

Therapy-At-Home Workbooks™:  
**The Marriage Refresher Course  
For Couples**



A cost effective marriage counseling program - based on premarital counseling principles - for couples to do together from the comfort of home.

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## Introduction

My name is Lisa Brookes Kift and I'm a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with a private practice in Marin County, California. I've helped numerous married couples through a wide variety of problems including communication, infidelity, emotional safety, resentment, relationship imbalance and more. In addition, I've done extensive premarital work with couples interested in strengthening the foundations of their relationships prior to marriage. I am the author of **Therapy-At-Home Workbooks™: Premarital Counseling Workbook for Couples**, the first in my series of cost effective alternatives to face-to-face therapy. **The Marriage Refresher Course – A Marriage Counseling Workbook** is the second of this series.

I've heard therapists and non-therapists alike, agree that many married couples could benefit from relearning or learning anew, the principles of premarital counseling work. Someone even suggested that perhaps if married couples took a premarital counseling course, they might have a greater chance of preventing divorce! When I thought carefully about the primary issues that married couples have brought to me – I noticed a similarity between them and many aspects of my premarital work. Perhaps if these couples had learned – or remembered – the fundamental elements of how to keep a relationship strong, might they not be in my office in the first place? A light bulb went off in my head and **The Marriage Refresher Course** was born. This workbook fuses together the concepts of my premarital work and the primary marriage issues I've seen in my therapy practice. It's designed to be helpful to couples married for any amount of time.

**The Marriage Refresher Course** contains the couples counseling theories, methods and exercises used by me in my own therapy practice. They are a fusion of concepts adapted from Imago Relationship Therapy, family of origin ideas, the research of John Gottman, general communication skills and my conceptualization of how to shore up the foundation of a relationship. I will provide you with guide posts leading to an understanding of emotional safety and elements of a strong relationship foundation – the two driving forces underlying my couples counseling work.

Below are the primary areas of this workbook – and what you will have the benefit of exploring in the following pages.

### **My goal is to help you and your partner:**

1) **Strengthen Your Communication Skills:** Being able to effectively listen, truly hear and validate the other's position is a skill that isn't necessarily a "given" for many people. Couples that communicate well can discuss and resolve issues when they arise more effectively. I will help you tune up your talking and listening skills. This is one of the most important aspects of emotional safety between couples. We will discuss in detail ways you can communicate more effectively as well as look at conflict resolution techniques.

2) **Increase Your Emotional Safety:** I have a very specific definition of “emotional safety” and way to assess the level between two people. They are how much each person feels respect, trust, prioritized, heard, understood, validated, empathy and love from the other.

3) **Explore Your Relationship Balance:** How much attention is paid to the “you,” “me” and “we” of the relationship? Couples who are out of balance can struggle with a number of issues. You will identify whether you’re both satisfied with your relationship balance – or if it might benefit you to make a few adjustments.

4) **Identify Problematic Family of Origin Issues:** We learn so much of how to “be” from our parents, primary caregivers and other early influences. If one partner (or both) experienced a high conflict or unloving household, it can be helpful to explore that in regards to how it might be playing out in the marriage. Couples who have an understanding of the existence of potentially problematic conditioning around how relationships work - are usually better at disrupting repetition of these learned behaviors. We’ll explore what each of you might have brought into your marriage from the past.

5) **Explore Your Marriage Logistics and Roles:** Are both of you satisfied with the way your marriage works and “who” does “what?” This can apply to job, finances, chores, sexual intimacy and more. There will be opportunity for an open and honest discussion about how you each feel about the way things have been working and if any changes can benefit the marriage.

6) **Develop or Revisit Your Personal, Couple, Family Goals and Marriage Vision:** Many couples have never discussed their relationship goals – let alone personal or family. There are many areas that can be explored and it can be a fun exercise to do together, whether you did something like this a long time ago or not. You and your partner will explore the other’s goals and how to combine them into one vision.

7) **Learn Tips about How to Work Through Three Common Marriage Problems:** The three most common marriage problems I've seen in my practice involve a build-up of resentment, sexual intimacy issues and infidelity. If you have experienced any of these problems with your spouse, you will learn some tips about how to work through them.

I enjoy helping married couples reconnect again and I hope you find **The Marriage Refresher Course** a helpful tool to meet that goal. I look forward to sharing my knowledge with you.

If you find yourselves having unresolvable conflict over a particular topic – please find a local therapist in your area for further assistance. This workbook is an alternative to face-to-face counseling – not a replacement. Some couples may find they need help navigating through the more challenging areas.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is for couples to use together and provides a framework for you to **strengthen the relationship foundation** that supports your marriage. Its' interactive format with worksheets and a space for couples journaling makes it a great keepsake for you and your spouse – to help you keep sight of what's important to your marriage. It is divided into six sections and I recommend you stop after each section for as long as you want to be able to think, digest and further explore the subject matter. Some areas may bring up some serious conversations between you. Take as long as you need – this isn't a race! We will discuss communication skills early in the workbook to provide tools to be able to navigate through the more difficult topics, if they exist.

You will also notice that there are assessments and worksheets for you and your partner to do separately. Decide now who will be "Partner #1" and "Partner #2." As you encounter your assignments, take them out of the workbook and do them on your own, unless otherwise indicated. Decide together when you'd like to reconvene with your completed work, then continue on to the end of the section. You will also find exercises to do together.

In each section there's a Journal page for you both to take notes. If you find yourself stuck on a particular issue, this is a good place to jot down a few notes about it for you both to refer to later. At the end of the workbook, there is a list of recommended books should you desire to further educate yourself about healthy relationships.

If you come to a section or worksheet that you both decide isn't necessary or applicable, skip it and move ahead. Now assign one person to read aloud the narratives in each section and let's begin...

Therapy-At-Home Workbooks™: The Marriage Refresher Course

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## Section 1:

# A Walk Down Memory Lane

## **SECTION 1: A WALK DOWN MEMORY LANE**

### **OVERVIEW:**

No matter how long ago you were married, you have a story unique to you about how you got together. This period of time is usually one that elicits pleasant memories of a period when you and your partner were in the “honeymoon phase” of your relationship. Wouldn’t it be nice if all marriages could just stay deliriously stuck in this phase with all of the feel-good brain chemistry keeping them floating in the clouds?

If you and your partner are like most married couples, this is not the case. You might have settled into routine where you became ships passing in the night, stopped communicating as well as you once did, got busy with a growing family and/or careers or any of the other countless obstacles that prevent couples from maintaining the emotional and physical intimacy they once shared. The reality is – relationships and marriages change. The challenge is to successfully adapt to and navigate through those changes.

We’re going to start by reminding you of your “story” and what brought you two together in the first place. On the next two pages are worksheets for you and your partner to pull out of this workbook and do separately. Decide between yourselves how much time you’d like to take to do them and reconvene.

Now take out each of your worksheets (no peeking!)

Fill in each answer. If you're having a difficult time remembering, relax, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to help bring yourself back.

**Where/how we initially met:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What drew me to him/her:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When did I know, "This is it."** \_\_\_\_\_

**What made him/her different than others before:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What was the best part about the wedding?** \_\_\_\_\_

**If there was a honeymoon, what was the best part?** \_\_\_\_\_

(Now let's test your knowledge of each other a little just for fun...)

**MY WIFE/HUSBAND...**

**is happiest when** \_\_\_\_\_

**gets the angriest at** \_\_\_\_\_

**worries the most about** \_\_\_\_\_

**thinks his/her relationship with his/her parents is** \_\_\_\_\_

**gets the most annoyed at me when** \_\_\_\_\_

**thinks he/she is most like which parent** \_\_\_\_\_

**married me because** \_\_\_\_\_

**thinks the strongest part of our marriage is** \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in each answer. If you're having a difficult time remembering, relax, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to help bring yourself back.

**Where/how we initially met:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What drew me to him/her:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When did I know, "This is it."** \_\_\_\_\_

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**thinks he/she is most like which parent** \_\_\_\_\_

**married me because** \_\_\_\_\_

**thinks the strongest part of our marriage is** \_\_\_\_\_

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Sit down together with your exercises in hand and take turns going over them. Spend time reminiscing and remembering this period of time in your lives. When I do couples work, I always want to know – and want them to remember – how they got together. Whatever is currently distressing the relationship, this can inspire them to reconnect. It's very easy to “forget” and I hope you've enjoyed taking this “walk down memory lane.” Spend as much time as you want before moving onto the next section.



## Section 2:

# Couples Communication

## **SECTION 2: COUPLES COMMUNICATION**

### **OVERVIEW:**

I once heard someone say, “Communication is to a relationship as water is to a plant.” It’s true. As cliché as it might sound, communication is truly one of the most important aspects of a healthy relationship. In my couple’s therapy practice, it’s the single most problematic area for people. It underpins almost all other problems from misunderstandings and assumptions – to sexual intimacy issues. It’s always one of the first areas I address in session – whether the couple are planning their nuptials - or have been married for many years.

Now we’re going to assess your communication together. On the next two pages are communication self-tests for you and your partner to pull out of this workbook and do separately. Decide between yourselves how much time you’d like to take to do them then reconvene.

Read each sentence and put a checkmark by it if you agree – and an “X” if you don’t. If unsure, put a question mark. Go with your initial gut reaction – and remember, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. This is a simple tool to get a conversation started between you and your spouse about your communication strengths and areas for improvement.

**My Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_ I always tell my partner when something is bothering me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don’t criticize my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not defensive with my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ If my partner and I have a misunderstanding I try to work it out instead of shutting down.

**Partner’s Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner usually discusses his/her feelings when upset.

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner doesn’t criticize me.

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner doesn’t get defensive with me.

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner doesn’t shut down with me when we have a misunderstanding.

**Our Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_ We listen to each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We always try to resolve conflict as soon as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ We both know how we feel about each other.

Read each sentence and put a checkmark by it if you agree – and an “X” if you don’t. If unsure, put a question mark. Go with your initial gut reaction – and remember, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. This is a simple tool to get a conversation started between you and your spouse about your communication strengths and areas for improvement.

**My Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_ I always tell my partner when something is bothering me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I don’t criticize my partner.

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**Our Communication**

\_\_\_\_\_ We listen to each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We always try to resolve conflict as soon as possible.

\_\_\_\_\_ We both know how we feel about each other.

## **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Sit down together with your assessments in hand and compare them. What items did you each check? What areas have an "X"? Were they the same? Were they totally different? Remember, there is no "good" or "bad" here. This simple tool provides an opportunity for discussion. The more answers you marked with an "X", the more you and your spouse could benefit from better communication which in the long run will only serve to strengthen your relationship foundation. Let's further explore some of the most important elements of the assessment.

## **COMMUNICATION TIPS:**

### ***"We always tell each other when something is bothering us."***

The more successful marriages are typically the ones where the door is open for each partner to talk about whatever's bothering them. Ideally, there's enough "emotional safety" present in the relationship where both parties feel comfortable doing that. If there's something keeping one or both of you from expressing your feelings then it's worth taking a look at. We'll further explore the aspects of emotional safety later.

### ***"We don't criticize each other."***

Couples who criticize each other a lot tend to have problems. If one or both of you picks on, belittles or embarrasses each other in front of others, you should seriously ask yourself, "Why?" Criticism will undermine the foundation of your relationship. One or both of you will feel badly and possibly begin building resentment against the other. The couples I see on the brink of divorce often have built up mountains of resentment. By the time they come to me, the resentment has reached a toxic level. You have the ability to avoid this.

### ***"We're not defensive with each other."***

Defensiveness is another communication inhibitor. Communication in the form of "active listening" can help mitigate this. In other cases, people can have a propensity towards personalization which has more to do with their own issue than that of the relationship.

### ***"If we have a misunderstanding we try to work it out instead of shutting down."***

"Shutting down" typically comes as the result of physiological over-stimulation or the "fight or flight" response. This is very damaging behavior for the person on the receiving end as the experience can feel abandoning – as if their partner has emotionally 'checked out' and left them alone. I always encourage couples to avoid this at all costs. The active learning skills you'll learn later will help with this if it's something one or both of you experiences. We'll also explore family of origin influences on your relationship.

After you have adequately discussed the results of your communication assessment and have identified areas for improvement, you can move on. If this exercise has been difficult or has provided reason for conflict, the following sections will likely be helpful.

## **I-FEEL STATEMENTS:**

Telling each other how you feel (mad, sad, glad, afraid) can improve your communication. However, many couples focus on what their partner did (the content) vs. how it made them feel (the process). Instead of using language like, “You always...” or “You never...” try saying “I felt \_\_\_\_\_ (emotion) when you did \_\_\_\_\_ (behavior).” This type of communication typically has a disarming effect instead of engaging the other in an argument.

## **ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS:**

Active listening is a communication tool that if used properly can greatly enhance your marriage. It's a way of listening that allows people to speak about problematic topics. It takes practice and may even feel a little awkward at first. This is because it slows down your normal rate of communication – but there's good reason for it. In the future, you're bound to hit a speed bump of some sort – where you and your partner are in complete disagreement or in an argument about an issue. You'll be able to work through these inevitable moments with greater ease if you learn the following steps:

- 1) **Listen without interruption** as your partner describes his/her feelings about the subject.
- 2) **Pause** and imagine how your partner might be feeling.
- 3) **Reflect back** what the partner has said in regards to their feelings such as, "It sounds like you're saying you're upset because..."
- 4) **Validate** their feelings such as, "I understand that you're upset..." You don't have to understand why - just allow them to have their feelings.
- 5) **Offer support** by saying something like, "Let's try to figure this out together." If it's a really hot topic that you are on opposite sides of the fence, you might try, “I want to figure this out with you...here is what's going on for me....”

The main idea here is not to allow emotional reactivity to spin the two of you out. The person doing the talking should also be aware of how they're shaping their language. Use “I feel” statements rather than critical words and attack. Working through difficult subject matter is tough for any couple! The ones that are more successful at navigating through it have mastered loving and respectful communication skills such as active listening. If you run into any rough spots as you continue through this workbook, ideally you can start to practice your newly acquired active listening skills.

## **MORE COMMUNICATION TIPS:**

### **Nonverbal communication**

Nonverbal communication can speak louder than words. I'm referring to things like eye contact, facial expression and body language. Be aware of negative messages such as eye rolling or looking at other things while your partner is trying to speak to you about a subject matter that is important to them.

### **Recognize and Manage Your Emotions**

Emotions are the most important part of communication though "words" shape it. For this reason it's important for each of you to check in with yourselves – and each other - as to how you're feeling in the moment. There are four primary emotions; mad, sad, glad and afraid. Anger tends to cause us the most trouble when it comes to conflict in that it can cause damage to your partner. If this is a problem for either of you, consider using a "time-out (see below)."

### **Crack Each Other Up**

Partners who can make each other laugh tend to be good at de-escalating conflict when it arises. It's a great mood lightener. For example, funny nicknames can be an indicator of fondness for one another. The names often stem from a "you had to be there" moment from the beginning of their relationship.

### **Use Time-Out if Needed**

Because of the physiological reaction (fight-or-flight) that can be associated with high levels of anger, this is a skill that can benefit the person struggling with excessive anger - and the relationship. It allows the angry person time to de-escalate and decreases the chance of damage done to the relationship while in this state. If one of you has a tendency to spin up pretty quickly, start to get in better touch with physical cues to this. For example, does your heart race? Do you sweat? Do you clench your fists or jaw? As soon as this happens, say, "I'd like to take a time-out, I'm going \_\_\_\_\_ (place) and I'll be back \_\_\_\_\_ (when)." Stick to the plan – don't leave your spouse hanging. When you've calmed yourself down you can try the discussion again (perhaps trying the active listening skills you just learned). The tricky thing with high levels of anger is that once you are physiologically flooded, it's pretty difficult to stay rational. For this reason, it's helpful to know in advance when you're "ramping up" and leave the situation before you lose control.

**LET'S TRY IT:**

On the next two pages are communication vignette worksheets for you and your spouse to fill out. Now that you both have learned something about I-statements, active listening and other tools, you have an opportunity to practice them together. Take your respective worksheets out and do them on your own – then come back together when you're ready.

Think of two recent events or situations that occurred with your spouse where you felt upset, frustrated, angry or disappointed. If you can't think of anything, make up two scenarios for the benefit of this exercise. Describe the event then fill in the "I-statement" blanks that follow.

**EVENT #1:**

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**I-FEEL STATEMENT:**

I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_

---

**EVENT #2:**

---

---

---

---

**I-FEEL STATEMENT:**

I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_

---

Think of two recent events or situations that occurred with your spouse where you felt upset, frustrated, angry or disappointed. If you can't think of anything, make up two scenarios for the benefit of this exercise. Describe the event then fill in the "I-statement" blanks that follow.

**EVENT #1:**

---

---

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---

**I-FEEL STATEMENT:**

I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_

---

**EVENT #2:**

---

---

---

---

**I-FEEL STATEMENT:**

I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_

---

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Sit down with your completed communication worksheets. Now we're going to put all of the tools to use. Whoever goes first read aloud the first "event" described followed by the "I-feel statement." The partner should listen attentively and use the active listening skills discussed earlier. Watch your nonverbal communication, notice and manage your emotions, infuse humor if appropriate and use a time-out if the subject matter brings up more emotional reactivity than is comfortable. Take as long as you need to work through each of the four events you listed. This may be really easy for you both or surprisingly difficult. You will decrease the chance of building up resentment in your marriage by learning to successfully navigate through challenging events that will inevitably occur between the two of you.



## **COMMUNICATION REVIEW CHECKLIST:**

Put a checkmark by the items that you do well together. Put an “X” by the areas that could use some improvement. If one of you struggles with a particular area, put an “X” by the item and come back to these topics later and continue to work on them. Put a question mark by items you’re unsure of at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_ We talk about it when something’s bothering us.

\_\_\_\_\_ We’re not critical of each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We’re not defensive with each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We don’t shut down on each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We use “I feel” statements effectively with each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are effectively able to use active listening skills with each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We don’t send negative messages with our nonverbal communication.

\_\_\_\_\_ We’re good at recognizing and managing our emotions.

\_\_\_\_\_ We know how to use humor to de-escalate conflict.

\_\_\_\_\_ We could effectively implement a time-out if needed.

Remember, if you get stuck, consider finding a local couples counselor to help you out.

## Section 3

### Relationship Foundation

- Emotional Safety
- Relationship Balance
- Relationship Logistics

## **SECTION 3: STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP FOUNDATION**

### **OVERVIEW:**

What do I mean by “relationship foundation?” This is the platform in which your marriage rests, the place on top of which your relationship “house” is built. The stronger the foundation, the more your union can withstand the stressors that come your way. If you have not had a particularly strong foundation in your marriage thus far, it doesn’t mean you can’t shore it up now. It’s never too late to strengthen your relationship foundation, if you both are committed to working on it.

My conceptualization of “relationship foundation” consists of three main aspects; emotional safety, relationship balance and logistics/role expectations.

In the following section we’ll do some assessments of your relationship foundation and open up discussions about each of the areas. You may find your foundation is very strong or it’s possible you’ll discover that it’s a bit shaky. If it’s the latter, try not to be discouraged. You are working on it together now and like I mentioned previously, it’s never too late if you don’t want it to be.

There will be assignments for you individually as well as together. The first assessment in this section will take a quick first look at your relationship foundation. There will be further detailed assessments that follow later on in this chapter.

Read each sentence and either put a checkmark by it if you agree, an "X" if you don't and a question mark if you're unsure. Go with your initial gut reaction.

**Relationship Emotional Safety**

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel prioritized by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel trusted by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel heard by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel understood by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel validated by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel empathy from my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel respected by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel loved by my partner.

**Relationship Balance**

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner values my need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ I value my partner's need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ We spend adequate time together nurturing our relationship.

**Relationship Logistics**

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our relationship roles.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our sex life.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our spiritual life.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with the way we manage our finances.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our couple and family life.

Read each sentence and either put a checkmark by it if you agree, an "X" if you don't and a question mark if you're unsure. Go with your initial gut reaction.

**Relationship Emotional Safety**

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel prioritized by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel trusted by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel heard by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel understood by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel validated by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel empathy from my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel respected by my partner.

\_\_\_\_\_ I feel loved by my partner.

**Relationship Balance**

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner values my need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ I value my partner's need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ We spend adequate time together nurturing our relationship.

**Relationship Logistics**

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our relationship roles.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our sex life.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our spiritual life.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with the way we manage our finances.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our couple and family life.

## **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Sit down together and compare your assessments. Remember, this isn't about "right" or "wrong" but rather an opportunity for education and discussion. In this case, the more you've marked your answers with an "X," the more you and your partner could benefit from strengthening your relationship foundation which is what we're here to do. Keep in mind that most marriages can benefit from this to some degree. Let's begin to touch on each of the three areas of the initial assessment. I want to be sure you have an understanding of how I define these areas and why they would benefit your marriage.

### **Emotional Safety**

Emotional safety is one of the most important elements of a healthy relationship. One of the biggest problems with the couples I see in my practice is an absence of emotional safety. This is a topic I've written a lot about and am passionate about its power to strengthen and heal the relationship dynamic. It's a fundamental aspect of my relationship therapy. If couples learn how to create an emotionally safe environment together, they feel truly relaxed and comfortable with one another. Typically, the couples who present as the most hostile, distant, angry, or disengaged are the least emotionally safe together.

So what is "emotional safety" in a relationship? I define this as the level of comfort both people feel with each other. There are eight aspects in which I assess the emotional safety in a relationship. They are respect, trust, feeling prioritized, feeling heard, understanding, validation, empathy and love. We will explore this topic further shortly.

### **Relationship Balance**

When two people come together there are now three parts to this system; "you," "me," and "we." Imagine if you draw two overlapping circles. There are three parts – the individual pieces on the sides and the overlapping piece in the middle. The outer parts represent each person and the middle is where they join in relationship. Every marriage will look slightly different on paper in where the emphasis is.

On one end of the continuum will be the couple where each person essentially lives a separate life with different friends, few mutual decisions and little time spent together. In this scenario, one partner often desires more togetherness with the other but their mate possibly fears intimacy and a perceived loss of their independence.

On the other side, there's the couple who spends as much time as humanly possible together, with no outside friendships or interests. They are totally enmeshed in one another. They live "as one." The circles would be almost totally overlapping each other, with most of the focus on "we" and very little, if any on "you" or "me."

I find (though there will always be exceptions) the happiest couples are whose circles overlap somewhere in the middle, where there is adequate attention paid to “you,” “me” and “we.” Each partner is able to maintain their own identity, friends, hobbies and outside interests while nurturing the marriage. A personally fulfilled person can be more open, giving and loving to their spouse than one who has lost their identity. We will take a closer look at your relationship balance coming up.

### **Relationship Logistics**

Relationship logistics are about expectations, family goals, work, intimacy, children and other issues around how the marriage functions. Sometimes married couples can benefit from a re-evaluation of their roles after a long period of doing things the same way. In other cases, things work logistically fine. We’ll take a look at your relationship logistics to help you determine whether changes might add to the refreshment of your marriage.

Now we’re going to dig a little deeper into the previously discussed areas; emotional safety, relationship balance and relationship logistics. Do each of the following exercise separately then come back together when you’re ready.

As I mentioned earlier, there are eight aspects in which I assess emotional safety. They are respect, trust, feeling prioritized, feeling heard, understanding, validation, empathy and love. Using this paradigm, I'd like you to rate, from zero to ten, (zero being "never" and ten being "all the time") how much you feel each of the eight mentioned aspects of emotional safety from your spouse.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Respect:** How much do you feel respected by your partner? People who report low levels of respect often experience criticism or judgment from the other.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Trust:** How much does your partner trust you? Many issues can spring out of a basic lack of trust.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling Prioritized:** How high do you feel on your partner's list of priorities? Feeling low on the priority scale can contribute to a build-up of resentment.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling Heard:** How much does your partner listen to you? Those who don't feel heard complain of being ignored, tuned out or talked over by the other.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Understood:** How much do you feel understood by your partner? People with low levels of understanding from the other report frustration around their partner not "getting them" or twisting their words into a different meaning.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Validation:** How much do you feel validated by your partner? Low levels of validation are problematic to any relationship in that one or both feels the other is rejecting their feelings which can serve to increase painful feelings and resentment.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Empathy:** How much do you feel empathy from your partner? A lack of empathy in a relationship means a lack of attunement to the others' emotions. The partner experiencing a lack of empathy can experience a great deal of sadness or anger. "You don't care how I feel."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Love:** How much do you feel loved by your partner? This encapsulates and reflects the state of the previous seven aspects.

As I mentioned earlier, there are eight aspects in which I assess emotional safety. They are respect, trust, feeling prioritized, feeling heard, understanding, validation, empathy and love. Using this paradigm, I'd like you to rate, from zero to ten, (zero being "never" and ten being "all the time") how much you feel each of the eight mentioned aspects of emotional safety from your spouse.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Respect:** How much do you feel respected by your partner? People who report low levels of respect often experience criticism or judgment from the other.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Trust:** How much does your partner trust you? Many issues can spring out of a basic lack of trust.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling Prioritized:** How high do you feel on your partner's list of priorities? Feeling low on the priority scale can contribute to a build-up of resentment.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling Heard:** How much does your partner listen to you? Those who don't feel heard complain of being ignored, tuned out or talked over by the other.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Understood:** How much do you feel understood by your partner? People with low levels of understanding from the other report frustration around their partner not "getting them" or twisting their words into a different meaning.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Validation:** How much do you feel validated by your partner? Low levels of validation are problematic to any relationship in that one or both feels the other is rejecting their feelings which can serve to increase painful feelings and resentment.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Empathy:** How much do you feel empathy from your partner? A lack of empathy in a relationship means a lack of attunement to the others' emotions. The partner experiencing a lack of empathy can experience a great deal of sadness or anger. "You don't care how I feel."

\_\_\_\_\_ **Love:** How much do you feel loved by your partner? This encapsulates and reflects the state of the previous seven aspects.

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

What did you both come up with? The higher the numbers, the more emotional safety you have in your marriage. Are there areas for improvement? If so, this is a great place to use your active listening skills with each other. This can be tricky territory for some people. Check in with any feelings you're having and monitor your defensiveness. Use "I feel" statements if you notice emotional reactivity coming up.

Go through each of the aspects of emotional safety. Talk about them. Discuss ways you both might bring the numbers higher. What do you need from each other? Ideally, you have a union where you turn towards one another – and not away. If you don't, we're laying the groundwork for this. Take as long as you both need to fully explore this area and move on to the next exercise when you're ready - relationship balance.

## **RELATIONSHIP BALANCE EXERCISE**

## **PARTNER #1**

When two people come together in relationship they become three parts to a system; “you,” “me,” and “we.” Imagine if you draw two overlapping circles. There are three parts – the individual pieces on the sides and the overlapping piece in the middle. The outer parts represent each person and the middle is where they join in relationship. Every relationship will look slightly different on paper in where the emphasis is.

In this exercise, you will draw out your conceptualization of what your relationship balance currently looks like with your partner. Draw the two overlapping circles – the middle representing the relationship and the outsides representing you as individuals. Label the sections “you,” “me” and “we.”

Underneath the first drawing, draw how you would like the relationship balance to be. It may or may not look like what you just did.

### **Our Relationship Balance Currently**

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### **How I'd Like Our Relationship to be Balanced**

When two people come together in relationship they become three parts to a system; “you,” “me,” and “we.” Imagine if you draw two overlapping circles. There are three parts – the individual pieces on the sides and the overlapping piece in the middle. The outer parts represent each person and the middle is where they join in relationship. Every relationship will look slightly different on paper in where the emphasis is.

In this exercise, you will draw out your conceptualization of what your relationship balance currently looks like with your partner. Draw the two overlapping circles – the middle representing the relationship and the outsides representing you as individuals. Label the sections “you,” “me” and “we.”

Underneath the first drawing, draw how you would like the relationship balance to be. It may or may not look like what you just did.

**Our Relationship Balance Currently**

---

**How I'd Like Our Relationship to be Balanced**

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Again, let's compare what you did. What do the circles look like? Are they similar? Are there differences between what you both see yourselves having now and what you'd like? Which areas have the most focus or is there a balance between them? Are you both on the "same page" or might you benefit from further discussion about how your marriage has been balanced? There is no "right" or "wrong" way for you two to balance your relationship as long as you both are in agreement!

The goal here is to have the discussion about where you are, if you're both happy with it or if you might benefit from making some changes to the way your marriage is balanced. When you agree that you have explored this area enough, continue on to the next assessment – which will take a more detailed look at your relationship logistics and role expectations.

**MARRIAGE LOGISTICS AND ROLES ASSESSMENT**

**PARTNER #1**

Fill in the following blanks with your understanding of how things work in your marriage. If you don't know or it hasn't been discussed, leave it blank.

Are you happy where you live? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, where would you prefer to be? \_\_\_\_\_

Who does the chores? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you happy with the division of labor? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes would feel better? \_\_\_\_\_

Who handles the money and bills? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you content with this? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what would work better for you? \_\_\_\_\_

Is money an issue in your marriage? \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following descriptions best fits your emotional relationship with money (circle one)...

Power   Security   Autonomy   Control   Approval   Salvation   Success   Disapproval

Which description will your spouse pick? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you similar or opposite? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you happy with your sexual and intimate life? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, do you discuss it? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes would feel better to you? \_\_\_\_\_

If you have young children, are parenting responsibilities divided in a way that works? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what would feel better for you? \_\_\_\_\_

Who works – one or both of you? \_\_\_\_\_ Is this working out well for you? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what work changes would be better for the marriage/family? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are blending families, are you content with how this is working out? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes could be implemented? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you content with the amount of quality time spent with your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what suggestion can you make to change that? \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the following blanks with your understanding of how things work in your marriage. If you don't know or it hasn't been discussed, leave it blank.

Are you happy where you live? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, where would you prefer to be? \_\_\_\_\_

Who does the chores? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you happy with the division of labor? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes would feel better? \_\_\_\_\_

Who handles the money and bills? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you content with this? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what would work better for you? \_\_\_\_\_

Is money an issue in your marriage? \_\_\_\_\_ Which of the following descriptions best fits your emotional relationship with money (circle one)...

Power   Security   Autonomy   Control   Approval   Salvation   Success   Disapproval

Which description will your spouse pick? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you similar or opposite? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you happy with your sexual and intimate life? \_\_\_\_\_ If not, do you discuss it? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes would feel better to you? \_\_\_\_\_

If you have young children, are parenting responsibilities divided in a way that works? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what would feel better for you? \_\_\_\_\_

Who works – one or both of you? \_\_\_\_\_ Is this working out well for you? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what work changes would be better for the marriage/family? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are blending families, are you content with how this is working out? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what changes could be implemented? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you content with the amount of quality time spent with your spouse? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what suggestion can you make to change that? \_\_\_\_\_

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Carefully review your assessments. Remember, this isn't a venue for criticism but an opportunity to figure out what works well and what doesn't in how your marriage functions. What areas can benefit from further discussion? This can be a sticky part for some people. You may have encountered topics that you both have never talked about – or topics you've rehashed countless times with no resolution. Regardless, now is a chance to dialogue about it.

The following worksheet is to be done together and is a place for you to commit to a plan towards refreshing the logistics of your marriage.

## **OUR MARRIAGE LOGISTICS AND ROLES CHECKLIST                      DO TOGETHER**

Put an “X” by the areas one or both of you believes can benefit from change. Additionally, put a circle around the “X’s” you both agree can benefit from change. Leave blank where it’s not applicable to you. Take your time and use the communication skills discussed earlier.

\_\_\_\_\_ Place where we live

\_\_\_\_\_ Chores and division of labor

\_\_\_\_\_ Handling of bills and finances

\_\_\_\_\_ One or both of our relationships with money

\_\_\_\_\_ Sex and intimate life

\_\_\_\_\_ Parenting responsibilities

\_\_\_\_\_ One or both of our job situations

\_\_\_\_\_ Blending of families

\_\_\_\_\_ Amount and quality of time spent together

This exercise provides an opportunity to consider ways to refresh how your marriage “works.” I suggest you begin by considering the areas you agree on – and come up with ways together about how you can implement change. The areas that you don’t agree on can follow and may be more challenging for you to navigate through. Take your time and celebrate the modification of one area at a time which in itself should start to reinvigorate your relationship.



## **RELATIONSHIP FOUNDATION REVIEW CHECKLIST:**

Put a checkmark by the items that you do well together. Put an “X” by the areas that could use some improvement. If one of you struggles with a particular area, put an “X” by the item and come back to these topics later and continue to work on them. Put a question mark by items you’re unsure of at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel trust from each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel prioritized by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel heard by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel understood by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel validated by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel empathy from each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel respected by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We feel loved by each other.

\_\_\_\_\_ We value each other’s need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ We both value our own need for some independence in the relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ We spend adequate time together, nurturing our relationship.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our relationship roles.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our sexuality together.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with how we handle finances in our marriage.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with how we handle issues around blending families.

\_\_\_\_\_ We are satisfied with our personal, couple and family goals.

Remember, if you get stuck, find a local relationship therapist to help guide you through.

## Section 4:

# Family of Origin Analysis

## **SECTION 4: FAMILY OF ORIGIN ANALYSIS**

### **OVERVIEW:**

The experience you each had in your families of origin with parents or primary caregivers is part of the tapestry of what makes up who you both are. It's important to take a look at what you both learned about relationships and consider if – and how – it might impact how you are together in marriage. You may already have some knowledge about the following section but it doesn't hurt to review it. There may be things you don't know about each other and this is an opportunity to learn and revisit your partner's "story."

Whether we like it or not, many of us repeat behaviors we saw or experienced. Sometimes we even pick partners who remind us of the negative and positive traits of our parents! I've seen it enough in my couples counseling practice – and in my own life experience – to know it to be true.

Now let's explore each of your experiences...

**FAMILY OF ORIGIN ASSESSMENT**

**PARTNER #1**

Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. This is to gather information about your family of origin in which to share and discuss with your partner.

Who were you raised by? \_\_\_\_\_

If you lived in a two-parent home, how was their relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

“I learned that relationships are” \_\_\_\_\_

Did you grow up in a loving and supportive environment? \_\_\_\_\_

If your father was present, or another male role model, were you close? Describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

If your mother was present, or another female role model, were you close? Describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you have siblings or other kids in the house? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the relationships: \_\_\_\_\_

Were there emotional needs unmet from your parents or primary caregivers? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Using the previous description of “emotional safety,” rate the emotional safety level you felt in your family of origin. (“1” is not at all – and “10” is complete) Circle a number:

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Did you learn anything about relationships from your family of origin experience that might be problematic in your marriage? Did you learn anything that might be helpful?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. This is to gather information about your family of origin in which to share and discuss with your partner.

Who were you raised by? \_\_\_\_\_

If you lived in a two-parent home, how was their relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

“I learned that relationships are” \_\_\_\_\_

Did you grow up in a loving and supportive environment? \_\_\_\_\_

If your father was present, or another male role model, were you close? Describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

If your mother was present, or another female role model, were you close? Describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you have siblings or other kids in the house? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the relationships: \_\_\_\_\_

Were there emotional needs unmet from your parents or primary caregivers? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Using the previous description of “emotional safety,” rate the emotional safety level you felt in your family of origin. (“1” is not at all – and “10” is complete) Circle a number:

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Did you learn anything about relationships from your family of origin experience that might be problematic in your marriage? Did you learn anything that might be helpful?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Compare your family of origin experiences. This discussion is an opportunity to learn more about each other's most significant relationships, practice being supportive and empathetic if need be and identify possible unhelpful patterns – to avoid continuing to repeat them. If there were damaging or emotionally wounding relationship experiences for either of you, you have a wonderful opportunity to heal some of your old wounds through the marriage. Unfortunately, old wounds can also be re-wounded so it's a good idea to be familiar with this idea - which is a concept from Imago Relationship Therapy.

If you both had your emotional needs met in childhood, that's great! Your marriage has less of a chance of old "garbage" resurfacing. If you've been married for some time and there haven't been any problems such as this then it's likely there won't be in the future.

The next worksheet is another adaptation from Imago work and it will challenge you both to answer some questions about any similarities between your partner and one or both of your parents or primary caregivers. It is thought by some that we unconsciously partner up with people who have positive and/or negative traits of the people who raised us. The negative traits are the ones that can present challenges in the marriage.

Fill in the blanks. You both are now building up a comparison between your parents/primary caregivers and each other.

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your mother/female primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your mother/female primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your father/male primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your father/male primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your spouse?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your spouse?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Is your spouse more similar to your mother, father, both or neither? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you ever find yourself saying, “You sound just like my mother (or father)!”    Y    N

Fill in the blanks. You both are now building up a comparison between your parents/primary caregivers and each other.

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your mother/female primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your mother/female primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your father/male primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your father/male primary caregiver?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main positive personality traits of your spouse?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

What are the 3 main negative personality traits of your spouse?

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Is your spouse more similar to your mother, father, both or neither? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you ever find yourself saying, “You sound just like my mother (or father)!”    Y    N

### **LET'S TALK A LITTLE MORE ABOUT IT:**

Warning: This section might cause giggling – or spurn some serious discussion. A lot of people I work with are initially shocked at the notion of their spouse being anything like a parent. What did you come up with? Did you find negative or positive qualities that matched one or both of your parents? Do you find that you're triggered by your partner in ways that remind you of a parent? If you do – trust me, you're not alone.

The trick is to be aware of it – and the possibility that each of you might have a heightened sensitivity to situations that are reminiscent of earlier experiences. Here's another chance to practice your Active Listening and "I Feel" skills. If you both couldn't find any similarities at all then consider yourselves unique and continue on.



## **OUR FAMILIES OF ORIGIN REVIEW CHECKLIST:**

Put a check by items that are true. Put an "X" by the areas that are false. Put a question mark by items you don't understand or need further exploration of.

\_\_\_\_\_ We know something about each other's families of origin.

\_\_\_\_\_ We know something about each other's relationships with parents/caregivers.

\_\_\_\_\_ We know something about what each of us learned about relationships.

\_\_\_\_\_ We know something about each other's emotional wounds (if any).

\_\_\_\_\_ We've identified potential issues that might come up as a result of our early experiences.

\_\_\_\_\_ We've identified similarities between each of our parents and each other (if any).

\_\_\_\_\_ We've identified sensitive issues that might get triggered between us that feel similar to old experiences we had with our parents.

If this section has left you both confused, or you feel a deeper look into this area might be beneficial to your relationship, find a local couples therapist in your area who has some experience or knowledge in Imago Relationship Therapy and/or family of origin work in general.

## Section 5

# Your Marriage Goals and Vision

## **SECTION 5: YOUR MARRIAGE GOALS AND VISION:**

### **OVERVIEW:**

Did you ever discuss goals prior to or during the course of your marriage? If not, you're not alone. A lot of couples don't. Perhaps you did but they have changed. Regardless, you're now going to get an opportunity to create goals and a vision for your marriage and how you'd like it to be from this point forward. No matter where you are in life – older or younger – you will take a look at each other's hopes and dreams for the future as they relate to you individually, as a couple and as a family.

The next worksheet will ask you both to think about your individual, marriage and family goals in the short term. If you enjoy this exercise, I encourage you to do it again considering a longer time frame.

Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer or have never thought about it – don't worry about it. Simply leave it blank.

What are my personal goals – or hopes - for the next five years? (This can be work, creative, friends or anything that relates to you as an individual)

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What are my goals – or hopes - for the marriage for the next five years?

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What are my goals – or hopes – for my family for the next five years? (If applicable)

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Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer or have never thought about it – don't worry about it. Simply leave it blank.

What are my personal goals – or hopes - for the next five years? (This can be work, creative, friends or anything that relates to you as an individual)

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What are my goals – or hopes - for the marriage for the next five years?

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What are my goals – or hopes – for my family for the next five years? (If applicable)

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### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Compare each other's worksheets. Were you aware each other's hopes? How do they line up together? Don't worry if you have unanswered questions. This provides an opportunity to take a look at where each of you are coming from as you continue on with your marriage – and to start to think about how to blend your hopes and goals into those you share or at least be supportive of. This is a great chance to refresh your marriage from a perspective you may not have considered – but is also important.

The next exercise you'll do together. When finished, you'll move immediately onto the "marriage vision" exercise which will ask you to capture an image of a satisfying marriage with your partner.

**OUR INDIVIDUAL, MARRIAGE & FAMILY GOALS      DO TOGETHER**

Fill in the blanks together to the best of your abilities. Don't worry if you don't have clarity about where you see yourselves in five years. Simply leave it blank.

What are our personal goals – or hopes - for the next five years? (This could be work, creative, friends or anything that relates to you as an individual)

**Partner 1** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Partner 2** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are our goals – or hopes - for the marriage for the next five years?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are our goals – or hopes – for my family? (If applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_







### **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:**

Hopefully you both enjoyed the previous exercises and now have general goals and a rough “Marriage Vision” to move forward with. If this section brought up issues that you’re struggling to resolve together, try not to get frustrated. There’s nothing wrong with your marriage being an ongoing “work in progress.” Most marriages are - as there’s an ebb and flow of all relationships as they go through growth and transition.

Married couples who get caught in the “hum-drum” of daily life sometimes forget what they value and need to be satisfied. It can get swept under the carpet or minimized. The problem is that even covert dissatisfaction can become resentment if left unchecked. We’ll look more at “resentment” ahead. Hopefully, you have reassessed and gotten reacquainted with your visions of a satisfying marriage. The combined exercise you just did provides a visual testament to this.



## Section 6:

### Three Common Marriage Problems

- Resentment
- Sexual Intimacy
- Infidelity

## **SECTION 6: THREE COMMON MARRIAGE PROBLEMS**

### **OVERVIEW:**

When we marry, no one wants to believe that the union could be challenged with big problems in the future. It's easy to assume we won't have the trouble we hear of **other** married couples having. And maybe we won't! The reality is, marriage is hard work but with potential for a huge payoff if adequate attention is paid to it. Without proper care - communication, time spent together and emotional safety levels can slip – increasing the chances for more challenging issues to surface.

Whether or not you and your partner have faced – or are facing – any or all of the following three common marriage problems, you can benefit from reviewing this section together in the event you do in the future.

Let's look at ways to deal with three very common marriage problems; **resentment, sexual intimacy and infidelity.**

### **TIPS TO WORK THROUGH RESENTMENT**

Resentment is a build-up of anger or hurt feelings. The longer those feelings go unexpressed or invalidated (remember the section on emotional safety), the higher the “mountain” of resentment can get. Couples I see in my office on the brink of divorce typically have huge mountains of resentment between them. Part of my work is to help them work through their resentment, ideally leaving a small pile of dirt in place of the mountain that loomed in front of them at the onset.

Let's say you and your partner have resentment between you. If it's never been addressed, perhaps now is a good time to explore what's gone on for both of you and look at ways to move past it. Seeing as resentment is toxic to marriage, let's see if we can explore ways to release some of it.

#### **Make a List**

Each of you take some time to make a list of all of the things that you have resentment for. Start with the biggest offenders and if the list becomes too long, assess which items can be left off (it may be a “pick your battles” moment). If you feel strongly that they all need to be there – so be it. One of you might have a short list. The other of you may have a list that reads more like a novel.

#### **Put to Use Your Effective Communication Tools**

Agree that you will both be mindful of using Active Listening and “I Feel” statements discussed previously as you begin the task of clearing out old wounds weighing down your marriage. Be prepared for a potentially difficult conversation and try to stay calm. Keep yourself focused on the goal – to decrease resentment in order to increase closeness in your marriage.

### **Take Turns Covering Each Item on Your Lists**

Explain to each other how you felt. Listen carefully to each other and don't interrupt. Validate each other's experience and empathize with the feelings that were attached to it. Consider how the other might have felt by imagining yourself in their shoes.

### **Sincerely Apologize Where Mistake Were Made in Behavior**

If you believe mistakes were made, apologize! Sometimes this is all your partner will need. Other times, it can be the start of a path to healing. If you don't really mean it, don't bother. An insincere apology has the potential to do more damage than no apology at all.

### **Agree to Disagree – With Emathy**

If you come to a place where one felt hurt but the other truly doesn't believe they did something wrong, agree to disagree. However, empathize with the feelings the other had. For example, "I may not understand how my behavior impacted you this way but I'm sorry that you were hurt."

### **Seek Professional Help**

If this process leaves you in conflict, find a therapist in your area to help you out. Be sure to give yourselves a break – this is not a reflection of irreparable damage to your marriage. Working through a long history of deep resentment is hard work! However, if done successfully, it can be very bonding and leave you more connected than you've been in a long time.

## **TIPS FOR IMPROVING SEXUAL INTIMACY**

Couples married for a long time often report their sex lives "lose their spark." This is not so unexpected considering the amount of time it might have been since you two were in the "honeymoon phase" of your relationship. Unfortunately, the revved up physiology and brain chemistry is usually unique to that stage – and temporary (boo hoo to that).

The reality is marriages have a tendency to fall into a predictable routine around work, kids and life in general. Unfortunately, quality time spent in the bedroom can fall into this kind of rut as well. I recommend turning a lot of your routines upside down as you work on refreshing your marriage but in particular, your sex life. We want to make sure we steer you clear of a dull domestic partnership and rekindle the spark that likely was there to some degree during the famous honeymoon phase.

If you and your spouse are nodding your heads as you read this, let's explore some ways to rekindle this part of your marriage.

### **Work on Your Friendship and Laugh!**

The better friends you are, the better you can talk about sexual intimacy issues and allow yourselves to laugh at how much your sex life has taken a nose dive. So often it's totally unintentional. If you can address the serious topic in a light-hearted manner, it will take the weight and pressure off. For example, Mary calls out playfully from the bedroom to her husband, "Jim, can you come here for a minute? I want to show you something...tee hee..."

### **Reprioritize Your Life to Make Room for Sex**

As much as sex may have dropped down the totem pole of your priorities, it can be moved back up a few notches. This requires acknowledgement by both partners that it's become a problem and a desire for change. If you both are committed to refreshing your marriage, this area must be given attention. Just do it - the laundry or a work call can wait!

### **Treat your Partner as if You're Dating**

Flirt, be playful and ask each other out on dates once in a while. You're never too old to get in the same mindset you once had together. If you need to schedule a "date night" then do it! Perhaps you can take turns planning it every other week.

### **Resolve Underlying Relationship Conflicts**

Resentment is an example of an "underlying relationship conflict" and hopefully you're starting to tackle that if it exists. The bottom line is that these types of deeper relationship issues will spill into the bedroom.

### **Seek Help if Needed**

Seek help if you still need it. If there are more complicated matters occurring, such as sexual dysfunction problems, find a sex therapist.

### **TIPS FOR WORKING THROUGH INFIDELITY**

Infidelity is one of the most challenging issues a couple can face. The depth of pain experienced by the partner who was cheated on can be excruciating and unrelenting. For those who want to rebuild their relationship after an affair – there is hope. It requires hard work and a commitment to the process.

#### **Cease the Affair**

As obvious as this may seem, it needs to be said. Marriages can't heal if there's a third person triangulated into the relationship. If the person who had the affair wants to save the marriage, the third party must be out of the picture completely.

#### **Apologize, Apologize, Apologize**

The person who was cheated on was likely wounded very deeply. There must be sincere remorse and humility by the partner who engaged in the affair - and a willingness to repeat words of remorse repeatedly if needed.

#### **Allow Partner to Have their Feelings**

The person who was cheated on will probably cycle through intense emotions – from rage to devastation. This is normal and this person needs to experience his/her feelings. The person who had the affair needs to be prepared for this and allow it to happen. Listen, validate and empathize with his/her experience.

#### **Find out What Partner Needs from the Other to Heal**

Find out what the wounded partner needs to heal. It's possible they won't know. But ask the question a lot.

**Consistent Behavior and Patience**

The person who had the affair should focus on consistent behavior that is kind and loving. He/she will be challenged to be patient as it will likely be increasingly difficult to have the same discussions over and over – as well as be reminded of what transpired. Consistency and patience will help the other heal, forgive and trust again.

**Eventually Examine What Might Have Led to the Affair**

At some point later on, when some healing has taken place, it's important to address what issues might have led to the affair in the first place. This isn't about shifting responsibility of the affair away from the person who engaged in the behavior, but about taking an honest look at your marriage before the affair occurred. There are a number of possibilities including conflict and intimacy avoidance, addiction, lack of communication, resentment, etc.

## **“DO WE NEED MARRIAGE COUNSELING?”**

I'd like to stop for a minute and check in with you both – how are you feeling about your marriage right now? Do you feel refreshed, invigorated and hopeful? This workbook was designed to provide a framework to visit important areas in your marriage that may have never been explored – or revisit areas that have been forgotten about. The goal was to provide a roadmap to “refresh” your marriage and shore up any soft spots in your relationship foundation. If you feel that goal was met, I'm happy for you both and hope you continue to work on the sensitive areas that may have been touched on in the course of doing this workbook.

If you find that this workbook wasn't enough to begin to get your marriage back on track, I encourage you to find a couples therapist in your area. At the very least, you now have a pretty good idea of what your trouble spots are. Couples counseling provides an opportunity to explore some of the deeper issues with someone trained in relationship dynamics in a face-to-face setting. You'll find a few therapist resources at the end.



## **CONCLUSION:**

Congratulations on completing **The Marriage Refresher Course!** I'm pleased to have been given the opportunity to take this journey with you and I hope you have a newly invigorated view of your relationship, remember what brought you together in the first place and are inspired to refocus your energy on your marriage.

I encourage you to continue to dialogue about your experience and areas for continued focus. Keep the lines of communication open between the two of you and seek additional help if needed.

Now go enjoy each other!

Warmly,

***Lisa Brookes Kift, MFT***

Marriage and Family Therapist

The Toolbox: Relationship Articles, Tips, Tools and Advice

[www.lisakifttherapy.com](http://www.lisakifttherapy.com)

Lisa's Psychotherapy Practice in California

[www.marintherapyandcounseling.com](http://www.marintherapyandcounseling.com)

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **THE TOOLBOX: RELATIONSHIP ARTICLES, TIPS, TOOLS AND ADVICE**

Lisa Brookes Kift, MFT, is the creator of **The Toolbox** at [www.lisakifttherapy.com](http://www.lisakifttherapy.com), an online mental health and relationship resource where you'll find her relationship articles, tips, tools and Therapy-At-Home Workbooks™. **The Toolbox at LisaKiftTherapy.com** is also the home of [The Healthy Relationships Place Blog](#), a compilation of relationship articles from various relationship therapy professionals – and [Ask the Therapist – A Relationship Advice Blog](#) where you can submit relationship questions to Lisa.

### **RELATIONSHIP BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS**

Getting the Love You Want by Harville Hendrix, PH.D. (Imago Relationship Therapy)

Keeping the Love You Find by Harville Hendrix, PH.D. (Imago Relationship Therapy)

The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work by John Gottman, PH.D.

Passionate Marriage by David Schnarsch, PH.D.

### **FAMILY OF ORIGIN WORK BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS**

Healing the Shame That Binds You by John Bradshaw

Journey to Enlightenment by Ross Bishop

### **THERAPIST DIRECTORIES**

[www.family-marriage-counseling.com](http://www.family-marriage-counseling.com)

[www.goodtherapy.org](http://www.goodtherapy.org)

### **OTHER ONLINE RELATIONSHIP INFORMATION**

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Lisa Brookes Kift is a Marriage and Family Therapist in Marin County, California where she has a private practice doing individual therapy and couples counseling. Lisa is the creator of [Therapy-At-Home Workbooks™](#) - a series of cost effective alternatives to face-to-face counseling. She has written numerous articles about topics related to mental health and relationships.

Lisa enjoys writing, photography, travel and spending time with her husband and young son.

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