

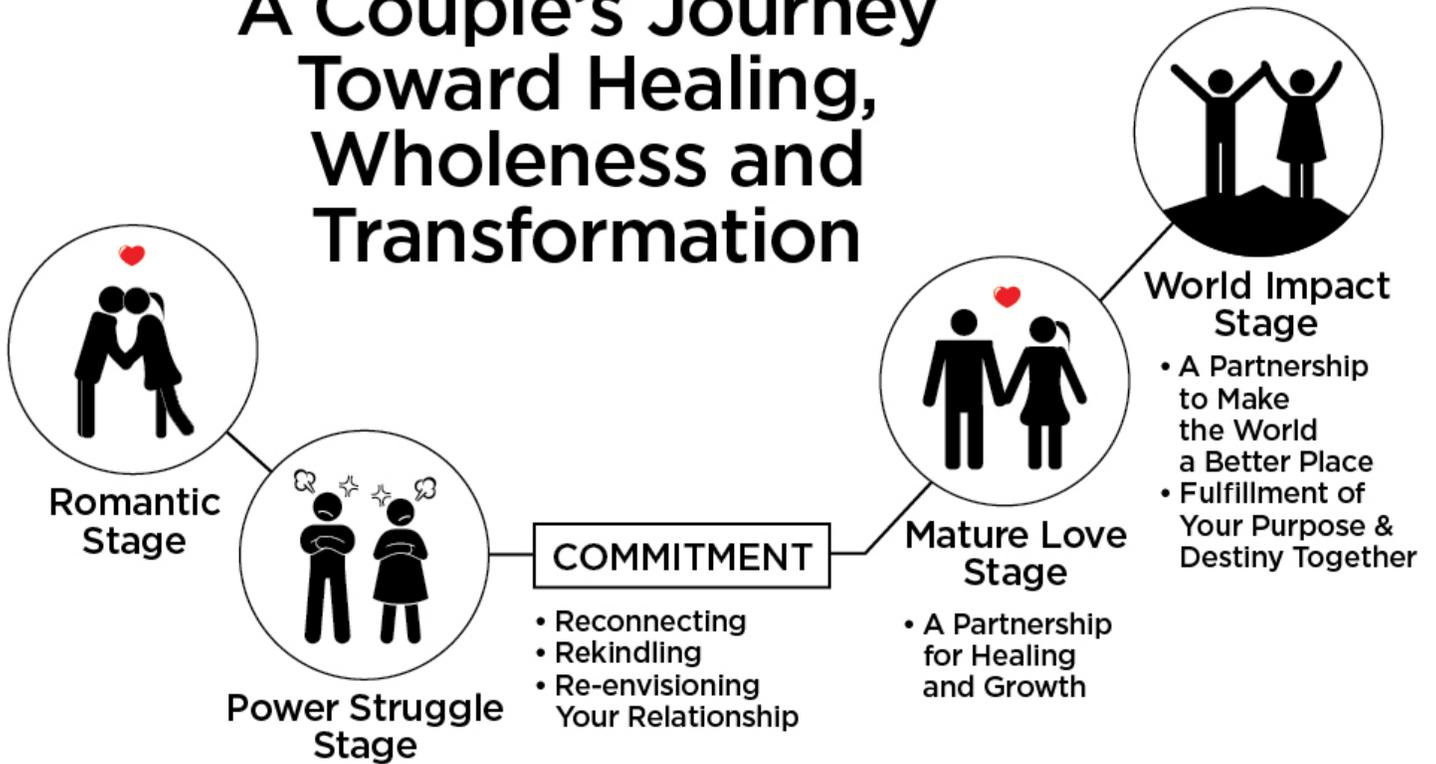
# Couples Toolbox



Building The Marriage Of Your Dreams

Compiled by Chuck Starnes

# A Couple's Journey Toward Healing, Wholeness and Transformation



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## RELATIONSHIP VISION

Envision your marriage how you would like it to be. Make a list of positive statements beginning with the word “We” that describe the kind of relationship you would like to have. State them in the present tense as if the future were already here. Example: “We enjoy each other’s company; We spend time together doing things we both enjoy; We are financially secure; We have a stable, intimate relationship both emotionally and physically; We are a great team parenting our children; We serve our community together by \_\_\_\_\_ ; etc.”

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

Share your sentences. Underline the items you have in common. If your partner has written sentences you agree with but didn’t think of, add them to your list. For now just ignore the ones not shared.

Take your expanded list and rank them in importance with “A” being most important, “B” important and “C” least important.

Work together to design a mutual relationship vision listing each sentence in order of importance.

Post this list where you can visualize it and recite it daily. Once a week read it out loud to each other. Soon you will begin to experience this marriage that you are visualizing and declaring.

# MIRRORING AN APPRECIATION

## SENDER

Ask for appointment

Make eye contact

- One thing I appreciated about you is...
- When I experience that, I feel...
- When I feel that it reminds me of when I was little and...

## RECEIVER

Grant appointment

Make eye contact

Listen and then say...

- What I hear you saying is...
- Did I get that right?
- Is there more about that?

# THE COUPLE'S DIALOGUE

## SENDER

Ask for appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync

### **ALWAYS START WITH APPRECIATION**

- *"One thing I appreciate about you is..."*
- *"And what that makes me feel is..."*

### **THEN SHARE FRUSTRATION**

- *"It was frustrating when..."*
- *"When that happened, I felt..."*
- *"That reminds me of when I was little and..."*
- *"What I'm really afraid of is..."*
- *"What I did in reaction was..."*

- Yes or no. If no, try again.

- Yes or no. If no, try again.

### **END WITH 1 MIN. FULL-BODY HUG**

## RECEIVER

Grant appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync

### **MIRROR**

- *"Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*

*"Thanks for sharing that."*

### **MIRROR**

- *"Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said..."*
- *"Did I get it?" (add or correct)*
- *"Is there more about that?"*

- **Summarize** *"To summarize what I heard you say..."*

### **VALIDATE**

- *"You make sense, and what makes sense is..."*
- *"Is that the validation you need?"*

### **EMPATHIZE**

- *"I can imagine your feel..."*
- *"Did I empathize with you?"*

## FOUR POWERFUL APPRECIATIONS EACH DAY

This is a tool to help you you rekindle romantic love and create a safety zone in your relationship for further growth and healing.

It has to do with four critical moments that occur each day:

**1. The first four minutes you both are awake in the morning**

**2. Saying “Goodbye”**

**3. The first four minutes you are home in the evening**

**4. Saying “Good night”**

According to Dr. Gary Brainerd, what you do during these times each day has 5 times the impact on your relationship than other times.

The goal is to use these four critical moments to say or do things that make your partner feel loved. Start by doing the following during these four times each day:

**1. Give a 60-second full-body hug.**

In about 20 seconds you both will begin to feel pleasurable sensations all over your body as oxytocin and other super-healthy pleasure chemicals are released into your system. Continue for one full minute to get the full effect.

But don't just count the seconds. Use the time to share an appreciation.

**2. Share an appreciation...“One thing I appreciate about you is...”**

Look into each other's eyes, and one at a time, finish this statement:  
***“One thing I appreciate about you is...”***

It should be whatever comes to your mind that you genuinely appreciate. It could be *“I appreciate you wearing that shirt today. You make it look good, and it makes me feel proud to be with you.”* Or it could be something like *“One thing I appreciate about you is the way you give of yourself so unselfishly to take care of our children.”*

Get the idea? Now try it.

A 30-second appreciation one way. Then a 30-second appreciation the other way.

Giving one. Receiving one. All while embracing in a 60-second full body hug.

**3. Do this four times a day over the next six weeks.**

## BRIEF RELATIONSHIP WORKUP

Think back to when you were 0-18 years old...

1. In the columns below write the POSTIVE TRAITS of your primary caretakers. Use words like *warm, loving, always there, nurturing, sense of humor, intelligent, hard-working, playful, spiritual*, etc. (Circle the 5 most significant)

MOTHER

FATHER

OTHER

2. In the columns below right the NEGATIVE TRAITS of your primary care takers. Use words like *never there, critical, anxious, angry, controlling, cold, distant, preoccupied, depressed, hard to please*, etc. (Circle the 5 most significant)

MOTHER

FATHER

OTHER

3. In the section below write THREE THINGS YOU NEEDED MOST and did not get from your caretakers. Use words like more time, acceptance of who I was, encouragement, affection, understanding, respect, a peaceful home, etc.

1)

2)

3)

4. List THREE CHILDHOOD FRUSTRATIONS, what you felt, and what you did in response to them. Use words like *argued back, stayed away, kept on until I got my way, went to my room, locked myself in the closet, avoid contact*, etc.

FRUSTRATION

WHAT YOU FELT

WHAT YOU DID TO COPE

1)

2)

3)

Relationship Resources  
ChuckStarnes.com

## MY UNCONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIP AGENDA

Follow the instructions to transfer information from the Relationship Work up. Imagine this is your unconscious speaking when you were in the meat selection process, and when you are being “automatic” in your relationship.

1. I am trying to find a life partner who will be... (Insert circled positive traits from section 1 of the Relationship Workup).

2. But I won't really fall in love unless he or she also has at least some of these traits... (Insert circled negative traits from section 2 of the work up).

When I find someone with a blend of these positive and negative traits, I will get really interested in him or her and may fall in love and form an intimate, committed to love relationship.

3. In my relationship I will struggle to get my partner to stop exhibiting negative traits, so I can finally get what I am longing for in a relationship – an adult version of this...(Insert unmet needs from section 3 in the Workup).

1)

2)

3)

4. In my relationship I will sometimes do things that are self limiting, things that actually keep me from getting what I'm longing for. This will tend to happen when I do an adult version of these behaviors... (Insert past coping responses to frustrations from section 4 of the Workup).

1)

2)

3)

## THE ZERO NEGATIVITY PLEDGE

Nothing can happen in a relationship that is not safe. No relationship can be safe if there is negativity in the form of criticism, blaming and defensiveness.

1. We understand that “negativity” is any transaction that ruptures our connection – whether intentional or accidental. This includes negativity under the guise of “constructive criticism” and non-verbal communication such as a glare, an eye-roll, etc.
2. We pledge to make our relationship a Zone of Zero Negativity for the next 30 days by omitting from all our interactions with each other any words, tones, or body language that could be experienced as a “putdown,” thus rupturing our connection.
3. We will make requests when we have a problem and ask for what we want in a way that does not put our partner down.
4. We will express our concerns using “I” statements rather than “You” statements.
5. If we experience a rupture, we will send a gentle signal (bing, ouch, wow, oops!) immediately to communicate that we have experienced a “put-down,” and then use the repair process to restore safety and connecting.
6. We pledge to give three appreciations daily to each other, no matter what!
7. Will chart our progress on a calendar for the next 30 days, recording when we succeed, when we fail, and when we repair it and reconnect (see next page).

By signing below I agree to the following zero negativity pledge:

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Signed Date

---

Signed Date

## THE ZERO NEGATIVITY REPAIR PROCESS

What if you experience negativity?

Say, "Ouch." (or whatever word you agree on that signals you hear or feel negativity)

And now, it's time to repair and reconnect using ONE of the following ways:

1. Be curious rather than negative. Ask for a dialogue to learn what produced the "ouch." Was it a word, tone of voice, look in the eye, gesture, etc.?
2. Ask your partner to say what they said in a way that doesn't feel so negative to you. You can model it for them.
3. Take a time out. Ask for a RE-DO. You can simply start over and redo the transaction.
4. Science says it takes 5 positives to repair 1 negative. Give 5 appreciations to your partner.
5. Have a dialogue with your partner about what repairs an "ouch" for each of you. It can include apologies, laughing, a back rub, dancing with each other, etc.
6. When you repair and restore connection, put a "reset" sticker over the frowning face and CELEBRATE. This is a moment of triumph. The sign of a healthy relationship is how quickly you can repair.

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## CARING BEHAVIORS

**OBJECTIVE:** To share with each other specifics about what you want, what pleases you, what your partner could do that will make you feel loved and valued. Then to commit to do these things for each other randomly at least three times a day over the next two months.

**PURPOSE:** To rekindle feelings of romance and to create a safety zone in the relationship where bonding can occur.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Make a list as you think about three areas: (1) what your partner is already doing that pleases you, (2) what your partner used to do that pleased you and (3) what have always wanted but never asked for. These may be very private fantasies but should not be a present source of conflict.

With each item complete the sentence, “I feel loved and cared about when you...” (Examples: make me coffee in the morning, call me from work just to check in, tell me I’m doing a good job, help me with my chores around the house, spend quality time talking with me, take a shower with me, compliment me on how I look, give me a back rub, want to have sex with me, bring me an unexpected gift, cuddle without having to have sex)

- |    |     |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6.  |
| 2. | 7.  |
| 3. | 8.  |
| 4. | 9.  |
| 5. | 10. |

Indicate the importance of each item with an A, B or C, with A being most important.

Now exchange lists. On your partner’s list put an X by any items you are not willing to do at this time, making the rest of the list conflict free. Then beginning tomorrow, do at least two of these behaviors each day for two months. Start with the easier ones first and then move to the more difficult ones. These acts are to be GIFTS, NOT OBLIGATIONS. However, do them whether you feel like it or not. The act of doing these things will begin to ignite your desire, rekindle the romance and create a safety zone that will allow deeper connection and bonding. If either of you experience some resistance with this exercise, keep on doing these caring behaviors until the resistance is overcome. Do it even if you don’t feel it. Your feelings will follow.

## CARING BEHAVIORS DIALOGUE

### SENDER

Ask for appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync

### RECEIVER

Grant appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync

### MIRROR

- *“One thing that makes me feel loved and cared about is...”*
- *“When that happens, I feel...”*
- *“That reminds me of when I was little and...”*
- *“Let me see if I got you. If I did, you said...”*
- *“Did I get it?” (add or correct)*
- *“Is there more about that?”*

- **Summarize** *“To summarize what I heard you say...”*

### VALIDATE

- *“You make sense, and what makes sense is...”*
- *“Is that the validation you need?”*

### EMPATHIZE

- *“I can imagine your feel...”*
- *“Did I empathize with you?”*

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

**END WITH ONE-MINUTE FULL BODY HUG**

## PARENT/CHILD DIALOGUE

This dialogue is a role-play. One partner will play the role of a parent and the other will remember a time when young – 5 to 8 years old. Use present tense language in your dialogue.

### PARENT

1. Say to your child: **"I am your mom/dad, what is it like living with me?"**
3. Mirror: **"I'm your mom/dad, you said living with me is ..."**
- "Did I get it?"**
- "Is there more?"**
5. **"What is your deepest hurt with me?"**
7. Mirror: **"Your deepest hurt with me is ..."**
8. **"I am your mom/dad, What do you need from me that I don't give you?"**
10. **"I am your mom/dad, What you need from me is ..." when accurate say, "I wish I could give that to you, you deserve to have it"**

### DEROLE

12. I am now your partner, **"What behavior could I DO that will begin to touch that childhood wound?"**
14. **"I can do that."**

### CHILD

2. **"Living with you, dad/mom is ..."**
4. Continue until... **"There is no more."**
6. **"My deepest hurt with you, mom / dad is ..."**
- (Sentence stems may help deepen: "What hurts me about that is..." "I am sad about that because ..." What I'm afraid of is ...")
9. **"What I need from you, mom/dad, is ..."**
11. **"Thank you for Listening."**

### DEROLE

13. **"The behavior I want that will touch my childhood wound of \_\_\_\_\_ is ..."**
15. **"Thank you for your commitment to that behavior."**

# CHANGE REQUEST DIALOGUE

## SENDER

Ask for appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync  
(Begin with an appreciation)

“One thing that is happening that is frustrating to me is...”

“Yes. When this happens I feel...”

“Yes. What I’m afraid of is...”

“Yes. What that reminds me of from my childhood is...”

“No, there is no more.”

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

Yes or No. If no, restate and clarify...

## **CHANGE REQUEST**

“One thing that would help me next time is...”

(Ask for it “the next time”, not “from now on”.  
Make it a SMART request - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based).

## RECEIVER

Grant appointment  
Make eye contact  
Take a few deep breaths in sync

## **MIRRORING**

Mirrors: “What I hear you saying is...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

Mirrors: “You are saying...Did I get it?...Is there more about that?”

**Summarizes:** “To summarize what you said...”

## **VALIDATION**

Validates: “What you said makes sense, and what makes sense about it is...”

“Did I understand you?”

## **EMPATHY**

Empathizes: “I can see that you feel...” or “I can imagine that you feel...”

“Do I have that right?”

“I will do that.”