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# **A Guide to Conscious Relationships**

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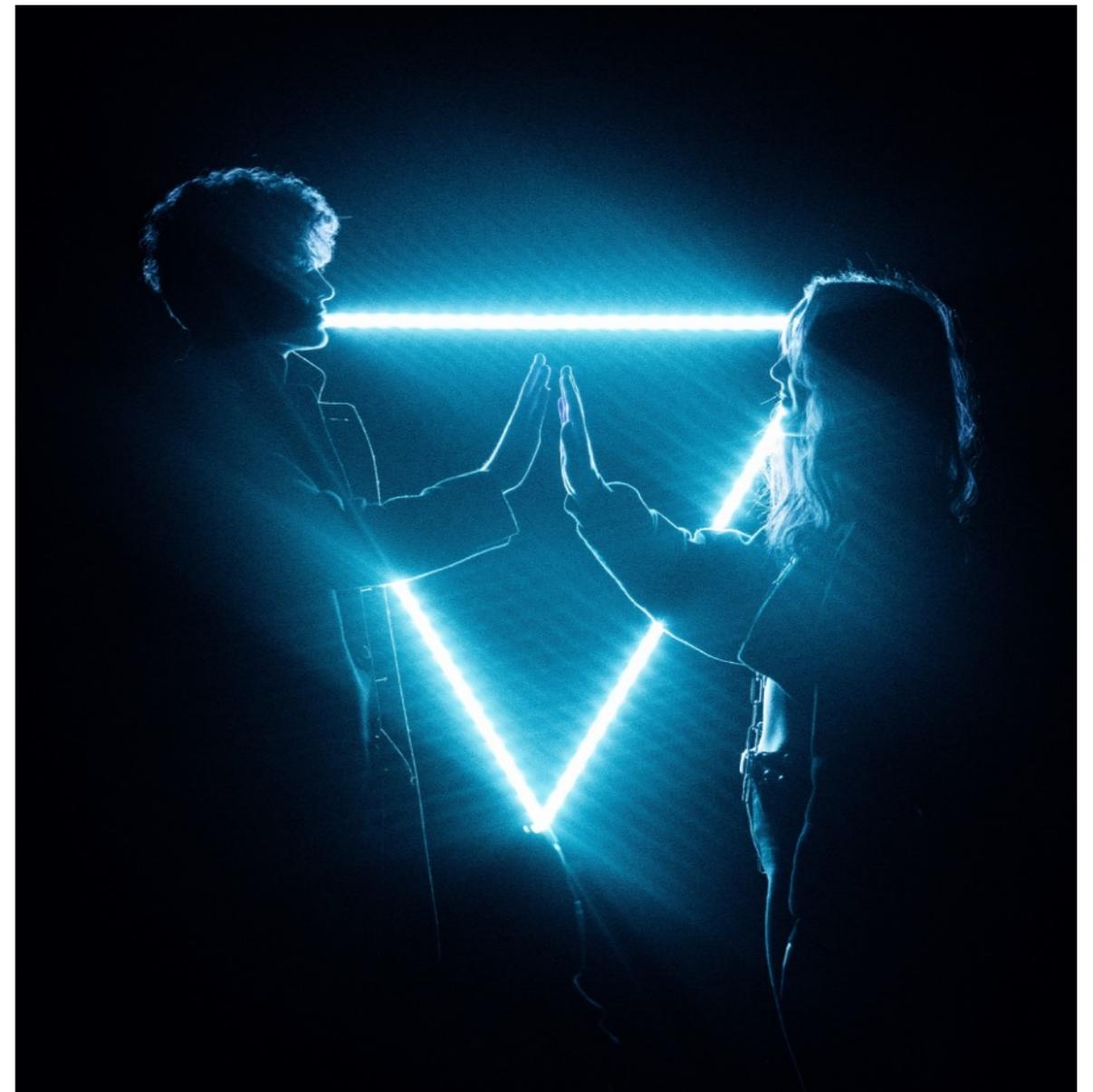
# Introduction

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**Y**our presence here tells me that you are on a journey of discovery. Perhaps you are here because you are interested in making relationships in your life happier and healthier. You may be struggling within a current relationship, have been deeply hurt by one, may be looking to nurture one, or are here trying to improve your ability to connect with a future romantic prospect. In all of these cases, you are taking steps to move inwards, into knowing yourself or knowing your partner better. This speaks to your ability to be open, a measurable and strong indicator of creativity and curiosity. Your willingness to embark on a new journey also takes courage and intention. Two traits which are synonymous with those who can believe in themselves and in their ability to make a change. As we'll see, not everyone will be ready to embark on this journey with you or even at your pace but rest assured that your invested intentions will be a powerful key to building a loving connection.

By now, you've probably realized that relationships can take work. Even those that have found ways to make them work for decades, may suddenly find themselves in disarray or in jeopardy of losing what they've built. Although many couples have had many years under their belt, they remain unclear of the value or power behind their relationship. It is easy to define a relationship by what is seen on the outside. But

behind marriage certificates, the quantity of years invested together, or how many kids a couple has raised, most underlying problems are rarely identified. The majority of the problems we pinpoint in therapy have been there for a long time. In fact, they've existed way before couples even meet each other.



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# All Relationships Need Work

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**C**ouples who successfully get through the first few years, enter commitments and new life stages which can disrupt the dynamics they carry. Through the years, couples can face deeply painful separations or betrayals. They may feel unfilled or become disconnected. Their experiential, emotional, recreational, spiritual, or sexual connection may change. Intimacy may be sporadic and emotionally distant. Communication breakdowns may begin to emerge or continue to plague them. They can face a number of transitions in life including the birth of a new baby, in-law participation, career shifts, financial stress, or family changes. Over time, the pressures can mount and become highly destabilizing to the relationship or the family.

For those in new relationships, the path to a lasting connection may also be difficult. While most new relationships enjoy what we call a “honeymoon phase”, the first six months can be an exciting period. The desire to be together is largely driven by evolutionary survival tactics, chemical processes in the brain, early relational bonds, and a whole lot of what they’ve schemed up in their imagination. Couples will court each other in hopes that their efforts finally align. In the arms of a new love, they may find healing from an old wound or become hypnotized at the notion of a beautiful future together. New couples often become enchanted in the story they’re attempting to create. The story can quickly become more important than the

characters in it. They often fail to listen to themselves or understand who they are placing in their new book. Once the reality of their dynamic begins to emerge, they find how it clashes with the fantasy they’ve been repeatedly telling themselves. Conflicts become inevitable and these relationships become disengaged as the new couple attempts to make it work or end it.

In this short book, you’ll learn about the psychology of establishing and maintaining a healthy and loving relationship. As you’ve already seen, relationships at all levels require work. The problem is that most couples are not equipped with the tools to build a solid relationship. They may get by for a while, but if unattended, most problems linger and insidiously manifest into larger problems. We feel that everyone deserves to this free book help outline the very basic elements healthy relationships model. As humans, we take care of our young longer than any other species. And during this time, we absorb what relationships are and how we manage our emotions in them. The school of how we have relationships is developed at home and ultimately carried into our future relationships. Yet, truly solid relationships are rare. Although our parents and caretakers may have attempted to give us the necessary tools to carry forward, the divorce data suggests that we’re still desperately needing better solutions. Our goal is to equip you with several concepts that can help enhance your relationships.

# Listen and Be Present

**T**he Mandarin character for the verb “Listen” reminds us that listening to another person requires so much more than what we’re accustomed to. It contains six other symbols that represent you, our ears, eyes, undivided attention, respect and the heart. Staying focused on what our partners are needing can be challenging. We have a tendency to make sense of what they are telling us based on how it relates to us. We’re really good at conjuring up stories that benefit and feed our story and dismisses theirs. Western cultures reward those who are able to speak well or entertain. There are no prizes given to those who can listen well. However, listening becomes a critical component to any conscious and symbiotic relationship.

The Mandarin symbol for the verb **“LISTEN”**



Additionally, our own inner chatter makes it hard to truly listen to another person. We’re so focused on what we need to say or do for the attention of another, that we fail to quiet and listen to our heart or our partner. Practicing the art of listening is an essential skill that all couples must bring in to their relationship if they are wanting to truly connect.

Our ears are designed to selectively tune in to what is important to our safety. But like most naturally occurring processes in our bodies, they are mostly controlled by autonomic processes. To take information in, we must bring our awareness to the moment and to the active speaker. If you already have children, you may already understand how frustrating the actions of a non-listener can be. Getting their attention may require a threat level high enough that they become aware of the consequences they may face if they fail to pay attention. With more mature beings, we hope that we can avoid having to raise our voices just to be heard. On the listening side, what is said may not always be what we want to hear. It can be uncomfortable to listen to someone else’s values, beliefs, or demands if we allow them to conflict with our own. We don’t have to agree, but listening begins to bridge the gap.

Some of what our partners say will trigger early emotional wounds which may still be open. What is said parallels the same emotions that we may have experienced in our upbringing. Your partner may only triggering or touching an earlier emotional fracture.

# Listen and Be Present *(CONT)*

As a natural defense, physiologically and psychologically we contract in order to protect ourselves. It is impossible to be defensive and curious at the same time. For us to listen to our partner more effectively, we must become aware of when we become defensive. Doing so will reject anything our partner needs and invalidates what they may be trying to communicate.

Even if they don't know how to properly communicate what they want to say, it is your job to be listen, be curious, and validate what they are wanting to express. By improving your ability to listen, you are helping your partner feel heard ultimately enhancing your connection with them.

Avoid these bad habits:

- Do not zone out when your partner is sharing- if/when you notice your mind wandering try and bring the attention back to your partner and listen to what they are saying. It's possible that the topic of conversation could be something you are trying to avoid.
- Creating a response while they are still speaking- it's a daunting task to listen to your partner AND narrate a response to what they are saying; it doesn't allow you

to truly listen and you may miss the most integral part of the conversation.

- Interrupting to provide input and/or advice- sometimes individuals just want to be heard. Sometimes they want someone to accept and give them permission for feeling the way they do. Try not to jump in mid-sentence and listen to what the person is asking for before jumping to the conclusion that they need you to fix or advise on something.

Becoming aware of these habits and patters is important to create long-lasting, intimate relationships. You want the individuals that you speak to, whether it be a romantic partner, friends or family to be heard by you.



# Managing Your Anger

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**T**hrough life's uncertainty and distress, anger can be just one of the emotions that individuals emanate. Anger is generally perceived as negative, bad or scary. It can sometimes cause individuals to shy away from exploring it as they identify it as forbidden or unacceptable. Individuals need to allow themselves to connect and feel anger in order to understand it. Whilst anger can be detrimental to relationships, it can also be the alarm that signals one's need to explore muted emotions lying underneath.

It's difficult to explore and understand something without connecting to its root. What are the reasons that I'm expressing anger? Ask yourself or work on these questions with your partner and explore what comes up for each of you.

- Do I feel misunderstood by my partner?
- Do I get angry when I don't understand something?
- Am I unhappy with where I am in my life?
- Am I taking my frustrations out on my partner?
- Do I bottle up my feelings and then lash out with anger?
- Am I avoiding or shutting down?
- Am I escaping from confronting an issue?
- Were my parents/caretakers aggressive?
- Did they express themselves with anger?

Anger can be contagious. When an individual is angry the likelihood of anger inciting in their partner is high and when anger increases, so will the wedge.

Anger presents itself and thrives in high stress situations when an individual feels misunderstood or lacking control. Imagine the moment after you catch your finger on a door. At first you feel the pain, and then there's a sudden rush of anger. Similar to when in an argument with a partner, something painful can disguise itself and be conveyed in anger. Partners want to allow one another to feel without suppressing or shaming, as anger is a very valid and real experience.



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# Power & Control

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The satisfaction in your relationship is highly affected by the roles you and your partner play in your relationship. More specifically, your roles of power and control. Individuals tend to have a negative relation with power and control as we compare our roles to societal institutions that we consider to be inescapable and unchangeable when in reality, neither is the case. Identifying important aspects of power can help you assess if you have a negative or positive valence to them. Go ahead and answer the questions below.

Questions to ask yourself when working to identify:

- Do I have more say in my relationship when it comes to making decisions?
- When issues are presented, I tend to lead and structure the conversation?
- I tend to give in to society's preferences when I disagree about decisions that have been made.
- My partner and I hardly discuss important topics, I just know he'll/she'll take care of it?
- I am complicit even when I disagree.
- Typically, my partner agrees with my decisions and opinions when we disagree about issues.

After taking the time to answer some of these questions, did you notice that you comply with your partner's opinions and decisions more often than not? Did you relate more to the questions on dominance control? How have you labeled yourself? Where do those beliefs and behaviors stem from?

Dominant individuals adopt characteristics such as confidence, assertion, self-confidence and competence with behaviors that establish control influence and power over others. Whilst "submissive" individuals have more self-doubt, feelings of powerlessness and incompetency with behaviors that relinquish control and delegate power over to others. Individuals learn and adopt roles and labels very early in life as one establishes relationships on the playground, in the classroom, with media, siblings, and in their homes with their parents. Early in life we form relationships with money, enemies, coworkers, friends and family that structures our safety net of either dominance or submission, to anticipate and avoid aggression.

Power imbalances can be ineffective, and they can also be dangerous to your romantic relationship. Couples and individuals that balance talk time, decision making, and responsibilities share benefits, burdens and responsibilities live a more satisfied and happier lifestyle. Individuals with dominant personalities tend to feel as though they carry the load of problems and issues and need to always find

# Power & Control (CONT)

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solutions and results. Whilst more submissive individuals feel their opinions and thoughts have no value and therefore are complicit to the actions, decisions and policies created by others. Individuals who allow their complicity or need for control dominate their relationship inevitably push away true connection and support. Allow yourself, your relationships and your opinions the opportunity to be shared, challenged and changed.

FIGHT ME  
I'll take it

and love it.

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# Learn How to Problem Solve

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**N**o relationship is without conflict and obstacles. Life is filled with problems that require you to respond as a couple. Feelings of fulfillment, care and connection arise when you're able to effectively face issues together. Both individuals have their own biases, views, resentments and triggers. There are many times when simple problems become enmeshed in triggers and resentments that make it nearly impossible to effectively and reasonably solve a problem.

In order to improve how you face your problems as a couple, take responsibility for your feelings and make the time to identify what bothers you about a situation. It can be instinctual to respond in anger to our partner, but anger tends to be a surface level emotion that can be a response when feeling scared, sad, hurt, upset, or abandoned. When those true emotions are identified, create possible solutions for you to share with your partner. Be flexible and willing to listen and compromise to your partners wants and needs. For instance, are you mad at your partner because they have been on their phone? Or are you sad because you don't feel connected to your partner? Are you afraid that they don't want to spend time with you and will abandon you? Perhaps it's another reminder that you haven't spent any quality time together.

Once you can identify that problems can be more complex, it's time you get clear about your own emotions. Perhaps you have realized that you feel afraid when your partner doesn't want to spend as much time with you as you would like. Take the time to talk and explain to your partner what your emotions are. Take accountability for your own emotions. A major problem we see in therapy is the blame game. However, in reality, your partner doesn't have the power to make you feel the way you do, you are making yourself feel the way you are feeling. Your emotions are yours and should be expressed from that space. You don't want to bombard or attack your partner with these feelings amidst an argument. Instead, find a time when the waters are calm. Without blaming them, proceed to share your own feelings. It can be easy to fall into blaming and shaming partners for their actions just as it can be natural to fall into defensiveness when you or your partner may feel attacked. State your own feelings and steer clear from an attack.

Be open, honest and vulnerable with one another so you can reach a plan that you can both agree to. Stay away from statements such as, "You always..." "Remember when you..." "What about when you..." Try and be honest and receptive to one another's responses and reactions. Have an ongoing conversation of different resolutions and compromises for your problems. The hope is not to get it perfect or right, but to be patient and persistent and try something different.

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# Build Safety and Connection

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Feeling secure in your relationships can take hard work and time. Security is an instinctual strategy that in difficult moments helps us turn to friends, family or partners. As children we turned to our caregiver when faced with emotional distress. We've all noticed that when a child is emotionally distressed they turn towards their caregiver for support and comfort. Unfortunately, during our development some of our caregivers were not as accessible or responsive as we may have needed them to be. In response, we develop a protective defense to help us offset our distress. Although it would be impossible for our caregivers to be there 100% of the time, these defenses can carry forward and can make it difficult for us to form secure emotional connections later in life. Under stress, we may not know how to process feelings of abandonment or rejection. Additionally, we may not know how to navigate our circumstances, accept care, or even know how to ask for it. Our early internalizations make it difficult to turn to a loved one when we may indeed need their support. Our stress may very well be a response to our early caregivers. In general, individuals want to feel safe in their relationships but others who may feel more tension in closeness, may have just adopted a defense to an early attachment wound which protected them from more anxiety. Maintaining a distance keeps is safer than aggravating the wound. Some will have a proclivity to reach out to our partner and hope that they could be accessible and consistent. Others will need to feel and learn that this new relationship can provide the safety and connection which may have once been broken.

Here are some of the ways in which you can be accessible, consistent and responsive to your loved ones:

- Listening to their worries, doubts and fears.
- Create a non-judgmental space where they feel they can be vulnerable.
- Support and help your partner with practical tasks when they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Provide physical affection when they are feeling emotionally distressed.

When you and your partner can feel secure, the more willing and able you'll both be to take emotional risks and share your innermost desires and fears. Learning to be vulnerable and rely on your partner can be difficult. This is especially true for those who struggle with emotional intimacy. Creating emotional intimacy and strong bonds require that you both feel understood, heard and accepted for whom you are. So, take the time to get to know your loved ones for whom they truly are and give them the opportunity to get to know you. The process of getting to know someone does not end in the beginning of a relationship, that's just when it starts. Offer one another a safe space to feel comfortable so that together, you can support and heal your early relational wounds.

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# Communication

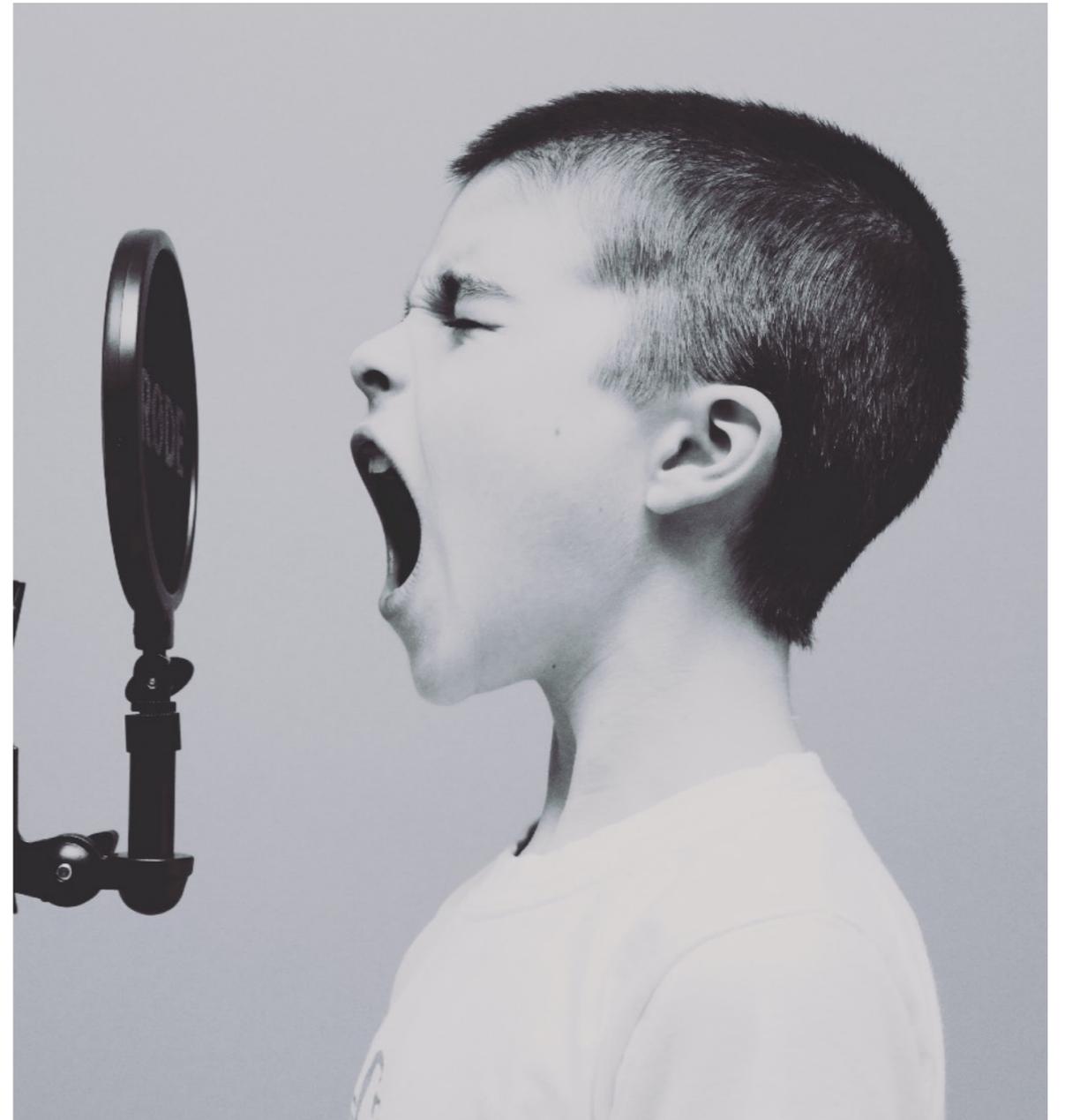
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**A**re you able to express to your partner what you feel, need and want? Are you asking clearly and directly?

A valuable communication skill is to be assertive with your partner using assertive statements. Assertive Statements are an opportunity for you to effectively communicate with positivity and respect for your partner. Clearly and directly stating to your partner what you need without the assumption that they are able to read your mind and know what you are feeling, thinking, or needing. You can take responsibility over your needs while continuing to show respect for your partner's needs, feelings or wants.

"I understand that you need help and I would love to help you. But today I need to take care of myself because I am feeling a bit tired. I can help you tomorrow. Does that work for you?"

"I have been feeling very sad lately that I haven't been receiving as many calls from you on your work trips. I know you are very busy so I would like to try and find a time for you to call that works for both of us".



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# Conscious Communication

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**A**s you've probably already heard, breakdowns in communication can be among the most destructive components to any relationship. Problems arise when let our emotions get the best of us. Instead of being open, compassionate, curious, and conscious, we may interpret communication from others as an attack. And while attacks may occur, we do not have control of how others react within their own emotional space. In fact, while we may want to assuage what others are feeling, we are often doing them a disservice. We do not have any control of the feelings of others. Thinking we do is a just giving you a layer protection to their very real emotions. We can certainly empathize and find compassion in our desire to help, but ultimately it up to our partners to manage through their emotions. This is not to say that what they are dealing with should not concern you or that you should dismiss their concerns. You should definitely work to validate their concerns and work at helping them in loving ways. It's just that it's helpful to understand from where your communication is coming from. When we feel attacked, we may be angry. Regardless of the story of what may have happened, we want to tune into the emotion – anger. Anger is an acceptable emotion, but the way it is used, may further hurt our partner. Similarly, if we're scared, we could go into the story of what makes you so vulnerable, but the underlying emotion beneath it may be fear. Your conversation may easily revert to the story that's happening, but what's really important is understanding what we're actually feeling. When

we can take responsibility for our own emotion, we'll be able to get through whatever is thrown our way. The reality behind most problems is a difference of opinion which is being moderated by you and your partner. The space between you is what needs to be addressed, not whether your views are valid. Recall that your partner is not making you feel something. You are making yourself feel something. It's your emotions that you have to learn to hold, process, and care for. It's your interpretation that's preventing the healthier communication that you can hold and give. Even if your partner is a poor communicator, it doesn't mean that you can't improve your responses or help them through their pain.

If your partner were to be physically hurt, you would likely want to help them. Psychologically, their pain resides within. There may not be blood indicating their wound, but their yelling or silence may their way of expressing their pain. Since their pain is often perceived differently than physical pain, we must learn to understand the mode they use to express their pain. But if your response aimed at hurting them more, then you're only adding salt to their wound. Would you do that if they had just been involved in a bad car accident? It's your emotions that may be getting in the way of helping them. When we can understand the emotional directions from which we entertain relationship concerns, we can improve the level of care our relationship or partner may desperately need.

Here's an exercise you can do to move forward from a more conscious place when communicating with loved ones.

If we're thrown into an emotionally charged situation, we should begin to ask ourselves: are the emotions we're feeling connecting or disconnecting us. We need to understand what these emotions are if we're wanting to promote conscious interactions prior to our response. If you are unable to manage the emotion, step away and take some time. After 15 minutes of fighting, our brains stop listening. We suggest that you find some space, clear your mind and contemplate the following questions.

## 1. What happened?

Without judging yourself or your partner, attempt to observe what may have occurred. It is easy to immediately react and take a defensive posture. Blaming ourselves or others will only perpetuate the problem. Instead, simply write down what happened and read it back to yourself several times if needed. *He was supposed to be home from his friend's house by 9:00 P.M. He arrived at 10:30 P.M. and just decided to watch TV. Meantime I had to take care of the kids and wash the dishes.*

## 2. What emotions am I feeling?

Read your own complaint several times until you identify the emotions you are feeling. Refrain from engaging in the event or story. Attempt to draw out the emotion such as anger, disrespected, resentment, jealousy, overwhelmed, unsupported, loneliness, worry, fear, etc. By identifying how you are feeling in the moment, you're taking responsibility for

your feelings. The emotions you are feeling are yours and yours alone. Your partner may have brought them to the surface and now it is your responsibility to choose how to express them. Taking responsibility for how you are feeling is the first step in exercising emotional intelligence and sets you up for success in your communication.

Be curious about your emotions and see if there's any defensiveness on your part. If you're finding yourself being defensive, you're simply blaming your partner for what has occurred. Instead, take responsibility for how you are feeling. Identify what you are feeling and ask yourself for what reason is that defense serving you. Is it constructive, is it protecting you? You may be victimizing yourself. Words such as feeling cheated, betrayed, unwanted, are words that contribute to our victimization. These words are ours, not our partners. It gives away the power and control we have for ourselves. It doesn't serve us, and it doesn't serve our partner. Instead of avoiding and pointing these words toward your partner and stating things like "*You betrayed me,*", digest and share what you are feeling as a result of a betrayal. You may instead say, "*I am feeling hurt and resentful.*"



### **3. What do I need that I'm not receiving?**

Before you can effectively communicate with your partner, we're going to need to understand what we're not getting. By identifying what we are missing, we can bring something back to our partners that are more constructive. Redirecting the blame into actionable and clear messaging, will help your partner understand what you need or want. Although some things may be out of both of your control, we're expressing our needs from a different place. By taking actionable items that are not driven with blame, we can have a sensible solution to most of our concerns. We can look at our problems more objectively and see exactly what may be needed to support our care.

It may be helpful to reflect back on a previous conflict where you needed something that your partner wasn't able to deliver. You may have needed your partner to come home sooner to help you with the kids, but let's look for the unmet need in that moment. Did you just need them to listen, empathize, or validate you? Can you see how this is different way of communicating? We don't have to be stuck to the story, simply the emotions of how you felt and what you're asking your partner for right now.

### **4. What am I asking for?**

Lastly, let's identify what you are asking for. Maybe you're wanting your partner to change or adopt a specific behavior. If you weren't happy with the specific outcome, you could try to make the request so that they consider what you experience, not what they did. Make requests not demands. A demand communicates control and implies a sense of superiority over another person. Demands are reactionary,

emotionally driven and irrational. For some people who are unable to hold to their own emotion, demands rarely work out well and nearly always create more distance.

Conscious communication understands that the incidents that occur in our life are conduits to what we really feel and need. By becoming aware of this, we can create open and compassionate interactions with our partners. You don't have to accept their behaviors, but how we talk to them is the key to your peace and freedom.



# Practice Non-Judgement

It's in our nature to judge others. However, becoming consciously aware of how we perceive the thoughts or behaviors of others can take practice. Much of what we see represents parts of ourselves and things that we may have experienced in the past. We do not have control of what others do and can only control what we do and what we decide to focus on. The amount of energy we place on other what we feel others "should" be doing, is energy wasted. We could instead focus and use that energy to understand where our judgements are coming from. You may be surprised to find that what someone is saying or doing is only a reminder of a previous wound for us. While some memories are there to protect us, we can learn new ways of managing our judgements so that we can manage new experiences more effectively. Ultimately, the practice of going within, will help us understand who we are and where our pain may be coming from.

When we consciously make the effort to put our judgments aside, they will become less severe over time. You will spend less energy attempting to fix someone else's behavior and focus on the things you can control. In relationships, harshly judging your partner creates distance. Instead, focus on validating them and becoming curious about their thoughts or behaviors. While you do not have to accept any of them, it can provide you a less conflictual platform from which you can attempt to understand your partner. We all have different interpretations of meaning to our relationships, but too often

we see individuals close themselves to their partners. Practicing compassion, genuine curiosity and intent, will help you both avoid the finger pointing and instead begin building a bridge to understanding.



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# Develop Healthy Boundaries

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**S**trong relationships have strong boundaries. Boundaries are guidelines to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone passes those limits. They include physical, mental, psychological and spiritual boundaries, involving beliefs, emotions, intuitions and self-esteem. Boundaries are essential to any healthy relationship. Just like it may be unsafe to let a 3-year-old child wander off too far from you, it is essential that both parties understand what limits you're both going to agree to honor. Again, this is not limited to time away or someone's geographic location, but it also includes what you're both willing to accept emotionally. Given our backgrounds, it is completely reasonable to assume that our beliefs and values will differ. Alternate perceptions of the world we hold can produce conflict, but healthy boundaries will define the comfortable limits we will use to navigate our contrasting opinions.

On the other hand, the lack of boundaries in a relationship sabotages the relationship. Without clear guidance, we're letting our partners know that we're unable to communicate our own needs. We're telling them that we don't know what to do or are unsure of what we're feeling. Although it is normal to feel that setting a boundary can be feel like a mistake or make our partner feel rejected, it is essential that we develop them. The failure to set proper boundaries can

stem from our own fear of being judged, rejected, or hurt. We must look beyond our own fears. Doing so shows that we can take responsibility for ourselves and demonstrate care to the relationship we are in.



## Part 1: Identify Your Boundaries

Start by pinpointing an area in your life where you feel that you're giving too much of, or an area where you feel you're being mistreated in some way. As you think of this situation and the person involved, answer the following questions:

1. What is the specific behavior or behaviors that you find unacceptable?
2. For what reason is this behavior unacceptable to you?
3. Make a list of the things that are important to you about this area. These are your core values.
4. Write down a few words about what each of those things mean to you and why they are important.
5. To see what your boundaries are, review the list and ask yourself, "If all these things were present in this area of my life, is there anything that would make me feel unhappy/unfulfilled?" Write down all the things that come to mind.
6. Next, go back to your list of things that are important to you and ask yourself, "If all of these things were present in this area of my life, is there anything that would cause me to leave (this relationship, my work, this family)?" From this list, highlight the elements that you identify as being "no go's," and this will give you your thresholds.

## Part 2: Communicating and Enforcing Your Boundaries

Once you've identified what your boundaries and thresholds are, you're ready to begin communicating them.

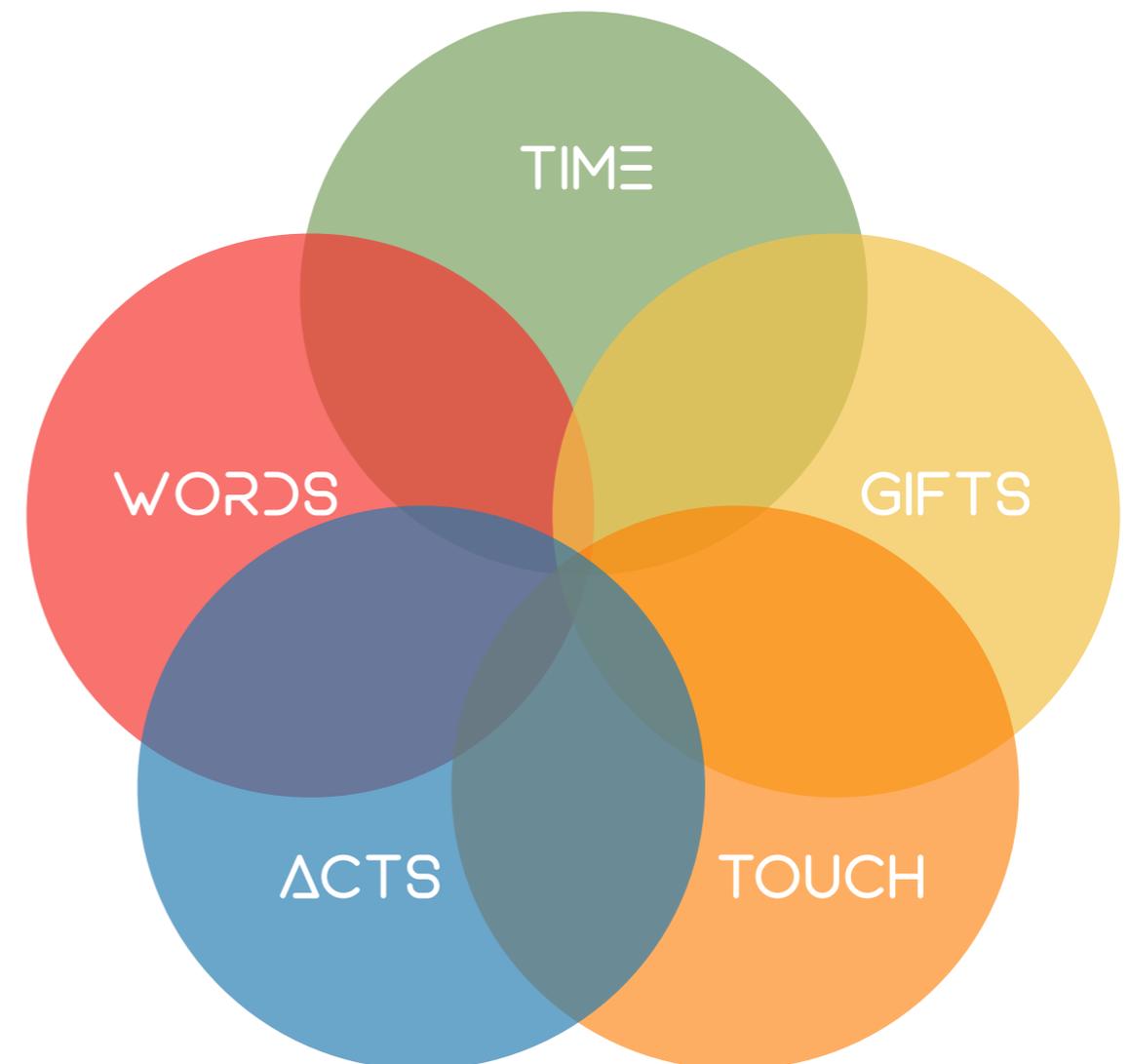
1. First, tell your partner for what reasons this relationship may be important to you. Be sure to give specific examples and share why it's important to you. Describe in what ways you value the relationship or appreciate them. This is often a good time to weave in your values to help them understand your position.
  - **Example:** *"In my friendships, honesty is very important to me because it implies that everyone is coming from a place of authenticity and integrity."*
2. Next, tell them what your boundary is. Be clear and concise, using a firm and compassionate tone of voice. (You'll need to find your own balance here.)
  - **Example:** *"In my friendships, dishonesty is a boundary for me. When there is dishonesty, it breaches this boundary and I'm no longer able to trust that there is a level of integrity in the relationship."*
3. Lastly, in some cases (if the boundary has already been violated and you're giving the person another chance), you may need to let them know what the repercussions will be should they violate this boundary again.
  - **Example:** *"If dishonesty continues to be an issue, I will no longer be able to stay in this friendship with you."*

When both sides can share their values and boundaries with one another in a kind and direct way, it increases the likelihood of mutual trust and respect in the relationship.

# Giving and Receiving

The cycle of giving and receiving can get complicated in relationships. It is not uncommon to see one partner give and the other receive more than they can equally share. In some ways, you may give more in certain aspects, but your partner may give more in other ways that you don't value or perceive the same. This is often a major struggle for couples where for example, one may be away working while the other is at home with the kids. There is a responsibility that they are each managing, but the expectations of what their day looks like may be very different. Emotionally, we can also experience an imbalance of attention and care if we feel that we're getting the short end of stick. Couples would like to think that things are 50/50 but they never truly are. One will give more affection, while the other may provide. One may listens better than the other. One may want more sex, than the other's libido or sexuality may be desiring. The dynamics behind coupledness are too vast to list but understanding that you and your partner will have differences in how you give, and take is an important component to any relationship. These are conversations you should have with your partner. They may not fully understand what you may be needing. They may also perceive a demand in the way you asking for it. This again puts them in a defensive posture which keeps them from being curious to what you need or want. One theory that also lends itself to the dynamics of giving and receiving is Gary Chapman's 5 Languages of Love. Although by no means is it completely applicable or

exhaustive to every relationship, it can serve as a helpful guide to understand the art of knowing how you and your partner feel loved and appreciated. Gary Chapman describes the 5 love languages as affirmations, quality time, gifting, acts of service and touch. Let's explore these a little deeper.



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# Giving and Receiving

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## Affirmations:

Expressing love through affirmations means the actual spoken words of appreciation which goes beyond just saying I love you. By acknowledging what your partner means to you through words such as “I loved watching you play with our kids today it made me feel close to you”, lets your partner know how you think of them when you think of them. This expresses what they mean to you. When you can verbalize what’s in your head, you’re telling them that you appreciate their efforts. We can sometimes have the tendency to express the negative thoughts with blame, but when we learn to express positive affirmations, we are letting our partner know that they are cared for and valued. These are bids that build desire.

## Time:

Spending quality time with your partner is something that most couples fully enjoy. But the gift of time means being fully present while you spend time with them. For example, if you are choosing to watch a show together, the gift is being present to their energy while watching the show. It is not just a physical presence which may lead you go off into your phone, texting friends or being preoccupied with what was going on at work. Instead, it’s being with them physically and emotionally even in a mundane task.

We often hear in our practice that one partner is upset with the other because as they’re were spending time together, one partner can’t leave their phone alone. This can kill desire. If you or your partner need this, practice gifting time. Your relationship deserves quality time, especially if it’s one of your love languages.

## Gifts:

Gifts shows thoughtfulness through tokens of appreciation. Through gifts you are able to say - I think of you when I’m not with you. These can be large or small items, but things are generally received in appreciation. A gift can be as simple as buying your partner a pack on M&M’s while you’re at the grocery store. You’re telling them that they are on your mind while you are away from them.

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# Giving and Receiving

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## Acts of Service

This means actions take precedence over words. This is something you do for the other as you are thinking of them. Perhaps you fill up their gas tank as you noticed their gas running on low. You may decide to take on some of the chores around the house or cook them a meal when they've had a tough week. It is something that states your love for them through a service.

## Physical Touch:

Simply the basics of touch. This touch does not have to be erotic touch leading to sex, but touch with the intention of deep appreciation that perhaps states love through affection. We suggest that you talk with your partner about what type of touch you like and what types of touch they also enjoy. Understanding this touch allows you to feel loved and vice versa.

If this is one of your love languages, we also suggest talking about erotic touch vs non-erotic touch so you can understand the touch you may be seeking.

We each have a preferred love language that allows us to share our own love language and also know what our partners love language might be. We often have clients feel that they give their partner so much love, but the partner doesn't see it or feel it. They may simply not understand what their partner's love language is. They may simply be speaking separate love languages and are having difficult time expressing or understanding how to show their appreciation.

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# Actively Love

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**L**ove takes practice. It takes effort and inner awareness. Many people fall into the theory of “Hollywood Love”. But behind the scenes, there’s so much work that needs to happen. Learning what love means for you and your partner, can take years of turbulence and growth. Many of the couples we see, get stuck on the earlier schemas surrounding love. They never really explore what it means for them and their relationship. It’s easy to live out a series of scripted fantasies, but the journey to understanding what love means for you and your partner, can take a lifetime. Couples can sometimes fall for the script of dating, marriage, and kids, without really seeing love through the trials that their relationship will go through. This is usually when the relationships become tested and require your utmost grace and care. The merging of two individuals in a single relationship will require active nurturing. This happens when we’re dating or when we are at odds with our partners. By actively tuning into your partner and yourself, you can see what you both could be doing to nurture and care for it. Relationships are a vehicle for healing and growth. It can provide you both a bubble to care and keep you both safe and loved. If you actively participate and engage under this premise, you provide what it needs to grow. When the relationship is strained, you know what is needed to fix it.



# Next Steps

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## Are You Ready To Go Deeper?

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