

The Premarital Counseling Workbook for Couples

Lisa Brookes Kift, MFT

A cost effective, do-it-yourself,
therapist-guided alternative to counseling.



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Second Edition

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Introduction

My name is Lisa Brookes Kift and I'm a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Marin County, California. This workbook 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 and Daniel Siegel, general communication skills and my conceptualization of how to shore up the foundation of a relationship prior to marriage. 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 my face-to-face premarital work – and what you will have the benefit of learning about in these pages.

My goal is to help you and your fiancé:

- 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. It addresses respect, trust, feeling prioritized, heard, understood, validated, empathy and love in the relationship.
- 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. It's ideal to 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 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 play out in the marriage. We'll explore what each of you might be bringing into your relationship from your past and how to disrupt the repetition of problematic learned behaviors.

5) **Explore Your Marriage Logistics/Expectations:** It's common for married couples to never have discussed "who" will be doing "what" in the marriage and other basic expectations that one or both of you might have. This can apply to career, finances, chores, sexual intimacy and more. Having an open and honest discussion about your expectations from each other can lead to fewer surprises and upsets down the line. We will take a look at both of your role expectations.

6) **Develop Your Personal, Couple, Family Goals and Marriage Vision:** Many married couples have never discussed their relationship goals – let alone personal or family goals. This is a long term investment together. Where do you want to be in five years? Approximately when would you like to have children? How many children? There are many potential areas to be explored and it can be a fun to do! You and your partner will each learn about the other's goals and contemplate combining both to create one relationship vision.

I enjoy helping couples get the best possible start - to do all they can ahead of time to avoid bigger problems that might bring them to marriage counseling later – or in the worst case, divorce. I'm excited to share my knowledge with you in this workbook.

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. A couples counselor can assist with this.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is for couples to use together and provides a framework for you to **strengthen your relationship foundation** prior to marriage. Its' interactive format with worksheets and a space for couples journaling makes it a great keepsake for you and your partner – to remind you of what you worked on in preparation for your marriage.

It is divided into six sections and I recommend you stop after each section for as long as you need to be able to think, digest and further explore the subject matter. Some areas may be more challenging than others. We will discuss communication skills early in the workbook to provide tools for you and your partner to be able to navigate through the potentially more difficult topics.

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.

Each section is followed by a journal page for you both to take notes if you'd like to. 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, websites and other resources should you desire to further educate yourself about healthy relationships. I hope that you do - as there is a lot of great information and research available to you.

Now assign one person to read aloud the narratives in each section. As much as you both may be tempted to peek over each other's shoulders as you do the exercises, I encourage you not to in order to have the most beneficial experience possible. Most importantly – have fun!

Section 1:
The Warm-Up

SECTION 1: THE WARM-UP

OVERVIEW:

If you're preparing for a wedding and/or marriage you're probably finding this to be an exciting time! Let's begin our journey with a light and fun exercise to get your feet wet.

Couples who know a lot about each other tend to more effectively build trust and understanding between them. We're going to do a mini-assessment of our own looking at how well you know each other.

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 and let's begin.

PARTNER KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT**PARTNER #1**

Fill out each answer. Don't worry if there are things you don't know about your partner. When you reconvene you can find out.

My partner's favorites:

Food _____

Sport _____

Color _____

Hobby _____

Movie _____

Book _____

Childhood Memory _____

Best Friend _____

Political Affiliation _____

Is happiest when _____**Gets the angriest at** _____**Worries the most about** _____**Thinks his/her relationship with his/her parents is** _____**Thinks he/she is most like which parent** _____**Gets the most annoyed at me when** _____**Thinks my best quality is** _____**Wants to marry me because** _____**Thinks the strongest part of our relationship is** _____

PARTNER KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

PARTNER #2

Fill out each answer. Don't worry if there are things you don't know about your partner. When you reconvene you can find out.

My partner's favorites:

Food _____

Sport _____

Color _____

Hobby _____

Movie _____

Book _____

Childhood Memory _____

Best Friend _____

Political Affiliation _____

Is happiest when _____

Gets the angriest at _____

Worries the most about _____

Thinks he/she is most like which parent _____

Thinks his/her relationship with his/her parents is _____

Gets the most annoyed at me when _____

Thinks my best quality is _____

Wants to marry me because _____

Thinks the strongest part of our relationship is _____

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

Sit down together with your exercises in hand and compare them. Which questions did you know the answers to? Which did you miss? Fill in the correct answers together. Ask each other questions if you have them. Take time to further discuss areas of particular interest. If you found that one or both of you couldn't answer many of the questions, don't worry about it! This is your opportunity to dig deeper with each other.

Friendship is paramount to a strong and connected marriage. The person sitting next to you will be relying on you – and you on them. Friendship in marriage is about enriching each other's lives and knowing that the other is a “secure base” in which to turn to.

In my couples counseling practice I have found that the most successful outcomes typically involve partners who truly LIKE each other. They show more resilience to life's curve balls and relationship ups and downs. If you and your fiancé haven't focused much on the friendship in your relationship, you can do so now!

**Dr, John Gottman has created more detailed partner knowledge assessment quizzes if you're interested in going deeper (see his book in “Additional Resources” at the back of the workbook).*

Spend as much time as you want before moving onto the next section.

“Emotionally intelligent couples are intimately familiar with each other's world.”

- John Gottman, PhD

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 area people struggle with the most. 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 wherever the couple is on the relationship spectrum.

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.

COUPLES COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT**PARTNER #1**

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 fiancé about communication strengths and areas for improvement.

My Communication

- _____ I tell my partner when something is bothering me.
- _____ I don’t criticize my partner.
- _____ I am not defensive with my partner.
- _____ If we 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 try to resolve conflict as soon as possible.
- _____ We both know how we feel about each other.

COUPLES COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

PARTNER #2

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 fiancé about communication strengths and areas for improvement.

My Communication

- _____ I tell my partner when something is bothering me.
- _____ I don’t criticize my partner.
- _____ I am not defensive with my partner.
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Partner’s Communication

- _____ My partner usually discusses his/her feelings when upset.
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- _____ My partner doesn’t shut down with me when we have a misunderstanding.

Our Communication

- _____ We listen to each other.
- _____ We 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 partner 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 tell each other when something is bothering us.”***

The more successful marriages are typically the ones where each person feels comfortable discussing what’s bothering them. Ideally, there’s enough “emotional safety” present in the relationship where both parties feel secure doing that. If there’s something keeping one or both of you from expressing your feelings then it would benefit you to examine this. We’ll further explore the aspects of emotional safety later.

“We don’t criticize each other.”

Couples who criticize each other can erode the security between them. If one or both of you picks on, belittles or embarrasses each other, you should ask yourselves, “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. If you nip criticism in the bud, you’ll have less chance of setting the stage for more difficulty down the road.

“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. Regardless, it has a way of escalating conflict because it’s a thinly veiled way to essentially blame your partner.

“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 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.

**I encourage you to take a look at Dr. John Gottman’s research on predictors of divorce which include some of the above ideas (see “Additional Resources” at the back of the workbook).*

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 disagreement, the following sections will likely be helpful.

I-FEEL STATEMENTS:

Telling each other how you feel 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...can we talk about what’s going on for both of us?”

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 active listening and “I Feel” statements.

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.

Recognize and Manage Your Emotions

Emotions are the most important part of communication though "words" shape them. 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 partner 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 think clearly.

Start the Flow of Oxytocin

It's long been known that oxytocin (the "cuddle hormone") is released by infant and baby during nursing. It's a way to assist with the attachment bond. This can also occur between two people in an intimate relationship where gentle touch releases oxytocin. According to Linda Graham, MFT, a "20 Second Body Hug" between two people who are in a physically aroused state (having an argument) can help the brain release oxytocin. Try this instead of a time-out if you feel it is safe to do so. (Please note: This may not be appropriate for everyone. Use with caution and as long as you both aren't so emotionally reactive that it elicits a hostile response.)

**Dr. Jeanne Segal, PhD is an excellent resource on emotional intelligence and Dr. Dan Siegel, MD is at the top of the field in interpersonal neurobiology. (see "Additional Resources" at the back of the workbook).*

LET'S TRY IT:

On the next two pages are communication vignette worksheets for you and your partner to fill out. Now that you both have learned something about I-statements, active listening and other communication tips, 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.

COMMUNICATION WORKSHEET

PARTNER # 1

Think of two recent events or situations that occurred with your partner 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-feel statement" blanks that follow.

EVENT #1:

I-FEEL STATEMENT:

I felt _____ when _____

EVENT #2:

I-FEEL STATEMENT:

I felt _____ when _____

COMMUNICATION WORKSHEET

PARTNER # 2

Think of two recent events or situations that occurred with your partner 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-feel statement" blanks that follow.

EVENT #1:

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 previously discussed. 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 and use humor if appropriate.

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.

"Speak when you are angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret."

- Dr. Laurence J. Peter

COMMUNICATION REVIEW CHECKLIST:

Complete together. Put a checkmark by the items that you do well as a couple. 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 is 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 can effectively implement a time-out if needed.
- _____ We feel comfortable trying a “20 Second Oxytocin Body Hug.”

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 will rest, the place on top of which your relationship “house” will be built. The stronger the foundation, the more your union will be able to withstand the stressors that will come your way.

My conceptualization of the “relationship foundation” in a marriage consists of three main aspects:

- 1. Emotional Safety**
- 2. Relationship Balance**
- 3. 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 could use some strengthening. If it’s the latter, try not to be discouraged. Most couples could benefit from working on their relationship and the good news is that you are making the commitment to work on it now!

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.

QUICK RELATIONSHIP FOUNDATION ASSESSMENT

PARTNER #1

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 trust 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 have discussed and/or are satisfied with our relationship roles.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our sexual expectations.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our spiritual beliefs.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our financial management and plan.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our personal, couple and family goals.

QUICK RELATIONSHIP FOUNDATION ASSESSMENT PARTNER #2

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 trust 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 have discussed and/or are satisfied with our relationship roles.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our sexual expectations.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our spiritual beliefs.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our financial management and plan.

_____ We have discussed and/or are satisfied with our personal, couple and family goals.

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. Now we'll 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 the ways in which they will benefit your marriage.

Emotional Safety

Emotional safety is one of the most important elements of a healthy relationship. It's the glue that binds people together in safety, security and attachment. Most of the troubled couples I've worked with in my therapy practice have reported low levels of emotional safety initially. Increasing the emotional safety in your relationship has the power to heal old wounds and reinforce the ability to withstand the inevitable curveballs of life and is 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 feel the least emotionally safe.

So what is "emotional safety" in a relationship? I define this as the level of comfort both people feel with each other, the degree at which they know the other is there for them. 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 further explore this topic shortly.

Relationship Balance

When two people come together in an intimate relationship there are 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 relationship 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."

My experience has demonstrated to me (though there will always be exceptions) the happiest couples are the ones 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 relationship. A personally fulfilled person can be more open, giving and loving to their partner than one who has lost their identity. We will also explore the relationship balance in your relationship coming up.

Relationship Logistics

Relationship logistics are about expectations, family goals, spiritual beliefs, work, intimacy, children and other issues around how the marriage will function and what is to be expected. This is an area that is incredibly important to discuss pre-marriage and the reality is - many couples don't think to do it! We'll do so shortly.

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.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY ASSESSMENT

PARTNER #1

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 in your relationship.

_____ **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 do you trust your partner? Many issues can spring out of a basic lack of trust like insecurity and doubt.

_____ **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 which can be toxic.

_____ **Feeling Heard:** How well 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.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY ASSESSMENT**PARTNER #2**

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 in your relationship.

_____ **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 do you trust your partner? Many issues can spring out of a basic lack of trust like insecurity and doubt.

_____ **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 which can be toxic.

_____ **Feeling Heard:** How well 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 relationship. Are there areas for improvement? Are there vast areas of discrepancies in how you feel? Do you both struggle with similar areas?

This is a great opportunity to use your active listening skills with each other as you process this assessment together. Clarify your assumptions. Keep in mind this can be tricky territory, particularly if the level of emotional safety isn't as high as would be beneficial. Check in with any feelings you're having and monitor your defensiveness if it comes up. Use "I feel" statements if you notice emotional reactivity that might negatively impact the constructive conversation you both are trying to engage in.

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 partnership 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 perception 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

RELATIONSHIP BALANCE EXERCISE

PARTNER #2

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 perception 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? There is no "right" or "wrong" way for you two to balance your relationship as long as you both are in agreement!

In my couples counseling practice, I always assess their relationship balance and whether it's working for both partners. If it's not, it first must be understood why they operate the way they do. There are many reasons that motivate people towards the various styles including family of origin experience (what did their parents do?), fear of engulfment or the opposite, fear of abandonment. The next step is figuring out what they can do differently to create more balance. Often it involves increased awareness, better communication and behavioral change. Ideally, the end result is the two overlapping circles that validate all three parts – the "you," the "me" and the "we" as they all play a role in emotional and relationship health.

**If either of you resonates with a "fear of engulfment" or "fear of abandonment," I recommend the work of Sue Johnson Ph.D., mentioned in the resource list in the back of this workbook*

Now is your chance to dialogue about the balance in your relationship. 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.

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.

LOGISTICS/ROLE EXPECTATIONS ASSESSMENT

PARTNER #1

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

Where will you live? _____

Who will do chores? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Who will handle the money and bills? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Will your money be put together or remain separate? _____

Will there be a prenuptial agreement? _____

What are your expectations around physical affection and intimacy? Are you comfortable discussing this area with your partner?

What is your expectation about involvement in religion or spiritual activity? If your partner is of a different – or no faith – how will this work out between you?

Will you have children? _____ How many? _____

If you have children, will they be raised in a certain religion?

Who will work? _____ If you have children, will one of you stay home?

If you will be blending families, how will this work? Will you both parent?

List any concerns not covered above: _____

LOGISTICS/ROLE EXPECTATIONS ASSESSMENT **PARTNER #2**

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

Where will you live? _____

Who will do chores? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Who will handle the money and bills? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Will your money be put together or remain separate? _____

Will there be a prenuptial agreement? _____

What are your expectations around physical affection and intimacy? Are you comfortable discussing this area with your partner?

What is your expectation about involvement in religion or spiritual activity? If your partner is of a different – or no faith – how will this work out between you?

Will you have children? _____ How many? _____

If you have children, will they be raised in a certain religion?

Who will work? _____ If you have children, will one of you stay home?

If you will be blending families, how will this work? Will you both parent?

List any concerns not covered above: _____

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

What did you both come up with? How close are your responses? What areas could benefit from further discussion? Keep in mind that this can be sticky for some people. You may have encountered topics that you both have never talked about.

A big mistake couples can make is never having discussed each person's views on some of the bigger life decisions and expectations around the future together. Perhaps you are unsure at this time about some of the issues presented. The important thing is to put it firmly on the table for discussion and come back to it until you both feel the end results are satisfying.

The following worksheet is to be done together and is a place for you to create your mutual plan for your relationship logistics and expectations once you marry. You may find that creating a more detailed plan based on the worksheet would be beneficial. Another option is to use the journal space at the end to take additional notes. You may already be living together and have covered this territory. If so – great! If you feel confident that you're on the same page and don't feel the next exercise is necessary, you may skip ahead.

“When you make the sacrifice in marriage, you're sacrificing not to each other but to unity in the relationship.”

- Joseph Campbell

OUR MARRIAGE LOGISTICS / EXPECTATIONS WORKSHEET DO TOGETHER

Fill in the blanks together, coming to a mutual decision about how things will work. If you get stuck, leave it blank and take notes about the topic on the upcoming journal page. Continue to discuss on your own. This might require negotiation and compromise as you begin to create the vision of your marriage.

Where will you live? _____

Who will do chores? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Who will handle the money and bills? _____ If you both will, how will they be divided?

Will your money be put together or remain separate? _____

Will there be a prenuptial agreement? _____

What are your expectations around physical affection and intimacy? Are you comfortable discussing this area with your partner?

What is your expectation about involvement in religion or spiritual activity? If your partner is of a different – or no faith – how will this work out between you?

Will you have children? _____ How many? _____

If you have children, will they be raised in a certain religion?

Who will work? _____ If you have children, will one of you stay home?

If you will be blending families, how will this work? Will you both parent?

List any concerns not covered above: _____

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 trust 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 needs for some independence in the relationship.

_____ We both value our own needs 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 sexual relationship.

_____ We are satisfied with the place spirituality will have in our marriage.

_____ We are satisfied with how we will handle finances in our marriage.

_____ We are satisfied with how we will 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.

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! Sometimes we are aware that we are repeating unhelpful patterns and sometimes we're not. The purpose of the following chapter is to make you familiar of you and your partner's history from an emotional standpoint as this can impact your marriage. The more you understand each other's sensitivities, the better the chance you'll have to demonstrate empathy for each other when one or both are emotionally triggered.

You may find that both of you are carrying old wounds which can come from the most obvious places (i.e. abuse) to less obvious (i.e. emotional unavailability of parent). If you and your partner are both fortunate to be "baggage-less" then good for you! Consider yourselves lucky. This will inherently be a strength in your marriage. For others, you can learn to do things differently and heal through each other with a little patience, commitment and love.

Let's explore each of your experiences...

FAMILY OF ORIGIN WORKSHEET

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 by 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?

FAMILY OF ORIGIN WORKSHEET

PARTNER #2

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 by 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 repeating 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 relationship you have together. Unfortunately, old wounds can also be re-wounded so it’s a good idea to be familiar with this idea.

My definition of “family of origin work” in its simplest form is, *“healing from our past to be able to move forward in the present.”* A range of issues related to emotional and relationship health can be linked to the person’s family of origin experiences with parents, primary caregivers and/or families in general. Anxiety, depression, anger, fear and recurrent relationship problems are often tied up in unresolved issues from the past – which can come up around unmet needs.

See the following list of problematic situations occurring earlier in life that might come up negatively for one or both of you now:

- childhood trauma (physical, sexual or emotional abuse)
- critical or harsh parenting styles in childhood
- rejecting or dismissing parenting styles in childhood
- living in a chaotic, fear-based environment in childhood
- witnessing a volatile, high-conflict relationship between your parents

If you both had your emotional needs met in childhood, that’s great! You can move on together with less of a chance of old “garbage” resurfacing in your marriage. If one or both of you are carrying unresolved family of origin wounds, I suggest you find an individual therapist in your area to help you sort it out. These things have a way of impacting relationships so it’s an important thing to consider in a premarital discussion.

**For a deeper look at unwinding out of childhood trauma, look for the book by John Bradshaw in the resources section at the end of the workbook.*

The next worksheet is another adaptation from Imago work and will challenge you both to answer some questions about any similarities between your partner and one or both of your parents or primary caregivers. Many believe 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 so it’s important to explore this area in premarital work.

MY PARENTS – MY FIANCE WORKSHEET**PARTNER #1**

Fill in the blanks. You both are now building 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 fiancé?

_____, _____, _____

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

_____, _____, _____

Is your fiancé 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

MY PARENTS – MY FIANCE WORKSHEET

PARTNER #2

Fill in the blanks. You both are now building 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 fiancé?

_____, _____, _____

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

_____, _____, _____

Is your fiancé 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 may incite giggling – or spurn some serious discussion. I’ve seen a lot of people be initially shocked at the notion of their partner being anything like one of their parents. 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 fiancé 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.

**I encourage you to take at the work of Harville Hendrix around the power of intimate relationships to heal old wounds. (see “Additional Resources” at the back of the workbook).*

“The type of human being we prefer reveals the contours of our heart.”

- Ortega Y. Gasset

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.

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

Section 5

Your Marriage Goals and Vision

SECTION 5: YOUR MARRIAGE GOALS AND VISION:

OVERVIEW:

Now you're going to get an opportunity to create goals and a vision for your relationship and how you imagine it to be. Unfortunately, some couples don't spend much time taking a look at each other's hopes and ideas for the future. This is a great way to connect and get even more excited about your future together – but also to be clear on where you both are coming from.

The next worksheet will ask you both to think about your individual, marriage and family goals.

INDIVIDUAL, MARRIAGE & FAMILY GOALS

PARTNER #1

Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer or have never thought about it, simply leave it blank and revisit later.

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)

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

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

INDIVIDUAL, MARRIAGE & FAMILY GOALS

PARTNER #2

Fill in the blanks to the best of your ability. If you don't know the answer or have never thought about it, simply leave it blank and revisit later.

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)

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

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

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

Compare each other's worksheets. Take time to discuss what you each have. Were you aware each other's hopes? How do they line up together? Are you learning anything new about each other? 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 prepare to join your lives together – and to start to think about how to blend your hopes and goals into those you share or at least be supportive of.

Ideally, you're not only happy together in your marriage but as an individual (as discussed when we explored your relationship balance). Connected partners have an awareness of the others dreams and hopes for the future. If your partner's individual goals aren't of particular interest to you, that's ok too. However, it's useful to know of them and ideal to be supportive.

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 fiancé.

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 yet have clarity about where you see yourselves in five years. Simply leave it blank and revisit later.

What are our personal goals – or hopes - for the next five years? (This can 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:

I hope 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.

“Marriage gives you the opportunity to be continually schooled in your own reality and in the reality of another person.”

- Harville Hendrix, PhD

OUR MARRIAGE GOALS AND VISION CHECKLIST:

Put a checkmark by the items that you are clear about. Put an “X” by the areas that might benefit from further exploration by one or both of you. Put a question mark by items you’re unsure of at this time.

_____ We’re fairly clear about our personal goals over the next five years.

_____ We’re fairly clear about our marriage goals over the next five years.

_____ We’re fairly clear about our family goals over the next five years.

_____ We’ve created a mutually satisfying marriage vision.

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

Section 6:
The Wrap Up

SECTION 6: THE WRAP UP**REVIEW:**

We're nearing the end of the workbook, having journeyed down a number of very important roads as they relate to the strength and resilience of your upcoming marriage. Together you've done the following:

- Taken a look at how well you know each other
- Assessed aspects of your communication
- Learned communication tools to put in your toolbox
- Assessed aspects of your emotional safety
- Learned about emotional safety
- Assessed aspects of your relationship balance
- Learned about relationship balance
- Explored what your marriage logistics and expectations look like
- Learned about each other's family of origin experiences—and the relevance
- Started the process of looking at future goals
- Started the process of creating a marriage vision for the two of you

Now we're going to remind you of the areas for continued individual and relationship improvement. You will do this last exercise together. It is an overall checklist covering all of the areas of the workbook which will serve as a reference point to remember what to continue to work on. You can refer back to your previous checklists to fill out this comprehensive list if needed.

OUR RELATIONSHIP AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT CHECKLIST

Put a checkmark by the items that you do well together. Put an “X” by the areas that could use some improvement. Put a question mark by items you’re unsure of at this time.

COMMUNICATION

- _____ 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.
- _____ We trust 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.

(Continue to next page)

RELATIONSHIP FOUNDATION

- _____ We value each other's needs for some independence in the relationship.
- _____ We both value our own needs 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 sexual life together.
- _____ We are satisfied with the place spirituality will have in our marriage (if any).
- _____ We are satisfied with how we will handle finances in our marriage.
- _____ We are satisfied with how we will handle issues around blending families (if applicable).
- _____ We are satisfied with our personal, couple and family goals.

FAMILIES OF ORIGIN

- _____ 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 family of origin wounds that might be triggered in our relationship (if any).
- _____ We've identified similarities between each of our parents and each other.

RELATIONSHIP GOALS

- _____ We've started to think about our individual, marriage and family goals.
- _____ We've created a marriage vision which we understand is a work in progress and always has room for improvement, additions and modifications.

CONCLUSION:

Great job! Congratulations on completing **The Premarital Counseling Workbook for Couples**. I'm pleased to have been given the opportunity to take this journey with you and I hope you both learned more about each other and feel even better prepared for your marriage ahead.

We covered a lot of territory and I encourage you to continue to talk about what you've learned about healthy relationships – and each other. The most important thing is to keep the lines of communication open between the two of you throughout your marriage. If you can talk and be open about what's going on for each of you, it will be more likely that you will successfully navigate through issues as they arise – and they will. That is just part of life. However, if you have a strong foundation beneath your feet, you can survive anything together.

If further education would be beneficial, see the additional resources on the next page.

Enjoy the engagement, the marriage – and each other!

Warmly,

Lisa Brookes Kift, MFT

Marriage and Family Therapist

The Toolbox: Tools for Marriage, Relationship and Emotional Health

LisaKiftTherapy.com

Lisa's Psychotherapy Practice in Marin County, California

MarinTherapyandCounseling.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

- *Getting the Love You Want* by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D.
- *The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work* by John Gottman, Ph.D.
- *The Language of Emotional Intelligence* by Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.
- *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* by Sue Johnson, Ph.D.
- *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* by Dan Siegel, M.D.
- *Healing the Shame That Binds You* by John Bradshaw, MA

THERAPIST DIRECTORIES

- PsychologyToday.com
- Family-Marriage-Counseling.com

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BY LISA BROOKES KIFT, MFT

- LisaKiftTherapy.com
- The Toolbox Monthly Newsletter—click on “Newsletter” at LisaKiftTherapy.com
- Therapy-At-Home Workbooks—click on “The Toolbox Store” at LisaKiftTherapy.com

CONNECT WITH LISA VIA SOCIAL NETWORKING

- **Facebook**—search for “The Toolbox at LisaKiftTherapy”
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Lisa Brookes Kift is a Marriage and Family Therapist - and creator of the *Therapy-At-Home Workbooks* series, a cost effective, do-it-yourself, therapist-guided alternative to counseling. She is also the founder of one of the first therapist-created online resources for the public of it's kind. *The Toolbox at LisaKiftTherapy.com* provides tools for marriage, relationship and emotional health with articles, tips, tools and advice by Lisa and other related professionals.

Lisa is a frequent consultant for the media and has been interviewed by CNN.com, HuffingtonPost.com, Martha Stewart Weddings Magazine, Fox National News, MSN Health, Women's Day Magazine and others.

Lisa Brookes Kift has a private practice working with individuals and couples in Marin County, California. She is happily married, has a precocious son and is an avid volleyball player.



“Emotional and relationship health go hand in hand.”

- Lisa Brookes Kift, MFT