

Find Your Relationship Strengths

The Couple Checkup

Take Our Free Online Survey at couplecheckup.com

- ✓ Based on a national Survey of 50,000 Marriages
- ✓ For dating, Engaged and Married Couples
- ✓ Powered by the popular Prepare Enrich Program
- ✓ Map out your Couple Positioning System (CPS)

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and Peter J. Larson, PH.D.

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

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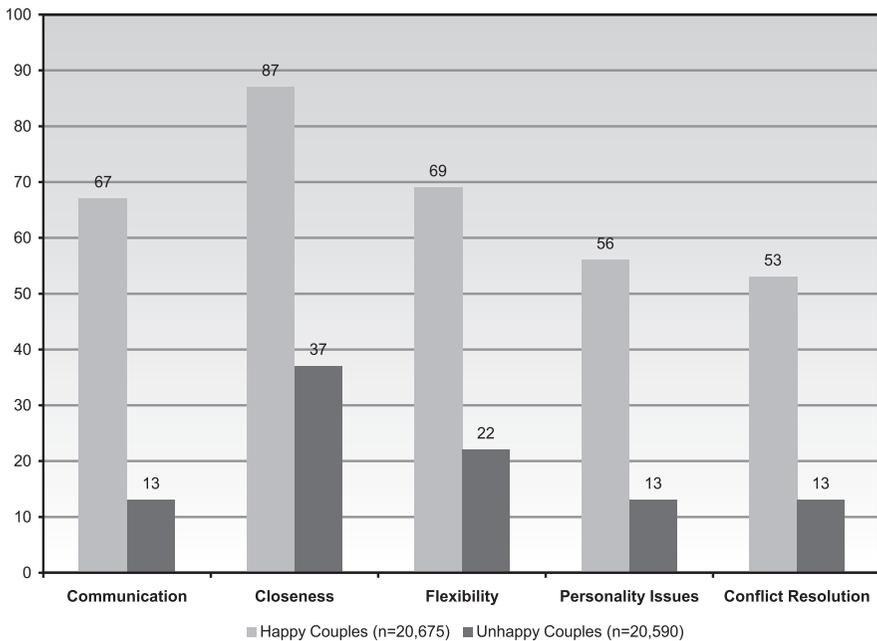
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DISCOVER YOUR COUPLE STRENGTHS

FIGURE 2.1



* PCA, or Positive Couple Agreement, measures the percentage of couple agreement that it is a positive relationship strength.

FIGURE 2.2

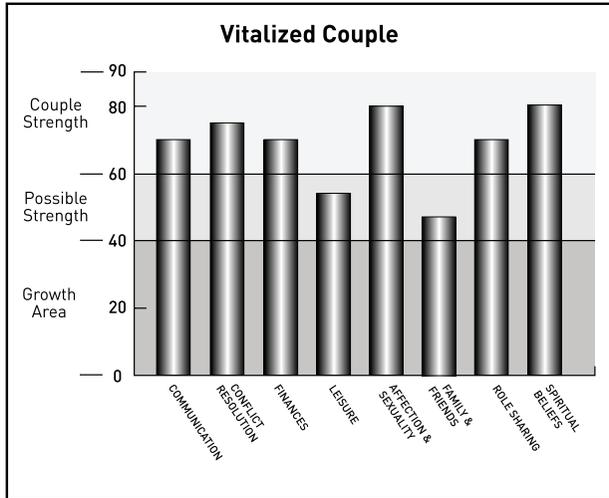


FIGURE 2.3

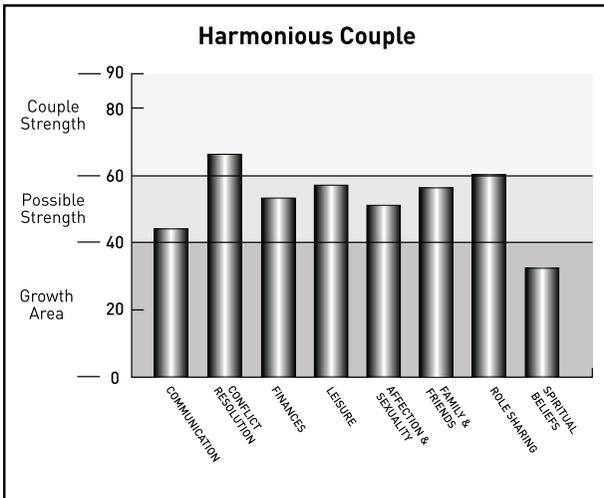


FIGURE 2.4

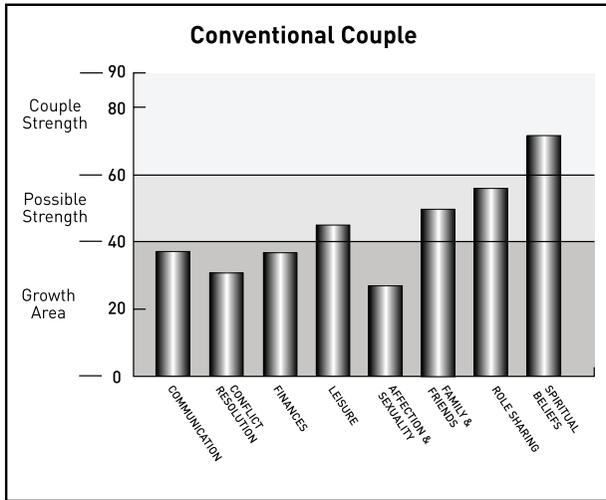


FIGURE 2.5

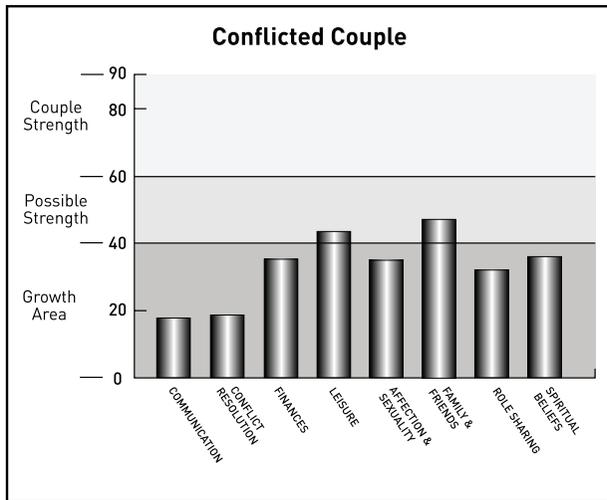
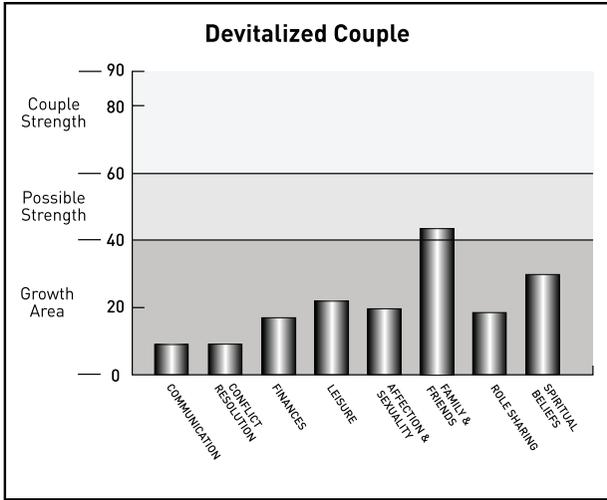


FIGURE 2.6



COMMUNICATION— THE #1 SKILL

FIGURE 3.1
Communication Strengths of Happy Couples vs. Unhappy Couples

Percentage in Agreement	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
Communication Issue		
1. I am very satisfied with how we talk to each other.	95%	15%
2. My partner understands how I feel.	79%	13%
3. I find it easy to express my true feelings to my partner.	96%	30%
4. My partner is a very good listener.	83%	18%
5. My partner does not make comments that put me down.	79%	20%

FIGURE 3.2
Top Five Communication Problems for Couples

Communication Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. I wish my partner were more willing to share his/her feelings.	76%
2. I sometimes have difficulty asking my partner for what I want.	69%
3. My partner often does not understand how I feel.	65%
4. My partner often refuses to discuss issues or problems.	64%
5. My partner makes comments that put me down.	62%

** One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.*

FIGURE 3.3
Communication Patterns and Intimacy

Person A Communication Style	Person B Communication Style	Relationship	Who Wins	Level of Intimacy
Passive	Passive	Devitalized	Both lose	Low
Passive	Aggressive	Dominating	1 wins, 1 loses	Low
Aggressive	Aggressive	Conflicted	Both lose	Low
Assertive	Passive	Frustrated	Both lose	Low
Assertive	Aggressive	Confrontational	Both lose	Low
Assertive	Assertive	Vitalized	Both win	High

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you *now*? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was communication a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your communication problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 3.1

Improving Your Communication

Once you and your partner have read the chapter on communication, you can explore the uniqueness of your relationship by doing the following exercise. Complete the exercise separately. You can either photocopy the pages or write directly in the book.

List three things you really like about the way your partner communicates.

Partner 1

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List three things you would like your partner to change about how he or she communicates.

Partner 1

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After you have completed your individual lists, share and discuss them with each other. Talk about the things you agree to work on changing.

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING YOUR COMMUNICATION

1. Practice positive communication. When offering criticism as a speaker, balance it with at least one positive comment.
2. Give your full attention to the speaker—turn off your phone, shut off your television, make eye contact with your partner.
3. Focus on the good qualities in each other and praise these often.
4. Take time to listen. Listen to understand, not to judge. After listening, tell your partner what you heard before you share your own ideas. Suspend your emotions until you receive feedback that you have interpreted correctly.
5. Be assertive. Use “I” statements rather than “You” statements. Let your partner know what you want—don’t let your needs become a guessing game.
6. Listen with your ears but also with your eyes and other senses.
7. Find the courage to ask questions (rather than making assumptions) until you are clear that you understand your partner.

CONFLICT— AN OPPORTUNITY IN DISGUISE

FIGURE 4.1
Strengths of Happy Couples vs. Unhappy Couples
Regarding Conflict Resolution

Relationship Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. When we discuss problems, my partner understands my opinions and ideas.	78 %	20 %
2. I can share feelings and ideas with my partner during disagreements.	78%	25%
3. We are able to resolve our differences.	58%	12%
4. We have similar ideas about how to settle disagreements.	72%	28%
5. My partner takes our disagreements seriously.	54%	14%

FIGURE 4.2
Top Five Conflict Problems for Couples

Conflict Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. One person ends up feeling responsible for the problem.	80%
2. I go out of my way to avoid conflict with my partner.	78%
3. We have different ideas about the best way to solve disagreements.	77%
4. Some of our differences never seem to get resolved.	77%
5. We sometimes have serious disputes over unimportant issues.	76%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

FIGURE 4.3

Constructive and Destructive Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Area of Concern	Constructive Approach	Destructive Approach
Issues	Raises and clarifies current issues	Brings up old issues
Feelings	Expresses both positive and negative feelings	Expresses only negative feelings
Information	Gives complete and honest information	Offers only select information
Focus	Concentrates on the issue rather than the person	Concentrates on the person rather than the issue
Blame	Accepts mutual blame	Blames the other person for the problem
Perception	Focuses on similarities	Focuses on differences
Change	Facilitates change to prevent stagnation	Minimizes change, increasing conflict
Outcome	Recognizes both must win or both lose	A loss for the relationship
Intimacy	Increases intimacy by resolving conflict	Decreases intimacy by escalating conflict
Attitude	Builds trust	Creates suspicion

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you now? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was conflict resolution a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your conflict resolution problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 4.1

Ten-Step Procedure for Resolving Conflict

Use this ten-step model when there is a frequent problem you have not been able to resolve. Try it with your partner now. Start with a minor ongoing issue in your relationship.

In step five, brainstorm at least ten new ways to resolve the issue. Do not judge ideas based on whether they are feasible. Simply come up with as many ideas as possible, even if they may seem far-fetched. Brainstorming in this way will allow you to get beyond what you have done in the past that has not worked.

1. Set a time and place for discussion. Be specific.

2. Define the problem or issue of disagreement.

3. Talk about how each of you contributes to the problem.

4. List unsuccessful past attempts to resolve the issue.

5. Brainstorm ten new ways to resolve the conflict.

6. Discuss and evaluate these possible solutions.

7. Agree on one solution to try.

8. Agree on how each of you will work toward this solution.

9. Set up another meeting to discuss your progress.

10. Reward each other as you each contribute toward the solution.

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING YOUR ABILITY TO RESOLVE CONFLICT

1. View conflict as a normal and healthy part of a close relationship.
2. Never negotiate in moments of anger. Take some time to compose yourself so that you will be able to rationally discuss the issue.
3. When negotiating, do not bring up past issues. Stay in the present. It is the only place where things are really happening.
4. Do not blame each other, but focus on the problem. Remember that everyone involved contributes in some way.
5. Deal directly with issues as they arise. If an issue keeps coming up, use the ten-step model to work through it.
6. Validate. Allow your spouse to have and express his or her experience. Have a discussion about the problem, without highlighting the fact that one of you may agree and the other may disagree.
7. Do not stockpile. Storing up hurt feelings and grievances is counterproductive. Let your partner know about the things that bother you as they occur.
8. Consider yourselves allies rather than adversaries in problem solving.
9. Be honest. Arguments quickly turn ugly when a partner does not feel they are being told the whole truth.
10. Create a win-win solution.

FINANCES— MORE THAN MONEY

FIGURE 5.1
Top Five Financial Problems for Couples

Financial Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. I wish my partner was more careful in spending money.	72%
2. We have trouble saving money.	71%
3. We have problems deciding what is important to purchase.	63%
4. Major debts are a problem for us.	56%
5. Credit card use has been a problem for us.	52%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

FIGURE 5.2
 If You Save \$1 a Day
(\$1 per day for 30 days = \$30 per month)

Years Saved	5 Percent Interest	10 Percent Interest
10	\$4,677	\$6,195
20	\$12,381	\$22,968
30	\$25,071	\$68,379
40	\$45,969	\$191,301
50	\$80,391	\$524,061
60	\$137,085	\$1,424,856
70	\$230,460	\$3,863,340

FIGURE 5.3
 Strengths of Happy Couples Versus Unhappy Couples
 Regarding Finances

Financial Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. We agree on how to spend money.	85%	43%
2. I am satisfied with our decision to save.	67%	29%
3. Major debts are not a problem for us.	69%	35%
4. My partner does not try to control our finances.	74%	43%
5. Credit cards are not a problem for us.	69%	42%

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you *now*? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Were finances a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your financial problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 5.1

Money: What Does It Mean to You?

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

- ___ 1. I look up to those people who have been very financially successful.
- ___ 2. In making a major purchase, an important consideration is what others will think of my choice.
- ___ 3. Having high-quality things reflects well on me.
- ___ 4. It is important for me to maintain a lifestyle similar to or better than that of my peers.
- ___ 5. Having some money in savings is very important to me.
- ___ 6. I would rather have extra money in the bank than some new purchase.
- ___ 7. I prefer safe investing with a moderate return versus high-risk investing with potentially high returns.
- ___ 8. I feel more content when I know we have enough money for our bills.
- ___ 9. I really enjoy shopping and buying new things.
- ___ 10. People who have more money have more fun.
- ___ 11. I really enjoy spending money on myself and on others.
- ___ 12. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure helps.
- ___ 13. He or she who controls the purse strings calls the shots.
- ___ 14. It would be difficult for me to put all my money into a joint account.
- ___ 15. One of the important benefits of money to me is the ability to influence others.
- ___ 16. I think we each should control the money we earn.

Scoring and interpretation: After taking the quiz, add up your answers to the four questions for each category and record your scores below. Scores for each category can range from 4 to 20, with a high score indicating more agreement with that approach. It is possible to have high or low scores in more than one category.

General guidelines for scoring and interpreting your scores appear in the two boxes below. Record the interpretation for your score in each category on the scoring chart.

SCORING

Category	Add Items	Your Score
Money as status	1-4	
Money as security	5-8	
Money as enjoyment	9-12	
Money as control	13-16	

INTERPRETATION

Total Score	Score Interpretation
17-20	Very high
13-16	High
9-12	Moderate
4-8	Low

COUPLE EXERCISE 5.2

Creating a Budget

INCOME: (Take-Home Pay)		
Male:		
Female:		
Other income:		
TOTAL INCOME:		
EXPENSES: (Monthly)	Current spending	Future Budget plan
GIVING:		
HOUSING:	Rent or mortgage	
	Utilities:	
	Phone:	
LOANS/DEBT:	Car	
	Personal	
	Credit Cards	
TRANSPORTATION:	Gasoline	
	Repairs/ Maintenance	
FOOD:	Food at home	
	Food away from home	
HEALTH CARE:		
INSURANCE:	Medical	
	Car	
	Home/Life/ Health	
CLOTHING:		
PERSONAL GOODS:		
HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES		

SERVICES:	Cell phone		
	Cable/Dish		
	Internet		
	Dry cleaning/ Laundry		
	Other		
OTHER EXPENDITURES:	Savings		
	Gifts		
	Entertainment		
	Daycare		
	Child support		
	Other		
TOTAL EXPENSES			
Surplus or deficit			

COUPLE EXERCISE 5.3

Setting Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Individually identify your short- and long-term financial goals. Goals should be realistic and attainable. Once you and your partner have each determined three short-term and three long-term financial goals, share your goals with one another. Decide together how you can reach these goals.

For example, one goal might be to open a savings account to help with your child's (or grandchild's) college tuition. Another goal might be to buy a new home. You can then decide exactly how much money you are willing to contribute to this fund every month.

Short-Term Financial Goals

Partner 1

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Partner 2

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Long-Term Financial Goals

Partner 1

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Partner 2

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING YOUR FINANCES

1. Review and update your financial goals monthly.
2. Talk about what each of you value most in life and whether money relates to those values.
3. Be aware of the “hidden costs” of the goods or services you purchase (i.e., loss of or interference with couple or family time, the unavailability of those funds for something else, the extra work hours needed to pay for purchases, and so on).
4. Challenge yourselves to “no money needed” date nights. Scour the Internet for ideas if you need. These dates are often more fun and more memorable than dates that require money. Whether you decide to visit local buildings and landmarks or explore a local forest or cave, these dates are also great ways to get to know your community better.
5. Review any major debt you may have and plan how you will pay it off.
6. Talk about the spender-saver patterns in your relationship.
7. Join or form an investment club. Investment clubs are social gatherings where people share and learn about finances and investments.
8. Seek the help of a financial advisor, particularly if you have ongoing financial problems.

SEX— BEYOND THE BIRDS AND BEES

FIGURE 6.1
Strengths of Happy Couples Versus Unhappy Couples
Regarding Sexuality

Sexuality Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. I am completely satisfied with the affection I receive from my partner.	68%	17%
2. Our sexual relationship is satisfying and fulfilling.	76%	28%
3. My partner does not use or refuse sex in an unfair way.	82%	36%
4. I have no concerns that my partner may not be interested in me sexually.	84%	40%
5. I do not worry that my partner may consider an affair.	86%	45%

FIGURE 6.2
Top Five Sexual Problems for Couples

Sexual Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. I am dissatisfied with the amount of affection I receive from my partner.	68%
2. Our levels of sexual interest are different.	66%
3. Our sexual relationship has become less interesting and enjoyable.	62%
4. Our sexual relationship is not satisfying or fulfilling.	58%
5. I am dissatisfied with the level of openness in discussing sexual topics.	52%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

1. Always remember that good sex begins while your clothes are still on.
2. Take time to think about yourself as a sexual being.
3. Take responsibility for your own sexual pleasure.
4. Talk with your partner about sex.
5. Make time to be together regularly.
6. Don't let sex become routine in your marriage.
7. Be creative—you'll find it's one of the best aphrodisiacs.
8. Understand that working at sex doesn't work.
9. Don't carry anger into your bedroom.
10. Realize that good sex isn't just a matter of pushing the right buttons.
11. Nurture the romance in your life.
12. Don't make sex too serious.
13. Don't always wait to be "in the mood" before agreeing to have sex.
14. Realize that you and your partner don't have to see eye to eye sexually.
15. Don't be afraid to ask for help.
16. Try to keep your sexual expectations realistic.¹⁴

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you now? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was communication a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your communication problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 6.2

Plan a Romantic Adventure

Make a plan to spend some quality time together. This “adventure” can be whatever pleases both of you and fits into your lives and interests. Schedule and organize this in advance, following these guidelines:

1. Be realistic.
2. Plan something you will be able to do in the next few months.
3. Plan something that is not too expensive.
4. Answer these questions:

- When?

- Where?

- What can you each contribute to make it happen?

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING YOUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

1. Remember the importance of being affectionate aside from being sexual (especially if you are a man wanting to please a woman).
2. Remember that it is OK to have sex just for the sake of sex (especially if you are a woman wanting to please a man).
3. Resolve underlying conflicts that will spill over into your sexual relationship.
4. Discuss your different levels of sexual interest.
5. Let your partner know he or she is valued and appreciated.
6. Learn to critically decipher sexualized advertising. What is being sold? What is the message? Who is the ad targeting? Do the models look like real people?
7. Keep physically fit—exercise, stop smoking, maintain healthy weight and cholesterol levels.
8. Remember that improving your emotional connection with your partner will consequently improve your physical connection.

ROLES— TRADITIONS, TRENDS, AND TEAMWORK

FIGURE 7.1
How Happy Couples Versus Unhappy Couples View Their Roles

Role Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. Both are equally willing to make adjustments in their marriage.	82%	46%
2. Both work hard to have an equal relationship.	87%	54%
3. Both are satisfied with division of housework.	76%	42%
4. The couple makes most decisions jointly.	87%	59%
5. Household tasks are divided based on preferences, not tradition.	67%	55%

FIGURE 7.2

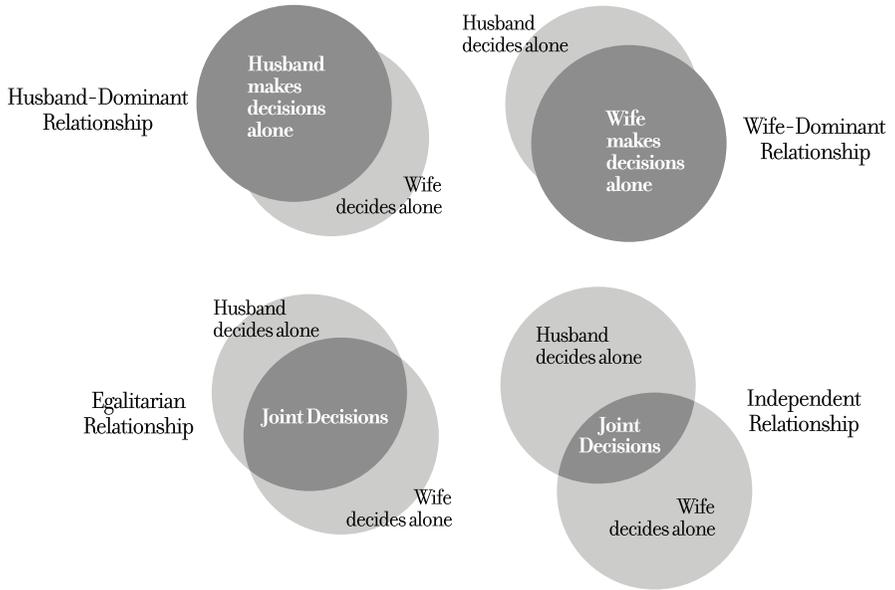


FIGURE 7.3
Top Five Role Problems for Couples

Role Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. Concern about unfair division of housework.	49%
2. Housework is based on traditional roles rather than interests.	44%
3. The husband is not willing to adjust as much as the wife is.	44%
4. Disagree whether or not the wife should work outside the home when children are young.	43%
5. Partners disagree that both work to maintain an egalitarian relationship.	36%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

FIGURE 7.4

Role Relationships in Happy Couples Versus Unhappy Couples

Perception of Relationship	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
Both perceive as egalitarian.	81%	19%
Husband perceives as traditional wife perceives as egalitarian.	50%	50%
Wife perceives as traditional, husband perceives as egalitarian.	37%	63%
Both perceive as traditional.	18%	82%

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you now? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was “roles” a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your role problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 7.1
Household Tasks: His and Hers

1. List your responsibilities related to the household and the children. Make a list of daily responsibilities (e.g., planning and preparing meals, walking the dog, helping child with homework) and weekly responsibilities (e.g., doing yard work, taking out recycling, washing a floor). Your partner should also separately create the same two lists.

Things You Do Daily	Things You Do Weekly
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____

2. After you have each completed your lists, compare and discuss them. Focus on what you each would like to change about who handles which household tasks.
3. Revise your current lists, finalizing an agreement about tasks you will each do next week. Set a time to review the new lists.

COUPLE EXERCISE 7.2

Switching Roles for One Week

After you have each completed Exercise 7.1, plan a day (or preferably a week) when you can perform each other's household responsibilities. This role-reversal experiment will help you gain a new appreciation for one another.

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR ROLE RELATIONSHIP

1. Remove gender from housework. Talk about and divide housework based on interests and skills rather than on gender.
2. Work to develop and maintain an equal relationship in terms of power and decision making.
3. Keep an ongoing discussion of your expectations and feelings regarding roles and changes you would like to make.
4. Working together on tasks works best for most couples.
5. Take a good look at how your work schedules may contribute to inequality at home.
6. Express appreciation to your partner for the contributions he or she makes to your family and home life.
7. Be flexible and open to change.

SPIRITUALITY— LIVE OUT YOUR VALUES

FIGURE 8.1
High vs. Low Spirituality Agreement

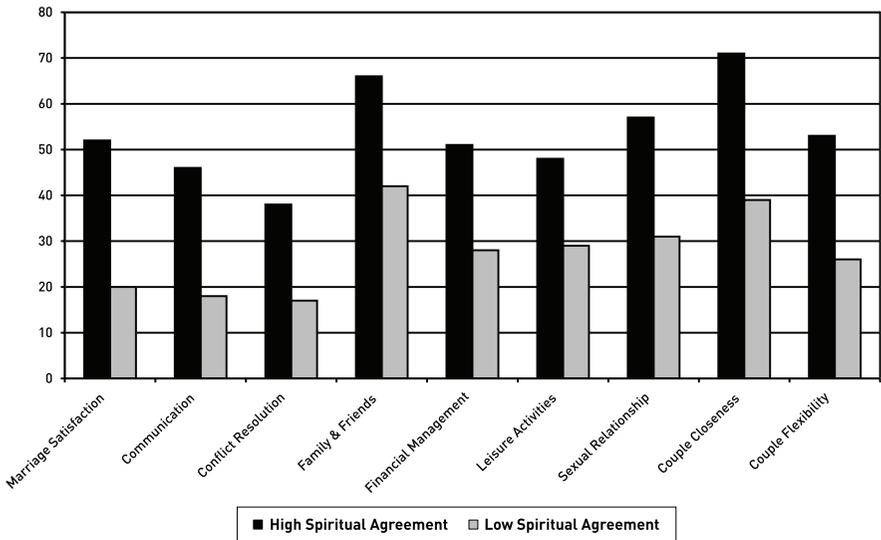


FIGURE 8.2
Strengths of Happy Couples vs. Unhappy Couples
Regarding Spirituality

Spiritual Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. I am satisfied with how we express our spiritual values and beliefs.	85%	40%
2. I feel closer to my spouse because of shared spiritual beliefs.	78%	43%
3. Sharing spiritual beliefs strengthens our relationship.	83%	50%
4. Spiritual differences do not cause tension in our relationship.	86%	56%
5. We rely on our spiritual beliefs during difficult times.	77%	46%

FIGURE 8.3
Top Five Issues Regarding Spiritual Beliefs

Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. We have not resolved the differences in our spiritual beliefs.	52%
2. We do not feel closer as a result of our spiritual beliefs.	47%
3. We do not rely on our spiritual beliefs during difficult times.	45%
4. We are dissatisfied with how we express our spiritual values and beliefs.	45%
5. Spiritual differences cause tension in our relationship.	34%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you now? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was spirituality a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your spirituality problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 8.1

Exploring Your Past

How much do you know about your partner's religious history? How much do you know about your own religious history? Family heritage lends a sense of stability and tranquility to relationships.

Set aside some time to discuss the following questions. If you do not have the answers, ask other family members or contact a historical society.

1. What is your family's ethnicity?
2. What is the origin of your family name? (In biblical times, names often were connected to race or profession.)
3. What is your family's religion?
4. What holidays (holy days) and rituals do you and your partner currently celebrate?
5. Where did those celebrations originate?
6. What do holiday symbols mean, like the menorah and Christmas tree?
7. Is there significance to the food you prepare?
8. What is the meaning of the gifts you exchange?

Through rituals, we create a treasure chest of memories, communicate information about values, and build a family legacy for our children and grandchildren. With that in mind, create a new family or couple ritual. Then integrate it into your weekly, monthly, or yearly routines.

COUPLE EXERCISE 8.2

Celebrating the Small Stuff

Set aside a quiet time to sit down with your partner. Try one of the following exercises:

- 1. Write down three uplifting moments in which you felt energized during the last month.** Picture those moments when you felt most alive—when the commonplace became not so common—such as the slant of late winter rays of sunlight, good work well done, a game of touch football in the fall leaves, or rocking your child to sleep. Share your experiences with each other.
- 2. Write down the names of the three people with whom you are most joyful.** Then write down the names of the three people who you trust the most. Share the names on both lists with your partner. Talk about why you trust the people you named. Discuss specific reasons you enjoy the people you named.

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING SPIRITUALITY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

1. Take time to learn about your partner's view of spirituality.
2. Integrate aspects of your spiritual lives into your couple relationship.
3. Establish rituals that will honor your spiritual beliefs.
4. Access faith by connecting with God, your partner, and others during difficult times.
5. Consider ways you could pray or worship together as a couple.

CLOSENESS AND FLEXIBILITY— MAP YOUR RELATIONSHIP

FIGURE 9.1
Five Levels of Closeness, Balancing Separateness vs. Togetherness

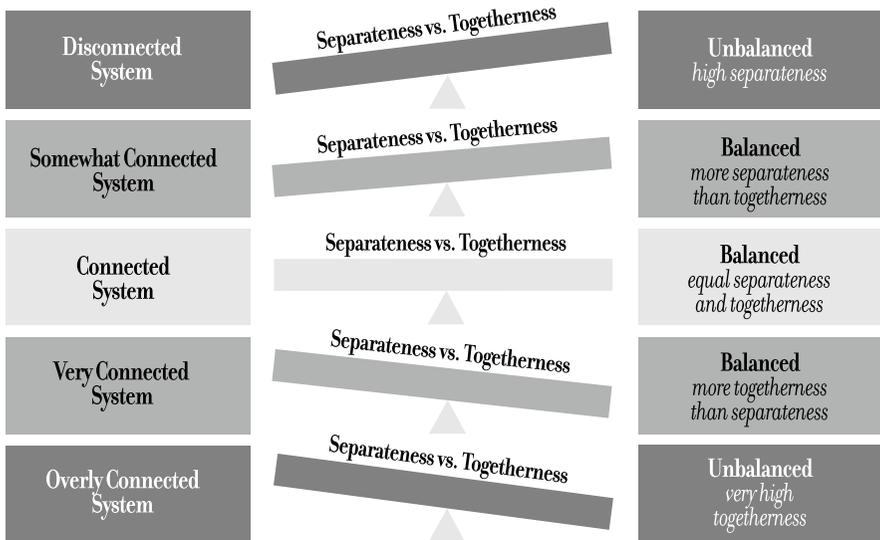


FIGURE 9.2
Strengths of Happy Couples versus
Unhappy Couples on Couple Closeness

Closeness Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. We feel very close to each other.	93%	29%
2. Our togetherness is a top priority for us.	83%	30%
3. We really enjoy spending our free time together.	95%	45%
4. We ask each other for help.	92%	43%
5. We find it easy to think of things to do together.	81%	30%

FIGURE 9.3
Five Levels of Flexibility, Balancing Stability, & Change

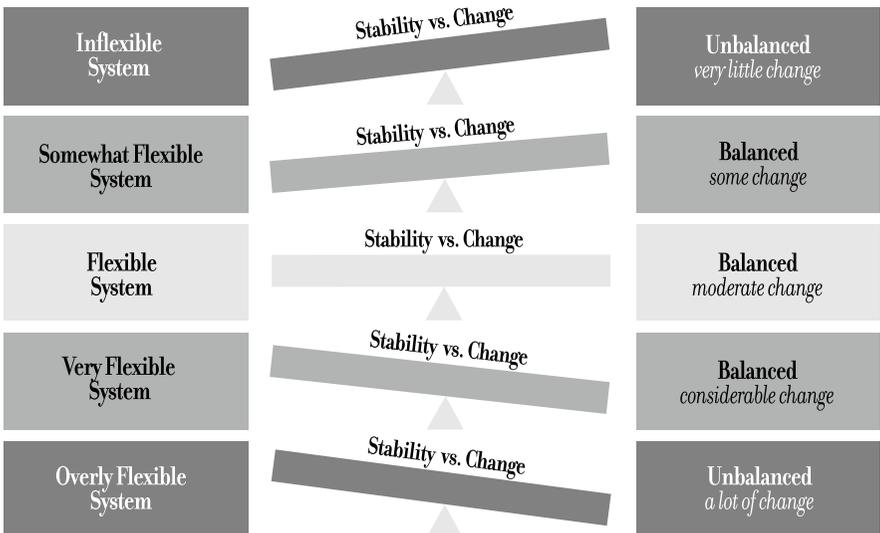


FIGURE 9.4

Strengths of Happy Couples versus Unhappy Couples on Flexibility

Flexibility Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. We compromise when problems arise.	83%	28%
2. We make most decisions jointly.	91%	42%
3. Both of us are able to adjust to change when it's necessary.	85%	35%
4. We are creative in how we handle our differences.	58%	14%
5. We share leadership equally.	63%	23%

FIGURE 9.5

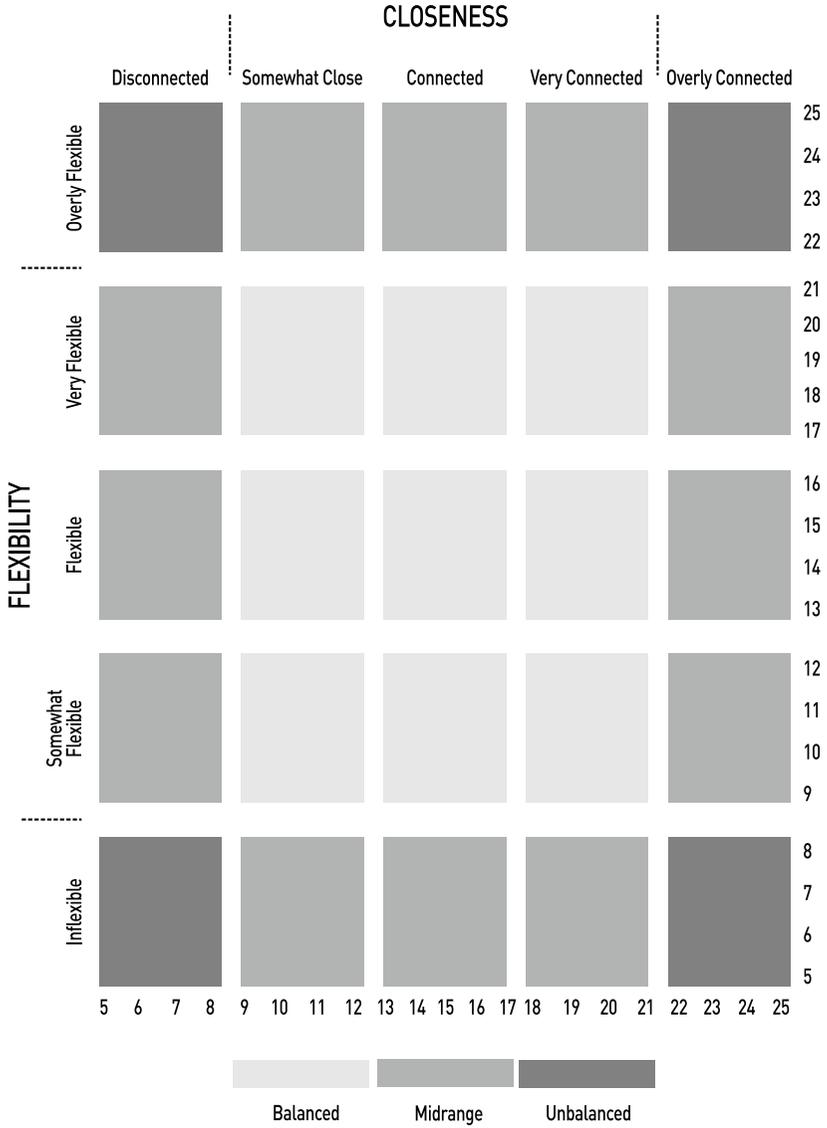
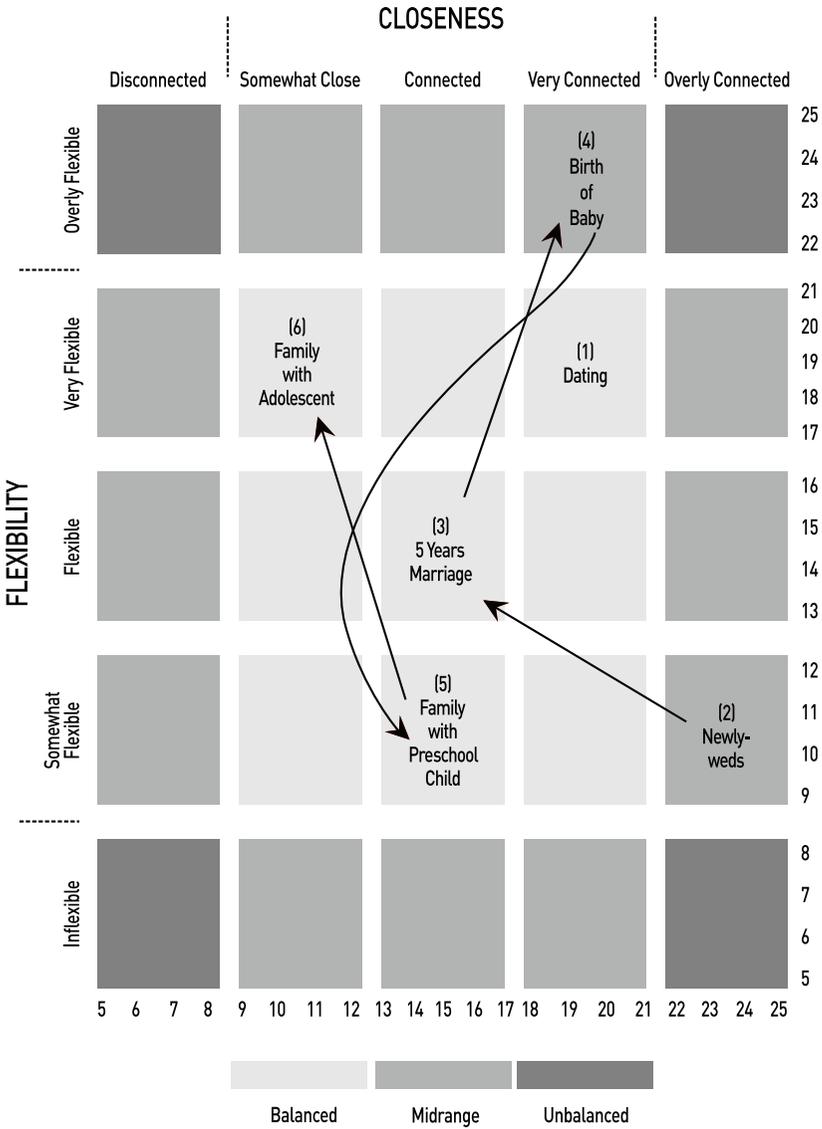


FIGURE 9.6



COUPLE EXERCISE 9.1

Couple Map Quiz

You can take this Couple Map Quiz alone and see how you perceive your relationship. Encourage your partner to also take the quiz so you can identify your strengths and issues regarding closeness and flexibility as a couple.

Couple Closeness

- How often do you spend free time together?
 1. Never
 2. Seldom
 3. Sometimes
 4. Often
 5. Very Often

- How committed are you to your partner?
 1. Slightly
 2. Somewhat
 3. Generally
 4. Very
 5. Extremely

- How close do you feel to your partner?
 1. Not very close
 2. Somewhat close
 3. Generally close
 4. Very close
 5. Extremely close

- How do you and your partner balance separateness and togetherness?
 1. Mainly separateness
 2. More separateness than togetherness
 3. Equally
 4. More togetherness than separateness
 5. Mainly togetherness

- How independent of or dependent on each other are you and your partner?
 1. Very independent
 2. More independent than dependent
 3. Equally dependent and independent
 4. More dependent than independent
 5. Very dependent

Add the numbers that correspond with each of your responses to get your total closeness score.

Couple Flexibility

- What kind of leadership is there in your couple relationship?
 1. One person usually leads
 2. Leadership is sometimes shared
 3. Leadership is generally shared
 4. Leadership is usually shared
 5. Leadership is unclear

- How often do you and your partner do the same things (roles) around the house?
 1. Almost always
 2. Usually
 3. Often
 4. Sometimes
 5. Seldom

- What are the rules (written or unwritten) like in your relationship?
 1. Rules are very clear and very stable
 2. Rules are clear and generally stable
 3. Rules are clear and structured
 4. Rules are clear and flexible
 5. Rules are unclear and changing

- How are decisions made?
 1. One person usually decides
 2. Decisions are sometimes shared
 3. Decisions are often shared
 4. Decisions are usually shared
 5. Decisions are rarely made

- How much change occurs in your couple relationship?
 1. Very little change
 2. Little change
 3. Some change
 4. Considerable change
 5. A great deal of change

Add the numbers that correspond with each of your responses to these questions to get your total flexibility score.

COUPLE EXERCISE 9.2

Exercise on Couple Map

1. Complete the Couple Map Quiz for how your relationship is *now*. Then take the quiz again to describe how you would *ideally* like your couple relationship to be.
2. Score the quiz for both the “now” and the “ideal.” Then plot both scores onto the Couple and Family Map (see Figure 9.5).

	Closeness	Flexibility
Partner 1		
Now		
Ideal		
Partner 2		
Now		
Ideal		

3. Compare how you each described your relationship *now* on the Couple and Family Map. Discuss similarities and differences on couple closeness and couple flexibility.
4. Compare how you each described how you would *ideally* like your relationship to be. Discuss similarities and differences.
5. Discuss how you can work together to make your relationship more ideal for both partners.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING YOUR COUPLE DYNAMICS

1. If you are not happy with the closeness in your relationship, talk about how you can achieve a more satisfying balance of separateness and togetherness.
2. If you are not happy with the flexibility of your relationship, discuss how you can achieve a more satisfying balance of stability and change.
3. Be aware that you will often repeat styles you learned from your family of origin, especially under stress. You can also discuss how you each perceive your relationship when you are each feeling stress.

PARENTING— CREATING A BALANCED FAMILY

FIGURE 10.1
Top Five Parenting Issues for Couples

Parenting Issue	Percentage of Couples Having Problem*
1. Having children has reduced our marital satisfaction.	82%
2. The father is not involved enough with our children.	65%
3. My partner focuses more on the children than on the marriage.	64%
4. I am dissatisfied with how child rearing is shared.	64%
5. We disagree on discipline.	63%

* One or both partners indicated this was an issue for them.

FIGURE 10.2
Parenting Styles Family Map

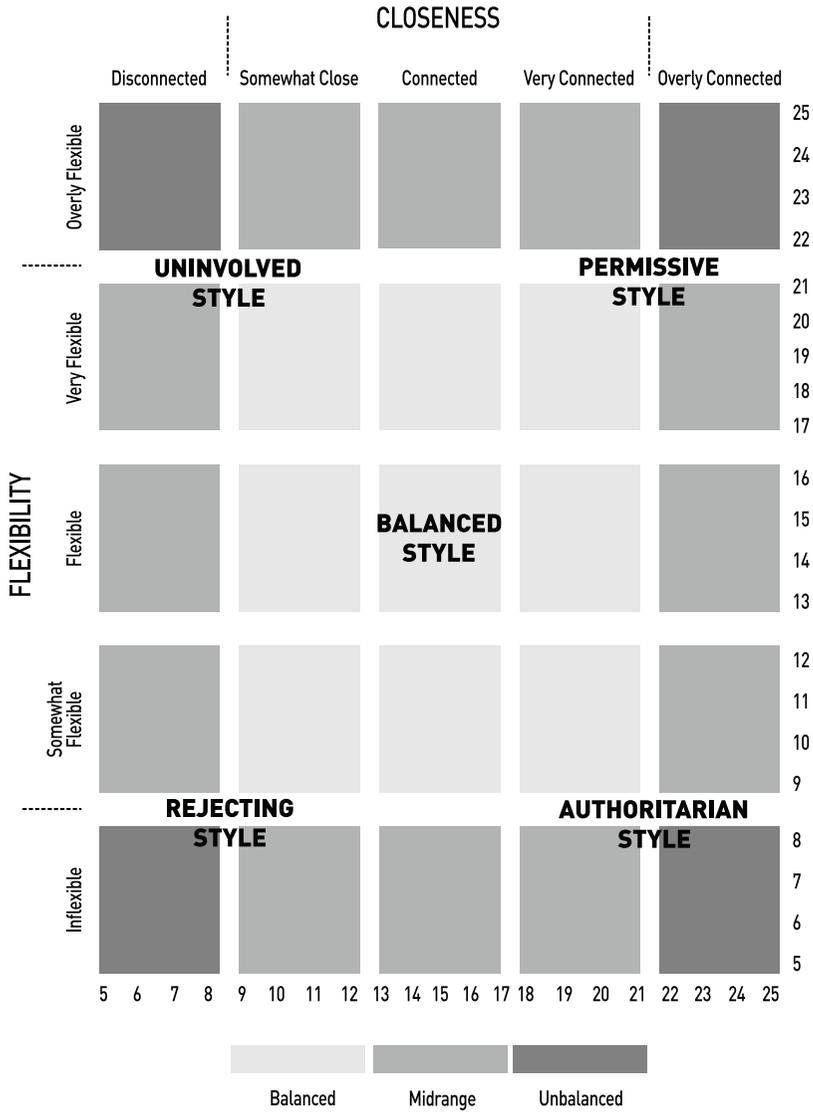


FIGURE 10.3
Parenting Styles and Children's Behaviors

Parenting Style	Children's Behavior
Balanced	Energetic and friendly
	Self-reliant and cheerful
	Achievement-oriented
Authoritarian	Unfriendly
	Conflicted and irritable
	Unhappy and unstable
Permissive	Impulsive and rebellious
	Low-achieving
Rejecting	Immature
	Psychologically troubled
Uninvolved	Lonely and withdrawn
	Low-achieving

FIGURE 10.4
Strengths of Happy Couples versus Unhappy Couples
Regarding Parenting

Parenting Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. I am satisfied with how child rearing is shared.	61%	30%
2. My partner focuses as much on our marriage as on the children.	59%	31%
3. We agree on discipline.	59%	33%
4. We feel closer since having children.	53%	33%
5. I am more satisfied in my marriage since having children.	35%	19%

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you *now*? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. Review the Couple Checkup *individual* results. How satisfied were each of you in this area?

2. Review the Couple Checkup *couple* results. Was parenting a strength or growth area?

3. Discuss your agreement items (your strengths).

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Review the discussion items in your Couple Checkup report.
2. Choose one issue you both want to resolve.
3. Share how you each feel about the issue.

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your parenting problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 10.1

Planning a Weekly Family Conference

A family conference is a time for your family to connect and reflect on recent family and personal experiences. Spending this time together helps family members feel supported and gives a new energy and sense of solidarity to the family system.

1. Be sure that everyone participates.
2. Establish a regular time and place—perhaps following a time the entire family is normally together, such as after dinner.
3. Encourage and share ideas. Do not criticize or critique.
4. Have each family member discuss the following three questions:
 - What do you feel was the best thing that happened to you or happened within our family this week?
 - What was the worst thing that happened to you or within our family this week?
 - For an issue that was brought up in the last question, what could have been done differently?

REMINDERS FOR IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING

1. Give attention to your marriage as well as to your children. Work hard to make sure you have time together without the children.
2. Discuss discipline styles and expectations with your partner.
3. Support each other in all aspects of parenting.
4. Be consistent and cooperative as a parenting team.
5. Never undermine your partner by critiquing or ridiculing their parenting in front of the children.
6. When rules have been established, both parents should consistently enforce them.
7. Do not allow your children to disrespect your partner.

SCOPE OUT YOUR PERSONALITIES

FIGURE 11.1
Strengths of Happy Couples versus Unhappy Couples
Regarding Personality Issues

Personality Issue	Percentage in Agreement	
	Happy Couples	Unhappy Couples
1. My partner is often unhappy or withdrawn.	41%	86%
2. My partner is unreliable and doesn't follow through.	16%	75%
3. My partner is too controlling.	30%	88%
4. My partner's behavior is embarrassing or upsetting.	29%	75%
5. It is difficult to deal with my partner's moodiness.	47%	85%

FIGURE 11.2
SCOPE Personality Profile Categories

Social	Change	Organized	Pleasing	Emotionally Steady
Extroverted vs. Introverted	Open to Change vs. Conventional	Conscientious vs. Less Organized	Agreeable vs. Forceful	Calm vs. Reactive
<p>Skilled in handling social situations</p> <hr/> <p>The life of the party</p> <hr/> <p>Comfortable around people</p> <hr/> <p>Makes friends easily</p> <hr/> <p>Often on the go</p> <hr/> <p>Loves large parties</p> <hr/> <p>Doesn't mind being the center of attention</p>	<p>Prefers variety to routine</p> <hr/> <p>Likes to begin new things</p> <hr/> <p>Enjoys visiting new places</p> <hr/> <p>Values flexibility</p> <hr/> <p>Enjoys thinking of new ways to do things</p> <hr/> <p>Comfortable with change</p>	<p>Always prepared</p> <hr/> <p>Makes plans and sticks with them</p> <hr/> <p>Carries out plans</p> <hr/> <p>Seldom wastes time</p> <hr/> <p>Gets chores and tasks done right away</p> <hr/> <p>Likes order</p> <hr/> <p>Tries to follow the rules</p>	<p>Respects others</p> <hr/> <p>Doesn't like to be pushy</p> <hr/> <p>Believes in the good intentions of others</p> <hr/> <p>Accepts people as they are</p> <hr/> <p>Values cooperation over competition</p> <hr/> <p>Loves to help others</p> <hr/> <p>Has a good word for everyone</p>	<p>Not easily bothered by things</p> <hr/> <p>Seldom gets mad</p> <hr/> <p>Rarely complains</p> <hr/> <p>Seldom feels blue</p> <hr/> <p>Comfortable in unfamiliar situations</p> <hr/> <p>Feels comfortable with self</p> <hr/> <p>Remains calm under pressure</p>

CHECK-IN PROCESS

Where are you *now*? (Identify and discuss your results.)

1. In what areas are your personalities similar?

How might the similarities affect your relationship positively?

Are there any drawbacks to being alike in these areas? (e.g., both scoring low on organization)

2. Review the following negative personality traits. With which ones might you have a problem?

Moodiness. Critical or negative attitude. Controlling. Depressed or withdrawn. Stubborn. Temperamental. Unreliable.

How might you help one another rid yourselves of these challenges?

3. Review the Couple Checkup Results.

In what areas are your personalities different?

How might the differences impact your relationship, both positively and negatively?

To what degree have you come to accept your spouse's personality? What still remains difficult to celebrate?

Do the roles you are expected to fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths? (e.g., Is an individual who scores low on organization being asked to manage the checkbook?)

Where would you like to be? (Discuss issues.)

1. Choose one personality difference or negative personality trait that you both want to resolve or change.
2. Share how you each feel about this difference or trait.
3. What would you do differently if you could accept or celebrate this difference more often, or what behavior would you implement to decrease the presence of the negative trait?

How do you get there? (Develop your action plan.)

1. Brainstorm a list of ways to handle your personality problems.
2. Agree on one solution you will try.
3. Decide what you will each do to make the plan work.
4. Review the progress in one week.

COUPLE EXERCISE 11.1

SCOPE Personality Scale

1. Rate yourself as high, medium, or low on the five personality areas in SCOPE.
2. Next, rate how you view your partner in the same areas.

	High	Medium	Low
S – Social			
C – Change			
O – Organized			
P – Pleasing			
E – Emotionally Steady			

COUPLE DISCUSSION

- Compare and discuss how you rated yourselves.
- Compare and discuss how you rated one another.
- If you have taken your Couple Checkup, compare the results from this exercise with your Checkup report.

REMINDERS FOR DEALING WITH PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

1. Don't try to change your partner's personality. It won't work!
2. Be responsible for yourself. The fact that personality traits are generally pervasive throughout life does not give you an excuse to not learn behaviors that will positively contribute to your marriage. For example, in order to serve your spouse you can learn to pick up after yourself even though a mess in the kitchen or dirty clothes on the floor doesn't bother you.
3. Remember the positive aspects of your partner's personality that attracted you to him or her in the first place.
4. Consider where you may be out of balance in your own personality and behavior. Think of strategies that could bring more balance to your life.
5. Use your self-awareness to comment out loud on what you're doing and why you're doing it. For example, you might say, "I know it's a little hard to talk to me this evening. I'm very concerned about a deadline at work, and with my personality, I always get a little more focused, quiet, and hard to reach when something's on my mind. Please know it's not about you. We're OK. I just need to get through this deadline, OK?"

ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

COUPLE EXERCISE 12.1

Defining Personal, Couple, and Family Goals

Clarify and define your personal, couple, and family goals for the next few years. Then share them with your partner. Remember, your goals should be realistic and clearly stated and attainable within one to five years.

Partner 1

Personal Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Partner 2

Personal Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Couple Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Family Goals

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

COUPLE EXERCISE 12.2

Developing a Couple Action Plan

Once you have identified personal, couple, and family goals, we encourage you to choose one of the three areas and develop an action plan based on the CHANGE Model. The six letters in CHANGE each indicate an important step in achieving your goal. An example of how the CHANGE model can be used follows each step.

Commit yourself to a specific goal.

We will increase closeness in our marriage by spending fifteen minutes each day focusing on the positive aspects of our relationship. We will try also to go on a date one evening a week.

Habits—break old ones and start new ones.

We will set up the new routine so that the fifteen minutes falls after the evening meal each night. The evening out will usually be on Wednesday night. We will alternate who is in charge of planning the activity for the evening out.

Action—take one step at a time.

During our fifteen minutes of sharing, we will each talk about our day and our feelings about each other.

Never give up; lapses might occur.

We realize that some days we won't be able to talk for fifteen minutes about our relationship and that we won't be able to have an evening out every week, but we will do our best to stick to the plan.

Goal oriented: focus on the positive.

After our sharing, we will praise each other for taking the time and effort to connect.

Evaluate progress and reward each other.

Each Sunday night we will review the week and see how well we've done. If we have achieved our goal, we will feel pleased, and this will probably make us

feel closer. If we are able to stick to this plan for six months, the final reward will be a weekend trip away together to celebrate!

CREATING YOUR ACTION PLAN

Use this as a worksheet to complete your Personal, Couple, or Family Action Plan. Writing down goals creates the road map to your success.

Commit yourselves to a specific goal.

Describe your specific goal. The more detail you give, the more clear the final outcome becomes.

Habits—break old ones and start new ones.

Old Habits:

New Plan:

Action—take one step at a time.

Indicate the steps in your action plan.

Never give up; lapses might occur.

How will you handle lapses?

Goal oriented: focus on the positive.

When will you praise each other?

Evaluate your progress and reward each other.

When will you review your progress?

How will you reward each other?

REMINDERS FOR ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

1. Find your authentic voice. Pay attention to the origin of your goals and desires. Ask yourself: *Whose voice is talking to me? Is it my voice? My parents? The voice of society and mass media?*
2. Decide exactly what you want. Define and share with your partner your personal, couple, and family goals.
3. Discuss with each other steps you can take to make your goals reality.
4. Start immediately. Use the CHANGE model. Make the decision, day by day, to commit to the goal. Dedicate at least five minutes each day to each goal.
5. Encourage and support each other. Do not let setbacks discourage you. Recognize the valuable feedback that failure provides.
6. Start a gratitude journal. Begin noticing and documenting things for which you are grateful.
7. Never, ever give up.
8. Need motivation? Call Dr. Rob Gilbert's Success Hotline for a daily inspirational message: (973) 743-4690.