



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EDUCATION

Couples Communication

Participant Workbook

SEPTEMBER 2014

Participant Workbook Session One

*"It was you, you and me
Two hearts drawn together bound by destiny
It was you, and you for me
Every road leads to your door
Every step I take forever more
Will you still love me forever more?"
--Will You Still Love Me? Lyrics by Chicago*

Session One: Introduction & Orientation Relationship Needs: Taking Time



Couples Communication Class Outline

Week One:

Welcome & Introductions
Class Format & Guidelines
Class Content & Outline
Building Blocks for Effective Connecting
Stages of Relationship
Taking Time
Reuniting at the End of the Day
Home Practice Assignments

Week Two:

Welcome
Relaxation Exercise
Check In
Review Home Practice
Listening Skills
“I” Statements
Home Practice Assignments

Week Three:

Welcome
Relaxation Exercise
Check In
Review Home Practice
Managing Anger
Home Practice Assignments

Week Four:

Welcome
Relaxation Exercise
Check In
Home Practice Review
Managing Stress
Relaxation Techniques
Caring Behaviors
Two Crucial Moments in a Conflict Conversation
Home Practice Assignments

Week Five:

Welcome
Relaxation Exercise
Check In
Home Practice
Problem-Solving: The Method
Approaching Couple Conflict as a Team
Couples & Family Meetings
Unsolvable Problems
Home Practice Assignments

Week Six:

Welcome
Relaxation Exercise
Check In
Home Practice Review
Review Key Learnings
Relationship Vision
Relationship Maintenance Plan

Introduction & Guidelines

Welcome to Couples Communication: Skills for Harmony & Growth! This class series will present basic skills that couples have found useful in helping them get along and improve their relationship. The following ideas will guide your learning and help make this a comfortable, supportive experience for all class members.

Promptness Sessions will begin promptly. Arriving on schedule will mean you hear the entire class and avoid disrupting other members.

Home Practice Home activities will be assigned each week. This class is an opportunity to learn new skills. These skills include learning how to manage stress, deal with anger, change negative thinking patterns, compromise, and communicate. Learning new skills requires practice. The time you spend will increase your learning.

Confidentiality It is important to respect the privacy of personal information shared in class. Who attends and what they say should not be repeated outside of this setting.

Be Supportive Try to make your responses to one another encouraging and positive. Avoid criticizing.

Abstinence In fairness to yourself and others, please do not come to class while under the influence of any mind-altering substance.

Couple Issues Personal issues discussed in the class are agreed to by both individuals in the couple. Please do not “force” your partner to discuss something by bringing it up in class without his or her consent. You may decide together to bring up something personal, but no one will pressure you to do this.

Additional This class is not therapy or counseling. If at any time during this class series you feel you need additional support, please speak with the facilitator.

Your Facilitator: _____

Local Health Education/Behavioral Health Department:

Your Mental Health /Psychiatry/Chemical Dependency Department:

Participant Introduction

Please introduce yourself by answering the following questions:

- Your Name _____
- How long you have been with your partner/spouse?
- What would you like to change/enhance in your relationship?
- Is there anything else you would like to share at this time?



Building Blocks for Effective Connecting

Session One: Relationship Needs: Understanding Stages of Relationships & Taking Time

Session Two: Learning to Listen & Express Ourselves

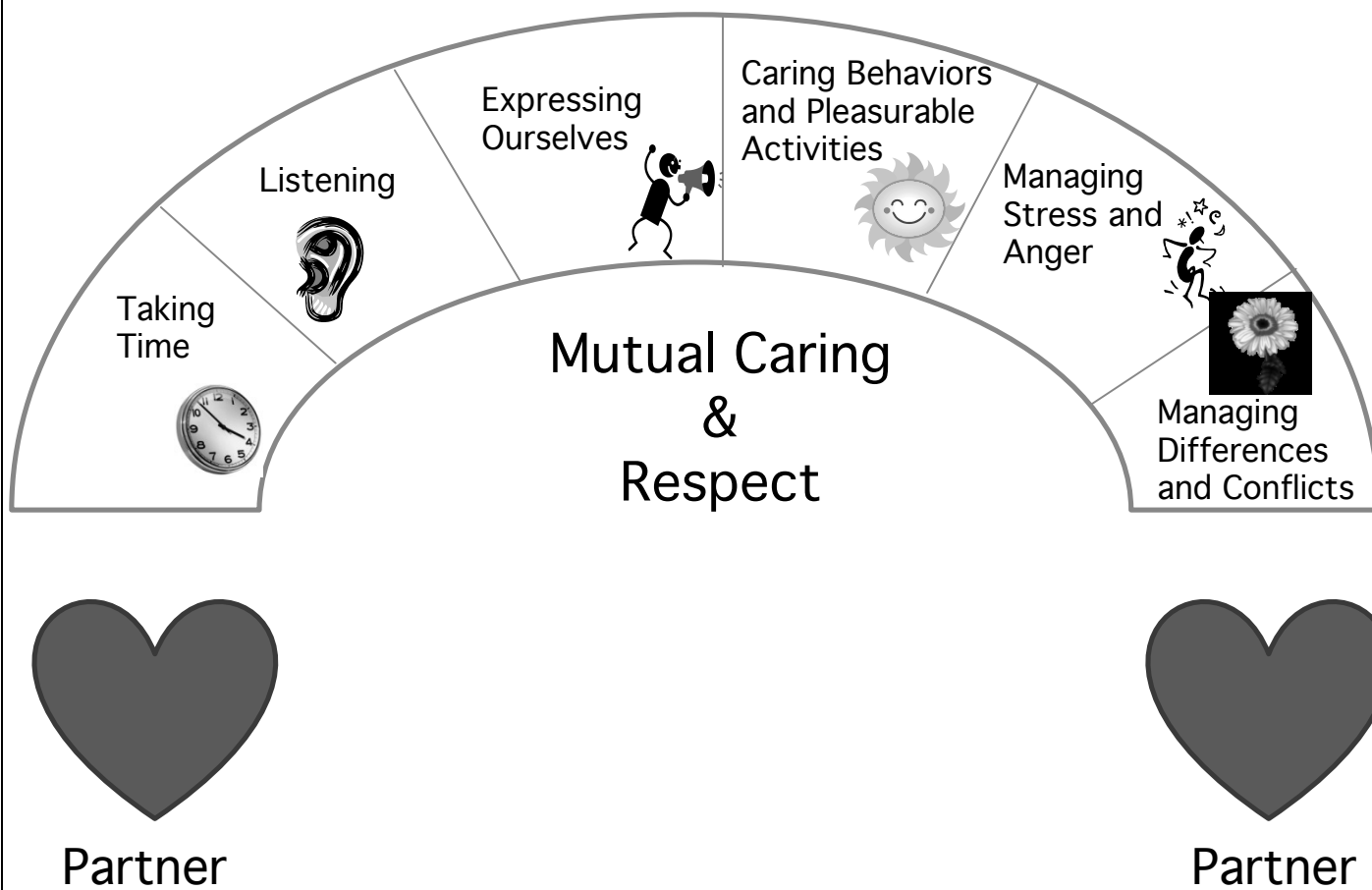
Session Three: Managing Our Stress & Anger

Session Four: Managing Differences & Conflicts

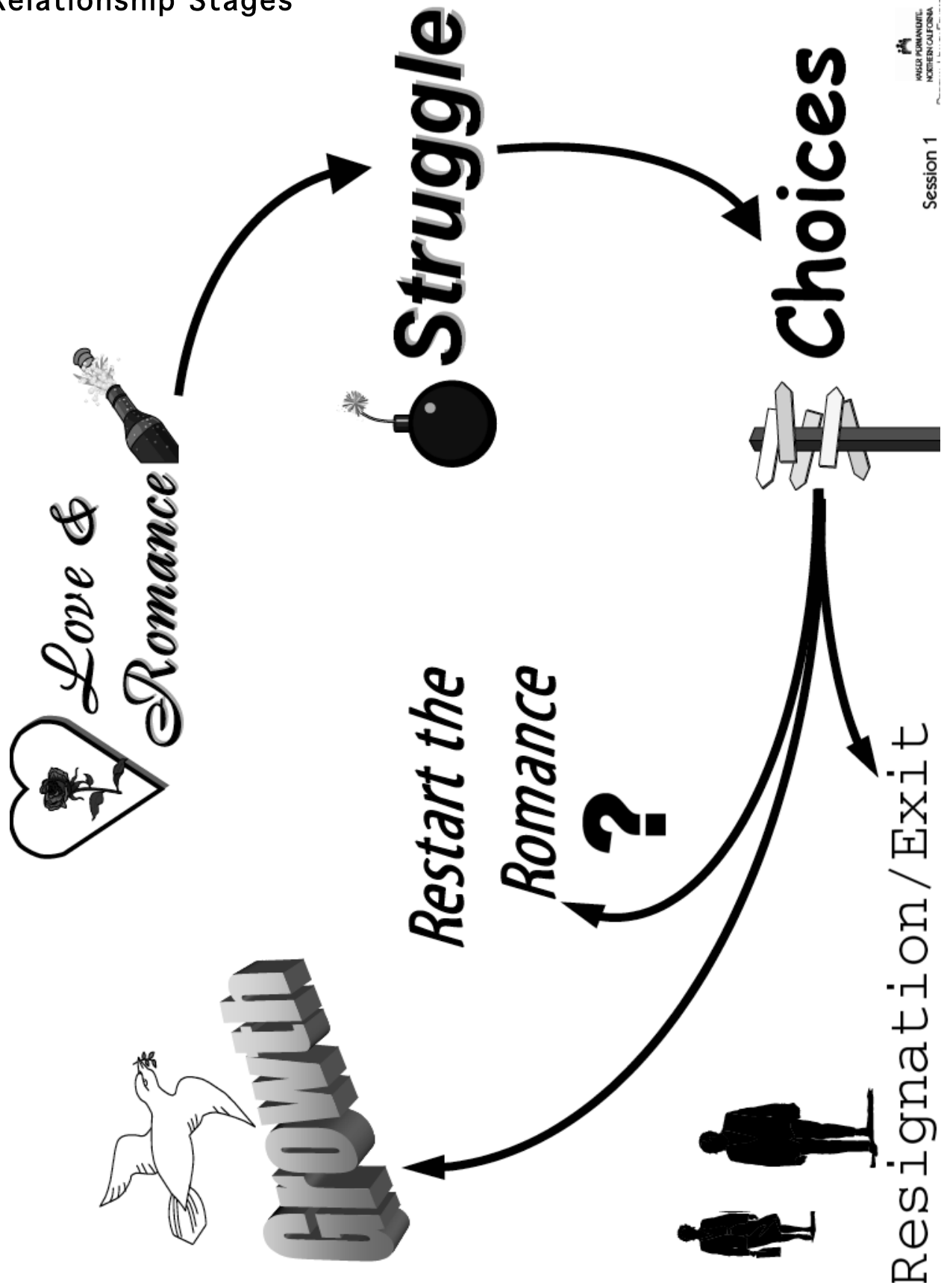
Session Five: Caring Behaviors & Pleasurable Activities

Session Six: The Future Vision of Our Relationship

Building Blocks for Effective Connecting



Relationship Stages



Session 1



Stage 1: Love & Romance Stage or “Love is Blind” Stage

Relationships are dynamic, growing entities that change over the course of the lifetime of the two people involved. Just as each person is growing and changing, so is the relationship. No one is the same person they were five years ago. Relationships also evolve and change over time.

The first phase of a relationship is the love and romance stage; this is the one couples remember most fondly and wish they could remain in. During this time, the partners feel a strong emotional and physical attraction to each other. It is characterized as a fun, bonding time. We view the other as the most interesting, most understanding, smartest, kindest, and sexiest person on earth. Most people would describe this time as “love is blind” because both people view and highlight the similarities between them and downplay the differences.

Stage 2: Power Struggle Stage or “Love Can Suddenly See” Stage

Just as the Love & Romance stage can be called the “love is blind” stage, the struggle stage can be called the “love can suddenly see” stage, or “now our eyes become opened to see who each other really is.”

The first part of the Struggle Stage begins with disillusionment. As the couple becomes more relaxed in the relationship, each begins to see the various flaws and shortcomings of the other partner. Yet, there is still enough happiness and goodwill from the previous stage that they are willing to overlook these perceived flaws.

However, many couples don’t know how to communicate effectively enough to resolve some of the conflicts they encounter at this point. As more arguments occur and couples are unable to resolve these, partners may begin to feel more disappointed, disillusioned, and discouraged with their relationship. Many couples misinterpret this period of adjustment and may feel alone or have a sense that they may have chosen the wrong mate.

Most marriages stall in the power struggle, but that is not the way nature intended it. The power struggle, like romantic love, is another weigh station en route to the real thing. It is supposed to happen, for it is necessary to make the potential hinted at in the romantic stage a reality.

For couples who have been together for a while, they may now have entered the second part of the Struggle Stage. They may be feeling disappointed, angry, anxious, depressed, and unloved. And they may tend to blame their partners for all this unhappiness. There may be feelings of failure as more and more conflicts remain unsolved.

Or they may feel desperation at not knowing what to do differently. Partners may begin to withdraw from each other as interactions become fractious and fun times have diminished. This stage is meant to be only temporary; however, many couples end up getting stuck and staying here. These couples may begin to consider ending the relationship at this point.

However, with some knowledge and assistance, couples can learn to negotiate their way through this troubling period and move on to the next stage: The Stability Stage.

Stage 3: Stability Stage

At this point, couples have worked through the Struggle Stage. They realize neither they nor their partner is perfect. This is the beginning of commitment, and even though the relationship may not be exactly as they would have liked, it is “good enough.” The friendship, love, and caring has deepened, and the relationship is predictable and less threatening than in the previous stage.

Staying together requires an intense bond of affection between the partners. If such a love bond does exist, the partners might accept that even though there are certain things they dislike about each other, they cannot imagine life without the other. If this is the case, the couple can enter into a new period of life together. It can be a time of discovery; of actively learning about each other as individuals. This sharing, referred to as a “psychological relationship” is a partnership of respect and support for each other’s emotional experiences and needs.

Stage 4: The Commitment Stage or Growth in Love

We enter this stage after we have negotiated the anger and disappointment of the power struggle and realized that we are responsible for our own relationships. During the power struggle, we cajole, harangue, and blame in an attempt to coerce our partner to meet our needs. When we move beyond this stage and into the Commitment stage, we realize our partner can indeed be a resource for us — once we abandon our self-defeating tactics.

“You learn to value your partner’s needs and wishes as highly as you value your own. Instead of assuming your partner will take care of your needs, you divert more and more of your energy to meeting your partner’s needs.

This is where true love begins to emerge, and we begin to experience the privileges and responsibilities of mature committed adults. We now have a more thoughtful way of dealing with problems and rely on the new level of intimacy we have formed to help in resolving conflicts” — Harville Hendrix (Getting The Love You Want p 89-90)



Building Block #1: Time Maps

Divide each circle below by the percent (estimated) of time you spend on the following activities (use numbers or letters to label each segment easily):

Work or **S**chool (including commute)

Household Chores

Kids

Volunteer or Community Service

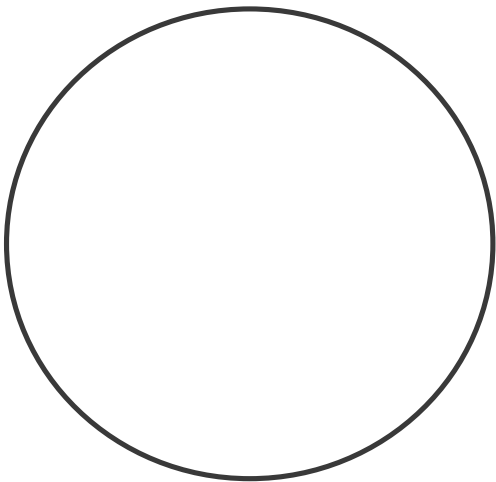
Exercise

Friends

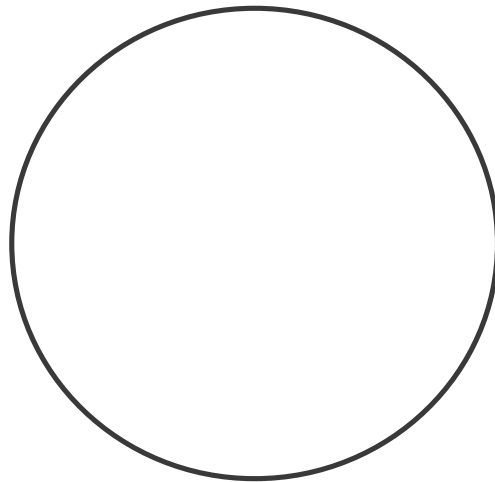
Extended Family

Couple Activities (fun, making plans and decisions, romance)

Personal Time



When We First Met



Now

Share your maps with your partner and notice how each of you SEES the way time was spent when you first met and how it is spent now.

- What did you learn about how time investment is affecting your relationship?
- Is there one small change you can make to increase your time together

Fun Things: 50 Things You Can Do with Your Partner

Exercise. It's free!	Take a walk in a quaint downtown area.
Ride your bike, or walk across a bridge.	Go out for an ice cream or yogurt.
Go to a scenic place to walk or hike.	Have breakfast in bed.
Pack a picnic & take it to the park/backyard.	Eat dinner by candlelight.
Go camping for a weekend.	Meet for lunch once during the work week.
Go to a local museum that interests you both.	Walk along the beach in your bare feet.
Stretch together.	Take a train ride somewhere fun.
Go window shopping at your favorite stores.	Try antique shopping.
Volunteer for a cause you believe in.	Go for a boat ride or ferry ride.
Walk or walk the dog together.	Try a new restaurant together.
Take a class together (pottery, yoga, etc.).	Take funny pictures of each other.
Work on a gardening project.	Start a box of good memories.
Go to the movies together or watch a DVD at home.	Start a journal together.
Have morning coffee together.	Work on putting together a photo album.
Sign up for a bowling league together.	Refinish a piece of furniture together.
Play some miniature golf (without the kids).	Go to a pet store.
Take a drive together.	Make an exciting dish for dinner together.
Take a walk in a different neighborhood.	Join a sports team in your community.
Give each other shoulder massages.	Plant a vegetable garden together.
Go to a local national park for a weekend.	Surprise your partner with his/her favorite dessert after dinner!
Watch a sunset together.	Go out for root-beer floats.
Buy a book on relationships and read it together at night.	Try a new sport together.
See a local play at a local theater.	Play a board or card game you both enjoy.
Start a collection together (rocks, leaves).	Go to a book store or library together.
Take a day to go wine tasting.	Kiss!

Reuniting at the End of the Day: Some Tips

It is important for couples to make time to reunite at the end of the day. This is another way to stay connected and current with what is happening in your partner's life.

All couples want to feel safe with their partner when sharing very personal thoughts. Here are a few tips to create the safety and closeness we all desire with our beloved. The more you stick to these rules, the closer you'll feel to your partner and the more positive you will feel about him/her. You each can become an oasis for each other when life is busy and/or stressful. And when life is going well, it will be a joy to have your partner to talk to.

Important Note: This is NOT a time to talk about conflicts in your marriage. This is time to catch up with each other's day.

- 1) *Pick a time when you won't be disturbed.* This debriefing at the end of day should take no longer than 30 minutes with each partner having 5 — 15 minutes of uninterrupted time. Do this every day!
- 2) *Just listen.* Most of the time your partner just wants you to listen and not give advice. If you jump in too soon with advice, your partner may not feel totally understood or validated. Just listen.
- 3) *Use Active Listening Skills.* Partners need to show genuine interest in what the other is saying. Use encouragers (Uh-huh, Really, nod head, eye contact). Keep focused on your partner.
- 4) *Keep it simple.* Both partners should keep the conversation short and simple, just sharing the salient points. If there's too much detail or information, your partner may find it more difficult to follow what's going on and may miss the main point.
- 5) *Take your partner's side.* No matter what your partner says, whether you agree with it or not, you ALWAYS take your partner's side. Rather than criticize or side with the other party, you listen and empathize with your partner. This creates the safety we all long for in our relationships.
- 6) *You are partners no matter what.* If your partner is going through an unusually difficult time, assure him/her that the two of you will see this through together. After all, you are partners and can lean on each other when needed.
- 7) *Be affectionate.* Telling your partner you love him/her, hugs, kisses, or any affectionate touch goes a long way in deepening the bond between you.
- 8) *Validate.* This means you can understand your partner's worldview even if you don't agree. Saying things such as, "I can see why you decided to do that" or "That would have made me angry too" lets your partner know you understand him/her. If you don't agree, don't say it. You are accepting your partner unconditionally. Isn't that what we all want?



Use this list to help you recall your partner's strengths when you write your Sticky Notes!

List of Positive Traits

Loving	Resourceful	Sensitive	Athletic	Brave
Cheerful	Intelligent	Coordinated	Thoughtful	Graceful
Generous	Elegant	Loyal	Gracious	Truthful
Playful	Strong	Caring	Energetic	A Great Friend
Sexy	Exciting	Decisive	Thrifty	Creative
Full of Plans	Imaginative	Fun	Shy	Vulnerable
Attractive	Committed	Interesting	Involved	Supportive
Expressive	Funny	Active	Considerate	Careful
Affectionate	Reserved	Organized	Adventurous	Receptive
Handsome	Rich	Reliable	Responsible	Calm
Dependable	Lively	Nurturing	A Great Partner	Warm
A Great Parent	Virile	Assertive	Kind	Protective
Gentle	Sweet	Practical	Tender	Lusty
Powerful	Witty	Flexible	Relaxed	Understanding
Beautiful	Totally Silly			

Session One: Home Practice

Sticky Notes (Seeing our Partner in a Positive Light)

There are Post-It Notes in your folder. You will use seven this coming week.

Instructions:

- Every day, for the next week, you will leave a Sticky Note in a prominent but unexpected place (i.e., bathroom mirror, pillow, rearview mirror, etc.) for your partner to find.
- The note will have a trait (can use *List of Positive Traits*, page 13, if needed) or something you appreciate about your partner (i.e., I really love how thoughtful you were last night when you did the dishes, or I love you, etc.)
- It is important not to keep score but to concentrate on leaving the notes.

Fun Night (Taking Time)

- Go on a 3-hour date this week.
- For suggestions on activities, you can use the list, *Fun Things: 50 Things You Can Do with Your Partner*, page 11.

Reuniting at the End of the Day (Taking Time)

- Read page 12.
- Do this every evening!
- Each partner gets 5 – 15 minutes of **uninterrupted** time to talk about the events of the day.
- This is not a time to talk about conflicts.
- Remember: Couples that know each other well tend to be happier in their relationship.
- This is also good practice for next week's session on Listening.

Stages of Relationship

- ♥ Read page 8 on *Stages of Relationship*.

Participant Workbook: Session Two

*"Listen to me – hear what I say
Our hearts can be nearer each day
Hold me darling – listen closely to me
Listen to me – listen, listen – listen to me."
--Listen to Me Lyrics by Buddy Holly*

Session Two: Learning to Listen & Express Ourselves





Building Block #2: Active Listening

3 Parts to Active Listening:

- 1) **Mirroring or Paraphrasing**
- 2) **Validating**
- 3) **Empathy**



Step One: Mirroring or Paraphrasing

Mirroring or paraphrasing is restating what your partner has told you to ensure you have understood the message correctly. Repeat in your own words what your partner has said. This lets your partner know she/he was heard and understood.

Start with responses such as...

"It seems like you're saying..."

"What you've said so far is..."

"What I understand is that..."

"What I hear you saying is..."

"Did I get that right?"

You repeat this process until you clearly understand what your partner is saying.

The communication can be deepened if the Listener asks if there is anything else to add to the topic.

Start with responses such as...

"Is there anything else?"

"Is there more?"



Step Two: Validation

The next step in Active Listening is validation. Validation means that each partner affirms the internal logic of the other partner's world. In other words, one can stand in the other's shoes and see how things appear to him or her.

When we do this for our partner, we are basically saying, "I understand you. You make sense to me." This does not mean you agree, but you can understand their worldview and respect it.

All of us want to be understood, and we want our worldview to be respected. Many times, it is difficult for us to imagine that others don't see the world as we do; our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs make so much sense to us that it is unbelievable that others don't have the same thoughts and feelings. This is when we may become stuck and many conflicts do not get resolved because we each insist on our viewpoint and dismiss our partner's.

Each partner's perspective is valid. Partners need to suspend their worldview for a moment and make an honest effort to see their partner's.

Start with responses such as...

"You make sense because..."

"I can understand that because..."

"It makes sense to me, given that you..."

"I can see what you are saying..."



Stage Three: Empathy

Here we are acknowledging feelings. In mirroring, we wanted to make sure we understood the message. In validating, we wanted to make sure we understood the logic behind the message. In empathy, we want to acknowledge feelings.

Empathy can be expressed using the following phrases:

"I can imagine that you might be feeling..."

"I understand how you must feel..."

The Art of Communication: Sending & Receiving Undistorted Messages

To begin with, both partners need to be committed to opening up and sharing with one another. Each person's experience needs to be seen as valid. Each partner may have totally different experiences of the same situation. However, BOTH PARTNERS' EXPERIENCE IS EQUALLY VALID.

Communication is a process of sending and receiving *undistorted messages*. The act of listening, of truly being *present* in the company of someone else is a healing experience. Learning to be validating and empathic toward the other person brings two people together. This is in sharp contrast to experiencing someone as not being interested in what we have to share.

How can we tell if someone is really listening to us?

♥ Couples Exercise: Sharing and Listening

In this exercise, choose which partner will be The Speaker and who will be The Listener.

The Speaker will have the opportunity to tell The Listener about the most frustrating thing that happened to him or her today.

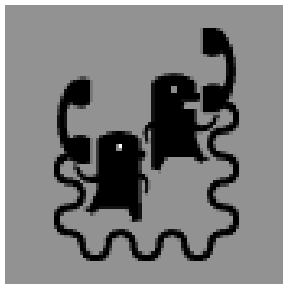
The Listener will then restate what he or she hears The Speaker saying.

The Speaker will then be asked if what The Listener stated was an accurate expression of what was said.

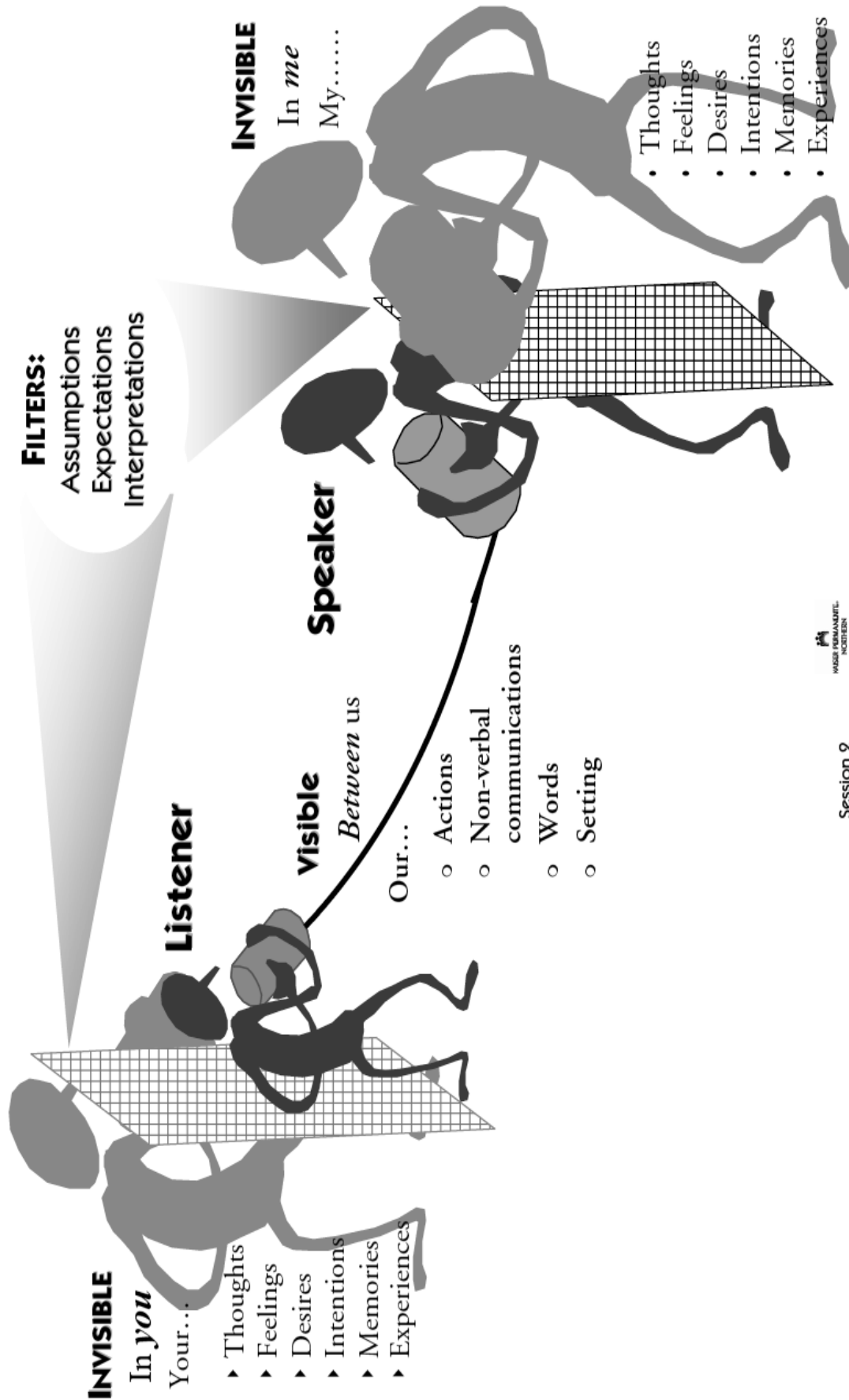
IF NOT, then The Speaker will restate what he or she wanted to share with The Speaker.

A second debriefing will take place.

OR, if the Listener stated accurately what The Speaker had said, then the roles are reversed and The Speaker becomes The Listener and vice versa.

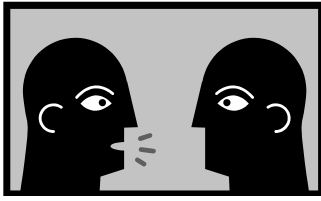


A Dialogue Map



Listening Blocks

- **Ordering, Directing, Commanding:** Telling Speaker to do something—giving orders or commands.
- **Warning, Threatening:** Telling Speaker what negative consequences will follow if he/she does something.
- **Giving Advice, Solutions:** Telling Speaker how to solve her or his problems.
- **Arguing, Lecturing:** Trying to influence Speaker with facts, counter-arguments, logic or your own opinions.
- **Judging, Criticizing, Blaming:** Making negative judgments or evaluations.
- **Praising, Placating:** Offering positive judgements that may be interpreted as manipulation or attempts to influence Speaker.
- **Name-Calling, Ridiculing, Shaming, Being Sarcastic:** Labeling or hinting that Speaker is foolish, unworthy of respect, shameful.
- **Mind-Reading, Interpreting, Analyzing:** Telling Speaker his/her feelings, thoughts or motives, or analyzing what he/she is doing or saying--communicating that you have the Speaker "figured out."
- **Sympathizing, Reassuring:** Trying to make Speaker feel better by talking her/him out of her/his feelings, denying the feelings.
- **Interrogating, Questioning:** Asking continuous questions to try to find reasons or causes. Involves "taking over" the conversation for Listener's purposes, not Speaker's.
- **Interrupting:** Finishing Speaker's thoughts or constantly intruding with Listener's comments, ideas or opinions.
- **Sidestepping, Distracting, Humoring:** Trying to get Speaker away from the problem; kidding her/him out of her/his feelings; pushing the problem aside or changing the subject; withdrawing from the problem.
- **Half-Listening or Paying Partial Attention:** Pretending to listen while doing other things like chores, paperwork, watching TV, etc.; using body language which shows that you are distracted, closed off or not listening.
- **Withdrawing:** Shutting off the conversation; verbally or physically leaving without Speaker's agreement and/or without "notice" or any plan to resume the conversation at a set time.



Building Block #3: Art of Communication

Verbal Attacks and “I” Statements

1) You always do this when you get home from work. You just sit down and do what you want to do.

When dinner needs to be prepared and the kids need attention, I feel overwhelmed because I can't do both. I need help.

2) I can't believe it. Just when we're getting on top of our bills, you go out and buy something we don't need.

When you buy something big without our agreeing first, I feel worried because I don't know if we can pay the bills. I want us to agree first on items over \$100.00.

3) How many times do you have to bring up the same issue?

When we discuss the same issue several times, I feel frustrated because it doesn't seem like we're getting anywhere. I want to work on compromising so we can get to a decision or solution.

4) You don't ever listen to me.

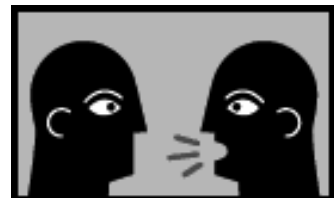
When your back is turned, I feel annoyed because it seems you don't care about what I am saying. I would like you to look at me when I'm talking.

5) You don't care what's going on with the kids.

When I am making most of the decisions about disciplining the kids, I feel alone and worried because I care about what you think and I'm not always sure about my decisions. I want your input and help.

6) You're so rude!

When you interrupt me, I really get frustrated because I can't finish what I want to say. I want you to share your ideas after I have finished.





“I” Statements and the Art of Communication

The Art of Communication is made up of three main steps:

Statement of Fact: When _____ (just the facts) _____

Statement of Feelings: I feel _____ (express feeling) _____

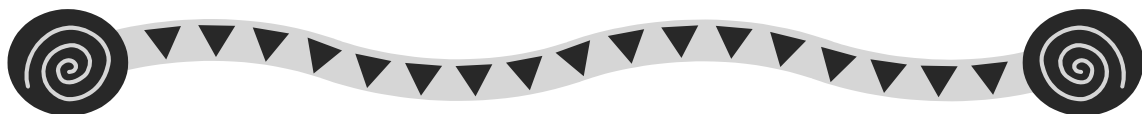
Statement of Request: I wish/want/would like _____ (request) _____

1) In the first statement, describe the situation — JUST the FACTS:
“When you get home two hours later than you said....”

2) In the “I feel” statement, state the feeling in ONE WORD (use the Feeling Charts to assist you):
“I feel anxious and worried...”

3) In the request statement, state your POSITIVE solution (I want/wish/or would like):
“I would like you to call me when you know you’ll be late.”

- Deal with one issue at a time.
- Be specific.
- Ask for a behavioral change.
- Ask partner for his/her ideas/suggestions.

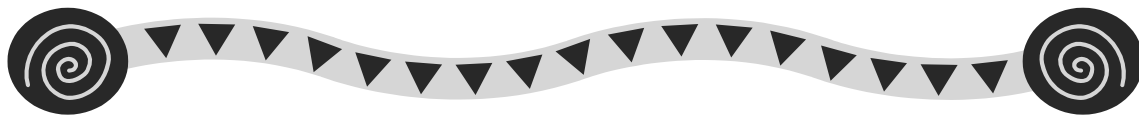


Building a Vocabulary for Feelings

In expressing our feelings, it helps to use words that refer to specific emotions, rather than words that are vague or general. For example, if we say, "I feel good about that," the word *good* could mean happy, excited, relieved, or a number of other emotions. Words such as *good* and *bad* prevent the listener from connecting easily with what we might actually be feeling.

The following lists have been compiled to help you increase your power to articulate feelings and clearly describe a whole range of emotional states. Words that express our interpretation and feelings about a situation:

Abandoned	Distrusted	Put Down
Abused	Interrupted	Rejected
Attacked	Intimidated	Taken for Granted
Betrayed	Let Down	Invisible
Boxed in	Manipulated	Unappreciated
Bullied	Misunderstood	Unheard
Cheated	Neglected	Unseen
Coerced	Overworked	Unsupported
Co-opted	Patronized	Unwanted
Cornered	Pressured	Used
Diminished	Provoked	Defeated



Feeling Words

Feelings we are likely to feel when our needs **ARE** being met.

Words of Happiness: I feel. . .

Excited	Cheerful	Content	Restored	Touched	Joyful
Relieved	Optimistic	Pleased	Complete	Comfortable	Satisfied
Lucky	Lighthearted	Delighted	Hopeful		

Feelings we are likely to feel when our needs **ARE NOT** being met.

Words of Unhappiness: I feel. . .

Sad	Lost	Exhausted	Tearful	Bitter	Hurt
Heavy	Hopeless	Bored	Lonely	Pessimistic	Crushed
Guilty	Regretful	Burdened	Worn out	Wounded	Helpless
Miserable	Depressed	Tired	Negative	Discouraged	Disappointed

Words of Anger: I feel. . .

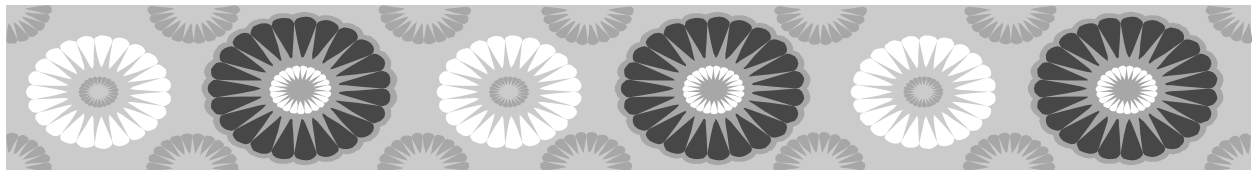
Angry	Annoyed	Vengeful	Aggressive	Disgusted	Frustrated
Insulted	Mad	Inpatient	Irritable	Enraged	Exasperated

Words of Anxiety: I feel. . .

Cautious	Worried	Afraid	Caught	Hesitant	Embarrassed
Distrustful	Anxious	Rushed	Panicky	Suspicious	Threatened
Self-conscious					

Other Assorted Feelings: I feel. . .

Confident	Curious	Envious	Obstinate	Interested	Apologetic
Determined	Confused	Mischievous	Puzzled	Skeptical	
Mystified					



Practicing the “I” Statements

Using the 3 components of the “I” Statement, put the following scenarios in the “I” Statement format.

- 1) Statement of Fact (just the facts)
- 2) Statement of Feelings (use Feelings Chart for assistance)
- 3) Request (positive solution in the form of specific behaviors)

Scenario One:

Partner A agreed to an invitation to his/her parents’ home without checking with Partner B. Partner B is upset.

When _____
I feel _____
I want/wish/would like _____
_____.



Scenario Two:

Partner A is consistently late picking up the children from daycare. Partner B often ends up dropping everything at the last moment to pick them up.

When _____
I feel _____
I want/wish/would like _____
_____.



Scenario Three:

Partner A has agreed to do the laundry weekly but has been inconsistent skipping up to two weeks at a time. Partner B would like Partner A to follow through on the agreement to do the laundry weekly.

When _____
I feel _____
I want/wish/would like _____
_____.



Looking at Communication Strengths

Three of my strengths in communication are:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



Three of my partner's strengths in communication are:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Understanding Barriers to Communication

1) One way that my partner and I differ in our communication style or preference is:

2) One **goal** I have for working with this difference is:

3) One way that I **block listening** is:

4) One goal I have to eliminate this block to my listening is:



Active Listening: Key Points

Pay Attention to Your Partner

- ♥ Maintain eye contact and face him or her.
- ♥ Eliminate distractions. Turn your attention toward your partner and away from any other focus or tasks (watching TV, phone, etc.).
- ♥ Use “encouragers” – head nods, “uh-hum,” “yes,” “really!” and “go on.” These all show you are listening and interested.



Develop an Attitude of Acceptance

- ♥ Focus on understanding the facts and point-of-view your partner is expressing. (Remember: you can understand even if you don't agree.)
- ♥ Listen for **feelings** (between the lines, if necessary).



Put Your Empathy and Understanding into Words

- ♥ Repeat in your own words what your partner has said. This lets him/her know he/she was heard and understood. **Paraphrase** your partner's message to check for accurate understanding. **Validate** her/his thoughts and beliefs. Show **empathy** for her/his feelings.
- ♥ Here are some responses to use to paraphrase, validate, empathize. . .
 - “It seems like you're saying. . .” (paraphrasing to clarify partner's message)
 - “What I understand is that. . .” (validation to understand partner's viewpoint)
 - “So you must be feeling. . .” (empathy for partner's feelings)
- ♥ Ask: “Did I get that right? Is there anything else?”



Offer feedback describing what you (as Listener) feel or think only after you have paraphrased, validated, and shown empathy of your partner's communication.

Be sure you really understand your partner before responding!

“I” Statements: Key Points

- ♥ Plan ahead when you want to bring up an issue by thinking out your own ideas and setting a time to talk with your partner.
- ♥ Start with an attitude of respect shown in your tone of voice and body language.
- ♥ Describe the issue in factual, neutral, unexaggerated language using only the *present* or *most recent* example.
- ♥ Focus on your *feelings* rather than blaming, judging, or interpreting your partner. This fosters communication because your partner won't need to defend him/herself.
- ♥ Tell how what you think about the situation (your opinion or interpretation) leads to how you feel.
- ♥ Describe how the situation affected you (the consequence).
- ♥ Suggest a specific solution stated in a positive way.
- ♥ Pitfalls:
 - ❖ Reporting anger when you're actually having more vulnerable feelings.
 - ❖ Expressing an opinion instead of a feeling.
 - ❖ Forgetting to be specific and positive.



Sample “I” Statements

- ♥ WHEN. . . (describe situation, “just the facts”)
- ♥ I FEEL. . . (emotion named in one word; use list on page 12)
- ♥ I NEED. . .
WANT. . .
WISH. . .
WOULD LIKE. . .

Example:

*“When you get home from work two hours later than you said,
I feel *anxious and worried*.
I would like you to call me when you know you’ll be late.”*

Below are more exercises to further your knowledge about “I” Statements.

Exercise One: Observations versus Evaluations

In an “I” Statement, the first part has to do with WHEN something happens. Often, this statement is not entirely clear. This can be due to confusion between making an *observation* (which is part of the “I” Statement) and an *evaluation or interpretation* of what has happened (which is not part of the “I” Statement).

In the following exercise, pick which of the sentences below are Observations and why.

- 1) “John was angry with me yesterday for no reason.”
- 2) “Yesterday evening Nancy bit her fingernails while watching TV.”
- 3) “Sam didn’t ask for my opinion during the meeting.”
- 4) “My father is a good man.”
- 5) “Janice works too hard.”
- 6) “Henry is aggressive.”
- 7) “Pam was first in line every day this week.”
- 8) “My son often doesn’t brush his teeth.”
- 9) “Luke told me I didn’t look good in yellow.”
- 10) “My aunt complains when I talk with her.”

Exercise Two: Expressing Feelings

The second part of the “I” Statement is expressing our feelings. Here is a simple description to further clarify what a “feeling” is: A feeling is a particular point of view that does not include facts; it describes an emotional state at any given time.

In the following exercise, pick which of these sentences expresses feelings and why.

- 1) “I feel you don’t love me.”
- 2) “I’m sad that you’re leaving.”
- 3) “I feel scared when you say that.”
- 4) “When you don’t greet me, I feel neglected.”
- 5) “I’m happy that you can come.”
- 6) “I feel misunderstood.”
- 7) “I feel good about what you did for me.”
- 8) “I’m worthless.”

Some additional guidelines when expressing feelings:

- Feelings should be expressed in one word.
- If you say, “I feel *that*...” then you’re probably expressing an opinion and not a feeling.
- Try to be specific rather than general about how you feel. Using words such as “bad” or “upset” may be too vague for the other to truly understand how bad or what kind of upset you are feeling (irritated, anxious, afraid, sad, etc.).
- If you have mixed feelings, express this and explain each feeling. For example: “I have mixed feelings about what you just did. I am glad that you helped me, but I didn’t like the comment about being stupid. I felt really hurt and angry and don’t think it was necessary.”

Exercise Three: Expressing Requests

The third part of the “I” Statement is making requests once we are clear about what we need. Many times, we talk without being conscious of what we are asking for and then feel frustrated and unheard when our partner does not respond in the way we wished.

It is important to make requests using language that is clear, positive, and concrete to reveal what we really want. Vague language contributes to confusion. No one can read our minds or should be expected to know what we want; we must explain what we desire kindly and clearly.

In the following exercise, pick which of these sentences express clear requests and why.

- 1) “I want you to understand me.”
- 2) “I’d like you to tell me one thing that I did that you appreciate.”
- 3) “I’d like you to feel more confidence in yourself.”
- 4) “I want you to stop drinking.”
- 5) “I’d like you to let me be me.”
- 6) “I’d like you to be honest with me about yesterday’s meeting.”
- 7) “I would like you to drive at or below the speed limit.”
- 8) “I’d like to get to know you better.”
- 9) “I would like you to show respect for my privacy.”
- 10) “I’d like you to prepare supper more often.”

Some final thoughts on making requests:

- Requests may sound like demands when unaccompanied by the speaker’s feelings and needs.
- Requests are received as demands when others believe they will be blamed or punished if they do not comply.
- If requests are poorly communicated, resentment builds up over time on both sides. This can negatively impact the relationship as we judge our partner as insensitive and they judge us as demanding.
- The clearer we are about what we want, the more likely it is that we’ll get it.
- It is important to express appreciation when your partner tries to meet your request.
- Remember, requests are not demands. Ultimately, we need to take care of our own needs. We are responsible for our feelings and our happiness.
- To tell if it’s a demand or a request, observe what the speaker does if the request is not complied with.

Home Practice: Session Two

Sticky Notes (Seeing our Partner in a Positive Light)

- ♥ Continue with the Sticky Notes.

Fun Night (Taking Time)

- ♥ Go on a 3-hour date this week.
- ♥ For suggestions on activities, you can use the list, *Fun Things: 50 Things You Can Do with Your Partner*, page 11

Reuniting at the End of the Day (Taking Time)

- ♥ Do this every evening!
- ♥ Each partner gets 5 – 15 minutes of **uninterrupted** time to talk about the events of the day.
- ♥ This is not a time to talk about conflicts.
- ♥ Remember: Couples that know each other well tend to be happier in their relationship.

Active Listening

- ♥ Practice the 3 parts of Active Listening this coming week.
- ♥ Be aware of any listening blocks and try not to use them.
- ♥ Read page 28 in the workbook, *Active Listening: Key Points*.

Expressing Ourselves: Using the “I” Statement

- ♥ Practice using “I” Statements this coming week.
- ♥ Read page 29 in the workbook, *“I” Statements: Key Points*.

More Practice on Communication (Optional)

For those couples who would like more information and practice on communication, the following pages might be of interest:

- ♥ Fill out page 26 in the workbook, *Looking at Communication Strengths*. Couples can write down 3 communication strengths each partner has.
- ♥ Fill out page 27 in the workbook, *Understanding Barriers to Communication*. Couples can explore and write down their differences in communication styles, goals to improve their communication, and listening block(s) they tend to use.
- ♥ *Exercises to Further Your Knowledge of the “I” Statement*. These exercises give you an opportunity to further your knowledge of the three components of the “I” Statement: what are the differences between “facts” and “evaluations,” “feelings” and “opinions,” and how to make requests?

Participant Workbook: Session Three

*"I know sometimes it's gonna rain...
But baby can we make up now
Because I can't sleep through the pain.
Girl, I don't want to go to bed mad at you.
I don't want you to go to bed mad at me.
No, I don't want to go to bed mad at you.
I don't want you to go to bed mad at me."
--Mad Lyrics by Ne-Yo*

Session Three: Anger: Learn How to Use It to Improve Your Relationship



A Brief Overview of Anger

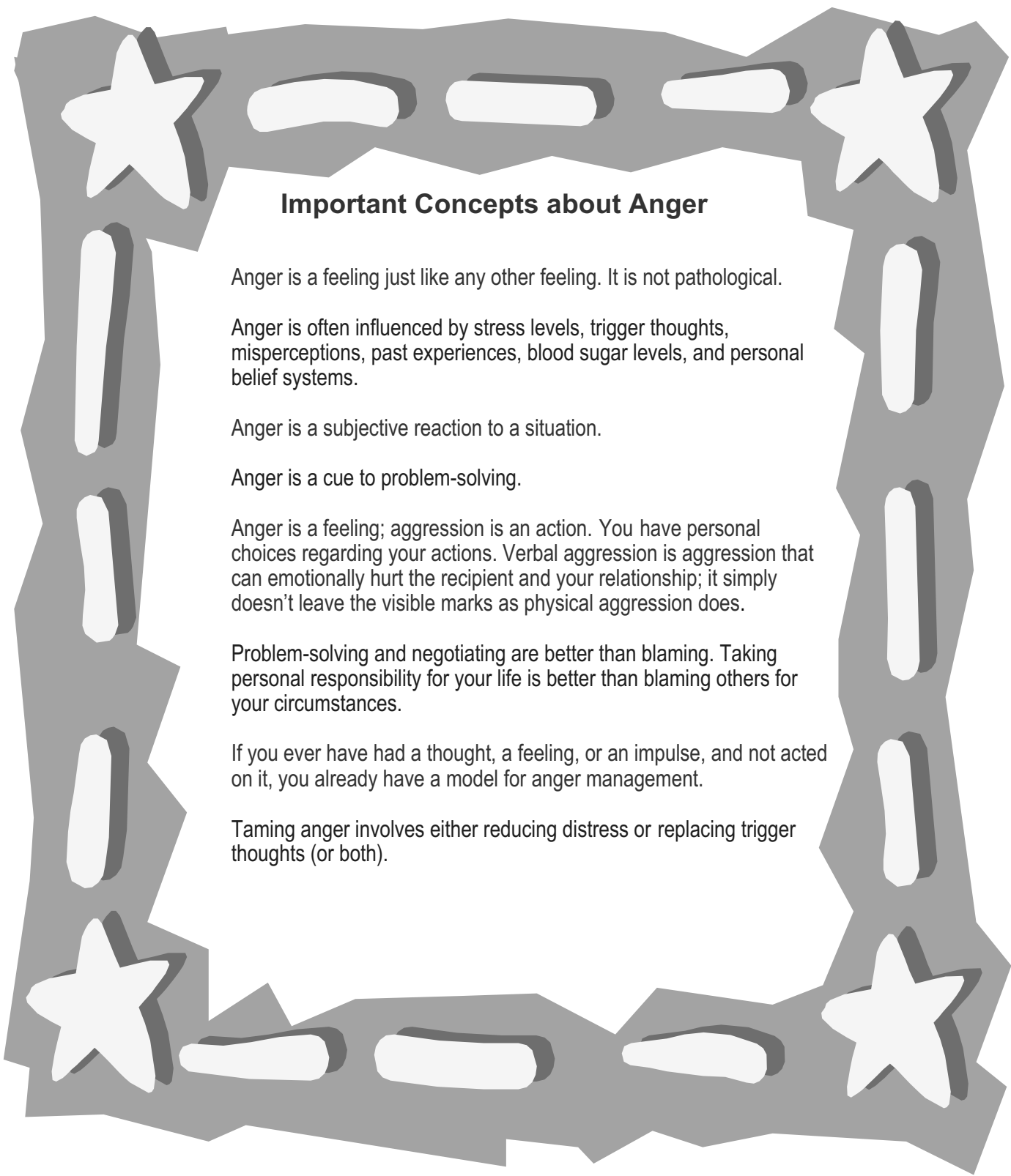
Angry people are experienced as dangerous and they are handled like a loaded gun...with caution and downright avoidance, even by those who love and care for them. Once we permit verbal or physical aggression to enter our relationships, we develop a tendency to return again and again to hostile, aggressive responses. Each episode breeds new fuel to generate attacks.

As the frequency of anger increases, there is a corresponding decrease in tolerance and flexibility. That is because angry relationships spawn an atmosphere of vigilance and fear. Energy gets channeled into erecting barriers, rather than into communication, problem solving, and being supportive of the angry person. The more someone expresses anger, the more others “tune them out” and distance themselves.

Anger is often used to coerce change in others. As a consequence, people erect defenses not only to shield themselves from hurt, but also to keep from feeling controlled. Tons of energy is spent resisting the angry person’s demands. This is wasted energy that could instead be spent trying to understand the underlying hurt and frustration that causes the anger. Usually, anger is the result of unmet needs that lead to blaming or judging someone else.

The angry person puts the responsibility onto others to meet his/her needs and gives up his/her own power in the process. One of the tragedies of choosing anger as a way to get needs met is that our anger drives all people, including our loved ones and supporters away. What we need — a sense of connection with others — is lost to us and we find ourselves even more estranged and alone. If we are able to get in touch with our unmet need, our feelings of anger dissolve. The goal in most disagreements is to resolve them, not to continue to argue about them.





Important Concepts about Anger

Anger is a feeling just like any other feeling. It is not pathological.

Anger is often influenced by stress levels, trigger thoughts, misperceptions, past experiences, blood sugar levels, and personal belief systems.

Anger is a subjective reaction to a situation.

Anger is a cue to problem-solving.

Anger is a feeling; aggression is an action. You have personal choices regarding your actions. Verbal aggression is aggression that can emotionally hurt the recipient and your relationship; it simply doesn't leave the visible marks as physical aggression does.

Problem-solving and negotiating are better than blaming. Taking personal responsibility for your life is better than blaming others for your circumstances.

If you ever have had a thought, a feeling, or an impulse, and not acted on it, you already have a model for anger management.

Taming anger involves either reducing distress or replacing trigger thoughts (or both).

Building Block #4: Anger Management Techniques

Below are suggestions of some effective solutions to deal with difficult situations.

Time Out Contract

This is the most effective anger management technique. Requesting time to stop a discussion that is becoming judgmental and abrasive is the most helpful action a couple can take. It is like putting on the brakes on a runaway car and slowing down so you can remain safe. Temporarily calling a time out and walking away allows you time to unhook from your primitive brain where you are in survival mode, and hook into your human brain where you can think much more clearly and rationally. Being able to think lets you come up with more creative options to an issue.

Time Out Signals

- 1) Body: sweating, tight gut, surge of adrenaline
- 2) Thoughts: hot thoughts, trigger thoughts
- 3) Actions: pacing floor, making fist, raised voice

If you are experiencing any of the above and can't stop **immediately**, take a time-out. When two people want to make a commitment to change patterns of anger that occur when they are together, a contract is in order. The following outline provides a framework for making the kind of changes that will benefit you both.

Time Out Rules

- Come up with a word (time out, veto, pause, etc.) or hand signal that indicates to your partner you are calling a time out. You will pick either a word or hand signal in tonight's class with your partner.
- As soon as the agreed upon word or hand signal is used by either partner, ALL talking stops—not one more word.
- Both parties walk away for 1 hour exactly. Time out is NOT used to avoid difficult discussions or control your partner; it is used as a time to calm down and not do or say something that you will regret later.
- During that 1 hour, it is good to take a walk and practice relaxation techniques to calm you down and let your body know you are safe; there is no need to go into fight or flight mode.
- You can think reassuring, calming thoughts such as:
 - a. I can stay calm.
 - b. We can see this through together.
 - c. We will come up with a solution.

- During the time out you cannot: drink alcohol, use mind-altering substances, or drive. This is not a time to focus on past resentments. This is a time to self-soothe and calm down.
- In exactly 1 hour you return to your partner. Adhering to rules and returning in 1 hour is a way of building trust and safety. We send the message that we know it is important to discuss the issue further.
- Check in with your partner and ask if she/he is ready to check in and continue the conversation. If neither partner is ready, take another hour or set a time when you will continue the discussion.
- A nice way to begin is for each partner to say to the other: "I know I was partly wrong and partly right. I want to hear your side of it again and then I will share my side."
- Now is the time to use "I" Statements and Active Listening Skills.

Time-Out Contract

When I realize that my (or my partner's) anger is rising, I will ask for a time-out and leave at once. No more talking and no parting shots!

I will return in one hour. I will take a walk to use up the anger energy and will not drink or use drugs while I am away.

I will try not to focus on resentments. I will think calm and reassuring thoughts.

When I return I will start the conversation with, "I know that I was partly wrong and partly right."

If my partner gives me our signal or word and leaves, I will return the sign or word and let my partner go without hassle, no matter what is going on.

I will not drink or use drugs while my partner is away and will avoid focusing on resentments.

When my partner returns, I will start the conversation with, "I know I was partly wrong and partly right."

My Signature

Date

My Partner's Signature

Date





Working with “I” Statements at Home

Practice:

Communication and listening are excellent anger management techniques. Using the “I” Statements and Active Listening Skills is a good way to bring up a situation in as neutral a way as possible. The Listener can also keep the situation from escalating.

Think of one situation that you have needed to talk about with someone other than your partner. Write an “I” Statement for that situation. Review the wording with your partner.

When _____

I feel _____

I want/would like _____



In this next practice, agree with your partner about a mildly annoying situation that you both have wanted to talk about. Then each of you write an “I” statement about it.

Once finished, share these with each other, using Speaker/Listener turns.

When _____

I feel _____

I want/would like _____



Getting to Know Your Anger

Anger is a normal, human emotion. It is intense. Everyone gets angry and has a right to his/her anger. The trick is managing your anger effectively so that it will mobilize you in POSITIVE, not negative, directions.

The first step in Anger Management is to get to know your anger by recognizing its symptoms.

DO YOU. . .

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral
☐ grit your teeth	☐ feel like running away	☐ cry/yell/scream
☐ get a headache	☐ get depressed	☐ use substances
☐ get sweaty palms	☐ feel guilty	☐ get sarcastic
☐ get dizzy	☐ feel resentment	☐ lose sense of humor
☐ get red in the face	☐ become anxious	☐ become abusive
☐ get a stomachache	☐ feel like lashing out	☐ withdraw

DOES YOUR ANGER...

- ☐ last too long? ☐ become too intense? ☐ lead to aggression?
- ☐ impair relationships? ☐ come too frequently? ☐ flare up too quickly?
- ☐ interfere with major roles? (parent, spouse, worker)
- ☐ contribute to physical problems?
- ☐ creep out in mysterious ways?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____



Anger Styles

Escalating

“Escalators” blame and shame the “provoker.”

“Escalating” often leads to abusive situations.

- ☐ Do you “escalate” to rage?
- ☐ Do you try to control, but lose control?

Some reasons we escalate are:

- ☐ believing “I have no other choice”
- ☐ to demonstrate an image of strength/power
- ☐ to avoid expressing underlying emotions
- ☐ fear of getting close to someone
- ☐ lack of communication skills
- ☐ a learned behavior (but it can be unlearned!)

Consequences/Problems:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ desired results may be short-term | ☐ results in possible physical destruction |
| ☐ impairs relationships | ☐ compromises physical & mental health |
| ☐ _____ | ☐ _____ |



Stuffing

“Stuffers” can deny anger. They may not admit to themselves or others that they are angry.

“Stuffers” may not be aware that they have the right to be angry.

- ☐ Do you “stuff” your anger?
- ☐ Do you tend to avoid direct confrontation?

Some reasons we “stuff” are:

- ☐ fear of hurting/offending someone
- ☐ fear of being disliked or rejected
- ☐ fear of losing control

Unfair Fighting Methods

Win/Lose, Right/Wrong:

Fighting for a victory rather than a solution; deciding that only one of you can “win” or be “right,” and that you will/must get the upper hand.

Gunny Sacking:

Gathering a long list of annoyances and issues that you have not talked about, then exploding over one, often small, event.

Kitchen Sink:

Often results from Gunny Sacking—bringing up a week’s or month’s worth of pent up issues in one argument or fight. Resolution becomes nearly impossible.

Below the Belt:

Using personal information about the other person’s vulnerabilities against them during a disagreement over a separate issue.

Withdrawal:

Leaving during an argument without promising to return, checking out emotionally, using the “silent treatment,” or agreeing only as a way to shut down your partner (“Whatever you say, dear.”)

Indirectness:

Fighting about everything *except* the real issue. Can include tears, yelling, coercing or forgetting in order to avoid the central difficulty.

Name Calling:

Put downs, blaming, or insulting the other person is NOT allowed.

Pushing Physical Boundaries/Physical Contact:

Using physical presence or nearness to threaten the other person: slapping, shoving, hitting, or otherwise physically abusing the other person. Physical violence is NEVER OK. This includes any threats, such as threatening suicide, threatening to hurt oneself, the other person, or someone the other person cares about.

Ground Rules for Managing Conflict

Think It Out:

- ✿ Think ahead about the problem: "Is it worth making an issue of it?"
- ✿ Identify a possible specific, positive solution.

Set a Time:

- ✿ Ask for a practical, mutually agreeable time to discuss the issue.
- ✿ Either partner can say, "This is not a good time." Whoever rejects a particular time takes the responsibility to suggest another time in the near future.

Approach with Respect & Gentleness:

- ✿ Come willing to listen.
- ✿ Try for respectful understanding of your partner's thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Commit to Resolution:

- ✿ One small issue at a time.
- ✿ Small issues first.
- ✿ Stick to the issue instead of attacking the person.

Listen!

- ✿ Give your partner a full turn to speak.
- ✿ Check out what you hear and observe.
- ✿ Restate or validate what you hear.
- ✿ Resist temptation to ESCALATE or withdraw.
- ✿ If you're too tempted, call a Time-Out.

Express Yourself:

- ✿ Start gently.
- ✿ Say what you observe.
- ✿ Say what you feel and think.
- ✿ Say what you want or need in positive, specific terms.
- ✿ Say what's in it for your partner to cooperate.



Rules for Disagreeing

It is important for you and your partner to agree on what is and is not acceptable behavior during a disagreement.

Complete the following questions alone first, and then go over your answers with your partner.

1) Do you feel good about the way you handle disagreements with your partner?

☐ yes ☐ no

2) Are you ready and willing to make changes in how you disagree? ☐ yes ☐ no

3) If there is one thing I could change about the way we disagree as a couple, it would be: _____

For the next 2 questions, consider possible behaviors including the following:

Physical actions such as hitting or pushing; verbal/vocal responses like yelling, crying, remaining silent; things that can/cannot be said; disagreeing in front of the children; acceptable and unacceptable ways to end a disagreement.

4) I think it is OK for us to do any of the following in a disagreement with each other:

5) I think it is not OK for us to do any of these behaviors during a disagreement:

*Remember: It is **NEVER OK** to threaten or use violence with each other. This is defined as when one or both routinely or deliberately uses verbal or physical attacks or threats to attack in order to control or manipulate the other. If your relationship includes this level of harmful behavior, or if you are confused or unsure about whether or not your relationship includes this kind of behavior, seek outside help. Contact your primary care provider or the department of psychology where you will find resources to help.*



More Anger Management Techniques

On the following pages are other anger management techniques you may use to curb your anger and improve your relationship.

Communication

Effective Communication & Active Listening

Communication and listening are excellent anger management techniques.

Using the “I” Statements and Active Listening Skills is a good way to bring up a situation in as neutral a way as possible. The Listener can also keep the situation from escalating.

When a situation makes you angry, put it in an “I” Statement format. Write it down and practice saying it in as calm a way as possible before talking to your partner.

“I” Statement Format:

When _____

I feel _____

I want/wish/would like _____

Active Listening Skills:

- Use paraphrasing if you’re unsure you understand your partner’s message.
- Use validation; validate your partner’s negative feelings of frustration.
- Use empathy to communicate your understanding of why this situation must annoy your partner. This doesn’t mean you agree but that you understand.

Remember:

- Use a calm voice.
- Stick to the facts.
- Check out your perceptions; don’t mind-read (assume).
- Watch for judgments such as he/she is inconsiderate, unkind, mean, etc.



Stress Reduction

- 1) All angry feelings begin with stress.
- 2) Stress is when we feel we don't have the adequate resources to handle the situation. We then feel out-of-control or overwhelmed.
- 3) Stress Reduction techniques stop the release of the powerful stress hormones that initiate the Stress Response (fight or flight).
- 4) This allows your human brain to stay in control so you can think more clearly, see different perspectives, and come up with more options to a situation.
- 5) Some stress reduction techniques include deep breathing, time out, exercise, meditation, etc.
- 6) Practicing a stress reduction technique every day is very helpful for keeping your stress levels down, while giving you the opportunity to think more rationally about a problem.
- 7) Some common stress reduction techniques are:
 - ✕ Practice deep breathing 3-4 times
 - ✕ Stop or rest for 10 minutes
 - ✕ Meditate
 - ✕ Listen to soothing music.
 - ✕ Read inspiration thoughts or poems.

We will be discussing stress, stress management techniques, and why they are important to our relationships in Session Five.



Coping Thoughts

Anger management requires not only learning and practicing relaxation techniques, recognizing trigger thoughts, and problem-solving communication skills, but also active “self-managing” to dismantle the anger escalation process.

Developing coping thoughts sets the stage for successful disruption of the anger cycle. You can use coping thoughts to soothe yourself or navigate yourself through provocative situations. If someone upsets you and you begin to feel angry and out of control, you can remind yourself to calm down, relax, and manage your anger.

Below is a small sampling of coping thoughts. Coping thoughts are thoughts that focus on staying calm and relaxed, keeping control, and distancing yourself from a provocative situation and/or person, etc. Please add your thoughts to this list.

Reassurance: see yourself in charge

- ☐ Take a deep breath and relax.
 - ☐ Just as long as I keep my cool, I’m in control.
-

Trigger Thought Responses: replace these thoughts without using “shoulds” or blaming yourself or others.

- ☐ I can’t expect people to act the way I want them to.
 - ☐ No one is right; no one is wrong. We just have different needs.
-

Physiological Coping: something to help when you’re starting to get “steamed”; something to cue the relaxation response (NOT use of alcohol or other drugs, or physical abuse).

- ☐ Take a time-out. Cool off, then come back and deal with it.
 - ☐ Take a deep breath and relax.
-

Staying on Task: something to get you back on track when things seem to be escalating.

- ☐ Easy does it — there’s nothing to be gained in getting mad.
 - ☐ Stay cool; don’t attack and don’t make judgments.
-

Coping with Arousal: to calm yourself use “self-managing” thoughts

- ☐ I have a plan to relax and cope.
 - ☐ I’ll stay rational — anger won’t solve anything.
-

Coping with an Angry Person: to distance yourself

- ☐ I’m not going to let him/her get to me.
 - ☐ Bottom line, I’m in control. I’m out of here rather than say or do something dumb.
-

Coping in Retrospect: when the conflict is over to handle the aftermath

- ☐ I got angry, but kept the lid on saying dumb things. That’s progress.
- ☐ I’m a good person and I did the best I could.



Rules for Fair Fighting

1) Take it private and keep it private.

- ✚ Don't fight in front of your children. Watching parents fight can leave emotional scars and a sense of insecurity.
- ✚ Use self-control and choose a time when you will not be distracted by family members, guests, TV, etc.

2) Keep it relevant.

- ✚ Don't bring up old grudges or sore points when they don't belong in a particular argument.
- ✚ Put boundaries around the subject matter so the fight doesn't become a free-for-all.

3) Keep it current.

- ✚ Only bring up a behavior that has recently occurred (no longer than 2 weeks).
- ✚ Talk only about the behavior that is a problem for you.

4) Keep it real.

- ✚ Deal with the issue at hand; not a symptom of the issue.
- ✚ Get real about what is bothering you.

5) Avoid character assassination.

- ✚ Stay focused on the issue, especially the behavior and the emotional feelings you have.
- ✚ Don't allow your discussion to deteriorate to attacking your partner personally.
- ✚ Don't name-call, mock, or use sarcasm.

6) Remain task-oriented.

- ✚ Know what you're arguing about.
- ✚ Keep the goal in mind (win/win) or compromise (you and I both get some of what we want).

7) Allow your partner to retreat with dignity.

- ✚ How an argument ends is crucial.
- ✚ Use repair attempts and recognize when they're being offered (apology, joke, etc.)
- ✚ Give your partner a face-saving way out of the disagreement.

8) Be proportional in your intensity.

- ✚ Pick your battles; don't have an issue of the day/week.
- ✚ Every single thing you disagree about isn't earth-shattering. Regulate your emotion.
- ✚ You do not have to get mad every time you feel you have a right to be.

9) Make a time limit.

- ✚ Arguments should be temporary; set a time for how long you're willing to argue.
- ✚ Anger and hurt are meant to be fleeting emotions.
- ✚ Don't let the ugliness of an argument stretch on indefinitely.



Home Practice: Session Three

Sticky Notes (Seeing our Partner in a Positive Light)

Fun Night (Taking Time)

- Go on a 3-hour date this week.
- For suggestions on activities, you can use the list, *Fun Things: 50 Things You Can Do with Your Partner*, page 10.

Reuniting at the End of the Day (Taking Time)

- Do this every evening!

Expressing Ourselves & Listening

- ♥ Use “I” Statements & Active Listening Skills.

Anger Management

- Read pages 34 on *Anger: A Brief Overview and Important Concepts About Anger*.
- Use the Time Out Contract, if needed.
- Follow the *Rules for Disagreeing* that you and your partner agreed upon.
- Review *Unfair Fighting Methods*, *Ground Rules for Managing Anger*, and *More Anger Management Techniques*.
- Fill out *Getting to Know Your Anger* and *Anger Styles*.

Participant's Workbook: Session Four

*Ooh-oo child
Things are gonna get easier
Ooh-oo child
Things'll get brighter
Ooh-oo child
Things are gonna get easier
Ooh-oo child
Things'll get brighter
Some day, yeah
We'll get it together and we'll get it all done
Some day
When your head is much lighter
Some day, yeah
We'll walk in the rays of a beautiful sun
Some day
When the world is much brighter
— Ooh Child Sung by the Five Stairsteps*

Session Four: The Hurtful Impact of Stress on Relationships



Building Block #4: Stress Management



What is Stress?

Stress is a physical or mental challenge to your system **along with** the belief that you have inadequate resources to cope.

Scientists have identified many sections in the human brain. The largest section is called the cerebral cortex. We might call this part the “thinking brain.” It is the part of your brain that makes it possible for you to recognize your favorite color, or be able to get into your car and start the engine.

If you cut the brain in half, down the center, you find another part of the brain (the limbic system) that contains the “amygdala.” The amygdala could be called the “reacting brain” or the “stress center.” This is an unconscious part of your brain that responds to fear or stress from your environment. When this “center” gets a *stress* or *fear* message, it triggers a sequence of changes in your body that are intended to protect you. This automatic system for responding to stress has been called the “fight/flight” response because it is designed to make you stronger and ready for action (to fight or flee).

Let’s take a look at what happens: Imagine you step off the curb, and a car speeding through a red light just misses you. You will immediately sense:

1. Increased heart rate
2. Increased blood pressure
3. Rapid shallow breathing (chest breathing)
4. Muscle tension, muscles contracting, body bracing for action
5. Digestive system both tensing and slowing down (causing nausea or stomach butterflies)
6. Surface blood vessels contracting (cold hands and feet, pale skin color)

This is a positive, helpful response because it prepares the threatened person for action if there is an immediate danger. In primitive man, this response provided the strength needed to get away when faced with extreme danger, such as a lion attacking.

Today, our bodies often have this same intense physical response to fear or stressful situations even when we don’t have a need to “gear up” or run away. It’s the triggering of this response when we don’t need it that causes the problems of anger and irrational thinking. **This unnecessary anger can begin to erode the communication between couples.**

Eustress: The Positive Stress

Most of the time we view stress as negative, but stress can also have a positive effect on our lives. Eustress is positive stress. We experience this when exciting things are happening in our lives such as a job promotion, being accepted in the college of your choice, getting married, having a baby, etc. These are seen as positive experiences that make life exciting. They can make us feel nervous and stressed but in a positive way.

Eustress is not damaging to the body as distress (negative stress) is. It lifts our spirits and gives meaning to our lives. It energizes us and keeps us committed to strive and meet our goals. Eustress improves our relationships and gives meaning to our personal lives. It can help us get rid of our chronic, negative stress by changing our attitude and beliefs. When we are enthusiastic, we are happier and more alive. We can commit to what is needed for the people we love. Our intimate relationship can help bring about eustress for us as we join with our partner in this adventure of being together and getting to know each other.



The Relaxation Response: The Antidote to the Stress Response

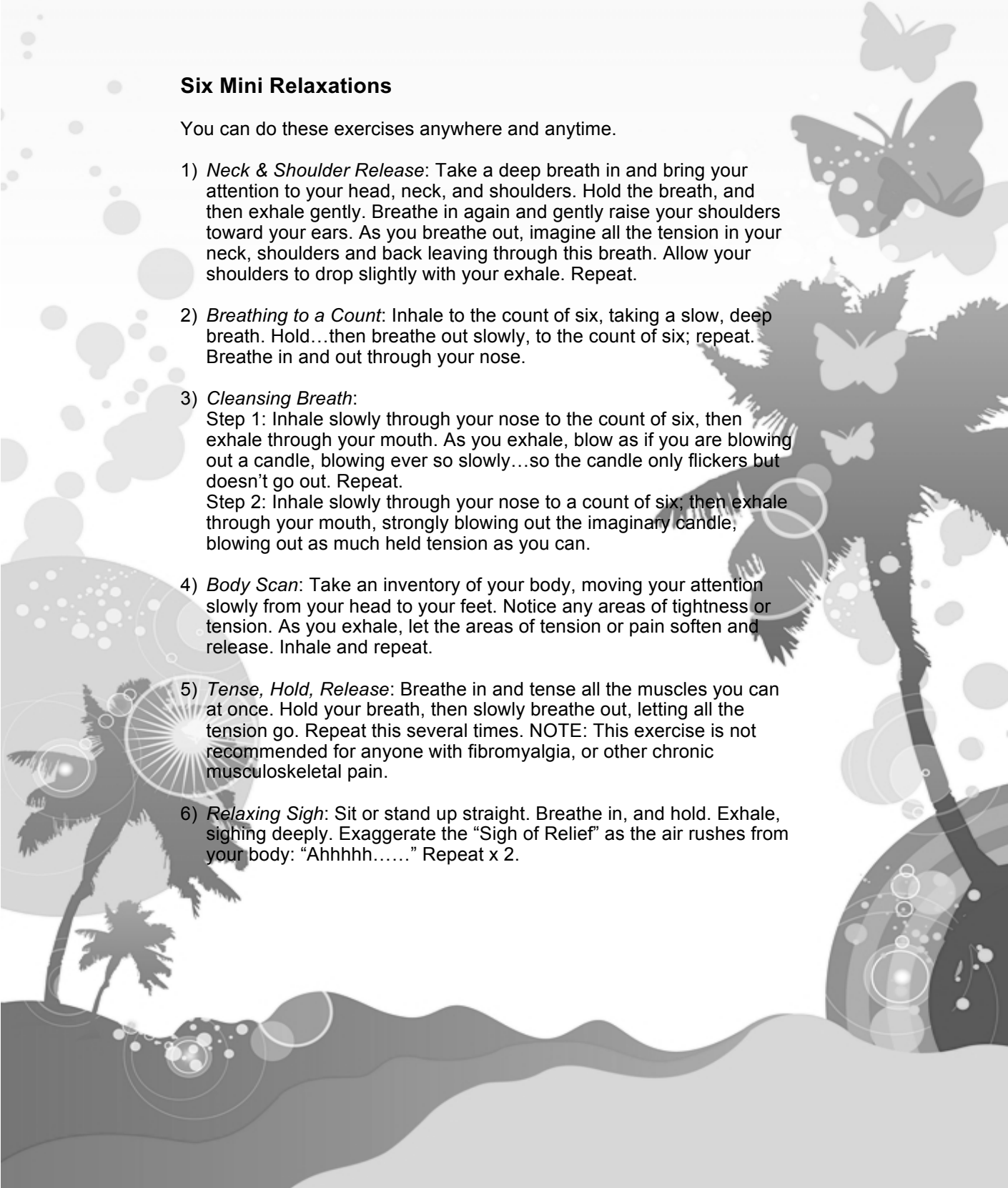
The Sympathetic Nervous System is responsible for activating our Stress Response — a kind of internal alarm system. The Parasympathetic Nervous System is responsible for counteracting our Stress Response.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System activates our Relaxation Response which slows down our heart rate and breathing, decreases blood pressure, calms muscles, and allows deep relaxation. It allows us to manage our stress better because it helps us access our more highly evolved human brain which is able to think in a rational, less reactive manner.

All the relaxation exercises in this workbook activate our Relaxation Response, which stops the stress response from releasing the stress hormones and preparing our body for fight and/or flight. When we are relaxed our “human” brain is in charge. This part of our brain allows us to handle situations more rationally and calmly.

We are then able to problem solve in a much more effective way. **Being calm and relaxed allows us to deal with marital conflicts much more creatively, rationally, and functionally.**

The following exercises are very simple and easy. It is not hard to activate our Relaxation Response; we just need to practice daily so that it becomes more quickly and easily accessible to when difficult situations arise. It allows us to manage our stress better because it helps us access our more highly evolved human brain which is able to think in a calmer and less reactive manner.



Six Mini Relaxations

You can do these exercises anywhere and anytime.

- 1) *Neck & Shoulder Release*: Take a deep breath in and bring your attention to your head, neck, and shoulders. Hold the breath, and then exhale gently. Breathe in again and gently raise your shoulders toward your ears. As you breathe out, imagine all the tension in your neck, shoulders and back leaving through this breath. Allow your shoulders to drop slightly with your exhale. Repeat.
- 2) *Breathing to a Count*: Inhale to the count of six, taking a slow, deep breath. Hold...then breathe out slowly, to the count of six; repeat. Breathe in and out through your nose.
- 3) *Cleansing Breath*:
Step 1: Inhale slowly through your nose to the count of six, then exhale through your mouth. As you exhale, blow as if you are blowing out a candle, blowing ever so slowly...so the candle only flickers but doesn't go out. Repeat.
Step 2: Inhale slowly through your nose to a count of six; then exhale through your mouth, strongly blowing out the imaginary candle, blowing out as much held tension as you can.
- 4) *Body Scan*: Take an inventory of your body, moving your attention slowly from your head to your feet. Notice any areas of tightness or tension. As you exhale, let the areas of tension or pain soften and release. Inhale and repeat.
- 5) *Tense, Hold, Release*: Breathe in and tense all the muscles you can at once. Hold your breath, then slowly breathe out, letting all the tension go. Repeat this several times. NOTE: This exercise is not recommended for anyone with fibromyalgia, or other chronic musculoskeletal pain.
- 6) *Relaxing Sigh*: Sit or stand up straight. Breathe in, and hold. Exhale, sighing deeply. Exaggerate the "Sigh of Relief" as the air rushes from your body: "Ahhhhh....." Repeat x 2.

Building Block #5: Caring Behaviors & Pleasurable Activities

Definition:

- A considerate behavior that can be accomplished in a few minutes.
- It is a specific and positive behavior.
- Example: "I really like it when you read to me for a few minutes before we go to sleep." (positive, specific behavior)

Not: "I wish you would treat me better when you first get home from work."
(negative, not specific behavior)

Better: "I love it when you give me a kiss and talk to me for a few minutes when you first come home from work." (positive, specific behavior)

Not: "Please stop being disrespectful of me in front of the kids."
(negative, not specific behavior)

Better: "I think it is important that we stick to complimentary comments about each other in front of the kids and address issues in a respectful way when we are alone together."

Sources:

- What considerate actions does your partner **already** do?
- What considerate actions did he/she **used to do** when you were first together?
- What considerate acts have you **sometimes wished** your partner would do for you?

Instructions:

- 1) Make a list of several "Caring Behaviors" you would like your partner to show for you.
- 2) Share these with each other calmly and openly.
- 3) Listen to your partner sharing his/her list.
- 4) On your partner's list, mark a small "x" by actions you would not be willing to do just now.
- 5) Circle or star the actions you are willing to do.
- 6) Keep your partner's list. Offer to do 1 to 3 of the actions they've requested daily.
- 7) Acknowledge your partner's Caring Behaviors toward you with an act of appreciation.



Caring Behaviors & Pleasurable Activities

- Give these behaviors even when you don't feel loving toward your partner!
- Don't keep score!

Here are some examples of caring behaviors:

- ❖ Read out loud to each other
- ❖ Take a walk together
- ❖ Give a back/foot rub
- ❖ Watch a sunset together
- ❖ Kiss/hug him or her
- ❖ Offer small gifts (flowers, coffee)
- ❖ Give compliments



Two Crucial Moments in a Conflict Conversation

Speakers often begin a conflict conversation in an abrasive, harsh manner, often complaining about their partner's character (selfish, disrespectful, unkind, etc.) instead of focusing on the behavior (no interruptions, kiss hello, pick up dirty dishes, etc.).

Usually, when the Listener hears judgment about her/his character, he/she becomes defensive and angry. He/she also doesn't know what his/her partner needs.

When we begin a conflict conversation in an accusatory, harsh manner it usually stays abrasive and can escalate into a hostile, aggressive argument. When this happens, conflicts are very difficult to solve or handle. The more conflicts are left unsolved, the more hopeless couples feel about their relationship.

However, conflict conversations that begin in a calm tone of voice and use neutral wording, generally achieve more attention and cooperation from the Listener. When a partner is not under attack, he or she can stay more engaged in the discussion.

The "I" Statement and Active Listening Skills are very helpful in these situations. They help the Speaker talk in a way that doesn't judge her or his partner and lets the Listener know what behavior change the Speaker is requesting.

♥ Couples Exercise: Beginning a Conflict Conversation Softly

Please change these three abrasive Conflict Conversation starters into a more neutral Conflict Conversation.

Conflict Conversation Number One:

You never support me when your mother criticizes the way we raise our kids.

Conflict Conversation Number Two:

You never think about me — only your friends. Why do you have time to go out with them but not with me?

Conflict Conversation Number Three:

You are so rude! You keep interrupting me.

To make these more neutral, use the “I” Statement.

1 Statement of Fact: When _____

2 Statement of Feelings: I feel _____

3 Behavior Change: I would like _____

The Listener's Part

Both partners are responsible for the conversation and keeping it from escalating into an unpleasant argument that can damage the foundation of the relationship.

If the Speaker starts the conversation in an abrasive way, the Listener has three choices:

- 1) Defend him/herself, escalating the volume and tone of the conversation and refusing to offer any kind of cooperation.
- 2) Withdraw from the conversation, either physically or by shutting down.
- 3) Stay attentive to the conversation, responding in a calm and neutral tone offering cooperation when possible.

Choice #1 should be avoided since it will only add to the conflict.

Choice #2 may be appropriate if the Listener feels he/she is being threatened or abused. No one has to accept unacceptable, abusive behavior. Exiting a conversation is okay if that is what is needed to be safe. But walking away or shutting down to punish the Speaker or to make a point, is controlling and will not help to resolve the situation.

Choice #3 is the preferred way to react. The Listener can remain attentive and assist in keeping the conversation from escalating out of control by concentrating on what the Speaker is requesting. By not taking the harshness personally and remaining calm can help keep the discussion from escalating and assist the Speaker in becoming clearer with his/her request. It is also helpful if the Listener is able to pay attention to his/her emotions and defenses, taking time to breathe and pausing before responding.

♥ Couples Exercise: The Listener's Part

Working with your partner and pretending that both of you are the Listener, how can the Listener respond to these abrasive examples?
(HINT: use paraphrasing, validation, empathy)

Conflict Conversation Number One:

You never support me when your mother criticizes the way we raise our kids.

Conflict Conversation Number Two:

You never think about me — only your friends. Why do you have time to go out with them but not with me?

Conflict Conversation Number Three:

You are so rude! You keep interrupting me.

Home Practice: Session Four

Focusing on Our Partner's Positive Traits

- ♥ Do Sticky Notes on a random basis.
- ♥ Compliment partner.
- ♥ Thank partner when they have complied with your request.
- ♥ Comment on partner's strengths.

Reuniting at the End of the Day: Keeping Current on Our Partner's Life

- ♥ Continue to debrief every night to keep current with what is happening in each other's life.

Fun Night: Taking Time & Tending to Our Relationship

- ♥ Have a 3-hour date to give partners time to experience each other as a source of fun.

Expressing Ourselves & Listening

- ♥ Practice "I" Statements & Active Listening Skills.
- ♥ Watch for Listening Blocks.

Anger Management

- ♥ Use "Time Out" if needed.
- ♥ Use any of the anger management techniques listed in the last session.

Stress Management

- ♥ Remember: "Breathe!"
- ♥ Use Relaxation Response by doing any of the stress management techniques listed.

Caring Behaviors: Partners Are a Source of Care and Nurturance

- ♥ Do a Caring Behavior from your partner's list this week.

Participant's Workbook: Session Five

*We can work it out
We can work it out
Life is very short
And there's no time
For fussing and fighting, my friend
I have always thought
That it's a crime
So I will ask you once again.
--We Can Work it Out Sung by The Beatles*

Session Five: Managing Differences & Conflicts



Problem-Solving: The Method

All couples have problems, even happy couples. Learning a method to deal with problems in which both partners' needs are being considered is usually a successful way to solve problems. However, some problems cannot be solved; partners will never agree on some issues. Yet, couples can find a way to stay together and grow closer in spite of these differences.

The method we are suggesting here has been shown to help many couples solve the problems they can and manage the ones they cannot. This method has six components which are described below.

1) Describe the problem.

Working together, come up with a joint description of the problem without focusing on your partner. Use neutral, soft language to describe the issue. Write this down on the worksheet. You can use the sample worksheet provided, as well as these examples below, to help you write a neutral, specific description of the problem.

- If it's an ongoing issue, use neutral language that refers to both sides of the problem:
Example: "We do not have enough income over and above our monthly bills to be able to meet Jim's desires for a \$2000 cushion in savings and Joe's desires to put \$1500 down on a new boat."
- If it's a recurring problem, write down a recent example:
Example: "After talking today we now know that yesterday evening we both wanted to make love, but neither of us said so. It seems like there was too much hurt for Brandy, and too much resentment for John. This keeps happening, with the result that this one way of being really happy together (through intimacy) is getting closed off."

2) Identify Needs & Feelings

Now work separately, each filling in your feelings about the situation and what you need.

- For feelings, use the *Building a Vocabulary for Feelings* charts in Session 3 to help you identify your feelings and not your evaluation or opinions of the issue or your partner.

Examples:

Jim: "I feel worried and anxious that we don't have money saved for emergencies."

Joe: "I feel disappointed that we can't buy a boat so we can enjoy ourselves now."

- For needs, be specific and positive as in an "I" Statement.

Examples:

Jim: "I feel insecure with a small savings account. I need to know we can survive on one of our incomes for a couple of months, if needed."

Joe: "I feel trapped and restless when we have money in the bank and don't take the chance to buy things we want now. I need to be using what we have to be making good times that we will remember forever."

3) Explore Possible Solutions

- Brainstorm. Write down your ideas as you come up with them, without comment.
- Don't censor yourself even if you know the ideas are not practical or are silly. Recording some outlandish ideas can actually help the creative process.

4) Select a Solution

- Adopt a two-winner approach.
- Eliminate all solutions that are not agreeable to both of you. Agree on one mutually agreeable solution to try.

5) Agree on an Action Plan

- Repeat what has been agreed on, including the action to be taken by each person. Make notes.
- **Remember:** *If you agreed to do something, **DO IT** no matter what! Being part of a couple is being a person of your word, which means you are reliable, dependable, honest, and trustworthy. These traits make for happy relationships because they create safety and trust between partners.*

6) Follow Up

- Before you finish, set a time to check on how your solution is working. Give this several weeks (4-6 least) and “tweak” the solution along the way if necessary, but stay with it. Many couples abandon their solutions too soon and then feel frustrated and powerless.
- If your solution didn’t work, use the method again to generate more ideas and decide on a new solution. If you want to discuss why your solution didn’t work, that’s great, but do not blame each other. That is not helpful.
- When the time comes to review, if you find your solution is working---celebrate! You worked as a team, you didn’t blame each other, you stuck to your word, and you solved a problem. Nothing makes you more attractive and sexy than keeping your word.

Congratulate yourselves on doing a good job!



Problem-Solving Worksheet: Example

Step 1: Describe the Problem. Be specific. Describe the last time it happened.

We love our new childcare provider except for the fact that she must have the kids picked up by 5:30 pm. Neither Chris or Jan work in town and both have difficulty getting there on time. Chris was late 5 times in the last 2 weeks. Jan dashed over to get the kids, and they were still charged \$10/day late fee.

Step 2: Identify Needs and Feelings

Chris' Needs/Feelings

- Feels alone in responsibility for kids and budget
- Feels "dumped-on" when Jan misses
- Needs Jan to help address this
- Wants to trust that Jan will take care of kid.

Jan's Needs/Feelings

- Feels guilty about messing up
- Tempted to feel angry instead
- Would like to have day care close to work
- Feels that having to stop at 4:30 pm is difficult

Step 3: Explore Possible Solutions. Brainstorm.

No censoring. Silly or outlandish ideas welcome too.

- Look for new Day care provider (DCP)
- Talk to DCP about later hours
- Jan could move to part-time or decrease hours and pick up kids on afternoons off
- Jan could take kids in a.m.; Chris picks up every evening
- Jan could call a grandparent to pick up the children if unable to pick up

Step 4: Select a Solution. *Eliminate any solution that is not agreeable to both.*

Morning/Evening split. Chris takes kids in the morning, so Jan can get to work a little earlier and leave earlier to pick the kids up each evening.

Step 5: Agree on an Action Plan. *What will be done, Who will do it & When it will be done.*

- Chris will talk to boss about starting 45 min later each day. Jan will plan to go in early.
- Chris will spend the next 2 weeks learning about the kids' "morning routine."
- Start date for new plan will be in 2 weeks.

Step 6: Follow Up. *Set a time to review how the solution is working.*

Follow up:

- 4 weeks after start date.
- If problems occur, note them down on calendar.
- Bring to Couples' Meeting in 6 weeks.

Congratulate yourselves for sticking with the process!



Problem-Solving Worksheet

Step 1: Describe the Problem. (Be specific. Describe the last time it happened.)

Step 2: Identify Needs and Feelings

Name: _____

Name: _____

Step 3: Explore Possible Solutions. Brainstorm. (No censoring. Silly or outlandish ideas welcome too.)

Step 4: Select a Solution. (Eliminate any solution that is not agreeable to both.)

Step 5: Agree on an Action Plan. (What will be done, Who will do it & When it will be done.)

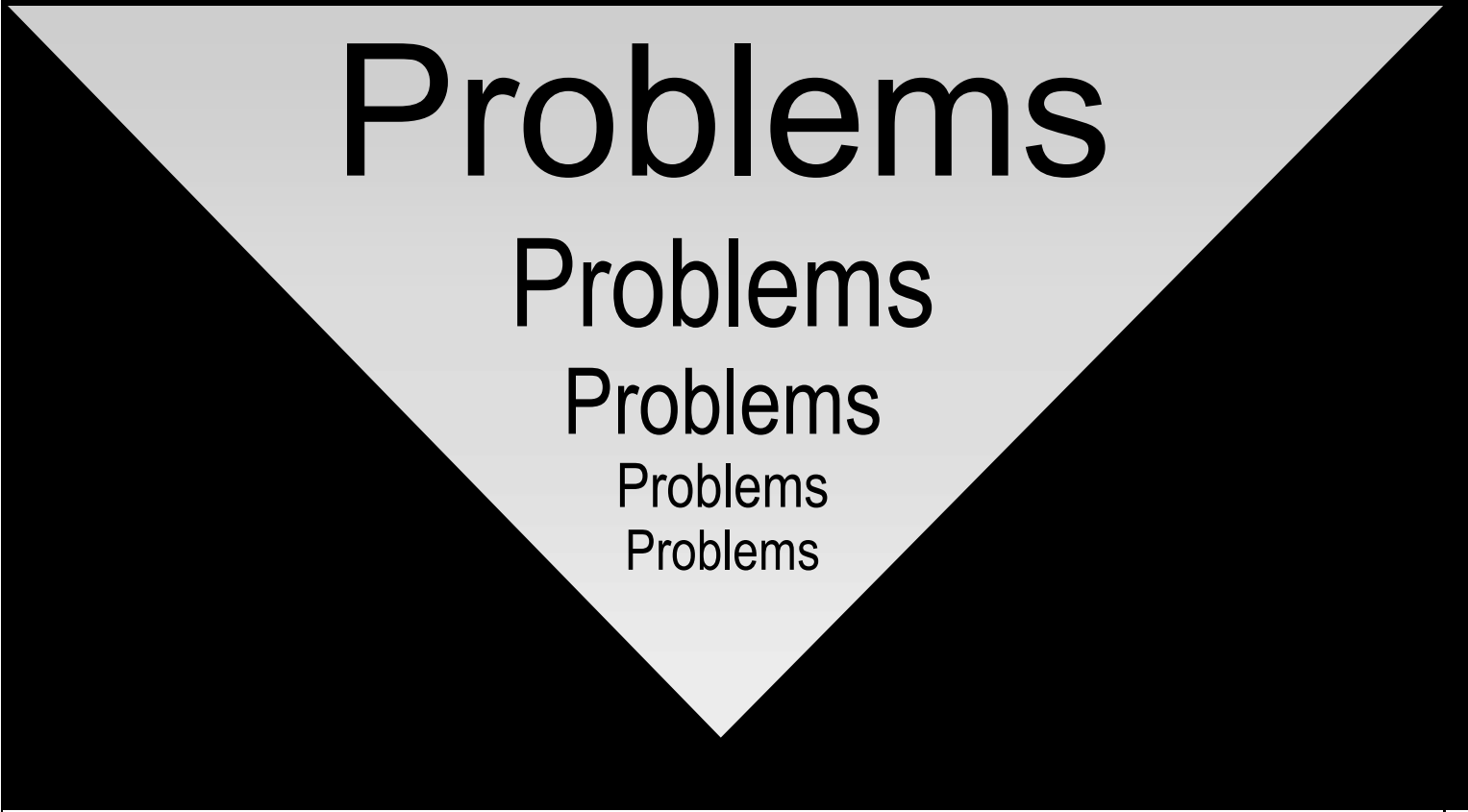
Step 6: Follow up. (Set a time to review how the solution is working.)

Congratulate yourselves for sticking with the process!



Approaching Conflict as a Team

Seeing Problems as a Wedge Between You & Me



Problems

Problems

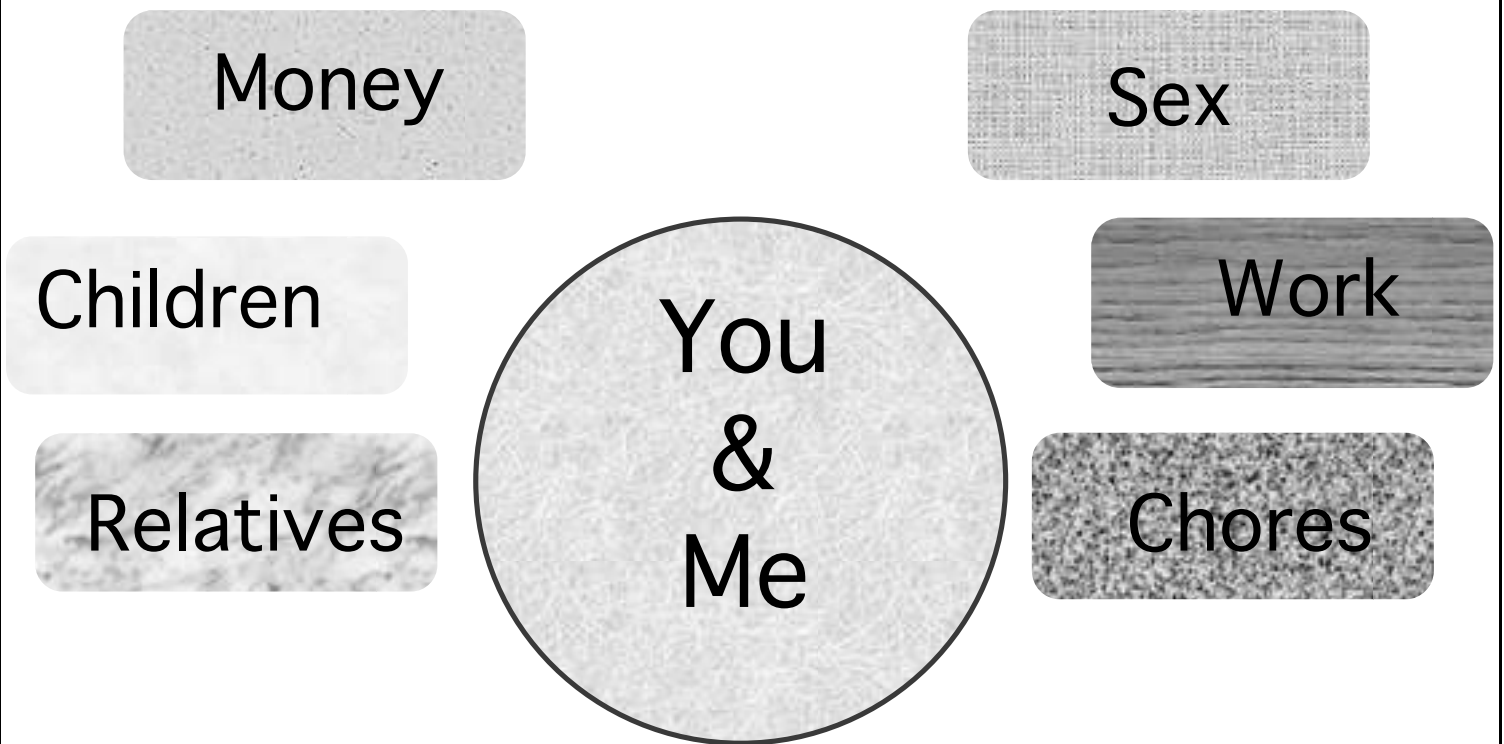
Problems

Problems

Problems

**WHEN YOU START TO SEE ME AS THE PROBLEM,
IT'S HARDER TO HELP WITH THE SOLUTION.**

**WHEN I START TO SEE YOU AS THE PROBLEM,
OUR TEAMWORK IS WEAKENED.**



We unite against these problems.

Examples:

- The problem is not having enough money, which creates stress on us both.
- The problem is finding time to have sex.
- The problem is that work interferes with family time.
- The problem is that my mother is ill and needs my help, making me less available to you.

Together we will find a solution.

♥ Couples Exercise: Teaming Up Against a Problem

Step One:

Each of you will identify a current problem you have with your partner. Write your problem here:

Step Two:

Try to identify the issue at the root of the problem without focusing on your partner (for example: not enough time, money, differences in child-rearing, work demands, etc.)

Step Three:

Now that you have identified the issue, complete this sentence:

"Honey, you're not the problem, and I'm not the problem.

_____ is the problem."

Step Four:

You will share this with your partner. Choose who will go first. Using positive body language say:

"Honey, you're not the problem, and I'm not the problem.

_____ is the problem."

Step Five:

Repeat the sentence one more time to your partner.

Step Six:

Now the second partner becomes the Speaker and you the Listener.

Repeat the exercise.

Couples Business Meetings

Couples and families make hundreds of major and minor decisions monthly, but often with no planned meeting to discuss how to deal with household tasks, schedules, responsibilities, upcoming events, family relationships, and problems.

A weekly 20 – 30 minute couples' business meeting has been shown to decrease conflicts and stress and help family members work together with a sense of teamwork.

The following is a list of suggestions for a couples' business meeting:

- 1) Select a weekly date and time for a meeting. Keep the meeting 20 – 30 minutes, unless you both decide it needs to be longer. Have a backup plan for a meeting if the meeting does not occur. Refreshments are nice!
- 2) Collect an agenda and have one of you record notes of the meeting. See the following page for an example of an agenda.
- 3) Suggested agenda items:
 - weekly schedule
 - fun activities
 - chores & future household projects
 - vacations, holidays, etc.
 - relationship issues: problem-solving
 - progress reports
 - kudos for a job well done!

The agenda may vary from week to week. Some couples focus on one or two issues for several weeks (sometimes months) and then move on to other items.

Each couple adjusts the meeting to their own particular needs. If a couple is facing a complex problem, it is best to break the problem down into small achievable parts. When a couple gets stuck in this process, they can use the meeting to agree to use a third party, such as a friend or counselor.

Couples Business Meeting: Sample Agenda

Sharing & Coordinating Schedules

- One partner is working late on Tuesday, 6/16, so the other partner needs to pick up the kids from school.
- Grandma's birthday party is Saturday, 6/20 at 2 p.m. at Aunt Martha's house.
 - one partner will pick up the gift after work on Wed, while the other partner will fix dinner and watch the children
 - one partner will make the potato salad that was requested for the party and one partner will get the children ready on Saturday.
- One partner to pick up the dry cleaning Friday at lunch.
- One partner to do the grocery shopping this week on Sunday afternoon.

Planning Pleasant Activities

- Take the children to see the new action-packed movie on Saturday afternoon.
- Eat out afterwards.

Chores & Future Household Projects

- One partner's weekly chores: master bedroom
 - will do on Thursday after work and other partner makes dinner and watches kids
- The other partner's weekly chores: kitchen
 - will do chores Saturday afternoon
- Kid's chores: make bed, dirty clothes in hamper, dust dresser, put toys away
- Future: cars need washing, gardening, living room needs painting

Relationship Issues/Problem-Solving

- Fun Night for the couple:
 - get babysitter
 - go to dinner
- Kids' fighting: brainstorm appropriate consequences when children begin to hit or throw toys

Family Business Meeting

Family business meetings occur after a couples' business meeting has taken place. The couple agrees during the couples' business meeting on what needs to be addressed and where they stand together on various issues. The couple needs to work out their differences as much as possible and present a united front in the family meeting. If the child(ren) are pressing for a decision that makes either partner uncomfortable, the couple may want to postpone the decision.

A family business meeting can help to organize and unify the family. Below are some additional guidelines to follow in setting up a family business meeting.

- Keep the meeting short, 10-20 minutes, and take notes. Establish a set time and date for the meeting.
- Use the Problem-Solving Method worksheet when it would help.
- Parents are in charge of both the agenda and the meeting. Children can ask for additions to the agenda and are encouraged to participate, sharing their concerns and views.
- Suggested agenda topics are:
 - chores/future projects
 - relationship issues
 - house rules
 - homework
 - discussion of family transitions (births, illnesses, parent job changes, moves, weddings, deaths, etc.)
 - schedules

Problem-Solving: Some Other Techniques

All couples try to solve their problems so both partners can be happy in the relationship. When there is a conflict, ask yourselves, “How can we solve this problem so we can both get what we want?” This is called “win-win.”

However, many times it is not possible for both partners to get exactly what they want. Using the effective communication skills we discussed earlier will allow you to find a solution that can still work for both of you. The most important thing to remember is that you want to create a safe environment so each person can express what he/she wants. The next step is looking for a solution that works for both people.

Below are some common problem-solving techniques that you can use to settle disputes and find workable solutions.

Brainstorming

This is a very popular technique and the one used in the earlier examples. It is utilized when people want to break out of old, stale ideas and see a situation in a different light. It is very helpful when people feel stuck and unable to think of new solutions.

Brainstorming can generate a relaxed and even fun atmosphere as partners get very creative in their thinking.

Instructions:

- Decide what the issue is.
- Each partner is encouraged to write down on a piece of paper all the solutions she/he can think of to this issue.
- Don’t judge any of the ideas that come up. Just write them down.

- Partners are allowed to come up with outlandish solutions that won't work, but that's okay. This is where the fun comes in.
- When both partners have written down as many solutions as they can think of, go through each one.
- Start with the solutions that really aren't practical but funny.
- Go through each one and talk about pros and cons of each idea, eliminating ones that won't work.
- What is left is probably the most credible solution to this issue.
- When you've decided on the solution, be sure you give it plenty of time — maybe 3 months — to allow both partners to get used to it.
- Be open to talking about it to see if it really worked for you or needed some changes.

Behavior Change Requests

"Criticism is the most common reaction to frustration in a relationship, and it is the most destructive, a perverse and counterproductive attempt to get one's needs met or to correct an uncomfortable situation." (Keeping the Love You Find, Harville Hendrix, p. 288)

The "I" Statement, which we have been practicing all along, helps us reframe our criticism from a negative command to a positive request. The third component of the "I" Statement (I want/wish/would like) is where we make our very specific, clear, and positive behavior change.

We usually make statements that are not very clear or positive to our partners.

For example,
"You seldom make time for me."

What response do you think you'll get back? Your partner will probably become defensive because she/he feels you are given lots of her/his time. He/she will now argue with you about all the times you've spent together, and how can you say this anyway? And on it goes. Your partner has no clue what behavior change you want.

A specific, clear and positive behavior change request would be:

"You are always late. You have no concern for my feelings."

"Why do you insist on driving so fast? One of these days you're going to get us killed!"

Establishing Agreements

Using negotiation with positive reinforcement is another method couples can use to solve problems and get their needs met. We usually want to punish the other person by saying or doing hurtful things, but in the end the only person we have really harmed is ourselves.

Negotiating with positive reinforcement is a technique to motivate the other to go along with what we are requesting by explaining that there is something in something in it for them.

“If you make dinner tonight, I’ll give you a backrub.”

“If you take the kids to school, I can run the errands and pick up the things you wanted from the store.”

Both parties get something they really want or will enjoy. Make it fun!

Compromise

All couples make compromises. Compromising is a very effective solution. The problem is that most times one partner feels they are the one that gives up more than the other partner. It is important to be as fair as possible. Remember, you both want to be happy in this relationship so make sure both partners, most of the time, get what they need. It is important to make the partner’s needs as important as yours.

Here are some ways in which couples can compromise to make it fair for both:

“We’ll do it your way this time, and my way the next time.”

Example: We’ll do what you want this Friday night and next Friday night

“I’ll do it my way when it’s my turn, and you do it your way when it’s your turn.”

Example: I’ll cook dinner my way when it’s my turn, and you cook dinner your way when it’s your turn.

“I’ll get part of what I want and you’ll get part of what you want.”

Example: I’ll help the kids with their homework so you can rest and then you’ll put them to bed so I can rest.

“Can we try it my way for one week and see if it works? If not, we’ll go back to how it was.”

Example: I’ll drive you to the train station and then I’ll drive to work. Then I’ll pick you up at the end of the day. According to the train schedule you’ll have to wait about 30 minutes before I get off work and get there. Can we just try it so we can save on gas and be greener?

Important Tips:

- ❖ Be creative in your solutions.
- ❖ Try to be as fair as possible.
- ❖ Agree not to yell or judge each other's ideas.
- ❖ Use the Time Out Contract if necessary.

Unsolvable Problems: Agreeing to Disagree

Recent studies on couples have shown that many happy, stable couples have long standing, unresolved issues and problem areas. The key seems to be in how they handle this lack of resolution, or how they agree to disagree.

Remember:

- Couples who successfully deal with these unresolved issues agree that they disagree. They are conscious of a difference in opinion or worldview and can accept this.
- How the disagreement is handled is more important than the disagreement.
- Couples who tolerate these disagreements well seem to have developed the ability to understand and respect each other's deepest motives for their position, even though the partner is unable to agree with that position. This can happen through carefully listening to each other, discussing each one's "dreams" or deepest feelings about the subject, without having to resolve the issue.

Reflect on Your Experience

If the problem solving process did not work out satisfactorily this time, discuss these questions:

- (1) At what point did the process break down or get bogged down?
- (2) What reasons might you have for sticking with old familiar conflict patterns?
- (3) What reasons might you have for changing your process?
- (4) What would you be willing to do differently next time?

Couples Research Form

Another way to talk about difficult issues and keep it neutral and calm is to use this questionnaire. It is useful in discussing issues that a couple cannot discuss without becoming angry.

Each partner interviews the other. On the first page, the partner that is interviewing jots down key points. (It is not necessary to write the partner's comments word for word.)

The second page has a list of questions for the interviewer to ask in order to better understand the partner's viewpoint on the issues. For example, under Needs, the interviewing partner would say, "What would make you feel better?" "What would you want to change?" etc. and writes down the main points.

When the first partner is finished, the roles are reversed so that the second partner is the interviewer and jots down the main points. This activity deepens the understanding of each partner's needs, feelings, fears, etc. This usually builds empathy by allowing partners to see each other as people with real fears, needs, and feelings, rather than as enemies or adversaries.

By the time a couple interviews each other and completes the form, they usually have a greater understanding of the needs and desires of their partner. This greater understanding of each other is usually helpful when it comes to problem solving or learning to live with differences of opinions and beliefs.



Couples Research Form

Issue/Conflict:

Needs (what my partner needs or wants):

Fears (what my partner is afraid might happen):

Other Emotional Pain (other feelings that affect my partner):

History (my partner's experiences from the past, in other relationships or childhood that relate to this issue):

Assumptions (my partner's beliefs about the issue, about what will happen in the future, about my motives, feelings, and intentions regarding the issue):

Perceived Choices (what options my partner believes he/she has regarding this issues)

Frame of Mind (what my partner is thinking during the conflict):

Physiological State (what my partner feels physically during the conflict):

Questions to Ask: Here are some sample questions to ask for each of the eight sections of the Couple's Research Form.

NEEDS

- What would make you feel better?
- What specifically would you want to change?
- If things could be exactly the way you want them, how would that be?
- What do you need to make this work for you?
- What's the most important thing you need changed?

FEARS

- What are you afraid will happen if this situation continues?
- When we're in the middle of the conflict, what are you most afraid will happen?
- What scares you about this issue?
- What's your biggest nightmare of what's going to happen (to you, me, us) when this issue comes up?
- Has anything happened before that you're afraid will happen again regarding this issue?

OTHER EMOTIONAL PAIN

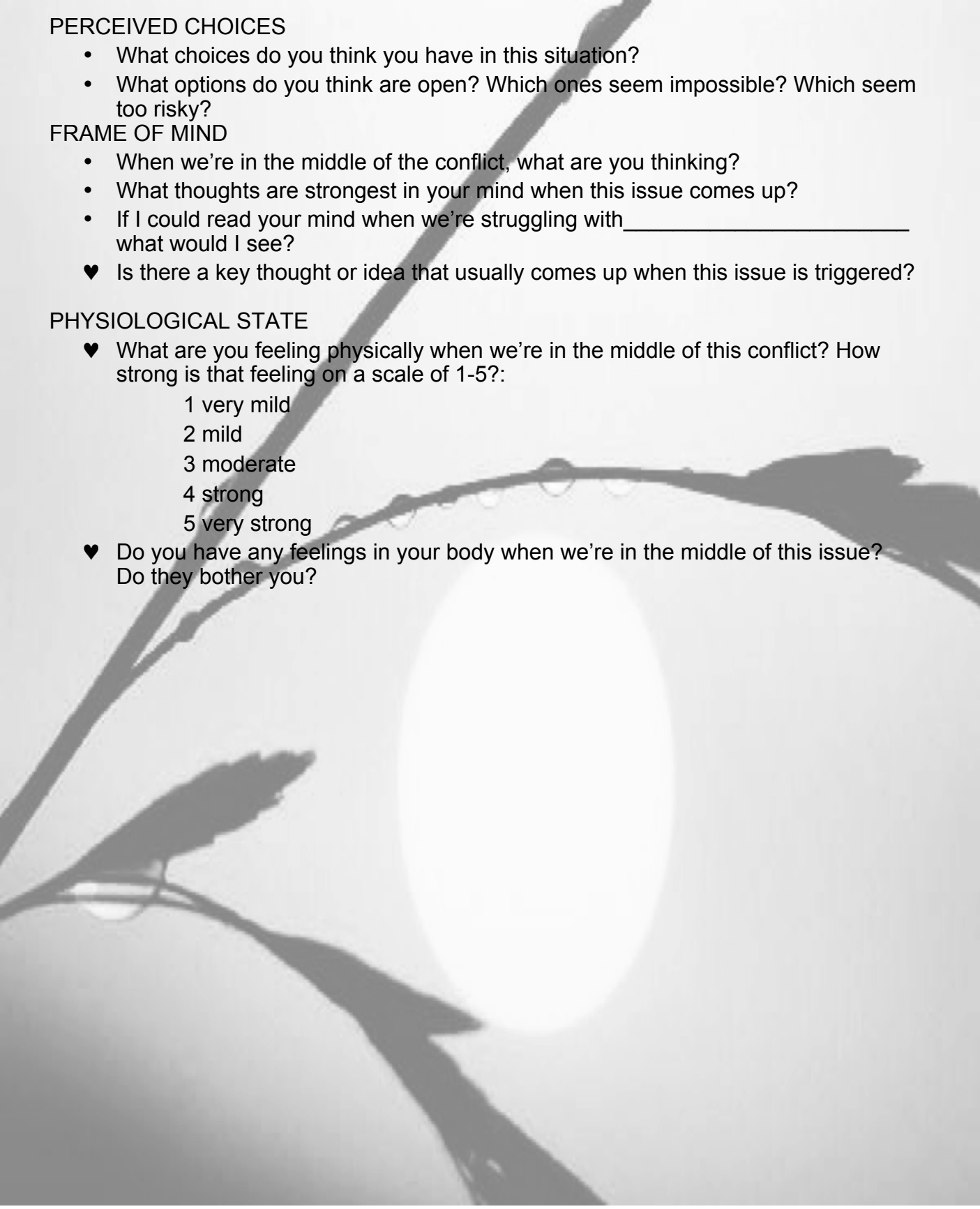
- Do you have other feelings that come up in connection to this issue?
- Do you feel hurt, sad, guilty, overwhelmed, ashamed, humiliated, betrayed?
- What's the most difficult feeling that comes up around this issue?
- What's the feeling that's hardest to talk about that gets triggered by this issue?

HISTORY

- Has anything ever happened to you in the past—either between us or even when you were growing up—that affects you regarding this issue?
- Are there things you've been through in the past that might influence how you feel or react?
- Have you been through anything before that feels like this - with me, in another relationship, or with your family?

ASSUMPTIONS

- What do you believe to be true about this issue?
- How do you see this; what's your point of view?
- What do you think is going to happen in the future regarding this issue?
- Do you think we're headed for trouble? What kind?
- How do you see me in this issue?
- Do you have ideas about my motives, feelings, intentions, or attitude toward you?



PERCEIVED CHOICES

- What choices do you think you have in this situation?
- What options do you think are open? Which ones seem impossible? Which seem too risky?

FRAME OF MIND

- When we're in the middle of the conflict, what are you thinking?
- What thoughts are strongest in your mind when this issue comes up?
- If I could read your mind when we're struggling with _____ what would I see?
- ♥ Is there a key thought or idea that usually comes up when this issue is triggered?

PHYSIOLOGICAL STATE

- ♥ What are you feeling physically when we're in the middle of this conflict? How strong is that feeling on a scale of 1-5?:
 - 1 very mild
 - 2 mild
 - 3 moderate
 - 4 strong
 - 5 very strong
- ♥ Do you have any feelings in your body when we're in the middle of this issue? Do they bother you?

Home Practice: Session Five

Focusing on Our Partner's Positive Traits

- ♥ Do Sticky Notes on a random basis.
- ♥ Compliment partner.
- ♥ Thank partner when they have complied with your request.
- ♥ Comment on partner's strengths.

Reuniting at the End of the Day: Keeping Current on Our Partner's Life

- ♥ Continue to debrief every night to keep current with what is happening in each other's life.

Fun Night: Taking Time & Tending to Our Relationship

- ♥ Have a 3-hour date to give partners time to experience each other as a source of fun.

Expressing Ourselves & Listening

- ♥ Practice "I" Statements & Active Listening Skills.
- ♥ Watch for Listening Blocks.

Anger Management

- ♥ Use "Time Out" if needed.
- ♥ Use any of the anger management techniques listed in the last session.

Stress Management

- ♥ Remember: "Breathe!"
- ♥ Use Relaxation Response by doing any of the stress management techniques listed.

Caring Behaviors: Partners Are a Source of Care and Nurturance

- ♥ Do a Caring Behavior from your partner's list this week.

Managing Differences & Conflicts

- ♥ Follow the problem-solving solution you decided upon in class.
- ♥ Read workbook pages on:
 - Problem-Solving: Some Techniques
 - Accepting Differences
 - Unsolvable Problems: Agreeing to Disagree
 - Reflect on Your Experience
 - Couples Research Form

Participant's Manual: Couples #6

*You can count on me like one, two, three, I'll be there
And I know when I need it
I can count on you like four, three, two, and you'll be there
'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do
oh yeah
You'll always have my shoulder when you cry
I'll never let go, never say goodbye*

*You know you can count on me like one, two, three, I'll be there
And I know when I need it
I can count on you like four, three, two, and you'll be there
'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do
oh yeah.*

--Count on Me sung by Bruno Mars

Session Six: Keeping the Good Times Going



Our Relationship Vision

Just as companies have vision statements, relationships can benefit from having one, too. A vision statement is a statement of ideals an organization tries to meet. These are usually posted to help remind employees to practice these ideals on a daily basis.

Each partner should fill out the first page, *Our Relationship Vision*, alone. Next, compare and explain your list with your partner. You may want to combine your lists to come up with *Our Combined Relationship Vision*.

Creating Our Relationship Vision

- ♥ Take some time to think about what you want your relationship to be.
- ♥ Make a series of statements that tell about your vision.
- ♥ Write them in the present tense, as if they are already happening.

Benefit: Getting the positive goals for your relationship in clear focus.

Examples:

- ♥ We are loving, supportive parents.
- ♥ We make a contribution to our community.
- ♥ We are fair with each other.
- ♥ We find closeness and fulfillment in our love-making.
- ♥ We practice give-and-take.
- ♥ We take time to be with each other and to build our relationship.

Your Statements:



Our Combined Relationship Vision

- ♥ Compare your “Relationship Vision” statements with your partner’s.
- ♥ Write this combined list, using all the statements you both like from both lists.
- ♥ Keep this Combined List where you can review it regularly.
- ♥ From time to time, you may want to add other statements to it.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

Our Relationship Vision



Our Shared Contribution

Together, we make a better contribution to:

- ♥ Our immediate family
- ♥ Our extended family
- ♥ Our friend
- ♥ Our faith
- ♥ Our neighborhood
- ♥ Our places of employment
- ♥ Our professions
- ♥ Our larger community

Examples:

Together, we have much to give:

- ♥ Energy, Drive
- ♥ Ideas, Vision
- ♥ Experience
- ♥ Money
- ♥ Time
- ♥ Faith
- ♥ Other: _____
- ♥ Other: _____

At times when you are the one contributing to our community, I support you by:

Our Relationship Maintenance Plan

Of the things we have learned in class, I plan to practice these three most important skills to support our relationship.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I believe that, to maintain the progress we have started in this class, we will have to deal with the following obstacles over the next six months:

My suggestions for this are:

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.

If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to **ndvh.org**.