

Introduction

Congratulations! You have taken the time to invest yourself in something that will help you build a stronger relationship with your partner. Being part of a couple can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. Within these pages you will find information and activities that will help cultivate your “coupleship”, reveal to each other parts of your individual uniqueness, and help you recognize that genuine caring, active listening, and effective communication are some of the most important concepts that help strengthen your bond as a couple.

Often we tend to take the “constants” in our lives for granted. For example, when is the last time you thought about the extraordinary blessing of having the ability to walk or grasp a cup in your hand? And these abilities improve with practice: as infants we gradually walked more and more until it became a habit. Remember that a relationship is one of these blessings. By paying thoughtful attention to what helps a relationship grow in a healthy direction allows for the development of lifelong skills and habits that create a fulfilling union.

Healthy relationships don’t just happen, they are made. People deserve and can have healthy, fulfilling relationships. All people can learn skills to have a healthy union. We are not merely persons who exist to eat, sleep, and work. We have been given the opportunity to create, for ourselves, lives in which we have numerous resources to help us accomplish the goals we desire. And for many of us, the creation of a fulfilling, lifelong bond with another person is one of these goals. This workbook is designed to help you along that journey.

Best wishes as you continue to develop your relationship with one another.

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Accepting Criticism

As much as we might not like it, criticism from our partner often contains a grain of truth. For example, if one partner says to another "You are so disorganized", the partner may in actuality have difficulty keeping his or her clothes folded or car clean. Of course, no one is "disorganized" in all areas, so the statement "You are so disorganized" is not *all* true, but *somewhat* true. Use this worksheet to help you separate "fiction" from "fact". Do this separate from your partner. Think of statements of broad criticism that you may hear from your partner (fiction). Then identify some of your relationship conflict areas and acknowledge their reality (fact). Include your thoughts and feelings to complete the exercise. An example is provided for you.

Fiction: Partner says: "You are so disorganized"

Fact: Self says: "I do have difficulty keeping my car clean"

As you acknowledge this, what thoughts and feelings come to your mind?

I feel as if my partner is "right" and I don't like that because then I feel inferior. But I also take the responsibility to acknowledge that there are conflict areas that I maintain that continually cause conflict. I think if I didn't feel so belittled about "being disorganized" I might be willing to compromise for the good of our relationship.

Fiction: _____.

Fact: _____.

As you acknowledge this, what thoughts and feelings come to your mind?

Fiction: _____.

Fact: _____.

As you acknowledge this, what thoughts and feelings come to your mind?

The Couple's Zoo

For this activity, work separately and think of two animals to describe your partner. In the box next to where the specific name of the animal is written, write down specific characteristics that make your partner this way. Finally, write down an animal that you would like to see your partner be more like, and what characteristics that animal possesses. When you are finished, discuss your feelings when your partner acts like the specific animal about which you wrote. Discuss how things would be better if he or she acted like the animal you desire.

There are more boxes on the next page. An example is provided for you.

Partner: My husband Dave

He is like a:

<u>Lion</u>	Because sometimes he acts like the "king" of the house. Sometimes he "growls" a lot. Sometimes I feel like he is going to "eat me alive!"
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He is also like a:

<u>Bear</u>	Because he sleeps a lot. He likes to be in the woods and likes the outdoors. Sometimes he moves really slowly and I wish he would hurry up!
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I'd like him to be more like a:

<u>Monkey</u>	Because monkeys are playful and seem to be nice to each other. Every time I see a monkey they seem to be getting along with other monkeys and talking with each other.
----------------------	--

And a:

<u>Labrador Retriever</u>	Because Labs are affectionate and like to be near their owners. They are gentle dogs.
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My thoughts and feelings when you act like a Lion: I feel overpowered, as if I am not your equal. Sometimes I feel disrespected. Sometimes I feel like I can't tell you things or talk to you because you just yell or become arrogant.

My thoughts and feelings when you act like a Bear: I feel ignored. I feel like you stall to do things, especially those things I find important. I feel like you mope around doing only what you want.

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a Monkey: Monkeys seem to get along with each other. I'd feel more respected and like I was your equal. I'd feel like we'd look out for each other and communicate better.

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a Labrador Retriever: I'd feel closer to you emotionally. I'd think that we were spending more intimate time together and I'd like that. I'd feel more relaxed around you.

Partner: _____

He/She is like a:

	Because
--	----------------

He/She is also like a:

	Because
--	----------------

I'd like him or her to be more like a:

	Because
--	----------------

And a:

	Because
--	----------------

What I think and how I feel when you act like a _____:

What I think and how I feel when you act like a _____:

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a _____:

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a _____:

Partner: _____

He/She is like a:

	Because
--	----------------

He/She is also like a:

	Because
--	----------------

I'd like him or her to be more like a:

	Because
--	----------------

And a:

	Because
--	----------------

What I think and how I feel when you act like a _____:

What I think and how I feel when you act like a _____:

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a _____:

What I'd think and how I'd feel if you were more like a _____:

Creating your Marriage Vision Statement

When two individuals enter a relationship the "I"s and "You"s of the individual often become "we"s. For example, instead of saying "I" am going on a vacation, two people might state "we" are going on a vacation. Of course, some of the "I"s and "You"s will always remain ("I" will be home late from work tonight), but many of the major aspects of a relationship are best addressed as "we". For this activity, work together on how you as a couple envision your marriage, as this will help you identify your marriage goals. Note: Use the current tense. Rather than "we *would like to be*" state "we *are*". It is ok to be specific ("we" take a vacation together once per year) and broad ("we" are able to compromise). An example is provided for you.

Example: We are financially secure

1) We _____.

2) We _____.

3) We _____.

4) We _____.

5) We _____.

6) We _____.

7) We _____.

8) We _____.

9) We _____.

10) We _____.

Dreams and Hopes

Individuals in an intimate relationship often have hopes and dreams for their relationship. This may be the dream of a happy family or the hope to travel together, among other things. However, partners often have difficulty sharing their hopes and dreams with one another. This might be due to poor communication, inability to comfortably express one's wants and desires, or simply a lack of time in which to discuss important issues. This activity is designed to help you become comfortable with sharing your relationship hopes and dreams. Work separately, then come together to discuss your answers.

Dreams

A dream is something you visualize as you think about yourself in a relationship. It is most likely something that you always wanted to do when you entered a relationship with that special someone. Begin with sharing a dream you have for your relationship. Each person is to do this individually and then share your answers. Be sure to attend and listen to your partner as he or she shares.

An example is provided for you:

I dream that in our relationship that someday we will be able to travel around the world

I dream that in our relationship we will:

Now list 3 more dreams you have for your relationship. If you like, you are free to list more on another sheet of paper.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Now spend a few minutes writing what you learned about your partner's dreams for your relationship.

I learned:

Share what you learned with your partner. Discuss the importance of having the dreams for your relationship realized. How would you compromise with each other if these dreams could be attained but not exactly how you envisioned them?

Hopes

Next, state a hope you have for your relationship as it continues. A hope is like a goal you have for your relationship as it continues. It is often common to have many hopes for a relationship. Furthermore, it is common to have hopes and dreams that are the same. Hopes, however, are something you tend to form after you enter a relationship and start building a commitment together. This is different from a dream, which as mentioned, is something you always wanted to do with someone, and did not need to be in a relationship to think about. An example is provided for you.

I hope that we have a relationship in which we make it a priority to communicate effectively on a regular basis to help us grow together as a couple.

I hope that in our relationship we:

Now list three more hopes you have for your relationship. If you like, you are free to list more on another sheet of paper.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Now share your hopes with one another. What are the similarities between the hopes? What are the differences? Write down what you learned about your partner's hopes for your relationship.

Share what you learned with your partner. Discuss the importance of having the hopes for your relationship realized. How would you compromise with each other if your individual hopes for your relationship are different? Try to write down one compromise as practice to help you begin communicating.

We could compromise by:

Filling the Gap

You may have heard couples describe their relationship in a way where one person “completes” the other. This can be true. We share similar characteristics and have different characteristics, and are often attracted to those whose qualities we desire or wish we had. Further, our partners will always have characteristics we admire and characteristics we dislike. Complete this activity together and use it to recognize how you and your partner are alike, how you are different, and what you admire and dislike. Finally, use the questions at the end of the activity to promote discussion and understanding with your partner.

How we are alike:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

How we are different:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What I admire in you:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What you admire in me:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What behavior or actions I dislike in you:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What behavior or actions you dislike in me:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What I'd like to see more of in you or in our relationship:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What I could do without in our relationship:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What you'd like to see more of in me or in our relationship:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

What you could do without in our relationship:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

As you complete this activity, think about your responses. Ask yourself the following questions and discuss your answers with your partner.

What value do your similarities hold for your relationship?

What value do your differences hold for your relationship?

What makes you admire those characteristics of your partner?

What makes you dislike those characteristics of your partner?

How can you compromise to increase what you'd like to see more of and decrease what you can do without?

Hard Road, Easy Road

People seem to improve in the things they do when they receive support and unconditional positive regard. On the other hand, harsh criticism and an unsupportive demeanor from one's partner are likely to make any task undesirable. For this activity, think about some things that seem to bring difficulty between you and your partner. Then think of some ways you can assertively request to make the day-to-day activities go more smoothly and efficiently. An example is provided for you.

I feel neglected when I ask if we could work together to complete some important phone calls and you do not do so.

I would feel supported if we would work together on getting these important phone calls made to complete what we have to do.

Now work separately (you will need a separate sheet of paper) and answer the questions. Then share your responses with your partner. The activity continues on the following page.

1) I feel neglected when _____
_____.

I would feel supported if _____
_____.

2) I feel unappreciated when _____
_____.

I would feel appreciated if _____
_____.

3) I feel unheard when _____
_____.

I would feel heard if _____
_____.

4) I feel unfairly criticized when _____
_____.

I would feel as if the criticism were constructive if _____
_____.

5) I feel inferior when _____
_____.

I would feel as an equal part of a team if _____
_____.

Now think about some of the feelings that you felt as you listened to your partner. Work separately and write them down. Then come together and share them with your partner, writing down his or her responses. It is common to feel happy, grateful, defensive, surprised, and even guilt if you are hearing some of these statements for the first time.

How I felt when listening to my partner: _____

_____.

What I learned about myself: _____

_____.

Now ask your partner to share his or her answers. Write down your partner's answers as accurately as possible.

What my partner felt: _____

_____.

What my partner learned about me: _____

_____.

Finally, write down what you learned about your relationship. Again, ask your partner and write down his or her answers as accurately as possible. Finally, discuss how you can compromise to help support one another in future situations.

What I learned about our relationship: _____

_____.

What my partner learned: _____

_____.

What we can do to support each other in the future: _____

_____.

I Brought This With Me

Each person in a relationship brings certain characteristics unique to their personalities. Work separately and use the terms provided to describe how your partner brings these characteristics into your relationship. Then share your answers with your partner. The activity is designed to help you gain insight to your partner's perspective of you. Listen attentively; you might be surprised what you end up or don't end up hearing!

1) How my partner brings **humor** into our relationship: _____

_____.

2) How my partner brings **anger** into our relationship: _____

_____.

3) How my partner brings **respect** into our relationship: _____

_____.

4) How my partner brings **romance** into our relationship: _____

_____.

5) How my partner brings **excitement** into our relationship: _____

_____.

6) How my partner brings **responsibility** into our relationship: _____

_____.

7) How my partner brings **stability** and **structure** into our relationship: _____

_____.

8) How my partner brings **instability** into our relationship: _____

_____.

9) How my partner brings **fun** into our relationship: _____

_____.

10) How my partner brings **boredom** into our relationship: _____

_____.

Now that you have shared your answers, was there anything that you expected to hear? Was there anything your partner said that surprised you? What did you learn about your partner's perspective of you? What did you learn about what your characteristics bring to the relationship? Write your responses on the lines below and share with your partner.

I was expecting to hear _____

_____.

I was surprised to hear _____

_____.

What I learned about my partner's perception of me in our relationship:

_____.

I learned that my unique characteristics bring these things to the relationship:

_____.

Increasing Relationship Closeness

Partners in a relationship resist communicating openly and honestly for a variety of reasons. Sometimes one partner may resist sharing hopes and dreams because of the *fear* of ridicule or disappointment, or a partner will resist being vulnerable because of the fear of being weak or foolish. This activity is designed to help you increase communication in areas in which you might at first feel uncomfortable, but will increase your bond by sharing another aspect of your individual self.

Below you will find four areas of increasing intimacy. For each area there will be an activity. Do these individually and then share your responses with your partner. An example is provided for you.

Area I: Caring

Area II: Communication

Area III: Compromise

Area IV: Giving (this does mean only material goods. It also means giving of time and other offerings of self).

Area I: Caring

I feel cared about by my partner when: She spends time getting to know the things that I like. She is willing to get to know my friends.

I have hindered showing care for my partner because: I get bitter when I feel unsupported. I feel resentful when I think she is spending too much time with her friends.

How can you increase feeling cared about? Using an "I" Statement, I can let my partner know I appreciate the time she invests in getting to know my interests.

How can you appropriately express your feelings that hinder your caring? Using an "I" Statement, I can reveal my negative feelings about certain situations. I can be willing to hear my partner's point of view on the matter and come to a compromise.

How can you increase the ways you show you care? If I know something is important to my partner I can show interest in the matter. I can set aside time to actively listen to my partner's wants and needs in our relationship.

Using the questions on the next page, work separately and then share your answers with each other after completing the work for each area. Be open and honest in your responses. Further, remember to practice active listening while your partner is speaking. Think about what your partner is saying as he or she is speaking to help you understand the perspective from which they are coming. It is common to feel uncomfortable as you play both roles: sometimes the person doing the expressing is uncomfortable revealing vulnerable areas of him or herself, and sometimes the person doing the listening may feel defensive or disappointed that he or she is not doing enough. Be aware of these feelings if they arise and use them as you discuss this activity.

Area I: Caring

I feel cared about by my partner when:

I have hindered showing care for my partner because:

How can I increase feeling cared about?

How can I increase the ways I show I care?

As you wrote, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind
(Remember to use "I" Statements)?

Now ask your partner the following question. Write down his or her response.

As you listened, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind?

Area II: Communication

I feel my partner and I are effectively communicating when:

I have hindered effective communication with my partner in this way:

How can I increase effective communication?

How can I work with my partner to increase effective communication?

As you wrote, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind
(Remember to use "I" Statements)?

Now ask your partner the following question. Write down their response.

As you listened, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind?

Area III: Compromise

I feel mutual compromise with my partner when:

I have hindered mutual compromise with my partner when:

How can I increase mutual compromise?

How can I increase the ways we work together to compromise?

As you wrote, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind
(Remember to use "I" Statements)?

Now ask your partner the following question. Write down his or her response.

As you listened, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind?

Area IV: Giving

I feel that I give to my partner when:

I have hindered giving to my partner because:

How can I increase giving?

How can we increase our sense of giving as a couple?

As you wrote, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind
(Remember to use "I" Statements)?

Now ask your partner the following question. Write down his or her response.

As you listened, what were some thoughts and feelings that came to your mind?

Intimacy and Financial Health

Poor communication and resentful compromise as it relates to finances often leads to conflict and unhappiness in intimate relationships. On the other hand, managing finances together and mutual compromise on major financial decisions can strengthen communication and improve the foundation of a relationship. Work together and list your total monthly income. Then list your total monthly expenses. Then go on to the next page to consider how you can reduce or eliminate expenses. A guide is provided for you.

Income versus expenses

For the first part of the activity, please write down your total **monthly** net income (what you bring home) plus any other income you wish to add: _____

Now list all of your **monthly** expenses:

Church Donation: _____

Housing:

Rent or Mortgage: _____

Taxes: _____

Insurance: _____

Electricity: _____

Sewer/Sanitation: _____

Gas: _____

Water: _____

Telephone: _____

Maintenance: _____

Other: _____

Automobile:

Payment: _____

Gas: _____

Insurance: _____

Maintenance: _____

License/Fees: _____

Insurance:

Life: _____

Medical: _____

Other: _____

Cable: _____

Clothing: _____

Food: _____

Debts/Savings:

Credit Cards: _____

Loans: _____

Savings: _____

Entertainment and Recreation:

Dining out: _____

Trips/Vacations: _____

Baby-sitters: _____

Movies/Plays/Sporting Events: _____

Other: _____

Medical:

Doctor: _____

Dentist: _____

Prescriptions: _____

Other: _____

Miscellaneous:

Hairdresser/Barber: _____

Laundry/Dry Cleaning: _____

Newspaper/ Magazine Subscriptions: _____

Internet: _____

Other: _____

Total of all Monthly Expenses: _____

Total Monthly Income -- **Total Monthly Expenses** = _____ (gain or loss)

To complete the activity, work together, list your monthly expenses, and calculate a total. A guide to expenses is included in the middle of the activity. Discuss with your partner those expenses that could be reduced or eliminated. On the right hand side, list the expenses that remain and calculate a total. An example is provided for you. Use the two totals, subtracting the right from the left, to calculate your savings.

Example:

\$ 150 _____ Telephone, Internet, Cable _____ \$100

How these can be reduced: I can switch from cell providers and cancel some of the cable channels we don't watch or can do without.

_____ House, utilities, maintenance _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Car, gasoline, maintenance _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Grocery items, food _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Telephone, internet, cable _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Clothing _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Entertainment and Recreation _____

How these can be reduced: _____

_____ Credit cards, loans _____

How these can be reduced: _____

Left total -- **Right total** = **Savings of**

Love is Wonderful

Having that special person in your life to which no one else can compare can bring about feelings of great happiness and joy. This may be during intimate moments that create touching lifelong memories, and it can also be during times when you're just "together", when no one else will do. It has been said, "Love is when your partner feels wonderful while in your presence". This activity is designed to help you communicate those times to each other.

For this activity, complete the following sentences separately and then share them with your partner. Another copy of this worksheet is on the following page.

I feel wonderful when:

- You are** _____.
- You are saying** _____.
- You are being** _____.
- You are talking to me about** _____.
- You are planning** _____.
- You are laughing about** _____.
- You are recalling** _____.
- You are doing** _____.
- You are taking** _____.
- You are wanting** _____.
- You are asking** _____.
- Your attitude is** _____.
- You are acknowledging** _____.
- You are agreeing that** _____.
- You are acting** _____.
- You are answering** _____.
- You are making** _____.

I feel wonderful when:

You are _____.

You are saying _____.

You are being _____.

You are talking to me about _____.

You are planning _____.

You are laughing about _____.

You are recalling _____.

You are doing _____.

You are taking _____.

You are wanting _____.

You are asking _____.

Your attitude is _____.

You are acknowledging _____.

You are agreeing that _____.

You are acting _____.

You are answering _____.

You are making _____.

Making Requests

It is healthy in a relationship to be aware that making appropriate requests of each other is an effective practice. It allows one partner to verbalize his or her wants and needs, and allows the other partner to become aware of the wants and needs of the individual with which he or she is intimately involved. Likewise, it is common for one partner to be unaware of the desires of the other unless these desires are expressed. The following is a list of some appropriate requests that you can make of your spouse to help get you started with effective communication. It is important to be as specific as possible, as vague requests can be easily misunderstood, leading to further miscommunication. An example is provided for you.

Example: If my partner was going to spend quality time with me, I would like it to be spent taking a walk after dinner, holding hands, and discussing our day.

1) If my partner was going to spend quality time with me, I would like it to be spent _____.

2) If my partner was going to express appreciation for me, I would like to be appreciated for this: _____.

3) If my partner was going to perform some act of service (i.e. make dinner) for me, I would like the act to be this: _____.

4) If my partner were going to give me some sort of gift, this gift would be most meaningful: _____.

5) If my partner was going to show me intimacy through physical touch, I would like it to be in this way: _____.

6) If my partner was going to support me in one of my personal goals, this is what he or she would say to me: _____.

7) If my partner was going to recognize one of my accomplishments, this is the accomplishment I would like recognized: _____.

Memory Box

One thing certain about being in a close relationship is that the couple is going to have experiences unique to only them. In this activity, create a memory box with items from special events that brought you closer as a couple or times that were special. You may need go back and find things to place in your box. You can also start fresh and have each item you enter from now on become a part of your memory box. The idea is to work together to create it! You can also secretly place special items in the box without your partner knowing. That way when you spend time together reliving these special memories, your partner might find out about a special moment in your life that meant a lot to you and he or she didn't even know it!

Your memory box does not have to be fancy. An old shoebox will do. Decorate it together. As you place items in the box discuss with each other the meaning behind the item. There are some item ideas listed below for you to begin.

- 1) Burn a copy of your favorite special song (s) onto a compact disc. Place it in the box. You can listen to it when you go through your box together.
- 2) Keep receipts or matchbooks from special times at restaurants. Place them in the box. Remember the moments as you go through your box together.
- 3) Concert tickets are great reminders of special times together. Keep them in your box.
- 4) Programs from plays and tickets from museums are great reminders. Keep them in your box.

Now list some items that will go in your box. Use this sheet to help you create the list. Put the date next to the item. It will help you remember times and events as you look through the box together. Use humor and be creative! You might even want to put a button from an ugly shirt your mother-in-law gave you!

Our items:

Date:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____
- 11) _____
- 12) _____
- 13) _____
- 14) _____
- 15) _____

Metaphorically Speaking

People often use metaphors to emphasize and accentuate something. For example, you may have heard the phrase “you are the light of my life” to exemplify the importance of that someone special. For this activity, work separately and describe your relationship using metaphors. There will be a broad category for you to choose from to help you think of a more specific metaphor. Be creative, use humor, and have fun with this activity! At the end of each metaphor discuss what makes your relationship this way. When you are finished, share your responses with your partner. An example is provided for you.

Category: Animals

Our relationship is like a lion because we’re always growling at each other when we’re ornery!

Category: Animals

Our relationship is like a _____ because _____.

Category: Weather

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____.

Category: One of the states in the U.S.

Our relationship is like _____ because _____.

Category: A type of vehicle

Our relationship is like a _____ because _____.

Category: One of the planets in the solar system

Our relationship is like _____ because _____.

Category: A type of fruit

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____.

Category: A book

Our relationship is like _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A type of vegetable

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A specific movie

Our relationship is like _____ because _____
_____.

Category: An amount of money

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A specific song

Our relationship is like _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A home appliance

Our relationship is like (the) _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A piece of clothing

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A type of candy or other sweet food

Our relationship is like (a) _____ because _____
_____.

Category: A restaurant

Our relationship is like _____ because _____
_____.

Phases of Love and Relationship

As relationships mature, couples will transition through certain phases of intimacy. For example, in the first phase of a relationship, couples are often infatuated with each other and time is spent blending two lifestyles into one. For the second phase, couples often begin planning a future together, which may include purchasing a home or planning a family. For this activity, think about your past phases of love and relationship and the phase of love and relationship you are currently experiencing. Then think about the future phases of love and relationship. Brainstorm healthy ways of communicating and keeping intimacy that will allow your relationship to thrive. The phases of love are provided below.

Phase I: New Love: Infatuation and blending of lifestyles.

Phase II: Life Love: Becoming “companions”, planning a future together.

Phase III: Shared Love: Pursuing and continuing our own individual interests (career, hobby, etc) within the marriage. Sharing time with our children.

Phase IV: Mature Love: Continuing to work together as partners as our children grow as we encounter life transitions together (parents get older, children display adolescent “defiant” behavior, children graduate from school).

Phase V: Refreshed Love: Transitioning back into a lifestyle that includes just you and me. Realizing the “empty nest” syndrome. Recognizing healthy methods of keeping our love alive and our relationship active. Communicating about the realities of aging.

An example is provided for you:

Phase I: New Love: Infatuation and the blending of lifestyles

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase I: We spent a lot of time calling each other. We discussed what was important to us as individuals. We shared some hopes and dreams. We learned to rely on each other for support. We learned each other’s likes and dislikes.

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase I: It was difficult to establish a routine so I felt I could rely on you for support. You were not willing to take responsibility for some things and I felt you weren’t serious. You did not always communicate with me in the way I hoped.

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things: It seemed like we were so caught up in having fun that it was difficult to really get to know each other. I think if we had regular dates, just you and me, we would have been likely to talk more intimately with each other.

On the following pages, write down your own thoughts on the specific phases you will encounter as your relationship matures. Do these separately first and then discuss together. Be honest with yourself and each other and communicate effectively.

Phase I: New Love: Infatuation and blending of lifestyles.

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase I:

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase I:

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things:

Phase II: Life Love: Becoming “companions”, planning a future together.

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase II:

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase II:

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things:

Phase III: Shared Love: Pursuing and continuing our own individual interests (career, hobby, etc) within the marriage. Sharing time with our children.

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase III:

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase III:

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things:

Phase IV: Mature Love: Continuing to work together as partners as our children grow as we encounter life transitions together (parents get older, children display adolescent “defiant” behavior, children graduate from school).

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase IV:

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase IV:

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things:

Phase V: Refreshed Love: Transitioning back into a lifestyle that includes just you and me. Realizing the “empty nest” syndrome. Recognizing healthy methods of keeping our love alive and our relationship active. Communicating about the realities of aging.

Healthy methods (or how we can be healthy) specific to our own Phase V:

What I did not like (or think I will not like) in our Phase V:

What I think would have helped/ what will help/how we can improve things:

What are you thinking or feeling as you write about these Phases of Love and Relationship? Share your thoughts and feelings with your partner.

I am thinking_____

I am feeling_____

Questions and Answers

This activity is designed to increase communication about topics that couples often encounter in a relationship. The purpose of this exercise is to listen and hear your partner's perspective. It is important that you respect it and consider it valid. This will enable you to gain an understanding of the viewpoint of your partner. It is common for to hear the other person's thoughts on a certain topic and disagree with those ideas. However, this exercise is not about coming to an agreement. Instead, it is about recognizing that agreeing and disagreeing will be inevitable in relationships. It is important that you listen to each other's thoughts and be willing to discuss and compromise for the benefit of the relationship. Write your own thoughts first and then ask your partner what his or her thoughts are on the question being asked.

Questions

Do we spend enough time together? Do I think it is quality time? What can I do to make this time more special?

My thoughts:

My partner's thoughts:

Do I express my love for you in a way that you respond to? What would you respond to best if I wanted to show you I love you? How would that make you feel?

My thoughts:

My partner's thoughts:

(Go on to the next page)

Are we sexually satisfied in our relationship? What can I do to make it more sexually fulfilling?

My thoughts:

My partner's thoughts:

Are we secure in our relationship? What can I do to make you feel more safe and secure?

My thoughts:

My partner's thoughts:

What areas could I improve to make our relationship run smoother? What would you like to see change?

My thoughts:

My partner's thoughts:

Recognizing the Real Reason

Sometimes when a couple enters an argument or dispute the communication put forth can be hurtful. It is important to remember that hurtful words, like physical hurt, can have long lasting consequences not only to the relationship but to one another's sense of worth. For this activity, think about a time when you have entered a dispute with your partner that resulted in hurtful words being said. Underneath these words, think about the real reason that you said this. This activity is designed to "dig underneath" words and reveal the meaning of your actions. If you are not used to communicating this way, it will be common for you to feel uncomfortable. You may even have to take a minute or two to think about the reasons for your actions during the dispute. However, it is important to be open and honest with your partner and take responsibility for your emotions and actions. There is another worksheet for you to continue this on the following page. An example is provided for you.

Dispute:

I told you that your idea about getting a better position at work would never happen even though you really wanted to try for it.

What I think the real reason was:

I was insecure that you were succeeding at your job. I felt like if you did better than I did, people, especially my friends, would talk poorly about me. I was also insecure that our relationship might change and I would feel like I was "weak".

Dispute:

What I think the real reason was:

Now switch, allowing the other person to discuss a dispute:

Dispute:

What I think the real reason was:

Continue to switch as desired, allowing for discussion of past or current disputes. Remember that this activity is designed to help you recognize some of the underlying meanings behind your observable behavior toward your partner. This does create a sense of vulnerability. It is important that you respect that vulnerability and willingness to open up to each other as something that enhances your relationship.

Dispute:

What I think the real reason was:

Dispute:

What I think the real reason was:

Recognizing your blessings

Sometimes persons in close relationships need some help re-recognizing the special bond that comes with a high level of intimacy. We can take each other for granted, and this is often a natural reaction to being with someone for an extended period of time. Do this exercise separately (you will have to use a separate sheet of paper for one partner's answers) and begin by listing what you are thankful for in your relationship. When you are finished, share with your partner what you wrote.

Example: I am grateful that you have been a father who has been there for our children.

I am grateful:

- 1) _____
_____.
- 2) _____
_____.
- 3) _____
_____.
- 4) _____
_____.
- 5) _____
_____.

Now list some areas that you would like to see improved or changed for the enhancement of the relationship.

Again, do this separately and share your statements with you partner.

Example: I'd like to see us begin to speak to each other more respectfully.

I'd like to see:

- 1) _____
_____.
- 2) _____
_____.
- 3) _____
_____.

Now discuss for a few minutes how you can cooperate and compromise to get these things accomplished. Remember to continue to use "I" Statements. Avoid "You" Statements and "Blaming" Statements. Remember to take responsibility for your actions. These wishes are not to accuse, but to change things in order to improve your relationship.

What I could do to compromise for the betterment of our relationship:

Finally, discuss with your partner how you felt about this exercise. It is common to feel many feelings, and none of them is right or wrong. You may feel appreciated that your partner is grateful for the things you do, and you may feel defensive (because you thought you were doing enough and things were fine) when requests are made. Remember, this is common among couples. Don't forget to use "I" statements!

How did you *think* and *feel* about the responses of your partner?

I thought: _____

I felt: _____

What did your partner think and feel about your responses?

He/She thought: _____

He/She felt: _____

The Relationship Absolutes

Individuals who enter a relationship build on this relationship over time. For example, if one partner does not respect the other (Absolute 1), then communicating and compromising (Absolute 2) about where to spend your "romantic weekend" might prove ineffective. Often, if one Absolute is not stable, the proceeding Absolutes will be difficult to maintain. Use this worksheet to help you identify the building blocks of a relationship and where your relationship strengths and weaknesses lie.

Absolutes 1: The "foundation" block. This is made up of trust, loyalty, respect, and security. Your partner is your closest ally. He or she can depend on you for support and reliability.

Absolutes 2: The "loving" block. This is the loving part of your relationship. It includes sensitivity, understanding, showing affection and caring. Your partner considers you a friend and companion.

Absolutes 3: The "strengthening" block. This is the part of the relationship that includes cooperation, consideration, and compromise. This part of the relationship includes strengthening your communication skills to help in decision making on sharing work and home responsibilities, financial decisions, and planning of leisure time activities.

Now that you have identified these areas, think about where your strengths and weaknesses lie for each area. Put an "S" (for strength) and a "W" (for weakness). It is ok to put both an "S" and a "W" next to a certain word. For example, you may trust your partner to keep the house clean, but you may not trust your partner to arrive on time for family or special events. Work individually. Then share your thoughts and feelings about your responses in order to help you gain an understanding of each other.

<u>Absolutes 1</u>	<u>Absolutes 2</u>	<u>Absolutes 3</u>
Trust	Affection	Listening
Loyalty	Caring	Consideration
Respect	Companion	Cooperation
Security	Friend	Decision Making
Support	Sensitivity	Planning
		Openness

Relationship Power

Individuals in a relationship bring a certain “power” to that relationship. In a healthy relationship, individual energy is built upon, creating enhanced power in that individual. This also helps to strengthen and create “relationship power”. For example, if you have a goal of taking a class to improve your professional skills, support in taking that class (be it financial, emotional, or any other aspect that “helps” facilitate taking the class) from your partner helps you to gain the confidence and freedom to pursue that interest. In this way, your power to improve and grow as an individual is enhanced. Your relationship power also grows and is enhanced because you have supported each other and worked together, which creates a deeper, healthier bond as a couple.

Conversely, individuals in relationships can diminish each other’s personal power, which also adversely affects the relationship power. For example, a person is ridiculed by his or her partner for the desire to take a professional development class. This diminishes the individual’s power to achieve his or her full potential, as well as diminishing relationship power because this ridicule is likely to build resentment and hurt for the persons in the relationship.

Enhancing and diminishing power in a relationship happens continuously, even in cases where one feels the need to have a “power up” situation. In a “power up” situation, one feels the need to have more power than their partner. Overtly, the person perceived to have more power might be seen as having more control in the relationship. Covertly, the person in the “power up” situation diminishes their own emotional well-being because he or she cannot become a healthy individual who can sustain an equal relationship, thus diminishing the overall enhancement and supporting power of the couple.

For this exercise, work separately and think of your own individual healthy life goals. Write three of them down in the spaces below.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Now take one of these goals. *Development* of one of these healthy goals helps to bring power to you as an individual. *Achieving* one of these goals continues to bring more power to your ability to grow as a healthy individual.

Take this goal and apply it to your current life situation. Again, work separately, and on the next page write the goal down. Beneath, write down times when you have felt supported, thus enhancing your power as an individual and enhancing your power as a couple. Then write down a time when you felt in a power-diminishing situation. If you have *never* shared an individual goal with your partner, now is the time to try it. If you feel that you cannot share this goal with your partner, explore within yourself why not. It is likely that you are in a power diminishing situation in two ways: 1) you diminish your own power by not honestly expressing yourself which denies your true self desires and 2) you diminish the relationship power by not communicating your wants and needs, and/or allowing your partner to maintain the “power up” situation. These situations adversely affect the power enhancing potential of the individual and the couple.

My goal:

Times when I have felt supported in my goal; times when I have been able to enhance my power as both an individual and as part of a relationship.

I have felt power enhancement when _____

Now take the same or another goal. List below when you have experienced a power-diminishing situation.

My goal:

I have felt my power diminished when _____

Now that this is complete, share the goal and the enhancing/diminishing situations with your partner. It is common to want to become defensive during the diminishment phase. However, it is important at this time to practice *active listening* in order to understand your partner's perspective about the situation.

Focus on what has happened during the situations when you felt power enhancement. Discuss how you felt as an individual. Discuss how you felt as a partner in a relationship. Discuss what it brings to you as a couple. It is these times that you grow and improve your healthy individual self and your relationship union.

Finally, come to a conclusion about how you can compromise to help one another achieve one of your desired goals. You do not need to use a goal you listed. You may find it more beneficial to think of a goal that is more easily attainable, especially if you are not used to compromising to help meet each other's needs. It is important to discuss this goal until you can come to a satisfactory compromise (individually and as a couple), which may take time.

If you are engaged in therapy as an individual or couple, this activity may be beneficial to bring to one of your sessions for discussion. Often, it is difficult to recognize power enhancing and power diminishing situations, especially if you have become accustomed to interacting a certain way. Your therapist can help you realize some of the ways you enhance and diminish, which can benefit your overall relationship.

Remember When

The demands of everyday life can take their toll on even the best of relationships, which can cause a couple to forget some of the enjoyable activities that made the relationship fulfilling. Do this worksheet separately from your partner to help you reflect on those times, and then come together to share your answers. It will help you get started on remembering what made your relationship unique, and communicate to your partner what you felt was special. It will also help you identify what you can start doing again to strengthen your bond as a couple!

One past activity that we regularly did together that I used to enjoy was:

One thing my partner used to do for me that made me feel special was:

One thing I know my partner would enjoy that I haven't done in a while is:

One thing that brought us together (that we have in common is):

A place we went together that I remember fondly is:

If I could relive one great time that I spent with my partner, it would be:

A great quality my partner has (even if it sometimes "irks" me) is:

One thing I love about my partner (that I tend to overlook) is:

Roles and Responsibilities

When an individual enters into an intimate relationship, he or she may already have preconceived notions of the roles and responsibilities of the other. For example, a man may have a preconceived notion based on his upbringing or expectations that his mate will play the role of the traditional housewife and her responsibilities will be to complete most of the housework. However, as a relationship continues, if roles and responsibilities are not flexible, conflict will occur. This exercise is designed to help to realize some of the preconceived roles and responsibilities you may have had about your partner as you entered the relationship, what shaped these preconceived notions, and how your current roles and responsibilities are actually played out.

An example is provided for you.

My preconceived notion about my partner's roles and responsibilities:

I thought that my wife would be the person to do all of the housework while I was the person who maintained a career.

What shaped my preconceived notion:

My mother stayed home to raise me and my brother while my dad went to work at the local factory.

How this is different from how our current roles and responsibilities are carried out:

When I met my wife she already had a career. We learned to share the housework.

Finally, think about the discrepancy between your preconceived notion and your reality. Is this causing conflict in your relationship? Is it making things better? Do you recognize that your preconceived notion has been shaped by your past experiences? Do you recognize that your past experiences will never exactly match your current reality? Write down how you can adapt to this situation for the good of the relationship.

This used to cause a lot of difficulties in our relationship. I had expectations for my wife that were unfair for her to meet. I had to realize that my mother and father agreed on a lifestyle that worked for them and my relationship was going to be different. Besides, my wife wanted to work outside of the home. She was working when we met and had no intentions of taking on the role of a "traditional house wife". And to be honest, we were both used to having independent incomes, so it would be difficult for us to adapt to only one income. I eventually learned that if my relationship was going to thrive, I had to adapt to how it functioned in the present, not how I saw relationships functioning in the past.

On the following pages, you will complete this exercise individually then come together to share your answers. Discuss your answers with your partner. Finally, compromise in order to benefit your current situation.

Partner:

My preconceived notion about my partner's roles and responsibilities:

What shaped my preconceived notion:

How this is different from how our current roles and responsibilities are carried out:

Finally, think about the discrepancy between your preconceived notion and your reality. Is this causing conflict in your relationship? Is it making things better? Do you recognize that your preconceived notion has been shaped by your past experiences? Do you recognize that your past experiences will never exactly match your current reality? Write down how you can adapt to this situation for the good of the relationship.

Discuss how you can compromise on these roles and responsibilities for the good of the relationship. A place to write down your compromise is provided.

I (we) could

Partner:

My preconceived notion about my partner's roles and responsibilities:

What shaped my preconceived notion:

How this is different from how our current roles and responsibilities are carried out:

Finally, think about the discrepancy between your preconceived notion and your reality. Is this causing conflict in your relationship? Is it making things better? Do you recognize that your preconceived notion has been shaped by your past experiences? Do you recognize that your past experiences will never exactly match your current reality? Write down how you can adapt to this situation for the good of the relationship.

Discuss how you can compromise on these roles and responsibilities for the good of the relationship. A place to write down your compromise is provided.

I (we) could

The "Statement" Activity

This activity is designed to help you become familiar with common statements people may display when communicating with each other. These statements reveal the level of healthy communication that you are capable of expressing, and tend to bring certain responses that are more effective than others. The three "Statements" we will focus on for this activity are "You statements", "Blaming" statements, and "I" Statements. Often people learn other forms: One being "You" Statements, such as "you always do..." and "you never do..."

You Statements

"You" statements are often your feelings about a situation that is displaced onto another person. For example, you may tell your spouse "You are never on time when we need to go somewhere!" In actuality, what you are displaying is your anger, hurt, and disappointment about the way things are being handled. However, rather than make an "I" statement to express your true feelings, "You" statements focus on the other person and the behavior he or she exhibits.

The difficulty with "You" Statements is that it often puts people in a defensive mood, as if they are being verbally attacked. Furthermore, they are rarely *entirely* true. Few people are always "this" or always "that". When "You" statements are made, people are often likely to respond back with another "You" Statement in order to defend themselves and acknowledge that the other person has some fault of their own.

An example of a "You" Statement is below:

"You are always late when we need to go somewhere!" _____

Think of a "You" Statement and write it down:

Now that you have completed this portion of the activity, realize that the "You" statement denies you the chance to honestly express YOUR true feelings about the situation.

Blaming Statements:

Another way of communicating that also tends to be ineffective is the "Blaming" Statement. These are statements that appear to excuse one behavior because another behavior is being displayed by someone else. In reality, they attempt to excuse the inappropriate behavior and allow irresponsible behavior. An example of a "Blaming" Statement is given for you.

An example of a "Blaming" Statement is below:

If you wouldn't be late, then I wouldn't feel the need to complain at you all the of time.

Where is the excuse? Where is the irresponsible behavior?

The excuse here is "If you wouldn't be late". It is an excuse because it is "excusing" the practice of complaining. The irresponsible behavior is the "complaining at you all of the time". This is an irresponsible behavior because it perpetuates a cycle of ineffective behavior and ineffective communication. It denies the person making the "blaming" statement the responsibility of taking control of his or her own actions.

Now you try a "Blaming" Statement:

If "Blaming" Statements are used as the primary means of interaction, the result is a never-ending cycle of ineffective communication and inappropriate behavior.

"I" Statements

An "I" Statement is a form of verbal communication that allows one person to speak while respecting the rights of others. Your behavior and communication reflect an "I" Statement if:

- **You respected your rights**
- **You respected the rights of the other person**
- **You were clear, direct, and appropriate in what you wanted to say or what you are requesting be changed.**

"I" Statements are learned ways of communicating, just as are other forms of communication.

To continue with the exercise, recognize that:

- 1) You love each other (it helps in putting up with "quirks"!)
2) Realize that marriage is a sacred covenant between two people that needs To be respected and honored
3) You must speak honestly about your wants and needs
1) You must listen attentively while the other person is speaking
2) Cooperate, putting an APPROPRIATE amount of yourself aside
3) Decide on an APPROPRIATE compromise
4) Make a commitment to change for the good of the marriage

Using the examples below, create "I" Statements as a way of communicating. Two examples are given for you.

Example 1:

I don't like being treated poorly in a relationship, so I have decided that we should break up.

Example 2 ("I" Statement and request for change):

I feel upset when you don't call when you said you would and I'd appreciate it if you'd call earlier next time.

For the first 5, only write "I" Statements:

- 1) I feel upset when _____.
- 2) I feel listened to when _____.
- 3) I trust people who _____.
- 4) I enjoy being with people who _____.
- 5) I respect people who _____.

Use your own feelings to create an "I" Statement and request for change:

- 1) I feel _____
and would appreciate it if you _____.
- 2) I feel _____
and would appreciate it if you _____.

Now complete the activity on the next page by making an "I" Statement and request for change. This time allow your partner to repeat back what he or she heard you say. When this has happened, your partner will ask you if what he or she heard you say is "correct". If it is correct, continue on to come to an appropriate compromise. If it is not, repeat the steps until you are both agreeing on what was said.

(Me)

I get upset when _____ and would appreciate it if
you _____.

(You)

What I heard you say is that you get upset when I _____
and that you would like me to _____. Is this correct?
_____.

If it is correct, go on to the next step. If it is not, repeat the prior step until you understand each other.

Compromise:

OK. What I will do is: _____. Is that
_____. Is that
what we agree on as best for us and our marriage?

If it is the best compromise for the situation, switch. If it is not, continue with this step until you come to an agreement.

Now try another:

(Me)

I _____ and would appreciate it if
you _____.

(You)

What I heard you say is that you would like me to: _____.
_____. Is that correct?

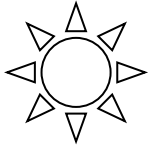
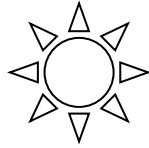
Compromise:

OK. What I will do is: _____. Is that
_____. Is that
what we agree on as best for us and our marriage?

Love Reminders

These love reminders are designed to be cut out and placed in places where your special someone will find them when they least expect it! Place them in a pocket so your partner will pull one out at work or place them in a wallet so your loved one will find it when he or she grabs some money for lunch. Be creative! Your partner will love the pleasant surprise!

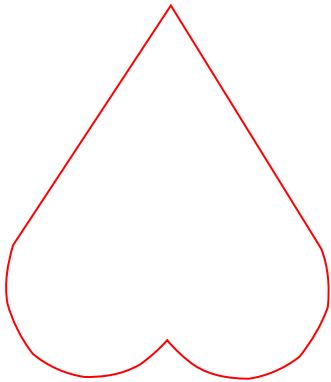
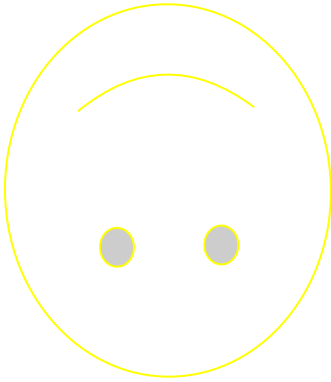
Instructions: Cut along the dotted lines. Place in a pocket, a wallet, or almost anywhere!

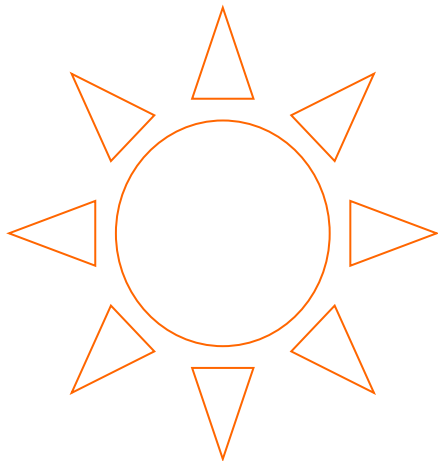
I LOVE YOU! 	You are the SUNSHINE of my LIFE!  
THINKING OF YOU! THINKING OF YOU! THINKING OF YOU!	<i>Just wanted to say I love you!</i>
Surprise! I just wanted to let you know how much you mean to me!	I just wanted you to know I can't wait until I get to see you! Have a great day!
I wanted you surprise you to say I am so blessed to have you in my life! I love you forever!	I just wanted to let you know how wonderful you are and that I cherish each moment we have together!

Love "Fold'ems"

Cut these out and lay them out as you would a place card at the dinner table. Be creative with where you place them! One idea could be to place one on the bathroom sink so when your partner walks in he or she will see it. These can be placed wherever they will be seen!

Instructions: Cut along the outside dotted line. Fold along the solid line and place on a kitchen table, bathroom sink, desk, or just about anywhere! The last fold'em is one in which you'll create your own!

	
Honey, I just wanted to leave this for you to let you know how much I appreciate you being in my life. God has truly blessed me with your presence, and this is something I will not forget. I know our love will become stronger with each passing moment and I cherish our time together. I love you always,	My Love, I wanted you to know how much fun I had last night. I fall more in love with you each time we are together. I am grateful to have you with me and wanted to express my love for you. The time we spend with one another I consider priceless and something that nothing else can compare. Sincerely,



Sweetheart,

I just wanted to let you know how much I was thinking about you. The days we spend together make me love you more and more, and being with you always seems to brighten my day. I thank God for allowing you to come into my life. You mean so much to me.

Love Always,

Love Certificates

Give these certificates to your loved one when you want to do something to express your love. They can be used at any time and are designed to create intimate moments and enhance the time you spend together. Leave one on the table so your loved one receives one at breakfast and can look forward to a intimate dinner, or place one in a "thinking of you" card. When your partner opens up the card, he or she can look forward to another special moment between the two of you!

Make copies and cut the certificates out whenever you feel like doing something for your special someone!

This certificate is good for one intimate dinner. The dinner will begin at
_____ am/pm and take place at
_____.

I am extraordinarily looking forward to
spending time this time with you.

Love,

This certificate is good for one ice cream come at our favorite ice cream shop. Lets talk about it and decide when to go!



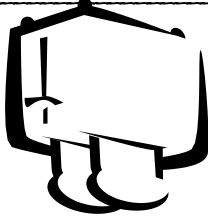
This certificate is good for one breakfast in bed. Your meal will be arriving at _____am and will consist of the following palate pleasing items:

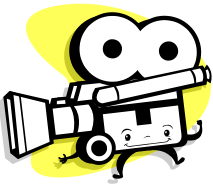
Love,

This certificate is good for one evening walk together.

Date and Time: _____



	
---	--

This certificate is good for one movie or theatre night of your choice Love, 	This certificate is good for one relaxing evening at home Love, 
---	--

**This certificate is good for
one bike ride together**

love.



This certificate is good for one picnic at
the location of your choice

Love,



*This certificate is good
for spending time in
prayer together*

Love,

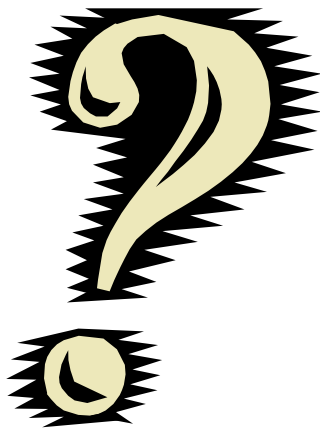


*This certificate is good for
one slow dance to our song*

Love,



**This
certificate is
good for an
event of your
choice**



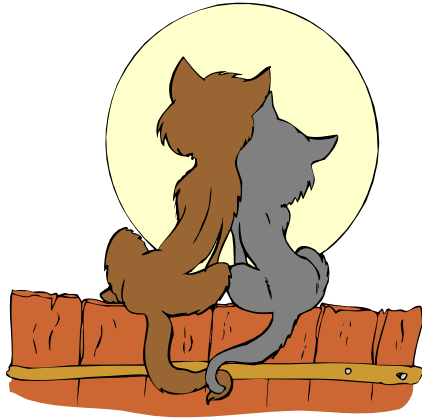
**This certificate is good for one
household project or one day of
cleaning together**

Love,



This certificate is good for time spent to simply hold each other

Love,



This certificate is good for time spent to simply hold each other that you won't buy y that I know you real

Love,



This certificate is good for One Wonderful massage

Love,



This certificate is good for time spent to simply hold each other that you won't buy y that I know you real

Love,

