

*The
Keeping Your Love Alive
Binder*



Reigniting Your Love

**By M. Joy Williams &
Sifu Karl Romain**

Abstract

This Ebook consists of a combination of guides that cater to specific and varying topics surrounding marriage and your love-life. These topics are designed to help you *Reignite Your Love* and *Save Your Marriage*, ultimately guiding you right on track to *Keeping Your Love Alive*.

We have included tips and tricks, stories and truths, and questionnaires in this combined binder designed for you.

Our hope is that this binder will allow you to open your mind and reshape your thinking to these new and healthy approaches that will benefit both you and your partner as you progress in your relationship.

Happy Reading.

M. Joy Williams & Sifu Karl Romain.

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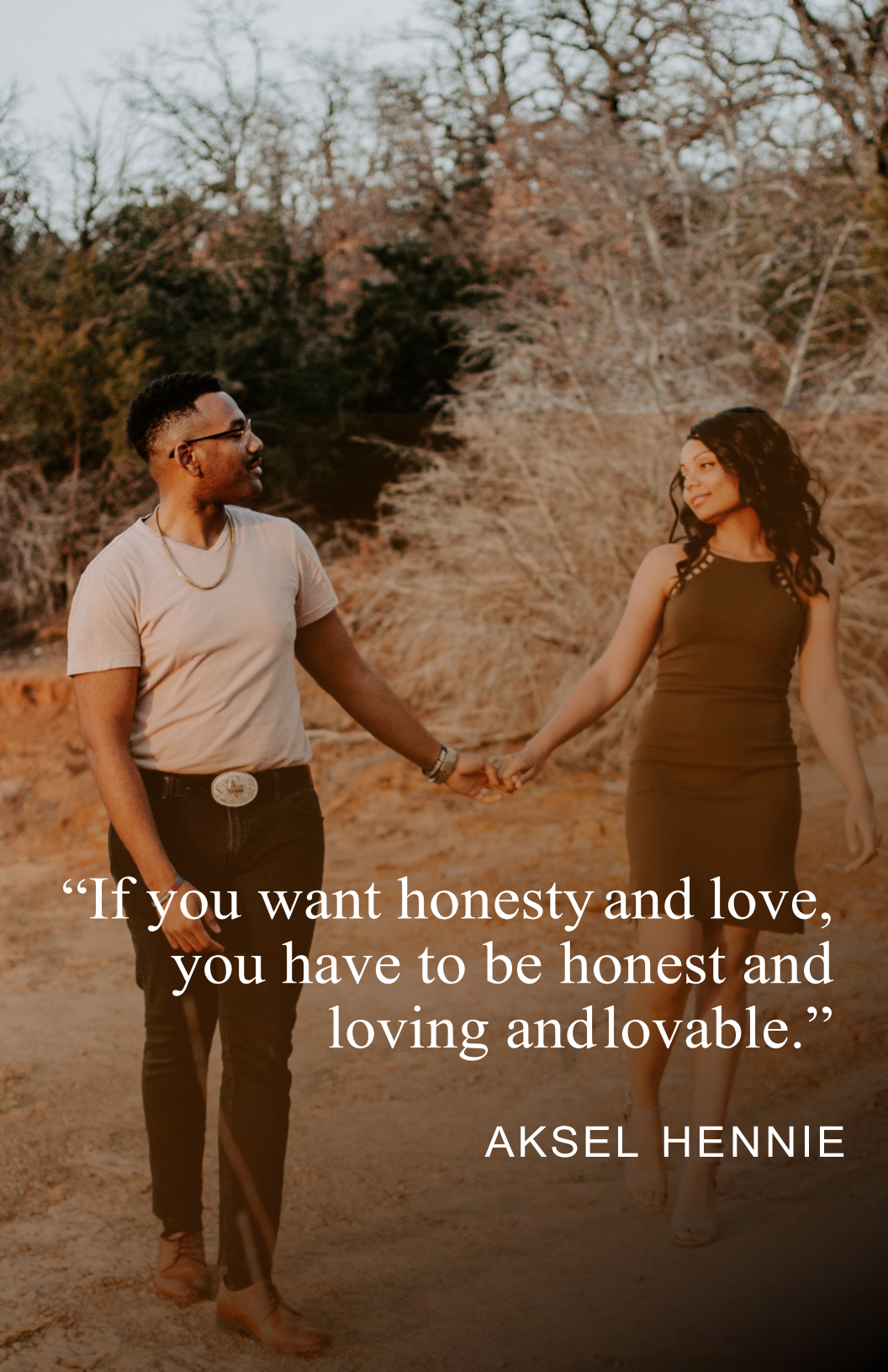
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A man and a woman are walking together in a field of tall, dry grass. The man, on the left, is wearing a light-colored t-shirt, dark jeans with a large silver belt buckle, and glasses. He is looking towards the woman. The woman, on the right, is wearing a dark, sleeveless dress and is looking back at the man. They are holding hands. The background consists of dry, brushy vegetation and trees under a soft, warm light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

“If you want honesty and love,
you have to be honest and
loving and lovable.”

AKSEL HENNIE

INTRODUCTION

Authenticity is a prerequisite to intimacy. There are many layers to authentic connections, communication being only part of it. Authenticity is a learned skill that needs to be nurtured and reinforced.

Unfortunately, most of us do not learn to relate authentically as children. Learning this as an adult usually requires more internal work than most would recognize. It requires some risks, but it is so worth it.

Authentic connections require several elements:

1. **Safety in relationships.** This is particularly true in complicated relationships with people who lack emotional intelligence – and especially hard to achieve.

2. **Self-acceptance.** Learning to accept ourselves (and others) as the perfectly imperfect humans that we are is also necessary. This quality leads to relationship and emotional safety, as we will discuss in more detail.
3. **Self-awareness.** Self-awareness enables us to understand more about who we are and what makes us tick. It is about learning to embrace our strengths and limitations, good and not-so-good qualities, sensitivities, and vulnerabilities.

As we come to terms with the fact that we are all these things, not either/or, **we realize how this ‘messiness that is me’ affects our relationships.** It allows us to find ways to work with the messiness instead of denying it.

warts and all. As we learn self-compassion and acceptance, we are better able to feel and express empathy for others in all their messiness.

Conscious risk-taking involves piecing all these elements together with the ability to recognize who can reciprocate.

Not everyone is capable of emotional intimacy. Many are unable to cope with open and honest connection. Conscious risk-taking allows you to determine when and with whom it is safe to be authentic.

Learn more about these elements and enjoy the journey!

SAFETY: THE FOUNDATION OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

John Gottman is one of the pioneers in relationship education. He does fascinating research with couples that involves quantifying their responses during conversations to assess their relationships.

He and his wife teach couples, therapists, and coaches the skills involved in healthy relationships. From their work, many couples have learned to connect in a more intimate way and grow their relationships.

Safety in Relationships

Gottman and others talk about three **types of relationship safety that must be in place for couples to have intimate, healthy relationships**. As we discuss the

need to be more authentic in our relationships, you will see that his theory applies to most of them.

These are the three types of relationship safety:

1. **Physical Safety.** We need to feel safe from physical harm before we'll speak openly. Physical safety includes no hitting, slapping, pushing, shoving, scratching, choking, pulling, or in any way touching someone with the intention of harming them or expressing your frustration, anger, or need to control and dominate.
 - Many times, people say, “He (or she) never hit me!” But you later learn that they were choked or pushed. None of this leads to feeling safe!

2. **Emotional Safety.** Emotional safety is knowing you may speak openly about how you feel, what you think, or what you did without fear of being humiliated, ridiculed, shut out, or otherwise emotionally punished. If any of these are possible outcomes, we're less likely to be open and honest emotionally.
3. **Relationship Safety.** Relationship safety allows you to feel secure enough in the relationship that you are willing to risk being honest - with no fear of being abandoned or pushed aside.
 - Those who have difficult relationships where one party threatens to leave when things are hard are less likely to be honest and open.

If you think of safety as the foundation upon which everything is built, you realize

that **if one of the three ‘legs of the stool’ is missing, the foundation upon which you build is unstable.**

STORY:

Randy and Nancy

Randy and Nancy have been a couple for over a decade. They’re comfortable in their life together. However, Randy wants to get married and then have a couple of children.

Nancy isn’t convinced that motherhood is for her. She enjoys the freedom of being without children and knows that most of the care will fall on her.

Randy works long hours and has a great job. Nancy wants to go to graduate school and build a private therapy practice. She doesn’t see room for a child in her near future.

In the past when this discussion has come up, Nancy hasn't budged on her position. At the age of 30, she sees her relationship as satisfactory. Adding a child will derail her career goals, and she has stated that if he wants children, Randy will need to find another partner.

Randy hates conflict. He avoids anything that may result in a disagreement, which is how they have stayed together for ten years. Nancy can be a hothead when she feels pressured and often reacts with anger when confronted.

Randy wants to bring up the issue of marriage and parenting but he dreads the argument that will likely follow. He knows that if he doesn't bring it up, the issue won't get resolved. At this point, he feels the need to settle it and decide if he will stay in the relationship without children.

Using the **Relationship Safety Assessment** he learned in couples' counseling, he sat down to consider the possibilities.

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY ASSESSMENT

1 - DANGER 2 - RISKY 3 - SAFE

Physical Safety:

Nancy has never been physically aggressive – that is not a concern.

SCORE: 3

Emotional Safety:

Nancy is not a touchy-feely type and she can have a bad temper at times. She considers this subject closed and is likely to become angry if he raises it again. Although she is not emotionally abusive, he simply does not like conflict and shuts down when anyone expresses anger.

SCORE: 1

Relationship Safety:

Nancy has said for years that if he wants children, he will need to find another partner. He has tried to let it go but feels something is missing from his life without children. He is considering the possibility of leaving if Nancy does not agree and realizes that she may end the relationship before he is sure about it.

SCORE: 1

Decision:

Randy is not ready to end the relationship, but he is willing to risk that Nancy may leave if he initiates this conversation again. He has planned to call his sister for support if things do not go well.



“Enlightenment is the key to everything, and it is the key to intimacy, because it is the goal of true authenticity.”

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

ACCEPTANCE OF SELF AND OTHERS

It behooves us (and everyone we know) to spend time in honest self-reflection. This helps us come to terms with the fact that **we are both good and bad, positive and negative, darkness and light - not one or the other - just like everyone else in the world.**

Carl Jung, world renowned psychiatrist, writer, and healer, talked about the shadow selves - those parts of us that we want to disown and deny - as being critical to our self-understanding and personal growth.

Paradoxically, it is only by embracing these qualities that they lose power over us.

By accepting ourselves as human, and therefore imperfect, we are better able to accept others.

As we stop judging ourselves, our thoughts, and our behaviors as good or bad, we begin to accept ourselves as the fallible human beings we are and accept others as the same.

This is necessary to create safety in our relationships.

SELF-AWARENESS AND VULNERABILITY

With raised awareness of our imperfection comes some degree of vulnerability. **Most of us do not do vulnerability well.** It feels emotionally risky, and it can be if we share it in an unsafe relationship or with those who are not equipped to cope with our openness and honesty.

Brene Brown, shame and vulnerability researcher out of University of Texas, Houston, talks about being present *with* people. She points out that *being with* (instead of *doing for or to*) someone who expresses their vulnerability also makes us feel vulnerable.

As such, **we must learn to accept and sit with our own vulnerability to connect with others when and how they need us.** Authenticity - being real - can be risky. That level of honesty leaves us open to

criticism, rejection, manipulation, and other scary things.

There are times when it's not appropriate (work, perhaps) and people who aren't able to share intimately (Nancy and Kaylee's father). **Sharing authentically should be reserved only for those who can cope with it and reciprocate.** That probably leaves out most of your contact list.

It can be so tempting to pour our hearts out to those we want and expect to love us. Taking the risk seems worth it if this will be the time he or she gets it, even though past attempts have been abject failures.

STORY:

Kaylee

Kaylee is a 12-year-old whose father is an alcoholic and has little experience giving or receiving love. His primary emotional expression is anger. He would be described generously as emotionally and verbally unkind.

Because he has been physically absent most of Kaylee's life, she has no real relationship with him but desperately wants him to love her.

Kaylee has only had contact with her father for the past three years. During that time, she has spent holidays with his 'family' and attempted to talk on the phone occasionally. His wife spends time with her on her visits, but Dad is usually not home.

Their two children are young, so they require most of the adult time. Kaylee usually watches TV alone when she is there. When her dad is home, he does not know what to say to her, so he avoids eye contact. He is usually drinking, which makes her uncomfortable. She tries not to do anything that will make him yell.

Kaylee's therapist taught her to use this informal safety assessment before talking with her dad. The safety assessment can help her make a conscious decision about the risks associated with anything she wants to talk about with him.

She's learning to assess how likely she is to get what she wants from the talk, and what could happen if she allows herself to be vulnerable with him.

Kaylee is considering whether she should bring up feeling sad about not having a dad when she was young, as seeing him with his other children brings this up for

her. She is scoring the level of risk that talking about this would hurt more than help her cope with these feelings.

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY ASSESSMENT

1 - DANGER 2 - RISKY 3 - SAFE

Physical Safety:

Kaylee's father has never physically abused Kaylee or her mom in any way. She has never felt afraid of him physically.

SCORE: 2.5

Emotional Safety:

Kaylee desperately wants her dad to love her and has opened up to him before, only to feel hurt by his inability to support or express love for her. She feels sad and rejected when this happens.

SCORE: 1

Relationship Safety:

Kaylee's relationship with her dad is tentative, at best. She still feels uncertain if he really loves her, or just feels sorry for her. She has learned before that he does not really talk about feelings.

SCORE: 1

Decision:

Based on this information, sharing her feelings with her dad right now could result in her feeling hurt or rejected, and it is unlikely to give her the support and reinforcement she wants. She is also afraid that if he feels that she's too needy or clingy, he will stop inviting her to visit.

Kaylee decided that it is in her best interest not to share her feelings with him at this time. As they get to know each other better, she may revisit the possibility.

“EMPATHY IS ABOUT **STANDING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES**, FEELING WITH HIS OR HER HEART, SEEING WITH HIS OR HER EYES.

NOT ONLY IS EMPATHY HARD TO OUTSOURCE AND AUTOMATE, BUT IT MAKES THE WORLD A **BETTER PLACE.**”

DANIEL H. PINK



EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

It is often said that empathy is compassion in action. In this sense, we are talking about empathy as a skill, rather than a way of being.

Empathy is a way for us to express our compassion and relate to others on an emotional level.

Brene Brown talks about empathy as being present for someone who needs to be heard, and allowing that person to express their emotions and thoughts without being told what to do, how to feel, or ways to stop their pain. Without being consoled or interrupted in anyway.

Your Stuff and My Stuff

Empathy requires the ability to sit with our own feelings as they come up. As you express your feelings of sadness, I may

feel a lump in my throat, butterflies in my stomach, or a kick in the gut.

Emotions are experienced in the body, not the head where thoughts live. When emotions are translated by the mind into thoughts, they are expressed verbally as feelings.

Some would say that when I have those visceral experiences as you emote, I am feeling what you feel. They think and speak of empathy as an intuitive skill, absorbing the feelings of others around us. That is a separate discussion.

Here, we're saying that **your emotional expression reminds me of my own experience of similar feelings.** You feel what you feel, and I feel what I feel based on my own emotional experience of past situations.

Boundaries

Boundaries are critical. It's not our business to take on the pain of others (if that is possible). **When we try to 'make people feel better' we often do so because our own vulnerability is too difficult to sit with.**

We interrupt their emotional flow to make ourselves feel better - not them.

By doing so, even if we do not realize or intend it, **we may inadvertently send the message that we want them to stop - that they're making us feel uncomfortable.** When that happens, they may not have the opportunity to 'go there' again - to complete the work of processing those emotions by expressing them openly.

Being aware of what is your stuff and what is their stuff is the beginning of healthy

boundaries and relationships. Being able to label it and work it out later takes practice.

Turn Down the Intensity of Your Emotional Reactions

There's a way to turn down the intensity of your emotions without totally disconnecting.

Try these techniques when you recognize that your emotions are becoming too intense:

1. **Breathe.** Focus on your normal breathing – in and out, in and out.
2. **Shift your body.** Straighten up in your chair, pull your shoulders back, or change your position.

3. **Look away briefly.** Look at a spot over their shoulder, or glance down or to the side, but not in a distracted way.
4. **Use your sense of touch.** Touch the fabric on your shirttail, silently touch your fingers, gently sway a bit, or twist your ring a few times - whatever works.
5. **Name your feelings.** Identify the feelings you experience and make a mental note to return to them at an appropriate time.
6. **Remind yourself that your focus at this time is on the other person.**
7. **Notice other sensations briefly.**
What do you hear in the background? What do you see around you?

Then, reconnect at a lower intensity.
Repeat as needed.

Mindfulness

To connect with another person, to sit with them as they express their vulnerability, we must stay in the present moment.

In the present we are aware of our senses - what we see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. We are aware of all these things that are happening around us simultaneously.

When we tune in to someone's story, we hear what they say, think about and process the information, and sense the emotions they express. Our attention is on them.

Feeling/Sensing

Empathy is about emotional connection. It is choosing to sit with the emotional memories that come up when you connect with this person, rather than drift away into your own thoughts.

Thinking

If we allow ourselves to think about our own feelings as they come up, we shift our focus from them to ourselves. At that point, we're no longer connecting with the other person. We are lost in our own thoughts.

In essence, your mind has 'left the building' and drifted away. The emotional connection is broken. You are lost in your own stuff.

Returning to the Present

Thinking is normal. You will find your mind drifting multiple times throughout the day. This is not bad. Your mind is just doing what the mind does.

Simply refocus your attention on your senses. What do you hear? See? Feel? Taste? Smell?

Take a couple of breaths. Shift your body a bit to align your mind and emotions again.

Reconnect.

Verbal Expression of Empathy

When it's the right time, without interrupting the emotional flow, say what's in your heart. **Verbally expressing empathy is about authentic**

communication. The words are not as important as the intent.

A 22-year-old I know says, “That’s so messed up!” to express empathy. She gets it. She hates it. She hates that I must go through it.

Later, when your friend has moved forward, you may have the chance to talk about what you experienced while she or he was talking.

That type of reciprocity is authentic connection.

CONSCIOUS EMOTIONAL RISKS

Intimacy is complicated. It does not work in a one-sided relationship. **Reciprocity - the emotional give and take - is required.** Not everyone can or will connect authentically.

Learning when it is safe to be open and honest with those you care about requires forethought and trust, as well as emotional support for when it does not go well.

Taking emotional risks to share intimately leaves you open and feeling vulnerable. That can result in a very fulfilling and healing experience in the right relationship. It can result in feeling hurt, rejected, and abandoned in the wrong one.

Sometimes, taking the risk seems worth it. It may give you the resolution you seek, one way or the other. This is especially

true when physical and emotional safety are present, but relationship safety is in question.

Follow your gut in those cases. It may allow you to move on to healthier relationships.

If you have a pattern of unhealthy relationships - particularly those with emotionally and/or physically unsafe people (romantic or otherwise) - find someone to talk to about this. It may enhance all your relationships and help you to choose people who are able to connect authentically when you are ready.

Authentic connections are fabulous! They enhance your life and help you to feel fulfilled. Practice connecting on an authentic level whenever you can, and soon, this skill will come to you naturally. It will serve you well to build and strengthen your relationships with those around you.

AUTHENTIC **CONNECTIONS**

RECOGNIZING JUDGMENTS WORKSHEET

Everyone has biases and prejudices that affect how we view the world and others. In some cases, these are judgments about ourselves that are projected onto others. Many are passed on from our elders. Sometimes we go to the other extreme and do the opposite of the elders.

Take an honest look at your judgments and where they come from. Learning self-acceptance and self-compassion is the key to non-judgment.

In what ways do you judge yourself?

Example:

- *How I look, how much money I make, if people like me...*

Think about your elders - what judgments do you remember from them?

Example:

- *Mother judged other women and herself by beauty. Father judged others and self by wealth and status. Both judged people by race and class.*

Who do you judge harshly? Why?

Example:

- *People who are unkind to those of lower status, different races, classes, or cultures.*
- *Those who are concerned with their status or beauty. Those that are judgmental of parents for being judgmental.*
- *I judge those who do not help others in need, especially if they have the means.*

What judgments are you passing on from previous generations?

Example:

- *See myself as superior, and others as needing me, inferior.*

How are judgments about yourself projected onto others?

Example:

- *When I feel self-conscious about something and afraid of being judged, I judge others.*

AUTHENTIC **CONNECTIONS**

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY ASSESSMENT

It can be helpful to think about how to approach difficult conversations with those you are unsure about. This brief assessment will help you consider the risks involved before you decide how to proceed.

Write your thoughts about each question and score it. Then make some notes about your thoughts as you make a decision.

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY ASSESSMENT

1 - DANGER 2 - RISKY 3 - SAFE

PHYSICAL SAFETY:

Is there any threat of physical harm?

EMOTIONAL SAFETY:

Based on your history together, what possible emotional reactions are you concerned about if you open up to this person, at this time, about this subject?

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY:

What concerns do you have about the security of your relationship?

DECISION:

Based on these responses, what are the costs and benefits of having this conversation? What is the best way to proceed?

AUTHENTIC **CONNECTIONS**

SELF-AWARENESS WRITING EXERCISE

Self-awareness happens in layers. As we come into our own, we have an opportunity to reflect on who we are, what we like and do not like about ourselves and our relationships. We also find ways to improve or simply accept ourselves.

Take a few minutes to complete the following writing exercise. If you do not like to write, make an outline of bullet points.

**How are you different now than you were five years ago?
In what ways have you **grown** or **changed**? How did that happen?**

Example:

- *Less social - come to realize that I am an introvert and being alone is not a negative thing.*

**What do you like most about yourself? Character?
Personality? Other traits (not physical)?**

Example:

- *You care deeply for others.*

**What do you like the least about yourself? What are
you embarrassed by? Ashamed of? Hiding?**

Example:

- *Mental health issues? Shame? Regrets? Traumas?*

What do others say about you that you like to hear? Do you think it is accurate?

Example:

- *Fun, exciting, brave, cool, pioneering...somewhat accurate when not depressed and/or anxious.*

What do people say about you that you do not like to hear? Do you think it is accurate?

Example:

- *Lazy, self-centered, unrealistic, sometimes hard to get along with, but not in all case.*

What do you want to change about yourself?

Example:

- *I would love to be more free-spirited and interact more socially.*

What do you want to learn to accept?

Example:

- *My quirks and mental health issues are just a part of my messiness and what others think is not my concern, I AM lazy, self-centered, unrealistic and hard to get along with AND fun, exciting, brave, cool, pioneering...all of the above.*

AUTHENTIC **CONNECTIONS**

CONSCIOUS EMOTIONAL RISK ACTIVITY

Making conscious choices about who you share your vulnerability with is self-protection. As you learn to be more authentic, you want to be selective about who deserves and can cope with your honesty and openness. Complete the activity below to learn from others you know that have authentic connections.

List some people you know who have emotionally intimate connections and give an example for each person.

Example:

- *My husband speaking from the heart with our niece about his concern for her alcohol abuse.*

For each example, summarize what was said and done.

Example:

- *He invited us to dinner and said to her that he realized kids her age experiment with alcohol, but having experienced addiction firsthand in his family, he was concerned about the recent incident when she blacked out with no memory of how she hurt herself badly enough to go to the ER.*

What do you remember about the setting and emotional expressions?

Example:

- *He waited until the right time to bring it up. He spoke very earnestly and shared his own vulnerability about growing up with alcoholic parents. He spoke to her in a way that did not incite rebellion, but a response of, "Thank you for caring enough about me to talk to me about your concerns." It was truly an authentic connection. She was not defensive; she felt seen, supported, and loved.*

What can you learn about conscious risk-taking from your examples?

Example:

- *He was careful not to overshare about his family, which would have made it about him, not her. He spoke from a position of concern, not judgment. He thought about the timing and setting beforehand. They have an open and honest relationship, so going deep was safe for both of them. He is the only man in her life she can be authentic with or has ever had an intimate connection with.*

AUTHENTIC **CONNECTIONS**

VULNERABILITY EXERCISE

Vulnerability is hard. Sharing parts of ourselves that leave us feeling exposed and susceptible to hurt is not to be taken lightly. Identifying areas of vulnerability to consider how we want to respond if things come up can relieve some of the pressure.

Write about this for one area of vulnerability in your life. Repeat the process for other issues when you're ready.

What is one issue you want to work with that makes you feel vulnerable?

Example:

- *Being adopted.*

What are some ways this comes up for you?

Example:

- *When friends have babies or get pregnant, being around families with loving parents, when people talk about wanting children, seeing mothers and babies/children display affection.*

What happens? How does it affect you?

Example:

- *I usually just try to fade into the background - do not make eye contact, stay quiet and try not to cry.*

How would you like to respond when this comes up?

Example:

- *I want to be happy for them instead of sad for me.*

What can you say to yourself that would honor your feelings/experience and soothe you?

Example:

- *This reminds me that my mother was not able to raise me, which makes me sad. But I can manage these feelings without missing out on this experience. Being happy for them does not discount my grief. This is a time to be present for my friend.*

What would you like to say to others at these times to both acknowledge your feelings/experience (without oversharing) and allow you to join with them?

Example:

- *It can be difficult for me in these situations because I was adopted. I am glad for you and the baby, that you can be a family. Thanks for including me in your celebration.*

How do you want to address questions about this if someone asks? Do not over-explain. Be brief and direct.

Example:

- *This is a sensitive topic for me. I do not feel comfortable talking about it now. (or) I would prefer not talking about that. Can we talk about something else?*

How can you take care of yourself after the fact?

Example:

- *If needed, call my support person to talk about how I handled it and what that was like. Ask for support if I need it. (or) Write about it in my journal.*

BREAK FREE FROM YOUR NEED TO BE CODEPENDENT

Do you rely on your partner's approval for a sense of self-worth and identity?

Here are some more signs:

- You have no longer take personal time or do things on your own.
- You no longer have an active social life without your partner.
- You constantly feel anxious (about your relationship and your partner).

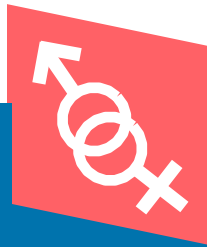
Try these tips to reduce your need to be codependent:

- Create an exciting and fulfilling life on your own.
- Have a group of people in your life.
- Show yourself that you have value outside of your relationship.
- Create boundaries for any romantic relationship.
- Go slowly.
- Maintain your identity. Those that are codependent lose themselves in their partner.
- Work on your feelings of self-worth.
- When you feel good about yourself, it is easier to maintain a separate identity.
- Get professional help.
- You are a whole and complete person outside of any relationship.

Healthy Relationship

Habits

ACTION PLAN



It can be helpful to reminisce and reflect on your relationship to strengthen and reinforce your connection.

Storytelling is a great way to do this, but you may also want to write your responses in a journal and then discuss things from both perspectives.

Sit down together as a couple and answer one or two of the following questions each evening for a week:

Questions for Couple Sharing:

- ▶ How do you show your love for each other in little ways and big ways?
- ▶ How do you divide tasks and household chores?
- ▶ Do you have an endearing term or “pet name” for each other?
- ▶ Is there a personality difference in your partner or spouse that you have learned to respect and affirm?
- ▶ What is one compromise you have made with one another?
- ▶ How often do you say or demonstrate, “I love you!”? What are some examples?
- ▶ What do you like to do together?
- ▶ What was one of your favorite dating or anniversary celebrations?
- ▶ What was one of your favorite birthday, graduation, or promotion celebrations?
- ▶ What has influenced your sensitivity to each other’s needs?

Daily Practice

- Make a list of five special things your partner has done for you.
- Share your lists with each other and do at least one of the things on the other's list before the next mentoring conversation.

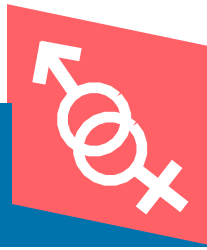
An option would be to share three things you would like for him or her to do for you that are ways of demonstrating love to you.

Help one another by giving him or her a positive target at which to aim. "I really like it when you..."

”

Relationship Tips from the Experts

FACT SHEET



Howard Markman, PhD, Scott Stanley, PhD, and Susan Blumberg, PhD, the authors of Fighting for Your

Marriage, and Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), suggest the following:

Four Hallmarks of a Great Relationship:

- ▶ Be safe at home - physical, emotional and commitment safety
- ▶ Open the doors to intimacy – couple meetings, date night, positive connections, listening
- ▶ Do your part and be responsible – use effective skills to solve problems and take ownership of your feelings and actions
- ▶ Nurture security in your future together – work through relationship challenges together, renew your commitment and be willing to do whatever is necessary to have a relationship that is good for both of you

John and Julie Gottman were surprised to find that couples whose relationships continued to be strong over time were devoting only an extra five hours a week to their marriages. Those extra hours consist of small actions done regularly.

The Five Magic Hours:

- ▶ Spending a few minutes in the morning talking about your upcoming day
- ▶ Debriefing at the end of each day with a stress-reducing conversation where partners actively listen to each other review their day
- ▶ Finding some way to express admiration and appreciation to your partner every day
- ▶ Showing affection toward your partner daily (John Gottman and his wife, Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman, have a 6-second rule for kisses in their relationship – all kisses last at least six seconds.)
- ▶ Spending time weekly really talking to each other. Ask questions about your partner's hopes and dreams, plans at work or home. . . know each other intimately.

Boundaries/Emotional Protection

FACT SHEET

"Boundaries make it possible for us to separate our own thoughts and feelings from those of others and to take responsibility for what we think, feel and do. Intact boundaries are flexible—they allow us to get close to others when it is appropriate and to maintain our distance when we might be harmed by getting too close. Good boundaries protect us from abuse and pave the way to achieving true intimacy. They help us take care of ourselves." (lifeesteem.org)

Boundaries are invisible layers of protection separating us from others; that layer is fluid and can be adapted as needed.

We want and need to exchange some emotional energy with people if we are to connect with them.

We can determine how much or little of our psychic (emotional) energy to share in specific situations and with different people. We also decide how much or how little emotional energy we will accept from other people.

When someone shares more information than you are comfortable knowing, s/he has crossed a boundary. By saying "Okay – TMI – that's all I want to know." you have set a boundary.

By refusing to answer questions in detail – only sharing what you feel comfortable with – you are setting a boundary.

Often, we do not establish good boundaries because we don't want to hurt someone's feelings, or aren't comfortable dealing with what we perceive to be a confrontation. When this happens, we are at risk for being taken advantage of or even abused.

This can happen by allowing people to say things to us that we don't like, or by not saying 'no' to requests that we really don't want to do.

When we do not set clear boundaries about what we will accept from others and what they can expect from us, we are sending the message about what behavior or requests are acceptable.

Sharing feelings 'openly' (unguarded) with a loved one may be appropriate. However, when interacting with people at work, the level of emotional sharing and closeness will likely be very different.

If at any time you begin to feel emotionally vulnerable or unsafe, you can 'close off' (guard) or 'shut down' (withhold) your thoughts and feelings.

In new dating relationships, boundaries are critical. You are setting the tone for how you will be treated later, and the behavior you are willing to accept.

Finding the right balance of what is enough and what is too much takes practice. You will naturally let down your guard/boundaries as you get to know and trust a new dating partner.

Biggest Fears

WORKSHEET

Complete the following:

- ▶
- ▶ What are your biggest fears about your future committed relationship/marriage? Be specific. For example, that s/he will find out_____and leave me. Why?
- ▶ What are your biggest fears about settling down with one person long-term? Be specific. For example, I am afraid that I will become too dependent on him/her. Why?
- ▶ What are your biggest fears about blending your finances with your future partner/spouse? Why?
- ▶ What are your biggest fears about parenting with your future partner/spouse? Why?

Increasing Loving Communication *With Your Partner*

Do you devote your full attention to your partner when they are talking with you? How can you strengthen your listening skills?

Do you laugh together each day? What can you do to bring more humor and fun into your life?

Do you share your hopes and dreams together? How will you make them happen? Do you have a detailed plan? How can you work towards these dreams each day?

Do you follow through with commitments to your partner? Do you procrastinate in doing it? Why? Will a compromise work better for you in a current commitment so that you can always follow through?

How do you currently handle disagreements? How can you turn your disagreements into loving communication instead?

Do you sweat the small stuff? How can you develop more patience and understanding for your differences?

Are you open and honest with your partner, even in tough situations? How can you make your communications more honest?

How do you communicate your love to your partner? Do you show your love numerous times each day? What else can you do to show your love and fulfill your partner's needs and desires?

Do you schedule quality time together? What does quality time mean to you? What does it mean to your partner? How can you meet both of your needs for this time together?

The Language of Love: Deepen Your Relationship With Loving Communication



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*The quest for love may be exciting, but the journey you
embark on once you've found true love
is much more spectacular...*

The Language of Love: Deepen Your Relationship With Loving Communication



Just imagine sharing such a deep and everlasting passion that – even after 30 years together – your heart still skips a beat whenever you see each other. Envision everyday life with someone that thrills you so much that they are the one you check out at parties as they walk across the room.

How can you deepen your relationship to such a passionate level?

One of the critical keys to developing and maintaining such a relationship is the language of love. What is this language and how can you master it? Simply speaking, it is in **loving communication**.

Love language consists of many aspects besides simply speaking. It also includes *how* you speak, effective listening, body language, and being attuned to your partner's needs and desires.

It comes not only from the heart, but also from a conscious desire to live a passionate and joyful life together.

Whether you have just found each other, or you would like to re-kindle the fire in your current relationship, the language of love can enable you to experience the happiness you've always desired.

This guide gives you tips and techniques that will start you on the road to a deeper, more loving relationship. **Practice them each and every day.** Once you've mastered these, your new mindset will never cease to bring you new ways to enjoy your love.

"We waste time looking for the perfect lover, instead of creating the perfect love."

~ Tom Robbins

~ LOW KODIU2

Trust

Trust is one of the most important characteristics of a loving relationship. When you and your partner can trust each other, it paves the way for effective communication. On the other hand, without trust, your partner might not believe anything you say, and your good efforts may be brushed aside. So do everything you can to establish and maintain trust in each other!

Consider the following:

1. **Tell the truth.** Communication is much simpler when you tell the *whole* truth. Even if your partner doesn't like what you said or disagrees with you, it's easier to deal with your differences when you're being honest.

★ ***Honesty builds your partner's trust and respect more than any other quality.***

You can be great in every other quality, but that will not make up for dishonesty in your relationship!

2. **Follow through and do what you say you'll do.** Loving communication means more than just saying what your partner wants to hear. When you say you'll do something, then be sure to do it. Your partner *needs* to be able to trust you to do what you say.

★ If you can't do something they want you to do, then work out a compromise that both of you are happy with. This way, you can tell the truth about what you're going to do and then you'll do it. No one has to nag, you build more trust, and everyone's happy!

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

~ Mark Twain

— WALK JOURNAL

Effective Listening

When it comes to communication, listening is just as important as speaking and this is especially true with your partner. ***When you make a concerted effort to let your spouse know that what they say is important to you, it makes them feel important and loved.***

Effective listening also prevents misunderstandings that can lead to arguments. It is easy to **assume** what your partner is saying without really listening, so you tune them out and miss what they are, indeed, saying.

Another biggie in this day and time is only *partially* listening while you surf the Internet or watch TV. In doing this, you may miss something crucial in what they are saying! Later, when something surprises you, your partner says, *"But I told you already. We discussed this!"*

Use these strategies to make effective listening part of your love language:

1. **Give them your full attention.** Turn off the computer, put down your book, turn down the TV – do whatever is necessary to show them that they have your complete attention. Then ***look at them while they speak.***
2. **Use appropriate body language.** As your partner speaks, show them you are listening by nodding or smiling at appropriate times. These actions signal that you are paying attention and actually thinking about what they are saying.
3. **Let them finish.** Avoid interrupting before they have finished their thought.
4. **Repeat what they said in your own words.** When you are having a discussion, or even a disagreement, let them know that you understand their complete meaning by rephrasing what they have said. This also clarifies it in your own mind.
5. **Ask questions.** If you do not understand something, ask questions rather than assume their meaning.

Once you really start listening to what your partner has to say, you might be surprised at what you hear. Once your partner ***knows*** that you listen and take whatever they are saying to heart, they will likely feel free to open up to you and discuss things with deeper meaning.

Sharing your deepest thoughts brings a closeness you can never feel if listening to your partner is not a priority!

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

~ Maya Angelou

~ Maya Angelou

Share Your Hopes and Dreams

Now that you are listening and talking on a deeper level, you can get to know your partner better and look toward the future when you share your hopes and dreams. Discuss them in detail.

- ★ What have you always wanted to do?
- ★ Where have you always wanted to go? Why?
- ★ What's your dream job?
- ★ What kind of car do you really want?
- ★ What does the house of your dreams look like?
- ★ Do you have a family yet? Do you want kids? Boys? Girls? How many? Why?
- ★ What beliefs are most important to you? Why?

As you envision your hopes and dreams together, begin planning how you'll make them happen. You'll now have some exciting things to work toward together! These are things you have wanted your whole life, and now, **the two of you can bring these dreams to fruition.**



"Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction."

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupery

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupery

When You Disagree (And You Will!)

There will inevitably be times when you disagree. This is human nature. After all, no matter how close you are, you are still two different people. However, disagreeing on something does not mean you need to escalate the situation into a fight each time!

This is where your love language may take some effort, but with practice, it will get easier and easier until it's almost second nature to disagree amicably.

Follow these strategies to use loving communication when you disagree:

1. **Remember your love for each other.** Even if you feel anger at the situation or at something your lover has done (or did not do), **keep in mind that this person is the most important person in your life.** You may be angry about your partner's actions, but you still love them.
2. **Refrain from name-calling.** This can only bring about more negative feelings and **never** solves the problem.
3. **Focus on the current issue.** Avoid saying things like, "You always..." Discuss the current situation and leave past issues out of it.

4. **Use effective listening skills.** These skills, discussed in a previous section, are most important when you are having a disagreement. Even though you're disagreeing about something, effectively listening to each other prevents misunderstandings and shows your love.
5. **Share your feelings.** Let your partner know your feelings so they can understand why you are upset. For example, maybe when your partner came home late for dinner, it upset you because you felt unloved and disrespected. Whatever it was, clarify it. ***Avoid assuming that they know exactly how you feel.***
6. **Apologize if something is your fault.** Take responsibility for your actions and mistakes and say you're sorry. Offer a way to make up for it.
7. **Find a solution.** If you cannot agree on an issue, look for a way to compromise. Be creative. Compromising does not always mean someone has to give up something. Find a win-win solution for both of you.
8. **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Just because your partner does something differently than you that does not mean that they're wrong. Develop patience and pick your battles. Is it really important enough for you to bring it up?

When you disagree, ***the most important thing isn't that you "win," but that the issue is solved*** so that you both are satisfied with the outcome. That way no one goes away angry or holds grudges.

Never let a problem to be solved become more important than the person to be loved.

~Barbara Johnson

Show Your Love

There are hundreds of ways to communicate your love to your partner and creativity keeps it fresh. Get in the habit of showing your love many times each and every day. The really great thing about this is that ***the more you show love, the more you receive.***



As you each become more attuned to your partner's needs and desires, and fulfill them, you will find your passion increasing as well!

Here are some ways to get you started:

1. **Show gratitude.** When your partner does something nice for you, let them know you appreciate it. ***One of the basic desires of human nature is that we need to know that we are appreciated.*** Simply saying "Thank you," goes a long way towards fulfilling this need.
 - ★ You can also express your gratitude in many ways. Doing something nice back to reciprocate is always a fun way to show your gratitude.
2. **Do one of your partner's chores.** Especially when your partner is tied down with work or having a tough time, show them you care by helping them out. They will really appreciate your efforts.
3. **Turn mundane tasks into fun.** Even everyday tasks can provide an opportunity to show your love for each other and bring some fun into your relationship.
 - ★ For example, make dinner together and have fun with it. Feed each other tastes of the food you're making. Have a food fight.

- ★ Decorate a cake together – the more icing you get on each other, the better.
 - ★ Need to clean the garage? Each of you take one half of it and have a contest to see who can do the best job in the least amount of time. Doing it together can take the **chore** out of it.
 - ★ Need to water the grass? Have a water fight!
4. **Surprise them.** Leave loving notes and gifts where they'll least expect it. You'll brighten their day when they find it, even if you're not there to see it.
 5. **Look your best; feel your best.** Make an effort to exercise, eat right and keep in shape. You and your partner will enjoy better health and greater energy.
 - ★ Also, dress up for your partner from time to time. It lets them know that they are worth the effort.
 6. **Take time for yourself, too.** Taking time for yourself reinvigorates you and renews your energy for an active life. Go to a spa, meditate, or just read a good book – whatever relaxes you. ***Treat yourself well and it will be easier to meet your partner's needs, too.***
 7. **Pray together.** Bring your spiritual side into your relationship. It strengthens your love and gives you to a solid foundation for more **loving communication.**

*Love grows by giving.
The love we give away is the only love we keep.
The only way to retain love is to give it away.
~ Elbert Hubbard*

~ Elbert Hubbard

Laugh Together

Laughing together is an important part of the language of love. When you laugh together, you are relaxed, having fun, and enjoying each other. You are making good memories that you both can cherish.

When you have fun with each other, you always look forward to being together. ***It draws you together when you are apart.***

Laughter also helps lighten the mood when you or your partner feels stressed. It gives you a chance to take a step back and bring clarity to your thinking in disagreements. Plus, ***it is impossible to feel anger when you're laughing.*** You **can** feel love, though!

Share funny movies, books, and jokes together. Just have fun with the humorous side of life. If your partner gets a kick out of your celebrity impressions, then do it!

Having your own inside jokes together also lets you share a secret bond when you are in public. When someone says or does something that reminds you both of your funny joke, your eyes meet to acknowledge it and you share a secret laugh. ***It is one more thing that makes you in tune with each other.***

So be sure to bring laughter into your relationship and your everyday life together. It strengthens the bonds of love and your loving communication.

Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.

~Victor Borge

Make Time for Each Other

Making time for your partner communicates to them how much you love them. Go out of your way to spend quality time together. It keeps that spark alive, just like when you were first dating.

Although date nights are fun, you do not always have to spend money to spend time together. Having a romantic evening at home can be perfect.

Try new things or take turns picking out new activities to do together.

You can vary the activities you share to keep things fresh and exciting. You could go to the beach, the park, or the museum. Fly a kite or go bicycling. Play a sport together or pursue a fun hobby. Take a weekend vacation. Whatever it is, enjoy life together!

It does not matter what you do, as long as you're enjoying each other's company.

*Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is
what makes the ride worthwhile.*

~ Franklin P. Jones

Start a savings fund for a special trip to somewhere you have always wanted to go together, like Hawaii or on a cruise. Planning a vacation to a tropical paradise is exciting and lets you look forward with anticipation to these good times. Every time you put money in that fund, you are sending a message of love to your partner.

In a nutshell, the language of love is all about sending loving messages to your partner in both your words and deeds. Using the language effectively and consistently establishes a mindset of love for your partner.

When your partner reciprocates, it makes a never-ending cycle of love and increases the passion in both of you. ***Your wants and needs are fulfilled, and you find a joy in each other and in your life that you never knew existed!***

Use these tips and techniques to get you started with the language of love. As you become fluent, the sky is the limit. Enjoy!



Do You Have Realistic Expectations?

Do You Have Realistic Expectations for Your Partner?

When your expectations are unreasonable, they will frequently go unmet.

Having realistic expectations will enhance your relationship.

Avoid believing in these unrealistic ideas:

- My partner should be able to read my mind.
- At the same time, ask what your partner needs from you.
 - Zero fighting.
 - The right partner will make my life perfect.
 - My partner will always be available when I need them.
 - Our ability to be there for others varies from day to day.
 - I will always be the only important thing in my partner's life.
 - Everything should be 50/50.
 - All we need is each other. It has been said that the best possible partner for you can provide for 70-80% of your needs.
 - Good relationships are easy.
 - When your expectations are unreasonable, a romantic relationship becomes impossible.



TOP 10 WAYS TO REKINDLE THE ROMANCE AND RECONNECT WITH YOUR PARTNER

Has the romance and passion waned in your relationship? This is a common phenomenon. After the excitement of the early phases of a relationship pass, things become routine. Luckily, however, you don't need to resign yourself to just a ho-hum relationship.

There are many ways to enhance the romance in your relationship. Imagine how great it would be to feel excited about your relationship again!

START REKINDLING THE ROMANCE TODAY WITH THESE TIPS:

1. **Go to bed together.** Studies have shown that a few minutes of cuddling each night increases the bond between couples. Staying up late to watch the late show while your partner is in bed can have negative consequences.
2. **Have a weekly date night.** Relive one of your early dates. It is a fun way to get out of the house and remember the excitement of getting to know each other. Make your date night a habit. If you can get out weekly, great. If you can only get out once or twice each month, that is okay, too.
3. **Compliment your partner at least once each day.** When a couple starts dating, they keep all the negative opinions to themselves and let the compliments flow.

Over time, the ratio tends to swing in the opposite direction. Make a consistent effort to say something nice to your significant other each day.

4. **Take a shower together.** Not only will you conserve water, but you'll also spend some fun, quality time together. If you have time, take a bath instead.
5. **Give your partner a surprise.** It doesn't have to be a new car. **A simple note, flower, or any other small gesture can make anyone's day brighter.**
6. **Make a list of your partner's positive traits.** You can probably rattle off your partner's characteristics that drive you nuts. However, you might have to think about the qualities you appreciate.
7. **Give each other a massage.** This is a real massage, not rubbing her shoulders while she watches television. Pick up some candles, massage oil, and do it properly.
8. **Find a hobby you both enjoy.** Maybe you play poker with the boys while she goes out for wine with the girls. Why not find something you both enjoy? You could take an art class together, join a co-ed soccer team, or volunteer at the local animal shelter.

9. **Avoid attacking the other person.** There's a difference between saying, *"It drives me crazy when you leave your socks on the floor"* and *"What's wrong with you? Why can't you pick anything up?"* The first statement addresses the behavior. The second attacks the person. **The difference in the response you receive is significant.**
10. **Change up your sex life.** After a while, most couples fall into a routine that leaves both parties less than enthusiastic. Change things up a little. Get a book and experiment. You might find the excitement coming back into your lovemaking.

Increasing the level of romance in your relationship requires effort and commitment. Relive your cherished memories of the past and focus on your partner's positive qualities. **A daily compliment can open the doors to appreciating each other all over again.**

Give your relationship the time and energy it deserves. You'll be glad you did.

In the next lesson, you will explore how to know what is important to you, your partner, and the two of you as a couple.

YOU CAN KEEP IT SPECIAL

In the last lesson, you discovered that relationships usually begin with passion and excitement. As the relationship progresses to moving in with each other or marriage, that passion decreases and can even disappear.

Does that mean the wonderful excitement and passion is gone forever? Happily, no. You can keep that fire of passion going. We're going to discuss some of those strategies in this lesson.

THE POWER OF MAKING YOUR RELATIONSHIP A PRIORITY

A priority is something or someone you spend time, energy, and money on. That someone or something is the most important in your life.

IF YOU'RE UNSURE ABOUT THE TOP PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE, ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Who or what takes up most of my time?** You may spend most of your time at work, but why do you work?
 - Sure, you work to pay the bills, but don't you work so that you and your partner have what you need for your lives to flourish?
2. **Where does my money go?** Some people are great at saving money while others don't know where it went.
 - Most of your money may go to providing a place to live. **When that house or apartment is for a home and not just a place to live, you have set your relationship as a priority.**
 - If most of your money goes to something just for you or other than your family, then your family is not your priority.

3. **Who or what do I think about the most?** What you think about uses your mental energy or mental currency. What you think about the most, especially when not at work, lets you know what your greatest priority is.
 - When it is your spouse or partner, then your relationship is your priority.

The routine of work and taking care of shelter, transportation, food, and clothing can occupy much of your time and energy. When you keep your partner as your priority (and your expanded family if you have children), it's easier to keep the passion going in your relationship.

Forming a few habits or rituals to enrich your relationship helps keep those fires burning and makes the routine exciting and fun.

ROUTINES VERSUS RITUALS

Your routines are actions which enable you to accomplish the necessities of life. These are the actions to get yourself going in the morning, making it to work, and ending your day.

Rituals are a type of routine, but they have a deeper meaning behind them. Rituals provide a specialness to your activity. Some common rituals are found at church, family celebrations, and even ball games and concerts.

When you establish a few meaningful rituals in your relationship, you reinforce the importance of your partner and your relationship.

RITUALS TO CEMENT YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Have some fun establishing rituals for the two of you. The only ground rule is that they be meaningful for both of you.

FUN RITUALS WHICH HAVE PROVIDED EXCITEMENT AND INTIMACY FOR OTHERS:

1. **A special greeting sets the tone and mood.**
Whether you do a happy dance and then throw your arms around each other or say, "Honey, I'm home," followed by a warm hug, have a meaningful greeting for each other.

- The way you greeted each other when you were dating may still be perfect for the rest of your life together. Your body has its own memory, and your greeting will trigger the memory of the fun you had when first dating.
2. **Saying “Good Night” and “See You Later.”** Just as you set the tone of your time together, you want to make the ending of your day or time together special.
- Not meaning to put an element of fear or anxiety here, but, if something were to happen, what are the last words you would want your loved one to hear?
3. **“Spontaneous” Gifts.** “I love you” gifts and actions can brighten up a tough day and give a warm, tingly feeling.
- Meaningful “I love you” gifts vary according to the person. Flowers or cards are the ultimate for some while others prefer uplifting words of affirmation. There are those who feel all tingly when you empty the dishwasher.

- If your partner asks you what is the greatest “I love you” gift for you, be sure and tell them what you enjoy, not what you think they want you to say.
4. **Remember why you fell in love.** This is for you. Make it a daily habit to remind yourself of the wonderful qualities in your loved one and be in a place of gratitude for them.
- As your relationship grows, recall the new things you appreciate about your partner. Keeping these in mind will assist you when life gets challenging, and there will be those challenging times.

SUMMARY

Keeping your relationship a priority and demonstrating that priority by rituals of love and affection will cement and bolster your relationship. **Make it a daily practice to remind yourself why you love and appreciate your partner.**

Take a few minutes with the following exercise to anchor in what you have learned. Then head over to the next lesson where you will learn how to handle things that may already be getting difficult.

REFLECTION

By reflecting on the following, you will generate ideas to strengthen your love and affection for each other.

1. What can your partner do or say which would be most meaningful to you?
2. What would be most meaningful to your loved one? Ask them to verify what you think. They might surprise you.
3. List the 10 things you love and appreciate the most about your partner.

HELP! IT'S ALREADY DIFFICULT

In the last lesson, you learned some tips on how to keep the passion in your relationship. Remember to establish the greeting and “leave-taking” rituals. You’ll be surprised at how much you look forward to them.

What happens, though, when you haven’t lived with each other long and things are already difficult? Before you doubt yourself and your decision, read about common difficulties when a couple first moves in with each other.

YES, YOU WILL HAVE CHALLENGES

Think about the irritating things your parents or siblings did when you were living with them. Weren't there times you thought you would go crazy and couldn't wait until you were living on your own? We have all been there.

You may not have known it, but once you move in with someone you love, expect similar challenges. The two of you are independent people who will now need to make some adjustments. How good are you at adapting? Both of you will discover that answer!

PLANNING MAKES IT EASIER

If you haven't joined households, this is the perfect time to agree on how your household will run. If you haven't had that conversation yet, now is an excellent time to sit down together and divide up the duties.

It is important to realize each of you have moved in together with certain expectations. The surprise comes when you realize that your expectations may be totally opposite to those of your partner.

THERE ARE TASKS WHICH ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO BE DONE. DECIDE NOW HOW THOSE DUTIES WILL BE DIVIDED:

1. **Money and bills.** Previously, you each paid for everything. How will you handle your finances?
 - Will you have one checking account or three? One checking account means both paychecks go in the same account and bills are paid from that account.
 - With three accounts you each have your own money and deposit an agreed amount into the “house” account where bills are paid.
2. **Who pays for what?** You only watch Netflix and Amazon Prime. Your partner wants the highest end cable package. You belong to a gym and your partner prefers to walk in the park.
 - If all your money is in one account, you’ve agreed to pay for each other’s bills no matter what they are.

- Each of you list your bills. Decide who will pay for what. Some non-mutual expenses may balance each other out. You may decide that it's okay if you pay half of something you don't use.
3. **Do not let chores cause resentment!** There are always things you do not like doing that must be done for the house to run smoothly. Divide up those chores now.
- The last thing you want is a break-up because the toilet bowl isn't clean.
Sharing chores is a sign of mutual respect.
 - Make a list of all the chores that need to be done. Claim the ones you want. Negotiate on the rest. Alternate tasks monthly unless someone really likes one specific chore.

TIME AND SPACE

When living by yourself, you are used to things staying where you put them. You are also used to it being quiet when you want quiet time or turning the music up loud

and dancing when you're in the mood. You did what you wanted when you wanted. Times have changed.

Unless you and your partner have the same needs, which is rare, it's time to talk about your needs. Sometimes you're not aware you have a specific need until you don't get it. Your needs may change over time. That is why you'll have this conversation often.

THREE AREAS TO BE AWARE OF:

1. **Needs.** Everyone has needs for quiet time and fun time. **If you need hours of quiet and your partner needs lots of socializing, talk about these needs and decide how to accommodate each other.**
2. **Stuff.** Decide how much "stuff" each of you are bringing. Moving into someone else's place can be difficult because it was theirs and now it's both of yours. Space needs to be made and some "stuff" needs to go. Some of your "stuff" may send shivers up your partner's spine. Talk about it.
3. **Quality Time.** **Be sure to schedule quality couple time with each other.** Yes, you are with each other during your non-work time, but that special time to share thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, and fun will keep the intimacy going.

WHEN THE CUTE BECOMES ANNOYING

It may not have happened, but there may come a time when that little quirk you thought was cute turns into something that sends you screaming. If you catch yourself grimacing or doing eye rolls when your partner does that “cute” thing, it’s time to deal with it.

The key is finding out why it bothers you. Your annoyance could mean that there’s something deeper for the two of you to sit down and talk about. (Module 2 will give you excellent pointers on how to talk so others listen.)

Then there are things about the other you just need to accept. That is part of living together.

SUMMARY

If moving in together has been more difficult than you thought, you now know you are not unusual. Bringing together two different people requires much communication and acceptance of each other’s quirks and habits.

Before you move to the next lesson, in which you’ll explore ways to keep problems to a minimum, answer the following reflection questions to deepen what you’ve learned.

REFLECTION

1. What chores do you enjoy doing?
2. What chores do you dislike so much you'd pay someone else to do them if you could?
3. What are your partner's mannerisms you enjoy?

KEEPING CHALLENGES TO A MINIMUM

In the last lesson you explored the common difficulties many couples have when they begin to live with each other. You are merging two households as well as two different ways of living.

In this lesson you will explore how to keep challenges to a minimum. Most of what you will learn is what you can do individually. **The challenge for many people is that this involves how you handle your inner life, the life of thoughts and feelings.**

A STORY ABOUT ELEPHANTS

Do you know the story of three blind men exploring an elephant for the first time? Since they are blind, they come to know the elephant by touch.

The first one is touching his trunk and declares, "Elephants are long and thin and move a lot."

The second one, at the back, says, "No, elephants are massive. Ugh, and they dump smelly stuff on you."

The third guy, touching the tusks says, "You're both wrong. An elephant is smooth and hard and has a sharp point at the end."

IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

The biggest disagreements between couples are a matter of perspective. It's how each is viewing the same issue, but differently. You could say one is at the tusk of the elephant and the other at the back end getting dumped on.

When you begin wondering if your partner is intentionally misunderstanding you, remember that you could be examining different parts of the elephant.

Your past experiences and personal preferences determine how you view a situation.

LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THESE:

1. **Family Patterns.** Generally, what was important to the family, whether you liked it or not, is going to have an impact upon how you perceive things. The same is true for your partner.
 - One person may be from a family where family meals at the table were important, even if they're take out. Another family may have eaten in front of the television.
 - One person comes from a family in which you share every part of your day and the other from a family where you came home, changed clothes, and sat in front of the television the rest of the evening.
2. **Family Values.** There is no one set of family values every family adheres to. People value different things.
 - Some families value sharing what they have with others outside of the family, while others believe the best should be saved for "blood kin" only.

- You may come from a family where you look your best whenever you step outside the house, and your partner may come from a family in which how you looked was not important. It was only about comfort.
- Your values are based upon beliefs. Your beliefs determine how you act and respond to situations. **If you and your partner have opposing beliefs, you will likely have a challenge in that area.**

IT'S NOT PERSONAL

This may seem strange, but it is very important. **Most disagreements, no matter how difficult, are rarely about the couple. They are about the individual.**

They are about each person's beliefs, values, and habits and how they feel when someone has different beliefs, values, and habits.

When your partner does or says something different than what you would do, it is personal to them because it's about them. Even if they say you're wrong, it is based upon their perspective, their part of the elephant. It is all about them. The same applies to you.

This is where communication is crucial. In fact, it's so crucial, the entire next module is about how to communicate in a healthy and productive manner.

MOLEHILLS, MOUNTAINS, AND FEELINGS

The molehills in your relationship are irritating things like squeezing the toothpaste from the middle rather than from the end. They don't need to become mountains which have you breaking up your relationship.

LITTLE BUMPS BECOME BIG MOUNTAINS DUE TO SEVERAL FACTORS:

1. **Memories and hurts from the past.** When your partner's words or actions remind you of something painful in your past, it is like someone put you in a time machine. You hurt like you did then. You respond like you did then.
 - One way to identify if you have suddenly been thrown into the past is to ask yourself, "How old do I feel?" If it is younger than you

are now, you're reacting to a past painful event and not just to what's happening now.

2. **You each have different perspectives.** This is such a common challenge it bears repeating. You may never agree on how you perceive things, but you can at least understand the other's view.
 - **Communication is the key.** Make time to sit together, holding hands, and talk with each other. Make an effort to understand where your partner is coming from.
3. **Not keeping your word.** If you have talked about something and agreed upon a particular action, do what you say.
 - Molehills stay molehills and even go away when you arrive upon a solution and follow your plan.
 - **Not keeping your word is a sign that you do not think your partner's desires are important. It is a sign of disrespect.**

SUMMARY

You will have challenges in your relationship. There's no way that's not going to happen. The key to keeping the challenges small is to understand that you each have different ways of viewing situations. Then you can talk about them.

In the next lesson, you will learn about the challenge of thinking you made a mistake in moving in together. Before exploring that topic, please take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned in this lesson.

REFLECTION

1. List three ways you and your partner differ in how you look at things.
2. What past memories are often triggered by something your partner does or says?

3. What family traditions are you and your partner working to combine?

DID I MAKE A MISTAKE?

In the last lesson you learned how minor issues can explode into major issues and how to prevent that from happening. You also explored how each of you could have different perspectives on an issue.

In this lesson, you'll explore ways to evaluate your concerns that you may have made a mistake in moving in together or in getting married.

THE ABSOLUTE DANGER SIGN YOU SHOULD LEAVE

This is simple. If you have been physically threatened or attacked you need to get to safety. Once safe, find someone to assist you in sorting out the rest. Just be safe.

That said, let's move to the usual challenges people face when merging two lives.

MERGING LIVES TAKE TIME

We live in an impatient society. Consider this. When you boot up your computer, how long does it take before you get impatient? I bet not long.

You may think it should only take a couple of weeks of living together for you to be functioning together easily. That is not an unusual thought, but it's unrealistic.

Two amazing, independent beings with different habits and expectations are merging their lives. It takes a few months to sort those things out and establish new habits.

Give yourselves some time, at least three months. If things have improved, but are still a little rocky, give yourselves another couple of months.

REVIEW YOUR STRENGTHS

Sometimes people allow their self-doubts about situations crowd out the good things which are happening.

DOUBTS ARE OFTEN BASED UPON EMOTIONS. TAKE SOME TIME TO LOOK AT THINGS OBJECTIVELY:

1. **Do you and your partner listen to each other?**
Giving each other your full attention when you share your day is indicative of interest and caring.
 - Eye-rolls or a reluctance to share or listen can be signs the two of you need the assistance of a relationship expert.
2. **Do you have fun together?** Having fun keeps your relationship strong.
 - When life gets too intense, your relationship can seem more difficult than it actually is. **Take time to do some of the fun things you did when dating.**
3. **Are you compatible?** Having mutual interests is bonding.
 - Compatibility is more than interests.

Compatibility is also about your values, beliefs, priorities, and dreams in life. It also includes schedules, time and money management, and keeping your house neat... or not.

- When you have areas of compatibility of ideas and beliefs, you have more to share with each other. **When you have compatibility in time, money, and house management, life flows more easily.**

THE DANGER OF COMPARISON

Remember that your relationship is *your* relationship. Be careful about comparing it with someone else's. You only see the public image of other couples. You have no idea what's going on once the doors close.

On the other hand, if you are having challenges and your friends and family are warning you that what's happening isn't healthy, you have a choice to make. Are you and your partner willing to work on forming a stronger relationship? If not, your answer may be made for you.

HOW COMMITTED ARE YOU?

When evaluating challenges in your relationship, discuss how committed you are to working things out.

IF YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ARE COMMITTED, THERE ARE STRATEGIES YOU CAN USE WHICH WILL HELP YOU BECOME A STRONGER COUPLE:

1. **Remind yourself of your why.** Why is this relationship so valuable that you want to devote time, energy, and money to working things out?
 - Always remember why you love each other. Keep that uppermost in your mind.
2. **Take time to be with each other.** Date night is important. Schedule it to be sure it doesn't get lost in the busyness of life.
3. **Find someone objective to help you over the rough spots.**

- One of the biggest mistakes people make is waiting until it's too late to get outside help. Don't have that regret.

SUMMARY

Bumps and self-doubts are normal in the beginning stages of relationships. You are bringing two lives together and that takes time, communication, and some finesse. If you are committed, find objective third parties to assist you when needed.

In the next lesson, you will come to know all the wonderful things you have to look forward to.

Before moving ahead, take a few minutes to reflect on how you can apply what you have just learned.

REFLECTION

1. List everything you can think of that you enjoy and appreciate about your partner.

2. How committed are you to your relationship?
What would you do to keep it healthy?
3. Why is it dangerous to compare your relationship to someone else's?

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

In the last lesson you explored why you might be having doubts in the early months of moving in together and ways to resolve those doubts.

In this lesson, you will learn about what to expect over the years of your relationship.

YOU'LL LEARN MORE ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE!

In the 1950's Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham developed a simple and powerful model to explain personalities. It's called the Johari Window.

Let's look at this model in greater detail to see how it applies to you, your partner, and your relationship:

Johari Window	Known to Others	Unknown to Others
Known to Self	Public	Private or Hidden from Others
Unknown to Self	Blind to Self	Undiscovered (Unknown to anyone)

THE JOHARI WINDOW SHOWS HOW EVERYONE HAS FOUR ASPECTS:

1. **The Public aspect is what everyone knows.** This could be what you look like, your job, and other easily discovered things about you.
 - When you first meet each other, the “Public” square is small, and the “Private” square is large.
 - The longer you know each other, the “Public” square becomes larger.
2. **The Private part of yourself is that which you know but others do not.**

- Some people keep this “Private” part hidden. They do not want anyone to know certain things. This makes for good novels and weak relationships.
 - In healthy relationships, the “Private” becomes smaller as you come to know each other better.
3. The “Blind” part of you is what others know about you, but you have not discovered yet.
- Your partner may have a better awareness of what both your gifts and weaknesses are. **As you learn from your partner, you will know more about both your strengths and weaknesses.**
 - Most of us resist recognizing the areas we need to work on. We also often resist acknowledging what our gifts are.
4. The “Undiscovered” are the hidden qualities that neither of you know.
- In relationships, many “undiscovered” qualities will become discovered. You will

be surprised at some gifted areas you were not aware of. You will be disappointed when you learn things you aren't happy about.

What you learn about each other can bring you closer together. You can become comfortable with each other because you accept and trust each other. This brings a deepness to your relationship that you did not know was possible.

IN THE MIDST OF THE ORDINARY WILL BE PASSION AND BUMPS

Most of life is filled with routine. The same actions and events occur with regularity. Your job is to ensure that your relationship also has times of excitement and passion. That's why you want to build passion into your life by the rituals we discussed earlier.

Keeping your relationship strong will ensure you make it through the challenging times. There will be times when someone loses a job, becomes ill, or struggles emotionally. **The more solid you make your relationship during the ordinary times, the better you will be able to handle the challenging times.**

CHANGE - THE CONSTANT IN LIFE

It may seem strange to say change is the one thing you can count on in life after we have talked about the ordinariness of life. Even when life is ordinary, change is happening, even if barely noticed.

One day you look back a few years and realize you're a different person than you were. You look at your partner and realize they're different, also. You just did not notice it and then you did.

THERE ARE NATURAL DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES ADULTS GO THROUGH:

1. In the mid to late 20s, we're getting used to being an adult. We're "trying on" the adult mindset.
 - Our idea of what makes a relationship is in flux. **Sometimes we act like a teenager and other times like an adult.**
 - We are making decisions about our personal values and what we want to do with our lives.

2. **The late 20s to early 30s is where lifestyle changes often occur.** Marriage and children have a strong impact upon the individual and the relationship.
 - How each partner handles these changes determines the flow of the relationship.
3. **The late 30s and early 40s are when we seem to settle into our lives.** Work and children consume most of our time and energy.
 - **If you have made rituals a tradition in your relationship, you'll enjoy the highs of passion mixed with a deep sense of commitment to each other.**
4. **The mid-40s to mid-50s are a time of evaluation of yourself and life.** You look at whether you've accomplished what you wanted in life.
 - Many people begin to think of being closer to the end of their lives rather than the beginning.
 - This is a time in which your relationship can deepen into the kind of relationship you dreamed of when you were in your

teens and 20s.

Each developmental change brings changes to the individual. Each partner will need to adapt to those changes. **The foundation you set now will assist as changes occur.**

SUMMARY

The early passion which brought you together can bring you to a deepening commitment to each other. This results in a comfortableness you did not know was possible. It takes both of you working on your relationship by forming daily and weekly rituals to keep your passion alive.

The most important ritual you will discover is healthy and consistent communication with each other. That is the subject of the next module.

Before you explore ways to communicate with each other, take a few moments to reflect on the following questions.

REFLECTION

1. What are some ways you have changed since you began your relationship with your partner?
2. What are ways your partner has changed?
3. What are three things you've learned about your partner and three things you've learned about yourself through your relationship?

DON'T COUNT ON MIND READING

In the last module you examined challenges with merging two different personalities into the same household.

In this module you will discover attributes which can impact good communication.

Your communication styles began before you met each other. It began with how you grew up. You also have different personality characteristics which affect your communication with each other.

This and the next lesson lay the foundation for healthy communication practices. To integrate the information in this module, begin practicing what you learn as soon as possible.

ARE YOU A MINDREADER?

If you believe you know what your partner is thinking and feeling, you could be setting yourself up for some challenges. You might be right some of the time, but let's look at what can happen if you make assumptions about your partner that are incorrect.

MAKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ANOTHER'S THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS HAS CONSEQUENCES YOU MIGHT NOT BE AWARE OF:

1. **Privacy is invaded.** Remember the "Private" area of the Johari Window? That area is special or sacred to each person.
 - It's up to the individual to share the private part of themselves. When others assume that they know that private area, the first individual can feel violated.
2. **When people assume that they know what another is thinking or feeling, they are implying they have power over that person.**

- Rarely do people feel comfortable when others know something that they're not ready to share. They become guarded and defensive if they're feeling "read" by another.
3. **When someone makes assumptions, they already have a fixed idea about the situation.**
- It can be difficult to move away from the initial assumption. This can color the rest of the conversation.
 - **Making assumptions can shut down communication before it begins.** This can damage your relationship.

YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT

There are people who are more intuitive than others. They have an ability to "read" the subtle shifts in body language. Some intuitive people say they can "feel" the emotions of others. They may be right.

The longer you know your partner, the more you will learn about them. You will be able to know when they're not themselves, when something seems "off." You may even know how they act when there are challenges at work... or with the parents... or the bowling team.

When you know something is off, ask how the day went. You might even ask if they are okay. If they choose not to tell you, avoid taking offense. Just give them time.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

Communication is an exchange between two people. Because honest communication is important, keep in mind that you are two different people.

Even if you are concerned about your partner, there are times you need to give them space. Yes, you might be worried that you've done something or that their mood is about you. That is an uncomfortable situation for you. Still, give them some space.

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS NOT TO INSIST THAT SOMEONE TALK BEFORE THEY'RE READY:

1. Some people take more time to share what's

happening. Their reluctance to immediately sharing may have nothing to do with you.

- Introverted thinkers take time to mull things over. They want to be sure they understand what is happening within them before sharing.
- Extroverted thinkers have a tendency to process their feeling out loud.
Extroverted thinkers often have a difficult time understanding introverted thinkers.

2. **Family of Origin (the family you came from)**
communication patterns have programed you to communicate in particular ways. Your families may have two opposing styles of communicating.

- The person who came from a family who didn't share what was happening in their lives often finds it difficult to share with their partner.
- In some families, members are punished or made fun of for certain things they share. **If you or your partner grew up where it wasn't safe to share, you'll find it difficult to share with each other.**

- When you or your partner have difficulty sharing, the one who finds it easier to share will need to be more patient as the other learns that it's okay to share.

3. **One of you may not think sharing is important.**

This can create challenges, especially if sharing is important to one member and not the other.

- Some people want to know everything about their partner and feel hurt if their partner does not share. Others want to reserve a part of themselves just for them and do not share as much.
- As neuroscientists learn more about the brain, they have discovered that some people don't notice social cues, such as someone being upset, due to how the brain and its chemicals are working.
- The person who is more adept at communication needs to be patient while the one who isn't as adept at communication learns how to share.

THEN AGAIN, COMMUNICATION IS ALL ABOUT YOU

You can't control the communication patterns of your partner. You can, however, control your own communication style. You can also control how you respond to your partner. How you respond to challenging situations can make things easier or more difficult between the two of you.

SUMMARY

In this lesson, you explored how the ability to communicate with each other is influenced by:

1. Your family
2. Being an introverted or extroverted thinker
3. The brain and its chemicals

You have also learned that the one who wants more sharing and finds it easier to communicate is the one who needs to be more patient.

In the next lesson, we're going to lay another level to the foundation before we begin on specifics strategies for communication.

Before you move to that lesson, please take a few minutes now to reflect on what you have learned.

REFLECTION

1. Think back upon how you grew up. Describe how your family talked about their lives. Did they share feelings, important happenings in their lives, their schedule? How did this affect you?
2. How do you prefer to share information? Immediately or do you need time? All of the information or just some of it? Is it difficult or easy to share?
3. How do you feel about your partner's way of communicating?

EVERYONE NEEDS SPACE

In the last module, you learned about attributes of effective communication. In this module, we will go in depth into the need for personal space and boundaries.

As you move through the lessons, keep in mind that everyone is different. Some people need more personal space than others, just as some people are more revealing about their thoughts and feelings than others.

Let's begin by looking at why personal boundaries are needed.

THE NEED FOR PERSONAL BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

No matter how much you love each other, you are different. In this course, you have been introduced to the differences in how you handle communication, anger, and social interaction.

People who need less personal space and desire more connection often feel insecure with partners who are opposite of them.

If you need less personal space, and your partner needs more personal space, you might want to use a mantra such as, “My partner’s need for personal space is about them, not about me.”

A PERSONAL SPACE EXERCISE

The amount of personal space needed by any individual may be different according to the emotional atmosphere at the time as well as the person involved.

HERE'S A SIMPLE EXERCISE TO DISCOVER THE AMOUNT OF PERSONAL SPACE THAT YOU AND YOUR PARTNER REQUIRE:

1. **Determining your space.** Stand about 10 feet apart facing each other. The one going first walks slowly towards the other. The second person puts their hands up when the one walking is close enough. It is that simple. Then the next one does it.
2. **Repeat the exercise with each of you having an image of the last time you each felt:**
 - Angry with each other
 - Sad
 - Scared
 - Happy
 - Amorous
3. **Discuss your results.** Use the Reflective Listening process to discuss what happened.

THE WHY'S OF PERSONAL SPACE DIFFERENCES

People who need less personal space have a difficult time understanding why others need more personal space. Let's look at some research on the topic.

People with more anxiety and those known as highly sensitive need more personal space. People needing more personal space have an active parietal-frontal network, which is in the brain.

CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

1. Their comfort level with others coming close to them is smaller than most people. This means they need more personal space.
2. Their sensitivity to stimulation (sounds, sights, emotional energy) is high. Sometimes they need to get out of the room and away from people completely.
3. This is about their needs, their comfort level, and not about their partner.

INTROVERTS VERSUS EXTROVERTS

Introverts need more personal space than extroverts. Introverts are more sensitive to the brain chemicals dopamine, which brings excitement, and acetylcholine, which brings calm.

SEE HOW THESE BRAIN CHEMICALS AFFECT INTROVERTS AND EXTROVERTS DIFFERENTLY:

1. **Dopamine.** The more excitement, the more dopamine is produced.
 - For an introvert, a little dopamine goes a long way. Too much dopamine means introverts grit their teeth and want to run.
 - An extrovert needs much more dopamine than an introvert to feel the effects of it. The more excitement, the more dopamine produced, the more extroverts can feel it.

2. **Acetylcholine.** Quiet activities stimulate the production of the calming chemical, acetylcholine.
 - The more reading, thinking, and quiet an introvert has, the calmer they are.
 - **An extrovert barely notices the subtle calming effects of acetylcholine.** They feel the excitement of the dopamine rush and prefer it.

MANAGING A RELATIONSHIP WITH DIFFERING PERSONAL BOUNDARY NEEDS

Acknowledging that you each have different needs regarding personal space is the first step in preventing a challenge from escalating. Take time to discuss the need for personal boundaries using the communication skills you learned earlier.

IMPORTANT TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. You may have different needs in the home.

- If you have space, each of you may need your own “cave.” This would be a space you decorate just for you. It doesn’t have to be a room. It can be a corner of a room.
 - Develop a signal or sign letting your partner know you need alone time.
2. **You may have different needs for space when you’re experiencing different emotions.**
- The exercise at the beginning of this lesson will give you an indication of how much space each person needs under different circumstances.
3. **Physical space needs are also about touching.**
Some people want more touching when they are upset while others want less.
- People who reach out to others by touch when the other is upset may feel rejected when their partner does not want to be touched.
 - **Part of being an emotionally supportive partner is knowing when not to touch.**

Realize that their needs for touch probably have nothing to do with you.

- Use communication skills to address any difficult feelings which come up.

4. Sexual intimacy also involves personal boundaries and personal space.

- Be very clear with each other about your expectations regarding monogamy.
- In the next lesson on sexuality and sensuality, we will address this more in depth.

SUMMARY

When you and your partner have differences in your needs for personal space, communication is crucial. You now know personal space issues involve different areas of the brain as well as different chemicals in the brain. Keep this in mind when challenges arise in this area.

In the next lesson, you will examine differing personal needs regarding outside friendships

But before moving on, please answer the following questions to integrate what you have learned.

REFLECTION

Use the following scale to answer the questions:

1 - Not at all or rarely

2 - Somewhat

3 - About half the time

4 - Often

5 - Almost always

1. My partner and I have different personal space needs. (Use the scale above.)
2. Jot down a few sentences about how this affects you.

3. Sometimes my partner wants to be separate from me and it hurts my feelings. (Use the scale above.)

4. When your feelings are hurt, does this remind you of anything in your childhood? If “yes,” write about your feelings and how you can manage them.

OUTSIDE FRIENDSHIPS

This course is about keeping the fires burning in your relationship. You have demonstrated your commitment to your relationship by getting to this point. In the last lesson, you learned about the need for personal space and how some need more space than others. You also learned about managing new family settings and the responsibilities and boundaries that will come with an addition of children. In this lesson, we will discuss friendships.

The best long-term partnerships are those which begin with friendship. At the beginning of relationships, people find it difficult to believe they need friendships other than their partner. It is time to delve into the need for other friends in addition to your partner.

THE NEED FOR OTHER FRIENDSHIPS

You and your partner are amazing people with gifts, talents, and interests. You may even have some of those in common. They probably drew you together. Others, you don't share. You may have an interest in some of your partner's interests, but not as strong as they have.

The key to having outside friendships is the comfort level you each have in sharing each other. If you use communication skills and fun rituals or games to keep your relationship strong, you will be able to enjoy each of you having different friends.

Outside friendships give you variety as well as the opportunity to explore various aspects of yourself.

CONSIDER THESE BENEFITS:

1. **Add excitement to your life.** You each need time to explore your passion. In pursuing your interests, you will meet different people you enjoy. Each friendship adds excitement to your life and expands your horizons, while adding to your fun as a couple.
 - For example, perhaps you are an avid

marathon runner and your partner is an amateur chef and Food Network fan. When the big race comes, your partner will want to cheer you on. And who wouldn't want to share wonderful food?

2. **Take a break.** As much as you love each other, there will be times you need a break. Sometimes you'll get on each other's nerves. Short breaks to engage in activities you enjoy gives the space needed and renews your friendship with each other.
 - Remember that introverts need more time alone. An extrovert will gravitate toward group experiences while an introvert will engage in more solitary or quiet experiences.
 - **Accept and enjoy your differing personal needs for activity and companionship.**

WHAT ARE ACCEPTABLE FRIENDSHIPS?

Some people are comfortable with their partner having friends of either gender, while others are not. This is an important area to discuss as there are differing needs and expectations. If one partner feels more strongly about this than the other, use your communication tools to sort out feelings and expectations.

HERE ARE SOME POSSIBLE AREAS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Friendship with someone the same gender as your partner can bring uncomfortable feelings to the surface.
 - Are there any situations in which the two of you are comfortable with this?
Perhaps it's fine if they are in a group setting but not alone for any length of time.
 - Are you comfortable with this if you are both with the friend?

- A partner who has been betrayed may be more skittish in this area.
- A disagreement in this area can present major challenges. Use Reflective Listening or the clearing exercise to express your feelings. Being honest with each other will strengthen your intimacy.

2. Friendship with someone the opposite gender of your partner may not be as difficult for one or both of you.

- If so, continue to use your communication skills to maintain ongoing awareness of any feelings that may change.

Every couple's experience has their own complexities, such as the sexual orientation of both partners, as well as the sexual orientation of the friends. **The key is communication, trust, and mutual respect.**

WHAT IF SOMEONE FEELS LEFT OUT

If either of you begins feeling left out of the other's life, it is time to sit down and do some reflective listening. Without realizing it, one of you could become so involved in your hobby that you accidentally forget how your partner is doing.

Also, situations change. You or your partner may need more time together now than previously.

THE NEED FOR SEPARATE TIME CHANGES DEPENDING UPON:

- What's happening between the two of you
- Challenges in your extended families
- Work situations
- Personal challenges such as health, depression, or anxiety
- How much time you are spending with each other

If jealousy rears its head, honest communication is critical. The one who is jealous or feeling left out will benefit by the technique to discover how old you're feeling. The one who's being asked to curb their away time may also need to discover how old they feel.

Once you're clear about your own feelings and whether past issues are being triggered, you'll be able to have a more productive discussion.

SUMMARY

As your relationship grows and develops, you will each find the need to spend time with others. This could happen as a part of work or when you engage in different hobbies. As always, communicating with each other on a regular basis will help you to better understand each other and smooth unsettled feelings.

In the next lesson, you will go deeper into the topic of family and merging two households, and how to handle the emotions that arise as a result of these new changes.

Before moving on, though, please take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned and how it affects you

REFLECTION

Before discussing these questions with your partner, ensure you know how you feel by answering these for yourself.

1. How do you feel about your partner being good friends with someone the same gender and sexual orientation as you?
2. What if your partner is already good friends with someone the same gender and sexual orientation as you? How do you feel about that?
3. Are there situations in which you wouldn't trust your partner in friendships? How would you handle it?

BLENDDED FAMILIES

In the last lesson, you learned about friendships and the impacts they could have on your relationship with your partner. In this lesson, you will delve into the other hot topic in relationships: children.

This lesson is about managing the challenges of bringing children into your relationship, making yours a blended family.

THE OTHER PARENT

You only need to go as far as fairy tales to hear horror stories about stepparents and stepchildren.

Although you know that fairy tales sensationalize these situations, children may not know this. They may be frightened, resentful, or looking forward to the new situation.

There are millions of successful and healthy blended families. Yours can be one of those. It takes all involved parents to make life easier for everyone by engaging in healthy, open, and regular communication.

LET'S LOOK AT SOME SITUATIONS OF BLENDED FAMILIES:

1. **Children with only one parent are the easiest situation since you are adding fewer people into the new family.** The “non-present” parent is a part of the family even if not with you.
 - **The emotions of the children determine how easy the blending of your family will be.** If the parent has walked out of their lives, the children will feel confused, angry, and hurt.
 - If the parent passed away, the children may still be coping with grief. They may also be resentful of someone coming, as they see it, to take the place of the parent who died.
 - If there never was another parent, the children may be resentful of having to share their parent with someone else.

2. **The most challenging situation involving children is when one or both parents use the children against the other parent.**
 - **This is an emotional minefield.** The parent using children as a weapon to cause pain is difficult for all. If both parents are doing so, and you are not that parent, there is little you can do about the situation.
 - The children are caught in the middle and their emotions will be volatile. If they are angry with you, do not take it personally. It is not about you.
3. **Healthy parents working together for their children make it easier for blended families.**
 - The children will still have challenges in adjusting to the new situation. However, when everyone involved communicate and support each other, as well as set clear boundaries with the children, a potentially difficult situation can be fun and enriching.

THE “NEW” PARENT

As the “new” parent, you have the biggest adjustment in parenthood. Yes, your partner will need to address the emotions of their children, but they know their children. You do not.

BE AWARE OF SEVERAL DYNAMICS WHICH COULD AFFECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARTNER:

1. **You are not the parent**, and older children will certainly be sure you know that, but **you still have rights and responsibilities**.
 - **You have a right to be treated respectfully** by both the children and your partner.
 - You have the responsibility to initiate communication with your partner when needed.

- You'll have the responsibility to engage in parental tasks such as transporting the children, keeping them clean, and feeding them. When, and how much, needs to be agreed upon by both you and your partner.
2. **You'll need to set limits and discipline your partner's children.** Use the communication tools you know to clarify what you can and cannot do.
- Because you do not have a history with the children, you might be more objective with them. If you have not been a parent before, you may not be aware of how quickly children can trigger emotions.
 - As much as possible, **remember that much of what the children say and do is about them and not about you.** How you respond to them is about you.
3. **You can and, hopefully, will fall in love with the children.** Being a stepparent can be enriching and fulfilling. The more adults who support and love the children, the better it is for them.

4. **Have fun!** Being a new parent is not all responsibilities. Schedule fun times for all. This will ease the transition and enhance your relationship with your partner as well.

THE “OLD” PARENT

The parent who brings children into the relationship often does not realize how difficult this may be for their children and their partner. Consider what you are going through in adjusting to a new and loving situation.

Your children did not choose this. Your partner chose you, and the children came with the package. Not only are you primarily responsible for your children, but you also have a responsibility to your partner.

BEING PROACTIVE IN SEVERAL AREAS WILL EASE THE ADJUSTMENT FOR ALL:

1. **Use your communication tools with your children**, especially children of school age.
 - Ensure that they know what is expected of them regarding respect, boundaries, and chores.

- Demonstrate your love for them through words and actions. Just as you have learned the “love language” of your partner, learn that for your children.
2. **Be in continual communication with your partner about your children.** Daily communication is preferable for the first few months.
- Agree upon responsibilities.
 - Keep everyone aware of your schedule and the children’s schedules. This includes which parent is doing what.
3. **Have fun together!** Include your children and your partner in fun family activities.

SUMMARY

Nurturing another life is one of the most fulfilling and difficult activities anyone can do. When children come with a new relationship, there are challenges to be addressed. As with all things, clear communication keeps your relationship strong.

In the next lesson, we will discuss how to address the needs each of you have in a relationship.

Before you move on, take a few minutes to integrate what you have learned by answering the reflection questions below.

REFLECTION

1. What are your greatest fears about bringing children into your relationship?
2. List the 5 greatest strengths you bring to parenthood. Elaborate on how you will use those strengths.
3. If there are children in your relationship, what areas do you and your partner need to address

through Reflective Listening and clearing exercises?

4. What are your dreams of a relationship in which children are a part?



YOU'RE BOTH LEARNING

In the last lesson you explored how family patterns, personal preferences and how your brain functions can affect the way someone communicates.

This lesson lays another layer to the foundation regarding personal differences in communication. Being aware of personal differences can assist you in accepting others as they are and adapt how you interact with their style.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Consider this question: **How much do you want to know your partner?**

When you were first dating you wanted to get to know each other. You telephoned, you texted, you dated. You talked. You listened. You learned.

People communicate because they want to know something, even if it's what time to be ready for dinner. What do you want to know about your partner? What do you want your partner to know about you?

- Hopes and dreams?
- Feelings?
- What's important?
- What makes you hurt?
- What makes you laugh?
- What makes you feel good?
- What's most meaningful in life?
- What they want from you?

Your desire to deeply know each other, as well as what time is dinner and when the next appointment is, will keep you talking to each other. As long as you have the desire to know more about each other and to live a fulfilling life together, you'll want to share your life through words.

GIVE YOURSELVES TIME TO LEARN

As discussed in Module 1, moving in together takes your relationship to a new level. You do not have the privacy and down time from each other that you used to have. You don't have the space from each other you once had. (You will learn more about space in Module 4.)

In the last lesson, you explored assumptions. You've each formed some when you were dating. Be open to discovering that some of what you learned when dating may be different now.

When dating, you have a tendency to be on your best behavior. That can change when you are with each other more often.

CONSIDER THESE CHANGES:

1. When living together, you don't have the energy to always be on your best behavior.
 - It takes time and energy to **communicate well**. When you're tired, the tendency is to not try as hard as when you were dating.

2. **You become used to each other and aren't as polite to each other.**
 - You may begin to take each other for granted and not think you need to continue the niceties such as "please" and "thank you," or even "I love you."
3. **You think the "getting to know you" mode is over.** You forget that you are both changing and there is always something to know about each other.
 - The only time there is nothing left to know is when someone has died.

Getting to know each other takes time and effort. Give yourselves time. Don't expect that your partner is going to know everything about your wants, needs, and desires. Those may change for each of you as you age.

When both of you want to know more about each other, talking on a deep level is easier.

THE POWER OF LISTENING

The only way you can learn more about someone is to listen. Listening means that your full attention is on your partner. You're not thinking about what you have to do next. You're not even thinking about what your response will be to what they're saying.

The greatest sign of respect and the greatest motivator for someone to share is for you to listen. As you listen, they will talk. They will share their lives with you because you are demonstrating your desire to hear them with acceptance.

THE ART OF QUESTIONING

Asking questions demonstrates interest in someone. There is, however, a difference between asking questions and interrogating. You want to learn about your partner, not put them on the spot.

TRY THESE TECHNIQUES:

1. **Give your full attention to your partner.** No looking at the phone, telephone, or mail. If you need to be doing something, such as putting dinner on the table, look at your partner as much as possible.

- **If they seem reluctant to talk, ask them if they would rather talk about this later.**
 - Many people, when coming home from work, need time to decompress before they can interact meaningfully.
 - One area to learn about each other are personal preferences about when is the best time to talk.
2. **Ask open-ended questions.** These are the ones people are least likely to answer with one word. Open-ended questions invite a wider range of answers. Instead of “Did you have a good day?” you might want to ask, “What were the highlights of your day?”
 3. **Once you ask a question, give them your attention so they know you’re listening.** If they do not answer immediately, wait for a bit before trying to fill in the space. Some people take longer to answer than others.
 - Check to be sure they aren’t distracted. If they are, wait until they can give you their attention and then repeat the question.

COMMUNICATION IS A PUZZLE

There are techniques and strategies to communication. There are good times and not-so-good times to attempt to gather information. As you come to know each other, you'll learn more about what techniques work best for you and when are the best times to have heart-to-heart talks.

SUMMARY

You'll be learning about each other the rest of your lives. Establishing a good foundation for communicating will assist during those times of change. Being open and attentive, as well as asking open-ended questions at times conducive to sharing, are excellent strategies no matter how you each change.

In the next lesson, you're going to discover more differences in the ways people communicate.

Before moving on, please take a few minutes to anchor in what you've learned by answering the following reflection questions.

REFLECTION

1. When are the times you're more open to conversation with your partner?
2. What communication patterns of others irritate you the most?
3. How can you be more open to your partner in your communication patterns?

COMMUNICATION DIFFERENCES

In the last lesson you learned about the importance of listening, asking open-ended questions, and finding the right time to communicate. We also discussed some differences in the ways people communicate.

In this lesson, you are going to explore more in depth some natural differences in how people think, express themselves, and feel surrounded by people.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INTROVERSION AND EXTROVERSION

In Lesson 8, you were introduced to the concept of introverted thinkers and extroverted thinkers. Let's delve more deeply into this topic as it will help you understand the differences in yourself, your partner, and others.

Most people think of introverts as being shy and withdrawn from others. This is not correct. Understanding introverts is more complex.

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF INTROVERTS:

1. Social introverts
2. Introverted thinkers
3. Those who are both

Knowing characteristics of an introvert will assist you in understanding why they often like being alone.

CONSIDER THESE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF INTROVERTS:

1. **A social introvert needs alone time.** The more socially introverted they are the more alonetime they need.
 - Being with people, especially in groups, drains the energy from a social introvert.

To recharge, social introverts need to be alone.

- If your partner is a social introvert, they will need time apart from you. It does not have anything to do with you. They just need to spend time alone to get their energy back.
- If you are both social introverts, you'll both need space from each other. There is nothing wrong with your relationship. You simply need alone time to recharge.

2. **An introverted thinker sorts through their thoughts and feelings internally.** Even if they are the expert in a subject, they'll take a few seconds to gather their thoughts before they speak.

- Introverted thinkers are private people. They keep their inner world close to them. **When introverted thinkers share their life with you, they have handed a sacred part of themselves to you.**

3. **A person who is a social and thinking introvert may seem withdrawn from you and the world.** There's a tremendous amount of activity

happening in their quietness.

- If you're an introvert, know your needs to recharge. If you're an extrovert, know an introvert's behavior is not about you. Be adaptable and be patient.

AN INDIVIDUAL CAN BE AN EXTROVERTED THINKER, SOCIALLY EXTROVERTED, OR BOTH. CONSIDER THESE CHARACTERISTICS:

1. **A social extrovert needs people to recharge.** Being with a group recharges them. They love parties. They will strike up conversations with anyone one around. They are very social.
 - **Being alone is draining for a social extrovert.**
2. **An extroverted thinker thinks out loud.** This means they may begin their thought process with one idea and end it somewhere totally different. They're not changing their mind.

They are examining their options aloud.

- When you ask an extroverted thinker a question, they will answer immediately.

Extroverts have a difficult time understanding introverts. Introverts can find extroverts overwhelming.

TWO DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOOKING AT LIFE

Some major miscommunications occur because people look at life differently. We see it in politics, families, business, and religions. The source of the problem can often be identified as the thinker versus the feeler.

A THINKER CAN FEEL, AND A FEELER CAN THINK, BUT THEY MAKE DECISIONS DIFFERENTLY:

1. **A thinker looks at the world and makes decisions based upon rules, laws, and social norms. Right and wrong is important to them.**

2. **A feeler will make decisions based upon feelings and relationships.** It's not that right and wrong aren't important, but they're likely to take into account an individual's feelings.

The communication challenge comes when the feeler is discussing an issue from an emotional perspective and the thinker is coming from a rational perspective. When each person believes their perspective is correct, hurt feelings, confusion, and frustration can develop.

Instead of discounting the other person's viewpoint, know that their perspective can broaden your viewpoint.

In Lesson 12, you'll discover strategies you can use to ensure each of you is understanding what the other is saying.

TWO SPECIAL TYPES OF PEOPLE

Good communication requires that you access non-verbal information. The words of the message are only 20% of the message. Body language and tone of voice are most of communication.

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE AT OPPOSITE EXTREMES IN PICKING UP SOCIAL CUES:

1. **Highly sensitive people (HSP) are easily overwhelmed in situations most people consider normal.** Sudden noises, bright lights, and intense feelings can send an HSP running for cover.
 - About 20% of people identify themselves as HSP. Of these, about 70% are introverts and 30% extroverts.
 - When an HSP says they need to leave, they mean right now. They're at a point where their anxiety level is high.
 - When in conversation with an HSP, be sure they are calm and relaxed.
Communicating with an HSP when they're overwhelmed results in misunderstandings and hurt feelings for both people.
2. **Some people have difficulty picking up on social cues.** They either can't or have difficulty noticing when someone is sad, upset, or anxious.

- Their brain functions differently than most people.
- Don't take it personally when they don't notice you're upset. **You need to tell them what's going on with you emotionally.** They won't figure it out on their own.

SUMMARY

In this lesson, you have discovered how there are differences in personality which will affect how you give messages and how they are received. When you and your partner are different, it is important to take more time in communication and working to understand each other.

Now that you've laid the foundation for communication, you're going to learn about four different ways people talk to each other. Three are both unhealthy and common. There is one healthy way to communicate.

Before you go to the next lesson, anchor in this one by reflecting on the following questions.

REFLECTION

2. Are you introverted or extroverted? Why?

3. Is your partner introverted or extroverted? Explain your answer.

4. Describe a situation in which you and your partner can't seem to communicate. Based upon what you've learned in this lesson, what do you think is causing the challenge?

FOUR WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

In the last lesson, you explored the fascinating world about natural differences in the ways that people think, feel, notice social cues, and relate to the world. These differences affect the way they communicate. If you have completed the reflection exercises, you've discovered how it applies to you.

The way you communicate is the topic of this lesson. You will learn about four basic communication styles and when to use them.

A WORD ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

In the last three lessons, you learned about personal differences in temperaments and how that affects the way people relate to their world. We have not talked about cultural differences. That is an entirely different topic.

It is important to know that there are differences. For instance, in Western cultures, people are taught to look each other in the eye when speaking. If you do not, you're thought to be dishonest or not paying attention.

In Eastern cultures, it is considered rude to look people in the eye. Not looking people in the eye is considered a sign of respect and of humility. Keep this in mind if you're speaking to someone from a different culture.

FOUR WAYS TO COMMUNICATE AND WHEN TO USE THEM

If you have read about different communication styles, you've probably read the words "healthy" and "unhealthy" to describe particular ways of communicating. Rather than using those words, let's use the terms "appropriate" and "inappropriate."

An appropriate communication style achieves its goal in the given situation.

PASSIVE: NOT SAYING WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND

When you sit back and don't express your opinions, desires, or needs, you're being passive. You may not get what you want, but you also don't rock the boat.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT'S APPROPRIATE TO BE PASSIVE:

1. **You're not interested in others knowing your opinion.** Some people enjoy gathering information and learning about others.
2. **When the time just isn't right.** Certain situations may require you wait until another time to express yourself. For example, if your partner is having a bad day, you may want to hold off on relating bad news. Just ensure you do have that conversation.
3. **Expressing yourself is dangerous.** You don't want to escalate the situation. Being passive may prevent a bad situation from getting worse.

BEING PASSIVE IN YOUR COMMUNICATION OFTEN CAUSES CHALLENGES, SUCH AS:

1. If you don't speak up, others won't know what you think or want.
 - Your partner may become frustrated because they do not know what's important to you. This can negatively affect emotional intimacy.
 - Your partner may feel unappreciated or unimportant because they feel that you are not expressing yourself because you don't trust them.
2. When you don't stand up for yourself, others may take advantage of you.
 - When you project yourself as being unimportant, other people, even your partner, may think less of your needs and focus on their needs.
 - When you are passive most of the time, you reinforce within you that you aren't

important. This makes it more difficult for you to set healthy boundaries.

3. **Standing up for yourself is a skill. It is also a muscle you need to exercise.**

- When you are reluctant to stand up for yourself, fear and anxiety can prevent you from taking care of yourself.

AGGRESSIVE: THIS IS THE WAY IT IS

When you are aggressive in stating your needs or opinions, you do so in such a way that leaves no room for people to express their needs or opinions. You give off an energy which says you do not care about others.

THERE ARE TIMES YOU WANT TO EXPRESS YOURSELF IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT THE OTHER PERSON WANTS:

1. If someone is taking advantage of you, you want to tell them to stop in a no-nonsense way. People who take advantage of others rarely listen unless your message is given in an aggressive manner.
 - You may need to speak aggressively to your partner if you feel they are not paying attention to your needs.
2. When confronting a bully, you need to speak in an aggressive manner. Bullies act from a place of insecurity and fear.
 - Of course, it's important to consider the bully's reaction to you. You wouldn't want to be aggressive with someone who will respond in a physically aggressive manner.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION: THE PASSIVE WAY TO BEING HOSTILE

If you're using the passive aggressive style, you're expressing your hostility without seeming to.

IF YOU SEE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP, IT'S TIME TO HAVE A HEART-TO-HEART TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER:

1. **Saying you'll do something but "forgetting."** This is a common, and sometimes unconscious, passive-aggressive behavior.
2. **Refusing to speak when angry, also known as "the cold shoulder."** This behavior increases feelings of separation.
3. **Using sarcasm to mock or ridicule.** Although sarcasm can sometimes be funny, when used regularly it demonstrates hostility or a lack of respect for the individual.
4. **Any of the aggressive characteristics hidden in such a way that it is difficult to confront, such as:**

- Talking behind your partner's back
- Mumbling so they can hear your voice but not your words

ASSERTIVE: LETTING PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU WANT

Being assertive in your communication is the most effective way to express your needs and opinions. The next lesson is about being assertive in your communication style.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ASSERTIVE STYLE ARE:

1. Telling people in a respectful and direct manner what you want them to know
2. Stating calmly what you need
3. Expressing your opinion without putting anyone down

SUMMARY

In this lesson you've learned about the four communication styles of Passive, Aggressive, Passive-Aggressive, and Assertive. In the next lesson you'll learn a powerful method of communicating in an assertive manner with your partner.

Before you move on, please answer the following reflection questions to learn how this lesson applies to you.

REFLECTION

1. List five times you have used the Passive communication style. Was this effective?

2. List five times you have used the Aggressive communication style. Was this effective?

3. List five times you have used the Passive-Aggressive communication style. Was this effective in communicating your needs?

4. List five times you have used the Assertive communication style. Was this effective?

COMMON CHALLENGES

Congratulations! You have learned much about communication styles and ways to communicate. Keep practicing what you have learned. When something is ingrained in you, you'll have ready access to it during stressful situations.

In this chapter, you will revisit some potential challenges discussed in Module 1. Now, we will talk about how to communicate with each other about it.

THE POWER IN MONEY

Consider this: the one who has the most money, has the most power. You may not realize that, but it plays out in relationships whether you are married or not.

Some couples have challenges regarding money almost immediately. For others, the difficulty may not happen until much later, if at all.

WHEN ONE OF YOU DOESN'T DO WHAT THEY SAY THEY WILL

When one of you has gone against your agreement, it is important to sit down together and resolve the issue.

The one who violated the agreement may feel guilty and defensive. The other partner may feel violated and betrayed.

Not talking about what happened can create resentments which carry over to other areas of your relationship.

FOLLOW THIS PROCESS TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE:

1. **Set a time to talk about the situation.** You both want to be as calm as possible.
2. **Ask questions.** Ask questions calmly and be in listening mode so the other can express themselves.
3. **Share feelings.** Each of you share your feelings about what happened.
4. **What did you learn?** Share what each of you

learned from the experience.

5. **Make a plan.** Develop a new agreement or renew your commitment to your old plan.
6. **Keep your word to each other.** If it happens again, you may need a third party to assist you.

WHEN LIFE GETS DIFFICULT FOR ONE OF YOU

The primary thing to remember is that needs change and situations change.

There will be times when one of you is under more stress than the other. These are situations which require greater sensitivity and flexibility. It is important to allow your agreements to change according to each of your needs and the needs of your relationship.

The need for space and privacy may expand. This can be difficult if you do not keep the channels of communication open.

USE THESE STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN OPEN COMMUNICATION:

1. **Have a daily 5 to 10-minute check-in time.** A short connection period allows you both to know, no matter what the stress, that you are important to each other.
 - This may be as simple as, “It’s still horrible at work. I feel frustrated and angry.” The response may be, “I’m concerned about you and want to do what I can to help. Please let me know.”
 - Holding hands, a touch on the shoulder, or a hug will assist in a feeling of connectedness. **If the stress is due to an issue between the two of you, one of you may not want to touch.** Allow that space.
2. **The one who is stressed may want more or less touching and more or less space.**
 - Some people need more space when stressed. Others want closeness. **The**

person under the least stress will be the one to make allowances for the other person's needs.

THE CHALLENGES OF A BLENDED FAMILY

One of both of you may be bringing children into the family. Let's go over some very basic areas of communication in this situation.

If you both have children, you both know the demand upon your time, the emotional energy it takes, and the amazing love children bring into your life. If only one of you has children, the other may not be as aware of the depth of emotion and sacrifices involved.

If one of you doesn't have children, know that life has changed drastically and sometimes dramatically when instant parenthood has arrived. Let's look at some situations.

BE AS CLEAR AS POSSIBLE ABOUT BOUNDARIES AND ROLES FOR STEP-PARENTS AND THE CHILDREN'S OTHER PARENT:

1. **Who is the primary custodial parent and when are the children with you?**
 - If there is tension with the “other” parent, be clear about it. Sometimes the “other” parent will not be happy with a step-parent situation or a live-in partner.
2. **What is your role in discipline?** Are you allowed to set boundaries with your partner's children? Can they set boundaries with yours?
 - Children are amazing, but they can be manipulative. The parent needs to be clear with their children about respect and boundaries.
3. **What will be the responsibilities of the non-parent partner?** Be as honest as you can knowing that the situation can change, and emergencies do happen.

SUMMARY

You have a wonderful life ahead of you. No matter how compatible you are, surprises will present themselves. Communication is the key to sorting through any issue.

If one or both of you bring children into the relationship, it is crucial to keep the lines of communication open. With children, you have complexities involving their feelings about their parent's partner as well as any issues with the other parent.

Relationships being what they are, someone will become angry at some point. Just as there are different communication styles, there are different ways of expressing anger. This is the topic of the next lesson.

Before you move on, please take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions.

REFLECTION

1. What concerns you the most about

communicating with your partner?

2. How are you and your partner similar and different about managing money?

3. If children are involved, what are your concerns and how will you address them with your partner?

HANDLING ANGER

Communication is an everyday event. As you discovered in the last lesson, it's especially important during times of stress. It is also crucial when children are part of the new family.

Regardless of how good your communication is, someone will get angry at some point. In this lesson, you will learn the real reason people get angry, the different ways people respond to anger, and the differences in how people handle their own anger.

THE TRUE CAUSE OF ANGER

Anger is the result of loss - it's the 2nd stage of the grief cycle. Most people think of the grief cycle being related to death, a tragedy, or the end of relationship. You can experience grief at any loss, such as a job, money, things, or even safety.

When you and your partner are angry, think about what you lost. This is where you begin your conversation.

CONSIDER THESE IDEAS:

1. **There are additional feelings hiding beneath the anger.** These are the feelings to discuss when you are engaged in Reflective Listening.
 - **Fear is often hiding beneath anger.** Fear has you feeling weak and powerless while anger has you feeling strong.
 - Sadness can also hide beneath anger. Sadness has usually been present for a while before anger surfaces.
 - Jealousy can also be beneath the anger. Jealousy, however, is more connected to the fear of losing something or someone.
2. **Anger is a strong emotion. Treat it gently.**
 - You may need some cooling-off time before you sit down and discuss your anger. **Just be sure that you do sit down and talk about it.**

THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE COPE WITH THEIR OWN ANGER:

1. Some people express their anger by exploding.

- Anger can produce fear if the other person is afraid of being harmed.
- If you are fearful of being hurt, go to a place of safety.
- Many people who express their anger in an explosive manner are often no longer angry afterwards. If this is your partner, you might want to let them vent as long as you feel safe.

2. The other extreme to exploding is holding your anger within you. You bury it inside until something forces the anger to break through.

- For some, their anger eventually becomes explosive.
- For others, their anger can turn inwards to depression and even self-harm.

As you and your partner come to know each other, you will come to recognize the signs that you're **angry**. As soon as you recognize those signs, it is time to set an appointment with each other to use Reflective Listening to sort through the emotion.

THERE ARE ALSO DIFFERENCES IN HOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THEIR ANGER, SUCH AS:

1. "I'm going to tell everyone about what you did to me." Some people do need to vent to someone else so that they will not say something to their partner they can't take back.
 - The best person to vent to is a third-party person you can trust completely. You do not want your relationship difficulties spread across the world like feathers in a strong breeze.
 - If you need to vent, remember that the people you vent to do not know when everything is okay. If these are friends and family members, be sure and keep them updated so they don't hold onto their anger at your partner.

2. **“I’m not going to tell anyone about my anger.”**
They often do not tell themselves about their anger. Remember the Johari Window? They hide their anger in the “unknown to self/known to others” window or the “unknown to everyone” window.
 - When you are not aware of your own anger, you can’t talk about the anger. You can, however, discuss with your partner the other feelings which are present. **The anger will often come to the surface as you’re talking about the other feelings.**

WHEN DO YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR ANGER?

As important as anger is to discuss, you and your partner could be at odds as to when to talk about it.

Some people need to cool off before they discuss their anger. They may need from an hour to a day before they are able to discuss it. If this person is forced to sort everything out immediately, this can increase their frustration and anger.

IMPLEMENT THESE STEPS WHEN THE TWO OF YOU ARE AT ODDS AS TO WHEN TO TALK ABOUT THE SOURCE OF THE ANGER:

1. **Set an appointment with each other for the discussion.** This may be difficult for the person who wants to talk about things right now, but it will relieve some of the inner tension because they know exactly when they can talk about it.
2. **If you want to talk right now, you will benefit from some activities to relieve the inner stress.**
 - Take as long as you need for some deep breathing.
 - You may find some relief from your inner tension by journaling. **Getting the words on paper will also help you sort through your own feelings and be prepared for the upcoming discussion.**
 - You can also take a walk, read a book, listen to music, watch a movie, or find another way to distract yourself until it is time.

It is important that the two of you sort through the causes of the anger. You may want to ignore what happened, but that can weaken your relationship.

SUMMARY

Anger is a sign of loss. People express their anger in different ways. They may explode, withdraw, stuff it, or even deny that it happened. The important step is to set aside time to sort it all out, so it doesn't fester and weaken your relationship.

In the next lesson, you will learn that what people think they are upset about isn't it at all. You will learn some techniques to discover what the true source of your emotional discomfort is.

Before you go on, please take a few minutes to reflect on what you've explored in this lesson.

REFLECTION

1. What do you do when you are angry? Do you hold it in, scream and yell, post everything on social media, or ignore it all?

2. How have you and your relationship been affected by the way you handle anger?
3. Write out what you would like you and your partner to do when you're angry.

WHAT'S THE REAL REASON FOR YOUR ANGER?

In the discussion on anger, you learned that other feelings are often under the anger. Keeping feelings hidden takes energy away from the energy needed to have an intimate, passionate, and amazing relationship.

In this lesson, you will discover ways to unearth what's at the root of your anger and what you can do about it.

YOU ONLY THOUGHT YOU LEFT HOME

YOU ABSORBED THE BELIEFS AND FAMILY PATTERNS YOU UNKNOWINGLY BROUGHT TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS:

1. **Who did what jobs?** People have a tendency to expect the woman to do what their mom did and the man to do what their father did.
 - It doesn't matter if one of the parents was absent. **Adult children form expectations of their partners based upon their parents.**
 - If you and your partner are the same gender, you still carry expectations of the relationship based upon what happened in your family.
2. **What were the family customs and traditions?** People bring the familiarity of their traditions with them.

- Your new family, you and your partner, want to establish new traditions. You may each want to bring some “old” traditions with you.
3. **Each partner also brings with them negative or unhealthy beliefs and behavior patterns.**
- This may mean having unreasonable expectations. You can't expect your partner to relate to you in the way one or both of your parents did.
 - **When a parental behavior pattern caused pain when you were a child, if your partner exhibits that pattern, the pain could surface.** This leads to misinterpretations of what your partner said or did.

The average family had good times and not so good times. Be aware that both left an imprint upon you which can be triggered by something your partner says or does. **The key is to become aware of what triggers you.**

AND YOU THOUGHT THAT RELATIONSHIP WAS OVER

Just as you carry imprints from your family, you carry imprints from past relationships. When a past partner exhibited the worst aspect of one of your parents, the imprint deepened.

If one parent abandoned the family, and your past partner abandoned you, you could form an expectation of abandonment. This can result in misinterpreting things your partner may want, such as a night out alone with friends.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR AWARENESS

Discovering the source of emotional reactions requires a willingness to discover things hidden within you. Back to the Johari Window, you would be enlarging the blocks which are currently hidden from you.

Some of what you discover could be painful but know that you can release that pain which was festering. **Once you are aware of what is happening, you can make decisions on how to respond rather than reacting out of pain.**

DISCOVERY EXERCISES

Some people prefer to do this type of self-discovery alone.

For these exercises, the old-fashioned way is best. You need paper and something to write with. The reason not to use a computer is because your brain responds differently when your hand moves upon the paper. Something happens which unlocks your subconscious mind more easily.

PLEASE WRITE YOUR ANSWERS:

1. **List all the ways that you are like each parent.** If other family members raised you, use them for this exercise.
 - List things you like and dislike about yourself. List those things people have said, “You’re just like your dad,” even if you don’t agree.
 - Next to each characteristic, jot a note as to how you see that in your relationship.
 - Put a checkmark next to the characteristics which you see in your partner.

2. **On separate sheets of paper, write the most common challenges in your relationship.** Just one challenge per page.
 - On the page with each challenge, write out how your parents or primary caregiver would respond to the challenge. Are you and your partner acting as one of your parents would?
 - What upsets you the most about the particular challenge you're having? How is this similar to what happened in your family?

You can always ask someone else to assist you with these exercises. They will see things in you that you do not see. That can be tough, but it will also be enlightening.

THE POWER OF CLEARING EXERCISES

Clearing exercises assist you and your partner in understanding what is going on with each of you. You're sitting across from each other, having eye contact. Just as in Reflective Listening, one person speaks and the other listens.

ALTHOUGH THE CLEARING EXERCISE IS SIMPLE, IT MAY TAKE A FEW TIMES TO FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THE FLOW.

1. "I feel..."

- This is where you take responsibility for your feelings.
- "I feel hurt..."

2. "... when you..."

- You clearly state the event in a clear and calm manner.

- **“... when you didn’t remember to pick up my clothes at the cleaners.”**

3. **“This reminds me of when...”**

- What does this remind you of from your childhood? If you have difficulty with this, recall the incident you are remembering and ask yourself how old you felt when it happened. Once you have the age, recall what was happening in your family at that time.
- **“This reminds me of all the promises my parents made and never kept.”**

Use the clearing process as often as needed. Use Reflective Listening if your partner isn’t clear on what you said.

SUMMARY

Your reaction to things your partner says and does is almost always based upon the past. By using some reflection tools, you both can come to a better understanding about what is behind your reactions.

In the next lesson, you'll explore how to adapt and support each other as you and your partner both grow and change.

Before you move on to the next lesson, please take a few minutes to answer the following reflection questions.

REFLECTION

1. List 5 ways you're like each parent or primary caregiver.
2. Recall the last major disagreement you and your partner had. List three ways you reacted like you did when growing up.

3. In that disagreement, list three ways your partner reacted like one or both parents when you were growing up.

NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIP AS YOU GROW AND CHANGE

After the lessons on children, money, friendships, and personal space, you may wonder what more about needs can you learn about. Every lesson has been about needs and the importance of talking about them with your partner.

This lesson isn't about the most obvious needs. It's about the needs you discover as you enjoy your relationship and personal growth and development.

LIFE INVOLVES GROWTH

People have the mistaken idea that developmental growth ends in the 20s. It does not. Your brain continues growing and developing, resulting in changes in the way you view the world.

Relationships are a major source of growth. As the two of you navigate the joys as well as challenges of life, you learn about yourself personally and about your partner. Going back to the Johari Window, the box about what you know about yourself, and what others know grows.

A HAPPY RELATIONSHIP SUPPORTS YOU

When you relate to each other with honesty and respect, you grow closer. You are also happier with yourself. Your partner's support gives you the opportunity to be comfortable with yourself. Your support of your partner does the same for your beloved.

LOOK AT THESE WONDERFUL AREAS IN WHICH YOU'LL GROW:

1. **You learn to trust yourself and be comfortable with who you are.** When the one you love is continually supporting you, self-doubt diminishes.
 - Self-doubt can overwhelm you unless you have someone you trust supporting you. **Your partner will tell you when your self-doubt is not based upon reality.**
 - With love and support, you trust yourself more and more.
2. **You challenge each other to be a better person.** Your good habits will call each other to be your best self.
 - Habits are ingrained in your brain. You “do” those habits without thinking. **Because of your love for one another, your good habits challenge each other to be the best you.**
3. **You learn to be dependable.** Because you each

depend upon each other, you strengthen your ability to be dependable.

- Because of your love for each other, you want to please your beloved. You learn what it is like to be depended upon and the positive feeling of being dependable.

4. **You learn more about yourself.** You discover talents you didn't know you had.

- Your partner supports you in your discovery. With their support, you will have the strength and courage to explore new areas.

YOU EACH ARE CHANGING

Healthy people grow and change. Their understanding of themselves, the world, and their relationships change as they themselves gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of themselves. This means you are both growing.

It is possible for you and your partner to grow in different directions. This is not a reason for concern as long as your relationship is based upon trust, honesty, and consistent and respectful communication.

Your growth can be emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. These changes affect the core of who you are and your perception of how you want to live in the world, including in your relationship.

Internal growth can be confusing for you and your partner. You'll want to explore with each other what is happening.

CONSIDER THESE IDEAS:

1. **Be clear about how you're feeling and what these internal changes mean.**
 - Changes can range from a desire to change jobs, professions, or receive more education to exploring new spiritual interests.
 - The first step is for you to be clear within yourself about what is happening. Journaling is an excellent resource to sort through your ideas and feelings.
 - Part of having an intimate and powerful relationship is sharing with your partner the wonderful and sometimes confusing internal changes you are experiencing. Be clear about your thoughts and feelings.

2. **Know the difference between what you want versus what you need.**
 - If you have a strong desire to help children who have cancer, do you need to be a doctor, or will volunteering at a cancer hospital satisfy the desire?
 - If your desire is to explore spirituality, do you need to join or change religions or will taking various workshops be sufficient?
3. **Taking into account your family's needs and responsibilities and satisfying your own requires flexibility of all parties.**
 - Everyone involved has their own wants and needs. To accommodate everyone's needs requires the ability to be flexible mentally and emotionally as well as in concrete situations such as schedules.
 - Communication is crucial.
4. **Know when to say "yes" and when to say "no."**

There are times when the answer is a clear "yes" or "no."

- Be clear in expressing your “yes” or “no.” Clarity involves your feelings as well as the “why” of your response.
- Many times, the answer is, “Let’s investigate further and see what we can do.” Leave yourself open to possibilities. When you give a definite “no,” minds close to exploring options.

Change can be both exciting and scary. As long as you’re alive, internal growth keeps life exciting and fun. Your mutual growth will keep your relationship exciting. Sharing with each other your feelings as you grow produces an intimacy you never knew was possible when you first came together.

SUMMARY

No matter how old you are, as you live your life, you gain experiences and open yourself to change. This change can range from a deepening of awareness of yourself and your partner to the inner drive to change jobs, locations, and even professions.

Being clear with yourself and your partner deepens your relationship.

In the next lesson, you will explore how to know what is important to you, your partner, and the two of you as a couple. Before you move on, please take a few minutes to reflect upon what you have learned in this lesson.

REFLECTION

1. Have you considered the possibility that you or your partner can change in significant ways, such as interests, spiritual desires, professions, wanting to move, and more? What feelings or questions come up in your mind when you consider this?
2. How well do you handle change? What would you need if your partner said they wanted to significantly change something in their life which would also affect you and the family?
3. Write a few sentences about how you have changed from the time you were in high school to now. From what you have written, imagine areas in which you might continue to change and grow.

DEFINING WHAT'S IMPORTANT

In the last lesson, you explored the fact that everyone changes. Part of life is adapting to these changes. The exciting part of change is that you know it will happen, you just do not know how it will happen or in what areas.

In this lesson, you will explore what is most important to you. Some of these will be tangibles, such as how you spend your time together. Others are intangibles, such as respect.

SOME AREAS OF EXPLORATION

Having come this far, you have gained insight into yourself and your partner. **If the two of you have delayed having a heart-to-heart discussion about what's important to you, now's the time.**

Here are examples of topics for discussion. Some topics may be important to one of you but not the other. If one is not important to either of you, then you're all set in that area.

IMPORTANT TOPICS:

1. **Is monogamy important to both of you?** You may have an assumption regarding monogamy, but your partner might not.
 - Earlier you explored the expectations of friendship. You may have discussed monogamy at that time. If not, take time to discuss your expectations.
 - This is also a good time to discuss expectations about pornography. No? Yes? If yes, what are you both comfortable with?
2. **Do you want to have children together?** In the lesson on children, you explored challenges when you bring children into the relationship. Do you want to have children of your own?
 - Same gender couples need to explore

whether adoption, surrogacy, or sperm bank donors are agreeable to you both. Women, of course, need to discuss if one will become pregnant.

- Different gender couples may also explore the same issues as well as whether or not the female will become pregnant.
- Religious beliefs may play a role. Be clear with each other on the various questions which can arise.

3. **Do you have expectations regarding visiting with extended family?** Some people are very close to their extended family and others are not.

- Discuss your relationships with your family. Do you want to visit them often, just once in a while, or stay as far away as possible?
- Often, one partner ends up buying gifts, cards, and staying in contact with both extended families. Be clear with each other about who has what responsibility.

4. **If not married, do you intend to get married?** It's very painful when one of you thinks you're headed to marriage and the other has no intention of doing so.
 - Some people want to get married for religious reasons, others for social reasons, and still others for legal reasons.
 - If marriage is important to one and not the other, you may need to reevaluate your relationship.
5. **List other areas of discussion important to one or both of you.**

As you discuss the important expectations in your life, put them in writing. Time can change your memory of what was said. There are healthy couples who have a conversation about their lives together on their anniversary.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE VIOLATED

You are two imperfect people and mistakes will be made even with the best of intentions. What will you do when that happens? It depends upon what was violated, doesn't it? Be aware of what your non-negotiables are.

THERE ARE TWO COMMON NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR MOST PEOPLE:

1. Affairs
2. Physical violence

How the situation is handled may depend upon whether or not you're married. Many people have a religious belief that marriage is for life no matter what happens. If that is your belief, you might need the help of a third party to learn how to manage what has happened.

KNOW WHAT'S IMPORTANT AND WHAT'S LESS SO

Compromise and flexibility are part of any relationship. What areas are you willing to be flexible about? Are you going to leave your partner because you discover you are doing more than your share of the housework... or buying most of the family gifts... or...?

Be clear about what is most important to you. If you find it difficult to be flexible, perhaps you would benefit from discussing with a third party why that is true for you. The lack of flexibility can relate to control issues because you do not feel safe.

If you find yourself being too flexible, as in you feel taken advantage of, use your Reflective Listening skills. If that doesn't help, an objective third party may be needed.

SUMMARY

It is impossible to cover everything that is important to discuss. You have a beginning point for discussion in this lesson and throughout this course. **Know what is important to you and to your partner.** That makes life fun, exciting, and keeps the passion going.

Before closing, as you process all of the information covered thus far, please answer the following reflection questions:

REFLECTION

1. Make a list of topics you have not yet discussed with your partner but believe are important.
2. What is your ideal of your relationship with your partner's family and their relationship with your family?
3. What are the non-negotiables in your relationship? Why are these important to you?

4. What are your partner's non-negotiables? Why are these important?



