and being independent. In other words, they are able to be emotionally close, and if on occasion their partner is focused on things outside the relationship, creating distance, or wants something from within the relationship, creating closeness, they can adapt easily. Therefore, these people are comfortable functioning both independently and in harmony.

Roots of Attachment

We develop our attachment style when we are very young through repeated interactions with our parents and other caregivers. If we experienced our caregivers as being helpful, supportive, and responsive to our calls for support and protection, we conclude that it is safe and good to be close to others since they can be relied on to be there when we need them.

Because many of us are raised in families where our parents or other caregivers couldn't consistently be there for us when and how we needed them, however, we may conclude it's risky to get close to others. In this case, we develop a preference for one of two “insecure attachment styles,” either preoccupied or dismissive.

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These attachment styles kick into high gear when we feel anxious. In general, it's normal to try to alleviate stress or anxiety by looking for comfort from our partner. When we have an insecure attachment style, however, we look for that comfort in ways that are self-defeating, or we avoid seeking or receiving comfort. Either reaction can jumpstart a cycle of negative, unproductive interactions, called the negative cycle.

Preoccupied Attachment

People with the preoccupied attachment style need a lot of closeness to feel serene. They feel empty and lost when not in a romantic relationship. Even when in one, they live with the nagging feeling that they will be abandoned. So they keep an eye on their partner's behavior, looking for signs that he or she will pull away, not be there when needed, or leave.

The frequent pull for reassurance often makes the partner of a "preoccupied" feel smothered. The partner then pulls away, which reinforces the original fear of abandonment. For example, if the partner starts socializing more with friends, the person with a preoccupied attachment style may think, "See? She doesn't really love me. This relationship is on its way out. I knew this would happen."

Dismissive Attachment

People with a "dismissive attachment style" are afraid of getting too close. They can feel claustrophobic in a long-term, committed relationship, so they put up walls to prevent being emotionally overwhelmed. They sometimes view love as an obligation or duty, and think their partner appears "needy" and an emotional drain.

Dismissive partners stay on the lookout for signs of controlling or smothering behavior. If they notice their partner coming closer, they get anxious and react by shutting down or pulling away. For example, if their partner is distressed and threatens to leave, they may respond by thinking, "I don't care! He's way too needy anyway. This relationship is exhausting."

The Negative Cycle

Together, people with preoccupied and dismissive styles often engage in a painful interaction pattern often called the negative cycle. The cycle can be triggered by any issue, big or small, and by either partner.

In one scenario, the preoccupied partner feels lonely in the relationship, gets anxious, and attempts to feel better by pursuing the partner. The pursuing strategies may start off soft and inviting, but become harsh and critical over time if they don't meet with the desired response.

The dismissive partner then feels the pull for connection, gets anxious, and attempts to feel better by creating distance. Distancing strategies can take the form of extra hours at work, outside relationships, alcohol or drugs, or simply shutting down.

As their efforts to regulate the distance between them fail, their reactions to each other fuel an ugly escalation, with each working harder to achieve their end. The arguments become stormier and more intense but nothing is accomplished. Once the partners are worn out from the intensity, they make back down and things return to normal.

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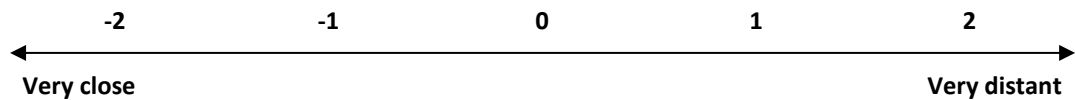
If this sounds painfully familiar, rest assured you can change it. This section will teach you the building blocks of emotional intimacy and help you identify the reasons it may be hard for you to be close. It will give you healthy strategies to use with your partner when you feel alone and abandoned, on the one hand, or pursued and smothered, on the other.

Take a moment to assess the current level of closeness in your relationship.

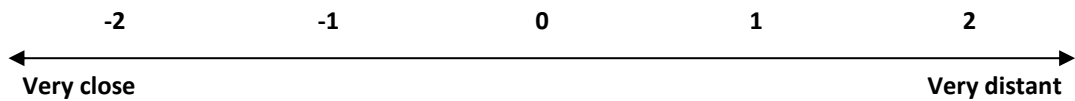


Exercise: Think about the level of closeness in your relationship today.

1. In general, how close do you feel to your partner?



2. In general, how close do you think your partner feels to you?



3. How do you like the level of closeness between you?

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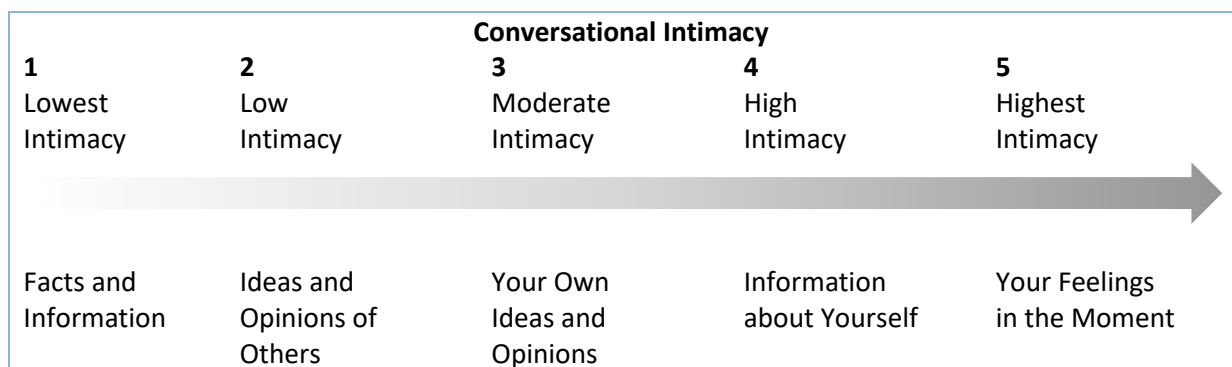
Conversational Intimacy

Remember that intimacy includes a willingness to disclose one's true thoughts, feelings, wishes, and fears.

It's no surprise, then, that conversation creates the framework within which all other types of intimacy grow. If you're like most couples, for example, your emotional connection deepened in direct proportion to the intimacy of your conversations.

It's a good idea to understand how to regulate conversational intimacy so that you can use it to adjust the level of emotional intimacy in your relationship.

The level of intimacy in a conversation is determined by two factors: how much you disclose about yourself and how much immediacy, or "here and now," you focus on.



For example, here's how a conversation about a trip to the beach would look at each level of conversational intimacy.

Level 1. Lowest intimacy conversations tend to center on facts, explanations, or information. These conversations can be interesting and enjoyable, but won't help you feel close to each other. For example

Sam tells Jena about an article he read about surfing conditions at different beaches in their vicinity.

Level 2. Low intimacy conversations include the ideas and opinions of others – friends, family, celebrities, etc. This is a little more personal, but since it's still about other people, and not you, it doesn't promote closeness. For example

Sam tells Jena about a friend from work, who chipped in with two other couples to rent a large beach-front house and had a great time.

Level 3. Moderate intimacy conversations include your own ideas or opinions, but don't reveal how they relate to you personally. For example

Sam tells Jena about the attributes he thinks would be nice in a beach house.

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Level 4. High intimacy conversations include personal experiences and the emotions that go with them. For example

Sam tells Jena about the best beach vacation and how he loved the times he spent with his father just fishing and talking about life.

Level 5. Highest intimacy conversations include your immediate thoughts, emotions, sensations, desires, and fantasies. They reveal what is going on inside of you here and now. For example

Sam tells Jena he is excited about going to the beach with her because he likes her sense of fun and adventure. He says he feels closer to her when they plan things to do together.

It's normal in conversations to switch gears from lowest to highest and back as you discuss various aspects of a topic. If you tend to stay near the lowest level of intimacy, however, you are likely giving in to fear about getting close. In the next session you will be able to explore the reasons for that.

	Exercise: Take turns discussing a topic at each of the 5 levels of intimacy. Pick a topic that is relevant to your relationship. (An example of a topic, potentially buying a new home, is included below in parentheses.) ▪ Lowest intimacy level. (<i>Merits of buying vs. renting; cost of living in different areas, changes in property values, etc.</i>) ▪ Low intimacy level. (<i>Your cousin is rehabbing a townhouse; someone at work found a great realtor; the homes the upstairs neighbors are finding in their search, etc.</i>) ▪ Moderate intimacy level. (<i>What constitutes a good investment, your opinion about split level vs. colonial houses, etc.</i>) ▪ High intimacy level. (<i>Your ideal home and why, what excites or worries you about buying and living in a new home with your partner, etc.</i>) ▪ Highest intimacy level. (<i>What it feels like to be talking about the topic, how your partner's wishes are affecting you right now, etc.</i>)
	Take turns discussing ▪ At which levels was the conversation most interesting? Least interesting? ▪ At which levels were you most comfortable? Least comfortable? ▪ What did you learn about yourself from this section?

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Making Sense of Emotions

Consciously managing the intimacy in your relationship also depends on your ability to disclose your true feelings, wishes, and fears. This is impossible unless you can label and verbalize your emotions.

Whether or not we realize it, we each have a philosophy about emotions. Some people think certain feelings, such as love, are good, while other feelings, such as anger, are bad. Other people think that emotions only cause problems and it is better to use logic and reasoning to get along in the world.



Exercise: Take a moment to check in with yourself on your attitudes about emotion.

How comfortable are you expressing these emotions?

	Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Neutral	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
Fear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sadness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hurt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anger	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Joy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pride	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Love	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Desire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enjoyment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How comfortable do you think your partner is expressing these emotions?

	Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Neutral	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
Fear	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sadness	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hurt	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Anger	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Joy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Pride	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Love	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Desire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enjoyment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Most people learn about handling emotions in childhood. As kids, we watched how our family members handled emotions and how others reacted. We absorbed messages about our family's unique culture and philosophy of emotional expression.

In some families, for example, people were shamed or punished if they showed anger. Everyone was expected to "bite the bullet" or "turn the other cheek." Alternatively, someone in the family had a temper and blew up every so often, reinforcing beliefs such as "anger is destructive."

In other families, people were able to express anger appropriately, but sadness was off limits. People were ridiculed or ignored if they showed sadness. Everyone was expected to "buck up" or "look on the bright side." Perhaps people would enforce false cheerfulness or frenetic activity until someone became so depressed, ill, or exhausted they couldn't function. Alternatively, someone in the family had a serious

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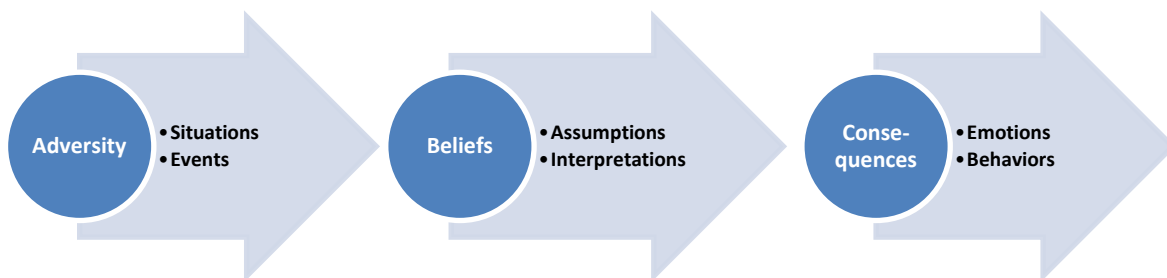
depression, reinforcing beliefs such as “sadness is bad for you.” Regardless of which emotions were allowed and not allowed, the message was that some feelings are good and can be expressed, and other feelings are dangerous, bad, or destructive, and should be avoided.

Sequencing

In fact, emotions are neither good nor bad. They serve important function by giving us critical information about the conditions around us and what is needed for us to survive or thrive. They provide the energy with which to take needed action. In an evolutionary sense, if we could not feel emotions, our species would not have survived. We would not have been able to flee from danger, which requires feeling fear, protect our kin from invaders, which requires feeling anger, or procreate, which requires feeling desire.

To become skillful with emotions, we need to know how they are generated. Emotions never occur in isolation. They follow a predictable sequence that can be mapped using the A-B-C method.

- A. A is for adversity. We experience a triggering situation or event.
- B. B is for beliefs. We filter the situation or event through our assumptions, expectations, and interpretations.
- C. C is for consequences. Based on our beliefs about the adversity, we experience emotions and respond with behaviors.



It's easier to see how A-B-C plays out in an example. Suppose that one night, Betty came home from work a few hours late. She went straight upstairs without saying hello to George, her fiancé. George had been waiting for her to eat because they had plans to have dinner together. Using the A-B-C model, George's experience would look like this.

- A. George experiences the **adversity** as
 - i. Betty was late and didn't let him know.
 - ii. George has been waiting to eat dinner.
 - iii. Betty went upstairs without the usual hello kiss.
- B. George's **beliefs** about the situation are
 - i. "She should have called. She is so thoughtless.
 - ii. "She knew I was waiting to eat. She is so selfish."
 - iii. "She must be upset with me."

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C. The **consequences**, or George's emotions and behaviors, are

i. Emotions

- Anger
- Anxiety

ii. Behaviors

- Going upstairs and blasting Betty.
- Going out to eat without telling Betty.
- Zoning out in front of the TV with a bag of chips and a few beers.

In the next chapter, which is about conflict resolution, you will learn how knowing the A-B-C formula can help you trace your disturbing emotions and ineffective behaviors back to your beliefs, which created them. For now, the focus is on identifying your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors so that you can communicate them to your partner.



Exercise: Use the A-B-C method to identify a recent problem in your relationship, the interpretations you made about the situation, and the consequences you experienced as a result. If you need help labelling your emotions, refer to the Emotions Tree in this chapter.

A. Adversity (Situation, Event):

B. Beliefs (Expectations, Assumptions, Interpretations)

C. Consequences (Emotions, Behaviors)

What did you learn about yourself from this exercise?

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The Emotions Tree

The Emotions Tree gives a summary of the emotions we feel. Basic emotions, in the left column, are those we are able to feel as soon as we are born. Basic emotions can be broken down into secondary and tertiary subtypes, which increase in specificity in this table from left to right.

You can refer to this table when you want to identify all the emotions you may feel at a given moment.

Basic Emotion	Subtypes	Subtypes
Love	Affection	Adoration, fondness, liking, attraction, caring tenderness, compassion, sentimentality
	Lust	Arousal, desire, passion, infatuation
	Longing	Yearning, pining
Joy	Cheerfulness	Amusement, bliss, gaiety, glee, jolliness, joviality, delight, enjoyment, gladness, happiness, jubilation, elation, satisfaction, ecstasy, euphoria
	Zest	Enthusiasm, zeal, excitement, thrill, exhilaration
	Contentment	Pleasure, satiation, pride, relief
	Optimism	Eagerness, hope, anticipation
	Surprise	Astonishment, amazement
Anger	Irritation	Aggravation, agitation, annoyance, bother, grouchiness, grumpiness, frustration, exasperation, torment
	Rage	Outrage, fury, wrath, hostility, hate, bitterness, loathing, scorn, spite, vengefulness, resentment
	Disgust	Dislike, revulsion, contempt, aversion, distaste, repugnance, repulsion
	Envy	Jealousy, covetousness
Sadness	Melancholy	Anguish, depression, desolation, dejection, despondent, despair, forlorn, hopelessness, gloom, grief, glumness, unhappiness, grief, sorrow, woe, misery
	Disappointment	Chagrin, dismay, dissatisfaction, displeasure, discontent, disillusionment, dejection, disenchantment, despondent
	Shame	Contrition, embarrassment, guilt, regret, remorse, self-reproach
	Neglect	Abandonment, defeat, dejection, desolation, embarrassment, forlornness, homesickness, humiliation, insecurity, insult, loneliness, rejection
	Sympathy	Commiseration, compassion, empathy, pity
Fear	Horror	Alarm, dread, fright, horror, hysteria, mortification, panic, terror
	Nervousness	Agitation, anxiety, apprehension, concern, dread, distress, tenseness, uneasiness, worry

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Mirroring

Now that you can use the A-B-C method to reflect on how your beliefs affect your feelings and reactions, you can use the information to discuss issues productively with your partner.

While there are many excellent communication techniques used in marriage, the workplace, and in the schools, we use a technique known as Mirroring.

When you're the speaker in this technique, you respectfully and clearly describe the problematic situation, articulate your beliefs, and share the feelings and behaviors that arise in you as a result. As the speaker, you have the benefit of your partner's full attention and can get immediate feedback on how well he or she is taking in your message.

As the listener, you listen carefully while your partner goes deeper into the issue, check out how well you understand your partner's message, and stretch your point of view to empathize and validate your partner's position.

Being the Speaker

The process of being the speaker in mirroring is described below and in summary sheets on the next pages. Remember these important principles about being the speaker.

1. Use sound bites.

You may be so grateful for being able to speak without being interrupted that you go on and on. By the time you are done, your partner has forgotten most what you said. Keep in mind that your listener can hold only so much information at one time. So break your message into small pieces, perhaps one to three sentences, and pausing frequently to let your partner take in your message and reflect it back to you, piece by piece.

2. Use A-B-C to paint a complete picture of the situation.

It's important to articulate each of the three parts of your experience. This is what it means to be transparent. You connect the outside, observable parts of the problem with the internal, subjective parts that are visible only to you.

- A. Adversity. You share the external, observable situations or events that constitute the problem. Be sure to include a specific incident in which the adversity occurred. If that's not possible, describe a prototypical or potential incident, instead. For example,

"I came home from work last night and found the kitchen a complete mess. Dirty dishes were all over the counters, there was food sitting in pots on the stove, and the trash was overflowing. Then I went upstairs and saw that you were getting ready for bed."

- B. Beliefs. You share your applicable expectations, assumptions, conclusions, and interpretations. Sharing your beliefs gives your partner a context in which to understand your reactions. For example

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"I thought we had an agreement about keeping the kitchen clean. Remember when we talked about it a few weeks ago? We said we'd each clean up when we use the kitchen unless we are cooking together. I assumed we were on the same page."

- C. Consequences. You label and list the specific emotions that you feel. You can refer to the Emotions Tree for help identifying the specific emotion. You also describe your actual or potential behavioral responses.

"It made me feel frustrated and angry, and my feelings were hurt. I wanted to talk about it then and there, but I was too upset and didn't want to start an argument. So I went downstairs to watch TV."

3. Talk about yourself, not your partner.

It's easy to focus on your partner. It's difficult to focus on yourself, especially when you feel angry, hurt, sad, or anxious.

One reason this technique is so powerful is that it gives your partner gets a look at what it's like for you to live with the problem and so promotes empathy and a willingness to cooperate.

Another reason is that this technique reduces defensiveness. Remember that you are an expert on yourself and your observations, perceptions, feelings, and needs. No one can legitimately say you are wrong for feeling what you feel or wanting what you want.

You are not an expert, however, on your partner. You are on shaky ground when you talk about his or her observations, perceptions, feelings, and needs.

Being the Listener

There are a few important principles to remember about being the listener.

1. Clear a space.

Your first job is to communicate openness, acceptance, and interest in what your partner is saying. This becomes especially important when you have strong feelings about the issue being discussed. Remember that accepting your partner's position is not the same as agreeing with it.

As you listen, you may notice some of your habitual reactions coming up. Take a breath and remind yourself that your job is to listen, not to agree, and that you'll get a chance to say your piece.

2. Listen carefully.

Listen to each component, the A, the B, and the C, of your partner's message. Try to catch the sequence of your partner's narrative. Pay attention to your partner's tone and expression and what these say about his or her current feelings. Don't interrupt. Don't ask questions.

If you start to feel overwhelmed because your partner is saying too much at a time or you are getting upset, raise your hand and ask if you can mirror back what you've heard so far.

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3. Mirror.

Repeat back what you heard of your partner's message, staying as close to the data as you can. Try to follow the sequence of events in the narrative, mirroring the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative just the way your partner expressed them.

4. Check and invite.

Whenever you mirror back your partner's message, check out whether you got it right. Your partner is the final judge of whether you mirrored correctly. Keep trying until your partner says it's right. For example

"I heard you say you came home from work last night and the kitchen was a mess. There were dirty dishes and food out. The trash was full. It looked like I wasn't going to clean it all up because I was getting ready for bed. You were frustrated, angry, and hurt, because a few weeks ago I agreed to clean up after I use the kitchen."

"Did I get that right?"

When your partner confirms you got the message right, then invite your partner to continue. For example

"Is there more?"

5. Walk a mile.

The last two tasks are to empathize and to validate. Once your partner indicates he or she is finished with the narrative, take a moment to reflect on what you've heard. What would it be like if this had happened to you? Is it possible that you, or anyone else for that matter, could react to the problem the same way?

Say a few words of empathy and validation. Speak from your heart. For example

"You're right; I did agree to clean up the kitchen after I use it. It makes sense to me that you'd assume I'd follow through with my agreement. I can see how it would be frustrating and you'd feel hurt."



MIRRORING SUMMARY

Being the Speaker	Being the Listener
1. Use sound bites. ▪ Only 1–3 sentences at a time, then pause to let your partner mirror back. 2. Connect what's outside & observable to what's inside & invisible. ▪ Use A-B-C ▪ A = adversity (e.g., kitchen was dirty) ▪ B = beliefs (e.g., I assumed you'd clean up) ▪ C = consequences (e.g., frustrated, angry, hurt) 3. Talk about yourself, not your partner. ▪ You are always right about yourself. ▪ You are often wrong about your partner.	1. Clear a space. ▪ You don't have to agree with the message. 2. Listen carefully. ▪ Notice each specific A-B-C part of the message. ▪ Listen for specific emotion words. 3. Mirror back what you heard. ▪ "I HEARD YOU SAY THAT [____ .]" 4. Check and Invite. ▪ "Did I get that right?" ▪ "Is there more?" 5. Empathize and Validate. ▪ Think about what it would be like for you. Could a reasonable person see things this way? Why? ▪ In your own words, tell the story of how you understand your partner's situation.



Exercise: Choose a minor issue or problem and tell your partner about it using the mirroring process. Limit your speaking turn to 20 minutes. Then, listen to your partner speak about a minor issue or problem.

After you're finished, discuss the following with each other.

- What was the hardest part about being the speaker?
- What was the hardest part about being the listener?
- How would it affect your relationship if, when a problem came up, you talked about it using this method?

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Behavior Change Requests

Once you and your partner have explored an issue fully and your respective positions have been understood and validated, you are ready to begin the problem-solving process.

Again, there are many excellent approaches available to couples. The process we teach, **Behavior Change Requests**, gives you a way to articulate exactly the changes you believe will solve the problem from your point of view. You can specify what you would like from your partner and ask your partner to make a concrete response.

The process is based on the idea that, in general, it is normal and healthy to ask for changes from your partner. Because you know your partner well, you are in a unique position to see the ways your partner can grow as an individual. Often the things that bother you the most about your partner's behavior are the things that he or she would benefit most from changing.

Even so, the decision to grow and change belongs to your partner. All you can do is ask respectfully and accept his or her answer.

If, however, your partner decides not to change, you can continue to dialogue about the problem to explore the reasons underneath your partner's position. With continued dialogue, your and your partner's viewpoints on the problem might shift enough to make a solution easier to reach.

Making a Behavior Change Request

When you make a behavior change request, you give your partner a clear picture of what you wish he or she would do differently. The request should be phrased in a way that conveys respect for your partner's option of saying no. For example,

"It would help me out if you would be sure to clean up the kitchen if you mess it up. If that's not possible for some reason, it would be helpful if you could let me know when you think you'll get to it without my having to ask."

It's important to keep a few key points in mind when you are making a behavior change request.

1. **Avoid selfish demands.** The difference between a selfish demand and a behavior change request is that in the former, you are thinking only of yourself. In the latter, you are looking for a good outcome for yourself, your partner, and your relationship
2. **Be specific.** Make your request as specific as possible to give your partner a clear understanding of what you want. Your partner cannot honestly agree to a vague request. And even if he or she agrees, without a clear definition, there is little way to tell if the request was fulfilled.
3. **Explain how it will help.** Connect the dots for your partner on why the change will be helpful to you. How will it affect your feelings, hopes, wishes, dreams, fears, etc.?
4. **Prepare for a "No."** Your partner is not required to comply with your request. You have to prepare to accept this possibility with grace. The next chapter will give you strategies for handling the situation when the two of you cannot come to an acceptable solution.

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Responding to a Behavior Change Request

When your partner asks you to change something, consider it an opportunity to think about whether making the change would be in your own best interest. In other words, ask yourself

“Would it make me a happier, healthier, wealthier, or otherwise better person if I changed this?”

“Would it be good for my relationship if I changed this?”

For example, in the example above, you would take a moment and consider whether cleaning up the kitchen after using it would be of benefit to you in some way. Perhaps you wouldn’t have to keep worrying about when you’ll get to it or how your partner will react when he or she sees it a mess. Perhaps you would get a lift from seeing the kitchen looking clean.

In the event you concluded it wouldn’t make a difference to you whether you, you would consider whether you wanted to do it anyway, as a gift, with no strings attached.

Sometimes your partner might ask you to change something that you feel a lot of resistance to changing. Perhaps your partner wants you to make a large purchase that you don’t think is wise. Or perhaps you think that the change being requested would be too difficult or take too much energy.

Most couples have problems for which they struggle to find solutions. The next chapter will give you strategies for handling such gridlocked issues. For now, your task is to give your partner a clear and firm response from among the following options.

1. “Yes, I will do this.”

In this case, you agree to start fulfilling the request immediately, cheerfully, and with no strings attached.

2. “I will do some parts, but not others.”

In this case, you tell your partner which parts of the request you will start fulfilling immediately, and which parts you want more time to consider. You also agree to keep exploring and discussing the reasons you are not willing to change.

3. “No, I won’t do this.”

In this case, you tell your partner that you are not going to fulfill the request. You also agree to keep exploring and discussing the reasons you are not willing to change.



BEHAVIOR CHANGE REQUEST SUMMARY

Being the Requestor	Being the Responder
1. Be specific. Describe exactly what you would like your partner to do differently. 2. Avoid selfish demands. Consider the impact on your partner and your relationship. 3. Respect your partner's ability to decide. For example, ▪ "It would help me out <u>if</u> you could....." 4. Accept your partner's decision. You don't have to like it but it's in your best interest to respect it and continue exploring the issue together.	1. Mirror the request to see if you got it right. 2. Consider the request. ▪ Would I be a better person if I did this? ▪ Would it be good for my relationship if I did this? 3. Pick one response below that best fits how you feel: ▪ "YES, I CAN DO THAT for you as a gift. ▪ "I CAN DO SOME PARTS, BUT NOT OTHERS" ○ State the parts you can do. ○ State the parts you can't do. ▪ "NO, THERE IS NO WAY I CAN DO THAT." 4. Commit or Explain. ▪ Commit to do what you agreed to do. ▪ If you said no to any part of the request, explain your reasons. 5. Agree to keep talking about any parts you said no to until you and your partner know the underlying reasons.



Exercise: Referring back to the issue or problem you discussed in the mirroring exercise, ask your partner for a behavioral change. Then, be the responder when your partner asks you for a behavior change.

After you're finished, discuss the following with each other.

- What was the hardest part about making the request?
- What was the hardest part of responding to your partner's request?
- How would it affect your relationship if, when you and your partner faced a problem, you used this method to create change?

Mirroring and behavior change requests take a lot of effort, especially at first. Compared to the effort involved in having repeated, unproductive conversations and tolerating the effects of chronic problems, however, mirroring and behavior change requests free up energy for better things.

Advanced Listening Techniques

This section provides a few additional tips and techniques to enhance your skills as a listener.

Advanced Listening Tip # 1 - Handling Difficult Emotions

Sometimes when you listen to your partner talk about a problem, he or she will experience an emotion that is a sore spot for you. At these times you may get flooded, forget the procedure, or have trouble remembering your partner's message long enough to reflect it back.

If this happens, slow down, take a deep breath, and ask your partner to break the message down into smaller segments so you have less to reflect back at one time.

Even if you don't get flooded, it will be easier to listen to some emotions than others. Here are strategies to help you work effectively.

- **Sadness.** Instead of trying to cheer up your partner or offer solutions, **look for the loss.** Key questions are

Is anything slipping away or being lost here?

What would you miss the most if this (problem) didn't change?

For example, "I hear you saying that you really miss the days when we used to get pizza after work. You get really lonely since I started this job because I don't come home until late."

- **Anger.** Instead of taking it personally, getting angry yourself, or minimizing your partner's feelings, **look for the threat.** Key questions are

How did this (person, situation, event) block or compromise what you wanted?

What is at risk that needs to be defended, protected, or restored?

For example, "I think you're saying you wanted to keep things simple. The caterer your mother chose is going to make this into a big production and your mother isn't hearing you."

- **Fear.** Instead of trying to reassure your partner or show him or her why the fear is unjustified, **look for the perceived danger.** Key questions are

What feels shaky or unsafe, either emotionally, physically, financially, or socially?

What's the worst that could happen with this?

What action is needed to restore a feeling of safety?

For example, "I hear you saying that if you don't go back and discuss this with your boss, everyone's going to think you're the one who screwed up. You worry it could eventually affect your review."

Advanced Listening Tip # 2 – Exploration

Top 10 Exploration Statements. When you want to help your partner exploration his or her feelings, try using one of these statements.

1. *Tell me the whole story.*
2. *I want to know everything about this.*
3. *Tell me about the worst part of this.*
4. *Tell me what you need right now.*
5. *Tell me what you think your choices are.*
6. *Help me understand your feelings a little better.*
7. *Help me understand this from your point of view.*
8. *Tell me what you're most concerned about.*
9. *Tell me more about how you are seeing this.*
10. *Tell me what you see as your choices here.*

Advanced Listening Tip # 3 – Expressing Empathy

Top 10 Empathy Statements. When you're not sure if you're being empathic enough, try using one of these statements.

1. *You're in a tough spot.*
2. *Oh, wow, that sounds awful.*
3. *You must feel so awful.*
4. *I totally agree with you.*
5. *No wonder you're upset.*
6. *I'd feel the same way in that situation.*
7. *Wow. That must have bothered you.*
8. *That sounds upsetting.*
9. *POOR BABY!*
10. *Wow! That must have been bad.*



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HAPPILY EVER AFTER

CONFLICT & PROBLEM-SOLVING

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Conflict is a lot like fire. It can be a force for good, providing warmth and light, or for bad, destroying homes and property. The key to conflict, as with fire, is handling it with skill and care.

Learning to handle conflict with skill is important because being married provides almost endless opportunities for conflict. Marriage is unique because it's a relationship in which we must

- Live in close quarters and share just about everything.
- Negotiate with our spouse before making decisions.
- Deal with our and our partner's moods, wounds, triggers, and unconscious behavior.
- Change to meet our partner's needs, even when changing is difficult or uncomfortable.

This chapter reviews current theories on marital conflict, most of which are based on valid research.

Specifically, in this chapter you can

- Prioritize **high-conflict areas** in your relationship.
- Avoid using the **four horsemen** and **harsh startup**, behaviors that destroy relationships.
- Understand why you and your partner can get stuck in a **negative cycle**.
- Learn how to take a **time out** and not let it turn into an **exit**.
- Learn the **disputation** method of reducing your unproductive responses in arguments.
- Identify the **goals, dreams, and wishes** that may be fueling chronic conflict.
- Use a research-based process for **solving problems** together.
- Create rituals of **repair & restoration** after arguments.
- Learn how master couples handle **perpetual problems**.

High-Conflict Areas in Your Relationship

You've probably heard the saying "There are two kinds of people in the world..." In some cases, this cliché may be true. Through genetics, environment, painful experiences, or life-long habit, we each have fundamental preferred styles of approaching life. While we can all grow into better people, and being responsive to our partner's requests for change is one way to do that, our fundamental personality styles are not likely to change substantially unless we put in a significant amount of effort.

Our fundamental differences may be partially responsible for Dr. Gottman's statistic that 69% of all problems in a good relationship are essentially unsolvable. Knowing if any of the seemingly unsolvable problems in your relationship stem from your fundamental differences can increase your tolerance for your partner's differences and get you to stop trying to change him or her.

Personality Type

There are many systems to help people understand their personality type and preferred way of doing things. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), for example, is a popular personality test with a high degree of accuracy. If you know your and your partner's type, you can access a lot of information online and in books about the unique strengths and challenges of a relationship between your personality types.

If you have not taken the Myers-Briggs, you can do so through many of the online websites that offer the test at nominal cost. (As of this writing, the MBTI was offered for \$49.95 at the site <https://www.mbtionline.com/TaketheMBTI>.)

Differences in Life Dimensions

The table on the next page presents the top five style differences that can feed a couple's perpetual problems. For each difference, the table lists some preferences, dreams, fears, and escalating statements typical of a person with that orientation.

- **Independence vs. togetherness.** As discussed in the section on intimacy, people have different attachment styles that determine closeness in relationships.
- **Present vs. future orientation.** Some people like to think ahead, while others like to live in the moment. How much do you like to plan?
- **Predictability vs. spontaneity.** Some people focus on stability, while others seek adventure. How much structure do you need to be comfortable?
- **Slow to get upset vs. quick to get upset.** Some people think it's normal to get upset sometimes, while others think it's a waste of energy. How long does it take for you to get upset?
- **Problem-solving first vs. understanding first.** Is it a waste of time to try to understand all the feelings associated with a problem before solving it?



Exercise: Look over the "different strokes" list and check off any that sound like you. Circle any that sound like your partner.

Discuss your answers with your partner using mirroring.

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Different Strokes for Different Folks	
INDEPENDENCE FIRST Preferences: ☐ Do tasks and activities mostly independently ☐ Assume responsibility for meeting own needs and completing own tasks ☐ Speak up when I need something Dreams: ☐ Feeling free to pursue own dreams ☐ Not being responsible for partner's happiness Fear of accepting influence: ☐ I'll spend my whole life meeting my partner's needs, and I'll be neglected ☐ My partner will take my choices away Escalating Statements: ☐ You Want Me to Read Your Mind! ☐ You expect too much! ☐ You're too needy! ☐ You want me to do things for you that you are capable of doing for yourself!	VS. TOGETHERNESS FIRST Preferences: ☐ Do tasks and activities mostly together ☐ Count on help from partner in meeting needs and completing tasks ☐ Assume my partner understands my needs Dreams: ☐ Feeling connected in all areas of life ☐ Feeling like it's "us against the world" Fear of accepting influence: ☐ There will be nobody looking out for me but myself ☐ I'll have no backup Escalating Statements: ☐ You're self-centered (or selfish)! ☐ It should be obvious when I need or want help! I shouldn't have to ask! ☐ You don't care about me! ☐ You can't handle a relationship!
PREPARE FOR FUTURE FIRST Preferences: ☐ Work first, then play ☐ Delay gratification Dreams: ☐ Sharing a secure future together Fear of accepting influence: ☐ We'll get sidetracked and things will get worse ☐ I have to make sure we're OK before I can have fun Escalating Statements: ☐ You're lazy and/or irresponsible! ☐ You're like a child who has to have what you want right now!	VS. ENJOY THE MOMENT FIRST Preferences: ☐ Enjoy the present moment ☐ There will be time enough for work Dreams: ☐ To have a life where we enjoy each moment Fear of accepting influence: ☐ Our life will be a continual chore ☐ What's the point, if you don't enjoy it along the way? Escalating Statements: ☐ You're rigid! You don't know how to have fun! ☐ You're a control freak (slave-driver)!
PREDICTABILITY FIRST Preferences: ☐ Establish security, predictability, and order first to prevent mistakes ☐ Be spontaneous only after parameters are defined Dreams: ☐ Avoiding disaster through established routines ☐ Never being caught without what's needed Fear of accepting influence: ☐ I have to stay on top of things or we'll have a train wreck ☐ I'll make mistakes if I don't think things through first Escalating Statements: ☐ You're reckless! ☐ You're irresponsible!	VS. SPONTANEITY FIRST Preferences: ☐ Seek adventure, creativity, open-endedness first; the rest will fall into place ☐ Be structured only if a spontaneous approach doesn't work Dreams: ☐ To avoid boredom, tedium ☐ To live life as an adventure! Fear of accepting influence: ☐ I will slowly die of boredom if I plan everything to a T ☐ I won't feel alive and free to follow my desires Escalating Statements: ☐ You're boring! ☐ You're a coward!
SLOW TO GET UPSET Preferences: ☐ Don't make a big deal of things ☐ Getting upset just makes things worse Dreams: ☐ To have a partner who doesn't overreact Fear of accepting influence: ☐ Life will become a never-ending series of things to be upset about Escalating Statements: ☐ You're never satisfied! You're a negative person!	VS. QUICK TO GET UPSET Preferences: ☐ It's normal to get upset when something goes wrong ☐ If nobody gets upset, nothing ever changes Dreams: ☐ To have a partner who accepts my feelings Fear of accepting influence: ☐ I'll have to go through life stifling my feelings Escalating Statements: ☐ You're afraid of conflict! You're shut down!
PROBLEM-SOLVING FIRST Preferences: ☐ Problems should be solved. Feelings get in the way ☐ Not having to talk and talk without looking for solutions Dreams: ☐ To have a partner with a matter-of-fact outlook Fear of accepting influence: ☐ I will "fuel the fire" by paying attention to my partner's feelings Escalating Statements: ☐ You're such a whiner / victim / negative person! ☐ Either do something about it, or get over it!	VS. UNDERSTANDING FIRST Preferences: ☐ Problems can't be solved until everyone's feelings are aired ☐ Being able to talk about the problem from various angles Dreams: ☐ To have a partner who will understand my views Fear of accepting influence: ☐ If we don't talk it through first, we will just fix things on the surface Escalating Statements: ☐ You don't care about how I feel! ☐ You don't listen!

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Prioritizing High-Conflict Areas

Where are the high-conflict areas in your relationship? Common sources of conflict are listed below. Your RELATE results may have flagged high-conflict areas in your relationship, as well. For the rest of this chapter, you'll want to focus on one of your specific high-conflict areas using skills you learn in this course. For now, choose which area is your top priority.



Exercise: Review the list below and indicate whether any items are a source of conflict in your relationship. Flag any items you wish to discuss in a session with your counselor.

	High-Conflict Area?	Discuss in Session?
Finances and Spending	☐	☐
Affection and Sex	☐	☐
School, Career, and Work	☐	☐
Children and Parenting	☐	☐
Ex-Partners, In-Laws, and Extended Family	☐	☐
Spirituality and Religion	☐	☐
Friends and Co-workers	☐	☐
Alcohol and Drug Use	☐	☐
Recreation and Fun	☐	☐
Other (e.g., from RELATE):	☐	☐
Other (e.g., from RELATE):	☐	☐
Other (e.g., from RELATE):	☐	☐

Rank the High-Conflict Areas that cause you the most stress from those you checked above. One (1) is the highest stress area, and 3 is the lowest.

1.

2.

3.

For your #1, highest priority area listed above, answer the following.

What is it about the way you and your partner discuss this area that leads to conflict?

What would you like to do differently yourself? What would you like your partner to do differently?

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The Four Horsemen of the Marital Apocalypse

Because we are close to our partner, we are keenly aware of the ways his or her differences create problems in our lives. We have to have a constructive way of handling our differences and the problems they create.

Unfortunately, many couples have so much trouble working through their basic differences that they fall into the most common communication traps, nicknamed “The Four Horsemen” and “Harsh Startup,” that are known from research to weaken and eventually destroy relationships.

In the section on Mirroring, you learned how to make a constructive complaint using clear and non-offensive statements. Another word for this is complaining. Complaining is actually good for a relationship. When we complain, we are calling attention to a problem in hopes of finding a constructive solution. We give our partner important information about how they are impinging on us and what we’d like from them instead.

For example, a complaint might sound like this:

“Joe, I get angry when you bring the car home on empty. I end up having to stop for gas on the way to work. I missed a meeting this morning. Can you get gas when you notice the tank’s low, or at least warn me so I leave earlier?”

If couples stuck to complaining when they discussed problems, their arguments would be short-lived and result in solutions.

Unfortunately, if complaining in a straightforward manner does not work, couples can start using the “Four Horsemen.” The “Four Horsemen” are criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling.

- **Criticism.** We are being critical when we point fingers at our partner. It adds a negative note to what would otherwise be a complaint. Criticism usually results in your partner becoming defensive, launching a counter-attack, or turning away to run for cover. Criticism can sound like this.

“I can’t believe you didn’t get gas again. I’ve told you again and again how I hate being late for work! You don’t listen!”

- **Defensiveness.** We are being defensive when our main objective is to avoid responsibility for a problem. We may minimize the problem or argue that it’s really our partner’s fault. Defensiveness primes your partner to fight harder to get the point across or to get you to take ownership of the problem. Defensiveness can sound like this.

“I do so get gas! I get it all the time! You’re the one who’s always driving the car. Why should I get gas when I hardly even use the car?”

- **Contempt.** We are showing contempt when we throw in a tone of superiority to an already critical message. Contempt conveys that there is something fundamentally wrong with our partner. Contempt changes the focus of an argument from the original problem to your partner’s flaws, bad character, or poor upbringing. Contempt can eventually make our partner lose hope of ever feeling respected or understood. After a while, he or she gives up. Contempt can sound like this.

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“You won’t get gas, but you have time to sit around playing video games! You want me to wait on you hand and foot, like I’m your mother. News flash: I’m NOT your mother. Grow up!”

- **Stonewalling.** We are stonewalling when we put up a wall so that no matter how hard our partner tries, he or she cannot get us to discuss a problem. Stonewalling wears down your partner’s good will and causes him or her to lose hope that you will ever be able to solve your problems as a couple. Stonewalling can sound like this.

“_____.” (Silent, eyes glued to the TV or computer, waiting for partner to stop talking.) It can also consist of “Yes, dear” responses in which you have no intention of doing anything about the problem. If stonewalling is entrenched, it can consist of avoiding our partner altogether or having an affair.

Harsh Startup

A fifth destructive behavior that frequently accompanies the “four horsemen” is called harsh startup. Harsh startup is when you start a conversation on a very emotional, negative note. Perhaps you’ve been upset all day about something and by the time your partner gets home from work you are ready to scream. The intensity of your feelings makes it hard to start the conversation on a calm note. Harsh startup is known to cause emotional flooding in partners, which derails the conversation and kick starts the fight or flight response. Harsh startup can sound like this.

(In a loud, harsh tone) “The car was on empty again when I got in this morning!”

Antidotes to the Four Horsemen and Harsh Startup

It’s unrealistic to think that you or your partner will never display these destructive behaviors. Everyone has a weak moment occasionally and most of the time it’s not hard to undo the damage. The “four horsemen” and harsh startup threaten relationships only when they become frequent, intense, or entrenched.

With effort and practice, you can replace these bad habits with behaviors that make it easier to solve problems and strengthen your emotional connection. Here are some examples of replacement behaviors that start a conversation on a constructive note.

Replacing Criticism

- **Express appreciation.** Let your partner know that you see his or her good qualities, as well as the things that are bothering you. “I truly appreciate how much you do around here. You are a kind and considerate person.”
- **Give the benefit of the doubt.** Ask yourself if your partner is being rude, inconsiderate, or selfish on purpose. Probably not. “I know you’re under a lot of pressure at work right now. Stopping to get gas after a long and stressful day is probably the last thing on your mind.”

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Replacing Defensiveness

- **Take responsibility.** If you reflect on your behavior, you may see that you played a role, even partially, in creating the problem. “It’s true, sometimes I’m rushing to get home, it’s late, and I’m too tired to stop for gas. But I can see it’s unfair for you to do it all the time.”
- **Be a team player.** Weigh your options before you respond. How will you like the consequences if you refuse to cooperate? Are your partner’s happiness and goodwill worth any sacrifice involved in changing your behavior? “Okay, I can see how that’s a problem for you. I will pay more attention to it in the future.”

Replacing Contempt

- **Practice humility.** In addition to expressing appreciation and giving your partner the benefit of the doubt, try remembering that no one is perfect, and that includes you. It’s likely that some of your behaviors bother your partner, whether you realize it or not. “I realize I’m not exactly an angel, either. I know there are things I do that bug you, too. Like that time when I drove home with a flat tire.”
- **Avoid demonizing.** When you’re upset, it’s easy to see your partner in the worst possible light. Remember that your partner is a mixture of both good and bad qualities. You most need to focus on your partner’s strengths when you are convinced he or she has none. “You don’t remember to get gas, but you do take the initiative in a lot of areas that I don’t touch, such as keeping track of our finances.”

Replacing Stonewalling

- **Find your voice.** In addition to taking responsibility and being a team player, try voicing your own point of view. Ask your partner to see your side of the issue. Call a foul if your partner has been disrespectful. “I know you were upset last night. I want to discuss the problem, but not if when you yell or put me down. I would like you to consider my feelings on this issue and treat me with respect.”
- **Extend an olive branch.** When you’ve calmed down, send your partner a signal that you’re ready to reconnect. “That didn’t go very well, did it? Are you ready to try again? How about tonight after we put the kids to bed?”

The graphic on the next page summarizes the “four horsemen” and their antidotes.

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The Four Horsemen of the Marital Apocalypse		
Criticism Consists of -blaming -attacking -using “always” or “never” -seeing one side of things -using harsh startup Replace with ☒ appreciating ☒ validating ☒ thinking cool thought ☒ asking questions ☒ taking a time out ☒ using repair statements		Contempt Consists of -being insulting -mocking / mimicking -rolling your eyes -instructing / lecturing -complaining to others Replace with ☒ appreciating ☒ validating ☒ thinking cool thoughts ☒ asking questions ☒ taking a time out ☒ using repair statements
Defensiveness Consists of -deflecting -turning the tables -making excuses -saying yes, meaning no Replace with ☒ taking ownership ☒ accepting influence ☒ taking a time out ☒ thinking cool thoughts ☒ complaining		Stonewalling Consists of -withdrawing -“forgetting” & avoiding -being unavailable -complaining to others Replace with ☒ thinking cool thoughts ☒ taking a time out ☒ using rituals to reconnect ☒ disclosing feelings ☒ using repair statements



Review the Four Horsemen. Which ones do you use the most often?

Review the “replacements.” What can you try doing differently? Discuss this with your partner.

Discuss a mutually acceptable way to break through stonewalling.

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The Argument Cycle

Especially when the Four Horsemen and Harsh Startup are involved, arguments trigger a host of negative thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behavior. Such arguments activate our preoccupied or dismissive attachment behaviors. We almost instantaneously jump onto the merry-go-round of pursuing or withdrawing. Arguments can feel predictable, like a negative cycle with no end.

You can learn how to jump off of that merry-go-round by becoming well acquainted with your typical thoughts, emotions, sensations, and behaviors during an argument.



Exercise: Review the list below and rate each item for how much it affects you during an argument with your partner. (If you have completed this exercise online, you can skip it here and ask your counselor for a printout.)

When We Argue					
	Never	Almost never	Half the time	Almost always	Always
When we argue, I have these thoughts.					
1. My partner is the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Only one of us can be right on this issue.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can get my partner to change if I try hard enough.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Unless we see eye to eye, we will never have peace.	1	2	3	4	5
5. This is a huge problem that must be solved.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My partner is missing the point, as usual.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My partner has the facts all wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My partner's negative attitude is the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am totally justified in feeling this way.	1	2	3	4	5
10. If my partner would just listen, we could clear this up.	1	2	3	4	5
11. There is something wrong with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My partner is selfish, demanding, self-centered, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
13. He or she is doing this on purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
14. He or she knows better but won't change.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My partner's goal here is to blame me for the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
16. If my partner really cared about me, he or she would change.	1	2	3	4	5
17. My partner refuses to take any responsibility for the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
18. We shouldn't have to keep talking about this.	1	2	3	4	5
19. This isn't a big problem. He or she should just let it go.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Arguing is only going to hurt our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Arguing never solves anything.	1	2	3	4	5
22. If it got bad enough, this argument could break us up.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I have to get my partner to stop being upset.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I am the problem here.	1	2	3	4	5
25. There is something wrong with me.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Unless I accept blame, this argument will never end.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I should tell my partner what he or she wants to hear to get the arguing to stop.	1	2	3	4	5
28. We have to keep talking about this until we solve the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
29. If I let my partner take a break from the argument, he or she will just let it drop.	1	2	3	4	5
30. If we don't solve this problem, it could break us up.	1	2	3	4	5
31. I am sick and tired of my partner's harping on this issue.	1	2	3	4	5
32. My partner could become verbally abusive if I let this go on.	1	2	3	4	5
33. This could turn ugly, with pushing, hitting, or throwing things.	1	2	3	4	5

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When We Argue					
	Never	Almost never	Half the time	Almost always	Always
34. My partner doesn't really care about our relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
35. My partner takes me for granted.	1	2	3	4	5
36. My partner is tuning me out, as usual.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I have to get away from my partner right now.	1	2	3	4	5
38. It's a good idea to give in so the arguing will stop.	1	2	3	4	5
39. I cannot handle this level of stress.	1	2	3	4	5
40. My partner is driving me crazy.	1	2	3	4	5
41. If I correct my partner's misperceptions, the argument will stop.	1	2	3	4	5
42. I will show my disapproval by leaving for a while.	1	2	3	4	5
43. It's OK to slam doors or throw things if I'm upset.	1	2	3	4	5
44. It's OK to use name-calling, curse, or say mean things if I'm upset.	1	2	3	4	5
45. My partner should be able to handle arguments such as this.					
46. I have to buck up and deal with this because my partner is not going to change.	1	2	3	4	5
47. My partner wants a free ride on this issue.	1	2	3	4	5
48. My partner is being unfair.	1	2	3	4	5
49. If I stay calm, my partner will calm down.	1	2	3	4	5
50. I have to get louder or more dramatic to get my partner to listen.					
When we argue, I have these emotions.					
51. I feel scared or afraid.	1	2	3	4	5
52. I feel hurt.	1	2	3	4	5
53. I feel vulnerable.	1	2	3	4	5
54. I feel worried or nervous.	1	2	3	4	5
55. I feel let down.	1	2	3	4	5
56. I feel sad.	1	2	3	4	5
57. I feel alone.	1	2	3	4	5
58. I feel hopeless.	1	2	3	4	5
59. I feel depressed.	1	2	3	4	5
60. I feel empty.	1	2	3	4	5
61. I feel disconnected.	1	2	3	4	5
62. I feel isolated.	1	2	3	4	5
63. I feel ignored.	1	2	3	4	5
64. I feel pushed away.	1	2	3	4	5
65. I feel rejected.	1	2	3	4	5
66. I feel abandoned.	1	2	3	4	5
67. I feel misunderstood.	1	2	3	4	5
68. I feel frustrated.	1	2	3	4	5
69. I feel angry.	1	2	3	4	5
70. I feel like getting back.	1	2	3	4	5
71. I feel like protecting myself.	1	2	3	4	5
72. I feel guarded.	1	2	3	4	5
73. I feel like making my partner talk.	1	2	3	4	5
74. I feel flooded with emotion.	1	2	3	4	5
75. I feel unable to calm down.	1	2	3	4	5
76. I feel overwhelmed.	1	2	3	4	5
77. I feel confused.	1	2	3	4	5
78. I feel spacey or unable to focus my thoughts.	1	2	3	4	5
79. I feel numb.	1	2	3	4	5
80. I feel smothered.	1	2	3	4	5
81. I feel unimportant.	1	2	3	4	5
82. I feel inadequate.	1	2	3	4	5
83. I feel blamed.	1	2	3	4	5
84. I feel judged.	1	2	3	4	5

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When We Argue					
	Never	Almost never	Half the time	Almost always	Always
85. I feel criticized.	1	2	3	4	5
86. I feel put down.	1	2	3	4	5
87. I feel analyzed.	1	2	3	4	5
88. I feel invalidated.	1	2	3	4	5
89. I feel attacked.	1	2	3	4	5
90. I feel controlled.	1	2	3	4	5
91. I feel intimidated.	1	2	3	4	5
92. I feel dismissed.	1	2	3	4	5
93. I feel unwanted.	1	2	3	4	5
94. I feel unloved or unlovable.	1	2	3	4	5
95. I feel unattractive.	1	2	3	4	5
96. I feel like a failure.	1	2	3	4	5
97. I feel guilty.	1	2	3	4	5
When we argue, I have these physical sensations.					
98. I feel my heart racing.	1	2	3	4	5
99. I feel tense in body.	1	2	3	4	5
100. I feel uneasy in my stomach.	1	2	3	4	5
101. I feel tightness in my throat.	1	2	3	4	5
102. I feel pressure in my chest.	1	2	3	4	5
When we argue, I behave in these ways.					
103. I criticize.	1	2	3	4	5
104. I attack.	1	2	3	4	5
105. I blame.	1	2	3	4	5
106. I try to hurt my partner.	1	2	3	4	5
107. I defend.	1	2	3	4	5
108. I analyze.	1	2	3	4	5
109. I get confused.	1	2	3	4	5
110. I yell.	1	2	3	4	5
111. I try to stay calm.	1	2	3	4	5
112. I explain why my partner is wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
113. I yell.	1	2	3	4	5
114. I push or shove or hit.	1	2	3	4	5
115. I throw or break things.	1	2	3	4	5
116. I swear.	1	2	3	4	5
117. I make threats.	1	2	3	4	5
118. I get quiet.	1	2	3	4	5
119. I pretend that I don't care.	1	2	3	4	5
120. I withdraw.	1	2	3	4	5
121. I avoid my partner for a while.	1	2	3	4	5
122. I leave.	1	2	3	4	5
123. I threaten to end the relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
124. I give in.	1	2	3	4	5
125. I experience disturbing memories from the past.	1	2	3	4	5
126. I bring up old arguments and grievances.	1	2	3	4	5

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Exercise: Now that you are aware of your many reactions during an argument with your partner, try to identify what's going on at every step in your negative cycle using the prompts below.

Our Negative Cycle

When we argue,

My top 3 thoughts are:

My top 3 feelings are:

My top 3 physical sensations are:

My top 3 behavioral reactions are:

When all this is happening, what I really want or need from my partner is:

Now think about how your partner might answer these questions. What do you suppose are your partner's top 3 thoughts, feelings, sensations, and reactions?

When all this is happening, what do you suppose your partner really wants or needs from you?

Describe the steps in your negative cycle.

How it starts:

What happens next:

What happens next:

How it ends:

What happens after the argument is over:

What could you do differently that would interrupt the negative cycle?

Using mirroring, tell you partner how you answered all the questions in this exercise.

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Taking a Time Out

In the midst of a negative cycle, some couples argue about whether taking a time out is a good idea. Some people think that if the conversation is escalating, it's a good idea to stop and finish the conversation later. Others think that if the conversation stops, there is little chance it will be brought up again, and the problem will never be solved.

Indeed, unless time outs are handled correctly, they can do more harm than good. This section teaches you how to use time outs productively, to minimize any damage to your relationship while getting you back on track solving the conflict.

If you're the type of person who hates taking a time out, keep these points in mind.

- If your heart rate goes above 100 beats per minute, you won't be rational. Take a time out.
- It's in your best interest to stay calm and respectful so you two can solve your problems.
- Harsh startup, criticism, and contempt weaken relationships and can lead to their dissolution.
- If you become too upset to be respectful, asking for a time out will let your partner know you're committed to being the best partner you can be.
- If your partner asks for a time out, take his or her need to calm down seriously.
- Your partner is more motivated to help you when you convey respect and interest.

If you're the type of person who hates restarting a conversation, keep these points in mind.

- If your heart rate goes above 100 beats per minute, you won't be rational. Take a time out.
- It's in your best interest to stay connected to your partner so you two can solve your problems.
- Stonewalling and defensiveness weaken relationships and can lead to their dissolution.
- If you ask for a time out and later come back to the conversation without your partner having to ask, you will let your partner know you take his or her needs seriously.
- You can always ask for another time out if the conversation starts to escalate again.
- Your partner is more motivated to help you when you convey respect and interest.

How to Take a Time Out

When a conversation escalates into an argument, you may feel "hot anger" or "cold anger."

Hot Anger (Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness)

- Yelling
- Name calling
- Blaming & criticizing
- Throwing things, slamming doors
- Being defensive

Cold Anger (Stonewalling)

- The silent treatment
- Staying at opposite ends of the house
- Being unresponsive or apathetic
- Saying "Yes" just to end the conversation
- Coming home late to avoid your partner

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If you start to feel this way, you need a time out.

How to Ask for A Time Out

1. Tell your partner something like “I am getting too upset. I want to protect our relationship. I need to take a time out.”
2. Reassure your partner that you can be counted on to resume the conversation.
3. Since you’re the one asking for the time out, it’s your job to immediately set an appointment with your partner to resume the conversation.

Be sure to set the appointment between 30 minutes and 48 hours from the time out.

4. Wait until your heart rate has returned to normal and you are calm enough to resume the conversation.
5. At the appointed time, go to your partner and ask if he or she is ready to resume the conversation.
6. If you start to get too upset again, ask for another time out.

Never let a time out turn into stonewalling. Going past 48 hours without restarting the conversation will damage your relationship.

Things to Do During a Time Out

Taking a time out does no good unless you use the time wisely. The goal of a time out is to change your mindset and get your heart rate back to normal. If you think “hot thoughts” that keep you upset, you are wasting your time.

If you find that you just can’t calm down, try some of the strategies on the next page.

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Things to Do During a Time Out

😊 Get active

- Work out / go to the gym / do yoga
- Go for a brisk walk
- Clean the house
- Mow the lawn
- Cook something
- Go to a coffee shop
- Take a shower
- Play an instrument or sing
- Chew 5 pieces of gum at once
- _____

😊 Energize your mind

- Count to 100 forwards, backwards, or in a different language
- Go to a bookstore or newsstand
- Do a crossword puzzle or Sudoku
- Memorize sports statistics
- Read a how-to manual
- Read something out loud
- Draw or paint something
- Organize a drawer or closet
- _____

😊 Change your emotions

- Watch a funny movie or TV show
- Visit a joke-a-day web site
- Listen to uplifting music
- Play a game
- Read something religious or spiritual
- Meditate or pray
- Play with your pet
- Reread positive emails / letters
- _____

😊 Feel strong sensations

- Rub ice cubes on your body
- Suck on a piece of fresh lemon
- Snap rubber bands on your wrists
- Listen to very loud music
- Put your feet in a bucket of ice
- Smell strong scents (perfume, aftershave, flowers)
- Eat strong flavors (chocolate, cheese, pickles, hot peppers)
- _____

😊 Change your thoughts

- Play the "Glad Game" (appreciation)
- Think about your happiest day ever
- Remember kindnesses done to you
- Do Disputation A-B-C-D-E
- Think about plans for work or play
- Say "NO!" to upsetting thoughts & think something else
- _____

😊 Comfort yourself

- Make a cup of tea or coffee
- Go to a bakery & get a treat
- Take 3 long, slow breaths
- Take a hot bath
- Eat a favorite food
- Write in your journal
- Call a treasured friend
- _____

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Relationship Exits

Time-outs are an effective way to cool off when you're stuck in your negative cycle. It's not that hard, however, to change a time-out into a relationship exit. People who get flooded and use stonewalling to reduce conflict are the most prone to using exits.

Relationship exits are activities that create distance between you and your partner. Exits work by using up your free time or getting you out of the house so you're not around much and unavailable for spending quality time with your partner. Exits can be global, in which case you are unavailable in general, or specific, in which case you are unavailable for specific activities, such as sex or housework.

Everyday activities, such as being at work, seeing your friends, using social media, or doing things with the kids can be used as exits. More blatant exits are obviously dysfunctional behaviors, such as being depressed or ill and not getting treatment, having an affair, going online or paying for sex, shopping too much, drinking too much, or using drugs.

The best way to tell a harmless activity from an exit is to ask yourself *"Could I be doing this, at least partly, to avoid my partner?"*



Exercise: Check any activities that either you or your partner uses that create distance in your relationship. Add to the list as you need to if an activity is not listed.

	My Exit	My Partner's Exit
Doing things with the kids	☐	☐
Doing tasks, chores, and housework	☐	☐
Working at the office or at home, or travelling for work	☐	☐
Working out or going to exercise classes	☐	☐
Being online, e-mailing, texting, or talking on the phone	☐	☐
Being with extended family	☐	☐
Sleeping, or going to bed on a very different schedule than your partner	☐	☐
Isolating yourself because you feel depressed or ill	☐	☐
Spending time with friends (or in secret relationships)	☐	☐
Watching TV or reading	☐	☐
Volunteering or participating in religious / spiritual activities	☐	☐
Drinking alcohol or using drugs	☐	☐
Other: _____	☐	☐

Compare your answers with your partner's. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

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Disputation

In the section on making sense of emotions, you learned to become aware of your A-B-C sequence of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when upset or facing an adversity, such as conflict with your partner.

The next section builds on that A-B-C sequence by adding a process called **disputation**. In disputation, you expose your beliefs to an objective analysis and expose any errors in thinking that could be driving negative emotions and behaviors. As a result of disputation, you can interpret situations in a new way, which lightens your emotional reaction and brings new ideas on how to react.

In this context, we are using disputation to mean “debating with yourself.” It’s a way of challenging your automatic negative thoughts.

Disputation adds two steps, D and E, to the A-B-C method. D is for disputing, or challenging, your beliefs, and E is for the effect on your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

The full A-B-C-D-E method, then, looks like this.

- D. A is for **adversity**. We experience a triggering situation or event.
- E. B is for **beliefs**. We see the situation or event through the frame of our assumptions, expectations, and interpretations.
- F. C is for **consequences**. Based on our beliefs, we react with emotions and behaviors.
- G. D is for **disputing**. We challenge the validity of our beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and interpretations by checking them for **cognitive errors**.
- H. E is for **effect**. We look for the changes in our thoughts, emotions, and potential behaviors resulting from the disputation.

Cognitive Errors

We are all subject to cognitive errors, or errors in thinking. They consist of distorted attitudes and beliefs that we have had for so long that they feel true. They are sometimes called invisible beliefs, because they exist just below our awareness. When we slow down, identify them, and expose them to the light of reason, they can appear silly or extreme.

Take a look at the list on the next page for cognitive errors that may be affecting you.

Cognitive Errors

1. **Filtering** – looking at only one part of a situation
2. **Polarizing** – perceiving everything in extremes, either “black” or “white,” or “good” or “bad”
3. **Over-generalizing** – believing that one situation is a basis to explain all situations
4. **Mind-reading** – believing you know what other people think without asking them
5. **Catastrophizing** – jumping right to the worst-case scenario
6. **Personalizing** – using explanations that make the situation about you
7. **Confusion about control** – thinking that events are either
 - a. controlled by a force outside of yourself (e.g., luck, fate, other people)
 - b. controlled by you (or should be)
8. **Insisting on fairness** – thinking that people should play by rules that you think are fair
9. **Reasoning by emotion** – believing that everything you feel must be true, because you feel it
10. **Having change fantasies** – believing that other people will or should change to suit you if you pressure them enough, and that your happiness depends on their changing
11. **Blaming** – believing that bad things that happen are someone’s fault, either yours or someone else’s
12. **Shoulding** – applying a set of rigid rules about how everyone, including yourself, should act
13. **Having to be right** – justifying your point of view or behavior as if there is always a clear right and wrong, and that the other person is totally wrong
14. **Believing in Santa Claus** – believing if you sacrifice yourself or do the right thing, you will be rewarded eventually, even if it means ignoring your needs or tolerating painful or harmful situations or relationships along the way

Disputation can be applied to any situation in any part of your life. Suppose you’re driving to work, for example. You’re in a hurry so you are driving fast in the left lane. Suddenly a car pulls in front of you, stays in your lane, and slows down, leaving you very little following distance. Immediately enraged, you pull around to the right of the guy’s car, yell at him, and make an obscene gesture.

The grid on the next page shows how you could use the A-B-C-D-E method to examine the situation.

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Disputation for: Traffic Problem	
A is for Adversity. Give a few words to describe the situation that is upsetting.	A car cut me off and slowed down in front of me while I was in a hurry on my way to work.
B is for Beliefs. List the beliefs you used to interpret the situation. -What are you saying to yourself about this? -What would someone have to believe in order to react as you did?	-What an Idiot! That guy is a terrible driver. -I can't believe he was so selfish! All he cares about is himself. -How dare he treat me that way! -People should be considerate when they drive. -I can behave however I want if I get upset.
C is for Consequences. What are you feeling about the situation? -List your feelings. -List your behavioral reactions.	-Angry and disgusted. -Self-righteous, glad to have made an obscene gesture. -Drive even faster and more aggressively to make up the few seconds lost when the car slowed me down.
D is for Disputation. Argue with yourself on each of the beliefs you listed in B, e.g., -Are there exceptions? -Are there other explanations? -Are there facts that contradict this belief? -Are there cognitive errors?	-Maybe this guy isn't an idiot. Maybe he wasn't feeling well or was distracted and didn't see my car. -Not everyone who does that is rude and selfish. I'm sure I have cut people off before without meaning to be rude. - catastrophizing. The chances of an accident were slim. It wouldn't have mattered if I was late to the meeting. - personalizing. I was just another random driver on the road. - shoulding. People drive according to their own rules, not mine. - reasoning by emotion. Being upset doesn't make it OK to behave badly.
E is for Effect. What's the effect on your feelings of disputing these beliefs? -Has your outlook changed? -Have any new behaviors or choices occurred to you?	-I'm not upset anymore. It's not worth it. -I'm going to monitor the blind spot in my side mirror more often. -I'm not going to take it personally if and when something like this happens in the future. -I'm forgetting about this and getting on with my day.

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Exercise: Using the worksheet and the list of cognitive errors, use disputation to examine an argument or issue you have had with your partner.

Disputation for (Give an Example of Problem):

A is for Adversity.

Give a few words to describe the situation that is upsetting.

B is for Beliefs.

List the beliefs you used to interpret the situation.

C is for Consequences.

What are your emotions and behaviors?

D is for Disputation.

Challenge each of your beliefs.

- Are there exceptions?
- Are there other explanations?
- Are there contradictory facts?
- Are there cognitive errors?

E is for Effect.

What's the effect on your feelings of disputing these beliefs?

Discuss your disputation with your partner. What did you learn about how your beliefs affect your arguments? Which cognitive errors contribute to your negative cycle?

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Dreams within Conflict

When you and your partner become gridlocked on an issue, it is probably because it would be hard for you to compromise. Some issues are so important to us that we think we can't be happy compromising. to search for the reason why. Often, there is an unacknowledged dream, wish, hope, goal, or fear behind your and your partner's position.

Now that they are expecting their third child, Sally and Bob are arguing about whether to buy a new house. Sally wants a bigger house for their growing family. She gives Bob printouts of ads for houses she likes, but he never looks at them. Bob wants to keep expenses low and build up their savings. He thinks their current house is adequate and affordable.

When they argue, Sally tells Bob that he doesn't know how to enjoy their hard-earned money. They are making a comfortable living and should have to count pennies. Bob usually tells Sally she is irresponsible with money and would spend every dollar they brought if he didn't keep an eye on her.

If Sally and Bob were to dig a little deeper to find their "dreams within conflict," they might have had a completely different conversation.

Sally grew up in a large family and lived in a small house. She often had to wait a long time to take a shower on school days because her brother took a long time shaving and grooming in their only bathroom. She was sleepy at school sometimes because her big sister, with whom she shared a room, stayed up late on the phone with her boyfriend. Sally resolved that when she had her own family, she'd live in a big house with plenty of room for everyone.

When Bob was twelve, his father lost his tech job in an economic downturn. Unemployed for years, his father used the savings and retirement accounts to make ends meet. Bob used to worry if his parents were keeping up with the mortgage. He decided that when he grew up, he would put a lot of money in savings so he could take care of his family if something bad happened.

Eventually, Sally and Bob shared their "dreams within conflict" with each other. They felt more connected and empathic with each other. They were able to brain storm about solutions. The conflict was no longer gridlocked.



Exercise: Think about one of the high-conflict areas you identified at the start of this chapter. Could you have an underlying life dream, wish, hope, or fear that is making it hard for you to compromise?

- Imagine you gave in to your partner 100% on the issue. What would you lose? What would your life be like then?
- Imagine you could get your partner to give in 100% on the issue. What would you get? What would your life be like then?
- Refer to the list of common "dreams within conflict" on the next page for ideas, if needed.

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Common Dreams within Conflict

- ☐ I want to pursue my professional goals.
- ☐ I want to get very good at my hobby or leisure interest.
- ☐ I want to be financially secure or independent.
- ☐ I want to be surrounded by beauty.
- ☐ I want to make a difference in the world.
- ☐ I want to have adventure in my life.
- ☐ I want to give my kids a better life than I had.
- ☐ I want to be an accomplished musician, artist, scholar, or athlete.
- ☐ I want to be physically fit and healthy.
- ☐ I want a quiet, calm, low-pressure life.
- ☐ I want to go to the top of my profession.
- ☐ I want to spend time in nature.
- ☐ I want my life to revolve around home and family.
- ☐ I want to build strong ties to my community (e.g., religious, ethnic, political, or cultural group)
- ☐ I want to learn new things and broaden my horizons.
- ☐ I want stability, structure, and predictability in my life.
- ☐ I want to enjoy the fruits of my labor.
- ☐ I want to be my own boss.
- ☐ I want to go into public service, the military, or politics.
- ☐ I want to fight for justice in the world.
- ☐ I want to develop myself spiritually.
- ☐ I want my life to be orderly and predictable.
- ☐ I want my life to be fun and pleasurable.
- ☐ I want to be free to express my creativity.
- ☐ I want to be free to take risks, to think big.
- ☐ I want to maintain family and social customs.
- ☐ I want to develop my mind and intellect.
- ☐ I want to experience deep intimacy in my relationships.
- ☐ I want to heal from painful past experiences.
- ☐ I want to have variety and new experiences in my life.
- ☐ I want to have peace and relaxation in my life.
- ☐ I want to feel a sense of freedom.
- ☐ I want to feel a sense of security.
- ☐ I want my life to stand for something.
- ☐ Other: _____



Exercise: Use mirroring to discuss your answers with your partner.

Solving Problems Together

These six skills, developed by John Gottman, Ph.D., can help you have a reasonable dialogue about intractable problems that will lead to solutions that work for both of you.

The Six Crucial Skills for Solving Problems Together

Skill 1 **Soften Your Startup.**

- The way a conversation starts influences a lot of what happens during the entire discussion.
- Remember that it's in your best interest to keep your partner interested in what you are saying, and motivated to get involved to solve the problem with you.
- Be concise – don't go "on and on" because that makes it harder for your partner to listen and be attentive.
- Complaining is OK, Criticizing is Not. TAKE THE BLAMING OUT OF COMPLAINING.
- Make statements that start with "I ..." instead of "You ..."
- Use A-B-C-D from the Mirroring exercise:
When you do "A" in situation "B," I feel "C." It would really help me out if you could do "D" instead.
- Be sure to reach for the emotions you are feeling inside – reach all the way down to where you feel vulnerable, scared, hurt, or sad.
- Find things to appreciate while you are discussing the problem.

Skill 2 **Repair As Needed.**

- Have the Repair Checklist handy while you are discussing the problem.
- If you start to feel too upset, look at the list and find what you could say to get back on track.
- If your partner seems to take offense at what you are saying, use the list to find a way to "Get to Yes," or "Stop Action!" or say "Sorry!"

Skill 3 **Calm Yourself When You Start to Feel Flooded.**

- Develop a ritual to take a 20-minute break if you are feeling too upset to continue.
- During the 20 minutes:
 - Take a mental break. Don't think about the problem, what your partner has been saying.
 - Remember that it's in your best interest to stay calm, that your partner is more motivated to help you when you are not angry, critical, or attacking.
 - Do something physical to work the adrenaline out of your system.
 - Do something nurturing – have a bath a cup of tea, play with a pet.
- Only when you feel your heart rate has returned to normal, you are breathing normally, and your partner is feeling OK too can you resume the conversation.
- Never let the time out turn into stonewalling. If you can't get back to each other right away, make an appointment to resume talking within 48 hours.

Skill 4 **Be Willing to Accept Influence.**

- Research shows that people who compromise get what they want in the long run, and their partners have more respect for them.
- Remember: Yield to Win.
- Ask yourself: What am I afraid will happen if I budge at least a little about this?
- If you are immovable, your partner will probably escalate his or her attempts to convince you.

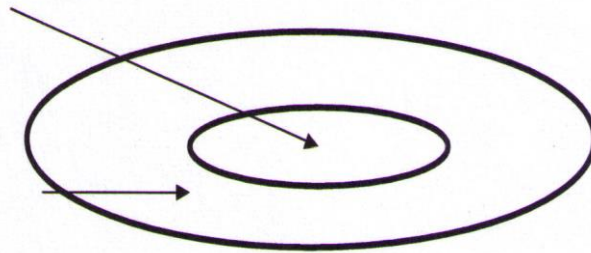
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- Own your part in creating the problem. This is different than taking the blame.
- Skill 5 **Compromise.**

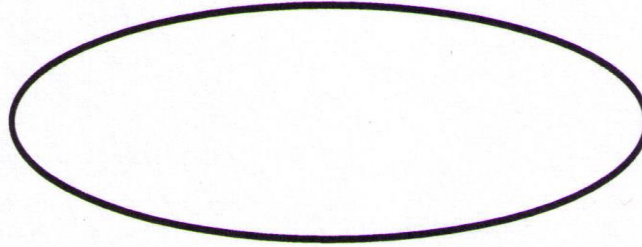
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - Is there any part of this we agree about?
 - What common goals do we have here?
 - What feelings do we share about this issue?
 - What am I afraid will happen if I compromise?
- Use the Fried Egg technique:
Identify what you can and cannot compromise about.

Inflexibility Area

Flexibility Area



Identify your common goals and common ground.



- Skill 6 **Agree to continue the dialogue.**

- Look for the meaning underneath your and your partner's positions.
 - Is there a life dream at stake?
 - What is the symbolic meaning of our positions?
- Honor your partner's dream as you would have him or her honor yours. Don't make it less important than yours.
- Search for the "disaster scenario" you may be picturing in your mind if you give in to your partner.
- Try saying a repair statement, for example:
 - I can respect your dream
 - I can join in your dream, to some degree.
 - I can agree to keep dialoguing about this issue.
 - I can agree to disagree.
 - I can accept you as you are

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Perpetual Problems

So far in this chapter we've identified your major areas of conflict and worked on the process of arguing. In this section, we discuss what happens when some of the problems you argue about don't have solutions. Researchers call these "perpetual problems."

All couples, including happy ones, have some perpetual problems. In fact, research has found that about 69 percent of a couple's problems are basically unsolvable. When you choose to build a life with someone, you also are choosing a set of problems that are unique to your relationship with that person. If you had chosen someone else, you would have chosen a different set of problems.

"When choosing a long-term partner...you will inevitably be choosing a particular set of unsolvable problems that you'll be grappling with for the next ten, twenty, or fifty years," says Dan Wile, Ph.D., in his book *After the Honeymoon*.

Couples can have perfectly happy relationships even though some of their problems are perpetual. What's important is to find a friendly tolerance for the differences between you.

If you believe that to be happy, you and your partner have to agree on every issue that's important to you, you will expend a lot of effort trying to change him or her. You may end up gridlocked, with each of you becoming more resentful and unwilling to budge over time. The Four Horsemen or Harsh Startup may take hold, and your relationship will be on a path to dissolution.

If, on the other hand, you believe that you and your partner probably will never see eye to eye on some issues and you learn to work around them, you will be able to put your energy into managing the impact of your differences with acceptance, tolerance, and good humor. You will remain able to see your partner in context, as a mixture of lovable qualities and challenging qualities.



Food for Thought: If you want to learn to live with your partner's foibles, you might consider adopting one woman's strategy. She was asked how she was able to remain happy with her husband through forty years of marriage, even though some of his behaviors annoyed her. She said that on her wedding day, she decided to make a list of his top ten flaws so she could start working on him to make changes. I asked her whether, indeed, he ever changed. She said she didn't think so, because whenever she started to make the list, she was distracted by his kindness and love for her. So she never got around to making the list!

Advanced Conflict Tip #1 – Relationship Repair Statements

When I Want to Say How I Feel

- ✓ I'm getting scared.
- ✓ Please say that more gently.
- ✓ Did I do something wrong?
- ✓ That hurt my feelings.
- ✓ That felt like an insult.
- ✓ I'm feeling sad.
- ✓ I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?
- ✓ I'm feeling unappreciated.
- ✓ I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?
- ✓ Please don't lecture me.
- ✓ I don't feel that you understand me right now.
- ✓ Sounds like it's all my fault.
- ✓ I feel criticized. Can you rephrase that?
- ✓ I'm getting worried.
- ✓ Please don't withdraw.

When I Need to Calm Down

- ✓ Can you make this safer for me?
- ✓ I need things to be calmer right now.
- ✓ I need your support right now.
- ✓ Just listen to me right now and try to understand.
- ✓ Tell me you love me.
- ✓ Can I have a kiss?
- ✓ Can I take that back?
- ✓ Please be gentler with me.
- ✓ Please help me calm down.
- ✓ Please be quiet and listen to me.
- ✓ This is important to me. Please listen.
- ✓ I need to finish what I was saying.
- ✓ I am starting to feel flooded.
- ✓ Can we take a break?
- ✓ Can we talk about something else for a while?

When I'm Sorry for What I Did/Said

- ✓ I overreacted. I'm sorry.
- ✓ I really blew that one.
- ✓ Let me try again.
- ✓ I want to be gentler to you right now and I don't know how.
- ✓ Tell me what you hear me saying.
- ✓ How can I make things better?
- ✓ Let's try that one over again.
- ✓ What you are saying is...
- ✓ Let me start again in a softer way.
- ✓ I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

When I Need a Time Out

- ✓ Please let's stop for a while.
- ✓ Let's take a break.
- ✓ Give me a moment. I'll be back.
- ✓ I'm feeling flooded.
- ✓ Please stop.
- ✓ Let's agree to disagree here.
- ✓ Let's start all over again.
- ✓ Hang in there. Don't withdraw.
- ✓ I want to change the topic for a while.
- ✓ I feel flooded. I need some time.
- ✓ Can we pick this up again at _____?

When I Want to Increase Cooperation

- ✓ I know this isn't all your fault.
- ✓ This is not your problem. It's OUR problem.
- ✓ My part of all this is...
- ✓ We are both saying...
- ✓ I see your point.
- ✓ You're starting to convince me.
- ✓ I agree with part of what you're saying.
- ✓ Let's try to find a compromise.
- ✓ Let's find our common ground here.
- ✓ I never thought of things that way.
- ✓ I think your point of view makes sense.

When I Want to Show Positivity

- ✓ Thank you for working on this with me.
- ✓ Even in the midst of this, I appreciate that you...
- ✓ I understand. This is hard for you too.
- ✓ I am thankful for _____.
- ✓ One thing I admire about you right now is _____.
- ✓ We can get through this.
- ✓ We've gotten through worse things in the past.
- ✓ Let's agree to include both our views in a solution.
- ✓ This problem doesn't change the big picture.
- ✓ I love you.

Advanced Conflict Tip #2 – Gambits and Comebacks (Combating Defensiveness)

No matter how hard you try, there will be times when one or both of you gets defensive and uses a “blocking gambit” as a defense. Identifying these blocking gambits and breaking through them can prevent destructive patterns from taking over. Some of the most common blocking gambits include:

- *Laughing it off...* Your anger is responded to with a joke or some other attempt to make light of the situation. “You’re so cute when you’re angry!”
- *Turning the tables.* You are blamed for the problem or met with a personal attack. “You’re too sensitive!”
- *The Put-off.* Your need to express your anger is met with “Go ahead, sue me” or “I’ll talk about it later.” Of course, later never comes.
- *Interrogation.* Everything you say is responded to with a series of questions, such as “Why do you feel that way?” “Why is that important?” “Why didn’t you tell me before?”
- *Threats.* You are threatened with statements like “So, I’ll leave if you don’t like it” or “If you keep nagging me, you can kiss our marriage good-bye.”
- *Denial.* You are told “That’s not true; I didn’t do that.” Or “That’s just your opinion.”
- *Guilt.* Your partner responds with tears and the message that you are being mean and cruel. “How could you say that to me?”
- *Debating.* Your partner debates you about the legitimacy of what you feel, or the magnitude of the problem: “Well, you shouldn’t feel that way.” “A lot of people do that and their partners accept it.” I don’t think it’s fair for you to say that.”

Here are some “comebacks” you can use to try overcoming the blocking gambits:

- *Broken Record.* Repeat your point calmly instead of getting sidetracked by irrelevant issues: “Yes, I know, but my point is...” “Yes, but I was saying....” Use with Laughing It off and the Put-off.
- *Processing.* Shift the focus of the discussion from the topic, and comment on what is going on between the two of you: “We’re getting off the point now. It seems we’re getting into old issues instead of the present one.” Use with Interrogation, Threats, Guilt, and Debating.
- *Partial Agreement.* Consider what your partner is saying but don’t get off track. “That’s a good point. I probably could be more attentive. But right now, we’re talking about...” Use with Turning the tables and Guilt.
- *Quick cut-off.* Respond to the gambit with only a word or two and quickly get back to the point. “Okay. But right now, we’re talking about...” Use with Turning the tables, the Put-off, Denial, and Threats.

Knowing how to overcome the gambits that your partner uses can help you stick to the issue at hand without becoming unglued. You will then have a strong defense against defensiveness.

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ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

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HEA ADDITIONAL EXERCISES 05302017

1. 10 Years and 10 Billion Dollars
2. Love Languages
3. Influence and Decision-making
4. Roles and Responsibilities
5. Handling Life's Curve Balls
6. Money Personalities
7. The Sex Talk
8. Imago Part 1
9. Imago Part 2
10. Imago Part 3
11. Imago Part 4
12. Imago Part 5
13. Watching "How to Make Relationships Work"
14. The Magic Five Hours
15. Let's Do It!
16. Re-Romanticizing – Keeping Your Romance Alive
17. Three Blessings – Finding Things to Appreciate about Your Partner

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10 Years and 10 Billion Dollars

Imagine you are given 10 Billion dollars, no strings attached, except that you have only 10 years to live. List what you would want to do, be, or have. Try to get to 100. Then, go back and circle items you would miss if you lived your whole life and could not do, be, or have them.

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. _____ | 35. _____ | 69. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 36. _____ | 70. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 37. _____ | 71. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 38. _____ | 72. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 39. _____ | 73. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 40. _____ | 74. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 41. _____ | 75. _____ |
| 8. _____ | 42. _____ | 76. _____ |
| 9. _____ | 43. _____ | 77. _____ |
| 10. _____ | 44. _____ | 78. _____ |
| 11. _____ | 45. _____ | 79. _____ |
| 12. _____ | 46. _____ | 80. _____ |
| 13. _____ | 47. _____ | 81. _____ |
| 14. _____ | 48. _____ | 82. _____ |
| 15. _____ | 49. _____ | 83. _____ |
| 16. _____ | 50. _____ | 84. _____ |
| 17. _____ | 51. _____ | 85. _____ |
| 18. _____ | 52. _____ | 86. _____ |
| 19. _____ | 53. _____ | 87. _____ |
| 20. _____ | 54. _____ | 88. _____ |
| 21. _____ | 55. _____ | 89. _____ |
| 22. _____ | 56. _____ | 90. _____ |
| 23. _____ | 57. _____ | 91. _____ |
| 24. _____ | 58. _____ | 92. _____ |
| 25. _____ | 59. _____ | 93. _____ |
| 26. _____ | 60. _____ | 94. _____ |
| 27. _____ | 61. _____ | 95. _____ |
| 28. _____ | 62. _____ | 96. _____ |
| 29. _____ | 63. _____ | 97. _____ |
| 30. _____ | 64. _____ | 98. _____ |
| 31. _____ | 65. _____ | 99. _____ |
| 32. _____ | 66. _____ | 100. _____ |
| 33. _____ | 67. _____ | |
| 34. _____ | 68. _____ | |

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Love Languages

Rank these "Love Languages" from your <u>MOST</u> preferred way of receiving love (circle # 1 at right), to your <u>LEAST</u> preferred way (circle # 5 at right). You can only have one #1, one #2, etc.		My Ranking
Words of Affirmation	Using words that "build me up;" giving me compliments, saying words of appreciation, thanking me the things I do, saying things that encourage me, remarking on my successes, noticing my strengths and openly appreciating them, remarking on my positive traits. <i>My specific examples of Words of Affirmation are:</i>	1 2 3 4 5
Quality Time	Giving me your time and attention, talking with me, taking a walk together, going out to eat and paying attention to each other, talking, doing chores together, doing hobbies, sports, or other fun things together, going to family or work functions together and making it fun. <i>My specific examples of Quality Time are:</i>	1 2 3 4 5
Receiving Gifts	Giving me symbols of love, whether purchased, found, or made, e.g., giving me roses, or picking a daisy while we are on a walk; giving gifts that you think I will love, e.g., my favorite type music or a book on a subject I love, or items for a collection I have; giving me gifts for no special reason ("just because"); buying token gifts while shopping so I know you were thinking of me, e.g., candy bar or a teddy bear or a small gadget. <i>My specific examples of Receiving Gifts are:</i>	1 2 3 4 5
Acts of Service	Doing acts of service that you know I would like you to do, e.g., cooking; chores that are usually "mine" to give me a break; taking care of my car; doing things I have been asking you to do; leaving a note that says "with love, your name" after doing an act of service. <i>My specific examples of Acts of Service are:</i>	1 2 3 4 5
Physical Touch	Touching me playfully and/or lovingly; learning my preferences for being touched; giving me back rubs, foot rubs, back scratches; sitting close to me when watching TV; hugging and kissing me for no special reason; asking me how I like the way you are touching me; "public displays of affection;" holding hands; holding me when I am upset; initiating sex; touching me affectionately without it having to lead to sex. <i>My specific examples of Physical Touch are:</i>	1 2 3 4 5

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Influence & Decision-making

How much influence do you want to have over the following kinds of decisions?

	<i>1=0% influence - 10=100% influence</i>
Choice of new car	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of home	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of furniture	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of own wardrobe	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of vacation spots	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of décor for the home	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of mutual friends	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of entertainment	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of house of worship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of child-rearing practices	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of TV shows / movies	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of menu	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of number of children	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of where we live	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of husband's vocation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of wife's vocation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Choice of determining for what, and how much, money is spent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- How do you define a “major decision” and a “minor decision?” Should partners consult each other before making each type of decision? Where is the line between major and minor?
- How will you handle it when you come to an impasse, and a decision must be made?
- How will you decide about responsibility for household chores?
- In what areas will you have the right to make decisions without consulting your partner? Who set this policy, and how did you arrive at this decision?
- Will you make the decisions you want to make, or the ones your partner does not want to make?
- Will you have any “veto power” over your partner’s decisions? If so, what is the basis for it, and how did you arrive at this decision?

Compare your answers with your partner’s. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

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Roles & Responsibilities

How well do your and your partner's expectations mesh when it comes to managing the many things that keep your lives running? Please indicate how you feel about each area, and put a note next to items you would like to discuss with your partner.

Item	I Will Take the Lead	My Partner Will Take the Lead	We Will Handle This 50-50	Discuss with Partner? Y or N
Housework				
Laundry				
Making Meals				
Grocery Shopping				
Clean Up After Meals / Clean Kitchen				
Clean the Bathroom(s)				
Straighten Up the House / Dust				
Take Out Garbage / Trash				
Pick Up Dirty Clothes				
Put Clean Clothes Away				
Sweep / Vacuum / Wash Floors				
Make Beds				
Clean Refrigerator				
Other:				
Errands				
Take the Cars for Maintenance / Repairs				
Wash & Put Gas / Oil in Cars				
Handle Mail, Bills				
Return Phone Calls or E-Mails				
Maintain Tools and Appliances				
Shop for Household Items, Clothing				
Do Maintenance / Repair Around the House				
Maintain Lawn & Garden				
Get House Ready for Guests & Parties				
Handle Repair Men / Contractors				
Drop Off & Pick Up Dry Cleaning				
Water, Feed, Care for House Plants				
Water, Feed, Care for Pets				
Other				
Finances				
Pay the Bills				
Balance the Checkbook				
Manage Savings & Investments				
Buy Gifts for Friends, Family, Kids				
Do Taxes / Bookkeeping / Handle Accountant				
Keep Track of Expenses				
Keep Track of Debt				
Do Long-Range Financial Planning				
Shop for Mortgages, Credit, and Loans				
Contribute to Household Income				

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Item	I Will Take the Lead	My Partner Will Take the Lead	We Will Handle This 50-50	Discuss with Partner? Y or N
Plan for Major Purchases (Cars, Vacations, Etc.)				
Other:				
Families, In-Laws, And Ex-Partners				
Maintain Relationships with Families				
Take Care of Parents If They are Sick				
Plan Family Visits & Activities				
Decide Where We Spend Holidays				
Decide Whether We Will Give Money to Kin				
Decide Whether to Let Them Stay with Us				
Other:				
Children & Childcare				
Take Kids To & From School or Bus Stop				
Handle After-School or Day Care Arrangements				
Prepare Breakfasts, Lunches, Dinners, Snacks				
Spend Time with The Kids				
Plan & Go on Family Outings				
Find, Screen, Hire, & Train Babysitter				
Go with Kids to Doctor Appointments				
Help Kids with Homework				
Help Kids with Baths, Grooming, Dressing				
Set and Enforce Rules and Consequences				
Take Care of Bedtime and Waking Up				
Stay Home When Kids Are Sick				
Handle Emotional Crises				
Go to School Events or Conferences				
Participate and Plan Birthday and Other Parties				
Take Kids to Lessons and Events				
Attend Their Sports Games & Special Events				
Watch Kids / Keep Them Occupied				
Other:				
Relationship & Communication				
Plan Dates, Evenings, Or Getaways				
Raise Issues that Come Up				
Initiate Email/Text/Phone Contact During the Day				
Initiate Affectionate Touching / Hugging				
Initiate Lovemaking				
Other				
Friends & Community				
Make Plans with Our Friends				
Make New Friends				
Other				

Handling Life's Curve Balls

Life will throw you a curve ball at some point in your lives. How you handle it as a couple will be a big factor in how happy your marriage will be.

Talk with your partner about how you might react to the following circumstances if they occurred, and how they would affect your relationship to each other.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ A miscarriage | ☐ Friend being attracted to your partner |
| ☐ Death or serious injury of a child | ☐ Partner arguing with your family members |
| ☐ Major financial difficulty | ☐ Partner working nights or second job |
| ☐ Being fired from a job | ☐ Partner becoming serious ill or incapacitated |
| ☐ Having a large credit card balance | ☐ Finding yourself attracted to someone else |
| ☐ Major illness in yourself or a family member | ☐ Partner no longer being interested in sex |
| ☐ Lawsuit with possible severe financial loss | ☐ Partner never having time for you |
| ☐ Partner running up huge credit card balance | ☐ Child in trouble in school or with the law |
| ☐ Partner quitting job to start own business | ☐ Having more children than you planned for |
| ☐ Partner going back to work with young children at home | ☐ Discovering that you cannot have children |
| ☐ Child born with a developmental disorder | ☐ Partner staying out very late at night |
| ☐ Partner not accounting for his/her time | ☐ Partner not caring for appearance/weight |

Add your own items here:

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Compare your answers with your partner's. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

Money Personalities

These questions can help you understand what you learned about saving, spending, and managing money when you were growing up. How you learned to handle money in your family can help you determine “hot spots” about money management that can arise in your relationship.

Part I. Think back to when you were young.

1. When was the first time you were aware of money, and what situation(s) do remember that made you aware of it?
2. Who paid the bills in your household when you were growing up?
3. Who usually ended up having the “final say” when it came to making large purchases? How did the other partner (if any) react to these decisions?
4. Did anyone in the family ever use money to lift their spirits, impress others, or express anger or other negative feelings?
5. How did your family handle conflicts about money, e.g., how much to spend, how much to save, what to spend money on?
6. What conclusions did you reach about money from growing up in your family / household? How much did your parents care about costs; how did they feel about budgeting, and saving up for purchases vs. using credit? How much did your parents emphasize putting money aside for retirement and children’s educational expenses?

Think about these categories to answer the question:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Housing (buying/renting, size, “moving up”) | ☐ Vacations / vacation homes |
| ☐ Large purchases, e.g., appliances, furniture | ☐ Education |
| ☐ Remodeling, repair, etc. | ☐ Retirement |
| ☐ Recreational items (boats, RVs, etc.) | ☐ Budgeting / meeting ordinary expenses |
| ☐ Cars | ☐ Savings (how and how much to set aside) |
| ☐ Food, restaurants | ☐ Investments / financial planning |
| ☐ Entertainment | ☐ Credit cards and other debt |
| ☐ Clothing, groceries, consumer goods | ☐ Emergency funds |

Compare your answers with your partner’s. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Part II. Think about your relationship now.

1. Which do you think is better for committed partners, joint or separate checking accounts?
2. Do you think paying the bills should be done separately or together?
3. Do you work with a budget now? How do you feel about following a budget?
4. How much do you want to earn?
5. Which would you rather have, a fulfilling, low-stress, low-paying job, or an unfulfilling, stressful high-paying job? Why?
6. What percentage of your annual income would you like to save? How successful have you been at saving up until now?
7. How much should each of you be free to spend without consulting the other, and on what?
8. How much are you willing to go into debt, and for what? How would your partner answer this?
9. Who should maintain the budget, pay the bills, and balance the checkbook?
10. Who should do the financial planning and manage investments?
11. What are your financial goals over your lifetime?
12. What mistakes have you made with money?
13. What is the most expensive item you have ever purchased?
14. Did you ever regret a large purchase you made?
15. How much research do you generally like to do before making a big purchase?
16. What stresses you out when it comes to money?
17. Do you track your saving and spending?
18. Do you tithe and/or give to charitable organizations?
19. Do you have any money habits that you would like to change?
20. Does your partner have any money habits that you would like him or her to change?
21. How do you handle conflicts about money in your relationship? How would you like to resolve conflicts instead?

Compare your answers with your partner's. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

How might your and your partner's views affect financial decision-making in your relationship?

The Sex Talk

It can be difficult to talk about sex openly. But if you don't talk about sex, you can't become a sexual team with your partner, and you can't resolve small problems before they become big ones. Couples who talk about their sex life have a happier marriage.

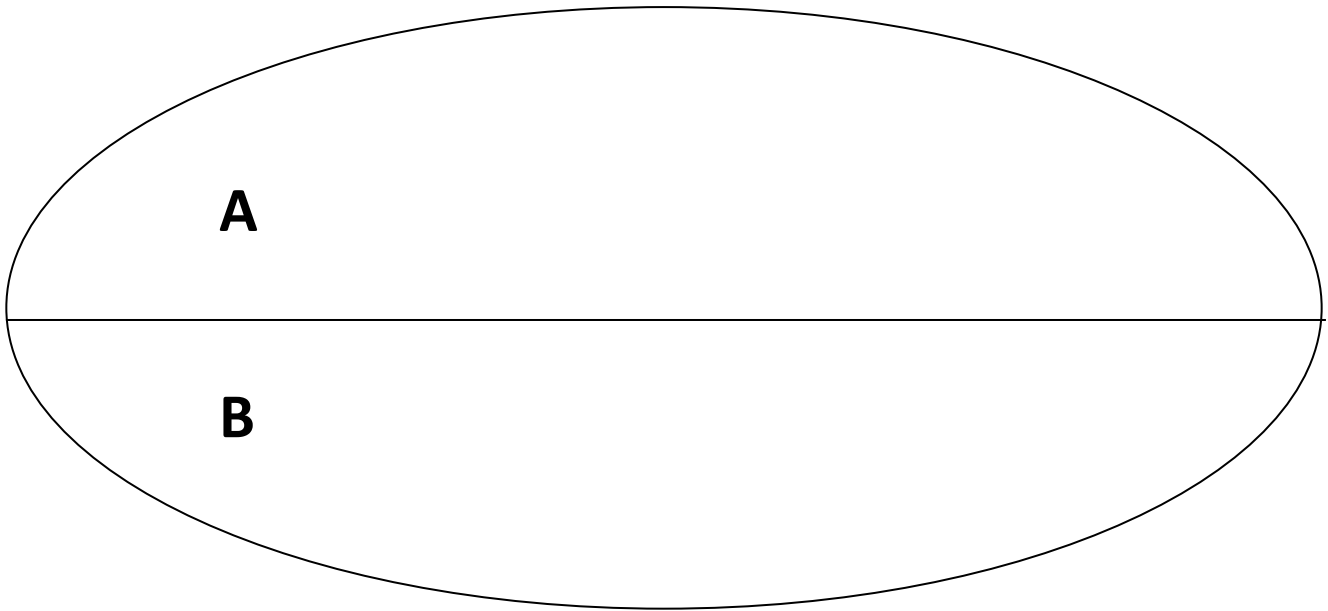
1. On a scale of 0 to 10, how comfortable are you talking about sex? If it's not easy, what would help?
2. On a scale of 0 to 10, how important is sex in a marriage?
3. How did your family express physical affection? What were your parents' attitudes about sex and "personal displays of affection?" What did you learn about being a sexual person from watching your parents?
4. What events and attitudes from your past have most influenced your sexual behaviors and attitudes?
5. What are your expectations regarding emotional intimacy, affectionate touch, and sexual touch in your marriage? How often do you want to have intercourse?
6. What's your worst fear about your sexual relationship after marriage?
7. What does "being a sexual team" mean to you?
8. What would talking about your sex life, asking your partner for specific things you would like sexually, and telling your partner about your "turn ons and turn offs" be like for you? How about listening to your partner talking about these things?
9. What sexual activities are OK and what are off limits? What if your partner asked you to do something that is off limits? What if your partner refused to do something because it is off limits?
10. How would you handle it if you initiated sex and your partner wasn't interested? What if your partner initiated sex and you weren't interested?
11. Fill in the blank: As a sexual partner, a wife should As a sexual partner, a husband should
12. What would you do if you found yourself in a sexless marriage?
13. What role would you like sexually explicit videos, web pages, photos, and other explicit materials to have in your marriage? How would you handle it if your partner was secretly engaging in sexually explicit activities on the internet, had online sexual contact with others, and/or got involved in clubs, with escorts, etc.?
14. How do you feel about masturbation?
15. How close should you and your partner get to members of the opposite sex after marriage, e.g., friends, coworkers, ex boy-friends/girl-friends, neighbors, acquaintances, people met on business or personal travel, and others? How close is too close? How would you handle it if it happened?
16. How important to you is novelty in a sexual relationship? How would you handle it if you were getting bored? What if your partner was getting bored?
17. Imagine a perfect sexual experience from start to finish, including setting, clothing, sexual activities, etc. Be as specific as you can. Could you ask your partner to do this with you? Why or why not?

Compare your answers with your partner's. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Imago Part 1

1. In the top half of the circle below, next to the “A,” list all of the **positive character traits** of your caretakers: mother, father, sisters and brothers, grandparents, and any other people who influenced you strongly when you were growing up. Lump all the traits together without bothering to group them according to the people who had them. Think of the people as they were when you were a child, not as they are today. Use simple words like “kind,” “warm,” “creative,” “fun,” “reliable,” etc.
2. In the bottom half of the circle, next to the “B,” list all of the **negative character traits** of your caretakers. Once again, lump all the traits together and think of the people as they were when you were young.



3. Think about your childhood, and list below the positive behaviors and experiences you remember with your caretakers from childhood. List the feelings you had in “C.”

Positive Behavior or Experience	Positive Feeling (C)

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Imago Part 2

Most people's childhoods contained at least some frustrating aspects. Some frustrations may have seemed to last longer or to happen over and over, while others were temporary.

1. In the left column below, list any frustrations you had over and over as a child with your caretakers (see example below.) Include any particularly painful events you remember with each person.
2. Next to each frustration you list, list ("D") the negative feelings you experienced over and over with your caretakers. Bring each caretaker to mind, and list the recurring negative feelings that come to mind with that caretaker.
3. Briefly describe ("E") the way you typically reacted to the frustration. (You may have reacted more than one way; list all of your common reactions.)

Person	Frustration	Feeling (D)	Reaction (E)
<i>Mother</i>	Dictated to me	Smothered	Withdrew Rebelled
<i>Father</i>	Was never around	Anxious	Tried to please him Tried to be good

Person	Frustration	Feeling (D)	Reaction (E)
<i>Mother</i>			
<i>Father</i>			
<i>Other</i>			

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Imago Part 3

Most people's childhoods contained at least some unfulfilled desires. We're not talking about material things, but rather emotional needs and wants that did not get filled.

1. List your important caretakers in the left column below (see example.)
2. Next to each caretaker, complete ("F") this sentence:

"What I needed and wanted from you most as a child and didn't get (or didn't get enough of) was:
_____."

3. List the feelings ("G") you had when you did not get your need met. (You may have had many feelings; just list your most common feelings.)

Person	Deep Unfulfilled Desire (F)	Feeling (G)
<i>Mother</i>	Feeling that my mother approved of me	Abandonment Futility
<i>Father</i>	Feeling my father was proud of me	Shame Fear

Person	Deep Unfulfilled Desire (F)	Feeling (G)
<i>Mother</i>		
<i>Father</i>		
<i>Other Caretakers</i>		

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Imago Part 4

Most people's childhoods contained at least some fears.

1. List your caretakers in the left column below (see example.)
2. Write down ("H") the things you feared would happen because of the way your caregivers were with you. For example, you might have had a fear that you would be:

Neglected	Invisible	Suppressed
Abandoned	Excluded	Disapproved of
Rejected	Ostracized	Controlled
Smothered	Used	Devalued
Shamed	Dominated	Unloved
Made to feel guilty	Ignored	Found defective
Made to feel different	Separated	Depleted
Hurt physically	Violated	Hurt sexually

Person	Deepest Fear (H) was that I would be
<i>Mother</i>	Unloved
<i>Father</i>	Dominated

Person	Deepest Fear (H) was that I would be
<i>Mother</i>	
<i>Father</i>	
<i>Other</i>	

Imago Part 5

Complete the following sentences by filling in the information next to the letters A – H.

1. I have spent my life searching for a person with these traits (from A and B):

2. So that I can get (from F):

3. And feel (from C):

4. When I don't get (from F):

5. I feel (from D and G):

6. I become afraid that I will be (from H):

7. And I often respond this way (from E):

Compare your answers with your partner's. What did you learn? Discuss this with your partner.

Watching “How to Make Relationships Work”

1. Schedule time when you and your partner are not distracted or sleepy, so you can pay attention.
2. Have a pen and paper handy so you can take notes.
3. Pause the video as you need to and write down things you want to remember.
4. Remember that every couple has a lot they have not been doing “right.” This is a learning experience, not an opportunity to blame yourself or your partner.
5. If you want to talk about the video, be sure to avoid pointing fingers or getting into a blame game.
6. Bring the video and your notes to our next meeting. We will talk about if anything in the video has been affecting your relationship.

Questions	Your Notes & Observations
Do I use any of the Four Horsemen of the Marital Apocalypse? Which Ones? • Criticism • Contempt • Defensiveness • Stonewalling	
What’s the difference between “complaining” and “criticizing?” Is complaining good for a marriage?	
How often do I use the Marital Grim Reaper (Harsh Startup) to begin a conversation about a problem?	
How do I usually respond to my partner’s “Bids for Connection?” ☐ turn toward _____ % of time ☐ turn away _____ % of time ☐ turn against _____ % of time	
When a conversation gets negative, how often do I use a “Repair Strategy?”	
How open am I to accepting influence from my partner?	
How much do I know about my partner’s “Love Map?” How often do I update it?	
How is the friendship part of our relationship going? What changes would I like in this part of our relationship?	
Other things from the video that seem important to talk about:	

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The Magic Five Hours

	Activity	Min. Per Day	Days per Week	Total Time per Week
1.	Partings. Make sure that before you say goodbye in the morning, you've learned about one thing that is happening in your partner's life that day—from lunch with the boss to a doctor's appointment to a scheduled phone call with a friend.	2 min.	5 days / week	10 min.
2.	Reunions. * Be sure to engage in a stress-reducing conversation at the end of each work day when you <i>both</i> want to talk (e.g., "How was your day, dear?") Resist the temptation to use this time to discuss relationship issues.	20 min.	5 days / week	1 hour, 40 min.
3.	Admiration and appreciation. Find some way every day to communicate genuine affection and appreciation toward your partner.	5 min.	7 days / week	35 min.
4.	Affection. Kiss, hold, grab, and touch each other during whatever time you're together. Make sure to kiss each other before going to sleep. Think of that kiss as a way to let go of any minor irritations that have built up over the day. In other words, lace your kiss with forgiveness and tenderness for your partner.	5 min.	7 days / week	35 min.
5.	Weekly date. Make sure to schedule and follow through with a relaxing, low-pressure way to stay connected with your partner. Ask your partner questions that let you update your love map and turn toward your partner. (At first, resist the temptation to use these dates to talk about marital issues or work through arguments you've had during the week. Later, it would be OK to use the time this way.) Think of questions to ask your partner (such as, "Are you still thinking about redecorating the bedroom?" "Where should we go on our next vacation?" or "How are you feeling about your boss these days?")	2 hours	1 day / week	2 hours
TOTAL time per week to keep your relationship loving and happy:		5 hours		

*Guidelines for Reunion Conversations

- **Take turns** being the speaker (split the time roughly 50-50).
- **No unsolicited advice.** Just try to understand and be a good listener. Give your partner a shoulder to cry on.
- **Show genuine interest.** Don't let your mind or eyes wander. Ask questions. Make eye contact. Nod, or say "Uh-huh."
- Communicate that you **understand.** Let your partner know you empathize, for example, say "That's awful!" "I'd be stressed out too!"
- **Take your partner's side.** Don't side with the opposition—side with your partner.
- Express an **"Us against the world"** attitude. Express solidarity.
- **Express affection.** For example, give your partner a hug, or say "I love you no matter what."
- **Validate.** Let your partner know that his or her feelings make sense to you, e.g., "I can see why you're annoyed by that."

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Let's Do It!

Rank each activity below for how much it interests you. **0=No Interest; 10=Extreme Interest**

Acting/Lessons	Family	Pool Playing
Aerobics	Fishing	Pottery
Amusement Parks	Flea Markets	Praying
Antiquing	Folk Dancing	Racquetball
Aquariums	Football/Watch/Do	Reading
Archery	Formal Parties	Religious Activities
Art Exhibits	Frisbee	Rock Climbing
Art Classes	Gardening	Rock Music
Astrology	Get-Togethers	Roller Blading
Astronomy	Golf/Regular/Mini	Roller Skating
Auto Racing	Hiking	Scuba Diving
Ballet/Watch/Do	Historical Sites	Sculpting
Barbecues	Hi-Tech Audio	Sewing
Baseball/Watch/Do	Home Improvement	Sexual Activities
Basketball/Watch/D	Horseback Riding	Shopping
Beaches	Ice Skating	Sightseeing
Bicycling	Internet	Singing
Bird watching	Investments	Skiing/Downhill
Board Games	Jazz	Skiing/X-Country
Boating	Jogging	Skydiving
Book Groups	Kite Flying	Soccer/Watch/Do
Bowling	Knitting/Crocheting	Softball/Watch/Do
Boxing/Watch/Do	Lectures	Stamp Collecting
Brunches	Libraries	Surfing
Camping	Long Walks	Swimming
Canoeing	Martial Arts	Tai Chi
Card Games	Meditation	Tennis
Chess	Model-making	Theater
Classical Music	Motorcycling	Video Games
Clubs/Associations	Moviemaking	Woodworking
Comedy Clubs	Movies / videos	Working on Cars
Computers	Museums	Working Out
Concerts	Opera	Yoga
Cooking	Painting/	Zoo
Crafts	Photography	
Dancing	Picnics	Other:
Decorating	Ping Pong	
Dining Out	Planning Trips	
Dinner Parties	Playing Music	
Drives/short trips	Poetry Readings	
Fairs	Political events	

Re-romanticizing – Keeping Your Romance Alive

1. Think about what your partner does currently that makes you feel loved, connected, and/or happy. Complete the following sentence with three different endings as three different examples of what your partner does now.

I feel loved and cared now about when you:

1A
1B
1C

Examples include kiss me goodbye, listen to me when I'm upset, talk to me before making a big purchase.

2. Now remember back to the days when you and your partner were first together. What kinds of things did your partner do for you that he or she no longer does? Complete the following sentence with three different endings as three different examples of what your partner used to do.

I used to feel loved and cared about when you:

2A
2B
2C

Examples include bought me flowers, called to say you missed me, stayed up late to make love.

3. Now think about some loving and caring things that you have always wanted someone to do for you, but you have not received or asked for in this relationship. These may come from your idea of what it would be like if you were with your perfect mate, or from your memories of a previous relationship. Complete the following sentence with three different endings as three different examples of what, if your partner were to do it, would make you feel loved and cared about.

I would feel loved and cared about if you would:

3A
3B
3C

Examples include buy me some flowers as a surprise, watch a movie or sports event that I like.

4. Now go back over your lists and write a number next to each of the items to show how important each one is to you (write big, so you can really see it). Use this scale:

1 = Very important, would make me feel **very** loved and cared about

2 = Important, would make me feel loved and cared about.

3 = Not that important, would make me feel loved, but it would not be that bad if I didn't get it.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

5. Now give your list to your partner, and get your partner's list from him or her.

6. Read your partner's list, and next to each item, put a "Y" next to each item that you would be willing to do, and an "N" next to each item that you would not be willing to do at this time. Make a copy of the sheet and then give it back to your partner, and give a copy to your counselor.

7. Starting tomorrow, without saying anything to your partner, commit to doing the things you put a "Y" next to. Try to focus on the things that your partner rated as a "1" or a "2."

Do at least one of these things a day, regardless of how you are feeling about your partner.

When you are doing these things for your partner, remember this:

By doing one of these things for your partner, you are **giving a gift**, and your partner is in no way obligated to do anything in return, even to acknowledge what you have done. Remember that **it is in your best interest** to make your partner feel loved.

1. If you notice any resistance or hesitation on your part, or if you have difficulty doing one thing per day, make a note of the problem you are experiencing, **but keep doing the thing anyway**.

This will get easier with time and practice!

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Three Blessings – Finding Things to Appreciate about Your Partner

Just before you go to bed, write down three “blessings” your partner brought into your life, or three things that you appreciated about your partner during the day. It could be a simple action, such as making coffee in the morning or doing something fun, or a quality that your partner expressed, such as enthusiasm, generosity, or affection.

1
2
3

Next to each item listed above, write down WHY you appreciated it (*because you did something with me that I find fun, because you made me feel loved, because when you are enthusiastic, it gives me a “charge” about our future, etc.*)

Why 1
Why 2
Why 3

Select one of the items on your list, and when you and your partner are saying goodnight, tell your partner about it and why you appreciated it.

Make this a nightly ritual, and see the effect it has on your happiness and good feelings in your relationship.

*****One more thing:** *It is very important to do something with your partner in mind, or to express a positive quality with your partner, every day. No exceptions, even if you did not get along very well on a given day. This will give your partner things to list on his or her Three Blessings sheet!*

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

WRAPPING UP

What has changed since you and your partner began this course? Did you achieve your goals for premarital counseling? It might help to review the goals you set for yourself when you began this course:

- ☐ I want to learn and use good communication, conflict, and problem-solving skills.
- ☐ I want to understand how our life histories—family, friends, and past relationships—will influence our marriage.
- ☐ I want to identify our key personality differences and learn how to work with them.
- ☐ I want to compare our expectations in areas of life such as finances, sex, romance, and parenting.
- ☐ I want to form a common vision based on our values and priorities as individuals and as a couple.
- ☐ I have other, specific goals (list here):

1.

2.

3.

We hope you found this course useful, informative, and enjoyable, and that you have gained the knowledge and skills to create a happy life together with your partner.

Please complete the HEA Evaluation Form in your binder to receive your HEA Certificate of Completion!

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Satisfaction with Counseling

Please let us know about your experience with our services.

Date _____ 1. Your First Name (optional) _____

2. Your counselor's name (optional)

☐ Marika Martin, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.

☐ Kier Maxwell, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.

☐ Elizabeth Sloan, L.P.C., L.C.P.C

Your overall satisfaction with counseling:

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Not applicable
3. My relationship improved overall					
4. My partner and I communicate better					
5. My counselor was helpful					
6. I would recommend my counselor to someone else					
7. Your CONFIDENTIAL comments, complaints, or compliments (optional)					

If you would like to CONFIDENTIALLY discuss your experience, you are welcome to contact

- our Administrative Coordinator, Jessica Mullins, at Jessica@CaringCouples.com or 866.588.0477, ext. 8., or
- our Director, Elizabeth Sloan, at Elizabeth@CaringCouples.com or 866-588-0477, ext. 2.

Thank you for your time!