Year One Post Divorce: Or Dating in your 50s for the Newly Single

Intro: Many of these ideas would also be applicable to those dating in their 40s, as well, but we are focusing on dating after your 50s.

What do you do after you are divorced and you are ready to move on? My suggestion is that you ask yourself a whole bunch of good questions, because, as they say, smart people know the answers, brilliant people know the questions.

In the 12 Step programs, like AA, the fourth of the 12 steps is the inventory. “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory,” can sound intimidating, but it prepares you to answer the questions that need to be answered. If you do not know your strengths and weaknesses, if you are not self-aware, you are going to cause a great deal of pain for others and hurt yourself in the process.

Day 1

Are you someone who trashes your ex? Do you tattle or do you tell? Do you acknowledge the rough patches and learn from your role or are you telling their bad deeds so that you sound innocent? Are you trying to come to terms with what happened or do you just want them to look bad? When you are dating, do you think the new person really wants to be the support group? If you have emotional baggage, or unfinished business, if you cannot stop talking about your ex, blaming your ex, you are not emotionally ready to start dating. You may start dating, you are just making life worse for all involved.

When you have taken inventory, let go of the grudges, faced the losses, acknowledged the feelings and finished the feelings, you are in much better shape and increase your chances of having a successful relationship. Many people rush that process because they want to escape their own pain. They don’t want to be alone. They are afraid they are unlovable and need to prove that someone can love them. They might be horny or just need companionship. Why would you force a relationship, rather than allow one to develop, if you had faith in yourself?

Spend the necessary time by yourself, but use the time wisely. Don’t bingewatch tv, or distract yourself just with work or busyness. Get to know yourself, your likes and dislikes. Become more self aware. Work on your weaknesses and become who you are. Look at your purpose in life and why you are here. Allow time to get to know yourself all the way and make friends with yourself and let go of the past hurts. Heal those wounds. When you find yourself triggered, rather than bring those into the next relationship, consider getting rid of them by healing them. Your love will wait for you if it wants a healthy relationship.

Day 2

Antonio Pascual Leone- in a TedTalk, suggests that healing requires “not just time” but some work. When we have unfinished business, are stuck, we need to go all the way through the feelings until our business is finished. Feel the feelings and let them work their way out of you or they weigh you down.

He reminds us that it takes work to heal the wounds even if you are the one who initiated it. You don’t sleep it off like a hangover, you feel the feelings.

“Isn’t it totally different for everyone?” No, actually, healing is a well-defined process, a universal process that lead to success.

It hurts to face our pain, so we lean in or we avoid and get stuck. We learn to tolerate the pain or we avoid it, but it doesn’t magically go away. What pain are you avoiding? What truth about yourself would you rather people not know? What part of you needs healing right now?

Day 3

There is a push/pull of sadness and anger- like putting one foot on the brakes and the other foot on the gas.

Name each thing that you’re avoiding and then spend time with it.

Distress tolerance is the goal rather than blame- blaming will get you stuck. Learn to lean into the pain and tolerate the pain. There is more pain and avoiding it or blaming others for the pain makes it last longer.

Focus on what you do want rather than don’t want! That makes the time go faster and the healing is quicker. What is in your control to create? Create that. Focus on your needs instead of your complaints, is what John Gottman, PhD reminds us.

“I don’t like how she didn’t listen to me. I want someone who can listen.”

“I felt like I didn’t matter to her. I do matter and tried to prove it to her. I tried to earn her love and never could. I want someone who doesn’t require me to earn the love every time.”

“She was just mean and judgy. I want someone who loves and respects me regularly and in ways I can comprehend.”

Day 4

Make it obvious what hurts. Name it and process it because it jabbed you in your soft spot. That is why it hurt you so much. It hit a wound. Something was said or done that really hurt. Acknowledge the hurt and what the wound is.

“It was not fair!” Stirs up older feelings that were not resolved.

Don’t wallow or even indulge in self-blame: “Maybe it is true that I deserved this abuse from them.” “Maybe i suck at relationships.” “Maybe this is my life and i will be alone.” If you are responsible for something, accept responsibility and change it going forward, but blame is fairly useless.

We are almost always vulnerable and broken in a familiar way- “it’s the same old story”- our unresolved story from earlier in our life, played over and over. You are the author of your life, so rewrite the doggone story. Change the story line and take control where you can.

What do you need? This is where self-awareness is essential. I have heard people joke that they don’t need to be self aware and these same people create chaos all around them. What we need is usually a variation of “I need to feel loved and valued and valuable, cared for. I need nurturing.”

What is your existential need? Not from them but from life? “In order to flourish, i need... To feel safe and that someone has my back, to feel worthy, to be someone’s priority, to be cared for.”

Now you assert your need- usually with anger attached. The anger acts as fuel and is a good sign according to most counselors.

Day 5

Want to heal your wound? Name each loss you face and face each loss.

Individual tombstones- grieve rather than ignore or pretend they aren’t there. What did you lose, exactly? Future losses, dreams, hopes, wishes, plans- make a list and face them with courage and bravery.

What do you resent about your ex?

What do you miss about your ex? This is all part of the grieving process. Get as much done before you get into the dating world or you will leak all over your partner, not fair to them.

Keep feeling the feelings until you feel better!!! Until they’re finished

Let go of any grudges- doesn’t mean you get back together but you’re not weighed down, either.

“Even when you’re not stuck there’s a minimum amount of time to heal - think of a minor bruise or scratch.” So, please also allow yourself enough time to properly heal and change things that are not healthy.

One of the mistakes I encounter in counseling is that people assume. They assume they know why someone did something, especially their partner. “You said that because you’re getting back at me because….”

The “You did it because” is a trap. Unless you are a psychic. Ask them for context and what the story in their head is. Do not tell them what they are thinking. That rarely is a successful strategy.

“You only rubbed my back because you wanted sex. I don’t even need to ask him, I know it.” That means there is no real reason for conversation and you are not open to influence. If you are right, follow that logic and if you are not right, adjust your love map accordingly.

The intention behind behavior is important. If you are giving only to get, you might want to do some personal work. That sounds a bit like manipulation rather than a healthy relationship.

Are you using them to get what you want in a transactional manner? Or are you giving the backrub because her back hurts and you want to see her out of pain? Do you like touching her back and connecting in that way? Don’t keep the context to yourself. Don’t make her guess.

If she thinks the only reason you might rub her back is for sex, chances are you need to have significant conversations about this. Remember, altruism matters- often the intentions behind the action are more important than the action itself. No guesswork.

Day 6

Gary Lewandowski, in a Ted Talk talks about the following

When she says, “We need to talk,” we know that she means it is the beginning of the end. Bad relationships fail because they should fail, right? The best relationships, by definition, find a way to work.

Relationships build, define and sustain us. When we lose a relationship or even walk away from a relationship, there is a loss of self.

Relationships are meant to make us a better person. If the relationship did not make you a better person, it was not a good relationship. When a relationship holds you back from reaching your potential, it was not a good relationship.

What if I do not like who I am with you?

What if being and staying with you requires me to behave in ways that are not me?

What if I am not allowed a voice or a say?

What if I am not allowed to protest your treatment of me without having bad consequences?

What if being with you means that I cannot treat you well, cannot bring you flowers, cannot be funny and playful, cannot have friends of my own, cannot spend time with my family?

(Ending that particular relationship automatically made me a better person.)

What demons did I face?

“I had to face myself and why I allowed myself to stay so long in something I knew was unhealthy. I had to grow and stand my ground when you were mean, cruel, emotionally abusive, cheated and lied, made up stories, told me that my opinion didn’t matter, didn’t show love in a way that made sense to me, excluded me from the fun and peak experiences you were having.”

“Now, I can create a life that expands my joy. I can now do things that I could not do during the relationship and rediscover myself and spread love. I knew there was another option and I overrode my instinct, my gut.”

“I took soul crushing journeys with you of my own choosing and I will not do that again. I went with you despite knowing what you would do and how you have that “been there, done that” attitude. I can blame you or I can take responsibility for going along with it.

“I kidnapped myself from the life I wanted to live and tried to earn your love, your approval. I gave away my power. When I realized I could never get your love, I made the choice to end the relationship. You actually ended it, I just acknowledged that it was dead on arrival. I have a sense of rejection, even though I was the one who officially ended it.

“I felt rejected until I realized I was just redirected to something better.

“I have to heal the wounds of all the battles I avoided with you. I had to get rid of that which was unnecessary. I was afraid of being alone again, of failing and so I stayed in something which was obviously not healthy. We kept making plans which postponed the inevitable. I confronted the behavior repeatedly, but I didn’t leave and stay gone when the deal breakers were there. I believed you when you said you would do the right thing, even when I knew your words lacked integrity.”

Day 7

What you do with your time speaks volumes about your priorities in life.

Find yourself, your hobbies, what you like to do and who your people are and where they get together. Don’t be someone you are not, though.

Are your people into Reiki, Shamanism, Yoga, soccer, hockey, lacrosse, watching baseball, darts, bowling, reading, Society for Creative Anachronism, bicycling, ultimate frisbee, Gandhi Center, Meet ups, building tiny homes, volunteering? By the way, being kind feels good. (For hobbies or ideas for going on dates in Rochester, NY, I have compiled a list of things in the area that might be of interest- updated as of 2019. Brainstorm what you enjoy and check out what your partner might enjoy. You are likely to find something. They are on my website [www.boicecounseling.com](http://www.boicecounseling.com) on the **Services** tab, under “Homework” and the actual file is entitled “Dates.”)

What is worth doing?

We have limited time, so make the best of it. That includes resting and conserving energy for the important things.

Are you into “busy dating” because you are avoiding yourself?

Especially those demons you never faced? Are you planning on outrunning your demons?

Or are you dating productively, thinking it through and making sure that you are ready and self-aware when the right time comes?

Will you allow yourself to be known in a relationship? Will you let them get to know you or are you keeping them at bay?

Are you keeping yourself at bay?

Are you attempting to prove to yourself that you are lovable every time you get asked out or someone replies to you? Are you dating to fix your feelings or to grow? There is nothing to prove and no one is coming to save you.

Go within and meet someone wonderful.

Avoiding yourself or knowing thyself… it will be groundhog day with dating until you really know yourself and how to make yourself happy, not dependent on others, content no matter the outside circumstances.

And breakups are often not as bad as we think. Did you survive the experience of a breakup? Did you learn anything from it?

No one emerges unscathed from dating. And sometimes we are relieved to be free of the ball and chain, the weight of the expectations and control of others. We long for liberation both within and outside of relationships. We go through fear and operating from fear, disappointment and confusion during a relationship- not good.

Do an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses, writing them down and setting up a realistic plan to either heal or accept the wounds that create weakness.

Good one to start: I will develop my capacity to care about people, enough to know them and want to help them.

Do things that you were not allowed to, or could not, do during your previous relationship. What did I learn from that relationship that I can take into my next one?

Self-discovery is the key to being happy now and when you choose to get into another relationship.

“What is one thing I could do differently to better empower you?” Ask your partner.

**Special Cases in Dating**

Young Kids

Would you date someone with young kids, if you are in your 50s? How about Grandkids and dating? Know what you want before you find yourself in that situation. Just get to know what you want and need in life, your preferences. Be self aware by spending some time with yourself and getting to know yourself.

The Babysitter

How would you deal with dating someone where they need a babysitter in order to go out with you? Babysitting and dating adds a bit to the cost of dating and has some longer term implications. If you just want to date but don’t want to be involved in the lives of the kids, make sure you are honest with yourself and them.

The In-Laws

Not everyone loves the family of the person they are dating. If you plan on getting married, they might become in-laws. Would you marry into this family? What would it take? Will your partner break away from their family enough for the two of you to become a unit? Will they be babysitting your kids? What influence will they have? Will they be staying with you when they come into town? Are they around for holidays? Can you tolerate them or embrace them for a few short periods? Do they include you? Are they actively hostile to you? Does your partner understand what your boundary is and what you expect them to do? Whose job is it to run interference versus take care of the situation? Do you have to be together for the holidays etc? Talk about it before you get married, especially the expectations. Ahh, the in laws and how much is too much?

Widower/Widow

Dating after losing a spouse- With divorce, you don’t get the same level of support and sympathy as you do with the death of a spouse, and you have to deal with sharing kids and finances. Divorce is harder in lots of ways and people do not always give it the respect. The losses and changes during divorce. You feel like your marriage died, but there is no ritual or societally sanctioned way to grieving the loss.

Dating After Married15 year or More, Then Divorcing

Dating after being in a marriage longer than 15 years might have some different challenges than the challenges of a shorter marriage. Any loss is a loss, but you have different attachment to the in-laws, come out a different age and have more or less child rearing left. Talk about what difference you might expect if there is a mismatch. Let’s say a 10 year marriage and divorce for one person and then a 21 year marriage for the other. That is a big difference, isn’t it? If the two people got married around the same age, one person will have had much more time being alone. What implications might that have on your relationship and depending on someone else versus independence? How about if one person is recently divorced and the other has been single 6 years or so…

The Ages of the Children

Dating and the ages of the kids - Kids don’t always have wonderful reactions to divorce. It can be a profound effect for some and minor for others. Imagine if the child was 2 (versus age 38) and the implications. The two year old likely has no memory of the parents being married, while the 38 year old does. Think about all the different ways life will be different going forward.

The Adult Child of Your Partner

How about talking about the perspective of the adult child? Talk with your adult child about their perspective and what they want and need. Everyone has different expectations and perspectives- not sure? Ask them.

Dating After The Second Divorce

Dating after two (or more) divorces and the dynamics for you and your kids. Imagine the kids meeting the new person. What chance does this person have with the kids, especially if either divorce was bitter? How protective of the parent will the kids be? What triggers might be there for each one? What do you do if the kids are triggered/reminded of the ex-step-parent and the new person didn’t do anything wrong? How do you have those conversations?

“I hate that when I put people down and judge them, you tell me I am judging people and putting them down. I want you to stop telling me that, but I have no intention of stopping my behavior.” Was how I heard it in my head, when she was confronting her husband. She saw him holding her accountable as the problem, not her own behavior. She was taking his inventory, not looking in the mirror. Imagine that she did that in the first marriage, as well. What are the odds of her doing that with the next boyfriend?

On-Line Dating

On-line Dating- If you are like me, online dating was not a thing when dating earlier in life. Now, with how isolated we are as a society, it seems to be popular and highly used. Us older folks might not really fully understand how to best use it. We might be stumped by the technology. We might not agree with the ethical considerations or the values used. There is a quite a bit of people using each other and the social mores have changed. That is one reason why they also have people who are Matchmakers and

Dating coaches. They can be paid to help you make introductions and meet like minded people who might have a higher degree of compatibility with you. It might be worth it to talk with people who have used these sites so that you are not inadvertently committing a faux pas. There are stories of people getting matched with their ex spouse. Some people lie about age, weight, income etc in order to appear “better” and they start dating based on a lie. Ask for help with your photos, your profile and setting up the first date. Ask for help on contacting someone, because their might be some tricks.

OPM

Other people’s money- Borrowed family money to buy the business, parents owned the house in which she lived, ex husband paid health insurance and spousal support. She deliberately timed her business to take off financially when spousal support ran out and when he would not be entitled to anything. Everything was on someone else’s dime, even at work. She never used her own money or risked anything herself and then lived a life of luxury and status, showing off her wealth, demeaning her peers, looking down her nose at people in the middle class and claiming meritocracy- she worked hard for what she had. She did work hard and she was given a 5 minute head start in a race that lasts 6 minutes. She clearly didn’t see her advantages and believed that she earned what she had rather than manipulated people and played the system. Imagine the challenges of dating her…

Special Needs Child

Special needs child- What would you do if the person you were dating had a child with special needs? You really appreciate and enjoy their company, but the child (or young adult) will be partially or fully dependent… Or what if your child is the one with special needs and they are not well defined? How would you have those conversations?

Dating After an Affair

Let’s say your last breakup, marriage or dating included an affair, emotional or physical. After an affair – how would you trust people in general and heal your wound?

Please heal that wound before you date or you’ll take it out on your new partner, and that is not helpful for anyone. How do you heal that wound? My suggestion would be that level of betrayal and violation is traumatic enough to get counseling for many people to heal it. Self help can help, but that is perhaps out of your reach.

Dating After Bullying or Worse

After domestic violence - emotional abuse as well as financial physical and sexual. This level of trauma can be healed. You owe it to yourself to work with a professional counselor, someone you can trust and repair the broken parts and heal the parts that need healing. Many people run from this or pretend it was not that bad or don’t realize how bad it was and then carry it with them. Please talk to someone to move through this thoroughly and with adequate support.

**Rationale**: The idea is that the first year of divorce is really challenging for most people. Figuring out that most people don’t have the same amount of money, but still have the same bills, can be painful. Feeling lonely is very common. Not seeing your children every day is tough. Many people feel depressed and cry a lot that first year, especially. Get help for depression if you feel depressed. The earlier the better so it takes less work to break out of it. This time of life is tough, rely on your supports. Work on your self-love.

How do I keep my values during that first year and still survive? There can be a lot of second guessing. I am deliberately not painting a rosy picture because very few people experience just the good stuff in year one. It is often a time for soul searching and taking inventory of your life. Who are you and who do you want to become with the time left? Let’s just say you have to be ready and prepared for the long term. Get yourself ready.

A Mantra is a word or phrase that keeps you focused on something you aspire to do/be: Stop playing it safe. Go for what you want.

Go into this situation with no expectations.

No one owes you anything.

Try your own mantra

Want another workbook to make sure you didn’t miss anything?

Check out the Divorce Recovery Workbook by Mark Rye PhD and Crystal Dea Moore PhD

Week one

**Dating**

Dating is likely different than the last time you dated and can be disorienting.

Dating after divorce can bump you off your game and challenge the way you live your life in some disturbing ways. Many people look for the opposite of what they had in the marriage. I have heard multiple stories of acting out behavior during the first year of divorce followed by regret and remorse or getting into a rut. Make sure you have good people supporting you and figure out what your bottom line is before you sleep with someone. After you’ve had sex or been romantic, it is much harder to break it off. More on dating in a few pages. Don’t rush into dating before you are ready or you will make some mistakes that were preventable. If you are not sure if you are ready, ask your friends, and ask them to be honest with you.

Hint: If you are asking if you are ready, you are likely not ready.

Instead of thinking that this person is my type or not my type, try on the concept that this person is in my comfort zone.

They have something familiar and it does not threaten you with discomfort. Ask yourself, “Who, from my past, am I reminded of by this person? Am I trying to date this person instead of meeting this new person in the here and now?” How would you feel if you knew someone was dating you because you reminded them of their ex? They felt like they already knew you and when you gave them new information, they insisted that was not true. Yes, this happens more than you’d care to know. Now, imagine he cheated on her (her ex cheated). What might you expect her to feel, say or do when there is an ambiguous situation that could be seen as cheating from someone who has a history of broken trust?

There are books written by pick up artists that are highly controversial. They help you trick people into thinking you are someone that you are not. Be careful if you read those books, because the ethics are sometimes horrible. Some books have good ideas for self-improvement, though- The Rules of the Game by Strauss has some practical self -improvement tips that you might benefit from and enjoy. Some are as simple as trim your nose hair before a date, ear hair, too. Have clothing from the current decade. Use deodorant and brush your teeth and hair and shower regularly. Expand your comfort zone and demonstrate value to the person you are trying to pick up. Good tips and more... When you are ready to date, though. Let’s not force things. Get yourself balanced and grounded first.

In the first two weeks of dating someone, be careful what you let go. Those two weeks are critically important in setting the tone for the rest of the relationship. If you allow someone to treat you horribly or badly, you are signaling they can treat you that way without consequence. This is the best part of the relationship, where people are on their best behavior. If you tell them they can mistreat you in these weeks, that behavior will continue. We train people how to treat us. Don’t train your new person that it is okay to treat you poorly. If they cannot treat you well in this time period, do not expect them to change. If it will only work if they change, don’t stay with them.

Please take your time and don’t rush dating. There are a lot of hurting people out there who have not done their work and they force dating. They are waiting for you to fix them or to fix you.

Homework: Be honest with yourself. You are probably not really ready for dating, even though you’d like to date or are lonely or bored or horny. If you are not sure if you are ready, think about it in-depth. Picture it in your head how you would like the dating process to work. Picture yourself forcing it and finding out during the date that you are not really ready, but you like the other person. Can you picture yourself being honest with them and telling them you thought you were ready but were not? Can you picture them breaking up with you at this point? Can you imagine getting your hopes up and maybe going too fast or rushing things? What harm is there in really getting to know yourself a little bit more and setting the foundation for a real relationship?

Week two

**Balanced and Grounded**

You will likely have many questions: How do you keep yourself grounded? How do you keep going when you are depressed, sad, lonely, have less money? What happens to that sense of relief and freedom that also accompanies divorce for many people?

I remember asking myself, “What gift do I want to give the world?”

Taking inventory can be invigorating and discouraging:

Is your body ready for a marathon? This is a marathon, not a sprint. You are in this for the long run, there is no rush.

You must prepare all of you or you won’t be prepared when the stress hits. You don’t prepare for the marathon during the race. Start now, if you have not already started.

Homework: Make a list of what you need to do.

Practical, but all of your life needs to have balance or you won’t make it. Lists help so many people. What do you need in the spiritual, social, emotional, mental, work, financial etc areas of your life? What structure can you impose on your life so that you succeed? Do you need to prompt yourself in your phone to help you organize? Not sure where to begin? See a counselor who has worked with people going through divorce.

Have you trained your physical body to be an efficient machine? Get it ready before you need it. Start today to reach the next level. Set up regular exercise, but more than you used to do, because it will help your level of stress, get you in shape and make you feel better and look better.

Is your support system strong enough for 3 years of you sharing your grief and sadness and loss?

If you are divorcing, plan on needing a little something extra for a few years. You might not have needed it before, but you will now. Not all the time, but when it hits... oh, and consider a support group or counseling or a team to have an extra outlet. Lean on different people so that you don’t wear out your one or two people that are closest.

Men, especially, tend to struggle reaching out for support and they get into trouble quickly. They tend to get into relationships quickly and expect that person to be their entire support system.

Homework: Practice making friends and get your support system in shape to support you, before you think about dating. The friends and family you currently have, integrate them into your life.

Week 3

How emotionally ready are you? Do you have strategies for emotional management? What is your plan to deal with intense waves of emotion? Most of us going through this process are already a little low on gas and now it is challenging us to use everything we have. If you do not have a plan, please see a counselor for a minimum of 6 sessions to set up support for intense emotions. They will come and they are not pleasant for most.

Are you reaching out to family and friends? More than usual? Fixing the relationships that you’ll need...

When you have down time, you might find yourself overwhelmed- who will you reach out to and are they a good support for you? (Can you list 4 options, to start and build from there?)

Spiritual- are you aligned with your purpose and highest goals?

Do you have a practice for getting in touch with a power greater than yourself?

How are you giving back?

Serving others tends to make us happy.

How do you prepare your brain and your emotions for what you’re about to experience?

Have you practiced emotion management?

How will you deal with the emotions- do you need to learn it? Counseling and self-help are useful for these skills. Develop the skills, not a dependency on someone, please.

What type of stress reduction have you begun practicing? Yoga?

Meditation class? Exercise 4-5 times a week?

Homework: Set up a schedule that you think you can do for at least six months and make your new habit or routine, no matter what life throws at you. Make it sustainable.

How much energy are you losing by eating poorly or indulging in junk food or caffeine, alcohol etc?

Homework: Take inventory of how much you are eating and drinking and get support.

Are you gaining energy by eating food that adds to your energy?

Sleep is frequently a casualty of breaking up. Are you working on the consistency of your sleep? How? Check out Beatrix Schmidt, a sleep expert.

If you are having depression, how are you coping and what plans do you have?

Counseling?

Meds? Herbal remedies?

Friends?

Denial?

Week 4

Is money going to be tight? How are you preparing your budget and how are you developing discipline for sticking with it?

What do you need to do differently with money? Make more, spend less? Are you being realistic?

It is sad to lose your partner, your friend, your lover, your confidant- even if things were not going well. There is still a loss of the future. How it ended can complicate things as well. Cut yourself some slack during the grieving process.

Would you like professional help planning how to co-parent and how to help the kids deal with it? Your kids will likely treat you differently after the divorce as they are trying to figure things out as well. They might have strong feelings and might be acting out their own feelings. They might resent having two households or disrupting their life.

Need professional guidance how to validate and discuss the conflict as it goes on in year one? How about support with how to deal with the depression and social isolation of year one? Know anyone who is divorced and can be supportive?

Do you have a new hobby you could try? Cooking, dancing or a creative outlet? Woodworking? New sport? Music lessons?

Any desire to get a massage or other touch to make up for what you’re not getting? Not being touched can really affect some people.

Homework: Let me suggest reading can be a good resource. For learning how to live in the moment - Untethered Soul by Singer (book)

Not only does it help you with living in the moment in your day to day life, it prepares you to be the best partner you can be.

Homework: My blog [www.boicecounseling.com](http://www.boicecounseling.com) can be helpful for relationship issues when it comes to that. Consider postponing dating as long as you can. At least 6 months of being with yourself can be very therapeutic and can help with insights into what happened and what you need going forward.

Homework: I suggest practicing gratefuls and actively seeking to appreciate people and things. What are “gratefuls”? Actively look for things which increase your gratitude and appreciation. Pay attention to these in your life if you want to be content.

Homework: Do the “Love” meditation where you repeat the word “love” a thousand times. Yes, literally say the word over and over and watch what happens to your mood.

“Enlightenment,” “bliss,” “peace,” “I surrender all”- are other options of words/phrases to say over and over. The objective is keeping the monkey mind occupied by repeating these words over and over and they will remind you of what is important in your life. Create your own mantra to fit you.

Like the new age stuff? Send love and trust through your chakras and keep the energy flowing- if you find yourself blocked or blocking, interrupt that pattern. Feel free to talk to someone about Reiki if this interests you.

**Week 5**

**Feelings**: Feelings are physical sensations and thoughts. Feel your body, allow yourself to have the physical sensations and be aware of them and the thoughts that accompany them. The story in your head is not written in stone. Pay attention to the story you tell yourself and how you feel after you have told yourself the story. You create your own feelings, therefore you are responsible for your feelings. Take responsibility, rather than playing victim or giving away the power you have. Don’t like how you feel? Tell yourself a different story and your feelings change. Practice seeing the perspective of your friends and family and see what it does to your emotions. Be compassionate with yourself and validate your own feelings first.

Homework: Learn how to deal with your feelings. How do feelings work and what place do they have in your life? Do you value feelings and do you express them clearly?

Fear and doubt will cause pain in your life. Where is the fear? It is in your head. The real you cannot really be hurt. I am not my body, but I live in my body. They can definitely hurt my body and my ego/pride can be hurt.

Lean into the pain and learn from the pain. Pain has a message for people that are smart enough to listen to it.

Homework: Make friends with fear and ask fear what it has to teach you. Avoid the fear and it grows, lean into fear and is shrinks.

**Week 6**

**Take Responsibility**: If you find yourself blaming the other person, you probably will take longer to heal. What role did you play? What could you have done differently? How can you be a better person and a better partner? Is there any room for improvement?

Learn from the relationship or it will come back and affect your next relationships.

Homework: Take responsibility for what your contribution was to the breakup or even the slow disintegration.

**Forgiveness:** Let it go so that it is in the past and stays there. Remember we’re supposed to learn from every experience or it repeats. Forgiveness implies that we don’t carry the weight anymore, not that we are a doormat. We don’t have to associate with them anymore or let them treat us poorly. Forgiveness is for yourself and for the other person.

Homework: Make a list of things you are carrying with you, grudges and resentments. Make as long a list as you need. Actively forgive yourself and them, even if they don’t deserve it. Let it go, release it…

**Week 7**

**A Better Version of Me**

Can you authentically be a better version of you for you and to you? Can you love yourself in a healthy way? Can you show more compassion to yourself and feel your value and worth? Can you align your life to fulfill your purpose?

Homework: Can you accept some challenges in your life that help your self esteem? Are you able to genuinely show confidence, not bravado or toxic masculinity? Consider that if you have done the work above of balancing and grounding, you are on a path of health.

Food is more challenging for many single people.

“Why bother cooking if it is just me?” is something I hear over and over.

Homework: Can I do better food choices and prepare for myself so that I have what I need and what works well with me?

Meal plan to grocery list simplify for people?

Challenge: less to no gluten, less to no sugar, less coffee and caffeine and junk food, less alcohol- burn clean energy and share how much better you will feel- better purpose, more exercise.

Really get your body involved. Most of us have neglected it or taken it for granted and we are not getting any younger. Your body is a tool (let’s have you read my blogs on Tantra if you want to learn better how to use your body as a tool with sex) work with it instead of your body working against you.

Now that you have worked on balance and getting on the right path, let’s go a bit deeper and fix the problems that are common for a lot of people newly divorced.

**Sleep** issues- Have you considered getting a sleep study? Treatment for insomnia? Talking to your doctor about melatonin or valerian? Are you drinking or taking Nyquil or Benadryl to get to sleep? If so, these habits usually backfire. Learn to sleep naturally.

Homework: Ask for some suggestions for sleep, from sleep yoga, to acupuncture to sleep hypnosis etc. Don’t deal with this by ignoring it. Beatrix Schmidt has a good deal of information on sleep issues, as well. Google her, you’ll thank me.

**Anxiety**- Your world just changed. Structure shifted. I could go on listing all the changes, but we are talking about anxiety, here. What are you doing to work on this for the long term? What about your pace, your priorities, perspectives, your habits and skills need to change?

Homework: Do you need to talk about short term medication for awhile until you feel stable? Do you know how many different types of anxiety there are? Would you benefit from an herbal supplement? Is it health related or thought related? What does your counselor suggest to help you with your anxiety? Have you read the Anxiety and Phobia Workbook by Edmund Bourne? It has exercises and diagnoses, medications etc.

**Week 8**

**Money**- For most people after the divorce, they struggle because there is less money. That in itself can be a source of stress. That usually means a tighter budget and some feelings of deprivation and maybe even resentment. Tough choices might need to be made and you might not have some of the previous luxuries. Some people have to get a new job or start working or a second job to make ends meet.

Homework: Come to terms with your money situation and consider meeting with a financial planner to help you decide what is best for you right now and then over the course of the next few years. Reconcile your thoughts and let go of what is in the past so that you can accept your present moment and move smoothly into the future.

**Depression** is common after divorce and suicidal thoughts are scary. Since depression during this first year is so predictable, I usually ask my clients to keep in touch with me more regularly and decide when to go on medication if they cannot exercise it away. Sometimes just a six month experience with medications is enough to give them the edge. Men’s depression tends to have more irritability.

Homework: Look for feelings of worthlessness, guilt, sadness, lack of motivation, not finding joy in day to day activities that used to bring joy. Get help- the sooner the better. The longer you wait, the longer it takes to heal.

Challenge: Call your counselor and/or doctor if you are thinking of dying, hurting yourself or killing yourself. If you have a plan for suicide, you can even call 911 and talk to someone to keep yourself safe.

**Week 9**

**Loneliness** is common. Solitude is when you choose your alone time and you appreciate it and enjoy it. Not being interrupted and being able to do what you want… ahh. But loneliness is wanting to have friends and family around or maybe a special someone and you find that this is not happening. There is a part of you that wants things to be different.

Homework: Prepare for things that are predictable- When you want something to happen and it doesn’t happen- how do you cope with that? Are you good friends with yourself? Do you talk to yourself in a respectful manner? Do you know how to have fun by yourself yet? These things help tremendously for when you move into a relationship later on.

**Missing kids** is so difficult. We used to see them every single day. We love our kids and would sacrifice for them and now we see them less and of course we miss them. That doesn’t really go away, but the pain grows less. We get used to the pain and we get more involved in different ways. You might see your kids on days you don’t have them- soccer game or orchestra or karate etc. You might find that on the days you don’t have them, you get more rest and then when you see them again, you have more energy and because you missed them, you show more appreciation and affection.

Homework: Feel the pain. Acknowledge the pain that you feel and self validate (“It is okay for me to miss my kids. Even if I just dropped them off, I might miss them. It might not make sense to others, but it makes sense to me.”) Look at possible routines for them when they are with you, pickup and dropoff routines, anything that helps everyone with the transition.

**Week 10**

**Resentment** can be a killer if you don’t come to terms with it. Here are the most common ones I hear in my office “I wouldn’t have to live like this if my spouse had….” “They’re probably not even using the money correctly.” “I got robbed. I got screwed by the system.”

Homework: Acknowledge the resentments and let them go. As you try on these thoughts, check out how you feel. Do you like how you feel when you hear them or say them?

They are victim thoughts and usually make us feel some righteous indignation. We might be saying, “I am completely innocent and have no responsibility/blame.”

Homework: Let go of resentment almost as soon as you feel it. If you cannot do anything about it, let it go. Dwelling on it is not helpful. Yes, acknowledge the feelings and do something about it if the situation is bad, but dwelling is not helpful.

**Grief** about the loss of the future, the loss of time with kids, the amount of time alone, less money, moving etc. are all reasons that people grieve.

Homework: Feel the feelings and go through the process. Cannot take shortcuts with feelings; that’s not how feelings work. Talk with your counselor if you get stuck with too much grief to handle. If you are having a hard time letting go, talk to a counselor.

**Boredom** is common. You might find yourself with more time than you have ever had. You might have more work than before because everything now is your responsibility. No one to divide the chores with you... So more time to do more work- sounds fun, doesn’t it? Or you might never have had time to yourself and you don’t know what to do with your time. You might find yourself watching more tv or escaping more for awhile until you find your way.

Homework: Ask yourself -What is your purpose? That question tends to help people with boredom. Also, what is worth doing? There are tradeoffs, which ones are you willing to take?

**Week 11**

**Running from feelings**- Who really wants to feel some of these feelings? What is the point? Feelings are like a guidance system. They tell you when an adjustment needs to happen. Need to do something differently? A feeling will deliver that message. Pain tells you to stop doing something immediately. Ignoring pain is a tempting strategy. Depression is telling you something needs to change and if you don’t pay attention, it gets worse.

Homework: Ignoring feelings is silly, yet we all do it. Feel it. Acknowledge the feelings you have. Act accordingly.

Homework: Can you name 20 emotions? Right now. Go ahead and do that right now. Go through each of the feelings and look yourself in the eye (mirror helps with this) as you say the feeling. Does the feeling you said match your face? “I am angry,” should have a face and tone of anger. Make sure they match if you want to be a good communicator. Also, if you want to know how to emotionally connect, connect with your emotions, first, by being congruent between words and face and tone. Not sure what to do with your feelings? See a counselor for some guidance.

**Week 12**

**Rebound dating** is something that hasn’t changed in decades.

We all make some bad decisions along the way. Try to minimize the damage to yourself and the other person, by being more self-aware and conscious, please.

Homework: How much time after the divorce is appropriate to date again? I keep hearing that 6 months post divorce is when most people get involved and then regret it. They might not be able to tolerate the boredom or loneliness. They might actually think they are ready within 6 months. From the outside it is painfully obvious that they are not ready. One size does not fit all. Get to know yourself and be with yourself. Develop your relationship with yourself before you go back out there, please.

Who doesn’t enjoy wonderful lovemaking, a great kisser? It helps the loneliness temporarily, but long term rushing things is not a good idea. It can cause more harm than good. There are plenty of people that can give you examples of how that goes poorly. Don’t force it.

The idea here is to normalize what is happening to you. You are not “going crazy.” You are having normal reactions to abnormal situations. It is hard to readjust and to figure out what your new normal is, while going through whiplash change.

**Homework:** When you believe you are ready to go out dating again, walk yourself through a dating profile and the complexity of on line dating. Then ask two of your friends and a family member if they think you are ready for a real relationship yet. Ask them what they think you might need to be ready to date again. Then have your ideas of who you would like to date and why. Go into it with self awareness or you are likely to make the same mistakes you made in your marriage (we tend to repeat our mistakes, just a pattern we seem to have).

**Week 13**

**Socializing** is different when you are divorced. Some people distance themselves from you to not “Catch divorce.” Others have no idea how to behave or what to say, so they avoid the awkwardness. Some people feel like they must choose between you and your ex and they just avoid both. Or they choose one of you and the other party might catch feelings.

If you are newly divorced, you may be seen as a threat to their marriage or seen as willing to hit on any person of the opposite sex. There are many reasons for the behaviors from others. Reach out and have real conversations with your family and friends about where you are and what you need.

What about you, though? Are you handling the situation well? Are your feelings hurt because someone chose sides? Are you isolating?

Homework: With rigorous honesty, ask yourself-Are you isolating because you are embarrassed, afraid of being judged, feel like you failed because of the divorce, feel depressed, anxious, don’t have enough money to go out, don’t have a place that would support people coming over to your place?

Ultimately, there are many ways to justify isolating and many ways to judge yourself. As you grow accustomed to your new circumstances, the awkwardness falls away and you start becoming more comfortable going out or having others come over. If you don’t, please seek counseling and support.

**Week 14**

**Dating sucks** after a divorce, even in the best of cases. Okay, it is challenging and takes more thought because it has a higher level of complexity.

Homework: Ask yourself the following questions-If you are divorced, have kids, will your love interest also be divorced and have kids? Will the kids get along? Will they be good ages for each other? Will you like their kids? Will they like your kids? How will their ex take it? Will your kids like them? Will their kids like you? How will you interact with their ex? What role does their ex have in your life?

Oh, wait, these are not the things you had to consider when you first dated people (prior to being married). Yeah, it gets super complicated. What about custody issues? Can you go on dates any time you would like? Can you sleep over? What about sex when the kids are in the house? What about disciplining your new partner’s kids or them disciplining your kids?

Wow, does it get complicated because these issues are in addition to normally complicated relationships between two people.

Homework: You might consider working on your ability to clarify, validate, use I statements and ask for what you need. If you have mastered the fundamentals of communication, all the issues become a little easier to discuss. If your communication is not good, imagine trying to discuss the above level of complexity.

Homework: You might consider practicing your ability to handle and initiate conflict. How can you succeed in real life and avoid conflict? It exists and avoiding it is not a great strategy. Really think about what you want to create and make sure you have a bottom line. Some people just “settle” because they have seen/heard or experienced the horror stories out there- they definitely exist. Some people give up totally. Some people become much more picky and just date for companionship because of loneliness and they don’t go beyond that level.

Homework: Be honest with yourself and with your new partner. Compromise but don’t settle for deal breakers. If they have a deal breaker, break the deal. Most couples counselors can help you with dating advice and how to be healthy enough to attract your equal. Worried about compatibility? Couples counselors have training in that as well. Consider also watching John Gottman PhD and Susan Johnson PhD on YouTube.

**Week 15**

**Telling the kids**

This has many levels. At this point, I assume you have told your kids at least once, likely more than that, about the divorce itself.

As they grow older, the questions they ask might shift.

Homework: They might avoid the issue altogether and I usually suggest avoiding something is not a healthy approach. You might share information that they need to know. No, don’t tell them your ex cheated or lied etc. Do not pit them against the ex, ever. Not a great idea.

Your kids want to know on some level that you tried to save the marriage. They don’t want to hear that you are a quitter or get discouraged too easily. You don’t need to give the gory details-rarely helpful.

The next level is when you plan on dating at all.

Homework: What do you tell them when you are texting or on the phone with someone who is a romantic interest? Do you tell them you went out on a date? At what point is it a need to know?

Homework: When you plan on introducing them, really plan it out. My suggestion is that after 6 months, the relationship might last. I know people that introduce the kids significantly earlier than that and the poor kids get confused. Suggest to your new partner that you are planning on introducing them to the kids. Ask them for their input. My suggestion would be to tell the kids at least a week or two before the introduction. Let them try on the idea and ask you questions. The questions might be really indirect, so try reading between the lines. How does you dating this person affect them? What is in it for them? Why are you introducing them? Is this someone that will be living with them on weekends? Will there be sleepovers? Are you moving in together? Getting married? Do we have new brothers and sisters? Do I have to share my room? Do I have to share my time with you with them? Meal times include this person? Holidays? Do they have to hate your new person in order to remain loyal to your ex? Are they allowed to like the new person? What benefits are there to your kids from you being in a relationship? What are the drawbacks? I could ask half a million more questions.

Rather than your ex hearing this from your kids, many people tell their ex. Many ex-spouses ask to meet the person who will be hanging out so much with their kids. They don’t have veto power, they just want to know the situation and get a heads up.

What happens when you have a breakup? You introduced your new person to your kids and now you break up. Different if live in or sleepovers or remarried, right? What impact will it have on your kids, if you break up? Do you stay together to not hurt the kids? Do you talk about it with your kids and how much info is healthy?

Please remember that your kids are your kids and “putting them first” is not always a clear choice. There are multiple ways to put your kids first.

When you get with another person, do you still put the kids first? Does that differ depending on the age of the kids? What about college age kids or kids moving home post college? What if your kids and their kids go to different school districts? What if there is an age difference that feels uncomfortable?

So many issues to consider and talk through. If you are good at negotiating, then this is easier. Communication skills are super important.

Homework: Look at what happens when you negotiate. Do you each have equal power in negotiations? Are power plays okay? Can you both veto something? If I am allergic to dogs/cats, will my new partner surprise me with a new pet and put me in an unenviable position of having to say no or “take it back”? Yuck

**Week 16**

**Budgeting** for yourself, and your kids (part time) and spousal/child support, becomes more challenging.

Homework: I usually ask people to have three columns in their budget. Column one you fill in each month for the actual expenditure. Column two is what you guess it will be from a fairly conservative estimate, like under the best case it will be this cost. Column three is your fear of what things will cost.

By the end of year one, you will have more data for creating a budget for next year. You will likely have forgotten a category or two or had a surprise expense, which is why you save money, if it is within your power to do so. Not all jobs pay enough to save. Please consider talking to a financial person about your savings and retirement and budgeting process. They sometimes have fantastic ideas that would save you frustration and angst.

**Week 17**

**Food** is an issue for almost every single person who divorced. You don’t feel like cooking for yourself the way you would for your family. You might even be the person who doesn’t cook, doesn’t feel like it, doesn’t know how, or doesn’t want to.

Homework: Learn more about cooking and experiment with new dishes, new spices, knives, glasses, plates, cooking implements. There are shows, DVDs, classes in person for those who want to improve their repertoire.

I took several classes from the Great Courses Company. I went to a class in Canandaigua and learned so much.

So I have the theory to be a better cook. I am not a better cook until I have actually used the learning, though.

Homework: Why not practice a new dish every week or so, so expand what you feel comfortable cooking? Otherwise, you really can easily get into a rut. Consider also having a meal plan for the week so that when you go grocery shopping, you know what to get and don’t waste any money or food.

I had a four week meal plan, each with a different grocery list, so that I had variety that I did not have to recreate the wheel each week and never got bored. I like routine and structure and being able to predict. So I would also include a random go out to eat or get take out or surprise night in the mix. I could switch Tuesday and Wednesday nights if I wanted. I also took leftovers from dinner for my lunch the next day. It also incorporated which days my kids were home, so no guess work. Yeah, I like efficient systems and it worked for me.

**Week 18**

**Exercise**- almost every single newly divorced person loses weight, exercises more, changes their fashion and updates their look. If it is a lifestyle change, it is more sustainable. I prefer the easy stuff like pushups and sit-ups, a simple dumbbell and walking. Cheap and easy. I have also done scuba, hang gliding, paddle board, yoga, rock climbing, biking, running, cross country skiing, volleyball etc.

Homework: Choose what brings you joy and do that. If it is just another chore, you are less likely to keep doing it. As I have gotten older, I find that walking is less likely to injure me. My injuries take longer to heal at my age, so I don’t get as much exercise at those times.

Healthy exercise helps your heart, helps your mood, your energy level, your metabolism etc.

Homework: Get a personal coach if you can. Get a workout buddy or a walking partner… If you get depressed or anxious, I would recommend 4-6 times a week getting a good workout.

**Week 19**

**Life out of balance**

Homework: How does your ideal month look? How do you get the full balance? What is worth doing? Is what you are doing in line with your highest values?

Not knowing what to do with your free time can be hard. Many newly divorced work a ton of hours at home and at work. It distracts them from the negative feelings, the loneliness and they feel more worthy. It can be a wonderful short term distraction or it can be super unhealthy. Avoiding legit pain is not a smart move for the long haul. What would it take to get your life back into balance? You might need to talk about it with friends and family and a counselor. Ask yourself, can I do a support group?

**Week 20**

**Do you want to date or *successfully* date?**

Dating comes up a lot when people are newly divorced. You have been reading these weekly, more or less, and have you noticed how many times we reference dating? That is because it is on a lot of people’s minds after divorce. Sometimes people are obsessed with it or force the issue. There are so many things to consider right now in your life. Is this the right time to start dating or preparing yourself?

**When you believe you are ready, and hopefully before you start dating**:

Who are you?

You have changed. Something shifted for you or them.

Homework: Get to know yourself. Date yourself and spend time in solitude. Be good to yourself and learn to enjoy your own company. Look for what you appreciate about yourself. Find yourself and create some meaning.

On line there are some inventories that help you explore who you are and what you like. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of my favorites. The Enneagram is another that I have used over the years. Some people really enjoy horoscopes and some people don’t do any of the above.

I had a teacher who sat in silence for a period of time every day. He wrote down his thoughts and contemplated his place in the universe and what gifts he was to give during his limited time on the planet. He wanted to be self-aware and consciously create his life. This takes discipline and determination because there are so many distractions, so many temptations.

Homework: Figure out your process for knowing yourself and making peace with your past, your ex, your parents, anyone who hurt you. Forgive yourself for mistakes you have made and better yourself as a person, a better parent, a better partner. It really yields results.

**Week 21**

**Are you honest about who you are?**

Some people are super critical of themselves.

www.Drjessicahiggins.com is a website I love for dealing with the inner critic.

If you are critical of yourself, it can backfire and you can become overly critical of others, driving them away. Yes, have high standards, not unrealistically high standards. That is actually destructive.

Other people do not take responsibility for their behavior.

Homework: In every situation that goes sour, ask yourself what your responsibility or contribution was. Work on your flaws on your character defects. If you need a counselor to help with that process, that is almost always a good use of time and money. You will learn wonderful things about yourself and face the parts of you that don’t really make you proud.

**Integrity**- Are you someone who does what you say you will do? Do you follow through? Do you walk the walk? Do you cheat on people? Do you lie? Do you betray people’s confidence? Are you perhaps a little on the selfish side? Do you manipulate people? Have you lied in business or on your taxes? Have you thrown people under the bus? Have you deliberately misled people?

Homework: Be rigorously honest with yourself first. Then work on having your word be gold. People respond to genuine, authentic, honest people. There is something very attractive about people with high levels of integrity. Being able to trust someone helps when people are worthy of that trust.

**Week 22**

**Clueless**- I have had people brag to me that they are clueless and they prefer it that way. At the very least, they are being honest. However, that is like someone being honest that they are a liar. I respect the honesty and I respect you enough to hold you accountable to change.

Homework: Hold yourself accountable to change and grow and develop. Be a better version of yourself. If you are clueless, that is not honorable. If you are clueless and you are in relationships with other people, that is selfish. You are asking them to do more than their share of the work in a relationship. Clue in and take responsibility for your part of a relationship.

**Interesting and fun**

I found myself not very fun. I lost my sense of humor for awhile and ended up going to the comedy club 12 weeks in a row, listening to comedians on Pandora and Netflix and YouTube. I got books on how to write jokes.

Finally a friend suggested I was depressed. How dare they! Anyway, I got my humor back and found myself more playful than ever. Life can be fun and any situation can be interesting, depending on perspective.

Humor is, in large part, the ability to twist the perspective on any situation. I am bored by sitting on the couch watching television. I didn’t have a tv for years. It forces you to read, call people, have conversations, be more physically active.

Homework: Challenge yourself to be more interesting and interested. Look at what is happening in your community and beyond. Where can you explore? What do you value? Follow that and be true to yourself. If you are not interested in your own life, it is unlikely that someone else will be interested.

I listen a lot to people because everyone has a different twist on life. Some are really twisted and some are thoroughly entertaining. How entertaining are the stories you tell?

Homework: Take a class on story-telling and practice telling stories that keep the attention. What is your point in telling your story? Practice telling stories that get your point across within three minutes.

If you are bored with your own life, other people will be bored with you as well. Do things you have always wanted to do. Have enthusiasm for your passions and follow them.

**Week 23**

**5 attraction switches every man should know**

What are five things a woman needs to know about you before they feel attracted to you?

Four doesn’t quite cut it, you need all five. I compare it to turning on a light. Imagine if the light didn’t actually work unless all five switches were flipped. It is different for men and for women, by the way.

Homework: If you don’t know what they are, you might want to search for pick up artists (Neil Strauss) “Five Attraction Switches”. Before you do that, put yourself in the mindset of a woman who is dating. She gets hit on by different guys all the time. Who gets her attention and why? Who keeps her attention and why? Who gets the actual date and why? Who does she continue dating and why? Who does she ignore and why? Who does she initially find attractive and what kills the attraction? Who does she find attractive and fun but won’t date and why? Who might get a date but not more than one or two dates and why?

Would you be interested in, or date, you? What do you need to do differently to have that spark be part of who you are (not an act)?

**More baggage now**

You have more baggage that you did earlier in life. So do they. More hurt, more wounds, more history, more triggers, more bad dates, more things that get your attention as red or yellow flags…

It feels like a war zone or a mine field sometimes when you are dating. People are more aware of what can go wrong. There is more cynicism for a lot of us.

Homework: Please heal your wounds. Feel the feelings, acknowledge them and don’t judge yourself so harshly. Sit with the wound and what it needs from you. Understand the wound and where it came from. Work with a counselor to heal the wounds you have. Do the homework. Sit with yourself in silence and get to know yourself more deeply. This is how you reduce the baggage you have. You still have the history of it happening, you just stop over reacting to it. It resides in the past, when it happened. It stops getting reactivated and you do not have to relive it anymore. There is big trauma and small trauma, big wounds and small wounds and they heal at different rates. Many do not simply go away with time, you have to do the personal work.

**Week 24**

**Negotiate**- how to negotiate in good faith.

Personally, I have found that most of us attempt to negotiate in good faith and do not always know how.

Homework: Please consider the other person’s perspective. Make sure you understand it thoroughly and why they are asking for what they are asking. Do you get where they are coming from? If you do, demonstrate that you get it, don’t just say that you get it. They are not being unreasonable from their point of view. Their behavior makes sense to them, based on their opinion and perspective. Don’t call them ridiculous.

Homework: Ask them to listen to your side once you have listened to their side of the story and have heard them out and they feel understood. Once you have both gotten to this point, ask for what it is you need from them or the situation.

They are not obligated to give you what you need. You are not required to give them what they request. My suggestion would be that listening to their request is courtesy. Think about what they are requesting and why.

What are the interests behind the request? Is there a way we can make this win-win? Do we both have the same interests?

Can we keep it focused on the need at hand rather than any complaining or blame or criticism? That generally makes it easier to continue the conversation.

**Week 25**

**The role of sex**

And how to talk about it: Especially the first time having sex after you have been divorced…

So many people talk about this and the anxiety that comes with it. So vulnerable… So do you talk about it or just do it?

Homework: Get tested, even if you do not have symptoms. Do you talk about getting tested for STI with your new person before you have sex? Rehearse that in your mind. If the person has had sex and is not getting tested or has not been tested, what information does that give you? Do you talk about protection? When? Can you mentally rehearse what that would look like and sound like? What if one of you has a disease or infection or hasn’t been tested? Think through waking up the next day with a little sore and having the conversation after the fact.

“They look healthy,” was something I used to hear when HIV was first discovered.

I have found that many adults simply do not talk about sex. They’ll talk about almost anything else (except money because that is way too personal, apparently) but not sex. Other people will talk at length.

Homework: Think through what you want them to know and what you want to know and how you would prefer to talk about it. My suggestion is that you do not talk about your ex and your previous sex life in graphic detail. Do you really want your new partner to have that picture of you having sex with someone else in their head? Think before you speak on topics that are this sensitive, please.

What would you want to hear? What do you need to know? What sort of trauma have they had in this area? Abuse, assault, groping, harassment or just imagery of an affair…

Do you want to hear what sex acts they have done and with whom and how many partners and what positions, toys etc? Play that through in your head. Does it turn you on to think of your new partner having sex with their ex? Does it turn you off to think of them as being sexual with others? How about having a vivid picture of them being sexual with someone else or multiple someone elses?

Homework: Try on this idea- My suggestion is to talk about it more neutrally, like, “I would be open to doing this with you.” “I am not sure I would like to try that with you.” Or “That doesn’t sound like something I would be interested in.”

**Week 26**

**Open marriage and swinging and bdsm**

Some couples have told me details about swinging, different open marriage arrangements and BDSM. Before you get judgmental, different people like different things. Some are more reserved and some are more adventurous.

The point is that there are many, many different ways to do sex and sexuality and relationships.

Homework: Try to practice hearing your new partner and not judging, just taking it in. Rather than have contempt or feelings of superiority, why not listen to them? That might not mean they want to do this with you, but they have this in their past. There are many unanswered questions about monogamy and people are trying to do the best they can to make things work. Be prepared to hear some variety of sexual ideas and appetites.

You can learn about things and as you learn, you can decline or accept. At the end, you may have learned some interesting things that you may or may not like. I would prefer you have the conversation without judgment or criticism, though. Have the conversation and let your preferences be known, please. You can always say no, or yes.

Week 27

**Erectile dysfunctions and your doctor**

By the age of 50, almost all men have had at least one experience of being surprised by how their penis reacts. Different people respond differently. New research is saying that porn is having this same effect on younger men. More research is needed on that topic.

For some men, they never have sex again because it was so humiliating to them.

Homework: Imagine, you are newly divorced and it doesn’t work the way you are accustomed to it working. “It’s never done it this way before,” is probably something better off left unsaid. Mentally rehearse what that might feel like for you to want to perform and not be able to. Prepare the conversation in your head because the chances are so high that this will happen at some point in your life.

The idea is to talk about this possibility before it actually happens. What is plan b? You have other ways of giving one another pleasure that don’t require a hard penis.

There is more to sexuality than just one body part.

Homework: Learn new ways to receive and give pleasure. Consider having the conversation before any sex and letting your partner know that it would be okay if that happened and you can try again later, but putting pressure to perform is unlikely a good idea. Don’t make it a big deal. Don’t demand or be sarcastic. Maybe have an agreed upon signal to go to plan b.

For some women, they mistakenly take it personally as a reflection of their sexual worth or attractiveness. It really has nothing to do with the woman.

It is a factor of age, blood flow, circulation, health, stress etc. on the part of the man. It is his responsibility.

Guys, go to the doctor to rule out medical reasons.

Yes, Viagra works great for many men, but there are more solutions available, depending on the reason. It might actually be that your cholesterol is too high and it improves with cholesterol meds. The solution might be simple.

It might be that your doctor suggests maca, rhodiola and gingko- herbs that approximate Viagra. Ask your doctor if those would work for you. It might be that you need to do more exercise in general or more specific exercises relating to your penis. Ask your doctor or urologist.

Homework: Talk to a sex therapist or someone in sexual wellness. Men tend to need more stimulation during sex as they age. Get to know your body and what you need.

Consider not ejaculating every time you have sex (learn more about tantra, too) or having less sex each week. Just know that as you age, your body changes and that is both normal and worth checking out with your health professional. Because it is so common, there are many ways to help.

Week 28

**Sex drive differences and ideas to navigate**

This is highly common and problematic in my office because one person often feels neglected or rejected by the other.

How you talk about it is vital.

No two people have identical sex drives. They want to know they are desired, loved, cherished and wanted.

They want to know you find them attractive and you are not rejecting them, you are rejecting the timing. If this is a common discussion talk about ways to resolve the difference. Some people masturbate once a week and have sex once a week with their loved one and they talk about it openly. Personally, I don’t mind what you decide, as long as it truly works for both of you and is sustainable.

Homework: Consider this, you just ate a full dinner and dessert. Your loved one comes home with takeout from your favorite place, with your favorite meal to surprise you. They feel sad that you have just eaten, but they don’t expect you to eat a second dinner. You like the food they brought and are not rejecting it, the timing is simply off.

Ensure you let them know it is the timing and suggest an alternative.

“I would love to make love with you. I enjoy you and find you very attractive. Let’s look at this weekend for times that we can connect.”

The person might still feel disappointed for not getting instant gratification, but they are unlikely to feel the sting of rejection if you frame it that way. Try not to pout or sulk (very unattractive) if you hear a no from your partner.

People who hear no and take it in stride actually have more sex.

The message your partner hears, otherwise, is that it is not okay for them to say no, ever. That is a yucky message.

“Don’t ever tell me no, if I want sex,” is actually something I have heard someone say.

Run that through your mind for a moment. So this person’s partner has to always say yes, even if they are not feeling sexual or up to it?

That really disturbed me when I heard that. Remember, not everyone thinks before they speak. They don’t realize that what they say has ramifications.

**Week 29**

**Moral guidance on sex**- I grew up Catholic and my understanding of sex was that we were only to have sex to have kids. I am not saying that is what the official teaching of the Catholic Church was, but that is what I understood. We could only be sexual if married and intending to have kids. Again, not sure that is what the church taught, but that was my take away.

Imagine being newly divorced and dating a non-Catholic. Wow! Not a fun conversation.

Can you imagine someone asking, “How do you know you are compatible until after you’ve had sex?” This person has sex before deciding if she will date the guy. That’s a different way of doing things and she said she only lives once and there would be no reason to keep dating if he was not good at sex.

Imagine the performance anxiety for this guy upon hearing this (she notes she always tells this to the guy before they have sex for the first time).

This person was still screening or interviewing mates and good sex was a dealbreaker for them. She would stop dating, not fix the problem.

Homework: What I am suggesting is that you think about what matters to you before you start dating.

Would you stop dating the person who told you that?

Would you look at them differently?

Do you agree with their thinking?

What is the role of sex in dating after divorce?

How soon: Do you wait until the second date? Do you wait a month? Do you wait six months? Do you wait until you are remarried? In other words, know what you want and why. Stick to your morals and principles. And communicate them and your context for your principles.

**Week 30**

**Tantra**

I have written quite a bit about tantra and have referenced authors and quoted them in my blog. [www.boicecounseling.com](http://www.boicecounseling.com)

Sex can be sacred or profane. It can be exploitative or it can be life giving and connecting and unite you with the divine.

Homework: You can learn techniques to take you beyond your body. I think everyone should at least read the material and decide for themselves. It is not something that most people in the USA have had deep conversations about and it can be very valuable. It is not just about fantastic sex, it is about connection. Educate yourself and make an informed decision.

“I don’t have time for that,” was one person’s reaction. It took self-discipline and that was not worth her time, she mused.

**Week 31**

**Porn traps**

I have been doing this long enough to see the theory change on porn. All the research is suggesting backing away from porn. It affects the sexuality, the thought processes, the sexual relationship, the ability to focus sexually, the ability to keep an erection, instant gratification etc.

Some people are watching it now for entertainment while eating dinner. Some people are so addicted that it is a daily thing and has been for a long time.

“She never says no,” is what one client told me about porn. Whenever he gets the urge, he can turn on his phone and have sex. He was doing this 6-8 times a day and saw no reason to stop or change his habit.

“It gives men wrong ideas about sex, what is okay and what women really want,” said one woman. When they get into a relationship with a real live woman, they don’t really know what to do but they think they do because they do what the women in porn seem to like. Imagine him imitating porn and being surprised the woman doesn’t like what the women on the screen like.

“It looks at women as sexual objects and not as people,” another client said. “My body is not a jungle gym and I am not a sexual acrobat.”

“There’s nothing wrong with it,” one client told to me, when I asked him about his use. “What is good about your porn use?” I asked him. “How does it help you connect?” That was not the goal of sex for him. Sex was to be used for pleasure and release, in his mind. Porn had taught him he didn’t really need people for what he needed. It also taught him to use people for his own pleasure.

“How do you feel talking about it with me or anyone else?” “How does it help you become a mature man?” These are conversations to have with yourself or your counselor.

Homework: Consider reading good research about the effects of porn on a relationship. There is actually quite a bit wrong with porn sexually from a practical standpoint. It really affects the relationship, even if both partners agree that it is okay. Instead, direct your sexual energy toward one another. Talk about what you want and need and what to do when one of you wants to be sexual and the other does not.

I won’t get into the morality of it because I would prefer you do that in person with a therapist. Don’t use this to beat yourself up, do this to help change behavior. Porn gets in the way directly with some relationships and indirectly with others. I have heard the positives of porn and, for some reason, people tend to get into trouble when they justify its use.

Homework: Be honest with yourself- How do you think about your porn use? Would you be proud of your kids knowing about it or finding it? How about your partner finding it on your phone or computer? Talk about porn with your new partner. Do your best to get your point across without being critical or judgmental, and realize that is super challenging to do.

**Week 31**

**Unhealthy behaviors**

Are there things you do sexually or have been asked to do that are not healthy? How do you challenge yourself to do it differently? Do you need professional help to make some changes?

Do you have any sexual shame or relationship shame?

Do you have unhealed sexual trauma

**I don’t do that...**

You have the right to say that.

Homework: My suggestion is that you talk about it before you are hot and heavy and in the moment. Think through why you do what you do and why you don’t do that particular thing. If you go ahead and do it anyway, you can say that you had mixed feelings when offered and you would prefer to not do that again. If you feel coerced/forced to do things you do not want to do, call your counselor and talk about that immediately.

You don’t have to have a “good” reason to not do it, but it is easier to stick to your guns when you know why.

You don’t have to explain yourself to anyone.

There are some people that will try to talk you into doing things you don’t want to do. Or maybe they just want to understand your perspective. Talk about it with your counselor, but you have the right to say no.

Even if you have done it once or twice (or more), you have the right to say no. You might want to explain what changed or it can be pretty awkward. “So, we’ve been doing the same thing for this long and all of a sudden it changed. What happened? Why is it different now?”

Homework: Think this through-Be careful of naked pictures of you and/or your partner or movies and talk about these before and after. I have been privy to many conversations about this dynamic and it can go south fast. Think about what happens to this when you break up or when (true story) someone hits the wrong button and it gets posted to Facebook.

Be careful with joking and fantasy versus dream. More than one couple joked about a threesome and one of the couple didn’t realize it was a joke. That is a challenging conversation that could have been prevented.

Just because it is a fantasy does not mean the person with that fantasy wants it to come true.

**Week 32**

**You have way more “experience” than I do**

Read between the lines. What are they saying?

Do I measure up? Do they?

Do I want my partner to be more advanced?

Homework: Ask yourself some hard questions- Am I judging them for their history, before I even met them? Do I want to think about my partner in sexual ways with other people? Did they just use people and exploit, that’s why their numbers are high? Are they sexually responsible?

Did they get tested? What kinda person does that? Are they a pervert or sex addict?

Are they going to influence me to do stuff that will disturb me? Are they square?

Are they going to tell me stories of their former lovers and I’ll be grossed out?

When they close their eyes during sex are they thinking of another lover instead of me?

How much is too much? Does any of this matter?

Can you see where treading lightly and using a filter is super important in this area? “I was just being honest,” has been said by more than one tactless communicator.

Week 33

**Feedback after Sex**

“We have an amazing sex life,” she said. She refused to give more specifics of what she likes and doesn’t like. They had talked about it for a long time, because he wanted to know her better and what specifically she liked. He went off, over the course of a session. (by the way, this is an amalgamation of clients, not just one couple. I cannot give specific or identifiable examples, in order to protect their confidentiality.)

He replied, “You have an amazing sex life. I ask you what you prefer and give it to you, when you feel comfortable telling me, but you often make me guess or tell me everything is good. That is not helpful to me. I caress you for hours at a time and the longest caress you give me is 5 minutes, it is usually 20 seconds. I rub your back multiple times a week and you haven’t even given me 6 back rubs total. You don’t ask me and when I tell you what I like sexually, you take it off the table and don’t offer it again. I am still finishing an orgasm and you stop having sex mid-orgasm (mine, not yours). Could you at least wait until I am done? I always make sure you are satisfied and I often go without because you are done. You have multiple orgasms every single time and the one time you gave me multiples, I told you how much I appreciated it and you have never done it again, despite me asking. I have asked you to read and brainstorm so we can talk about it. You have a lot to offer, you just don’t offer it. You have an amazing sex life and mine is mediocre.”

“My job is to just show up. It is your job to plan it, initiate it and I am just here. I just have to show up and let you have sex with me. All this is the guy’s responsibility,” she said.

Homework: Use full empathy and put yourself in his shoes right now. Now put yourself in her shoes. This conversation was not the first about this topic and they were worlds apart in terms of reconciling. They both thought they were being reasonable based on prior experience. With full empathy, I might suggest having a different approach to this conversation. What would you do differently to convey the information that needed to be conveyed?

She also talked about what type of rope she prefers when guys have tied her up in the past. She talked about how much she enjoys giving blow jobs and always has and how the guys she has done in the past rave about how good she gives blow jobs. She gave very specific and graphic examples of how she has had sex with multiple other guys, and how people walked in when she was naked with other guys. She asked, “Have we ever done such and such?” implying that she had done this and really enjoyed it -he was flabbergasted. She talked about how much she enjoys a particular type of sex that he had never done and they had not done together. (Who does that and why?)

Homework: Imagine getting those images out of your head. Imagine the guy asking her if she really thinks her job is to just sit back and enjoy the sex he provides for her. Imagine him asking her repeatedly to stop talking about sex with other people, especially when they are naked in bed together. That is not how he wants to think about her and those are not images he wants in his head. She never stopped talking about these things and simply could not listen to him and follow through. She thought he was being too sensitive and should be happy that she has had good experience because he benefits. What might you do with that information? If it were you…

**Week 34**

**Menopause**- books, counselors

I am a male counselor. Normally, that would be enough to disqualify myself.

I have sat with countless women telling me about menopause and the impact on their life. There are patterns that appear universal and a million exceptions to the rule.

Homework: Take it seriously and don’t believe everything that you will read will happen to you and your loved one. I would suggest guys read the articles she sends you. Keep in good touch with your doctor throughout so that you are not minimizing or overlooking. There are things that can be helped and things that apparently must be tolerated. There is symptom management.

Expect your body to change, though. Expect your sex drive to shift up or down. Expect your hormones to create some change. Read and educate yourself about the general symptoms of menopause.

Homework: Talk about it with your partner. Tell them what you are noticing and what you need differently. It might change again, so keep each other updated.

Sexually, many women talk about menopause as really disruptive. Some have said they will never have sex again, it doesn’t feel the same, their drive is non existent. Others have said their sex drive is on fire.

Homework: Most have said that they have to use lubricant (water based, please) every time now. So pay attention to what your person needs, and have the necessary conversations rather than guessing.

**Week 35**

**Bad habits you’ve developed and thoughts**

Year one sometimes finds people in new ruts. They might be drinking more than they think is healthy. They might have been in a few relationships that were ill advised. They maybe gained back the weight they initially lost. They might have isolated or become workaholic, the list goes on.

Homework: Take an inventory of your habits and your thought patterns. Does your life work for you?

If your habits don’t work for you, don’t do what you need them to do, interrupt the pattern and replace with something healthier. If you notice your thoughts get in the way of your life, consider talking to a counselor about cognitive behavioral therapy, disputing unhealthy thoughts.

The goal is the long term health and balance, right? Do what it takes now to correct your course.

Week 36

**Dating**

**Bayes rule**- Are we true partners?

Homework-Define that term. (For you and for the other person) Remember to define your terms like you would with a good business partner and renegotiate when you get new information. The more information you have, the more likely the obvious solution comes to the top of the pile.

I have found multiple different versions of that from being a companion that you also have sex with from time to time, to marriage.

What do you want from your partner? What do you not want?

Homework: Do you make decisions together from the beginning of the decision? Does it depend on the decision? Is it every person for themselves and you don’t really have your partner’s back?

That is kinda what cheating is, right?

But many couples do not have their partner’s back in ways that I would see as the foundation for a healthy relationship.

Or is your idea of partnership more like free agency- until you get a better offer, you stay?

Or is it “partner lite”- similar to real partnership but we don’t rely on each other in these mutually defined areas?

Homework: If you would like to practice negotiating and making decisions, just ask, “Wanna go out for dinner?” Work on this until you develop where you don’t want to go to dinner. What do you want from going out to dinner? Does either of you have a strong opinion? Does either of you not care? Do you have a challenging stomach or intestinal issue or allergies or are a vegetarian? Particular ethnic choice? Loud, quiet, expensive, less expensive, fast, slow? Basically, know yourself well enough to know on what basis you are making this decision. Make a list of your top 10-15 places to eat and keep it on the fridge for easy reference.

I heard a client make this joke (unlikely his own)- “Hey honey, get your coat on, I am taking you to your favorite place.” She replied, “Oh, we’re going to xyz?” He answered, “Yes we are” and that is how he cut down the time needed to decide where to go to dinner.

Week 37

**How much alone time**

I am 51% Extravert and 49% Introvert. That means that I might not feel like being around people, depending how the earlier part of my day went.

I need both alone time and time with people to recharge my batteries. When I am peopled out, I need down time and maybe (by myself) taking a nap.

I will come back ready to do people again. It is up to me to be self aware enough to tell you what I need and then make sure I have the courage to ask for it. If I am with an extravert, they might take it personally and I might have to explain, “I need some introvert time to recharge my batteries so I can be a good person again. Ha ha.” That tends to work.

Homework: Do you need a ton of alone time each day or each weekend? What would be your ideal weekend in terms of alone time? Does it depend? Does it change from week to week depending on context? Are there threshholds?

Basically, do you know yourself?

I know several couples that do not live together. They don’t appreciate the decoration or how the other cleans. They spend time together out or at one or the other person’s house. They are allowed sleepovers but they can go home when they need that. That is what works for them.

I also know extraverts that must always be stimulated by others and do not need or take down time. This is what helps them but that same menu would be horrible for a high introvert. Talk about it.

38

**“Active lifestyle” means “never sit still”?**

“I want someone with an active lifestyle,” sounds specific at first.

Is it though?

Homework: Does active mean you exercise three hours a day, clean the house and then go out with friends? Does it mean you are training for the iron man and travel every month? Does it mean someone who takes care of their physique or is chiseled?

“You lied to me, I thought you said you were active,” was an interesting accusation. I met this client with, “What did that mean to you that he was active?” She said she expected him to do long bike rides, travel extensively, go on long hikes daily and do projects around the house with her and go shopping with her and do her chores with her. They realized that there was tremendous overlap and that she was not nearly as active as she wanted him to be. They then settled on what would be a win-win for them and set expectations accordingly.

39

**Reading**

“Reading means you don’t live life,” one woman told her boyfriend. Let’s overlook the obvious contempt for now.

This was news to me. It wasn’t news to me that people with even their master’s degree choose not to read.

Others read everything they can. It says a lot about the person’s personality and values and introvert/extravert styles. Can we say we enjoy reading without getting judged and those who do not read also not be judged?

Some people think everything they learn should be through experience. “If you cannot learn it through experiencing it yourself, it is not valid.”

Some people, when confronting a problem, look to gurus from the past for safe advice.

Some people blend their own wisdom with the wisdom from experts.

Some people don’t value experts and call them “elite.”

Homework: There is so much variation and when we experience differences, my suggestion would be to attempt to not judge but to learn. This is not easy for people.

What if the reason we have differences is to learn from those very differences? One size does not fit all. Please, stop the judging and your relationship has a better chance.

Make a list of ways you judge your partner. Build a habit of not complaining, not criticizing or judging anyone- unless it is a dealbreaker. Bring the deal breaker to their attention once or twice max. If it does not change, stop talking about it. If it is truly a deal breaker, break the deal. Do not expect them to change. Practice the habit of appreciating your partner daily.

40

**Empathy and compassion**

What you mean, might be different than what your new partner means. You might be using the same words to mean something completely different.

Homework: Definition of each is important. What do you mean by each of these terms? What does your partner mean? Compare notes.

In general, being able to see where someone else is coming from is very helpful in life, and in a relationship. Even if you do not agree with them…

Having compassion or “suffering with” can be very close to being nice or kind or experiencing it with them, without judgment.

Homework: Take a look around you at the people who have wonderful empathy and compassion and what role they have in your life. If you l like these things, you can model their behavior. Try being extra compassionate to yourself.

**41**

**Dating and the role of money** (past present future)-

Homework: Who pays and on what basis did you decide that? Did you decide together? What process of decision making did you use?

Using people / exploitation for drinks and free dinner is a common theme I hear from women in my practice. They have no intention of dating him but he is buying them drinks. They string him along until he stops buying then go on to the next guy.

I keep hearing that the guy is “supposed to” pay for the first three dates. I had one woman say she would “allow” me to pay but that didn’t mean she was agreeing to have sex with me after dinner. That would make her a prostitute if she is having sex for money/meals, right? I was taken aback by her directness and wondered how many other women felt the same.

Well, I was surprised how many women feel pressured into sex or other physical contact to pay the guy back. What a horrible situation!

I was equally surprised by the women who accept a drink or multiple drinks (or several dinner dates) with no intention of anything but using the guy. They were not interested in him, just in his ability to provide a free meal or drink. (No gender is innocent. Yes, there are guys who use women as well.)

Homework: Think about what happens when you use someone for sex or drinks or dinner. That person feels hurt when they realize it. What does that do to trust? What do you suppose happens to the next person they date? We just keep the cycle of hurt going.

Did you talk about who pays and why (after the third date)?

Homework: Ask yourself -What if she has or makes significantly more money than him (extraordinarily complicated situation for many people coming out of divorce) and still expects her lifestyle -with him paying?

Does he pay for everything like she is accustomed to?

Is he embarrassed that he cannot compete with earlier suitors? (Did she tell him all the extravagant things others have done for her, including price tags?)

Does he just pay for himself and she pay for herself?

Does he pay until his money is gone and then she pays?

Do you split it pro rata?

Does she do what she can afford and he does what he can afford? What about trips they take?

What happens if he suggests a hotel he can afford and it is not good enough for her?

He runs out of money before she does and she makes him earn his share, but he has already paid a bulk of previous meals and entertainment and she owes him nothing?

What is fair? Is equal fair?

How about buying gifts for one another when there is a financial mismatch?

Money conversations are ripe for conflict.

Homework: Tread lightly and do your best not to judge until you understand. Even then, what is the point of judging?

Please, please before you consider dating someone in another financial world, consider how you are going to do the money and thoughts about money and judgment about money. There are so many landmines in this that people miss until it is too late.

**42**

**Retirement**

Have you talked with your new partner about retirement?

Homework: If you cannot talk about money, you are in trouble. Learn how to do so, with calmness and not judging. What if you cannot both retire or the timing is off by a lot because of money you came into the situation with?

What if one of you got money from your ex for retirement and the other has little or no money for retirement?

What if they were irresponsible versus the cancer treatment wiped out their money? Would that make a difference?

One of you has a pension or inheritance or has the ability to invest because of family money subsidizing?

You might make the same but the family money allows one party a completely different lifestyle. Do you talk about it?

Do you live two different lifestyles and call yourselves partners? Do you ignore it or avoid it when it comes up?

Is there contempt and judgment on both sides? Does one of you bring it up and the other refuses to talk about it?

What happens to the kids if you are near retirement and they want to live with you?

What if they are still in school? (plus a million more questions)

The idea is to talk about it and focus on what you need from the other person. Each person assumes they are being reasonable, based on their history.

**43**

**Family money**

I have witnessed what large differences in family money can do. They often tell you what they respective families believed about money. I have seen people fight bitterly over money and others have no fight.

Homework: What do you believe about money? What do you believe about debt? What are your thoughts about an inheritance, disability, trust fund, your kids versus your new partner’s kids, prenuptial agreements?

Real Life Statements: “You should never have credit card debt. That means you are bad with money if you do,” says the person who came from money. Yes, if you make that much money and additionally have credit card debt, that is poor stewardship. If you are living paycheck to paycheck and have to put the mri on the credit card, that is a good move as opposed to foregoing cancer treatment.

“Can you believe that some people have above ground pools? Stupid purchase,” says the person who can afford the inground heated pool. She didn’t realize that he had to save money and felt proud to have finally been able to afford the luxury of a pool for his kids. What impact did that statement have on the relationship?

“I worked hard for my money,” says the person whose family afforded them a tremendous loan for advertising, buying a business, getting support people, a social media person and having enough left over to volunteer and get free publicity. The unspoken is that people who have money worked hard for it (which many did) and those who do not have a lot of money, could have money if they worked harder. Ugh, that old, tired myth of meritocracy. I don’t have the space to address this issue fairly. Let’s just say that the judgment implicit in this statement was damaging.

“Can you believe they took that airline on their trip?” asks the family who thinks that there are only a few good airlines worthy of taking. What did that statement do to the person whose family rarely flies because they cannot afford to fly regularly? When you are constantly judged for doing things “wrong” like taking the wrong airline, what does that do to your relationship? Just use tact and have a filter, thinking before you speak. If you really look down on people who make less than you, don’t date them. In this situation, the guy spoke up. The woman was infuriated. She insisted he stop talking so much about money and class because it offended her. Him telling her that he felt hurt by her judgments, offended her. Hmmmm

“Why would you visit there?” the moneyed family asks about a trip overseas, to the wrong destination. There are only certain vacations and destinations worthy of their class. “There was so much poverty there. Why would someone want to live there?” was the response to one such destination. So, you are okay with other people living there but it would not be okay for you? Perhaps we should expose you to more than your current beliefs. Can you imagine that relationship working?

“I don’t feel safe in that neighborhood. I could never live there,” is said about the less moneyed person’s neighborhood. She didn’t realize that was his old neighborhood. She never had to go through a rough neighborhood, let alone live in a neighborhood in transition. She harshly judged people who lived there, but loved him, she notes.

“Why do you keep complaining that you don’t have the same opportunities I had? If you wanted them, you could have had them,” says the person whose father was a multimillionaire.

I think you got the picture that family money, as well as lack of family money (differences really) can be the catalyst for some uncomfortable conversations that lead to judging. Or you can ignore them, for awhile.

**44**

**Spousal support and child support issues**

Imagine having the conversation with your new partner and them getting jealous of how much money (or time) you are giving to your ex. They don’t understand the situation or the specifics, they just feel like they should be the one getting your money or that you’re being taken advantage of.

Homework: How in-depth do you get with your new partner? Is it their business? When is it rude to ask? Please have the conversations and understand where your partner is coming from.

**The ex** (plural if dating)

Ex-husband/wife or ex dating partner?

How involved do you have to be with them?

How involved do they have to be?

If they are traveling out of town for business or college and hang out together while out of town and you are not there, would you want to know? What would you want to know and why? What reassurance would you need?

What if they are travelling overseas and just happen to be in the same country but you are here?

What if they meet for coffee?

What if they text each other almost daily but it is about the kids?

What if you have to have meals with them or birthday celebrations with them (your partner and the ex and the kids)?

Are either of you being hypocritical?

I am jealous of you so that you have to tell me everything and I don’t have to tell you anything? Where is the line, the threshold? When is it a problem versus just jealousy?

Have those conversations, please.

How do you introduce your ex to your new partner?

Are you over your ex?

Would you welcome them back?

Do you have a full divorce yet? If you are still filled with resentment and have to talk about it weekly with your new partner, you are not fully over them.

Homework: Self inventory- You are maybe not ready to date if you feel the need to talk with your new partner that much about your ex.

Heal before you get into a new relationship, please. Hurting people hurt people.

**45**

**Trust your Gut**

Most people I know, on some level, knew they were over accommodating their ex or giving too much but didn’t stop.

In their gut, they knew something was wrong and sold themselves out.

Instead of stopping and saying, “There’s something wrong and I cannot put my finger on it,” they avoid the conversation, hoping it will go away. It does not.

Homework: If it is a deal breaker, break the deal. If it is not, then walk through it, together. Don’t ignore it. What red or yellow flags do you see in your current relationship?

**The role of parenting and co parenting** and grandparents

Do you parent their kids?

Homework: Talk about it and the expectations and problem solve together.

There are some wonderful books on this.

I am co parenting with my ex and she is co parenting with her ex. I also see her kids and see some things that she totally misses (blindspots we all have) and she does the same with mine. When do you let it go versus speak up?

What age are they, because that matters, too?

How much time do you spend with each other’s kids?

Now, the grandparents come into play. Want to know a lot about your new partner? Look at how they interact with the opposite gendered parent. This is their benchmark for how to interact with the opposite gender. You just might see some patterns in their relationship that are similar to the ones in your relationship. Expect them to project some of that relationship onto your relationship.

Want to heal your relationship with your parents? That may just help your current relationship as well.

Grandparents meeting your new partner, while still keeping a relationship with your ex… Talk about expectations.

Grandparents babysitting your kids and running into your ex there.. talk about it.

Should the grandparents meet? If they are total opposites and you are afraid of them ever meeting, that might be a clue as to your compatibility. If they are not compatible or at least will not behave responsibly or as healthy adults, let that play out…

**46**

**Hygiene**

Homework: Pay attention to your own hygiene and the standards in your family. Are you healthy with sleep hygiene, brushing and flossing, bathing, shaving etc.?

This also gets back to how clean you keep your house and your kitchen and bathroom.

Do your hygiene standards and cleanliness standards come close or is there judgement?

**Chores**

When you are first alone, you and the kids are responsible for all the chores. When you start dating and get more serious, do you expect the other to do chores at your house?

When does that happen?

Homework: How do you talk about that with the kids and your new partner? What chores get neglected? Do you divide them up?

Do you wish they would do a chore, but they don’t do it? Do you have an honest conversation about it?

Do you feel guilty asking them to do dishes if you cooked?

Do you do the prep and the dishes together?

Just talk about it before it becomes a problem, please.

**47**

**Your first breakup and bad thoughts**

After divorce, you will likely date and break up.

The first one tends to hit people very hard. They might be telling themselves they have failed in their marriage and maybe they are not cut out for relationships. Some people don’t date for a very long time after that. Others never date again, because dating is so doggone challenging.

Homework: Consider talking to a counselor at this point or if you feel it coming. Many people have told me that they didn’t see it coming.

**Self worth**

Gets called into question. Just because someone else doesn’t see your worth, doesn’t mean you have no worth.

Homework: Consider this-You might need better skills or updated skills or different expectations than you needed earlier in life. Consider doing some work to improve your feelings of self worth.

Your worth is not determined by others.

**48**

**Deal Breakers** You will find plenty of good people out there that you could force it to work with.

Gottman talks about choosing someone whose negatives you can live with.

Homework: What are the deal breakers for you? 3 felonies or more, hearing voices, drinking and other drugs, cheating, young kids, money, selfishness, controlling, bad language, bad relationship with friends, laziness, pets, religion etc ?

Do not compromise for deal breakers, though. If they have a deal breaker, don’t ignore it or expect them to change for you. They might change… but don’t expect it.

**49**

**Sleep patterns**

Lots of couples sleep different amounts. I don’t sleep for very long and function just fine. I go to bed early and wake up early. Imagine me with someone who needs a ton of bed time and strongly wants me to be there the whole time.

Homework: Talk about your expectations and preferences and negotiate a win-win. Do we go to bed at my time or hers? Do we cuddle the whole night or just for five minutes? Do we sleep in the same bed?

It pretty much always goes back to how you talk about it.

**Apnea**

“My cpap is better than your cpap”- look if you snore or wake up choking, it will disrupt your partner’s sleep. Pretending you do not snore is not cool.

Dealing with your snoring is much better. I don’t snore to bother you. I don’t do it on purpose. You teasing or mocking about it does not feel funny to me.

When I then mention that you also snore, you are highly offended, but it is funny when you say it?

Homework: Get a sleep study and get it taken care of. Gasping for air is not a good sign.

**50**

**Visiting family and friends**

Homework: Ask yourself and your new partner- What is fair? In town, do we visit my friends and your friends or just your friends? Do you avoid my friends and also get mad when I see my friends without you? What is a fair split?

Every other weekend we alternate or twice in two years we hang with my friends, the majority of times was with your friends? Are you available when my friends from out of town want to meet you?

Out of town, we have to discuss and plan.

Do we stay with your friends or my friends? Do we stay with my family or your family when visiting out of town? Is it equal or fair?

Can you talk about it without a couples counselor? Many of my couples clients are coming for counseling and are not married.

Please notice at this point that everyone tends to see themselves as reasonable and fair. They have reasons for their behavior that make sense to them. If it doesn’t make sense to you, consider that perhaps you don’t understand their reasons yet.

**51**

**Vacation/Travel**

“If she can afford it, she is welcome to come with me,” the husband said about his wife. He was talking about this great vacation he was going on.

“You have a problem with me travelling,” he told her, as if she was the one with a problem. She made less money than he made, so that was on her, he noted.

“She could have chosen a better job or career if she wanted to travel,” he said. He was not one who could sacrifice or pitch in to help her. He made $250,000 and she made $30,000 a year (and took care of the house and kids). Not married much longer after that session…

OR how about if the genders were different. She is making good money and he makes less but has more financial commitments. She likes going on vacation a ton to exotic places without him. One year she went on 10 weeks of (including 5 weeks international travel) vacation/conferences and invited him to one of those weeks. This was done with unilateral decision making. She just told him how it was going to be and he was incredulous and confronted her on her decisions each time. “You are living a different lifestyle and having all your fun and peak experiences without me. How on earth do you expect this to last?”

Obviously it is different if you are married than dating.

Homework: Would you be okay with the person you were dating going on that many weeks of vacation without you? How would you have the conversation beforehand and after? What if one of you kept avoiding conversation? Do you decide these things together as a couple or does one person get to just tell the other how it is going to be?

**Homebody**

If you are a homebody, just own it and claim it.

You are highly unlikely to change a homebody. Stop trying to do that, you will only frustrate yourself.

Homework: Do you allow people to have their own opinion and perspective? People like different things and that is okay. If it is a dealbreaker, break the deal, or better yet, don’t start dating someone and try to change them. Be honest with yourself and with them.

**52**

**Selfish**

This word has so many definitions. If you do not do what your partner wants, you are selfish. If you do what you want, you are selfish. We are all selfish. Does it work for you, though? Does your need collide with my need? Do we talk about it?

Homework: What is your definition of selfish and does it match your partner’s definition? Do we have rules for the relationship? Do both of us follow the rules?

Do both of us have consequences if the rules are not followed?

“I want the relationship you have. You come and go as you please and you basically have no rules. You want me to have rules and be accountable but not have them yourself,” he told her. That strikes me as selfish and perhaps he was not as direct with her as he could be.

Homework: Ask them if they consider themselves selfish. In what ways? When you tell a selfish person “no,” pay attention to what happens next and it will tell you a lot about the relationship.

Do they reciprocate when you rub their back or give a card or say I love you? Does one of you always initiate? Does one of you always give? Do they give in the way the person wants to receive? Do they give the way they want to give and the receiver has to accommodate them?

Do they interrupt when you are talking about something deep because their need is more important than yours?

Do they agree on an agenda for the day but when they are done with theirs, they are done even though your part hasn’t been done? Is that a consistent theme? Do they call others selfish, projecting on to them?

Homework: When they do something wrong, are they able to accept feedback, apologize and keep their word that they will follow through? Is it all about them? Do they one up your stories, your adventures, your life stories- always tying it back to themselves?

Do they use people? Are they a cutthroat in business/work or personal life, always making sure they get theirs? Does your relationship feel like every person for themselves?

If these ring true, you have to decide if the pain of their selfishness is worth the good that you get from the relationship.

**53**

**Agreeable**

“You fight me on almost every idea I bring up.”

“No, I don’t”

We’ve met this person, the one who cannot be wrong. The one who wants to prove others wrong, where maybe status or image is the most important thing and giving in or just going along is hard for them. Others are so agreeable that you don’t really know what they like or dislike. Either extreme can be challenging.

Homework: Choose your battles. They do not have to agree with everything. If you are constantly arguing and having these types of disagreements at this phase of the relationship, can you guess that things might not change. Some people, by nature or practice, are naturally more agreeable than others.

Pet peeve alert: If I am saying something factual, and I am very cautious with my speech and you “correct” me, you had better be right.

**54**

**Conscientious and considerate**

Driving is another pet peeve and one way to determine if the new partner is compatible.

Homework: Pay attention to your partner and they way they drive, on a regular basis. Patterns are important. If they are considerate of people in general, you are likely to see them being considerate when driving. Are they someone who respects the flow of traffic and their place in it? Are they doing the right things, following properly, obeying traffic laws that protect the flow of traffic? Are they cutting in line, cutting people off, speeding needlessly and recklessly, endangering others? If they are doing that in traffic, two guesses on how they will treat you.

Are they otherwise considerate or do they even notice others, especially servers at restaurants? How someone treats the servers or someone hierarchically “lower” than them, gives you insight into how they will treat you at some point.

Do they consider their own needs and stop there or do they see where they fit in the situation and make sure everyone is okay? Do they consider your needs or just their own?

This is very predictive of how they were raised and how they will continue to behave.

**55**

**Pessimism pep talk**

Some people do much better with a pep talk that acknowledges the negative. Their performance actually improves. “This is going to be a tough exam. You will need to study really hard and some of you might not pass.” Is a pep talk called the “pessimism pep talk” Those same people would not do well with the traditional, “I am sure you are going to do fine. You are an intelligent person and I just know you will get a good grade.”

Homework: Think about how their pep talk will impact you and how yours might impact theirs. Someone who prefers a pessimist pep talk will do worse if you give them a pep talk designed for an optimist. Give the person what they need, not what you feel like giving them. I know if someone tries to diminish my feelings about something, it doesn’t go well. They might be attempting to help from a different point of view and if I have not asked for their feedback, rarely is it welcome. “Unsolicited feedback is rarely welcome,” was repeated during undergraduate education a lot.

**Depth**

“I am not a deep person. I don’t want to be deep,” she said to her new boyfriend.

Consider what this person is telling you and what you might say back or might say inside your own head. I don’t even know what her definition is yet, so I would clarify her statement and see what implications this might have for the relationship.

Homework: Be honest with yourself: Is that a dealbreaker for you? Is it a partial dealbreaker, that, if combined with other statements, might be enough to break up? Does it matter at all to you? Are you deep and need those conversations in order to bond? What do you suppose she meant? Define terms and clarify, please.

This is for someone that wants to be with you for the rest of your life. You have to know what you want and what you stand for.

**56**

**Communication styles and preferences**

Please understand yourself before you get involved with someone else. Have some self awareness or you hurt people without having to.

Homework: Take your own inventory: Do you require text or email or phone or zoom? Only face to face? Are you able to be both indirect and direct when it is called for? Can you translate between traditional masculine and feminine language? Do you talk a lot or a little? What else do you know about yourself so that you can give the owner’s manual to your new partner to help them avoid guesswork regarding your communication style?

**Sarcasm**

I do not appreciate sarcasm. I find it biting and angry and people hide behind it, saying they were only kidding, after ripping someone a new halo. That just doesn’t seem funny or enjoyable to me. That is not always the case, but there are people that hide behind the sarcasm and pretend that they were joking. Were they, though? It didn’t seem funny at the time.

Homework: Try eliminating guesswork by minimizing sarcasm. If you are angry, own it. If you are angry, you can say, “Don, I am angry at you for doing…” I might immediately apologize and work to not do it again.

If I have to do the work of translating what you really mean, then realize that you are angry and could not tell me and then tell me that you were joking- I just don’t appreciate the amount of work, when you could have been efficient with your communication.

Sarcasm rarely comes through in text or email, so keep it for in person, if you want to use it. Some people love it and what surprises me is that they are often people that are usually remarkably direct.

**57**

**Religion**

I know people that lose their religion after the divorce. Their kids might, too.

Homework: Think about this in terms of dating. What if you both are very religious but different religions? What if one of you is religious and the other is anti religion? Try that one on. What if one of you is a cynic/agnostic and the other atheist? What if you are both the same religion or both atheist? Each combo has its own set of dynamics, right?

As with any differences, can we learn from one another instead of judging a whole set of people (especially based on someone you knew that hurt you)?

If your new partner is very different religiously, has a different set of values, can you predict future trouble? How might it get in the way? How would you deal with this ahead of time, if it is predictable?

**58**

**Politics**

Politics tell you some very important values that you have.

I have phrased some questions that quickly tell you which party you likely vote for regardless of the candidate. When you date someone, their politics tell you a lot.

Homework: Can you date someone who doesn’t care deeply about the same values you do? Which values does that apply to? Which values do you not care if they do not match?

Should women be paid the same as men for the exact same job?

Do you see life in black in white or nuances and gray?

Should we have police for business crimes or just property crimes?

Should powerful people be regulated like those with less power or should they just police themselves?

How do you feel about wealthy people getting an abortion with their own money?

How do you feel about planned parenthood and abortion?

Should everyone be allowed to live indoors and eat three meals a day, no matter what?

How do you feel about people who speak a different language or look different than you do?

Are we all in this together? Do we look out for one another? Do we help people who are struggling? Do we owe one another solidarity and speaking as one voice? Do we blame people for where they are in life? If someone has fallen on hard times, how do you relate to them? How do you feel about people who live in cities and take public transportation? If you work hard, should you be able to buy whatever you want? How do you feel about competition and compassion? People who think differently? Should we question authority? If I was born with enough money that I have a trust, should I be expected to work for a living? If I was born with a disability, should I be expected to work for a living?

What is the role of the government?

At what age should the children move out of the house.

We should/ should not spend money we do not have.

I think drugs should be illegal/legal.

I think everyone should/ should not have to serve in the military.

When someone “corrects” me or the way I just said something, I appreciate this.

I enjoy new experiences (explain)

Depression is a personal weakness (explain)

Political correctness has gone too far (explain)

Homework: Can you imagine asking these during an interview? I mean a second or third date… Think through how you might feel during an election or two or three with this person, knowing how deeply you feel about those issues and how deeply they feel about the issues. Some discrepancies might not matter and others might be great for conversations and others might be deal breakers.

**59**

**Live in moment**

Homework: Are you someone who can simply live in the present moment, let go of the past and not worry about the future? Is this something important for your new partner? By the way, this is a great predictor of a successful relationship. Think about the amount of anxiety in any relationship. If you cannot tolerate that level of anxiety, you probably won’t be terribly successful in a relationship.

What if they told you they were anxious (anxiety is future thinking) or depressed (depression is usually thinking about the past)? Can you be with someone who cannot be fully present with you? Does it bother you if they are distracted easily and interrupt or are flighty? What if it makes it really hard for them to listen to you and what is happening to you?

**60**

**Image conscious**

How conscious of your image are you? I know people that are super conscious of their status and image. Every purchase is intentionally reinforcing their personal brand. They spend significant time, energy and money on their looks and elective surgery…

They are a bit obsessed with wealth and almost every conversation revolves around indirect indicators of how “successful” they are. They don’t associate with many people who wear the wrong clothes, go to the wrong stores or go to the wrong parts of town or don’t speak the way they’d like.

Everyone reflects on them.

Homework: Can you talk about this without being judgy or critical? What do you need from this person in a relationship? I would need them to understand and respect my differences and priorities, not attempt to change me. They would likely need the same from me.

**61**

**Stuff you own**

How often do you focus on your things/stuff? Are you a minimalist or someone who needs to have a lot of things or somewhere in between? Are you always shopping and getting packages? Are you compulsively spending or doing retail therapy?

I have seen people berate people for hurting their things. It appears that they treat their things and pets better than the people in their lives. It is painful for me to watch this happen and if you asked them directly, they would not see it or agree that they do it.

Homework: Pay attention to how much you/they stress about material things and what happens if something untoward happens to their stuff. Can you be okay with someone who thinks and acts this way? Are you this person? What conversation would you need to have?

**62**

**Letting go of control**

Everyone seems to like to have some say over their life, right? If you are accustomed to having your input listened to or if you are single and always have the say, you might be more into that control. You like what you like. You prefer what you prefer.

Are you able to be mentally flexible?

Homework: If someone else wants a turn, are you able to turn over control to them for their turn? Are they? Are you able to trust them and yourself that you will get a turn again? Are you able to trust that they will not use their control to hurt you?

What happened when you lost control in the past? Did something bad happen and you somehow learned not to let go anymore?

If the other person (or you) is a control freak, how can you help them let go or is that a deal breaker?

**63**

**Listening like a pro**

Actively listening is a gift for your partner. Most humans appreciate being understood.

Homework: Practice listening better-So you are listening to them, giving your full attention. You are looking at them, reading between the lines, using sound effects like mmmm, uh huh. You say back to them what you heard them say. You follow up their statement with a probing question that helps you get to know them better. You ask if your understanding is accurate.

You pay attention to the water content in their eyes, the muscles in the face and their rate of breathing. What are they doing with their hands and legs? You are fully into their experience and then when you understand them, you let them know that you get what they are saying- all the while not judging (good or bad) just taking them in.

If you disagree or want to make an opposing view heard, you wait your turn rather than interrupt. You put your own needs on the back burner because you are the listener. You allow them to have a different perspective and their own opinion without judgment or criticism.

Can you imagine how good that feels to have that experience?

What do you need to do for yourself to allow them to have such an experience?

Are they a good listener? How can you help them give that gift to you?

**64**

**Love languages**

Gary Chapman wrote “The Five Languages of Love” and in it he highlights that couples do not give and receive love the same way. Let’s say I give you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to show my appreciation for you. I don’t realize you cannot eat peanut butter until you tell me. Knowing that information, I might ask you what you would prefer instead. OR I could keep guessing until I get it right.

Homework: Take the test in his book and figure out how you and your partner best feel loved. If you love them, give them what they need to feel loved, not what is most convenient to you. It is about how they receive love, it is about them, not you.

This is similar to not asking your new partner to guess. Take out the guess work by letting them know what builds your passion for them and what kills it for you.

**65**

**Apologies profile**

Chapman also has on that website an apology profile. People like hearing apologies differently. Again, this is not about you, it is about the person receiving the apology.

Quick pet peeve-“I am sorry you feel that way,” is a non-apology. An apology is you taking some responsibility for your behavior and the impact it has. Maybe tell me how yo are going to make sure you do not do it again.

Homework: Take the test on his website and tell your partner.

**Resonance**

I was at corning glass museum and the person was adding the handle to a mug. Blow torch kept going back and forth from the handle to the mug and then finally attached.

The demonstrator explained that if they were not in resonance, they would not bond. If one was hot and the other cold, the bond would be short lived and then the handle would fall off.

Homework: If one of you is hot and the other cold, how well do you connect in your relationship? I wonder if romantic partners have the same laws of physics. Does that resonate with you? What are you going to do with that information?

**66**

**Can’t not affect partner**

A relationship is all about how we relate to each other’s behavior and speech. When your partner does or says something, how do you relate to their speech or behavior?

“When you do x, I feel \_\_\_\_\_ “ is a relational statement.

Everything you do affects me. Self-aware people already know that. The effect is not the same for all things. If you have an affair, the effect is much different than if you work late and do not call.

“When you work late and do not call, I feel\_\_\_\_.” Let your partner know how what they do affects you, positive and negative emotions. In business, we would call this a feedback loop. How did the customer relate to your ad, your customer service, the layout of the store, your product/service? You look at your customer for feedback and make necessary changes.

That is the more direct way to build a relationship.

**67**

**Poison the water hole**

Homework: Be honest and tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, if honesty matters to you. When you tell people who do not need to know, you are not doing the right thing. When you are gossiping, you are tearing down people and do not have the right to do that.

Are you talking in order to prepare to confront them or are you talking just to make them look bad?

The information you are sharing about your relationship, would your partner be okay with that?

What if you found out they were sharing that about you, would you like that? Be direct with people and kill the drama.

I heard someone spreading rumors about someone else. They were unbelievable and reflected poorly on the one spreading the rumors, not less. They lost a bit of respect by doing that.

I heard someone talking about her sex life, telling her friends about it. They responded in kind and some stories were simply humiliating, if and only if, the person knew it was happening. The next time all three couples had dinner together, the conversation was markedly different. (It was about how well-endowed the spouses were and how good they were in bed. They never told the spouses that the other women knew this information.)

Where was the respect these men deserved from their partners? The details did not need to be shared. If they simply wanted to have conversation, they could have talked about themselves, but they chose to talk about the shortcomings of others.

This, oddly enough, was how they talked about one another as well. Talking behind someone’s back and then surprised that their friend betrayed them this way. You just betrayed your spouse with the information you shared, and you are shocked that they would likewise betray you?

Pet peeve: “I am mad that you do what I do.”

**68**

**Asserting self**

If you avoid conflict, you are going to have some painful relationships. It is a necessary skill because you are guaranteed to have conflict. You just will.

Homework: If you can predict you will have problems, you can prepare for them in advance. “I would prefer that you do… instead.” “I would like to end this conversation feeling understood. Could you help me meet that goal?” “I don’t like how we have been talking about … would you help me figure out a healthier way for us to get to our goal?”

“You said you would do x and it looks like you have not done it. Would you mind doing x now?”

You have a right to get your needs met without stepping on their toes. You have a right to call to their attention that they did not do what they said they were going to do, you do not have the right to be rude about it. You can say it without being a jerk. Do so.

When you are training a dog and the dog starts barking, do you wait until a half hour of barking or by the second bark are you training them? Much more efficient and effective to do it immediately upon the undesirable behavior. It takes much longer to correct the behavior when you wait. If you immediately correct it, you train the dog/person faster. This training works for a large amount of issues. Be respectful

**69**

**Affair definition of emotional and physical**

When you are getting your relationship needs met outside the relationship, and your contract is to get them met within the relationship, you are breaking that contract. This is called “cheating” because there are agreed upon rules that you are not following.

Cheating is also known as having an affair. Unless you both agree on different rules, cheating is not allowed.

Physically, it is easier to tell when someone kissed, had sex, touched, fondled etc another person. When they crossed the line it was fairly obvious, even if they do not admit it to you, they know they crossed the line.

An emotional affair is strangely still confusing for some people. If you are talking to someone of the opposite sex about your relationship, how would your partner feel?

Homework: If you have feelings for someone and are regularly having conversation with them, how would your partner feel (if you told them all the details including that you had feelings)? How would you feel if your partner were telling someone of the opposite sex the same things? Would you be happy to know that your partner didn’t have sex, but confessed their love for this other person? Would you be okay with them talking about sex and a future relationship? Would you be okay with them sharing with this other person first, or instead of you? Would you be okay with them having lunch together on a regular basis? Would you be okay with them being together out of town? Would you be okay with them working on multiple projects? Would you be okay with them texting and calling outside work hours? Would you be okay with them asking personal (non work related) questions- such as- what are you wearing to….? Would you be okay with them going to each other’s house? Would you be okay with them lying about being together at a place? Would you be okay with them talking about how funny and witty they are?

Would you be okay with them in a very small group, having drinks at happy hour? Would you be okay with them being on the same committee, spending hours with one another? Would you be okay with them going into business with one another and this other person giving a multi thousand dollar “gift” to your partner, that they do not have to repay? Would you be okay with them defending this person when you ask, but not defending you or the relationship?

Would you be okay with them simply not telling you anything and dismissing your request to talk about it with them because you don’t like how it looks?

If you are flirting, and several people have commented on how flirty you are, is it possible you are crossing a line?

Where is the line for you and for this other person?

There are levels of cheating and I would ask the reader to consider this. If you have to sneak something, if your partner would not be okay with you doing something, if you are not honestly answering a question, if you are hiding it, if you are omitting information- it damages, if not breaks, the relationship.

Homework: If your new person is going down the cascade towards physically cheating and will not listen, what would you do?