

Couples Handout

Do you even like me?

In every relationship, there is work to be done. Whether or not we stay together often depends on the above question.

Let's back up. **During courtship, we created positive feelings** and built a friendship. I got to know you, expressed gratitude, pointed out all the things we have in common and what I liked about you. It devolved into pointing out the things you need to change because I didn't like. We became focused on the negative instead of the positive.

Want a better relationship?

Do both **draining the swamp** (put the past in the past once we have acknowledged it and figured out how to heal it) **and building a friendship**. I long for good feelings that come with a good connection and I protest when I am missing that. That is often the root of the negative energy in the relationship.

Gotta do both eliminating the negative and building the positive for long-term healthy and satisfying results. There are plenty of people who I don't have a beef with, but we are not friends because we have not built a friendship. We are not enemies or opponents, just not friends because that takes work that has not been done for a plethora of reasons.

Am I committed to the relationship? If not, discussion is over. We cannot build friendship without a commitment. Will we sacrifice for one another?

Let's be friends- Getting to know you

We get to know each other

Ask questions, tell me who you are

Let me get to know you.

I want to know you and let you know me (definition of intimacy)

Who are you?

What do you prefer to have in your life so that you feel safe with me?

What things make you feel loved, lovable and connected?

What do you value?

What makes you tick?

What do you want from life, from a relationship, from us?

What dreams do you have about your future and our future?

What retirement thoughts are there?

Keep asking questions (metaphorically- keep updating the software on a regular basis or it will stop working)

Emotional connection

Gottman talks about **rituals of connection**- - Talk it through and negotiate what you need and how you need it, frequency, duration, and why. Allow your partner to understand you.

Can you figure out 5 times a day for guaranteed connection?

When you leave in the morning, do we hug, kiss, talk about the day for 5-10 minutes and have a sense of what is happening in each other's lives?

What is our ritual for when we see each other after work?

Ritual for dinner and after dinner?

Ritual for bedtime?

When you have **guaranteed connection on a regular basis**, you follow the connection. You talk about and negotiate what you want with physical affection, non sexual physical touch, love languages and the like. Gottman suggests that you talk about how you would like to show affection and how you would like to receive affection. Talk about how you grew up with giving and receiving affection. Talk about how you would like to do that with the children as well.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness to your partner- how often do you want to connect and why?

Do you notice when your partner reaches out to connect?

How do you respond?

Practice doing what you want and then practice doing what your partner wants.

Practice doing both and being flexible to get needs met.

Do you notice what your partner needs?

Do you help them meet their needs?

Do you say that is on them and they are on their own?

Sue Johnson talks about being able to rely on the partner and knowing that your feelings matter to them.

Be direct, with tact.

This part of the relationship is not working for me. I need this...

"I am grieving our friendship. I miss the connection. I need to connect with you."

"I am telling myself that you do not want to connect with me and that story hurts. I hope I am wrong in my story."

Some needs that couples routinely ignore:

Adventure- I enjoy building our bond through exploring our world together. I love traveling with you, even for a walk.

Fun- instead of complaining that we never have fun anymore, consider saying, “I would like to do something fun together this weekend. Here are the things that I am thinking about. Which sounds the best to you?”

Routine- I love that we are building a life together. I feel like it is a place of peace. I would like more well-roundedness, as well.

Sexual connection-

“Remember when we.... Let’s do that again. I felt so connected to you when we did that.”

“What I liked best in our early courtship was _____. Let’s do more of that whenever we can. That really helps me to have something we can look forward to. It helps me feel close.”

“I enjoy how sensual you are. You help me move out of just being in my mind too much and being in my body, my senses. Not just sexually, but that is especially wonderful.”

“I like taking the big risks for big rewards. Love is a big reward. What can we do to risk loving each other more deeply?”

Learning about you- “Taking in information helps me bond with you.”

Safety- “I like how you can calm me down. I know you will have my back and emotionally and physically protect me or help me recover. I feel safe with you.”

Play “I love being silly and laughing with you. The comedy club, the movies, sending memes and looking at how absurd life is. It reassures me when you “Get” me.”

“I do think we need to work on having fun and playing. Just draining the negative doesn’t mean that good stuff starts up again.”

“I so appreciate when you do nice things for me. It makes me feel cared for and special to you.” Gottman would say to build a **culture of appreciation**.

Point system - I already know what you want!! (Yet, here we are)

Intentionally create what you want- You help me feel terrific about myself and about life

Reduce the negative:

Not complaining about what we don’t do

“I can do that “

Not snarky responses- drain the negativity

Understand my point before you even attempt to prove me wrong. Why are you trying to prove me wrong?

We would never directly say:

“I don’t need to hear your perspective to blow you off“

“You are not worth listening to”

“My point is important and your opinion means nothing to me”

“I am (always) right and you are always wrong“

“What you have to say doesn’t matter “

Those are what we are communicating when we can’t listen to our partner.

Is that what we intended to convey? That question can be helpful. I am not making an assumption unless I check it out.

Can you “get” why your partner feels hurt and not safe by these meta messages?

Better Management of Conflict

Listening and connecting precedes “correction “

Constructive conflict- can we do this and feel safe?

Postpone persuasion until you can present my entire position to my satisfaction- (not simply active listening)

Assumption of similarity (versus fundamental attribution error- my mistake is never as bad as your mistake)

Sermon on the mount- see negative traits in myself- you have my negative traits- we’re similar to each other. When I see a positive in myself am I able and willing to see that trait in each other?

Humanize each other. When we dehumanize each other we make them undeserving of human dignity and rights and decency.

“I can’t listen when you are attacking me.”

“You have responsibility for this as well.” Is a hard concept to tell your partner. Talk about how to convey this to them in a way they can best receive. Do it before you have a conflict, you can anticipate needing this.

Avoid hurtful statements, and repair quickly if you goof up:

“I can never satisfy you!”

Or “here’s how we can make each other happy because that’s what we want from this.”

Be fair- “That is not fair to come at me like that and not expect me to respond- As if you are telling me, “let me smack you with no consequences””

Continually calm self during conflict to have the best chances of healthy conflict

Set a time limit- 15 minutes to do talker/listener- then take a 30 minute break from that topic and maybe from each other-no matter what. Get point across- in 5 minutes- think about your deepest point and how you can let your specific audience know calmly, in a way that they can hear it. No blame, accusations, criticism and use “need” language

Remember to take turns

Model I statements

When you start the discussion with an *I statement and mention your feelings and needs, it can stay a discussion instead of turning into an argument or fight.*

Start with “ I feel “—— (“feeling” list or menu from internet -no “spewing” of emotion)

About——

I need —— (needs list or menu)

Practice doing this. Multiple reps

Gottman refers to I statements as “Softened startup” which are more successful starters than the ones that have harsh start up

Examples of Softened start up:

Cooking

“I feel hurt About missing dinner tonight. You usually cook for both of us and tonight you cooked for just you.

I need to know that my needs are important to you.”

“I feel sad about you going out with the boys to dinner and not telling me. The plan was that we’d eat together so I could see everyone before my second job. You are such a considerate person to all your friends and family and the story in my head is that I don’t matter to you. I need to know that me working that second job is worth missing out on family time. I need more connection and the ability to predict what is happening. “

“I feel resentful about the dinner tonight. You told me that it was your turn to prepare dinner. I asked if you needed help or wanted me to get anything from the grocery store. You said no, then at 8 pm said you weren’t going to make dinner after all.

I need to eat and to be able to rely on you to follow through on what you say or communicate earlier.”

Examples of Softened start up:

Sex

“ I feel sad

About connecting with you sexually. I’m feeling lonely and having a pity party.

I need predictable connection with you and I miss your touch. I need to know you want to touch, that you find me desirable.”

“ I feel discouraged

About sex and what happened. We got along great all week and you mentioned that tonight you were in the mood. We made sure you had some alone time and felt rested

while I took care of the house and kids, then you were not in the mood and didn't communicate that til bedtime.

I need you to understand me and how my brain works and what it does to me when you say something and do something different."

" I feel embarrassed

About sex. I talked about my fantasy and I didn't think it was out there. Your reaction didn't feel good to me.

I need to know you will love me and listen and even validate - without having to agree to do it."

Examples of Softened start up:

Money

"I feel scared about how much we owe on our credit card.

I need a measure of safety and security in my bank account. I need to have a plan for paying it down and I need reassurance that we are on the same team the same page even when we don't see eye to eye."

"I feel embarrassed that we made this much money and spent more than we made.

I need to stick to a budget a plan and know that we can make it on less than we bring in."

"I feel scared that our account is so low.

I need reassurance that we will talk about the budget regularly until we figure out how to save more."

Examples of Softened start up:

Chores

"I feel irritated. We agreed on chores and you have not done your chores the way you agreed.

I need to be on the same page with the agreement. Either we agree and we do it that way or we change our agreement."

"I feel resentful

About the amount of work you expect me to do. You work at work, just like I do. When you come home we both are tired and don't want to do more. I still do my chores and I'm seeing that you don't.

I need you to speak up about needing help with chores or step up and do them even when you don't feel like it."

You try

" I feel "—— (feeling menu no spewing)

About——
I need —— (menu)

Examples of Softened start up:

You Try
In laws

“ I feel “—— (feeling menu no spewing)
About——
I need —— (menu)

“ I feel “—— (feeling menu no spewing)
About——
I need —— (menu)

“ I feel “—— (feeling menu no spewing)
About——
I need —— (menu)

Practice doing this. Multiple reps...

Ready for a challenge?

Write down the 5-10 most common arguments you have and do some writing about them using feelings and needs language.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

Extra Credit

Try using these phrases in your conversations when there is conflict:

“The story in my head is, right or wrong ”

“My subjective reality is, not that there aren’t other alternatives, ”

“My perspective, and I know you have a different take on this,…”

“My opinion is probably different from yours and that is okay with me.”

“My point of view”

You are signaling that your perspective or point of view is only one option (with your words).

How you say it is key

Often the person no longer feels compelled to defend themselves when you use this language. They don’t see themselves as attacked.

Thank you for taking the time to do this. This is what counseling reinforces for couples. Counseling is half the battle, reinforcing it and making sure it sticks is part 2. If you are not already in counseling, give the Office Manager a call. Michelle 585.544.5342