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# 

# Mutual differentiation is key

Differentiation is the maintenance of your own identity and center while in a relationship. You can rest securely inside yourself and stay centered during other people’s emotions, opinions, or moods. You have your independent value or self-worth, and also your value in this relationship. You can easily be close with this other person to be “us” and then easily separate to be your own self with your different activities and hobbies, much like being on a giant swing. Healthy intimacy is roughly 50% "us" and 50% "you and I in different realms.”

This coming together and being apart continuously is what great intimacy is, a closeness but not oneness. Two pendulum balls that often move together also move apart. Entering and exiting in each moment is hard. So, leave room in the relationship for periodic separation or loss. Give your partner space to reconnect alone with their inner selves and to re-regulate themselves before they try to co-regulate with you.

Neither person should sacrifice a deeply held value or interest to placate the other. Accept each other's right to their passions even if you cannot relate to them. This affirms the “us” place and the individual rights of each person.

You are responsible for only your feelings, and no one can reject you except yourself. You’re the most capable person to regulate yourself. Slipping into a needy child forces your partner into an awkward parent self, who is now parenting your emotions as well as theirs. Your own issues are separate from the relationship’s issues.

Your individuality, interests, and passions are what attracted them to you. Block time each week for self-care and for being with friends. Let them know you’ll be doing some nourishing activities on your own. Don’t reserve yourself just for dates.

Text less as well.

Imagine fulfilling each emotional need if your partner did not exist. The only thing limiting your wide arsenal is your imagination.

Initially, if you want to ask your new mate for reassurance, reflect internally for a month first. This will be hard.

# Trusting

## The three “cons” of trust

The three “cons” of trust: consistency, congruency, and consideration. Considerate actions are consistently congruent with considerate words. This applies to your relationship with yourself as well as with anyone else.

Others will break your trust, but trust that if you get hurt, you can leave them and rebound.

If you mistrust the other person, outline the area of mistrust, and then manage your expectations of them in other areas. Ensure the mistrust is not because of your past that does not involve them.

## B.R.A.V.I.N.G.

### Boundaries (or bottom line)

A boundary is a line demarcating behaviors you will not tolerate. If someone crosses it, we stop seeing them – no rationalizing, no excuses. Likewise, we set a boundary for our own bad behavior – making excuses for the other person, ignoring responsibilities, sacrificing our values to keep the other person, etc.

Unlike expectations, your boundary is independent of what the other one wants. There is no need to have someone agree to it. If someone else has to do it, it is an expectation. We can still have our own expectations however. When we set these, we first get the other’s explicit agreement.

A good set of boundaries for one relationship is a bad set of boundaries for another relationship. We set them based on what we do or don’t want as opposed to what we think is right or wrong.

Behind every present or future boundary is an unmet need. If your partner can’t meet that need, explain what the boundary is about, and then live healthily within those bounds. Trust that they appreciate hearing your boundary. If you express a boundary to someone when they do something that makes you uncomfortable, they’re less likely to do it a second time. If you express that same boundary again a second time and state that you’re angry about them crossing it, they’re now a lot less likely to do it a third time.

Resolve the small conflicts before they get bigger by setting boundaries immediately. Try saying, "This is a 1 or 2 out of 10 for me."

If they choose not to honor your boundary, have a strategy for how you will adjust your behavior in that event. Only threaten a consequence that you are willing to enforce and follow through on.

Sticking to our boundaries tests our will. It can feel like an inner war and make you feel anxious, guilty, and inflexible, but we feel a new freedom when we remain loyal to ourselves. Only when we have this warrior within can we shed our protective skin and commit to being with another.

Initially, when we are not used to setting boundaries, we might have to set an extreme one because we don’t trust ourselves to set and enforce all the tiny ones. These feelings pass, and each time you set a boundary, it gets easier. Others will respect us more, and you can become more flexible. You’ll feel empowered and free to allow others to say no to you.

#### Reading the body to set boundaries

Boundaries cannot be set without being in touch with our bodies.

Learn what “No” feels like in your body, describe it aloud, and set boundaries based on that.

It probably feel likes anger, sluggishness, disgust, resentment, grief, or even shame in healthy doses. Your body is resisting something, and so you must figure out what you need. Disengage for a moment from the chat. This is a boundary you need with yourself. “This time is really different!” indicates that you are being triggered.

Let them know that you’re feeling triggered by something that does not originate with them. The more you can become aware of which trauma response you tend to have – freeze, flight, fight, fawn, or flop, the more you can stay in the stew and respond with setting a boundary.

But don’t set boundaries when you are angry. Take a moment to calm yourself down first.

#### Seven types of boundaries

Time, material, financial, emotional, information, sexual, and physical

#### Boundary metaphors

##### Your fence vs your neighbor’s fence

A boundary can be seen as a fence you build on your property to protect your authentic and vulnerable self, a place where your inner child can play freely and safely. On the contrary, an expectation is when you ask the neighbor to build a fence on their own property to keep you safe, a fence that you don’t have control over.

Always stay open to talking about changing your expectations of both each other and your own boundaries. You may not change these, but stay open to discussing them. This discussion is the gate in your respective fences that can be opened and where you stand to discuss whether the fences need to be adjusted.

##### Parent self speaks up for inner child

See your parent self coming into the conversation and noticing that the other person is mistreating your inner child. Then see your parent self telling that person to speak to your inner child respectfully. When we set boundaries for ourselves, we are teaching our inner child what we as their parent will tolerate when it comes to how others treat our inner child. When our inner child internalizes this, we in reality are far better off. So, consider what the most vulnerable part of “you” needs in this moment. Otherwise it is apt to have a temper tantrum.

#### Steps in expressing a boundary

1) Validate the other person’s intentions.

2) Identify your feeling.

3) Identify why this hurts.

4) Identify what you need instead.

5) Calmly express it.

##### It’s an “if, then” statement

“I know your intentions were good, but I felt/feel\_\_\_\_\_\_ today when \_\_\_ happened. It hurts because (\_\_\_\_). If it happens again, then I will have to do this until we can return to….. Thanks.”

#### Practice with a friend

Practice this with people who you know are safe, maybe even those who you can go to and say,

“I want to start practicing setting boundaries and talking more about what upsets me because I’m placing a lot of conscious focus on becoming aware of that at this point in my life. So, if I come to you over the next couple weeks and tell you something I’m annoyed about or something that upsets me or something that I wish was different, I want you to know that usually I only express anger when it’s really intense. You might think I’m feeling really intense about this small thing. But I’m just trying to tell you about it before it gets big. I’ll be at like at a two out of ten, so it isn’t a big deal for me, but I promised myself that I’m going to practice talking about it. So, I’ll be sharing what I feel frustrated about or resent you for in this specific situation.”

Let them know you felt angry about that thing. Ask if you two you can find a clear interpersonal agreement, one that lets you feel safer and freer within. You’re asking them to work with you to repair the relationship.

#### Post or share your list with friends

Post your list somewhere in your home where you will often see it. Put a check mark by any item that gets disregarded or rationalized away; do this every time it happens.

Also give copies of it to one or two friends, or people in a support group. Report to them regularly on how you are doing and ask them to remind you when you disregard your boundary or start rationalizing. Most friends will be relieved to have permission to speak up when you are engaging in destructive behavior.

#### Certainly state your boundaries before deciding to break up

If the urge comes up to break up with someone, do this instead: State boundaries or request they meet certain needs of yours in that moment (more space, etc.). Tell them when you need more alone time. See if you can bring up important things before breaking up with them.

If you can do this, you can start addressing those moments respectfully to your partner and lessen the likelihood that you will want to bail out of the relationship.

The more you are able to make your needs known within a relationship, the less likely you will exit the relationship in an unhealthy, deactivated, and irrational way.

#### When they set boundaries

When people first set boundaries with you, thank them. Even if you feel some awkwardness or hurt, see it as helpful info. Clarify the boundary’s extent and the situations where it applies and then decide if their boundary works for you. You don’t always have to live under someone else’s boundaries and can say, "I can't be that kind of person for you."

### Reliability

Reliability is the ability to do what you say you are going to do and when. It’s the ability to keep any agreement you make with others. Doing this requires emotional reliability: a stable mood, self-worth, and emotional self-regulation.

## 

### Accountability

Be accountable to others and to your own values. Apologize for any of your misdeeds.

### Vault of confidentiality

Keep things confidential and don’t gossip. Unless you are speaking to someone whose professional duty is to keep things confidential, such as a therapist, don’t pass on to others what your partner has told you.

### Integrity

Your behaviors match your words and values, and this includes choosing to be courageous and vulnerable over being comfortable.

Courage in the relationship is demonstrated by

* asking for help or a time-out,
* allowing for closeness,
* asserting needs and boundaries,
* reflecting on your own fears and struggles and sharing them,
* setting higher and higher goals for the relationship,
* initiating new experiences together outside of your comfort zone, and
* speaking the truth, even when it is going to hurt.

### Non-judgment

Avoid judgment of yourself and of the other person, and do not worry about others' judgment. We are all human with our own insecurities and weaknesses.

Be careful how you interpret others’ behavior. Are they feeling what you think they are feeling?

In any interaction, the truth is split into four quadrants:

* what only we know,
* what only the other person knows,
* what neither one of us knows, and lastly,
* what we both know from having explicitly discussed or shared it.

Maximize this last quadrant to minimize the gap between your perception and theirs.

### Generosity

In addition to praise, appreciation, encouragement, and money, generosity with your partner means being generous with time and emotional space and in how you perceive their intentions. Assume that your partner has your best interests at heart.

Being generous with time means generously giving time to be together as well as giving time for the other one to have time on their own for their separate friendships, interests, and hobbies.

Space is emotional space as well as physical space. For the other’s emotional space, find out what their fulcrum is between needing your affection and seeing you as smothering. For each of us it is different. Ask them how they show affection and love and how they like to receive it.

For your own emotional space, if you are single and want a relationship, create space in your bedroom for your future partner. This will create space in your heart for them. Clean out your dresser and closet. If someone sees a crowded space, they may feel at a subconscious level that there is no room for them. Have a symbolic invitation to join you in your bed – two nightstands, two reading lights, two pillows, and two dressers. Think about what symbolizes love and marriage to you. You might place objects in pairs in the bedroom – two candles, two roses, two little animals, etc.

#### Avoiding premature break-ups

Generosity with your assumptions and perceptions can help you avoid premature break-ups.

The things that may be “negative” may not be fatal flaws (deal breakers) for the relationship. Meditate and sit inside the discomfort when you’re tempted to leave the relationship. Breathe into this urge to run. Does it dissipate?

* What are the ways you run away when you hit your edges?
* What would help you have the courage to look inside, challenge your beliefs, and live with anxiety, confusion, and discomfort?

Consider that you may never feel that crazy, passionate, over-the-moon feeling of meeting someone new ever again. Entertain the notion that you’re never going to feel the intimacy, comfort, and support that you feel with your particular partner ever again. Sit right inside the feelings as if they are different rooms. Let them nestle fully inside your heart.

Make a list of your partner’s shortcomings. Share it with a close friend or therapist. Are these shortcomings as valid as you think? We all have shortcomings, and others out there might have more shortcomings and fewer positive qualities than what your partner has.

Then ask your heart which situation feels more wrong, which feeling you cannot live without. That is the feeling you need. If you want to stay, brainstorm some ways of making a spicier and healthier connection with your partner.

You need to have at least three arguments, preferably one big one. See how you two compromise and work past difficulties. If you can't disagree effectively, there is no future.

# Asking someone for a date

Smile and show nonchalance about their looks. Beauty is a test that weeds out the losers who get dumbstruck. Look them in the eye and smile when you ask with your cool, can-do tone. Squeeze your abs if you’re nervous; that’s a good place to direct your nerves. Certainly go for it if you’re happy. You’re cuter when you’re happy, and self-confidence is sexy.

If you’re asking them out for a date, say, “I’d like to take you to...”

Be specific with the time and place, and have an original date idea. Also have two alternatives; this gives them a few seconds to think about it. Options can include the day, time, activity, and transportation, but ask for the relaxed and low-pressure nights – Tuesday or Wednesday night – and a week or so in advance. Offer to meet them there. If they say yes, get their e-mail address or phone number in case one of you needs to cancel.

If you say that you will call, ask if you can call them at a specific time instead of being vague.

## For shy folks

### Exercise 1: Good eye contact

Practice gazing into the eyes of others whether it's with people you pass on the street or talk to in person. Without staring, gaze until they break contact.

1. Look long enough to see their eye color. Then look away and glance back.
2. Focus on one eye and smile occasionally so you don't look too weird.
3. Slow down your blink rate to create mystery and intrigue.
4. Start with unattractive or older people first and work your way to those you desire.
5. Also do this with people in the service industry as long as you do it respectfully.
6. Maintain eye contact when you are speaking. It's too easy just to do it while listening.

### Exercise 2: Talking in general

Build your confidence at a mall that’s new to you, far from where you live. Make eye contact with the salespeople and ask for recommendations. Start by talking to as many people of the opposite sex as possible, regardless of age, and simply talk normally. Do it about 100-200 times, and you will no longer feel fear. Then start flirting with them. Don’t forget to smile and say “hi” to every attractive person of the opposite sex who passes you by.

### Exercise 3: Ask for a phone number

Now start asking for the phone number. Maintain eye contact, and ask for the phone numbers of at least two attractive members of the opposite sex on each day. The real goal is not to get phone numbers, but to get over the fear of asking, so the outcome is unimportant. The more you attempt, the less stressful it will be. Feel free to use some variation of the following script:

"Excuse me. I'm off to meet a friend [i.e., I have friends and am not a stalker], but I think you're really cute. Could we get coffee at … (a public place)? I can give you my phone number in case you don’t want to give me yours."

## Importance of going for no

### Handling a no

A no is up to you and the other person to define. There is never a singular truth.

You lose nothing by asking if another day, place, time, or event is better. You might say,

* “If not now, how soon?” or
* “Let me give you my number, and you can give me a call when you’re ready” or
* “Why don’t I give you a holler in a week or two and see how you’re doing?”

Breaking the ice with a beautiful person is one of the most difficult tasks out there.

If they determinedly reject you, you just aren’t what they desire. Or maybe they are having a bad day or seeing somebody else. People refuse not you but the idea of a third entity, a relationship. So, forgive yourself if you make a fool of yourself and then someone rejects the notion of spending more time with you. Some people merely don’t want to meet anyone right now.

Once you get the ultimate rejection, which is getting rejected by someone after being in a long relationship with them, everything else is a walk in the park.

#### Four benefits of any no

It…

* improves your character, your motivation for the future, and what you are offering,
* measures accurately your resolve and belief,
* enables you to ask for whatever you want and to accept yourself as is; and
* detaches you from the uncontrollable outcomes of acceptance and rejection.

#### Reframe no and failing

No and failing can be defined neutrally or even positively. No can mean “not yet.” Failing is just learning how an approach doesn’t work; eventually you will learn the right way.

#### For those sensitive to “No”

Tylenol has been shown to help with social rejection, as well as a trusted friend and other comfort treats, such as a hot bath or ice cream.

### Go for no 100 days in a row

This can build up the muscle of effortlessly going for no.

### Climb the levels of failing

1. Ability to fail: You have the ability to fail but want to avoid failing at all costs.
2. Willingness: You are willing to fail and accept failing as a by-product of seeking success.
3. The desire: You want to fail because you know that failing will lead to growth.
4. Faster and bigger: You know that failing leads to success, and thus you want to fail faster and for worthier goals. A no is a no regardless but the rewards are now larger.

### Increase your failing quotient

Consciously or subconsciously, you already have your own personal failing quotient, the number of times you are willing to fail in order to succeed. This ratio is the biggest determinant of whether you will achieve everything you want in life. Increase the ratio as much as possible.

#### Set “no” goals

Set goals for the number of noes you are going to collect. If you set your “no” goals high enough and do your best in each and every situation, then you will succeed.

##### The formula

1. Set your “no” goals on a daily and weekly basis.

1. Use your current failing quotient to determine the number of opportunities you need in order to get the number of yesses you want for the week. For example, if your failing quotient is 10:1 and you want to get two yeses, then you would need to make a pitch to 20 people at your current rate.

##### Going for no protects a hot streak

When you are going for no and you hit a hot streak of yesses, you have to increase your total number of pitches to hit your “no” goal.

# Tips for online dating

## Safety tips

* Create a new e-mail account that does not show your real name.
* Use a separate email address for online dating, and keep your last name hidden.
* Don’t provide any identifying information in the ad.
* The popular Bumble app ([www.bumble.com](http://www.bumble.com)) only lets women make the first contact.
* Only give out your first name, real e-mail address, and phone number when you are ready.
* Be in Invisible mode if someone is dogging you so you can avoid the Who’s Online feature.
* Meet in a crowded public place the first time.
* Tell someone where you’re going and when you plan to be home.
* Don’t let anyone bring you home.
* Also, at some point in the relationship, do a background check on the person. Run a name search on all phone directories that you can find on the Internet. See whether your state or county keeps a record of divorces and criminal convictions online. Look up public records about professional complaints if you’re dating someone who’s professionally licensed.

## Scouting a site

Once you have a secondary e-mail account set up, browse the most popular websites for free to see not only what kind of people frequent the site and whether there are any in your area, but also what user functions the site has.

* See if they have a favorites list for storing links to prospects that you can contact later.
* Do they have a contact log for when you start corresponding with multiple people at once?
* Are there people in your age category and geographic area who may be prospects?
* Does the site’s questionnaire ask the questions that matter to you?
* Is the website’s gender ratio skewed?
* Are there options for voice clips or video clips?

### Trial runs

Take a trial run before signing up for the long run. Most are time-limited. Find a trial run where you can receive email messages, send emails or reply to ones you’ve received, and communicate with or see all postings. You should also be able to post a full profile and answer all questions.

Most last a week or less, and the best day to sign up is Wednesday. If you upload your photo right away, the site will approve it by Friday, and you’ll be visible for the weekend, when activity is greatest. If you’re invited to return for free a few days after your trial run has expired, take the site up on its offer.

### How to search on a website

On some sites, searches retrieve matches alphabetically. Look at where you fall in the search list to know whether you’re rising to the top. Maybe the site ranks the profiles according to how recently they were changed. Therefore, refresh your profile to get it to come to the top.

### Wikipedia’s page comparing stats of most popular sites

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_online_dating_websites>

## Signing up

Be prepared with your profile and photo before signing up. Get a long subscription initially. Sites will then give you a lower month-by-month renewal rate in the future. “Subscribers” are the ones who pay. Most subscriptions automatically renew at the end of the billing cycle, so remember to cancel the subscription once you find someone.

### Carefully pick your locale

If you don’t want to reveal that much about yourself, select a zip code from a town that’s relatively close – just a few miles away – so that it appears online as your hometown. Once you become close with someone, explain your reason for giving a less-than-accurate zip code.

## Completing the profile

Profiles consist of photos, a questionnaire, and essays.

* Add an audio or video file to your profile if the options exist.
* Have good friends look at your profile – optimally a friend of the opposite sex. If you are working with a therapist, share your profile with that person.
* Save a copy of your answers in MS Word and use them for different sites.

### 

### Your photo

Unattractive people have far more online dating options than people who don’t have pictures up.

Include a recent close-up and a full-body shot with something in the background for scale. Put other photos up that show your favorite activities or that make your life inviting to someone else. You may also want to try a black and white photo.

#### Guaranteeing a great photo

1. Get your hair cut at least a few days beforehand.
2. Wear bright colors. Avoid wearing all white; it makes you look pale and pasty.
3. Point your chin slightly to the left or right, and look back to the camera with only your eyes.
4. The background should be simple, perhaps a white wall, and contrast well with your clothes.
5. Natural light is the best. If you’re outside, avoid pure sunlight on your face.
6. Never use flash, especially when shooting yourself in the mirror.
7. Photos taken from a low angle are seen as more dominant, a good thing for first impressions.

#### Common photo blunders

These include sunglasses, webcam, bare chest, no smile, un-cropped body part of someone else, two or more photos with the same clothing and background, and beautiful people on your arms.

### 

### The questionnaire

* Only be hardline on the deal breakers.
* Open up your geographic boundaries as wide as possible.
* Don’t disclose information about your family other than whether you have children.
* Because some questions are silly, you have a golden opportunity to show your humor.
* For leisure activities, limit the checked boxes to four so that the auto-match function does a meaningful search.

### 

### The essays

* As research, read the essays of the people with whom you are competing. The ones that come to life are the ones where you feel like you’re hearing a person’s voice.
* Don’t apologize or say, “I’ve never done this before” or “I don’t know what I’m doing.”
* Specifics stand out. Focus on proper nouns and stories.
* Think of it as a work in progress. Keep it updated.

Describe the type of relationship you’re looking for, your interests, future goals, and your priority issues. Also, tell a story or some interesting life event that reveals your character.

## Evaluating others

### Living-dead profiles

Distinguishing the “living dead” postings (people who can’t answer like those on a perpetual trial period) from the effectively deadwood postings (people who would appear to be able to respond but for some reason just aren’t) is fairly easy. Just look at when the person last signed on.

### Lurk in that site’s chat-rooms

In chat-rooms, instead of engaging with people, just watch (lurk) and see who writes what and check out their profiles while they’re chatting. If you see someone who’s interesting, you also get to read more about them by following the chat thread you are legitimately eavesdropping on.

### Seeing others visit your profile

Sometimes when you visit a person’s profile, the site will report it to that person. This is known as the “Big Brother” feature. It works as an ice-breaker. If someone looks at your profile and you know it, you may feel more comfortable writing the person: “Hi, I noticed you gave me a look. I think you look pretty interesting, too. Why don’t we email?”

### Auto-match as an icebreaker

Use the site’s auto-match tool to let the computer do the work. Scan your results and write a brief email to the matches that interest you.

### Evaluating their photos

A person always looks better than their worst photo and worse than their best one. To evaluate a photo, question whether you would take it home to your mother. Get more than one picture, and ask if the person still looks like they do in the pictures. Men should be aware that some women who are very attractive – or who list themselves as “slim” - don’t post their photos due to an overwhelming response. It may be worthwhile to search for profiles of women who fit this body category and who aren’t showing a photo. They may be waiting for a guy like you who cares about more than just their body to write them.

## Communicating over distance

The goal is to meet offline.

Focus on being calm and concise.

### Things not to discuss

* compliments about body parts below the chin
* other people that either one of you might be seeing right now too
* bad things about your job
* your flaws
* your wealth
* costs of a date
* details of past loves and relationships
* your own inexperience
* your dysfunctional family
* that you have researched them too much or the date itself
* what you are looking for in a relationship (not on the first two dates)
* the same question twice
* these words: marriage, relationship, commitment, and the long-term plans of the two of you as a couple

### E-mails

#### General tips

* Wait at least a day before responding to another’s message.
* Use words and not emoticons.
* If you reply to someone’s email address, identify who you are and where you came from.
* Compliment them on their essays.
* Express some differences on online dates.
* Keep the message to two paragraphs with 1-2 how-why questions, max.
* Before hitting “Send,” reread it for errors, and ensure you could say it face to face.
* After the first couple of e-mails, flirt a bit.
* Avoid sarcasm.
* Don’t write to everyone at once; put most of them in your Favorites section.
* Communicating with several folks is normal. Expect them to be doing the same.
* Avoid them on social media.

#### Before your first email

* You’ve posted your picture.
* You’ve completely filled out your Q&A.
* Your essay screams “great guy/gal!”
* You completed a search to narrow the field.
* You’ve read through the essays of dozens of prospects from your search results.
* You saved all the prospects into the Favorites folder of your online site.
* You’ve selected a few prospects that you’ve just got to write.

#### Folks with expiring memberships

If you write to someone whose membership is about to expire, in addition to including your private email address in your message, save in a word document the person’s entire profile, including the photo and on-screen name. If you end up getting a message from the person on your private email, you may want to re-read the profile to refresh your memory.

#### Your first e-mail to them

Think of your first e-mail as a cover letter and your essays as your resume. A few caveats:

1. Look at their profile and see when they last visited.
2. Mention why the two of you might be compatible.
3. Do not comment on too many aspects of their essay.
4. Avoid politics and religion.
5. Do not give your number.
6. Sign with your real first name.

#### Save the e-mails from both of you

Save the e-mails in a folder named after the website you’re on. Then create separate sub-folders for each person you email. Keep a running set of notes, abstracting the prospect’s likes, dislikes, and such. Include the number of children, their names, ages, and custody issues. Also note any financial issues (job, spending habits, saving habits), interests (hobbies, level of commitment/involvement), and their life events (interesting life stories, foreign travel/study, and career challenges/changes/achievements).

#### Second e-mails

Wait 48 hours before responding to each of their messages (unless you two are exclusive). Take the time for a detailed message, longer than your first one. Make sure you answer their questions with info not in your profile, and pose some additional ones in return.

Rarely write to anyone more than once. If you do, wait a month or two in between letters as that person may have had someone before. If someone doesn’t write back, it hurts, but move on.

#### Going to phone or video chat

1. Agree when to call and who’s going to call whom.
2. The male should give his phone number to the female, who can call from a friend’s phone.
3. Review the emails. Note what questions you have. Starting with lighter subjects is best.
4. Beforehand, practice calmly answering “What do you like?”, “What are you like?” and “What do you do?”
5. Keep the first call to 15 minutes to make for more desire to have a second call.
6. Just focus on being curious and on continuously lengthening your exhale.
7. Put yourself on mute so you don't interrupt and can use the golden breath.
8. If you are asked a question that feels very sensitive, maybe ask to be asked it as a yes/no question.
9. Ask if there is anything on their profile that isn’t exactly correct.
10. Send a follow-up thank-you email and plan when you want to call again.
11. Don’t stop email exchanges; email lets you ask sensitive questions.

##### Five videochatting tips

1. Fill your face with light. Front-facing natural light is best. Set up your computer in front of a window, and importantly, make sure that light is hitting your face straight-on.

2. Avoid low angles. Keep the camera eye-level or higher. Stack your laptop on some books.

3. Mind your skin. Zoom has a filter used to even your skin tone.

4. Know what you’ll look like in advance. Don't join a call and use it as your mirror.

5. Pick the right background. A plain, white one is best.

# The 3 conversation levels of intimacy

The three levels of conversation leading to intimacy are 1) the informational level, where we discuss facts and objective things; 2) the personal level, where we discuss what we feel and think about those facts and things; and 3) the relational level, where we discuss what we feel and think about each other and our experience in that present moment. At this top level we are receiving with true, deep, and undefended curiosity what it is like to be them in that moment, and doing this is much easier than it sounds. There will be moments of pain if we are both being completely unfiltered and emotionally undefended. There will be a dissolution of any fantasy of any kind that one person has of the other's thoughts.

The question, “How you are doing?” takes on a much more physiological aspect: “Into me see.”

## Metaphor: A 3-story, stairless building

The three levels can be thought of as a three-story building with no stairs or elevator. You first go onto the ground floor with another person, wander around the facts and objective things, and see where it might be good to build stairs up to the second floor of personal thoughts and feelings. Only after wandering around that second floor does it make sense to then become curious about where to put a ladder to the third floor of the vulnerable experience of the here and now with this other person. You know by now that there is enough solidity in the building to support wandering around on this third floor.

## Talk in person to avoid limerence

The key to dating is co-regulation with the other person *in person*. Limerent people withdraw from being in person with the other whom they have idealized. They withdraw so that they can go home and mentally fantasize alone about this ideal in their own head. They think this other person can be their adult, protective self who will allow the limerent person to stay as an inner emotional child.

When you feel that you have a crush on someone, to avoid falling into limerence, start filling in the blanks about what you don’t know about them in a measured and logical way.

1. How big is the gap between your relationship with them within your own mind versus the relationship with them in reality? *How would you feel if you had to confess to them in person all of the fantasies you have about them within your mind?* Avoid thinking about wonderful scenarios with this person far off in the future.
2. Seek information about them that would disqualify them as a romantic partner for you. You are okay, they are okay, but maybe there are things that would not make you good romantic partners for each other. Be aware of what will be deal-breakers down the road so that you can bring them up right now. Stay grounded in who you yourself are and what you want.
3. Distinguish between your wants from them in reality versus your wants from them psychologically? How realistic are your psychological wants from them? Can they meet that? *Often psychological wants from this person when we are in limerence are just our own self-esteem needs that we must fill on our own*.
4. Check in and see what's going on in real time with them. "I have an idea that you like this (or are like this). Is that accurate?"
5. When you can, ask hard questions. Most divorces are about stuff known in the first ten days.
6. Ensure your perception of them is as similar as possible to their perception of themselves.

# Meeting up the first time

Remember, the goal is to meet in person. Assertively offer a choice of meeting on a weeknight or a weekend afternoon for either a glass of wine or beer, or an outdoor stroll with coffee or tea.

## First 3 dates’ in-advance checklist

\_\_\_\_ Have low expectations. Ask yourself, what’s the worst that could possibly happen?

\_\_\_\_ Have a haircut done recently.

\_\_\_\_ Do a sweaty cardio workout earlier in the day so they can see your radiance.

\_\_\_\_ Bring breath mints, cash, your phone, your date’s contact info, and any tickets.

\_\_\_\_ Meet in a public place that has a lot of people.

\_\_\_\_ Check your breath and your teeth.

\_\_\_\_ Arrive in separate cars and park yours far from the door of the meeting place.

\_\_\_\_ Only reveal your first name.

\_\_\_\_ Less than five minutes before seeing your date, breathe deeply several times and force yourself to smile repeatedly. The brain doesn’t register stress when you smile.

### Checklist for him especially

\_\_\_\_ Paying for at least the first two dates

\_\_\_\_ No flowers – too soon

\_\_\_\_ Enough gas in your clean car

\_\_\_\_ Enough cash to cover most situations

\_\_\_\_ Have your next activity idea in mind with the day & hour so you can ask her that night

## Minutes before you see them

A minute or two before you meet, do a couple deep breaths. Ground your feet, tuck your tailbone, pull your shoulders down and back, lift your chin, and loosen your lips. When you see them for the first time, smile and keep your eyes on their face. Drift to their cheeks, lips, and then back to their eyes. When you are feeling more confident, you can voyage to their neck and shoulders. If you want, compliment them on their clothes or anything above their neck.

## When listening

Look into the inner corner of one of their eyes as they speak, without staring and without changing your facial expression. Then take a breath after they have finished and before you respond. Listen especially when your date talks about what fascinates them the most.

## When speaking

Regulate yourself in their presence and give them space in that moment to self-regulate too. Long pauses that led to squirming can be good. Use these seconds to focus on how you feel about yourself in their presence. Ask yourself, “Is this someone I should invest in emotionally?”

Be assertive, a bit dismissing, and positive. Speak confidently and concisely about yourself. Don’t put yourself down or share past bad deeds, no matter how good it feels. Apologize rarely, and express a boundary if you can.

### When asking questions

Smile when gently asking questions so that it doesn’t feel like an interview. Focus first on your shared interests, then shared experiences, and only then your shared feelings. Eventually work your way up to sharing your feelings either about yourself right now or about them.

### When answering questions

Take a full, silent breath before answering, and then be concise. Share one 10-second thought, let that land, and just breathe. Then share another concise thought and let that land. This process will help you see both yourself from the 1st-person perspective (here I am) and the 3rd-person observer watching you talk (look at that speaker there), with facial and body stillness.

It’s okay to say that you feel too vulnerable on a certain question and would like to answer it in either a yes-no format or in depth at another time. If they ask, "What are you looking for in a relationship?" on the first or second date, do not answer. If you do, you’ll sound too vague or rigid. You won’t be able to convey that you are flexible on a lot of the issues.

If you’re about to share something personal, ask yourself if you would feel comfortable leaving a five-year-old child in the temporary care of this person. That five-year-old child is your inner emotional self. If you are doing it to make yourself feel more comfortable, don’t do it. Instead, pull back by changing the topic and then self-soothe with long exhales when they’re talking.

And if you are not yet comfortable with them sharing something with you that is deeply troubling or personal about them, then don't burden them with your stuff. Trust is only built through slow, reciprocal vulnerability. All of our relationships and friendships get healthier from this discernment. Be VERY wary of imbalances in vulnerability and self-disclosing.

Less is more. Leave them wanting a little more than thinking it’s time for them to go.

If you progress into a relationship, always ask first if you can share a heavy thing now, or if they want you to wait until another time that is better for them.

### If they seem annoyed

If you suspect your date is annoyed or impatient, you can say, “I seem to have turned you off. Was it something I said?” It’s also okay to say that you’re feeling nervous.

## Ending the date

It’s okay to set up the next date near the end of the current one. A good question for the guy is, “Do you like to let the guy plan the date or do you like to wing it and just hang out?” This is a good way to gauge how it’s going.

At the end, it’s not what you say but how softly you say it.

### If you want another date

Option #1: Express how much fun you had and that you’re impressed by your date’s unique qualities. Comments like these will reassure them and offer a way to plan a follow-up.

Option #2: Keep it simple. A good line said slowly is “Being with you was fun. I hope we get together again. When might be a good time for you?” Ask to kiss good-night, and do it on the cheek. Then follow up the next day, not three days later.

### If you’re not sure

Tell your date that you had a good time and need a little time to sort out your feelings.

### If you don’t want another date

A cordial “It was nice to meet you” is fine.

## Keep a journal

Are you being selective with your memory of what happened and with how you’re seeing it?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | How we met | 1st date when & where | How I felt | How I can improve | 2nd date when & where | Pros & cons |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

You might also want to keep a handwritten journal where you journal with your opposite hand.

Or even record audio-journal entries into your smartphone’s voice memos.

## Calling the next day

Ask if you can call them at a specific time the next day to plan the next date. Just don’t chat for too long.

# Second & third dates

The biggest difference between a first date and second date is expectation. Don’t assume that the two of you are destined to be together. It takes time to really trust someone fully.

Allow for two hours. A dinner date is a good idea.

Quietly do a bodyscan of yourself when with them. How do you feel once you do this?

If your date feels uncomfortable, it’s okay to say, “You seem to be uncomfortable, are you?”

## Silently showing you like them

* Touch their arm and smile
* Clasp their hand
* Face your shoulders toward them
* Gently open lips
* Hold extended eye contact with a silent “I like you” without moving your lips.
  + Say “I like you” silently during eye contact. Then extend that to
    - “I really like you.”
    - Then “I really, really like you.”
    - Then “I really, really, really like you.”
    - Then “I really, really, really, really like you.”

When you have reached six “reallys,” you have achieved some serious sensuous eye contact. You can tell their slightly nervous but excited reaction. These extra seconds of eye contact speak romantic volumes.

## After the 2nd date

### Reflection questions

* Does this person bring out the best of your true self?
* Do you think you could dream the same dreams?
* What is it that you have done right so far?

### If you don’t want to see them again

Call them, thank them for their time, say that you’re not feeling it in the interaction, and that you wish them well in their search. If they ask for specifics as to why you didn’t like them or don’t want to pursue the exchange further, decline.

## Third date

It’s okay for the guy to say yes if the woman offers to pay for herself now.

Be honest about who you are and what you enjoy doing.

The fewer people who know you’ve passed the third-date threshold, the better. Give the relationship a chance to get going before having others ask how it’s going.

Also, remember to be concise in the first five dates. You don’t really know them.

### If you want out after 3 dates & beyond

If you know you won’t ever cross ways with them again by accident, it’s okay to say that things are getting serious with someone else (a fictitious person that they don’t need to know about).

## See other people too

“Dating” is not being exclusive. Be careful of asking too soon for statements of care and reassurance. Be careful of feeling jealous. If feeling jealous, think, "I am enough."

Do not “confess” that you are seeing others. Assume that they are too. Unless they initiate the topic, avoid telling them that you only want to see them and not others too. Ask yourself, “Why wouldn’t this person be seeing someone else?”

Seeing several people over the same time interval keeps you from thinking unhealthily about one person. Do not allow yourself to think “maybe he or she is the one…” Just keep telling yourself, “They are just a wonderful person who I enjoy being with and with whom I’ve had three (4, 5, 6…) dates. That’s all it is.” Enjoy the “experience” of being with different dates *in person* and not with one *in your head*. Avoid limerent thoughts.

It also makes it easier to express your needs and wishes; you won’t fear that you might chase away a rare prospect. This lets you see whether someone can meet your needs before you become too exclusive with them.

You might want to only see each other once a week for several months. You will, of course, want to continue to talk on the telephone and email each other more frequently than this, but you do not want to wrap this person into every aspect of your life. This will prevent you from getting too attached too quickly. You will also have six nights left to spend with someone else.

Go on 2nd dates with at least ten people, 3rd dates with at least five people, and 4th dates with at least three. It takes 10-20 interactions with someone to know you want a relationship with them.

Meanwhile, continue your mutual-differentiation activities outside of dating that make you feel happy. This can include exercise, spending time with friends and family, pursuing hobbies, and practicing self-reflection and self-compassion.

Wait at least two months before talking about commitment and exclusivity and emotionally investing in the relationship. Take up to six months before knowing you can really rely on them.

## Communicate your expectations

Many sites give the time and date for when you were last online even if you set your mode to invisible. Communicate your expectations. Whether you opt for faithfulness or continue to play the field, partners feel more secure when there are no surprises.

## Kissing

### Kissing for the first time

Sit close, and look them in the eye silently. If they look back silently for three seconds, they want to kiss. The discomfort is sexual tension. Maintain eye contact on the way to your date’s lips. Then close your eyes. With your non-dominant hand, cup the back of their neck where it meets the head, tilt your head in the direction of your dominant hand, and slowly lip lock for 2-3 seconds or so, slowly separating their two lips with one of your lips. Pull back. If it’s a go, you’ll know by the way they look longingly back at you.

A good video on your first kiss with someone: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r87ohPQenso>

### Maybe wait 90 days before kissing

You may want to wait 90 days for any sort of physical intimacy including kissing. People can maintain their facades up for 30 days, but not 90 days. This makes it easier for the other person to understand if you want to see other people too during this time.

## If they don’t want to see you again

Focus on your healthy habits. Remind yourself of your value and strengths. Consider what your family and friends appreciate about you.

Spend time alone. Write a letter out to that person to unload your thoughts, but don’t mail it. Just burn it after you finish writing it.

Accept that many things don’t last forever, including sadness. Just some time is needed for the pain to pass. Sit in it, and feel it to process it fully. Be compassionate with yourself. Tylenol has been shown to help with social rejection, as well as a trusted friend and other comfort treats, such as a hot bath or ice cream.

To avoid making the same mistake, know whether your dates are following a pattern.

# Attachment styles in relationships

## Secure types

Secure types meet their own needs, find some explicit agreements about which needs they're going to meet for the other, and give leeway and grace when their partner doesn’t reciprocate in meeting their needs. Secure types strongly respect what both types bring to the table, and they take their fair share of accountability of the problems in the relationship. Distortions are minimized, and conflicts are seen as “us against the problem.”

The relationship with a secure type is neither a rollercoaster nor a drama. It can feel boring at times or even absent since even secure types need breaks sometimes from being really present for each other and just need to be alone for a few nights to rebalance themselves.

They know they’re not the answer to the other’s problems but just an empowering coach, a “secondary” secure base. Being a secondary secure base lets the other one explore their experiences while the secure type remains accepting, comforting, open, reassuring, and validating. This even includes those moments when the other one is dysregulated and exploring their negative feelings about the relationship.

Secure types also

* do not try to infer what their partner is saying but instead take things at face value,
* intentionally carve out time to be by themselves and to meet most of their needs,
* notice their boundaries and enforce these,
* know that their bad mood is likely not because of their partner and will tell them if it is,
* express those specific actions for their partner to take that would make them feel more loved,
* watch when they’re vulnerable and how their partner responds to that, and lastly,
* have outside support systems as well as a strong sense of independence and thus know that even if the worst thing happened in the relationship, they will be okay.

### Common secure-type phrases

* “Let me think about before I respond,”
* “I'm not comfortable with that,” and
* “This is who I am, and I'm proud of it.”

## Insecure types

### Checklist questions

1. Am I clear about what I want? (Children, lifestyle, financial, etc).

2. Am I clear about which wants are negotiable and which ones are not?

3. Am I deactivating over small things that are actually solvable? Can I adapt here?

5. Am I am staying mindful to trusting and vulnerable communication?

6. Am I communicating clearly who I am and what I expect from others?

7. Am I questioning my stories, and communicating instead of making assumptions?

8. Do I have relationship needs that I have yet to express? How can I express them?

9. Am I creating and appreciating peace and stability in the relationship?

10. Am I wrongly using feelings of boredom and a lack of excitement to push people away?

### Thought-bubble exercise

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Situation | Attachment-related anxious thoughts (related to your partner and you) | Effects of anxious thoughts on feelings and behaviors | Disconfirming evidence |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

### When one’s anxious & one’s avoidant

Be on the alert for a pursuit-withdrawal relationship. This happens when one person is overly anxious and the other one is overly avoidant. If you are the anxious one, pay close attention when you meet someone who displays an interest in you, *but* who

* does not seem to care about or attend to your feelings,
* does not respect or want to hear about your thoughts or interests, or
* dismisses your desire for closeness as being too needy.

You will be better off with someone who has a secure attachment style.

# Myers-Briggs for better rapport

The MBTI model is based on four dichotomous categories of personality: extraversion or introversion, sensing or intuiting, thinking or feeling, and judging or perceiving. Seeing another person’s preference for each category shows us a rough pattern of their personality, behavior, and how they view reality. A ***fantastic*** book on using the MBTI for couples’ communication is *Just Your Type*, by Paul Tieger and Barbara Barron.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Extraverts (E)** | **Introverts (I)** |
| have enthusiastic demeanor | have calm, measured demeanor |
| think out loud | think, then talk |
| talk faster and usually louder | talk slower and usually more quietly |
| are easily distracted | are able to focus their attention |
| change subjects quickly | stay with one subject at a time |
| like to be around people | like to spend time alone |
| often seek center stage | often shun the limelight |
| interrupt and finish sentences | start conversations without a preface |
| **with extraverts** | **with introverts** |
| let them talk, and think out loud | ask, then listen carefully |
| include a variety of topics | talk about one thing at a time |
| communicate verbally | communicate in writing, if possible |
| expect an immediate response | give them adequate time to reflect |
| keep the conversation moving | don't finish their sentences |
| **Sensors (S)** | **Intuitives (N)** |
| have clear, straightforward speech pattern | have complex speech pattern |
| have sequential thoughts | have roundabout thoughts |
| literal; use facts and examples | figurative; use analogies and metaphors |
| use language as a tool | use language to express selves |
| are more aware of their bodies | attracted to jobs that involve creativity |
| attracted to jobs that require practicality | are more likely to have graduate degree(s) |
| are less likely to have graduate degree(s) | often prefer fiction reading |
| often prefer nonfiction reading | repeat themselves, recap, and rephrase |
| are direct and to the point | think about global issues, the big picture |
| include details and facts | envision the future |
| remember the past accurately | tend to finish others' sentences |
| tend to listen until others complete their whole thought | will only be interested in helping if an enticing possibility is dangled before them |
| **with sensors** | **with intuitives** |
| state topic clearly | discuss the "big picture" and implications |
| prepare facts and examples | talk about possibilities |
| present information step-by-step | use analogies and metaphors |
| stress practical applications | brainstorm options |
| finish your sentences | engage their imaginations |
| draw on past, real experiences | don't overwhelm them with detail |
| **Thinkers (T)** | **Feelers (F)** |
| act cooler, more distant toward others | act warmer, friendlier toward others |
| may seem insensitive | are very sensitive to others' feelings |
| may be blunt and tactless | are usually very gentle and diplomatic |
| often appear businesslike | engage in social niceties |
| may argue or debate for fun | avoid arguments and conflicts |
| are more "thick-skinned | have their feelings hurt more easily |
| get right to the point | engage in small talk first |
| seldom ask if timing is inconvenient | ask if timing is inconvenient |
| appear low-key and matter-of-fact | may appear excited and emotional |
| give praise sparingly | are generous with praise |
| are usually very assertive | may lack assertiveness |
| use impersonal language | use lots of "value" words |
| use people's names sparingly | use people's names frequently |
| often are engaged in jobs of strategy | are often involved in helping jobs |
| are more likely to be male (65% odds) | are more likely to be female (65% odds) |
| need to know the result and to have the situation framed in a set of logical points. | need to have the situation framed in terms of what it means to the people involved. |
| **with thinkers** | **with feelers** |
| be organized and logical | first mention points of agreement |
| consider the cause and effect | appreciate their efforts and contributions |
| focus on consequences | recognize legitimacy of feelings |
| ask not how they feel but what they think | talk about "people" concerns |
| appeal to their sense of fairness | smile and maintain good eye contact |
| don’t repeat yourself | be friendly and considerate |
| **Judgers (J)** | **Perceivers (P)** |
| are more formal and conventional | are more casual and unconventional |
| are more serious | are more playful |
| like to take charge and be in control | are good at adapting |
| like to make decisions; decide quickly | may procrastinate; put off decisions |
| are definitive and express strong opinions | may be tentative and more "wishy-washy" |
| are often in a hurry; like rapid pace | prefer a more leisurely pace |
| dress more for appearance | dress more for comfort |
| probably have neat car interior | probably have messy car interior |
| like to set and reach goals | are liable to change goals |
| are driven to finish projects | prefer to start projects |
| like rules, systems, and structure | rules and systems are confining and limiting |
| are usually well organized | are often disorganized |
| check off completed items on a list | seldom complete all items on a list |
| usually have neat and tidy work space | usually have messy, cluttered work space |
| walk faster with deliberate movements | may walk slower |
| may have straighter posture | may slouch more |
| seek jobs that give them lots of control | seek jobs that are fun |
| have a "finished, "neat appearance, clothes pressed, hair combed, etc. | have an "unfinished" look; clothes rumpled, unruly hair, etc. |
| **with judgers** | **with perceivers** |
| be on time and be prepared | expect many questions |
| come to conclusions; resolve issues | don't force them to decide prematurely |
| be decisive and definitive | discuss options and allow plans to change |
| allow them to make decisions | focus on the process, not product |
| be organized and efficient with time | give them choices |
| stick with plans made | be open to new information |

### 

## How the last 2 categories interact

### Traits of \_\_TPs & \_\_FJs

These types all turn their feeling outwards (they extravert it): ENFJ, INFJ, ESFJ, ISFJ, ENTP, INTP, ESTP, and ISTP.

They...

1. Strive to connect with others. They naturally pay attention to other people, are good at reading feelings and knowing what others want and need, and are motivated to provide it.

2. Try to please others and seek approval (especially FJs). They often will go to great lengths to promote harmony.

3. Can be charming and charismatic (especially extraverts). They are "people" people - good talkers who are usually good at convincing others to trust and follow them.

4. Are physically expressive (especially extraverts). When talking with others, their faces are usually very expressive - they often have twinkling eyes, tend to laugh easily, and exhibit a wide variety of facial expressions, from smiling to frowning, from beaming to grimacing. Their reactions are often dramatic and immediate, and they are able to shift from one emotion to another quite quickly. Extraverts here usually engage with others physically, lean into conversations, sit or stand close to the person, nod their heads in approval, touch, hug, pat shoulders, rub backs, engage in extended handshakes, and show other more public displays of affection. They also give lots of supportive feedback and commiserate easily with people, using expressions such as "That must have been very hard on you" or "I understand how you feel."

5. Tend to praise and blame others. While they can be very complimentary, they can also direct their extraverted feeling toward others in negative ways, by deflecting blame from themselves and punishing others who may not be at fault.

6. Tend to be appearance conscious. They are generally very aware of and concerned about how they will be perceived by others, and often feel it is more important to look good or dress appropriately to the situation than it is to be comfortable. In other words, they frequently dress for others first, and themselves second. In this way, they tend to put appearance over function. This results in wearing coordinated outfits (this is especially true for women), and both women and men usually have a "pulled-together" look.

#### \_\_FJs: Unique aspects

(4 of the 16 types: ENFJ, INFJ, ESFJ, and ISFJ)

1. Really do make decisions based on their own personal values, unlike TPs, whose decisions are more dictated by logic and impersonal principles.

2. Are usually comfortable with feelings, their own and others' understanding them, talking about them, and sharing them.

3. Are genuinely motivated to help people, and find great fulfillment in doing so. They are so eager to be helpful that they often put other people's needs before their own.

4. Use language that reflects their values. They tend to describe things using words like: "wonderful," "horrible," "beautiful," "terrific," "outrageous," "ridiculous," etc.

5. Have strong opinions and express them; they like giving advice, and it often includes words like "should," as in "What you should do is march right down there and demand a refund! I know I would!"

6. Express their approval and disapproval with their facial expressions. Often they will raise their eyebrows and tilt their heads to one side as if to say," Oh, really?" to demonstrate their displeasure.

#### \_\_TPs: Unique aspects

(4 of the 16 types: ENTP, INTP, ESTP, and ISTP)

1. Make decisions based upon impersonal analysis, rather than according to their own values or concerns about how others will be affected.

2. Often use their feeling side strategically to connect with others to accomplish their objectives.

3. Are good at seeing both, or even several sides, of an issue, and usually enjoy debating or arguing the merits of different sides. This is in sharp contrast to FJs, who have such a strong need for harmony they will seldom risk confrontation, and the tension or ill will that an argument may create between people.)

4. Can be very dramatic with emotions (especially ENTPs and ESTPs). They have a wide repertoire of behavior and are comfortable moving from one behavioral extreme to another.

5. Are pragmatic: unlike FJs, they can usually change positions easily to accommodate new information or if they decide a different strategy is more effective. Also unlike FJs, they tend not to lock themselves into moral, or value-based, positions, so they tend to be able and willing to retreat from their original position as the situation warrants.

6. Are generally less serious, and more easygoing; they have a "lighter," more casual demeanor that usually makes them fun to be around.

### Traits of \_\_TJs & \_\_FPs

These types all turn their feeling inwards (they introvert it): ENTJ, INTJ, ESTJ, ISTJ, ENFP, INFP, ESFP, and ISFP.

1. Can appear rather impersonal and dispassionate.

2. Are more concerned with pleasing themselves than they are with pleasing others. That is, they are generally more concerned about how they feel or what they think about a given issue than about what others may feel or think about it.

3. Are not usually physically or emotionally expressive, except with people very close to them or in private. (This is especially true of Thinking Judgers). In fact, they often have a blank expression even while discussing emotional issues, which can belie the passionate feelings they may be experiencing inside (especially Feeling Perceivers).

4. In contrast to people who extravert feeling and who often have sparkly eyes, FPs and TJs often have what can best be described as sad eyes.

#### \_\_TJs: Unique aspects

(4 of the 16 types: ENTJ, INTJ, ESTJ, and ISTJ)

As Thinkers, TJs make their decisions based on impersonal logic. And, as Judgers, they seek closure, structure, and finality. This combination can make them among the toughest of all the types. It is usually quite easy to see the extraverted thinking of TJs.

1. Are no-nonsense and businesslike. They get to the point and don’t waste time. They don't willingly engage in excessive social niceties, and may be somewhat awkward when engaging in small talk for which they see little need and have little patience (especially Introverts).

2. Usually have and express strong opinions and can appear insensitive and unfeeling since they give honest, truthful feedback even if it is blunt or brutally frank.

3. Show little emotion. They keep their feelings in check and seldom let them influence their logical decision making.

4. Are not physically demonstrative and seldom touch people with whom they are interacting. This is especially true of ISTJs and INTJs.

5. Usually have a tidy, more formal professional appearance. They usually dress in a conventional, traditional manner.

#### \_\_FPs: Unique aspects

(4 of the 16 types: ENFP, INFP, ESFP, and ISFP)

1. Have a gentle and even mellow persona. They prefer cooperation to competition and have an easygoing attitude.

2. Have deep feelings, but are very private about them, and do not share them easily except with people with whom they are very close. However, at the same time, they can be extremely sentimental.

3. Are extremely sensitive. Outwardly friendly, they can also become suddenly moody. This is especially true of INFPs and ENFPs.

4. When things go wrong, they tend to look inward and blame themselves rather than to look outside and blame others.

5. Are flexible when dealing with little, everyday matters but can be tenacious, stubborn, and even inflexible when it comes to dealing with matters that involve their values or something very important to them. This can result in a tendency to hold grudges when they have been offended.

6. Often communicate their values more through their actions than through their words.

7. Are not overly conscious of appearance and generally dress to please themselves, not others. They can often have an unfinished, casual look about them.

8. Can be self-deprecating and humble and are often uncomfortable or embarrassed receiving public compliments or praise.

## Sensing their top strength

1. Look at the last letter of the four-letter code of the person’s personality – your own or someone else’s. This letter tells you which one of the two middle letters is extraverted and thus viewable to the general public. If the person is a J, their preferred mental process of the third category (T or F) can be seen by others, but not their preferred mental process for the second category (S or N), which is introverted (turned inwards). If the person is a P, the preferred mental process for the second category (S or N) can be seen by others, but not their preferred mental process for the third category (T or F), which is introverted.

The viewable letter for the J is **j**ust next to it (the third letter in the code), and the viewable letter for the P is **p**rior to the J’s viewable letter (the second letter in the code).

1. Now look at the first letter in the person’s four-letter code. If it is an E, then the extraverted mental process seen in the last paragraph plays the most important role in that person’s personality, and the person’s preferred mental process that is introverted plays the second-most important role, like an assistant to the chief executive. If the first letter in the person’s code is an I, then the preferred mental process identified above that is introverted plays the role of chief executive in the person’s personality, and the preferred mental process that is extraverted and seen by others plays the role of assistant, an assistant that is very careful about who is allowed in to meet the chief executive.

### How each strength dominates

#### Extrav. Intuiting: ENTP/ENFP

Extraverted intuiting involves noticing hidden meanings and interpreting them, often entertaining a wealth of possible interpretations from just one idea or interpreting what someone’s behavior really means. It also involves seeing things “as if,” with various possible representations of reality. Using this process, we can juggle many different ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and meanings in our mind at once with the possibility that they are all true. This is like weaving themes and threads together. We don’t know the weave until a thought thread appears or is drawn out in the interaction of thoughts, often brought in from other contexts. Thus a strategy or concept often emerges from the here-and-now interactions, not appearing as a whole beforehand. Using this process we can really appreciate brainstorming and trust what emerges, enjoying imaginative play with scenarios and combining possibilities, using a kind of cross-contextual thinking. Extraverted intuiting also can involve catalyzing people and extemporaneously shaping situations, spreading an atmosphere of change through emergent leadership.

#### Extrav. Sensing: ESTP/ESFP

Extraverted Sensing occurs when we become aware of what is in the physical world in rich detail. We may be drawn to act on what we experience to get an immediate result. We notice relevant facts and occurrences in a sea of data and experiences, learning all the facts we can about the immediate context or area of focus and what goes on in that context. An active seeking of more and more input to get the whole picture may occur until all sources of input have been exhausted or something else captures our attention. Extraverted Sensing is operating when we freely follow exciting physical impulses or instincts as they come up and enjoy the thrill of action in the present moment. A oneness with the physical world and a total absorption may exist as we move, touch, and sense what is around us. The process involves instantly reading cues to see how far we can go in a situation and still get the impact we want or respond to the situation with presence.

#### Introv. Sensing: ISTJ/ISFJ

Introverted Sensing often involves storing data and information, then comparing and contrasting the current situation with similar ones. The immediate experience or words are instantly linked with the prior experiences, and we register a similarity or a difference—for example, noticing that some food doesn’t taste the same or is saltier than it usually is. Introverted sensing is also operating when we see someone who reminds us of someone else. Sometimes a feeling associated with the recalled image comes into our awareness along with the information itself. Then the image can be so strong, our body responds as if reliving the experience. The process also involves reviewing the past to draw on the lessons of history, hindsight, and experience. With introverted sensing, there is often great attention to detail and getting a clear picture of goals and objectives and what is to happen. There can be a oneness with ageless customs that help sustain civilization and culture and protect what is known and long-lasting, even while what is reliable changes.

#### Introv. Intuiting: INTJ/INFJ

Introverted intuiting involves synthesizing the seemingly paradoxical or contradictory, which takes understanding to a new level. Using this process, we can have moments when completely new, unimagined realizations come to us. A disengagement from interactions in the room occurs, followed by a sudden “Aha!” or “That’s it!” The sense of the future and the realizations that come from introverted intuiting have a surety and an imperative quality that seem to demand action and help us stay focused on fulfilling our vision or dream of how things will be in the future. Using this process, we might rely on a focal device or symbolic action to predict, enlighten, or transform. We could find ourselves laying out how the future will unfold based on unseen trends and telling signs. This process can involve working out complex concepts or systems of thinking or conceiving of symbolic or novel ways to understand things that are universal. It can lead to creating transcendent experiences or solutions.

#### Extrav. Thinking: ESTJ/ENTJ

Contingency planning, scheduling, and quantifying utilize the process of extraverted thinking. Extraverted thinking helps us organize our environment and ideas through charts, tables, graphs, flow charts, outlines, and so on. At its most sophisticated, this process is about organizing and monitoring people and things to work efficiently and productively. Empirical thinking is at the core of extraverted thinking when we challenge someone’s ideas based on the logic of the facts in front of us or lay out reasonable explanations for decisions or conclusions made, often trying to establish order in someone else’s thought process. In written or verbal communication, extraverted thinking helps us easily follow someone else’s logic, sequence, or organization. It also helps us notice when something is missing, like when someone says that they are going to talk about four topics and talks about only three. In general, it allows us to compartmentalize many aspects of our lives so we can do what is necessary to accomplish our objectives.

#### Introv. Thinking: INTP/ISTP

Introverted thinking often involves finding just the right word to clearly express an idea concisely, crisply, and to the point. Using introverted thinking is like having an internal sense of the essential qualities of something, noticing the fine distinctions that make it what it is and then naming it. It also involves an internal reasoning process of deriving subcategories of classes and sub-principles of general principles. These can then be used in problem solving, analysis, and refining of a product or an idea. This process is evidenced in behaviors like taking things or ideas apart to figure out how they work. The analysis involves looking at different sides of an issue and seeing where there is inconsistency. In so doing, we search for a “leverage point” that will fix problems with the least amount of effort or damage to the system. We engage in this process when we notice logical inconsistencies between statements and frameworks, using a model to evaluate the likely accuracy of what’s observed.

#### Extrav. Feeling: ESFJ/ENFJ

The process of extraverted feeling often involves a desire to connect with (or disconnect from) others and is often evidenced by expressions of warmth (or displeasure) and self-disclosure. The “social graces,” such as being polite, being nice, being friendly, being considerate, and being appropriate, often revolve around the process of extraverted feeling. Keeping in touch, laughing at jokes when others laugh, and trying to get people to act kindly to each other also involve extraverted feeling. Using this process, we respond according to expressed or even unexpressed wants and needs of others. We may ask people what they want or need or self-disclose to prompt them to talk more about themselves. This often sparks conversation and lets us know more about them so we can better adjust our behavior to them. Often with this process, we feel pulled to be responsible and take care of others’ feelings, sometimes to the point of not separating our feelings from theirs. We may recognize and adhere to shared values, feelings, and social norms to get along.

#### Introv. Feeling: ISFP/INFP

It is often hard to assign words to the values used to make introverted feeling judgments since they are often associated with images, feeling tones, and gut reactions more than words. As a cognitive process, it often serves as a filter for information that matches what is valued, wanted, or worth believing in. There can be a continual weighing of the situational worth or importance of everything and a patient balancing of the core issues of peace and conflict in life’s situations. We engage in the process of introverted feeling when a value is compromised and we think, “Sometimes, some things just have to be said.” On the other hand, most of the time this process works “in private” and is expressed through actions. It helps us know when people are being fake or insincere or if they are basically good. It is like having an internal sense of the “essence” of a person or a project and reading fine distinctions among feeling tones.

# Committing to exclusivity

Think through everything about your partner – your doubts, fears, and joys. Write them all down, then sit quietly and hear what else comes up. Keep writing until you clear out all your thoughts and your mind becomes still. How good is your map of this person? Who are they? How can you live with them? What are their likes, dislikes, fears, stresses, deepest longings, dreams, and beliefs? What helps them feel appreciated? How curious are they? How eager are they to learn?

To know them is to know what matters to them, what hurts, and what makes them laugh. Until you can answer these questions, you are not ready for an exclusive relationship with them.

You may even want to ask yourself, "Would I be happy dying in a conversation with this person?

The more authentic we feel with our partner, the less fear of commitment we will have. This fear is usually due to something specific that you don’t want to bring up explicitly with them. Your emotions are valid, and the more attuned you are to them and aware of why you might feel hurt, the less fear of commitment you will have. Thus, think of it less as a fear of commitment and more of a need to now talk about some explicit component.

Accept that you take this person exactly as they are at this moment. Consider what traits are actually attracting you to them. Don’t push them into a projected image of who they could be.

Also, the fear is usually a fear of committing to the version of yourself within this relationship with this other person. Your commitment should first be to yourself, to ensure you don’t make a major mistake and lose something that is best for you. If stressed by the idea of a commitment, breathe into your fear. Is your fear grounded in reality, or are you bumping into a frightened heart that says, “It’s dangerous to love, to get close, to let anyone really love me”?

Thus, ask yourself,

1. In which ways am I not authentically showing up in this relationship?
2. What parts of myself am I hiding from this person?
3. Who am I pretending to be who I am not?

A commitment must come from a desire to go deeper into the relationship and only after many interactions in the “daily-ness” and “ordinary-ness” of the work. People are far more likely to be open, vulnerable, trusting, and real when they know their partner will be there for them.

Do not expect that your partner will assume exclusivity or know intuitively what you want. You must raise this issue. Not being ready does not mean that it will never happen or that anything about your relationship needs to change. Also, don’t assume your date is responsible sexually; you may want to ask for an STD test at this time.

Make the relationship known to close friends and family. By telling others of the relationship, the commitment becomes more real and allows you to be included as a couple in social gatherings. If your partner doesn’t want friends and family to know about your relationship, or doesn’t want to socialize with others as a couple, or you feel like a well-kept secret, you are probably with someone who will be unable to commit to a spiritually-centered relationship.

Before you quit a dating site, delete your photo and essays. Wait a few days and then resign. The company won’t restore a posting without an essay or photo, and your privacy will be secure.

# Exercises to build emotional intimacy

## Tonglen meditation

In Tonglen, we inhale others’ negativity and pain and exhale to them our calmness and clarity.

1. Sit facing each other, relax, and breathe in and out together until synchronized. Perhaps start with your eyes closed, but eventually make soft eye contact without staring too deeply.
2. See the circle of light surrounding the two of you, the light of “us” together.
3. Inhale your negative energy and exhale your positive energy to your partner.
4. Inhale your partner’s negative energy and exhale to them your positive energy.
5. If a conflict exists between the two of you, name it and then inhale it together. Feel it completely and exhale positive energy to both your partner and the relationship.
6. You might even do this on a daily basis together.

You can also inhale the pain of all couples who are feeling conflict and exhale healing and light to them. This will carry you to the universal heart and help you see that you are feeling “the” hurt, “the” frustration, and “the” sadness that are intrinsic to all human relationships. After a while, you will no longer feel alone, and you will be able to greet daily problems with grace.

## Gratitude list

List the qualities you appreciate in your partner. The read it over slowly to yourself. Also list the qualities of your relationship that you appreciate. Focus on the ways in which you and your partner are a great team. Lastly, list your qualities that your partner probably finds positive. This can help you develop more awareness, and eventual acceptance, of your positive attributes. When you complete this, read it over slowly, allowing yourself to really feel good about your relationship and to be grateful for having it in your life.

Keep this list close by. You are more likely to be influenced by this paper if you keep it with you, such as in your pocket. Whether you keep it there or elsewhere, you will benefit from reading it on a daily basis. Try it daily for eight weeks.

Then take time every evening to think back on the day. List at least one way your partner contributed, even in a minor way, to your well-being, and why you're grateful for them.

## Building relationship-assertiveness skills

Take turns with your partner making simple "I’m feeling (adjective)” statements only about yourselves. Take time to identify the exact feeling. Stop your partner after a few sentences so that you can remember the words. If necessary, ask for clarification. Repeat back what was said to you, starting with, "You're saying that you..." Try to use the exact words that your partner said. Practice on neutral topics frequently so that when conversations are about more emotional topics, you'll still be able to make "I" statements only about your own experience and feelings.

## Loving action (asking for what you want)

If you feel ready to tackle this, ask your partner to read this too, or explain it to them. If either of you is hesitant about doing this, take the time to think and talk about what makes you hesitant. For instance, some people feel that sharing what they want opens them up to being rejected, or might make them seem needy. Hopefully by talking openly you can reassure each other that you simply want to make each other happy.

Make a list of actions your partner could take that would make you feel loved. This could be something that they already do or used to do, or something that you would like them to do. Be concrete. Steer clear of asking for something that has been the source of conflicts or tension. Also, do not share this list with each other yet.

Pick just two actions that you would like them to do, ones that you think would be acceptable - maybe something that your partner used to do or has offered to do on occasion. Later, after you have experienced positive results, you can move to doing this in its full form.

Talk about what it would be like to share your lists. Share both positive and negative feelings. You might begin by saying that you are looking forward to hearing their requests. But you might also share that you are uncomfortable with the exercise. Then switch roles.

Read your lists to each other. One partner reads each item slowly so that the other one has a chance to hear and consider the request. The two of you might want to talk about some items, perhaps reminiscing about when your partner used to do those things or clarifying what is really being asked. Remember that these are requests, not demands. At the end, the listening partner should name one or two items that they are comfortable with and agree to do.

In the unlikely event that the listener is not comfortable with any items, both of you will benefit from them explaining their discomfort, reaffirming a desire to make the other one happy, and suggesting other loving actions. Take time to talk through this exchange until you are both comfortable.

Then change roles; the listener becomes the one who shares and vice versa.

Review the exercise after about one week. Share thoughts and feelings about the exercise. In particular, you might want to add some more ways you can express your love.

## Questions to ask each other

### General

* What are some words that accurately describe our relationship?
* What are the best things about our relationship?
* The biggest challenges?
* What can we learn from each other to improve our relationship?
* How do we annoy each other?
* What brings us closer?
* Are we comfortable talking about feelings, friends, work, external events, etc.?
* What do we need to know about each other’s past?
* Are we keeping agreements – keeping dates, being on time, following through on promises?
* How do we want to give back to society?
* Are there some things that you and I are NOT prepared to give up in this relationship?
* What will be the purpose of our marriage? What will be its essential reason for being? What will be its high priority goals?”

### Caring for and loving each other

* Do you ever question my love for you?
* What specifically makes you anxious about my love for you?
* How can I help you know that I truly love you?

#### Intimacy

* Will there be a television in the bedroom? In the house?
* Are we affectionate enough to the point where the other person is satisfied?
* Are you comfortable giving and receiving love sexually? During it, do you feel my love?
* Can we comfortably and openly discuss our sexual needs, preferences and fears?
* Are we satisfied with the frequency of our lovemaking? How do we cope when our desire levels are unmatched? A little? A lot? For a night? A week? A month? A year? More?

### Disagreeing

* Do we both listen to each other and show respect and consideration?
* What are our most common areas of conflict?
* How do we typically resolve most conflicts?
* How can we improve our method of disagreeing with each other?
* Do we fight a little or a lot?
* When we argue, do we insult each other?
* Are we afraid to be angry or make the other person angry?
* Are we able to negotiate?
* Are we able to solve problems and move on?

### Jealousy

* What is cheating and what is it not? Where’s the line between friendship and a potential affair?
* When is it natural to feel jealous?
* Does jealousy cloud our discussion of things?

### Personal ambitions and goals

* Do we have the sense that we want the same things in life?
* Are we at the same stage of life?
* Do we want to share in each other’s dreams?
* Do we want the same thing from the relationship?
* Do we have similar ideas about money and time?

### Traditions

* What traditions do we bring with us from the families in which we were raised?
* What traditions do we want to keep and create?
* What intergenerational traits or tendencies are we happy or unhappy with, and how do we make changes?

## 

### Spirituality/religion

* Do we share a religion? Do we belong to a church, synagogue, mosque or temple? More than one? If not, would our relationship benefit from such an affiliation?
* Have we reached a clear understanding of each other’s spiritual beliefs?
* Does one of us have an individual spiritual practice? Is the practice and the time devoted to it acceptable to the other? Does each partner understand and respect the other's choices?

### Health habits

* Have we fully disclosed our health histories, both physical and mental?
* Is each of us happy with the other's approach to health? Does one have habits or tendencies that concern the other (e.g., smoking, excessive dieting, poor diet)?

### Friends and time apart

* Do we like and respect each other’s friends?
* Do you have any close friends of the opposite sex?
* How much alone time do we each need?
* Are we satisfied with the quality and quantity of friends we currently have? Would we like to be more involved socially or are we feeling overwhelmed and need to cut back?
* What are our own needs for cultivating or maintaining friendships outside of our relationship? Is it easy for the other person to support those needs?

### Money

Create a shared vision for your money. Do you want to buy a home, have children, retire at a certain time and place, take expensive vacations, or start a business? Focus on the most important goals first. By exploring each other’s monetary attitudes, you stand a better chance of bridging those differences and reducing conflicts.

* What is our ultimate financial goal regarding annual income, and when do we anticipate achieving it? By what means and through what efforts?
* How much money do we earn together? Now? In one year? In five years? Ten? Who is responsible for which portion? Now? In one year? Five? Ten?
* Do our ideas about spending and saving mesh?
* How much of your income do you save each month, and what sort of system do you use for saving money?
* What percentage of our income are we prepared to spend to purchase and maintain our home on a monthly or annual basis?
* How important is home ownership to you?
* Do you foresee yourself getting another graduate degree?
* What are your career goals? What further training, if any, do you need to reach those goals?
* How do we decide what money is mine, yours, and ours?
* Would we have a joint checking account or separate ones?
* What sort of insurance coverage and financial contingency plans do we have for medical expenses and other emergencies?
* What is your system for paying bills?
* What are our categories of expense (rent, clothing, insurance, travel)? How much do we spend monthly, annually, in each category? How much do we want to be able to spend?
* What sort of limits, if any, do you set for my personal shopping sprees?
* What are your retirement goals?
* What is your philosophy about financially assisting elderly, disabled, or cash-strapped relatives?
* What monetary roles (earning, financial management, housekeeping, etc.) will each of us have?
* Who will pay the household bills and how?
* Do you have any debt?
* How do you feel about credit cards? Do you carry any balances?
* What is your credit score?

### Home maintenance and organization

* Describe your ideal house.
* Have we discussed our expectations for how the household will be maintained, and are we in agreement on who will manage the chores?
* Who is responsible for keeping our yard cared for and organized?
* Are we different in our needs for cleanliness and organization?
* Do we eat meals together? Which ones? Who is responsible for the food shopping? Who prepares the meals? Who cleans up afterward?

### Pets

* How do you feel about pets?

### Children

* Do you want children?
* If so, when? How many? How important is having children to each of us?
* What kind of parents do we want to be?
* How will having a child change the way we live now? Will we want to take time off from work, or work a reduced schedule? For how long? Will we need to rethink who is responsible for housekeeping?
* Should children be home schooled, taught in the public system, or in a private school?
* What principles do we want to teach our children to help them prepare for adulthood and to lead responsible, caring lives?
* How do we help develop the potential talent of each child?
* What kind of discipline do we want to use with our children?
* Have we discussed when and how our children will be exposed to religious/moral education?

### In-laws

* How can we best relate to each other’s families?
* How is your relationship with your family?
* What does my family do that annoys you?
* Do we value and respect each other’s parents, and is either of us concerned about whether the parents will interfere with the relationship?
* What place does the other's family play in our family life? How often do we visit or socialize together? If we have out-of-town relatives, will we ask them to visit us for extended periods? How often?
* If we have children, what kind of relationship do we hope our parents will have with their grandchildren? How much time will they spend together?

## Expectations & assumptions

This exercise helps both of you to step back and see your relationship in a realistic light. Take a few minutes to think about the things that you expect and assume about your partner. Do you expect him to open doors for you? Do you expect her to do the cooking? Do you assume he will always side with you against his mother? Do you assume she will always order something different from you in a restaurant so you can share? Do you expect respect? A good-night kiss? Do you assume fidelity, support, or a listening ear?

To begin, each person should draw a line down the center of a piece of paper and write "Expectations" at the top of one column and "Assumptions" at the top of the other column. Then write your list of the things that you tend to expect from your partner and the things that you assume about your partner. Include in both columns even the things you feel guilty about expecting or assuming. Naturally, these lists could be never-ending, so keep it to the things unique to your relationship or that are particularly important to you.

After you have finished, exchange lists to see what your partner expects and assumes about you. This opens the way for an honest discussion about relationships. Repeat this exercise every so often to raise your awareness about what the other is thinking, feeling, expecting, and assuming.

Perhaps the two of you want to keep your lists together in a visible space in the bedroom but not where the children might see it.

## Building love maps

A love map is the knowledge you have about your partner. The more you know about them, the richer your love map is. Try to answer the following questions about each other and find out how much you know about their world.

* What were they wearing when you first met?
* Name their two closest friends.
* Name one of their hobbies.
* Describe in detail what they did today or yesterday.
* What is one of their greatest fears or disaster scenarios?
* What is their favorite way to spend an evening?
* What is their favorite way to be soothed?
* What have been the major events in their life?
* What are their major goals?
* What medical problems do they worry about?
* What did they want to do as a kid?
* Why didn’t they do that?
* How did they end up doing what they do now?
* Does it satisfy them?
* If not, what would they want to do now if they could do anything?
* How would they like to be remembered?
* What are they looking forward to the most in the upcoming month?
* What dish do they look forward to the most?
* What is their favorite holiday?
* If they could go anywhere, where would they go right now?

## Creating shared meaning

Create shared meaning through rituals, roles, goals, and symbols. As you begin your life together, implement these to give purpose and meaning to your relationship.

### Rituals (true/false)

Rituals could be annual, something more frequent, or even at the beginning and end of each day. Building these in early will weld your connection to one another and the relationship.

1. We see eye-to-eye about the rituals that involve dinner times in our home.

2. Holiday meals (such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.) are very special and happy times for us.

3. Reunions at the end of each day in our home are generally special times in my day.

4. We see eye-to-eye about the role of TV in our home.

5. Bedtimes are generally good times for being close.

6. During weekends, we do a lot of things together that we enjoy and value.

7. We have the same values about entertaining in our home (having friends over, parties, etc.).

8. We both value special celebrations (such as birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions).

9. When I become sick, I feel taken care of and loved by my partner.

10. I really look forward to and enjoy our vacations and the travel we do together.

11. The mornings together are special times for me.

12. When we do errands together, we generally have a good time.

13. We have ways of becoming renewed and refreshed when we are burned out or fatigued.

14. We share many similar values in our roles as partners.

15. We share many similar values in our roles as parents.

16. We have many similar views about what it means to be a good friend to others.

17. My partner and I have compatible views about the role of work in one’s life.

18. My partner and I have similar philosophies about balancing work and family life.

19. My partner supports what I see as my basic mission in life.

### Goals (true/false)

20. My partner shares my views on the importance of family and kin in our life together.

21. We share many of the same goals in our life together.

22. If I were to look back on life in my old age, I would see that our paths had meshed very well.

23. My partner values my own accomplishments.

24. My partner honors my own very personal goals, unrelated to my relationship.

25. We share many of the same goals for others who are important to us (children, friends etc.).

26. We have very similar financial goals.

27. We tend to have compatible financial disaster scenarios (ones we both want to avoid).

28. There is compatibility in our hopes and aspirations as individuals, as a couple, and parents.

29. Our life dreams tend to be similar or compatible.

30. Even when different, we have been able to find a way to honor our life dreams.

### Roles (true/false)

31. We share many similar values in our roles as lovers and partners.

32. My partner and I have compatible views about the role of work in one’s life.

33. My partner and I have similar philosophies about balancing work and family life.

34. My partner supports what I see as my basic mission in life.

35. My partner shares my views on the importance of family and kin in our life together.

### Symbols (true/false)

We have similar views about

36. what “home” means.

37. what love ought to be.

38. the importance of “peacefulness” in our lives.

39. the meaning of “family.”

40. the role of sex in our lives.

41. the role of love and affection in our lives.

42. the meaning of being partnered.

43. the importance and meaning of money in our lives.

44. the importance of education in our lives.

45. the importance of “fun” and “play” in our lives.

46. the significance of adventure.

47. "trust.”

48. personal “freedom.”

49. “autonomy” and “independence.”

50. sharing “power” in our relationship.

51. being “interdependent,” of being a “we.”

52. “possessions” and “owning things” (cars, nice clothes, books, house, land, etc).

53. the meaning of “nature,” and of our relationship to the seasons.

54. what we want in retirement and old age.

# Listening & asserting your needs

Listen for the content, the emotion, and the implied desire. “What is this other person desiring?”

## Non-verbally

Imagine you are an actor and are acting as them with sincerity. Match their facial expressions, posture, arm gestures, breathing patterns, and the direction they’re facing by sidling alongside them. For their voice, mirror their tone and tempo, volume, favorite words, and the frequency of pauses. If you get into their precise posture and match their vocal qualities, you can more easily grasp what they are feeling and thinking.

Also, put your gaze on the inner corner of one of their eyes so their eyeballs won’t distract you.

### The platinum breath

After they have finished talking and before you speak, do the platinum breath. Silently inhale, blink, silently exhale, and blink. In that breath they know you heard them, that you are taking it in, and that you appreciate the communication. It is the most priceless breath you can take.

Longer silences can help each person self-regulate for further conversing.

## Verbally

### Listening

With the intent of truly listening, ask your partner,

* Am I loving you well?
* Do you feel understood?
* What can I do to make our relationship better?

#### 1. Check the emotion

First, check the emotion being felt with a question or a reflective statement. Emphasize their right to have that feeling or any other feeling, as well as any perception, thought, or sensation.

Checking the emotion with a question:

* You seem like you're \_\_\_\_\_\_. Are you?
* Is something making you \_\_\_\_\_\_?
* Are you feeling \_\_\_\_\_?
* I can see that you feel ... Is that right?
* You look like you're feeling \_\_. Are you?

Checking the emotion with a reflective statement:

* You feel that \_\_\_.
* Tell me if I'm wrong, but I sense that \_\_\_
* What I hear you saying is \_\_\_\_
* I sense your underlying concern is \_\_\_

##### When they’re sad

Convey that you empathize, but do not get lost in it with them. For example, your eyes might tear up, but you would not be sobbing. Do not get overwhelmed yourself. Offer emotional support, but let them find the solution unless you are explicitly asked for advice.

##### When they’re angry

1. Prepare yourself now by saying affirmations such as “I’m good at managing others’ anger.”
2. Stand your ground and listen.
3. Stay calm and breathe from your belly. Imagine a wall between you and their anger.
4. Calmly label their anger for them and encourage their right to express it: “You feel angry, right? You have the right to be angry.” (This is not agreeing with their view of the situation. You are just asserting their right to have any feeling regardless of whether it makes sense.)
5. See their anger as their weakness.
6. If they are not going to be violent, sit on the ground to listen and to stay “grounded.”
7. Gently reflect back what was said. Don’t follow up by saying “but…” and counterattacking.
8. Keep the focus on the main issue.
9. Use emotions such as respect or affection to help the angry person regain self-control.

#### 2. Clarify the content

* “Can I see if I understand?”

Seek to hear their view of the issue before seeking to be understood. Ask about their underlying needs, desires, fears, and concerns, and ask if you can take notes while listening so you can more easily recall what they said. When they finish, restate their points to their satisfaction. Aim to get them to say, “That’s right.”

Questions to ask:

* “What did that mean to you?”
* “How did that impact you?”

#### 3. Show you understand their intention or need

"Would you feel better if I gave you \_\_\_?"

#### 4. Take a few minutes to reflect before sharing your view

This may slow things down, but in the long run it saves time, nerves, and relationships. It lets you fully listen to them while then having time to assertively state your position.

### … and asserting your needs

Communicate your feelings and needs without the accusations and assumptions. Emotional, mental, and sexual fantasies about others tell us what our needs are in our current relationship.

* "Hey, I noticed \_\_\_\_\_ and it is making me feel \_\_\_\_. I could use some validation to know that we're in a good place.”

or

* "Hey, this is something going on inside of me, and I need more info. Can you be more transparent about this?"

# Conflicts & other emotionally heavy issues

Conflict is about wanting to be fully heard and to feel calmed down by the time we stop speaking. Any anger is usually more a cover for fear or hurt.

Conflicts are not only normal but, if constructively resolved, actually strengthen the relationship.

To manage conflict together, write down rules to govern arguments, such as not bringing up the past, changing topics, or settling disputes late at night or in the bedroom. Repeating and even role-playing each other’s position can be very helpful.

Consider what you really want before talking. State it in observable terms. For example, "I want you to hold my hand more often" rather than the vague, "I wish you were more affectionate."

Directly but concisely say what emotion you’re feeling and why: “I am feeling… because of this, and that leads me to perceive this. Am I right?"

Then be silent so they have emotional space to respond.

Limit the time each day you two spend on heavy issues. You can always continue tomorrow.

## The cycles of reconnection & rupture

All types of relationships are a continuous cycle of five R’s: reconnection > rupture > remorse/re-evaluation > repair > (and back to) reconnection. There is the connection where we see the world through their eyes and also ourselves through their eyes. But then when a rupture occurs, we want to go straight into repair mode to get back to that reconnection. However, before going into repair after a rupture, we need to go through remorse and re-evaluation.

Shame is the natural response to that rupture, the falling out of connection. If we have a secure attachment style, that shame helps us see where the differences of opinion happened, what we might have done that was not particularly loving or respectful of the other or ourselves, and how we need to behave differently in order to re-enter the relationship.

If we have an insecure attachment style, when we feel shame in the rupture, we either speed through it too quickly into repair without thinking how we are going to act differently next time or how to set new boundaries, or we might go into angry mode, not take our share of responsibility, and try to get the other person to wrongly take 100% responsibility for what went wrong. To act in a secure way, we need to sit for a bit in the shame of each rupture, feel it, see what we should have done differently, and only then move on to the remorse/re-evaluation stage.

## Arguing in a securely attached way

* Your partner’s bad mood is most likely not because of you. They will tell you if it is.
* Trust they will be caring and responsive, so express your needs and fears.
* If you're afraid that they are going to reject you, say so.
* Express those specific actions by them that would make you feel more secure and loved.
* Your partner doesn’t know what you're thinking. Tell them.
* This is true vice versa. Ask your partner to be explicit about what’s bothering them.
* Consider only what a video is recording versus imaginary issues or old stuff from the past.
* Ask your partner to clarify if you don’t understand what they mean.

## Taking a personal time-out

Sometimes we get emotionally flooded and need a timeout to get clarity. When this happens, agree to take some time for yourself before chatting. It might be several minutes, it might be several days, and it might include professional counseling. You will be able to step back on your own, see the argument’s relation to the larger picture, and have plenty of time to prepare for the discussion. Your judgment will be better.

Exercise, go for a solitary walk, meditate, take a hot bath, or do some other activity you find soothing. Then go to a private space to be alone and to think things through, maybe with a journal or an audio recorder.

Write out your feelings, and then your needs, wants, ideas, and hopes that underlie your feelings. Describe how what you need improves the connection. But check your interpretations: “What meaning am I attributing to my partner’s words?”

Instead of focusing on your hurt, irritation, fear, troubled relationship, etc., say to yourself, “I am feeling ‘the’ hurt, ‘the’ fear, ‘the irritation,’ ‘the’ troubled relationship.” Everyone feels these emotions in these moments. You are not alone and are feeling what most people feel.

Also, observe your fight from afar as if you are seeing it on a movie screen. Watch with fascination and interest. Can you see that you and your partner are just playing out your parts? Is the conversation predictable, even funny? How well could you play each other’s part?

Before returning to the conversation, see how you can revise your notes and wishes without violating your aforementioned bottom line.

## Let the relationship itself win

The goal is for the relationship itself to be the winner. Once you know the underlying interests and whose interests are involved, you can create options that satisfy both of you. Be explicit about what you’re trying to accomplish. Name the different interests, and invite your partner to brainstorm non-judgingly with you about ways of meeting them. Some options solve the whole problem while other ones are “process” options, options on the best process for moving forward that feels fair to both of you.

Be willing to negotiate and compromise on the things you want from one another. Work to accept the differences between your ideal mate and the real person you are dating.

List what the two of you have agreed to and what to do next. Consider putting the agreement in writing. Stick to it to show respect for this relationship.

## If giving feedback

Only do so when calm.

Perhaps memorize this template:

“May I give you some feedback? I noticed/observed/saw/heard that \_\_\_(your data)\_ (avoid ‘always’ and ‘never’). I interpreted this to mean that \_\_ . This made me feel (emotion/sensation) / think (perception/thought) \_\_\_. I ask that/you \_\_\_ (ABCD – a brief, changeable, and descriptive thing they can do to improve).”

Then be silent. Make no apologies for what you just directly said.

### If they are very sensitive

Use their 3rd-person proper-noun name to make them feel less attacked. It is stilted but effective.

They might prefer the feedback in writing (or in an audio recording) so they can reflect on it before giving a response, which itself might be in writing or on another day.

Sensitive folks need a while to return to their baseline after receiving feedback. Once they have processed what you said, ask for the impact it had on them.

When they try to change, show your appreciation and encourage them to keep going.

## If receiving feedback

Ask specifically how you can implement it. Maybe record it in a two-column “looks like / sounds like” chart. Then share your own observable data before asking for some time to reflect.

### Questions to ask

* “How can I improve?”
* “What would I do or say to implement it?”
* “Show me, model it, or give me an example.”

### Distill their words from your resulting emotions

Our feelings influence and distort the story we tell ourselves about what their feedback means.

Separate your internal story and emotions from their actual feedback itself.

#### Charts for containing the feedback

Feedback containment charts help you to see the feedback so that you don’t deny it. At the same time the chart helps you to contain it so that you don’t exaggerate it. Asking, “What is this feedback not about?” gives you a structured way of staying balanced. As you rope off the things that it’s not about, it’s easier to see and learn what it is about. It takes work to figure out what the feedback is about and then doing something about that, but it becomes easier when you realize that you need to work on one or two discrete things and not everything.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Feedback containment chart | |
| What is this about? | What isn’t this about? |
| … | … |
| … | … |

You might also want to draw a t-chart of their positive feedback and their constructive feedback. Doing this helps you to see the feedback in the way it was intended.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Positive feedback and constructive (negative) feedback together | |
| Positive feedback | Constructive (negative) feedback |
| … | … |
| … | … |

In private, you might make another two-column t-chart, a column for where you think their feedback is accurate and one for where it is not. Only then decide if you like what they said.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The constructive feedback itself | |
| What’s wrong with their feedback | What might be right |
| … | … |
| … | … |

Contain the constructive feedback by noticing which of these your internal story is violating.

* Time: Being lousy at it now doesn’t mean we were always lousy at it and always will be.
* Specificity: Being lousy at it doesn’t make us lousy at other things.
* People: If one person thinks we’re lousy at it, others might think we aren’t. That first one’s view of us doing it might change, and they might think we aren’t lousy at unrelated things.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Containing the constructive/negative feedback that might be accurate | | |
| **When** did I do it badly? | **What** did I do badly? | **Who** thinks I did it badly? |
| … | … | … |
| … | … | … |

### Try it out in small doses

Even if you don’t like the feedback, try it out in small doses, perhaps when they are not around, when the stakes are low, and the potential upside is great. You might be surprised that you feel better and more confident after incorporating their feedback. There are significant life rewards for being willing to test out feedback even when you’re not sure it’s right or even when you’re pretty sure it’s wrong. At the very least, it shows the giver you are open to trying their advice.

### If sensitive to criticism

If you are sensitive to criticism, ask for it in writing. If that is not an option, ask to audio-record it without responding or expressing emotion so you can then take 24 hours to process it. You may want to say, “I want to reflect on what you said and see it in the light that was intended.”

You may want to reply in writing and ask for their opinion about your own improvement plan based on that feedback. But always go back in person eventually and say, "Thank you. I appreciate this feedback. If I understand correctly, you're saying that…"

### 3 boundaries for receiving feedback

Sometimes you have to reject feedback “and” affirm the relationship. An incentive for others to reduce their unhelpful feedback might be to specify where you need it, and where you don’t.

1. “I’m happy to hear your feedback, and I may not take it.”
   1. When you solicit suggestions you know you may not take, you can avoid heartache by saying so upfront. Explain your reasons carefully.
2. “Not now, not about that. I don’t want feedback about that subject right now. I need time or space, or this is too sensitive a subject right now.”
   1. You’re asserting your right to decline feedback and also to move on from the topic altogether. You understand where they’re coming from, but right now you need them to give you space. There just isn’t anything more to say on the subject, and you don’t have the emotional energy to continue the conversation.
3. “Stop, or I will leave the relationship.”
   1. If the person can’t keep their judgments to themselves, if they can’t accept you the way you are now, then you will leave the relationship, or change its terms.

## Specific exercises

### Controversy (Both argue for both perspectives)

Controversy is a cooperative debate and is also called Constructive Controversy, Creative Controversy, and Structured Academic Controversy. It is used a lot in schools and businesses.

1. Focus on a small, specific issue.
2. Have a stopwatch ready.
3. One person speaks at a time. The other, while listening, is encouraged to take notes and can ask questions to clarify what is being said. It’s okay for them to interrupt so that they can take better notes but not just to refute something.
4. The first person gets to speak for as long as needed and expresses their feelings, wants, and the reasons underlying their feelings and wants.
5. The second person calmly reads aloud what they copied to ensure they did so correctly.
6. Now switch roles. The second person expresses their feelings, wants, and underlying reasons. The first person can ask questions while taking notes and then calmly reads aloud what they copied to ensure that they copied it correctly.
7. The first person has two minutes to dramatically and emotionally argue their own points again. They should really be dramatic even if they don’t feel that way. If there are many points, perhaps allow the first person five minutes. The second person can take some more notes if they want, but can’t interrupt.
8. Switch roles. The second person now has the same amount of time to dramatically and emotionally argue their own points again. The first person can take some more notes if they want, but can’t interrupt.
9. The second person then has an agreed-upon amount of time – perhaps a minute - to refute the first person’s points.
10. Switch roles. The first person gets to refute the second person’s points.
11. **Switch sides.** The second person has to dramatically and emotionally argue *for the first person’s points and refute their own initial points*, perhaps while pounding the table for dramatic effect.
12. The first person does the same for the second person’s points, dramatically and very expressively, while also refuting their own initial points.
13. Both people stop advocating for one position in particular and try to solve the problem together. Several options are brainstormed with one then being adopted.

### The rope (gauging emotional distance)

1. Stand apart, facing your partner, at whatever distance is comfortable, perhaps six feet.
2. Hold the opposite ends of a ten-foot rope. This signifies the distance between the two of you as well as the relationship bond.
3. Be honest as you take turns talking about the relationship.
4. Depending on how each response feels, move away from your mate on the rope or closer.
5. If it feels too forced, talk in pithy language that a ten-year-old would understand. “I like it when you… I don’t like it when you… I get scared when you…” It may seem stilted, but using the other’s name in 3rd-person form can feel safer.
6. Instead of stepping back on a certain turn, remain where you are and see what happens.
7. If you can, try moving closer.

### The one-way “Heart Talk”

One person talks, and the other listens. The listener can only speak if they didn’t hear or understand what was said; otherwise, they do not respond until 24 hours later.

As the listener, do not give in to the overwhelming urge to do any one of these things:

1. You may want to take responsibility for the speaker’s feelings, which you should not.
2. You may want to make the speaker feel better by offering comfort.
3. You may want to defend yourself if you feel misunderstood or misjudged.
4. You may want to apologize if you feel guilty.
5. You may want to offer a quick solution, to jump in and fix the problem.

Deep listening, such as what you will do in a Heart Talk, coupled with the 24-hour waiting period, can lead to the solving of problems and the healing of wounds that have existed for years.

If the other person does not speak, and we start listening to ourselves, we may start to realize that these negative beliefs originate in our own head.

In almost every relationship, one person or the other is verbally dominant: quicker with words, more articulate, more aggressive, and able to steer the conversation in a particular direction. This can be intimidating and confusing for the other. The Heart Talk creates a level playing field. Because the listener can only listen, the other will not be interrupted, will not worry about the reaction of the listener, and will not have to contend with the response, defense, or counter-attacks from the listener because there will not be any.

Sometimes if you are speaking, you will want an immediate response. If so, do not ask for a Heart Talk. Otherwise, this invaluable tool will be forever lost to you.

When you have an issue for a Heart Talk, do not assume that the other will respond and react in a certain way. You will likely be wrong. Your assumptions about your partner often have more to do with your own fears and suppositions than they do with your partner's reality.

Usually you would not follow a Heart Talk with another one 24 hours later. More likely there will be a normal dialogue to work on the issue if that seems appropriate. Alternatively, as the listener you may have understood the message so clearly that you markedly change your behavior. Whatever your method, a response of some type is necessary.

Steps of the one-way Heart Talk:

1. Ask specifically for a "Heart Talk" and hope that your partner agrees to one.
2. Sit with each other for a moment or two, just connecting. Take a deep breath. Relax your body. You can hold hands, look in each other's eyes, or match your breathing.
3. The person who has requested it then speaks without interruption for as long as they need, perhaps 30 minutes at the most.
4. The listener can only jot down keywords if they want to remember something – no sentences.
5. This is not a license to "dump" on the listener. This is about sharing how you feel. Use "I-messages," such as "I feel very sad and frightened when I think you are ignoring me." To be even more sensitive to your partner's feelings, omit the use of “you” and refer to them (to their face) in the 3rd person, such as in, "I become very sad and frightened when I think (your partner’s name) is ignoring me." On paper this sounds stilted, but it makes the listener feel even less attacked. If you need a more basic formula, try sentences that begin with "I feel (adjective) when I ..."
6. If the talker can reveal the deeper emotions of their insecurity, the results can be astonishing. If the talker is only dumping on the listener, the listener can end it.
7. No response is allowed for 24 hours. This is essential for the healing to take place.
8. Afterwards, exercise on your own to release any negative energy.
9. In the listener’s response 24 hours later, there may be a discussion, a change in behavior, or an acknowledgement that he has heard what has been said, but cannot quite respond yet as he needs a little more time.

## Post-argument

Every couple has something they’re good at together. After the tough discussion, find that and do it to pass the time until moods shift. It could be a household task that the other one hates to do, a handwritten apology note that mentions a special past moment, or a trip together to the gym.

# “I love you” & getting engaged

## When to say “I love you”

Wait several months, a minimum of three, but preferably longer, before saying this, even if you feel it on the first night. Building trust takes time, and it’s embarrassing to know you changed your mind and don’t really love them. If you must say something, just say something like, “I know it’s too soon to be feeling this, but it sure feels good right now,” and then laugh sweetly.

Hearing, “I love you” too soon tells you the other person either attaches too quickly or has no idea what love is. Probably both. If you hear it and don’t love them, don’t say it just to be nice. Say something along the lines of, “Hearing that from you makes me feel wonderful. It means so much, and I hope to genuinely say that to you too at some point.”

Be clear on how you feel before putting your feelings into words. Think about how your date might receive what you’re about to say.

Saying “I love you,” if not sincere, can be less intimate than saying, “I don’t love you.”

### 9 ways to know you’re in love

* You can explain why you don’t want to date others.
* You breathe easier when they are around.
* You hum love songs under your breath.
* You’re full of energy.
* You willingly go somewhere you hate.
* You willingly save if you’re a spendthrift and spend if you’re chintzy.
* You’re willing to risk being yourself.
* It’s like when you’re hungry; if you’re not sure, you’re not.
* The idea of doing nothing together sounds terrific. In the early stages of dating, there is a hunger to discover who the other person is, but this time also feels scary because they may not be what you thought. Even worse, you may not be what they’re looking for.

### Loving the right wrong person

Marriages are successful to the degree that the problems you choose are ones you can cope with.

"Loving the Wrong Person" - Andrew Boyd

“We're all seeking that special person who is right for us. But if you've been through enough relationships, you begin to suspect there's no right person, just different flavors of wrong. Why is this? Because you yourself are wrong in some way, and you seek out partners who are wrong in some complementary way. But it takes a lot of living to grow fully into your own wrongness. And it isn't until you finally run up against your deepest demons, your unsolvable problems--the ones that make you truly who you are--that you're ready to find a lifelong mate. Only then do you finally know what you're looking for. You're looking for the wrong person. But not just any wrong person: the right wrong person--someone you lovingly gaze upon and think, 'This is the problem I want to have.'"

## Bill Murray on when to get engaged

"If you have someone that you think is the one, take that person and travel around the world. Buy a plane ticket for the two of you to travel all around the world and go to places that are hard to go to and hard to get out of. And when you land at JFK airport and you're still in love with that person, get married."

In short, marry someone you would still adore when you'd be sick and tired of anyone else.

## Perhaps the best book on holistic intimacy

“Slow Love: A Polynesian Pillow Book,” by James N. Powell

The gist is that by synchronizing your breaths, moving as slowly as possible together, and expanding the space at the end of each breath cycle, you two can feel the tranquility of being on a Polynesian island by yourselves.

# Break-ups

To move on from someone in a healthy way, you have to "realistically" see the differences between you two. Imagine that a video camera recorded footage that you can now see.

As long as you challenged your assumptions about relationships, expressed gratitude towards your partner regularly, expressed your needs and boundaries, and took care of yourself, you can likely walk out of that relationship with no regrets about having not done more.

If they had a secure attachment style, consider which of their secure-base aspects you want to strengthen within you. This will help you when you’re on your own afterwards.

Every time we have a relationship, we are having a real one and also one with our identity of being in a relationship. When the real one ends, let it go peacefully. Respect whatever perception they want to have of us. We now need to arrive at a place of repair and reconnection with our identity that is now only in a metaphysical relationship with that other person and not in a physical one. Arriving here lets us reach a healthy closure without discussing it more with them.

Commit to several months of alone time - at least four - after a long relationship that has ended in order to mourn the relationship. Tears mean that you have accepted it’s over. Sit, feel, and experience the loss in your life of someone whom you loved.

When tempted to call them, journal instead what you are tempted to say.

Wait before a new relationship until you know what went wrong, with perhaps the help of a therapist.

## When it’s your decision

There may come a time when you seriously question whether your relationship is right for you, and you ask yourself whether you should stick with it or end it. Consider how well your relationship fits the criteria for a healthy relationship. You are likely to feel happiest in a relationship if your partner is emotionally available, a safe haven, and a secure base for you as you pursue your own interests.

A partner who really wants you to be happy will consistently give you the message that you are a priority and worthy of their efforts to try to please you. As you think about whether this characterizes your partner, you might want to talk with someone other than your partner, someone else whom you trust and respect. If this third person suggests that your insecurity is affecting your perceptions and that this is the real issue, then give some serious thought to this.

If you’re still thinking about it, share your must-haves and give them a deadline for it to work.

Meanwhile, open up to friends and family about what your relationship is really like. This will prepare them to help you when you feel the urge to reunite. Have them remind you why it did not work. You will need them to serve as a safe haven for you, to comfort you when you're distressed, and to encourage you to move on.

Before you do break up, write down all the reasons you want to leave so that you can look at this later when tempted to go back to them.

Be decisive if you want to end the relationship. Don’t break up until you can break full contact with them for a minimum of six months. Otherwise you will continuously backslide into it as if it is quicksand. Respect their privacy with their emotions.

If you are still unhappy when that deadline comes, be very specific and clear about why you are breaking up. Be transparent. State the boundaries moving forward that will work best for you as you heal. Try to reach a sincere agreement to see each other as friends or to go your separate ways. This shows you’re mature. Perhaps they’ll introduce you someday to your next partner.

Let yourself mourn. Friends might tell you this person is not worth it, but no longer having them in your life is still a loss.

Then remind yourself that the relationship ended, and no more reflection is needed. Move on.

## When it’s their decision

Ask for some feedback from your former partner, and if that is too difficult for them, ask for it in writing so they can express themselves freely. Thank them for that feedback.

Focus on your healthy habits, but wallow in the pain. Grieving at this stage is healthy. Tylenol has been shown to help with social rejection, as well as a trusted friend and other comfort treats, such as a hot bath or ice cream.

To avoid making the same mistake, know whether your relationships are following a pattern. Consider seeing a relationship therapist on your own.

Spend time alone. Write a letter out to that person to unload your thoughts, but don’t mail it. Just burn it after you finish writing it.

Any relationship’s end is painful. It’s impossible to avoid the pain of disconnection and loss that will come with it. Notice both of your imperfections. Don't see yourself as completely innocent nor guilty. Be present with the pain and the absence of this person in your life. Describe aloud the sensations, but also see the pain realistically.

Healthy types, when moving on, let go of the idea of co-regulation and the feeling of being more responsible for the other’s feelings than any other third person might be. Doing this then allows them to keep this other person in their life as “just a regular friend” with whom they can share respect, an understanding of what happened, and well wishes for the future.

Accept that many things don’t last forever, including sadness. Just some time is needed for the pain to pass. Sit in it and feel it to process it fully. Be compassionate with yourself. Remind yourself of your value and strengths. Consider what family and friends appreciate about you.

Lastly, visualize a future without the ex. End the reflection and dwelling on it. Move on.

### Mantras & affirmations for this

“I am in pain because I am losing something I care about that I once loved deeply. I am feeling (x, y, or z), this is what’s happening in my body, and I’m surviving it.”

## Protecting against stalkers

Sever all communication. Change your regular routine. If you see them, try not to look scared or shocked. Carry a cellphone, and let those who know you know what’s happening. Never meet the person for one last time. If the stalking seems to escalate rather than dissipate, call the police.

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# During the engagement period

Spend a weekend day together, once a month, doing “engagement work.” Look at areas of your life that you have never spoken about, such as your romantic pasts. Explore what hasn’t been said. Press yourselves to make your past patterns in relationships conscious. At the end of the period, decide if you’re ready for marriage.

Don’t hesitate to go together to a marriage therapist, no matter how tough the conversation might be to let it all out on the open. The quicker all the concerns are aired out, the quicker the impasse will be resolved, but it might go in either direction.

Also consider creating a pre-nuptial agreement.

## Planning a wedding

### Clarifying your shared values

Your wedding is a manifestation of your values and beliefs. Questions to clarify your values:

* What are the three most important things to you in a marriage?
* What religious or spiritual symbolism conveys our belief about marriage?
* What will bring joy and love to this time that we are sharing with our community of support?
* What is important to us as a couple that we want to share with the world?
* What beliefs, ideas, or philosophy do we have in common?
* Is music a big part of who we are? What form might that take?
* Are there friends, support groups, or faith communities whom we want to include?
* What traditions are a part of our family histories?
* What do we want to remember most from our wedding? Is it important that we have a solemn, prayerful experience, or would we rather have a joyous, upbeat affair?

### Greening your wedding

* Check to see if you can use borrowed, rented, or secondhand items.
* Ask yourself, "Do we really need this item?"
* Select wedding garb that can be worn again.
* Use organically grown food.
* Reduce electricity: Consider candles and "unplugged" acoustic music.
* Cut down on excess transportation by having the wedding near the reception.
* Use whatever Mother Nature provides. Perhaps you could rent live greenery.
* Avoid disposable and one-time-use items, including disposable cameras, plastic cake decorations, cheap wedding favors, and specific table decorations.

### Simplifying & saving money

* Ask some photographer friends to take pictures for you, but make sure that they are capable.
* Make it a potluck dinner perhaps, a contribution from everyone.
* Maybe have a school choir or church choir perform.
* Perhaps take some of the money you are thinking about spending on your wedding and set it aside for future getaway weekends that will help refresh the marriage throughout its duration.
* Take your guests to a local farmers’ market and ask them to choose bouquets that appeal to them. Gather together back at your home to make arrangements and have a great time getting acquainted with one another.
* Who can play an instrument? Or perhaps you could simply create in advance your own playlist on an MP3 player with speakers.

### Other possibilities

* Have a group prayer or meditation during the ceremony to create a mindful or sacred space.
* Serve your parents cups of tea. This symbolizes the nourishment they have given you.
* Write a marriage contract together and have people sign it as witnesses.
* Top the cake with a seedling of a tree. Then plant it and watch it grow along with your love.
* Ask people to bring a lit candle and holder, labeled with their name, from their home as symbolic of their role in bringing light and warmth to your relationship.
* Seat guests in a circle around you – instead of rows - to surround you with their love and support, literally and figuratively.
* If there is a creek nearby, use it as a symbol of letting go of things in your past. Write these things on a piece of paper, tear it up, and toss the torn bits into the flowing water.