

# Couples Handout

## What Patterns Do We Notice?

### **There are obvious patterns and subtle ones.**

There are many options and this is not all-inclusive. Once you notice a pattern, you can do something about it. It is a good thing to notice that you have a pattern.

What is our pattern?

“Smart people know answers, brilliant people know questions “

**What is our most frequent style of argument?**

**What is the root cause of that style and/or pattern?**

### **Common answers:**

I refuse to do my part of the work in the house

I don't do the personal work necessary for a healthy relationship

My anxiety is out of control and I can't tolerate my feelings that the relationship brings

I blame my partner

I overaccommodate people

I put the needs of the kids before the needs of the relationship

I spend too much

I control other people

I refuse to give in to you

I regularly do power plays

I am unhappy with myself, so I project my unhappiness on them and attack my partner with criticism on a regular basis

I have expectations about my partner, myself and my relationship that are not based in reality

I regularly jump to conclusions

I look for problems and find them even if they don't exist

I have multiple trauma responses that I choose to ignore

My depression affects us profoundly and I can't seem to heal

I am still living in the past relationships- childhood, previous romantic relationships instead of living in the present

I get sarcastic with my partner then I blame them for my behavior

I complain endlessly and expect my partner to stay positive

I don't listen and I am aware the message that communicates to my partner

I don't change or grow after a mistake

I am not true to my word. I don't follow through on what I said I would do

I use people

I cheat

I lie

My conscience doesn't speak up when I have done something wrong

I lack integrity more than I'd like to admit

I attack

I don't compromise

I call names

I hold the floor and fill the room with words, so my partner can't say anything

I am not attuned to my partner

I don't see us as a team

I am selfish and unwilling to address it

I know I need help and I procrastinate or kick the can down the road

I make every discussion about me

I feel needy

I am too quiet

I never express my preferences or needs

I pull away more than is healthy

I withdraw too much

I push too much

I can't stand to be alone

I know sometimes agreeing to disagree is the best result and I struggle with stopping talking about it

I am like a bull in a China shop

My emotions are not in my control

I speak without considering my audience

I am belligerent, hostile and aggressive towards my partner

I am judgmental

I have not taken the time to work on my anger

I overthink everything

I can be inconsiderate of others

I like to debate instead of talk

I hold everything inside

I drink too much

I'm too serious

I'm messy

Unorganized

*Take inventory of your contribution to the pain in the relationship*

## Look at, as a couple, how you argue:

Is there room for improvement?

Which statements resonate with you?

We know a lot about each other

We know each other's goals and dreams

We are friends

We fight fair

We have integrity between word and action

We express emotions instead of spew them

We often do healthy Compromise

Attack- defense is becoming a thing of the past

Withdrawing from the conflict in a healthy way is part of our relationship

We Avoid topics that are not worth (choose your battles)

We do Protest polka- that is Sue Johnson's phrase for protesting that someone is not loving you properly instead of just being direct and asking for what you need

We have looked at the issue of Bidding poorly and made more effective bids our norm

We have talked through what we need when there are feelings of Abandonment

We have addressed what to do when our partner is Not listening

We have a system in place to break through the issue of Not talking

We agree that we will not start a statement with "But..."

We agree that we will not respond to our partner with the word "But..." because nothing good happens next

We are able and willing to talk about deep subjects within the relationship

We are able to do healthy conflict and If not, we are pro active and learn better ways

After a difficult discussion, we are able to own our faults and improve

We can accept influence from each other

I can Take on the role of other person and get your point across

We can express feelings and perspective until the partner agrees that you get it

We are able to create better outcomes through negotiation

We can Translate our respective pain into our personal needs

When my feelings get the better of me, I work on my trigger (I made a trigger list so I can refer to it and grow it and do the work) and work with the wound that was revealed by the trigger

List 10 triggers (need a prompt? See list of needs and see which ones are not met)

We can both identify our wounds

We regularly do work to sit with the feelings and learn from our wounds

Instead of Avoiding feelings, we Witness them

Instead of Escalating feelings, we witness them and let them evaporate on their own

We accept responsibility for our own healing-

We know how many reps we need and will do what is necessary to heal?

We hold ourselves to account on both the Quality of reps and Quantity of reps

## Pattern related to attack

### Goal:

*Interrupt cycle of attack defend- not solve (at this juncture)*

### **Problem Under attack :**

I'm not thinking

I'm not funny or playful

I'm never open to be attacked

I don't have mixed feelings about being attacked and I need to have those

Let you know about me- you want me to be vulnerable when you are attacking me

5 yr old me want s to speak for "team Don" when 21 yr old could or 16 or 40 yr old

Flooding happens

General alarm -cortisol is released and takes awhile to break down, rendering me incapable of thinking clearly for a bit

### **Take the time away to calm** (30 minutes to 3 hours or so)

Self Calming Methods

List what you use to regulate emotions when taking time away

1

2

3

4

5

We know how to contain emotions and how to reduce our pulse, to regulate

We know how to do 4, 7, 8 breathing

Want to buy a pulse oximeter for home use

### **Reminders when taking time away:**

I remind myself that we have (and often use) a Structure to have a more constructive conversation

We say to each other, "Tell me about your needs"

I know better than to criticize when I go back to discuss this. "You always criticize me about... (that is me, telling you about you and your behavior- let's reduce that to never again) healthy " that hurt when you said—/“

We have the expectation of no criticism or blame or persuasion - goal is understanding first

We are focused on meeting needs, ours, mine, theirs, for example "You want to be heard and understood"

I ask myself if I am calm enough to be responsive or if I need more time

I remind myself that my partner Will be there for me

I remind myself that my partner does care about me

I assume the best about my partner

I look at my own contribution and how I failed to respond or failed to bid successfully

**I look at the following questions when I have time away:**

How did you nurse your grievance?

What story did you tell yourself?

Did you check it out?

Are you creating a victim story?

How can you change how you express your needs (BIDS)?

Does expressing my hurt equal expressing healthy vulnerability?

What hurt about this?

**I look at my contribution to this:**

Am I being fair in my thinking and behavior?

You made a move- I felt offended

You didn't make a move- I felt offended

You held me- I felt offended

You didn't hold me- I felt offended

Was there a win in there for my partner?

**Interrupting a pattern:**

It is not the behavior that creates feelings- you broke my temporary expectations for that particular situation- it is the story about the behavior.

Instead of blaming- ask for needs to be met.

Interrupt an old pattern-"We have a structure for that. Let's try it; we might find it helpful."

Try not to move into what they did, instead what I felt. I am telling you about me- allowing us to be closer with emotional intimacy, through vulnerability.

Easier to say "I am angry" and focus on your offense vs "I felt sad, hurt, disappointed, lonely" and own your version of the story **as a version** not "the truth"

I realize that I don't "do feelings " or know how

It is my choice-I can define their reality or accuse them or express feelings. My choice has a powerful impact. I want better results.

**Am I stuck in this pattern:**

Are you attracted to me?

If I question that, how do I feel?

Do you like me?

If I question that, I feel---

Where else might those feelings be coming from? I'm blaming the relationship for my feelings but it is not fair or accurate to do that.

Can you accept that there are different perspectives, opinions, points of view and realities? You are less likely to have a satisfying relationship or sex life with all or nothing thinking.

The world is a hard place- we need significant validation- more than most people realize. Validation and building up, reminding who they are... we get beaten down a bunch!

If you are not in counseling yet, what are you waiting for? I formally invite you to come in for counseling. I invite you to call Michelle, the Office Manager, 585.544.5342 have a conversation about the practicalities and make an appointment.

***Haven't you suffered long enough?***