



# Elevate

*Taking Your Relationship to  
the Next Level*

COUPLE WORKBOOK



[www.nermen.org](http://www.nermen.org)

ELEVATE is based on the work of the National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network and the resources shared in this workbook were adapted from the Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education Training project ([www.hrmet.org](http://www.hrmet.org)) funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant: 90CT0151.

ELEVATE was developed by colleagues in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University, and in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at the University of Georgia, who are experienced in family life and relationship education.



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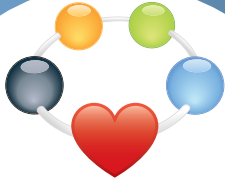
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**Empower Yourself** While better health is a consequence of healthy couple relationships, attending to one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being also fosters healthier couple and marital relationships.



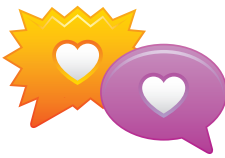
**Engage** The connections that couples develop with their family, peers, and community offer a source of meaning, purpose, and support that influence the health and vitality of their couple relationship.



**Enlighten** To develop and sustain healthy relationships partners must develop and maintain intimate knowledge of each other's personal and relational needs, interests, feelings, and expectations.



**Lay the Foundation** A strong, healthy, long-lasting relationship does not just happen by chance but, instead, through deliberate and conscientious decisions to be committed, intentional, proactive, and strengths-focused.



**Tame** Problems and conflicts are a normal part of relationships. Healthy couples use strategies to see their partner's view, accept differences, and manage stress to ensure emotional and physical safety.



**Value** Individuals who express kindness, use understanding and empathy, demonstrate respect, and invest time to be available and open to their partner are able to maintain stable, healthy couple relationships.



**Attach** Being a healthy couple involves spending meaningful time together and fostering a shared sense of couple identity in order to sustain a close, enduring friendship based on trust and love.



# Elevate

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# My Action Plan



*What will you do to ELEVATE your love?*

## Empower Yourself

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## Lay the Foundation

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## Enlighten

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## Value

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## Attach

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## Tame

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## Engage

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***Take your relationship to the next level!***



# Heart-Brain Connection

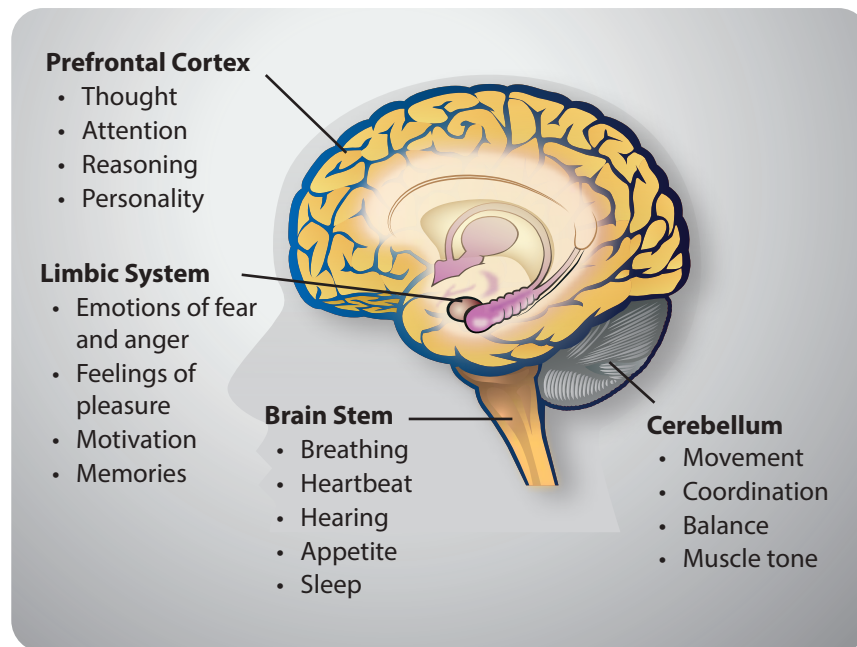


## What is the heart-brain connection?

The brain's emotional reaction to something drives heart rhythm patterns. The variation in time between heartbeats should be steady instead of irregular; this is known as heart rate variability (HRV).

## What are the areas and functions of the brain?

The brain is organized into four main areas and each area is responsible for different functions:



## What is the optimal heartbeat for clear thoughts and actions?

The heart rate you experienced when your mother was carrying you. Beginning during pregnancy, a mother's heart instills a pattern in her child. The average resting heart rate is 80 beats per minute (BPM). For most people, throughout our lives, this maternal heart rate remains a soothing rate and is established as a key rhythm in life. A heart rate for healthy adults can vary between 60-100 BPM, so your specific soothing rate may be different.

## How do emotions influence the heart-brain response?

Negative emotions can decrease the abilities of the immune system, increase stress levels, and put unnecessary strain on the heart's functioning. Positive emotions keep the heart at a healthier baseline rate and allow us to think more rationally than negative emotions would.

## How does the heart-brain connection affect couples?

Learning the appropriate skills to cope with emotional distress can help couples decrease angry outbursts and increase communication since their minds and hearts remain calm. When your heart rate is lower you are able to access your highest levels of thinking in your prefrontal cortex. You will think before you act.

# Heart-Brain Connection



	Pulse (15 seconds) x 4 = Heart Rate	Emotional State/Mood
Ex.	Pulse <u>20</u> x 4 = <u>80</u>	<i>happy</i>
1	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
2	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
3	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
4	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
5	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
6	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
7	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	

Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4
15	60	19	76	23	92
16	64	20	80	24	96
17	68	21	84	25	100
18	72	22	88	26	104

# Being a Mindful Couple



## What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an open attention to and awareness of the present moment, both internally and externally. It is used to help individuals and couples pay attention to thoughts and feelings in the moment. This also helps one to act skillfully, instead of emotionally, in stressful situations.

## Why is it important to practice mindfulness?

Research shows mindfulness can improve physical health (i.e., memory, pain, skin problems, headaches, etc.) and mental health (i.e., depression, anxiety, sleep, etc.). Generally, participating in mindfulness helps individuals cope with stress better, leading to decreases in overall stress.

## Why is it important to practice mindfulness as a couple?

Practicing these exercises as a couple allows you to develop an understanding of thoughts and feelings in the present moment with your spouse or partner. Also this empowers couples to act skillfully and not emotionally in stressful situations. Research suggests practicing mindfulness combined with having a healthy intimate relationship and social support may be as important as diet and exercising when it comes to maintaining good health.

## How do these practices help couples?

- Promotes unity, connection and closeness within relationships
- Allows couples to approach stressful situations as challenges
- Increases empathy in individuals
- Encourages acceptance and less avoidant behaviors
- Improves mental and physical health
- Permits couples to better cope with stressful situations

## How does somebody practice mindfulness?

There are many ways to engage in mindful practice including meditation techniques (i.e., loving kindness, body scan, attitude change, etc.) and active techniques (i.e., yoga, mindful walking, mindful eating, etc.). *Some examples that you can practice are provided on the back.*



## Where can I find further information about mindfulness?

- <http://marc.ucla.edu/>
- <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx>
- *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- *Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley

## Practicing Mindfulness

### PARTNER CONNECTION

*(Can be used to help regulate emotions.)*



- Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts
  - Shift attention to your breathing. Breathe deeply in-and-out. Do not worry if one breath is deeper than another, just focus on the breathing.
  - If your mind wanders away from your focused breathing, don't worry. Just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- ▶ *AFTER 5 Minutes of Breathing continue*
- Now think of a memory which is full of joy or gratitude towards your partner. This memory should bring you positive emotional feelings.
  - Maintain the memory and the emotions for as long as possible.
  - Shift attention to your breathing for a few more minutes.

### LOVING-KINDNESS

*(Can be used to maintain loving- acceptance.)*



- Take a moment to relax and focus on your breathing.
  - When you are ready repeat this thought to yourself:
    - May I be filled with loving-kindness,
    - May I be well,
    - May I be blessed,
    - May I feel peace, balance, and forgiveness,
    - May I be happy.
- ▶ **Now fill in the blank saying your partner or spouse name**
- May \_\_\_\_\_ be filled with loving-kindness,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be well,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be blessed,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ feel peace, balance, and forgiveness,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be happy.

### ATTITUDE CHANGE

*(Can be used when experiencing conflict with your partner.)*



- Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts
  - Shift attention to your breathing. Breathe deeply in-and-out. Do not worry if one breath is deeper than another, just focus on the breathing.
  - If your mind wanders away from your focused breathing, don't worry. Just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- ▶ *AFTER 5 Minutes of Breathing*
- Now think of a memory which is full of joy or gratitude towards your partner. This memory should bring you positive emotional feelings.
  - Now ask yourself: "What words or actions should I change within the relationship at this time?"
  - Take note of those thoughts and emotions so that you can follow through.

# Tips For a Healthy Relationship



**EMPOWER YOURSELF**—Individual health impacts the health of couple relationships. Taking care of yourself first can help improve the wellness of your relationship. Below are some ways that you can *Care for Self* and help your relationship:

- Eat healthy and exercise regularly.
- Set regular sleep and wake times for yourself.
- Notice and appreciate the small, good things in your life to help you find greater happiness and satisfaction.
- Find ways to use your strengths to serve your community.
- Look for the positive meaning in your life.
- Learn to manage stress in more healthy, effective ways.



**LAY THE FOUNDATION**—Are you making deliberate and conscious decisions about your relationships? It is important to be intentional when establishing and nurturing healthy relationships. Here are some ways to show how you *Choose* to strengthen your relationship:

- Make the decision to enter into a relationship rather than sliding into one.
- Commit and provide effort in the relationship.
- Focus on each other's strengths, and what each of you brings to the relationship.
- Avoid thoughts and behaviors that could potentially be hurtful to one another.
- Find positive and effective ways to grow your relationship.
- Envision and set goals for a healthy future together.



**ENLIGHTEN**—How well do you know your partner? Sharing and developing an understanding with your partner creates stability and increases awareness of your partner and the relationship. Here are some ways you can get to *Know* your partner better:

- Ask about your partner's life, thoughts, and feelings to get to know them better.
- Be sensitive to your partner's worries and needs.
- Think back on positive experiences you have had together.
- Express sincere interest in what is happening in your partner's life.
- See situations through your partner's eyes to gain a better understanding of how they look at things.
- Discuss what you expect in a relationship with one another.



**VALUE**—Keeping a relationship healthy is the responsibility of each person in that relationship. What do you do to show support, affection, and respect for your partner? Here are some ways to show that you *Care* for your partner:

- Show respect by expressing caring actions towards your partner instead of crabby reactions when they have had a stressful day.
- When communicating, be open and listen to your partner.
- Focus on the good in your partner.
- Accept and value the differences that you and your partner share.
- Give love in the way your partner likes to be loved.
- Show appreciation as a way to make a deposit in your relationship account.
- To maintain a strong relationship, make time for togetherness and moments of connection.



**ATTACH**—Developing and maintaining your friendship with your partner helps build couple identity. Learning and growing together as a couple further establishes this friendship. Use these tips to *Share* together when developing couple friendship:

- Schedule meaningful time together as a couple doing something you both like.
- Figure out common interests and activities you share as a couple.
- Create couple traditions and rituals that promote togetherness.
- Set and work towards common goals with one another.
- Nurture positive interactions with your partner.
- Send clear and positive messages when communicating.
- Embrace and turn toward your partner’s bids for connection instead of against.
- Envision yourselves as a “team”!



**TAME**—Dealing with differences in healthy ways can minimize friction among couples. Problems in healthy couple relationships may never be resolved, but they can be managed in effective ways. Here are a few tips on how to effectively *Manage* differences in your relationship:

- Understand and accept that there cannot always be an agreement between partners when in conflict.
- Share concerns with one another in a calm, respectful tone to avoid tension.
- Avoid criticism and defensiveness that could be insulting to your partner.
- Learn to stop conflict before it escalates out of control.
- When need be, take “time outs” during conflict, but make sure that you come back to talk.
- Soothe and support one another.
- Be open to forgiveness.
- Maintain emotional and physical safety with your partner.



**ENGAGE**—Engaging in a supportive, positive social network can be beneficial to any couple. Maintaining these relationships can act as safety nets that provide security to couples during good and challenging times. Here are some ways that couples can *Connect* their relationship to others:

- Grow and maintain extended family relationships.
- Develop and be a part of a supportive network of friends that can set and be examples to you as a healthy couple.
- Jointly engage in community organizations and services that can bring you and your partner together.
- Seek out resources to strengthen your relationship.

For additional information about healthy couple and marital relationships and other resources offered through Cooperative Extension, visit [www.nermen.org](http://www.nermen.org).

Based on T.G. Futris & F. Adler-Baeder (Eds) (2013). *The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model: Core Teaching Concepts for Relationship and Marriage Enrichment Programming*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Available at <http://www.nermen.org/NERMEM.php>



# EMPOWER YOURSELF



## Caring for Yourself to Care for Others

Taking care of yourself makes it easier to care, share, and connect with your partner and your family. Individual wellness is more than not being sick. Wellness involves making choices about eating right, exercising often, thinking positive thoughts, and sharing intimacy.

### Healthy Eating

In order to properly nourish your body, feel good, and have the energy to love your partner well, it is important to make healthy food choices.

*Consider these tips to make healthier choices about what you put into your body:*

- Increase intake of fruits and vegetables (especially dark green and orange colored) each day.
- Try to increase the amount of whole grains you eat – choose whole grain breads and pastas instead of white.
- Keep food safe – keep meat and dairy properly refrigerated. Make sure to cook meat until it has reached the right temperature.
- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and limit the overall fat that you eat. Choose low-fat options.
- Decrease your intake of foods that have a lot of sugar and salt in them. Choose foods labeled “no added sugar” or “low sodium” or ones that do not list sugar as one of the first 3 ingredients.



### Physical Activity

Move your body! Adding physical activity to your daily routine not only reduces health problems, but also improves your mental health and relationships.

*These guidelines can help you add more physical activity into your day:*

- Exercise with a partner so that you can support and motivate each other.
- Doctors recommend 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 days per week. Try walking at a brisk pace, housework, pushing a lawnmower, or dancing.
- Do at least 10 minutes of exercise at a time. Include some aerobic exercise that makes your heart beat faster and also strength building exercises.



## Regulating Your Emotions

Regulating your emotions involves controlling how you feel and how you react to stressful situations. Sometimes it seems we have no control over how we feel, but it is possible to manage emotions and how we express them.

*Try these tips:*

- Humor – learning to be lighthearted in the midst of highly emotional times can help ease the tension and can help you to calm down when necessary.
- Positive self-talk – learn to be the positive voice inside of your head instead of the negative one. For example, instead of saying “Oh, I can’t believe I did that” try saying, “I know I can do better next time.”
- Think logically about the meaning behind the emotion – ask yourself – Why am I feeling like this? Where is this coming from? How would I like to react?
- Be willing to change. Learning to compromise can solve a lot of problems.



## Sexual Health and Intimacy

Did you know most people report that the quality of their sexual relationship with their partner is more important than how much they have sex? Sexual satisfaction is clearly linked to the physical and emotional wellness of each partner.

*In order to have a healthy sexual relationship as a couple, there are key things to focus on:*



- Openness about sexual desires. This requires knowing yourself and your wants enough to talk freely about them with your partner.
- Set the mood early. Foreplay happens way before you make it to the bedroom; being kind and having fun sets a better mood for romance.
- Sharing power. A healthy balance of influence in the relationship is crucial for creating intimacy. Think about ways that you and your partner can share.
- Medical issues. Side effects of some medications can impact sexual desire. Talk with your doctor about any possible side effects that may occur and be patient with your partner.
- Emotional issues. There are countless other influences that affect your sexual relationship, including sexual history and mental health. Learn to be mindful about how these things might be affecting your sexual relationship.

## Think Positive!

Learning to think positively about life can have dramatic effects on your well-being and on your relationships with others. Optimism involves being hopeful and confident about the future and the successful outcome of a situation. It also involves viewing obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow.





# Signs of Stress



We know that we have to fill a car's gas tank before the gauge is on empty. The gas gauge is a signal that it's time to stop and get more fuel. As well, when cars hit potholes or curbs, tires get out of alignment and the car has trouble driving straight. A shaky wheel is a signal that alignment is needed. When oil is left unchanged for a long time, it causes other parts of the car to not work and break down. Odd noises under the hood, trouble starting the car, and sometimes smoke are signals that maintenance is needed.

Just like a car, our bodies also signal when we need to take care of ourselves. These signals are sometimes called "stress signals." We sometimes experience physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral signs.

## What are some things that happen to you when you are stressed?

### Physical

- Headache
- Body aches
- Heart pounds and breathe fast
- Upset stomach
- Feel very tired
- Not hungry
- Want to eat all the time
- Muscles tighten up

### Emotional/Mental

- Worry something bad will happen
- Feel helpless or overwhelmed
- Feel frustrated
- Become moody or grouchy
- Cannot concentrate
- Think people are disappointed in you
- Have trouble remembering things
- Get nervous and can't relax

Other "stress signals" you experience:

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What are some ways your partner and your partner's body responds to stress?

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Feeling stressed is not a bad thing. In fact, sometimes it can push us to do well or do something positive. But, sometimes how we respond to stress can harm us and could hurt others whom we care about. When we feel stressed, the first step in handling our stress is to understand how it makes us feel. Help those you care about, and who care about you, understand your stress signals.

When you start noticing your stress signals use healthy coping strategies to make yourself healthier.

***When you are healthy, your relationship with others will be healthier!***



# Managing Stress



When it comes to stress, sometimes we need to take care of ourselves before we can care for others. How we take care of ourselves and react to stress is important. There are many ways to cope with stress. Some are healthy and some are not.

## What are some ways that you deal with stress?

### HEALTHY

- Go for a walk or exercising
- Sit quietly and breathe
- Read a relaxing book
- Listen to music
- Do a favorite hobby
- Eat just enough healthy food
- Pray or go to religious services
- Use humor, share a laugh, watch a funny movie
- Get enough sleep at night
- Seek help from a professional
- Talk to your partner or a close friend
- Write your concerns down in a journal
- Think positive thoughts
- Look for the good in your life

### LESS HEALTHY

- Yell, shout, scream, or curse
- Dwell on things that make you angry
- Smoke
- Drink
- Use drugs
- Hurt yourself or others
- Eat unhealthy food
- Eat too much or too little
- Sleep too much or too little
- Buy things you do not really need
- Avoid being with or talking to others
- Complain a lot to others
- Take things out on other people
- Destroy or damage things

List other healthy coping strategies you use:

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List other less healthy coping strategies you use:

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### Make an Action Plan:

How can you use more healthy coping strategies the next time you feel stressed?

What do you need to help you cope with stress?

Who can you turn to for help when you are stressed?

***When we are healthy, our relationships with others are healthier!***



# EMPOWER YOURSELF



## HEALTHY LIVING, HEALTHY COUPLES

### Build a healthy plate

Before you eat, think about what goes on your plate or in your cup or bowl. Foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods contain the nutrients you need without too many calories. Try some of these options.

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to skim or 1% milk.
- Make at least half your grains whole.
- Vary your protein food choices.
- Keep your food safe to eat – learn more at [www.FoodSafety.gov](http://www.FoodSafety.gov).

### Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt

Many people eat foods with too much solid fats, added sugars, and salt (sodium). Added sugars and fats load foods with extra calories you don't need. Too much sodium may increase your blood pressure.

- Choose foods and drinks with little or no added sugars.
- Look out for salt (sodium) in foods you buy - it all adds up.
- Eat fewer foods that are high in solid fats.

### Eat the right amount of calories for you

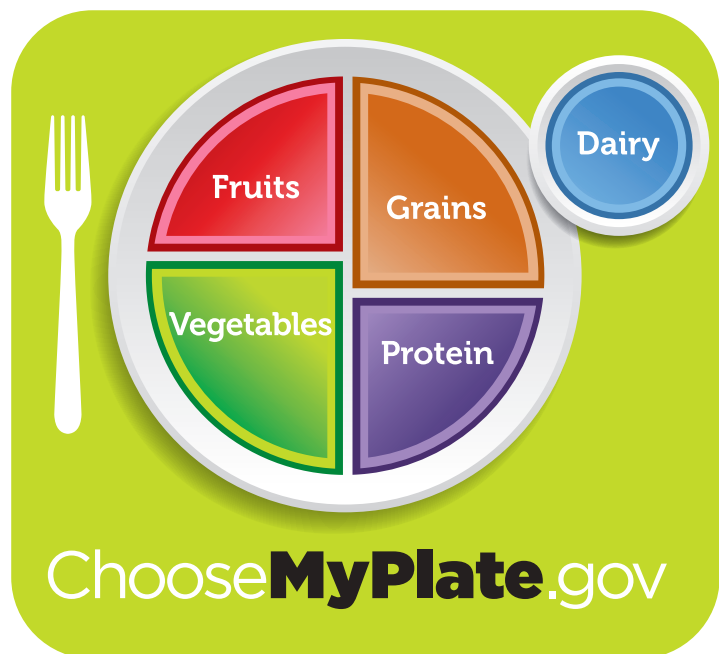
Everyone has a personal calorie limit. Staying within yours can help you get to or maintain a healthy weight. People who are successful at managing their weight have found ways to keep track of how much they eat in a day, even if they don't count every calorie.

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Cook more often at home, where you are in control of what's in your food.
- When eating out, choose lower calorie menu options.
- Write down what you eat to keep track of how much you eat.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so sensibly - limit to 1 drink a day for women or to 2 drinks a day for men.

### Be physically active your way

Pick activities that you like and start by doing what you can, at least 10 minutes at a time. Every bit adds up, and the health benefits increase as you spend more time being active.

Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) for more resources and tips for living healthy!



Source: USDA Dietary Guidelines Brochure – Choose My Plate





## Tips for a healthier sex life with your partner



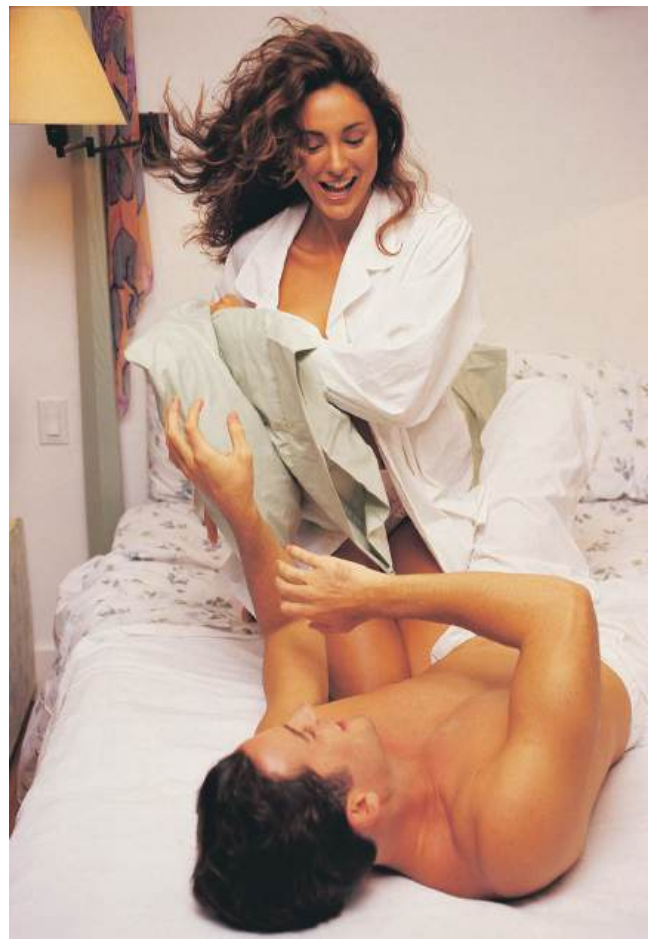
***Sex and intimacy are important to your relationship. Read below to find out more about keeping the sexual connection healthy.***

Benefits from sharing a healthy sex life with your partner:

- Ease tension and stress
- Release “feel good” chemicals called endorphins
- Release “bonding hormones” called Vasopressin and Oxytocin
- Slow down aging
- Slow the loss of vaginal lubrication
- Decrease prostate issues

***The problem is that fitting long-term intimacy, arousal, and sexuality in a relationship is difficult.***

- Be aware! There are certain times during most long-term relationships when couples are at a high risk for losing their sexual bond: before or after the birth of a child, when adolescents are in the home, when someone is in poor health, and during menopause.
- Passion tends to come and go throughout a long-term relationship. During the sexual lulls, extra effort is needed to connect with your partner. Hugging, kissing, and other forms of physical touch can enhance intimacy.
- Don't let “Hollywood Sex” that shows super stars aroused before any contact and having multiple and mutual orgasms intimidate you! Couples don't just walk around the house aroused and ready for sex. Many couples have kids, work, etc.
- MOST sexual encounters are NOT spontaneous. Surprised? Your best bet for having a sexual encounter is to *plan it*. Only about 1 out of 20 sexual encounters occur when both partners are aroused, without any planning. The stars only align about once a month. Enjoy when they do and plan for the rest of the time.
- Even happy, satisfied couples will have ‘not so satisfying’ sex sometimes. Sex is about more than performance or orgasms. About 5 to 15% of the time a sexual encounter will be a dud!
- Don't assume you know what your partner likes. Ask your partner, “What do you like?” The answer may surprise you! Just as people change over time, their preferences can too.



- You deserve to have sexuality and intimacy in your relationship if you both desire for that. New and different activities can help lead to sexual desire.
- Make the effort to go on dates with your partner, get away, or try something new together. Work together to figure out what bridges each other to desire. Couples who feel more emotionally connected have more frequent sex.
- Want to improve your sex life (especially if you are over 40)? Being physically healthy is a big part of a healthy sex life. For example, did you know that belly fat blocks testosterone; the hormone responsible for sex drive? Getting healthy will give you more energy for everything, including sex. If possible, start exercising, get good sleep, eat well, etc.
- Sex is not about intercourse, but about the flow of eroticism. Sometimes it won't flow to intercourse, and many couples struggle with an all or nothing approach. Try to think of sex as a way to share pleasure and work on becoming comfortable with erotic non-intercourse.

***Like driving a car, try imagining shifting from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> gear – the car would choke. Don't focus on getting to 5th gear. Instead, try enjoying 1st gear. If it progresses to 2nd gear, enjoy that too. Often the gears naturally progress and enjoy each gear in the process.***

**1<sup>st</sup> Gear of Connection:** Affectionate Touch is all about getting connected with your partner.

- Hand-holding, hugging, kissing
- Clothes on

**2<sup>nd</sup> Gear of Connection:** Sensual Touch is all about giving and being receptive to non-genital touch.

- Warmth
- Body massages, cuddling, caressing, hugging, kissing

**3<sup>rd</sup> Gear of Connection:** Playful Touch includes a mix of non-genital touching and genital pleasuring.

- Showering together
- Erotic games
- Dancing (erotic or romantic)

**4<sup>th</sup> Gear of Connection:** Erotic Touch becomes more physically arousing.

- Manual, oral, rubbing, vibrator
- Oral sex – may be viewed as more erotic by older couples

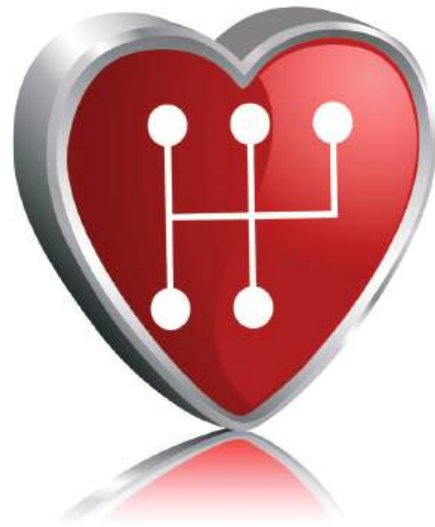
**5<sup>th</sup> Gear of Connection:** Intercourse

- Most transition when they can (3rd gear). Wait and transition to sexual intercourse when you should (4<sup>th</sup> gear)
- Waiting to transition to a higher level of arousal is especially helpful for ensuring the bodies are "ready" for intercourse

Although there are times you may not reach 5th gear, taking the pressure off and focusing instead on each other's enjoyment builds a positive connection that can last.

***If intimacy and sex are part of your relationship, a healthy sexual relationship is an important part of a healthy partnership.  
You get out of it what you put into it!!!***

Prepared by Scott Ketring, Sandy Morrison, and Vanessa Finnegan from Auburn University.  
For more information: McCarthy, B., & McCarthy, E. (2014). *Rekindling desire* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.





## My (and My Partner's) Strengths



When we hear the word “strengths,” we often think of talents like being athletic, singing, being artistic, or playing a musical instrument. But strengths can also refer to unique qualities, such as kindness, fairness, curiosity, and being a good parent or partner.

Read through the statements below. Mark those that describe you and your partner.

	My Strength	Partner's Strength
1. I am curious about the world.		
2. I enjoy learning new things.		
3. I like to think of new ways to do things.		
4. No matter what the social situation, I am able to fit in.		
5. I am able to look at things and see the big picture.		
6. I have taken frequent stands in the face of strong opposition.		
7. I finish what I start.		
8. I keep my promises.		
9. I have voluntarily helped a friend/neighbor in the last month.		
10. I have people in my life who are as concerned about my feelings and well-being as they do about their own.		
11. I avoid sarcasm and put-downs.		
12. I treat all people equally regardless of who they might be.		
13. I often get people to do things together without nagging.		
14. I control my emotions.		
15. I do not engage in activities that could put me in danger.		
16. I change the subject when people pay me a compliment.		
17. I often say thank you, even for little things.		
18. I look for positives even when things are not going well.		
19. My life has a strong purpose.		
20. I don't hold grudges.		

What are some of your other strengths that are not listed?

How can you use your strengths to help strengthen your couple relationship?

Think about some items you did not mark as strengths for you or your partner. How can you and your partner work together to develop that into a strength?

***Use your strengths to improve your health and the health of your relationship.***



## What Went Well?



When we feel a lot of stress, it can seem like we have very little control over our lives. We tend to be negative and wonder what bad thing will happen next. If we try looking for the good instead, and give ourselves credit for having a positive influence, we will feel more in control and find better ways to solve problems.

Seeing the many good things you do for yourself and others every day is one way to be positive and in control. Before you go to sleep each night, write down two things that went well that day. Next, ask yourself – “How did I make this happen?”

	What went well?	How did I make this happen?
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

***Learning to think positively about life can help you  
and your relationship with others.***





## Putting Effort into Your Relationships

### Putting your relationship first

- Be aware of your thoughts and behaviors; focus on things you really like about your partner.
- Make a daily commitment to try and make the relationship better. Just showing that you are putting in effort can work wonders.
- Explore what it means to create a healthy relationship. *That's exactly what you're doing by reading this fact sheet—well done!* You are taking the time to figure out what it takes to make your relationship even better.



### How can I show my partner I am committed to the relationship?

**Make the relationship a priority.** Making time for your relationship cannot be an afterthought. Try to set aside time each day to connect with each other.

**Spend time together without distractions.** Protect your relationship by doing more activities together. Avoid distractions like spending too much time watching television alone, making phone calls, or hanging out with others outside your relationship. The amount of time is different for each couple, so talk with each other about what you need.

**Build traditions.** Think of activities to do together consistently, in a way that builds connection.

- Make a point to set aside time every night and talk about the highs and lows of the day.
- Schedule a date night every week. Dates can be low cost or no cost, such as having a picnic, going for a hike at a nearby park or lake, or volunteering at an animal shelter or food pantry.
- Plan a day trip together every few months.
- Start your own traditions around the holidays. The holidays can get very stressful. Take time out each year to have some special time between the two of you – whether it's sharing what you're thankful for or exchanging a small gift with each other. Create a ritual that you can enjoy each year together and that will build your relationship.

### Practice Intentionality

Show your partner how much you love them by doing things that are important to them:

- Clean the house
- Plan dates
- Share intimate feelings without being asked
- Pick up your partner's favorite treat
- Cuddle on the couch



**Envision a healthy future together.**

Think about and talk about your future as a couple. Assure your partner that you want to spend the rest of your life with them. Make a plan each year to set new and exciting goals for your relationship.

**Focus on strengths.** Choose to concentrate on your partner’s strengths and look past their weaknesses. Think about what is going well rather than focusing on the negative aspects of the relationship. Learn to be positive!

**Make your relationship a priority.**

Make time for each other and balance your personal interests with the relationship. Talk about what you need from each other. Separate activities and interests are healthy, but only if they are balanced with couple time, too.



**Turn Off Relationship “Cruise Control”**

Sometimes relationships can run on autopilot. Partners sometimes forget or don’t have the energy to put the relationship first.

**Jumpstart your relationship by:**

- Sending the kids away to play at a friend’s house
- Setting time every day for couple talk
- Setting a bed time for the children and protecting that time
- Not inviting friends or family for a visit when you already have planned to do something together as a couple
- Reading a book together
- Taking evening walks together
- Learning something new together
- Most importantly, having fun with each other!

*Couples that choose to make the relationship a priority often have fewer fights and happier relationships!*



## Do You Avoid Hurtful Thoughts and Behaviors?



What we choose to think or say about our partner can help or harm the relationship. People often have rules or expectations about their relationship. Some of these “ground rules” include how partners treat each other, how they discuss problems, and the types of information that should or should not be shared with others. Below are some things that couples do that can help or hurt a relationship. What do you do? What do you feel that you could work on, do more or less of, or do better?

Things that Help a Relationship	I Do	I Need to Work On
I listen to my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make time for my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make efforts to keep my family from coming between us	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I keep promises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make efforts to be open and not keep secrets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think about my partner’s positive qualities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I remember things that are important to my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try to understand my partner’s point of view	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I thank my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Things that Hurt a Relationship	I Don’t	I Need to Work On
I yell and shout at my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I say things to make my partner feel bad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I tell friends about problems in my relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes flirt with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often compare my partner to other people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think about all the ways I want my partner to change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I put down my partner’s ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I cut my partner off when talking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I walk away from my partner during disagreements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Are you doing more things that help (not hurt) your relationship? If so, great!

If there are things you feel you can work on, what steps can you take to improve? Perhaps there are some new ground rules that you could create for your relationship to avoid hurtful thoughts and behaviors. Choose one or two things above to work on, or decide on something else to do, or stop doing, that will help strengthen your relationship.

***Choosing to think and act in positive ways and avoiding hurtful thoughts and behaviors will strengthen your relationship.***



# Ways to Show Commitment



It takes more than loving feelings to have a healthy relationship. It also takes commitment. Commitment means you will keep on treating your partner with respect, even if you are upset or angry. Commitment also means that you promise to support your partner now and in the future. How couples show commitment in a relationship can differ depending on past and present experiences and expectations.

Below is a list of actions that show commitment to a relationship. For each statement, decide whether it's something you do well or something you would like to do better.

I Already Do Well	I Would Like To Do Better	Committed Actions
		I make time to do things with my partner.
		I remember things that are important to my partner.
		I don't flirt with anyone but my partner.
		I celebrate traditions that are important to my partner.
		I keep promises that I make to my partner.
		I try to make our time together special.
		I pay more attention to my partner's good qualities instead of things I don't like.
		I make a point of remembering the good times we have shared.
		I do not share my partner's secrets with other people.
		I do not share details of our relationship with other people.
		I speak kindly about my partner to other people.
		I make the effort to understand my partner's needs and dreams.
		I take time to think of ways I could make our relationship stronger.
		I let my partner know that I value our relationship.
		I tell my partner that I want our relationship to last.

For the things you already do well, what are some specific examples and times you have done these things?

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For those things you would like to do better, what are some specific ways you could improve? What could you work on?

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What are the things your partner does well? Share this with your partner.

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***The grass grows greener....on the side of the fence you water the most.  
Make choices that show your commitment to your relationship.***



## Focus on Strengths



Meaningful relationships do not happen by accident. There are special things about your partner – things that were said and done – that made you feel good. Over time, these positive moments and experiences brought you together and defined your relationship. Remembering those moments helps keep the relationship moving forward.

Every relationship also has its tough times. Remembering the special things that brought you together can help you move through those struggles. But sometimes it is hard to remember the good times when we don't stop to think about them. By making an effort to regularly think about the good times (and talk about them with your partner), it makes it easier to remember them during tough times.

Take a moment now to think about your partner and your relationship. How would you answer the questions below?

- What did you like best about your partner when you first met?
- What do you currently like best about your partner?
- How does your partner show their love for you?
- What do you like best about your relationship with your partner?
- Why did you choose this person to be with?

### **What would help you remember the positives?**

- *Some couples keep a journal and write their thoughts and experiences so they can read them later.*
- *Other couples prefer to keep photos or something from their experience together that they can hold and look at later.*
- *Find ways that you and your partner can remember and cherish the good times in your relationship.*
- *Make time during special occasions, like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays to talk about those positive moments.*

***Couples that focus on the good in each other and remember the positive moments in their relationship are more likely to be happy and satisfied with their relationship.***



## Envision a Healthy Future Together



Having shared goals is a way to stay committed as a couple and helps you think about your future together. When we set goals for our relationship, it tells our partner we're in it for the long haul. As you set relationship goals, think about the type of partner you want to be as well as the type of relationship you want to have.

Use the following questions to help you name some goals. Goals should be specific and realistic. Be honest about the things that really matter to you.

***Short-term goals are things you would like to do within the next few months.***

What are 3 of your most important short-term goals for your relationship?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

***Long-term goals will take longer to achieve – perhaps a year or more.***

What are 3 of your most important long-term goals for your relationship?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What can you do to help you reach these goals? What are some things you need from your partner to reach these goals?

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Do you and your partner have some goals in common? How can you work together to achieve your goals?

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If some goals are different, what are some ways you can still work together to reach your goals?

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***Setting goals for your relationship shows you are committed to a future together.  
Working on goals together can help bring couples closer.***



## Getting to Know Your Partner Well

### Why is Know Important?

Know is about understanding your partner and sharing details about yourself with each other. This type of shared knowledge will help you to create and maintain a stable, healthy relationship. Just like in friendship, we must work hard to really know our partner. No one stays the same – we are changing all the time! Over time, our circumstances, stressors, and environment changes. The passing of time makes us change too.



### Intimacy = “In-to-me-you-see”

Continue to get to know each other even after you’ve dated and been together for a while. If we do not stay tuned in, we can get out-of-date with our partner. It’s also important for us to understand ourselves as we change over time. Being open and honest with each other requires being responsive and accepting.

When your partner tries to connect with you, use that moment as a chance to feed the relationship. For example, if one partner says: “Wow that sure is a beautiful sunset out there,” the other partner has three choices as to how to respond.

- *Turning toward* – “Wow, let’s go outside and look at it!”
- *Turning away* – Ignoring the partner’s comment or continuing with something else.
- *Turning against* – “Can’t you see I’m busy right now? Why do you always interrupt me?”

Can you guess which one connects and promotes “in-to-me-you-see”?



### How well do you know your partner?

- *What does your partner like to do for fun?*
- *What is your partner’s family like?*
- *What kind of food does your partner like to eat?*
- *Where does your partner like to spend their holidays?*
- *What does your partner like better – texting, emailing, or talking on the phone?*
- *What is your partner’s greatest fear?*
- *What kind of job would your partner like?*
- *What are your partner’s dreams for the future?*

To get to know each other you need to spend time together. Take time away from the dishes, the laundry, work, and other obligations. Spend time talking!

## What to Know: The 10 Ps

Here is a list of things to know about a partner in the beginning stages of a relationship or even before you start dating. Check the ones you don't know and ask your partner about them.

- *Personality* – What are your partner's qualities and characteristics?
- *Passions* – What are your partner's interests? What does your partner really care about?
- *Plans and Priorities* – What are your partner's hopes and dreams for life? Where do they plan to be in ten years?
- *Previous Partners* – What do you know about your partner's past relationships and experiences within those relationships.
- *Perspective Taking* – How good is your partner at seeing things from someone else's point of view? Does it come naturally? Do they focus on the positives or dwell on the negatives?
- *Problem Solving* – How does your partner manage conflict and disagreement?
- *Past Family Experiences* – What are your partner's relationships with family members like? How similar or different does your partner expect your relationship to be?
- *Physical/Psychological Health* – How is your partner feeling today?
- *Parenting Experience and Approach* – Does your partner want kids? What type of parent would they like to be? How well does your partner interact with kids?
- *Provider Potential* – What does your partner do to earn money? How does your partner manage money? Are they a spender or saver?







# Love Maps



A “love map” is information you know about your partner’s likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, joys and fears. Much like being sure we have an up-to-date road map, we need to be sure our love map also stays current.

Answer the questions below about yourself. Then answer the same questions about your partner. Compare your answers. How well do you know each other? Did you learn anything new?

## Life Experiences and Memories

Who is your best friend? \_\_\_\_\_

What do you like most about yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

What relative did you feel closest to as a child? \_\_\_\_\_

What person has had the greatest impact on your life? \_\_\_\_\_

If you had a nickname as a child, what was it? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite childhood memory? \_\_\_\_\_

What song reminds you of your relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite memory of an activity, event, or vacation you and your partner share? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is something you are currently worried about? \_\_\_\_\_

## Interests and Favorites

What is your favorite hobby? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite sport? Favorite team? \_\_\_\_\_

If you could go anywhere, where would you go? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite food? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite ice cream flavor? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favorite television show? Favorite movie? \_\_\_\_\_

## Preferences

Where do you like to go when you need to relax? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a morning person or an evening person? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you prefer dinner out or dinner at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you prefer hugs, gifts, or when your partner says “I love you”? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you prefer to spend your free time? \_\_\_\_\_

What other things do you want your partner to know about you? What do you want to know about your partner?

***The more you know about your partner, the greater the chances  
of a happy, lasting relationship.***

# Great Expectations



Expectations play a crucial role in how happy a couple relationship will be. When expectations are unstated, unreasonable, or unmet, this can become a source of significant conflict in the relationship. Take a moment to think about what you expect in your relationship. Mark the appropriate box indicating who is responsible for each item – you, your partner, or is it something you think you should work on together?

## Expectations I have for my relationship

**Me    Partner    Both  
                         of Us**

Expectations I have for my relationship	Me	Partner	Both of Us
Example: <i>We will talk first before buying things that cost more than \$50.</i>			X

Are all of your expectations realistic? If not, can some be adjusted so your partner is more likely to meet your expectations?

Is your partner aware of the needs and expectations you listed? If not, how can you let your partner know?

### Things to Remember:

- Communicate your expectations – do not expect your partner to just “know.”
- Be sure your expectations are reasonable.
- Expectations will change over time. Plan time to regularly share and discuss your expectations, why you have them, and how you can work together to achieve them.
- Healthy relationships require some give and take. Just as you want your partner to do things a certain way, they have similar wishes.

*Being aware of and agreeing about expectations reduces the chances for arguments and increases the chances for understanding each other.*



# Talking About Money



If you sometimes disagree about money, then you are like most other couples! Every couple handles money differently. What matters most is that couples have a plan they agree on and work together to make it happen.

**Clear Expectations.** Getting a plan started requires that you first have similar views about money and how it is handled. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Who manages the money? Does one person take charge or do you work together?
- Will you have separate bank and credit accounts, or open one or more joint accounts?
- Do you have similar goals for bigger items like buying a car, getting a new TV, owning a home, doing some home improvements, or going on a vacation?
- How much money do you want to have in savings?

**Setting Goals.** When you talk about your goals and write them down, you are more likely to stick to your plan. Discuss your needs (what you *must* have) and your wants (what you would *like* to have). What do you have in common? List them below.

**Things We Both Need:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Things We Both Want:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Reaching Your Goals.** There are many ways to reach your goals. Coming up with more than one way can be helpful in case your first plan does not work out. Select one of your needs or wants from above and come up with ways you can work together to reach that goal. After you come up with your steps, talk about the pros and cons. Make changes as needed. Set a target date when you hope to reach your goal.

**Need/Want:** \_\_\_\_\_

Steps to Reach Goal	Pros	Cons
1. _____		
2. _____		
3. _____		
4. _____		
5. _____		

**Target date to reach goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Things to Consider.**

- How might your spending or saving habits need to change to reach your goal?
- Schedule a regular time (each week, every two weeks, or each month) to talk about your progress toward your goal. Is your plan working? Are there some small changes you need to make to help you reach your goal? Have your goals changed?

*Learning about each other's wants and needs and setting financial goals can lead to greater understanding, which leads to happier relationships.*





# Setting Financial Goals



Plan a sound financial future by setting **S.M.A.R.T.** goals. These goals will make it possible for you to actually reach them.

- S.** Specific – detailed, not generic.
- M.** Measurable – how much, how many? Track the progress and measure the outcome.
- A.** Attainable – can accomplish them.
- R.** Realistic – something that can be done.
- T.** Time sensitive – with an ending date.

Post your goals so you can see them every day. Put them on your mirror or refrigerator. Post a picture of the goal too. Be sure that the goals involve the whole family. Before you plan to spend money, ask “Will this activity help me to reach my goals?” Change or adjust goals as circumstances change.

## Financial Goals

Short-Term Goals (within 12 months)	Total Cost	Needed Per Month	Target Date (for goal completion)
<i>Reduce credit card debt by \$1,200</i>	<i>\$1,200</i>	<i>\$100</i>	<i>December 2025</i>
Intermediate Goals (within 1 to 5 years)	Total Cost	Needed Per Month	Target Date (for goal completion)
Long-Term Goals (more than 5 years)	Total Cost	Needed Per Month	Target Date (for goal completion)

Adapted from Money Management Calendar 2014: Alabama Cooperative Extension System  
www.aces.edu/counties/Montgomery/documents/2014MoneyManagementCalendar.pdf





## Showing Affection and Respect

### Make Time for Togetherness

While big celebrations and vacations are special and can contribute to the relationship, healthy relationships depend more on everyday moments of connection and affection. Try to think of ways that you can show your partner your care in the midst of your daily routine.

- Make time to talk together everyday.
- Take a short evening walk together.
- Work together on a household project.
- Take the kids to the park.
- Learn to find small moments of caring for each other by being together and talking.
- Send “I love you” text messages.



### Did you know that playing together as a couple helps to improve your communication?

Spending time together doing something fun helps couples to encourage each other and share about their day. Playing together can also make conversation lighter – just have fun and let loose!

### Showing Compassion

One of the best ways to care for your partner is by showing compassion. Showing compassion involves trying to understand someone else’s perspective in order to love and care for them.

Another way to care for your partner is by understanding and respecting them. Accepting that some differences will not change or cannot change is a way to show respect and care. Every relationship has differences; instead of expecting your partner to change, learn to accept them for who they are and care for them unconditionally.

Knowing that you are loved is essential in a healthy relationship – let your partner know that you love them for who they are, not what they do.



### Supporting your partner during difficult times

Every relationship experiences hard times. What counts is how you care and support each other during those times.

Ask your partner how you can best care for them. Whether it’s offering a big hug, helping out more around the house, or spending time listening while they share their frustrations, learning to care for your partner during times of struggle can be one of the most helpful ways to strengthen your relationship.

## What makes your partner feel the most loved and appreciated?

- A warm hug?
- Hearing the words “I love you” or “I’m proud of you”?
- Being brought home a surprise gift?
- Spending uninterrupted time talking and sharing with each other?
- Coming home to a clean house?



You most likely have different ways of feeling and demonstrating love and caring. It’s important to share with each other what makes you both feel loved so that you know how to love each other.



## Show “no-strings-attached” Affection

Learn to see each act of kindness toward your partner as adding to the relationship, rather than making a sacrifice. This helps to create a sense of joint effort to make the relationship better.

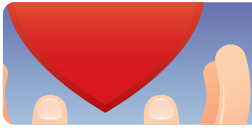
Don’t wait to show your partner how much you love them – do it without a reason. Be the first to make a deposit in your love bank by:

- Giving an affectionate hug
- Writing an encouraging note on the fridge
- Saying “I love you” as you leave the house

Instead of keeping track of how many “nice” things your partner has or hasn’t done for you before you do something for them, show them how much you care by being the first to demonstrate kindness.







## Name The Ways You Care



In the stress of day-to-day life, we sometimes have a hard time showing that we care. The good thing is that there are a lot of ways to show you care for someone you love. Some of those ways require more effort than others, and some are very simple things to do (or say). For example:

- You clean the dishes when your partner cooks dinner.
- Your partner kisses you before leaving for work.
- You call (or text) your partner at work to say you are thinking about them.
- Your partner makes sure the children eat breakfast every day.
- You hug your partner and say, "I love you."
- Your partner leaves you a note that reads, "thank you for all you do."

It can be helpful to remind yourself of the caring things you do for your partner, as well as the many things your partner does for you.

List 5 ways that you show you care about your partner.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

List 5 ways that your partner shows they care about you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you've made these lists, make plans to tell your partner "thank you" for the caring things they do. During the course of each day, be mindful of what you each do for each other and your family. Show thanks every day!

***When you receive love from your partner, say "thank you" to send love right back!***



# Caring in Action

How well do you and your partner know when the other person is showing love? Do you sometimes say or do things to show affection, but your partner doesn't notice? This activity will help you identify different things you both do and say throughout the day to show care and love.

## **For this exercise you will need:**

- Two empty containers (jars, bowls, boxes). Label one container "How I showed love today" and the other "How my partner showed love today."
- Two different colors of paper cut up into small squares. Each partner will use one color of paper so you can tell who wrote what. (If you do not have different color paper, you can use two pens with different colored ink).

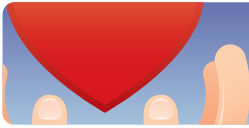
## **Instructions:**

1. Agree on a day to do the activity.
2. Throughout the day write down (on your color paper) the ways **you** show love for your partner. Use one piece of paper for each thing you do or say. Place them in the container labeled "Ways I showed love today." For example, you might write "I kissed you before you went to work," "I cooked dinner," or "I took the kids to school."
3. Also write down the ways **your partner** shows love for you. Place these in the container labeled "How my partner showed love today."
4. At the end of the day, sit down together and take turns reading how you showed love that day. Read what you wrote down on the color sheet you used and put in the container "Ways I showed love today." Next, read what your partner wrote down on their paper and put in the container "Ways my partner showed love today." Now read the sheets that describe how your partner showed loved that day.

Talk about the notes. Did you write down the same things? If not, that's okay! There might be some things that you did to show love, but your partner didn't notice. There might also be some things that your partner did, but you didn't notice and write those down. Or, maybe you both did notice and just forgot to write it down? Use this time to express your appreciation for the loving things your partner did – both what you noticed, and what you didn't.

**This exercise is about showing care, not competition.** Do not compare the number of things you and your partner do. Some days one partner may show more care for the other. Use this activity to remind yourself to show care and appreciation for each other.

***Recognizing the many things your partner says and does to show love can strengthen your relationship.***



# Appreciating the Positive



## ***When life gives you lemons, what do you do?***

The way we respond to good and bad things in our lives affects how we see our partners. If you tend to focus on the negative and find fault in situations, you are more likely to focus on problems in your relationship. Showing you care, sharing happy memories, and expressing appreciation can help ease troubled feelings and nurture positive feelings.

## ***How often do you tell your partner you appreciate them?***

Thinking about what you admire in your partner is important, but that is not enough. *Telling* your partner that you appreciate them is even more important. It is easy to get caught up in daily hassles and become too tired or busy to connect and let our partners know they are valued and appreciated. Taking just a moment to say “thank you,” sharing happy memories, and letting your partner know that you are happy they are in your life can help ease troubled feelings and nurture positive feelings.

## ***What do you appreciate in your partner?***

Couples who have the closest, healthiest relationships focus more on the positives than the negatives in their relationship. The more positive ways you can express or show appreciation and love, the better you will be able to work together when problems arise.

Read through the list below and mark characteristics you really like about your partner. Is there more about your partner you like? Add it to the list!

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good personality                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Listens to you                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of humor                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligence                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> My partner’s sensitive side         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to help out around the house | <input type="checkbox"/> Shares some of my passions          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard worker                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Similar plans and priorities        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How my partner treats my children        | <input type="checkbox"/> Willing to solve problems together  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shows compassion and understanding       | <input type="checkbox"/> Takes care of themselves            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dependability                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Talks openly about childhood/family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open-mindedness                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Shows respect, even during conflict |

Others:

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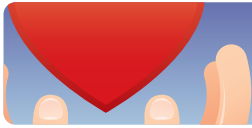
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Now that you have identified some things you like about your partner, think of specific examples of these characteristics. For instance, if you like your partner’s sense of humor, think of a time your partner made you laugh.

## ***Share these with your partner!***

Tell your partner what you like about them, and share the specific example you remember.

***Sincere expressions of appreciation can help couples strengthen their relationship over time.***



## Caring Actions, Not Crabby Reactions



Happy couples have far more positive moments than negative ones. This isn't because those couples are special, or just lucky. It is possible to *choose* to stay positive, even when we're tempted to be irritable, angry or "crabby." How do you react to your partner?

### Here are some examples of couple moments, with a "Crabby Reaction" and a "Caring Action."

- Example 1:** Your partner answers their cell phone while you are trying to tell them something important.
- Crabby reaction:** Shout at your partner while they're on the phone, and give them the cold shoulder when they hang up.
- Caring action:** Wait patiently; when the phone conversation ends, say, "That hurt my feelings. I felt ignored."
- Example 2:** You are very busy, helping one child with their homework and changing another child's diaper at the same time. Your partner walks in and says, "Is dinner ready yet?"
- Crabby reaction:** You say, "You can cook your own dinner! Can't you see I'm busy! I can't believe you never help out around here!"
- Caring action:** You say, "I could really use your help. Can you take care of the kids, or would you rather get dinner started?"

**What would you do?** Now practice how you would react to your partner. Read the following examples and come up with your own Crabby Reactions and Caring Actions for each one.

Your alarm clock didn't go off this morning, and now you are running late for work. Your partner is still asleep in bed and the children aren't ready to leave for school yet.

**Crabby reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Caring action:** \_\_\_\_\_

You've been looking forward to watching your favorite TV program, but when the time comes your partner insists they want to control the remote.

**Crabby reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Caring action:** \_\_\_\_\_

You and your partner have agreed on a budget for your money. At the end of the month, your partner has spent too much on eating out, and you barely have enough money to pay your bills.

**Crabby reaction:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Caring action:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Healthy, happy couples use more caring actions instead of crabby reactions each day.**

**Choose to stay positive!**



# ATTACH



## Develop and Maintain Your Friendship

One of the most important parts of a relationship is the friendship you have with each other. **SHARE** is about working together as a team, finding common interests, and enjoying each other's company. As a couple, you are constantly learning together, experiencing things together, and facing challenges together. **Just remember, a strong foundation of friendship will help you weather any storm.**



### Fostering 5-minute Connections

- **Cuddle at the most important time of day.** Set the alarm five minutes early and cuddle with your partner in the morning. It can help keep you feeling close all day long.
- **Before you leave home, ask your partner if anything special is going on that day.** This lets your partner know that you are interested in them and care what's going on in their life. If something special is happening for your partner, check in with them during the day or in the evening.
- **Share what you like about each other.** Do this daily and do it frequently. Look for excuses to praise your partner. Don't take each other for granted. Your partner will feel loved and be more willing to work through any differences you may have.
- **Do small acts of kindness for one another.** Send your partner a card or e-mail just to say you love them, bring home a special treat, or do a chore that your partner usually does. The kindness you show to your partner will almost always be returned, and serving your partner will strengthen your bond.
- **Talk about the stresses and successes of your day.** Spend 5 minutes when you get home from work talking with your partner about the stressful things you may have experienced. Don't attack your partner with it; just share it with them. If you get the stress out of the way first, you will be able to enjoy the rest of your time together.



### Get Creative!

Anniversaries are a big deal. Remember them and make them special. In addition to wedding anniversaries, couples can also celebrate the anniversary of your first date, the first time you kissed your partner, or the time you knew you were in love.

### Did You Know?

Partners who show that they are committed to each other and who put the couple relationship before other relationships or disruptions are happier in their relationship than those who don't.

What and how much partners share with each other greatly affects the quality and value of their relationship. Partners who share common interests and values, are open and honest with each other, and invest in the friendship will be happier in the relationship. Couples who share more, argue less!

## Couple Traditions that Strengthen the Relationship

- **Share Intimacy.** Plan romantic and intimate times with your partner.
- **Share Spirituality.** Shared religious or spiritual activities are a wonderful way to grow together as a couple.
- **Happy Anniversary!** Be creative with the anniversaries you celebrate and the ways you celebrate your partner.
- **“I Love You” Codes.** Develop subtle or indirect ways of letting your partner know you love them.
- **Frequently Connect With Your Partner.** Use brief phone calls, texts, or e-mails to connect with your partner throughout the day.
- **Do Your Partner’s Favorite Thing.** Let your partner know you care by doing one of their favorite things together.
- **Think Partner First.** Think about and do the things that will show your partner that they are your #1 priority.
- **Have Couple and Family Meetings.** Businesses meet often to talk about profits, losses, and strategic planning. Invest time in your relationship to yield the same benefits.



## Maintaining Friendship

- Being supportive
- Spending time together
- Being willing to resolve problems together
- Accepting influence from one another
- Sharing thoughts and feelings
- Trusting each other





# Making Time to Connect



## There are 168 hours in a week. How many do you devote to your relationship?

How much time do you devote to your partner in a single day? What about in a week? Life is hectic. Sometimes it can feel like we do not have any time for ourselves, let alone our partners and families. But couples who have the strongest relationships find time to work on their relationship every day through shared interactions.

Couple rituals are shared interactions that are repeated and significant to both partners. They do not have to be time consuming. In fact, you might be surprised how quickly just a few simple daily rituals can add up.

### Following are a few ways you can spend just 5 extra hours each week connecting:

**Before leaving:** Do not leave without knowing one interesting thing that will happen in your partner's day. 2 minutes a day X 5 working days  
= 10 minutes per week

**When returning:** Have a 20 minute stress-free conversation. Give full attention. Show support and understanding before giving advice. 20 minutes a day X 5 working days  
= 100 minutes per week

**Admire and appreciate:** Find some way every day to give or show genuine affection and appreciation. Call, text, or email to touch base when you are away from each other. 5 minutes a day X 7 days  
= 35 minutes per week

**Affection:** Cuddle, kiss, and hold hands. Go to bed at the same time even if you do not go to sleep at the same time. Remember to kiss each other before going to sleep. 5 minutes a day X 7 days  
= 35 minutes per week

**Alone time:** Devote at least 2 hours a week to uninterrupted time alone together. Avoid talking about who will do what chores or tasks. Spend time catching up, reminisce, talk about your hopes and dreams, and just enjoy your time together. 120 minutes per week

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**TOTAL:** 300 minutes per week (5 hours)

***Commit to putting in a little extra effort every day to strengthen your relationship!***



# Ways We Like to Share



Over time, because couples get busy with work, chores, and family responsibilities, they spend less time focused on each other. No matter how long couples have been together, it is still important to find ways to spend meaningful time together. Small moments of connection can add up to deep intimacy and passion.

Following is a list of some simple things couples can do together to nurture positive interactions.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Call or text just to say, "I love you!" | 11. Plan a vacation                     |
| 2. Go for a walk                           | 12. Send funny/flirty emails or texts   |
| 3. Cook dinner or dessert together         | 13. Watch a sunset or look at the stars |
| 4. Volunteer together                      | 14. Have a tickle fight                 |
| 5. Attend a sporting event                 | 15. Plant flowers or a tree             |
| 6. Play cards or a board game              | 16. Flirt like you just met             |
| 7. Go to a free community event            | 17. Hold hands                          |
| 8. Listen with all your attention          | 18. Make up a song                      |
| 9. Do household tasks together             | 19. Go to the park                      |
| 10. Ask about each other's day             | 20. Write love notes                    |

Now come up with your own lists of ways to share and spend meaningful time together.

There are probably some hobbies or activities you like to do together, as well as some things that one of you likes to do but the other does not enjoy as much. Take some time to write down a few things you each like to do, as well as a few things you like to do together.

I like to:	My partner likes to:	We both like to:
1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____	10. _____

From time to time when you select an activity, try out something from each other's lists. You might discover more activities you enjoy doing together!

***Small moments together add up to a stronger friendship and deeper connection.***





## Couple Rituals and Traditions



The special things we look forward to as a couple and the everyday routines we follow are like threads that bind us together. The ways we do things become our traditions and rituals. They are rarely written down, but they are important to our connection with each other.

Use this tool to identify traditions and rituals that already exist in your relationship, as well as to name some new ideas you would like to try.

What are 3 things you and your partner do together almost every day?  
(Examples: kiss, hug, talk about our day, eat a meal, share morning coffee)

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What are 3 things you do with your partner as traditions, things you look forward to and plan?  
(Examples: holiday or birthday celebrations, vacation)

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What are some things you wish you and your partner did together every day? Be specific. How could you and your partner begin these new rituals?

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What are a few new traditions that you would like to start? Be specific. How could you and your partner begin these new traditions?

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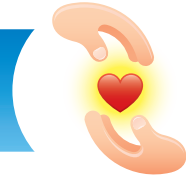
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***Families that have the strongest ties have the most traditions and rituals in their life.***



# Bids for Connection



Successful relationships have at least five times as many positive interactions as negative ones. One key to creating and maintaining more positive than negative interactions is by noticing a partner's "bid for connection." A bid is any type of request for connection to another person. Here are a few examples:

- Questions – "How was your day?" or "What do you want to do tonight?"
- Gestures – Reaching out to hold hands
- Facial expressions – Smiling or winking
- Touch – Hugging or kissing

**Read through the following examples and think about how you could "turn toward" your partner.**

**Example 1:**

Your partner walks in the door after a long day of work, sits down on the couch, and turns on the television without saying a word. How could you respond?

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**Example 2:**

Your partner arrives home from work excited and happy. They were offered a higher paying job at work, but will have to work longer hours. How could you respond?

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Now think about your relationship. When you are with your partner, how often do you give positive responses? What can you do to be more responsive to your partner's bids for connection?

***Turning toward bids for connection help keep relationships positive and moving forward.***

## Dealing with differences in healthy ways

### Conflict is Normal in a Relationship

Every relationship involves some level of conflict and stress; it's a natural part of relating to another person. However, there are many things that you can do as a couple to reduce this stress and improve the way you handle conflict. Learning constructive conflict management is very important to avoiding unnecessary distress in your relationship. Here are a few helpful things to remember:

- **Differences are a normal part of relationships** – you are two different people after all! Don't expect to resolve all of your differences.
- **Accepting your partner the way they are** and adjusting your expectations of them are two of the best ways to allow your partner the space to change.
- **Putting yourself in your partner's shoes** will help you to be more understanding of your partner's point of view. Try to focus on how your partner might be feeling rather than just trying to get your point across.
- **Try to focus on the positive aspects of the relationship.** The more conflict couples have, the more likely they will stew on the issue – leading to even more negative thoughts.

### Parental Conflict Can Be Harmful to Kids!

The level and intensity of the conflict between parents and whether or not the conflict is resolved has the most influence on the child. It is unrealistic to never fight in front of your children. What is important is that you pay attention to *how* you are handling the conflict and *what* you are modeling to the child. Be patient with each other and show forgiveness and compromise so children learn these skills.



#### There are several ways that children respond to negative conflict:

- Acting out
- Turning inward
- Trouble interacting well with others
- Trouble concentrating
- Poor academic performance

*Watch for these signs and be aware of what you are exposing your children to during times of conflict.*

### Managing Stress in Conflict

- **Maintain a positive environment.** Try to make emotional “deposits” in your partner's love bank; tell them what you love about them or why you're thankful for them.
- **Avoid harmful patterns of interaction.** Avoid criticism, insults, defensiveness, and ignoring. Instead, listen and speak gently and honestly.
- **See your partner in a positive light.** During times of conflict, take time to think about why you value and love your partner. This will help you to see things more positively.
- **Always, always, always maintain emotional and physical safety.** If you ever feel unsafe in your relationship call 911 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

## Regulating your Emotions

Remember these three tips when trying to regulate your emotions:

1. Identify what is causing the emotion you are feeling so that you can be prepared the next time it comes up. Think about the emotions you experience and how you are expressing them. Are you overreacting?
2. If necessary, practice soothing behaviors to calm down during times of stress (such as taking deep breaths or walking away from the conflict for a moment).
3. Practice managing your emotions together as a couple to promote connectedness.

## Use SPEAK skills when you are sharing your thoughts, feelings, or concerns with your partner.

- **Start with a positive.** Start by saying something positive about your concern. Long-lasting relationships have 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction; really good and happy relationships have 20 positive interactions to every 1 negative interaction.
- **Pay attention to what you say and how you say it.** Be careful about the words you use, your tone of voice, and your body language. You are more likely to be listened to if you speak in a gentle, non-threatening way.
- **Explain how you feel, using details.** Share how something makes you feel and what specific situations have upset you. Use an "I" statement to take charge of your own feelings. Name the specific behavior that concerns you and how that behavior makes you feel. For example: I feel frustrated when you say you will clean the house but you don't.
- **Avoid trigger words, like always and never.** Trigger words are words that can quickly turn a conversation into a fight. Everyone has their own set of trigger words as well. Recognize these words and avoid using them.
- **Keep it brief; then give your partner a chance to paraphrase.** Briefly share your concerns with your partner, and then allow your partner a chance to paraphrase what you said.

## Use HEAR skills when you are listening to your partner share thoughts, feelings, or concerns.

- **Honor your partner's thoughts and feelings.** Honoring your partner is about making them feel valued and showing respect for their thoughts and feelings. Show your partner that you value them by listening and focusing on what they say, not what you want to say next. *When using the HEAR skills you are only listening to your partner's viewpoint, not sharing your own.*
- **Empathize: Put yourself in your partner's shoes.** Empathizing with your partner means that you understand and can imagine how they might be feeling. Show your partner that you respect their feelings as being real and valid.
- **Allow a difference of opinion.** Even if you disagree with your partner, your job as the listener is only to listen to what they say and to repeat back what you hear. Don't judge your partner or share how you feel.
- **Repeat respectfully.** After your partner is done sharing their feelings, repeat what they said as closely to their words as you can. This helps you to really focus on what your partner is saying.

# Common Myths About Conflict in Relationships

**Myth #1: *In a healthy relationship, couples never argue.***

**Fact:** Even healthy couples have disagreements and conflict from time to time. In fact, on average, healthy and unhealthy couples disagree about the same number of things. The difference is not the number of disagreements, but how they are handled. When happy couples disagree, they listen and respect each other. Also, they are truthful, and willing to apologize and forgive. Perhaps most importantly, they are never violent!



**Myth #2: *Jealousy is a sign of love. Partners who are not jealous do not care.***

**Fact:** Jealousy is not an indicator of a person's love for another. In a healthy relationship, neither partner does things to make the other feel jealous nor does a person feel jealous for no reason! Ask yourself this question: *Why* is your partner jealous? When one shows jealousy or is suspicious about a partner's actions, this is not a sign of a healthy relationship – nor a sign of love.

**Myth #3: *As long as the children do not see it, they are not impacted by conflict.***

**Fact:** Families are like a system made up of many different parts – if one part of the system is having difficulty, its effects can be felt by every other part. Higher levels of marital problems negatively affect how children feel and behave, leading to feelings of depression, yelling, and/or acting out. Conflict between parents can also negatively impact the quality of parenting that children receive.



**Myth #4: *I am who I am. I cannot change the way I react when I am angry or upset.***

**Fact:** Everyone reacts in different ways when angry, frustrated, or upset. However, feelings of anger and frustration in conflict do not need to control us – rather we can control how we react to those feelings. Individuals can practice various strategies to “cool” or calm down in order to get a handle on their intense emotions.

**Myth #5: *Forgiveness means saying that what my partner did was okay.***

**Fact:** Forgiving someone does not mean that you believe what the person did was acceptable. Further, forgiveness does not imply denying or forgetting about an offense, making excuses for it, or opening the door for the person to hurt you again. When you forgive, you are making a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of making your partner pay for what they did. You are agreeing to give your partner and the relationship another chance.

**Myth #6: Conflict only becomes abusive once there is physical violence.**

**Fact:** Abuse can occur in various forms. It can be physical, like hitting, shoving, slapping, or sexual coercion. Abuse can also be emotional and involve things like shaming, belittling, name-calling, inducing guilt, or making comments that devalue the victim. Such abuse can occur both during and outside of times of conflict. All forms of abuse are dangerous.

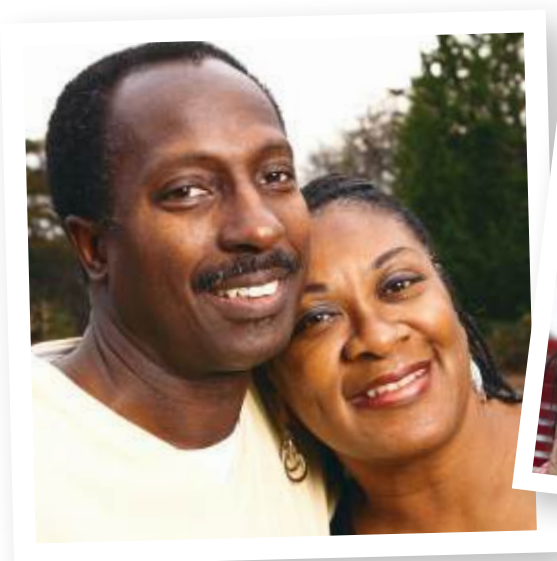


**Myth #7: Once you find the right person, you will be consistently happy and feel complete.**

**Fact:** While being in a relationship with someone who is committed and caring will bring happiness, there will be times of unhappiness and frustration. Times of conflict will occur. Also, being in a relationship with someone does not mean that all your desires and wishes will be fulfilled by them. No one can give you an identity, a sense of worth, or a purpose – you must gain these qualities yourself. Being happy and having a good relationship has a lot to do with how developed and healthy you are personally.

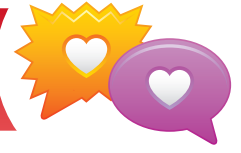
**Myth #8: Opposites attract.**

**Fact:** Healthy relationships are based on two people having more similarities than differences. No two people will be entirely alike and differences will exist (things that make relationships exciting and also frustrating!). Strong relationships are built on common ground where two people share a lot of the same interests, values, and goals. Picking a partner who shares many of the same values, beliefs, interests, and life goals will help to reduce the amount of conflicts that arise in a relationship. But remember, conflict is normal and happens in all relationships.





## When Couples Fight, Children Suffer



### Conflict and adults

Couples who handle conflict poorly are less likely to be happy and more likely to separate or divorce, increasing their risk for negative health outcomes such as depression, poorer general physical health, and greater use and cost of health care services.

But adults are not the only ones who are affected by conflict in their couple relationship. A family is a system, and anything that affects one part of the family is bound to impact other parts as well. A healthy, positive couple relationship can have positive impacts on children's well-being, behavior, and relationships with parents. On the other hand, when couples are distressed, children can suffer.

### When children observe conflict between parents

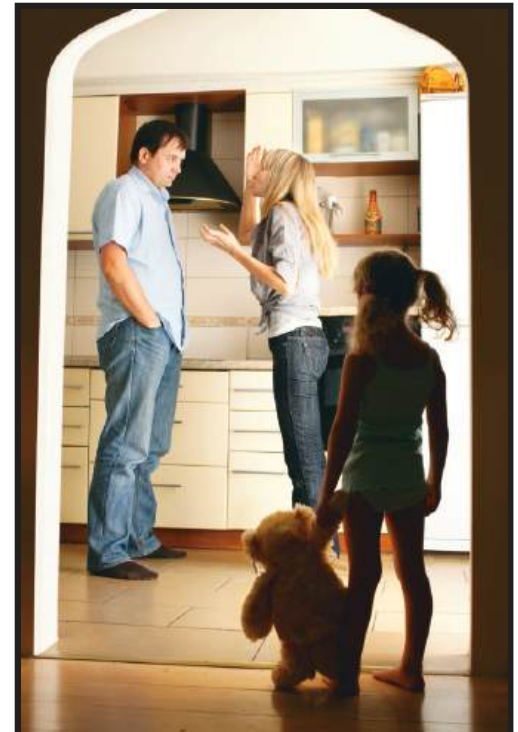
Conflict between parents does not go unnoticed by children. Parental conflict can impact how children feel and behave. The more parental conflict there is, the more likely children are to feel depressed, show negative emotions, yell at other family members, or act out in school. In addition, the more negative the children's reactions to their parents' conflict, the greater likelihood of other problems.

### Conflict impacts one's parenting

Children's behaviors are influenced by the quality of parenting they receive. As relationship problems increase, the quality of parenting can be diminished. For instance, declines in marital quality have been linked to fathers becoming less warm and more controlling toward their preschool-aged children. A similar pattern also exists among unmarried parents. The more supportive the relationship between parents, the more engaged and positive mothers and fathers are with their young children.

### Learn to manage conflict

Problems between parents do not automatically indicate that parenting quality will be poor. Even when relationship conflict is high, parents who still cooperate well together can reduce the negative effects of parental conflict on the parent-child relationship. What happens between parents does not stay between parents. Children exposed to high levels of conflict between their parents are negatively impacted. *Importantly, couples can learn skills to help them manage conflict in a healthy, respectful way! As parents work to manage their conflict effectively, positive impacts can occur in both adults and their children.*



**When parents are upset, even if they try to hide their conflict, their children are affected. Verbal conflict is obvious, but children can detect non-verbal conflict too.**



# Getting Worked Up

## Recognizing Anger Signs

Our bodies react when we have strong negative emotions, such as anger. Getting angry is not something that just occurs in our heads, but it impacts the entire body. Knowing the types of things that signal our anger can help prevent times of intense anger from spiraling out of control. Which of the following signs or symptoms do you experience most when you are angry?

- Increased breathing rate
- Heart pumping faster
- Higher blood pressure
- Sweating
- Cold hands, sweaty palms
- Face feels hot, flushed
- Tightness of chest
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Feel like you're in a "fog"
- Neck tightens up
- Legs get shaky
- Upset stomach
- Loss of appetite
- Increased appetite
- Tapping fingers
- Cramps
- Backaches
- Grind teeth
- Headaches
- Fidgeting

## Anger Triggers

Different people get angry about different things. These can be thought of as "triggers." What are some specific situations or behaviors that are common anger "triggers" for you? How angry (a little upset versus *really* angry) do you get?

Event or "Trigger"	A little upset	Very, Very Angry
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	
_____	☺ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 ☹	

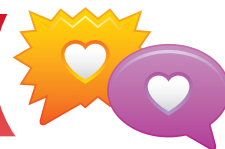
Times of intense anger can cause us to say or do certain things we later regret. Recognizing times when we are starting to get angry and worked up can help us know when we need to find ways to calm down. Being able to prevent these situations from spiraling out of control is a benefit to individuals and their relationships.

***The more we are aware of when we are angry,  
the better we can manage it.***





# Anger (Mis)Management



In any relationship, feelings of anger are going to occur. The intensity of angry feelings varies from person to person and from couple to couple. How you deal with anger can affect you and your relationship.

## How do you deal with anger?

Below is a list of different ways that some individuals deal with their anger. Think back to some recent times when you were angry. What did you do? Check each behavior below that describes ways you tend to deal with anger.

### Five common myths about anger

- **If you don't look angry, you're not.**
- **If you ignore anger, it will go away.**
- **If you vent, it will go away.**
- **Holding anger in will not harm you.**
- **Expressing anger or hurt will harm your relationship.**

### Physical or Verbal Anger

- I am forceful when things don't go my way.
- If I am upset, I'll hit something.
- If things are bad enough, I'll throw something.
- I swear loudly to blow off steam.
- I feel like hitting someone who makes me very angry.

### Suppressed Anger

- I avoid or withdraw from people.
- I overeat, drink, or take drugs.
- I try not to let my anger show.
- I feel uncomfortable expressing my anger.

### Passive Anger

- I complain about people behind their backs but not to their faces.
- I pout and feel sorry for myself.
- I use sarcasm to make people look or feel bad.
- I become silent to make it obvious I am unhappy.
- I get depressed/moody.

### Active Anger Management

- I disagree with others without attacking on a personal level.
- I disagree with others without being defensive.
- I don't hold grudges or seek revenge when problems cannot be resolved.
- I take time to calm down before talking with others about disagreements.
- I politely, but firmly, tell others when I am angry.
- I look for mutually agreeable solutions when people disagree with me.

Did you check mostly physical or verbal, suppressed, or passive anger behaviors? If so, work on using more active anger management techniques. This approach includes identifying the original cause of the anger, expressing the anger in appropriate ways, and having strategies to calm down.

***Managing conflict well requires managing your anger well.***



# Keeping Your Cool

Everyone gets angry, “worked up,” “hot,” “ticked off” – whatever you want to call it. If we are not careful, problems or conflicts can lead to negative outcomes. When we are really angry or frustrated, there are different ways to think and act that can help us manage those emotions.

## Strategies for Individual Anger

Which of these do you currently do? Which of these do you think would work best for you?

### Thinking Strategies

- Talk to yourself – Talk through why this is happening, what you are feeling, why it is impacting you in this way.
  - Change perspectives – Try to look at the situation from a different point of view. What might you be missing about what happened? Why might the other person be behaving that way?
  - Think about a solution – Consider possible solutions, both immediate and long-term. Think about the possible impact of each solution. What are the pros and cons of each choice?
  - Are there any other personal thinking strategies that work well for you?
- 
- 

### Behavioral Strategies

- Controlled breathing – Take long, deep, steady breaths.
  - Walk away – Remove yourself from the situation for a moment.
  - Work out – Do a physical activity or exercise to help relieve tension and anger.
  - Do something relaxing – Read a book, watch a movie, listen to music, or take a nap.
  - Talk to someone – Turn to a trusted friend or family member who can listen and offer advice.
  - Are there any other things you do when you are upset or angry that work well for you?
- 
- 

**Your turn:** What is one thing that often makes you angry? What strategies could you use?

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

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Strategy: \_\_\_\_\_

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If we do not learn to control our anger, it can control us! Knowing – *and using* – specific strategies to calm down will help us better manage our anger and conflict. Being in control will benefit you as an individual and your relationship.

***When you manage your anger, you improve your relationship with others.***



# Managing Tough Talks

It is not the absence of conflict that makes a relationship better — it is how we manage conflict that matters. Communicating during conflict can be very difficult. Though no one approach or method can be applied to every situation, certain skills and techniques can be helpful.

## Speak Clearly to be Understood

The “W.I.N. Formula” allows a person to more clearly address the real issue, state how they are affected by it, and express what they would like to change or improve.

<b>W</b>	<i>stands for WHEN...</i>	When you...	State the specific behavior you don't like
<b>I</b>	<i>stands for I...</i>	I feel...	Express your feeling or thought
<b>N</b>	<i>stands for NEED...</i>	I need/want...	Specify what it is that you want to change

### Example:

**When you** make jokes about me in front of your friends, **I feel** hurt and upset. **I would like** you to stop telling those jokes and would love to have you talk respectfully and build me up around your friends.

### Your turn:

When you... \_\_\_\_\_

I feel... \_\_\_\_\_

I would like... \_\_\_\_\_

## Listen Carefully to Understand

Listening carefully and well does not always come naturally to us. Listening takes work! Here are a few things to remember.

- Listen with full attention – Do not interrupt, disagree, or judge.
- Paraphrase what you hear – Start your response by making sure you heard the other person correctly. “So what I hear you saying is...”
- Seek to understand and ask questions if you do not understand – If you are confused or need clarification, politely ask for it.

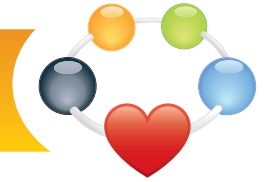
Communication is a two-way street. It involves both speaking clearly and listening carefully to reach understanding. Following these steps can help you better manage conflict.

***Speaking clearly and listening carefully can help manage conflict in relationships.***





# ENGAGE



## Engaging Support as a Couple

### “It Takes a Village”

We hear this phrase a lot, but what does it actually mean? It means that children develop in a complex system of family, friends, and experiences. Parents and couples need others that they can ask for help when raising children – don’t try to go it alone and don’t be afraid to ask friends and family for help.



### Why Connect?

The concept of “connect” is about developing social support. Strong social connections help you to build strength, develop strong personal relationships, and most importantly, they provide support for you as a couple.

Couples who have strong relationships with the people around them report stronger, healthier, and more durable relationships.

When couples feel alone in their relationship (without friends to talk with) that is often when conflict arises. Having friends and family to confide in and to go to for advice relieves stress and can be an important resource for you.



### Finding meaning and purpose

Another part of connecting is finding a greater meaning and purpose in life. Think about what the greater purpose may be for your life, both individually, and as a couple.

For some, that might mean joining a church or synagogue. Faith-based groups can offer support and other resources. For others, it may mean joining a community or support group. Finding meaning and contributing to the community have been found to work wonders for relationships. Try to get out into the community and lend a hand every now and then!

## Finding support

Support comes from friends, family, and the community. Some examples of social support are:

- Your partner
- Friends & family
- Neighbors & the community
- Faith-based center
- Social organizations
- Schools
- Division of Social Services



Can you think of other examples of support in your own life? Are you making the most of your support by letting others help you?

The more you try to go at it alone, the harder life can be. We all need help from time to time; it doesn't make you a bad partner or a bad parent. In fact, you can be an even better parent/partner just by asking for help!

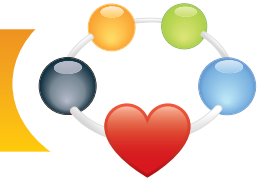
## Steps to take to connect

- Let others help you.
- Keep up close relationships with your extended family. If they don't live close, talk on the phone, send text messages or email.
- Get involved with community groups that are supportive of your relationship.
- Think about what gives your life meaning – Your faith? Values? Community service? Find groups in your area with similar values and get involved.
- Take part together in activities and organizations outside of the family.
- Be a support for others in your life, including your external family members. Has someone you know just had a baby? Take them a meal. Or show a friend going through a hard time that you care by offering to babysit.
- Create traditions that add meaning to your relationship. Attend faith-based services or arrange weekly play dates to connect with other parents.





# Growing Family Connections



Extended family members offer love and support in good times and in bad. When we spend pleasant, positive time together with extended family, we build up a reserve of good feelings. When we are having some difficult times, those good feelings make it easier to reach out for help and also offer support to others.

**Who is in your extended family? What are some ways they offer you help and support with your relationship? What are some ways you help them? List your answers in the spaces below.**

People in my family:	Ways they help us:	Ways we help them:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**How does it feel when you receive help from your extended family?**

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**How does this support help strengthen your relationship with your partner? Your children?**

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**How do you feel when you offer support to your extended family?**

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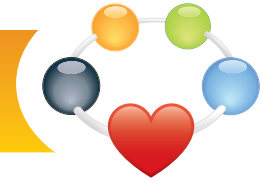
## Additional Tips

- Getting along with in-laws and relatives is not always easy. Family members can avoid hurting each other's feelings by not repeating past mistakes. Focus on the present and work together to build stronger relationships for the future.
- It is important for couples to talk about how much interaction they want with other relatives. Some couples like to spend more time with relatives, while other couples prefer to spend more time alone. Talk about your expectations with your relatives.
- Adults and children need opportunities to have fun and learn from extended family. Building and maintaining supportive relationships among family members and with people in the community is important for you and your children.

***Maintaining extended family relationships takes work,  
but it can strengthen your couple relationship!***



# Giving to Others



When an individual does a good deed, it feels good. It gives that person a sense of accomplishment. When a couple does a good deed together, it has even greater meaning. Doing things for others provides couples with a greater overall sense of connectedness, both to each other and to their community. It also gives partners more time together!

**What are some things others have done for you without being asked, or expecting anything in return? How did it make you feel?**

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**Think of the last time you did something for someone else without needing to be asked. How did it make the other person feel? How did it make you feel?**

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**What are some of your shared strengths or skills that you could put to use to help others?**

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**If you already have engaged in volunteer work or service with your partner, what did you do and how did it make you feel?**

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*Our lives are improved and our relationships are strengthened when we put our strengths to use by giving to and serving others.*









