



## SHARING STRENGTH AND GROWTH AREAS

*"Your strengths develop by working through your issues."*

Check what areas you agree or disagree most with your partner.

- Select three **Strength Areas** (most agreement and positive aspects of your relationship)
- Select three **Growth Areas** (most disagreement and areas you want to improve)

	STRENGTH AREAS	GROWTH AREAS
1. COMMUNICATION <i>We share feelings and understand each other.</i>		
2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION <i>We are able to discuss and resolve differences.</i>		
3. PARTNER STYLE AND HABITS <i>We appreciate each other's personality and habits.</i>		
4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT <i>We agree on budget and financial matters.</i>		
5. LEISURE ACTIVITIES <i>We have a good balance of activities together and apart.</i>		
6. SEXUALITY AND AFFECTION <i>We are comfortable discussing sexual issues and affection.</i>		
7. FAMILY AND FRIENDS <i>We feel good about our relationships with relatives and friends.</i>		
8. RELATIONSHIP ROLES <i>We agree on how to share decision-making and responsibilities.</i>		
9. CHILDREN AND PARENTING <i>We agree on issues related to having and raising children.</i>		
10. SPIRITUAL BELIEFS <i>We hold similar religious values and beliefs.</i>		

### COUPLE DISCUSSION:

1. Take turns sharing what each of you perceive as your relationship strengths. Verbally share one strength at a time, until you each have shared three.
2. Use the same procedure to share and discuss growth areas.
3. Now have a discussion around these questions:
  - a. Did any of your partner's responses surprise you?
  - b. In what areas did you mostly agree with your partner?
  - c. In what areas did you mostly disagree with your partner?



## COMMUNICATION

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*"It is a luxury to be understood."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

### CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

**Assertiveness** is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

**Active listening** is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your Assertiveness skills. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your Active Listening skills.

**Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other.

#### ***SPEAKER'S JOB:***

1. Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...")
2. Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.

#### ***LISTENER'S JOB:***

1. Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
2. Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

*How good were each of you at being assertive?*

*In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?*



## PERSONAL STRESS PROFILE

*"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."* —Reinhold Niebuhr

### IDENTIFYING MOST CRITICAL ISSUES

#### Do you control stress in your life or does stress control you?

Stressors are events that cause an emotional and/or physical reaction. Stress can be positive (wedding, job promotion) or negative (loss of job, car accident, major illness). But what is important is to be able to manage the many stressors in your life.

One way to manage stress is to prioritize the issues that are most important to you. Another is to decide what issues can be changed or resolved and which ones cannot. This exercise will help you focus on the high priority issues and those that can be changed (Box 1).

#### Couple Exercise:

1. Select up to **four issues** that are the most stressful for each of you.
2. Review each issue and put it into one of the four cells below.
3. Box 1 contains the "Most Critical Issues."

	Able to Change	Difficult to Change
High Priority	<b>Box 1: Most Critical Issues</b>  <i>What changes can you each make?</i>	<b>Box 2</b>  <i>How do you plan to cope?</i>
Low Priority	<b>Box 3</b>  <i>Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?</i>	<b>Box 4: Least Critical Issues</b>  <i>Can you accept or forget about these issues?</i>

#### COUPLE DISCUSSION:

Select one issue from Box 1 that you will work on together as a couple.

Work together as a team to achieve your goals.

1. Communicate about the issue.
2. Use good conflict resolution skills.
3. Be flexible with one another.



## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

### TEN STEPS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

All couples have differences and disagreements. Studies show the amount of disagreements are not related to marital happiness as much as how they are handled. Happy couples do not avoid disagreements; they resolve them while remaining respectful of each other, thereby strengthening their relationship. This Ten Step Model is a simple, but effective way to resolve conflict while avoiding the common and destructive patterns. Use this model with an ongoing issue in your relationship, as well as future issues.

**1. Set a time and place for discussion.**

**2. Define the problem - Be specific.**

**3. List the ways you each contribute to the problem.**

Partner 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.**

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_ 4) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Brainstorm**—Pool your new ideas and try to list 10 possible solutions to the problem. Do not judge or criticize any of the suggestions at this point.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 6) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_ 7) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_ 8) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_ 9) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_ 10) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Discuss and evaluate each of these possible solutions.** (Be as objective as possible. Talk about how useful and appropriate each suggestion feels for resolving your issue.)

**7. Agree on one solution to try.**

**8. Agree how you will each work toward this solution.** (Be as specific as possible.)

Partner 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Partner 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.**

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Reward each other for progress.** (If you notice your partner making a positive contribution toward the solution, praise his/her effort.)



## COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

*"In marrying another person, you are also marrying their family."*

### MAPPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In the computer report, there is a **Couple Map** which indicates how you each described your couple relationship and a **Family Map** which indicates how you each described your family of origin. These Maps are designed to help you better understand and discuss your couple relationship and families. The fact that families are so diverse can add to the challenge of merging individuals from two families into a couple relationship.

**CLOSENESS:** *Closeness refers to how emotionally connected you feel to your partner and family.* How do you balance separateness and togetherness? Indicators of closeness are I vs. We, loyalty, and independence vs. dependence. There are five levels of closeness. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of closeness are most healthy for couples and families, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

**FLEXIBILITY:** *Flexibility refers to how open couples and families are to change.* How do you balance stability and change? Indicators of flexibility are leadership, relationship roles, discipline and rules. As with closeness, there are five levels of flexibility. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of flexibility are the most happy and healthy, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

### COUPLE DISCUSSION:

- Compare how you each described your couple relationship.
  - Compare your family of origin with your partner's family on closeness and flexibility.
  - Use the examples below to discuss the closeness and flexibility in your families of origin:
    - Family gatherings during a holiday
    - Celebrating a birthday or anniversary
    - Dinner time / Meal time
    - Handling discipline and parenting responsibilities
    - Closeness in your parents' marriage
    - Flexibility in your parents' marriage
    - Caring for a sick family member
    - Adjusting to a stressful change (e.g. a move, job transition).
- 1) How similar or different were your families in terms of closeness and flexibility?
  - 2) How might the similarities or differences impact your current relationship?
  - 3) What from your family of origin would you like to repeat in your couple relationship?
  - 4) What from your family would you not like to repeat in your couple relationship?
  - 5) How satisfied are you with the current level of closeness and flexibility in your couple relationship?
  - 6) Consider ways you might increase or decrease closeness and flexibility (see next section for ideas.)



## PERSONALITY

*Question: Do “opposites attract” or do “birds of a feather flock together”?*  
*Answer: Both are true.*

### SCOPE OUT YOUR PERSONALITY

Exploring your personality and your partner's personality, can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also point out challenges for couples who love one another, but have very different personalities and approaches to life.

#### COUPLE DISCUSSION:

First, review the Personality SCOPE section of your computer report.

**1. In what area(s) are your personalities similar?**

- a. How can your similarities be a strength?
- b. How can your similarities create problems?

**2. In what areas are your personalities different?**

- a. How can your differences be a strength?
- b. How can your differences create problems?

**3. Do the roles you fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths?**

(e.g. Does the person who scored high on organization manage the checkbook?)

### Dealing with Personality Differences

- Don't try to change your partner's personality.
- Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you in the first place.
- Be responsible for yourself. Try to learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your relationship.
- How can you use your personality differences as a strength in your relationship?