

Relationship Revolution

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How you interact is more important than the activities you do or the interests you have in common. That's why the 3 C's of 'Relational Contentment' are communication, conflict and confidence. Healthy connection builds unity – which encourages you to stay focused on the things that are important, helps repair the damage of past hurts and ultimately, builds intimacy.



SESSION OBJECTIVES

This session is designed to help you:

- (a)** enhance your styles of communication
- (b)** learn to do conflict well
- (c)** develop confidence and satisfaction in marriage

Intentional Connection

Marriage masters understand that connection in marriage requires intentional time and effort. Even in the midst of a busy routine, successful couples create a rhythm (a consistent time, place and method) for interaction, understanding that regular connection is what creates emotional intimacy. So, rather than complaining your spouse is too busy, uninterested or has other priorities that inhibit your connection, take the initiative. Which of the following connection rituals could you be intentional about doing:



TECHNOLOGY ✓

Send encouraging text messages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brag about them on social media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Video-call them just to say 'Hi'	<input type="checkbox"/>

AFFECTION ✓

Hold hands when walking side-by-side	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hug/kiss upon leaving/arriving home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limbs connected when seated/laying	<input type="checkbox"/>

SCHEDULED RENDEZVOUS ✓

Book in a lunch date	<input type="checkbox"/>
Go out for coffee or for a walk	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have a regular kid-free date night	<input type="checkbox"/>

SPONTANEOUS CONNECTION ✓

Unexpected passionate kiss	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unexpected gesture of kindness	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unexpected kind words/act of service	<input type="checkbox"/>

**BE INTENTIONAL
NOT ONLY IN
WHAT YOU SAY
BUT ALSO HOW
YOU SAY IT.**

**Be the
change you
desire to see.**

Intentional Communication

Leading researchers at the Gottman Institute have found that couples who excel at building relational contentment, communicate 20 times more positive messages towards their spouse than negative messages. But communication is a two-way street. So, if your spouse makes an effort to connect with you in a positive manner, tune in and respond.

ACTIVE LISTENING

It's said that 'being heard' is so close to 'being loved' that they're virtually indistinguishable. When it comes to emotional intimacy, being able to really hear our spouse, to listen closely and empathically, is vital to creating contentment. Active listening is not merely receiving information, it's seeking to really understand the person. There are two ways this can be achieved:

1. **Effective listening** – seeking to understand the information being conveyed
2. **Affective listening** – seeking to understand the emotion behind what's being conveyed

Ironic as it may sound, active listening is best achieved by... 'talking'. After listening to our spouse speak, we ask questions to clarify our understanding. This not only communicates that we are being attentive, but that we are interested in what they are saying.



In the following examples, see if you can identify which clarifying questions are 'effective listening' and 'affective listening' styles:

	Effective	Affective
So, there were three of them, not two?		
How upsetting that must have been for you. Are you okay?		
So, if I understand you correctly, you feel like you can trust them?		
Did you say next Tuesday? Is that weekly, or just a one off?		
Let me get this straight. You're asking me to buy olive oil and garlic?		
Sounds like you're worried it might not arrive in time, is that right?		

Non-verbal messaging

Sometimes our tone, actions, gestures and body language communicate even louder than our words. In fact, before we've even opened our mouth, we've likely already communicated our intentions, emotional temperament and/or interest level. Therefore, we need to be intentional about connecting non-verbally.



Match the following non-verbal scenarios with what's ultimately being communicated:

Scenario

Husband rolls his eyes and places his head in his hands.

Wife reaches over and places her hand on husband's thigh, looks at him and smiles.

Wife walks in looking upset. Husband immediately stands to embrace her.

Husband is late collecting his wife. She looks at him, climbs into the car, but says nothing.

Message

"I'm so sorry you're going through this. I'm here for you."

"Here she goes again. This is doing my head in."

"I don't just love you; I really like you."

"You're so unreliable. You frustrate the life out of me."

Dealing with defensiveness

Defensive reactions (interrupting, correcting, minimizing, blaming or justifying) can stem from past experiences where we have been hurt or misunderstood, or they may simply arise from emotional “hot buttons”; feelings, that when triggered, are too hot to handle. An intentional commitment to learning the skills of non-defensive responding will go a long way to improving both your connection and contentment.

Consider the following suggestions:

Get curious about your own defensive feelings. Where are they coming from? What’s the real trigger? Are your defensive feelings really about the issue, the way it’s being presented or an unpleasant experience (unresolved hurt) you’ve had in the past?

To avoid being caught off guard, set aside a specific time to discuss relationship challenges. Prioritise emotional connection and supportive conversations during the conversation. Don’t just listen, seek to understand the other person’s perspective.

Write down the key points of what your spouse is sharing, including any defensive feelings you might be having. When your spouse expresses concerns or complaints, remember, you are listening because you care and want to make your marriage better.

Prior to meeting, anchor yourself in love. Prepare for your meeting by rehashing fond memories of times you felt extremely close or loved. During the discussion, stay focused on respecting and honouring your spouse by hearing them out. Don’t interrupt.

Slow down and breathe. Be prepared to take a break if your pulse is over 100 beats a minute, or you are becoming emotionally overwhelmed (too upset, angry) or cognitively flooded (feeling confused, can’t think, going blank).

Learn to fight right

When facing conflict or threat, blood flows from the rational-logical centre of your brain (Pre-frontal cortex) to the emotional primal-drive control centre of your brain (Limbic system), making it difficult to problem solve. Your brain interprets conflict as “threat”, and in turn, triggers the same automatic response as though you’re in danger. In other words, panic mode! Is it any wonder why it’s so hard to think clearly when you’re all worked up and butting heads with each other? Therefore, to ‘fight right’ necessitates the management of your own emotions.



Which emotional management strategies could you employ?

Physiological Change ✓

Go for a walk while discussing difficult or contentious topics	✓
Interject humour into the discussion to relieve pressure and laugh about it	✓
Take a 15-20 break from the conversation to breath and calm down	✓

The Approach ✓

When raising a difficult or contentious issue to discuss, start gently	✓
Set up a time to talk, and establish boundaries (i.e., max. discussion time)	✓
Introduce a ‘time-out’ signal (agreed to in advance) to take a talking-break	✓

Couples who know how to self-soothe are much more likely to de-escalate conflict and communicate with confidence and precision. Couples who learn how to soothe EACH OTHER, become even more successful in solving problems. Soothing your partner means paying attention to their signals of distress and knowing what helps them feel calmer, heard and validated. Discuss with your spouse what would help you stay calm during conflict (this might include phrases, words, physical touch, humour, use of memories). **List below 3 practical strategies each.**

What would help soothe my husband?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What would help soothe my wife?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A photograph of a young man and woman sitting outdoors, smiling and looking at each other. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise. The woman is on the left, wearing a dark blue top, and the man is on the right, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. They are both looking towards each other with joyful expressions.

Rather than fight **TO BE RIGHT** fight to **STAY RIGHT**

**WHEN IT COMES
TO CONFLICT, HOW
YOU COMMUNICATE
IS EVEN MORE
IMPORTANT THAN
WHAT YOU ARE
COMMUNICATING
ABOUT.**

Daily Check-in

Research shows that couples who prioritise a “daily check-in” conversation (most days) report higher levels of emotional connectedness and attraction to one another. These stress-reducing conversations are simply an opportunity for husbands and wives to talk about their day for a defined time (e.g., 15 minutes each). The role of the listening party is to intently lean in and ask questions. Importantly, this time is not used to air gripes about each other or the relationship. It is to be used to communicate experiences, generate understanding and foster support for one another.



Daily rituals often start out with great intentions, but often get lost in the busyness of life. Come up with an action plan to help you successfully check-in with one another:

Q: What time of day shall we check in with one another?	A:
Q: How long should we ‘check in’ with each other for?	A:
Q: What things could we do to make this time a safe, special and loving experience (e.g., location, beverage, music)?	A:
Q: What things could potentially get in the way of us ‘checking in’ with each other on a daily basis?	A:
Q: What things could potentially go wrong when discussing each other’s daily experiences?	A:

Early intervention & prevention

Communicating positivity during times of peace is directly related to the level of positivity expressed during conflict. That means, if you are looking to improve your ability to handle conflict, get into the regular habit of scanning your spouse and relationship for what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtue and admirable or praiseworthy.



From the list below, find 3 characteristics you believe accurately represent your spouse:

Kind	Positive	Understanding	Enthusiastic
Easy-going	Considerate	Flexible	Cooperative
Upbeat	Witty	Reasonable	Humorous
Sincere	Accepting	Gentle	Articulate
Open-minded	Motivated	Cheerful	Unselfish
Modest	Clever	Polite	Forgiving
Passionate	Compassionate	Confident	Intelligent
Trustworthy	Optimistic	Persistent	Dedicated
Artistic	Thoughtful	Observant	Energetic



Describe an actual experience where your spouse has demonstrated each characteristic:

Husband characteristic 1.

Situation:

Wife characteristic 1.

Situation:

Husband characteristic 2.

Situation:

Wife characteristic 2.

Situation:

Husband characteristic 3.

Situation:

Wife characteristic 3.

Situation:



NOTE: MAKE IT COUNT

Share these observations with each other for an added boost of admiration. Make a commitment to look out for these qualities over the next week and surprise each other by doubling or tripling down on the level of admiration and positivity you extend to your spouse over the next week. Receive extra bonus points for finding creative ways to both notice and share these attributes.