



Marriage Enrichment Morning



A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

Proverbs 25:11

Schedule

Theme: Building Connection through Conversation

Proverbs 25:11 - A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

9:00-9:45

Session 1

- What It Takes to Build Connection
- Understanding Love & Attachment

9:45-10:00

Break

10:00-10:30

Session 2

- Conversations for a Lifetime of Love
- Talking About Your Problematic Patterns

10:30-10:40

Break

10:40-11:15

Session 3

- A Conversation to Engage & Connect
- Consistent Conversation for Connection

11:15-11:30

Break & Lunch

11:30-UTC

Session 4

- Panel Q&A

The instruction today is based on *Created for Connection* and *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. These books are written by Dr. Sue Johnson and Kenneth Sanderfer.

What it Takes to Build Connection



Proverbs 25:11 - *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

The right words spoken at the right time brings hope and renews faith to restore the sweetness of life.

Let's start with the basics of every marriage: we want to be loved.

We want to address the emotional underpinnings of our relationship by recognizing that we are attached to and dependent on our partner in much the same way that a child is upon a parent, and as we are on the Heavenly Father for nurturing, soothing, and protection.

The way to enhance or save our relationships with each other and with God is to be accessible, responsive, and engaged in order to reestablish safe emotional connection.

How do we build that kind of connection? Knowledge and consideration are two foundational building blocks for love and connection.

According to 1 Peter 3:7, Husbands should **understand** and **be considerate** of their wives' intellectual, emotional, physical, social-relational, and spiritual needs.

It might be good if husbands and wives occasionally took inventory of their marriages. Here are some questions, based on what Peter wrote.

1. Are we partners or competitors?
2. Are we helping each other become more spiritual?
3. Do we understand each other better?
4. Are we sensitive to each other's feelings and ideas, or taking each other for granted?
5. Are we seeing God answer our prayers?
6. Are we enriched because of our marriage, or robbing each other of God's blessing?

Honest answers to these questions make a difference!

Understanding Love & Attachment



North American couples spend an average of **12 minutes a day** talking together. The most discussed topics are **scheduling** and **chores**.

When you don't know how to communicate, that lack of ability usually shows up in **pointless arguments**.

The solution is to increase affection and emotional responsiveness.

There are two main requirements are vital to increasing the bond in your marriage:

- 1) an honest self-assessment
- 2) having **conversations** about affection and emotional connection.

Couples need to learn how to **reconnect**. Regardless of the situation or debate, the underlying question that our spouse is always asking is, '**Are you there for me?**' This question can also be expressed in the "**A.R.E.**" questions:

- A: Accessible - Are you emotionally available to me?
- R: Responsive - Can I rely on you to respond when I need you?
- E: Engaged - Will you engage with me, give me your attention?

When we know that the answer to these questions is "yes", our love relationships become a safe haven--a place we can turn to for acceptance, belonging, comfort, and safety.

The Self-Assessments

Practical Questions to Determine if you A.R.E. there for your spouse.

These are some of the key questions in love and marriage. To give our loved ones a lasting treasure, we can commit ourselves to living in a way that lets them know, now and always, that we are truly there for them.

Accessibility— are you there for me? Can I reach you? Do you stay open to your partner when you have doubts or feel insecure?

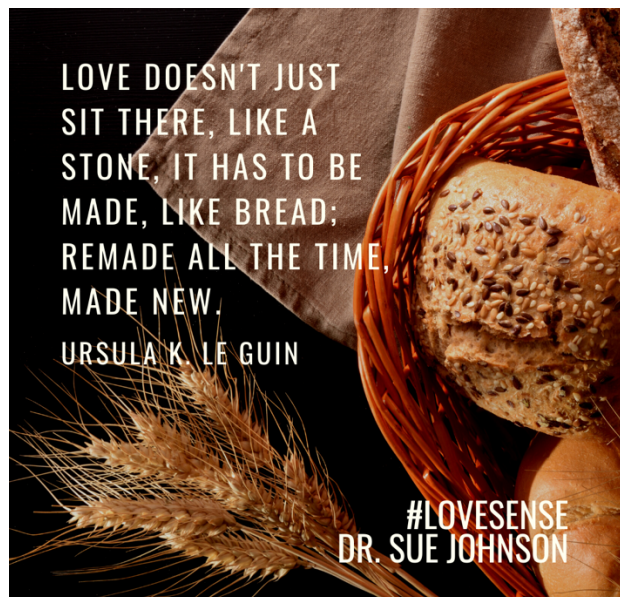
Responsiveness— can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally? Tuning in to your partner and showing that their emotions, needs and fears matter to you. Place a priority on being attuned to the emotional signals that your partner sends. Work on sending clear signals yourself.

Engagement— do I know you will value me and stay close? Give a special kind of attention that you give only to your spouse. Be emotionally present. Get “in your feelings” and express those feelings to your partner.

Can you think of a moment when your partner reached out and you responded in a way to connect and vice versa? What does this feel like?

Share with your partner how you felt in that situation as a result of their loving attention.

Complete the A.R.E. Questionnaire on the next page.



The following "A.R.E. Questionnaire" (developed by Sue Johnson, as found in her book "Hold Me Tight", p. 57-58) will help you to evaluate ways that you can improve in truly being there for those who matter most.

From your viewpoint, are you emotionally accessible to your partner?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My partner can get my attention easily.				
2. I am easy to connect with emotionally.				
3. I show my partner that he/she comes first with me.				
4. My partner doesn't feel lonely or shut out in this relationship.				
5. My partner can share her/his deepest feelings with me, and I will listen.				
In your opinion, are you emotionally responsive to your loved ones?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. If my partner needs connection and comfort, he/she knows I will be there for them.				
7. I respond to signals that my partner needs me to come close.				
8. My partner can lean on me when she/he feels anxious or unsure.				
9. Even when we fight or disagree, my partner knows that he/she is important to me and that we will find a way to come together.				
10. If my partner needs reassurance about how important she/he is to me, she/he can get it.				
In your opinion, are you positively emotionally engaged with each other?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. My partner feels very comfortable being close to and trusting me.				
12. My partner can confide in me about almost anything.				
13. My partner feels confident that we are connected to each other even when we are apart.				
14. My partner knows that I care about his/her joys, hurts, and fears.				
15. My partner feels safe enough to take emotional risks with me.				

Conversations for a Lifetime of Love



The conversations are aimed at encouraging a special kind of emotional responsiveness that is the key to lasting love for couples. The three main components are:

Accessibility: Are you there for me?

Responsiveness: Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?

Engagement: Do I know you will value me and stay close?

The conversations we will discuss today will teach you how to limit destructive interaction patterns that leave you both disconnected.

You will also learn how to tune in to each other in a way that builds lasting emotional responsiveness.



Love relationships aren't meant only to be joyrides; they're also restorative and balancing meeting places where negative emotions are calmed and regulated.

from *Love Sense*

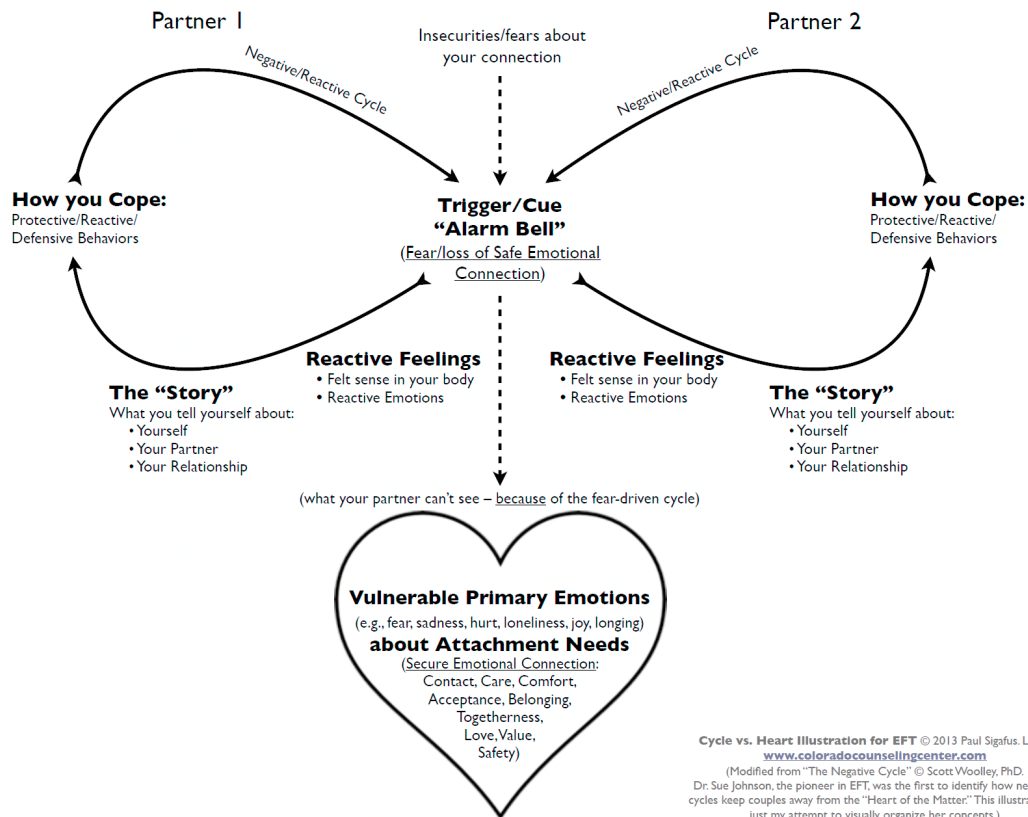
DR. SUE JOHNSON

Talking About Your Problematic Patterns

Everyone has a pattern of negative reactions that prevents emotional connection with their spouse. These are referred to as “Demon Dialogues.”

In order to move toward “Divine Dialogues,” couples must first identify negative and destructive patterns in their remarks and coping patterns in order to get to the root of the problem and figure out what each other is really trying to say.

In order to protect yourself you either avoid engagement by numbing, denying, or shutting down or you fight for recognition and response by making demands and being critical. This begins “the dance.”



Change starts with seeing the pattern, with “focusing on the music rather than the steps.” Don’t get caught up in the content of your fights like who’s right and who’s at fault.

If you get stuck in your conversations and fail to connect emotionally, you may be stuck in one of three basic patterns.

The Demon Dialogues patterns are 1) Find the bad guy, 2) Protest Polka, and 3) Freeze and Flee.

Pattern 1: Find the Bad Guy

The purpose of Find the Bad Guy is self-protection, but the main move is mutual attack, accusation, or blame. Dead end pattern of mutual blame that keeps you disconnected, blocks re-engagement and safety.

The pattern is: accuse / accuse. “It’s not me it’s you. It’s them, it’s their fault, they need to change.” The goal is to fight to win.

How to Stop the Pattern

Recognize that no one has to be the bad guy.

Think of a time when you clearly were at fault in creating a minor problem. What would have happened if you:

Stay in the present and focus on what is happening between you right now.

Look at the circle of criticism that spins both of you around.

There is no true start to a circle. Consider the circle, the dance, as your enemy and the consequences of not breaking the circle – which becomes more like an infinity loop.

A desire to win the fight and prove the other is the bad guy has such a pull. Don’t get caught in it. When you win an argument, you’re losing the relationship.

Pattern 2: Protest Polka

The partners are trying to get a response, a response that connects and reassures.

When we get no emotional response from a loved one, we are wired to protest.

The pattern is: demand-withdraw or criticize-defend. One partner reaches out, albeit in a negative way, and the other steps back, and the pattern repeats.

It’s a subtle pattern. Partners can complain of a fuzzy “communication problem” or “constant tension.” One protests the disconnection while the other protests the implied criticism.

Sometimes it’s hard to see how your own feet move in the dance. Here are some examples of what this pattern sounds like:

- “I have a broken heart. I could weep forever. Sometimes I feel like dying in this relationship.”
- “These days he is always busy, somewhere else. Even when he is home, he is on the computer or watching TV. We seem to live on separate planets. I am shut out.”

- “Sometimes I think that I am lonelier in this relationship than I when I lived by myself. It seemed easier to be by myself than living like this, together but separate.”
- “I needed him so much. He was so distant. My feelings didn’t matter.”
- “I can never get it right with her, so I just give up. It all seems hopeless.”
- “I feel numb. Don’t know how I feel. So I just freeze up and space out.”
- “I get that I’m flawed somehow. I am a failure as a husband. Somehow that just paralyzes me.”
- “I shut down and wait for her to calm down. I try to keep everything calm, not rock the boat. That is my way of taking care of the relationship. Don’t rock the boat.”

Focus on *your* moves rather than your partners. Women tend to pursue; men tend to withdraw.

How to Stop the Pattern

Be aware that ambiguous messages are what keeps the polka going.

When you recognize the music, step aside as say, “Wait a minute. What is happening here? We are getting caught up in a silly fight and we are both getting hurt.”

Look at the whole dance. Don’t just focus on specific steps, especially the steps of the other person.

Both people have to grasp how the moves of each partner pull the other into the dance. That is, they pull one another into defense and justification.

The polka is about attachment distress.

Learn to see the pattern as the enemy.

What do you do tend to do when you feel disconnected or unsafe?

Fill in the blanks:

The more I _____, the more you _____ and then the more I _____, and round and round we go.

When is it possible to feel connected? What do you do to keep the polka at bay? Figure this out together. Recognize attachment signals.

For example, “I see that you’re really upset and need something from me, but I don’t know what to do here.”

Pattern 3: Freeze and Flee

In this pattern, each person is in self-protection mode, trying to act as if he or she does not feel and does not need.

The pattern is: withdrawal-withdrawal. If we think of a relationship as a dance, then here both partners are sitting out!

The pursuing critical partner gives up trying. They will grieve the relationship, detach, and leave. The withdrawn partner finally tunes into the fact and agrees to get help.

Both people step back to escape hurt and despair. They will be polite, calm, and cooperative, but there is a sense of helplessness concerning how to restore the relationship.

Both partners decide that their difficulty lay in themselves, in their innate flaws. They attempt to hide their unlovable self.

How to Stop the Pattern

Admit that you've given up and built a wall.

New beginnings start with knowing how we create the trap that we are caught in.

Strong bonds grow from resolving to halt the cycles of disconnection, the dance of distress.

Can you share with your partner one cue that sparks the distancing dance?

Can you identify how you push your partner away from you or make it dangerous for him to come closer?

What do you tell yourself once you have emotionally withdrawn to justify separation and to discourage yourself from reaching out to your partner?

Make a list of all the things this dance has taken away from you.



As a final exercise for this conversation, can you identify which of the three patterns – Find the Bad Guy, the Protest Polka, Freeze and Flee – most threatens your relationship?

The facts of the fight aren't the real issue. The real concern is always the strength and security of the emotional bond you have with your partner. It's about accessibility, responsiveness, and engagement.

When _____, I do not feel safely connected to you. (Fill in the cue that starts up the music of disconnection, e.g., “when we fight about my parenting, when we don't seem to speak for days.” No big, general, abstract statements or disguised blaming is allowed here. You cannot say things like “when you are just being difficult as usual.” That's cheating. Be concrete and specific)

I tend to _____. I move this way in our dance to try to cope with difficult feelings and find a way to change our dance. (Choose an action word, e.g., complain, nag, zone out, ignore you, run, move away)

I do it in the hope that _____. (State the hope that pulls you into the dance, e.g., “we will avoid more conflict” or “I will persuade you to respond to me more.”)

As this pattern keeps going, I feel _____. (Identify a feeling. The usual ones that people can identify at this point are frustration, anger, numbness, emptiness, or confusion.)

What I then say to myself about it our relationship is _____. (Summarize the most catastrophic conclusion you can imagine, e.g., “you do not care about us, I am not important to you, I can never please you.”)

My understanding of the circular dance that makes it harder and harder for us to safely connect is that when I move in the way I describe above you seem to then _____. (Choose an action word, e.g., shut down, push me to respond.)

The more I _____ the more you _____. We are then both trapped in pain and isolation. (Insert verbs that describe your own and your partner's moves in the dance)

Maybe we can warn each other when this dance begins. We can call it _____ Seeing this dance is our first step out of the circle of disconnection.

See if you can summarize the pattern that takes over your relationship by filling in the blanks in the following statements. Then edit them into a paragraph that best fits you and your relationship.

Share with your spouse.

Once you can identify these negative cycles and recognize that they trap both of you, you are ready to learn how to step out of them.

WHEN I AM UPSET BY YOU, WHEN WE ARE NOT GETTING ALONG, I FEEL (some feelings are on the surface, and some are deeper, less conscious feelings):

Angry	Sad
Alone, Abandoned	Disappointed
Justified in my anger	Like I have to figure this out myself
Frustrated by him/her	Deprived
Annoyed, Irritated	Despairing, Hopeless
Scared, frightened	Like I want to protect myself
Anxious Hurt,	Not heard, Not valued, Not important

WHAT I THEN DO IS (BEHAVIORS):

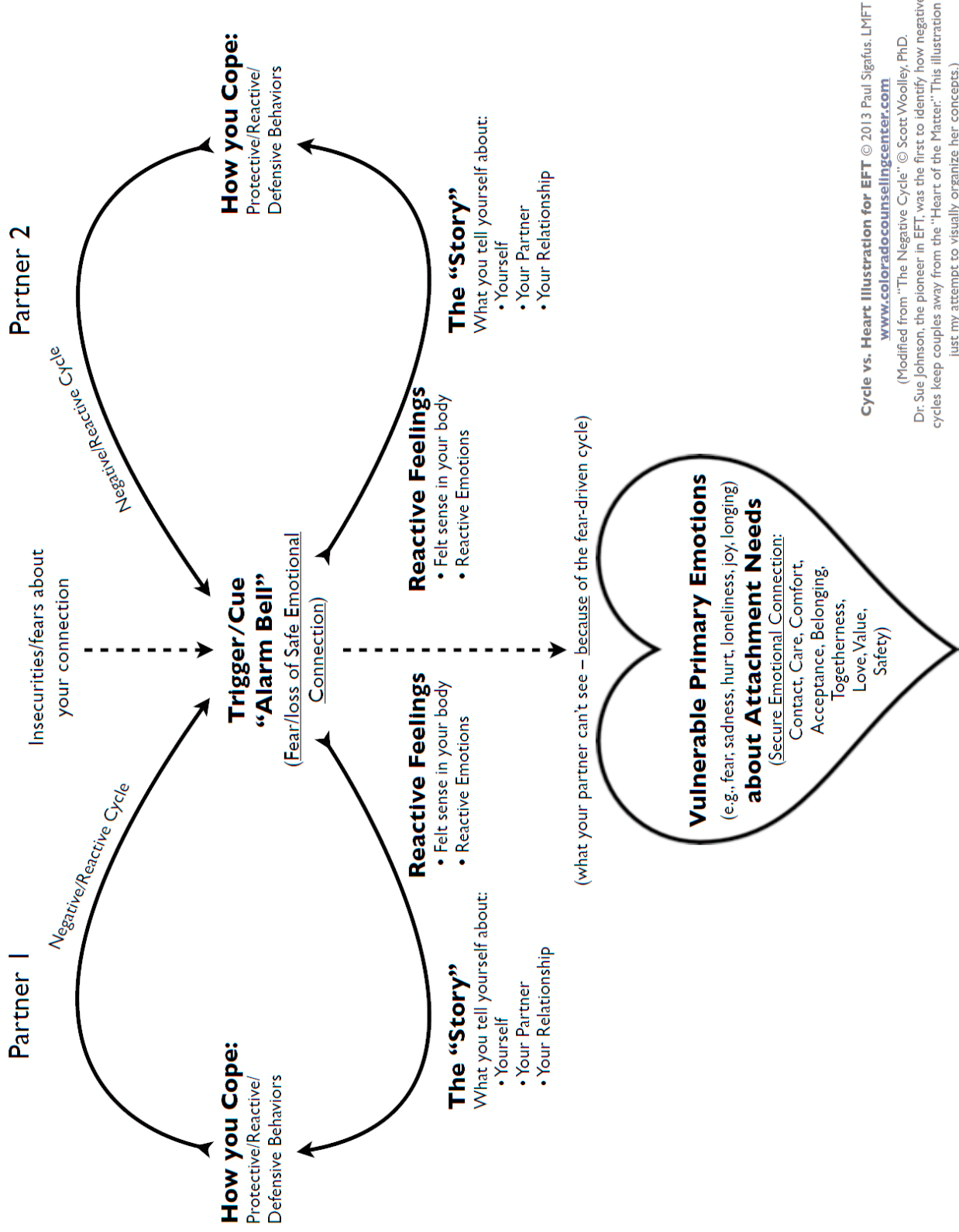
Criticize you, blame you
Interrupt you
Try to manipulate to get what I want from you
Yell, Attack, Say nasty things to you
Beg or Plead
Demand
Point out how you are letting me down or hurting me; try to get you to understand how you hurt me
Explain again and again what I want
Pull away, Withdraw, Give up
Refuse to talk to you
Get logical and point out how irrational you are
Find solutions, try to fix it so the conflict will stop or so that you won't be so upset or angry
Defend myself
Try to show why I am right and you are wrong
Justify my feelings and actions
Counter-criticize or counter-blame or counter-attack and say nasty things to you

I BEHAVE AS I DO (ABOVE) IN THE HOPE THAT (WHAT I LONG FOR IS):

BUT WHEN I DO THIS, YOU SEEM TO (CHOOSE FROM THE BEHAVIORS ABOVE):

WHEN YOU DO THIS, I FEEL (CHOOSE FROM THE SURFACE FEELINGS ABOVE):

THESE BEHAVIORS DON'T WORK. INSTEAD, WE GET STUCK IN THESE REPETITIVE CYCLES THAT UPSETS US BOTH.



Cycle vs. Heart Illustration for EFT © 2013 Paul Sigafus, LMFT
www.coloradocounselingcenter.com
 (Modified from "The Negative Cycle" © Scott Woolley, PhD.
 Dr. Sue Johnson, the pioneer in EFT, was the first to identify how negative
 cycles keep couples away from the "Heart of the Matter." This illustration is
 just my attempt to visually organize her concepts.)

A Conversation to Engage and Connect



This conversation moves partners into being more accessible, emotionally responsive, and deeply engaged with each other.

2 important questions: What am I most afraid of? What do I need most from you?

A Question to help you Engage: What am I most afraid of?

The goal is emotional clarity.

“Handles” are descriptive images, words, phrases that open the door into your inner most feelings and vulnerabilities, your emotional reality. Handles help you go to your deeper feelings.

Examples of handles are: a shattered heart, overwhelmed, anxious, freaking out, and fleeing.

Like a digger in a mine, we must dig out our handles, our emotional reality, in order to identify the emotion and where it’s taking us.

Exercise: Go back to a “rocky moment” in your relationship and find your handles and write them down. Ask your partner to do the same. Whichever of you are the most withdrawn will start the conversation. Tune in to your core fears, share them, and say what it feels like to reveal them. If you are the listening partner, respond by saying what it feels like to hear the disclosures. Was it easy or hard to understand the message? If it was hard, at what point did it become difficult? What feeling came up then? Examine the feelings together.

Then the listening partner repeats the disclosure process.

This is a sensitive conversation; respect the risk the other is taking.

Things to Keep in Mind When Listening:

Don't dismiss your partners new revelations. Often this sounds like, "That's ridiculous!" or "So let's see you prove it." Don't spin back to the negative cycle.

Say, "The basic emotion I'm hearing is _____, is that right?"

Attend (reach toward) and affirm your spouse's deepest disclosures.

Things to Keep in Mind When Disclosing:

Consider and answer, "What is the biggest catastrophe that could happen?"

Identify the primary concern by asking yourself, "What's the main threat?"

Consider what may be blocking you from opening up. Identify your fears, excuses (ifs, buts), consequences.

Reveal your fears while your partner reflects.

Connect and open up. Be vulnerable.

Dig deeper: Are your handles (images, phrases, feelings) really just descriptions of fear shame, sadness, or loss?

A Question to help you Connect: What do I need most from you?

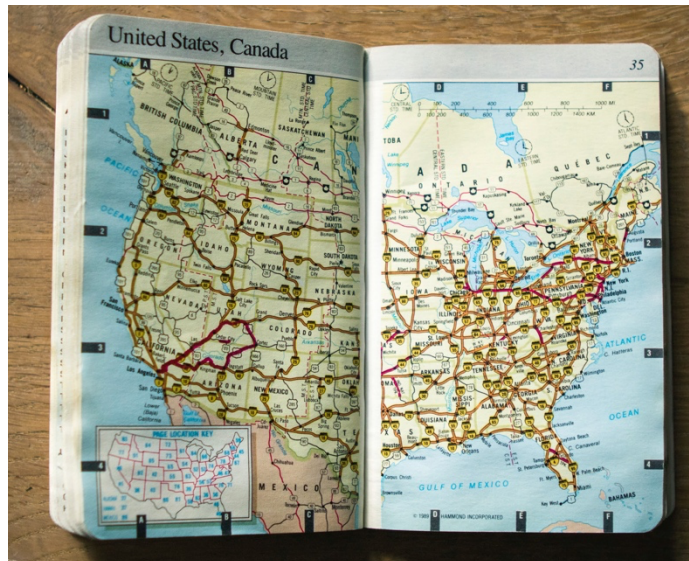
Being able to declare our core attachment fears naturally leads to a recognition of our primary attachment needs.

Here is a list of some of the phrases that partners use in this conversation:

- I need to feel, to sense that: I'm special to you, I wanted by you, I'm loved and accepted, I am needed, I'm safe, I can count on you, I'll be heard and respected, I can count on you to hear me, I can ask you to hold me.
- Accept me and don't view my traits as flaws.
- Stay with me and come close, show me you care especially when I don't feel strong.
- Touch me and hold me and tell me that I matter to you.
- Tell me that you can love me even with all my problems.

Being present is the secret in this conversation.

Consistent Conversation for Connection



This last conversation is built on the understanding that love is a continual process of losing and finding emotional connection; it asks couples to be deliberate and mindful about maintaining connection.

Love is a continual process of seeking and losing emotional connection, and reaching out to find it again. Slipping back into old habits is easy. Stay vigilant and active.

Roadmap:

- Recap and reflect on danger points in your relationship where you slide into insecurity and get stuck in your dialogues. Figure out detours and shortcuts that lead you back to safety.
- Celebrate positive moments big and small. Reinforce positive impacts you have on each other and articulate turning points in your relationship.
- Plan rituals around separations and reunions in your daily lives. Helps you not to become distracted from your busy chaotic lives. These are key attachment moments. Regular small gestures that say you matter to me.
- Help each other identify attachment issues and recurring differences and arguments and decide together how to defuse these. Allows you to solve problems. Safety first strategy. Once emotional safety is established you can bring up problems in softer less aggressive ways. Allows you to stay emotionally engaged. A secure bond leads to better problem-solving. You're more cooperative open and flexible. Mundane problems remain that. Address attachment needs before problem-solving. Like insecurity vulnerability fear or abandonment.
- Create a resilient relationship story. Retell how you got stuck and what you learned from it how you reconnected and forgave. Getting stuck in your negative cycle often leads to feelings of confusion. Once you feel safe with each other you can create a clear story together. Sums up your past and gives a blueprint for the future. Recount how you got stuck in insecurity and found ways to move out of that together. Realize it's a different marriage. Realize you express her differently. Realize you found your way back to being close.

- Think of three adjectives that describe your relationship when it was stalled in insecurity and negative spirals. This may be when you decided to seek council. Dead ended, exhausted, minefield.
- Think of two verbs that capture how each of you moved in your own negative dance and how you were able to change the pattern. “Stuff, explode, blame, shut down. I pushed you turned away.”
- Describe one key moment when you saw each other differently, felt new emotions, and were able to reach for each other.
- Think of three adjectives, emotions or images that express your relationship now. Examples include: playful, contented, delighted, blessed, hand in hand.
- Think of one thing you’re doing to keep your connection with each other. For example: Cuddling before we fall asleep, kissing when we wake up.
- Create a future love story. Outline what you want your bond to look like five and 10 years down the road. Actively plan for your future. How can you make it a reality together?
- Love is a living thing. Attention is the oxygen that keeps the relationship alive and well
 - What are your detours? Are they: Ultimatums, storm off, yelling, smart remarks.
 - Instead: empathize, slow down, share how you really feel deep down, and be vulnerable.\
- Notice when there are emerging danger points in your relationship.
 - Identify small positive moments in your relationship.
 - Be sure to tell them.
- Single out key moments when your partner took a risk of becoming more open and responsive.
 - Be conscious.
 - Celebrate moments of connection.
 - Notice and share the good.
- Design your own bonding rituals.
 - Regularly hold, hug, and kiss on waking, sleeping, leaving home, and returning.
 - Write letters or notes to one another.
 - Participate in spiritual or other rituals together like family meals, planting spring flowers, attending church.
 - Call during the day just to check in.
 - Create a personal sharing ritual, a time that is for sharing personal things and connecting not for problem-solving. Share time.
 - Arrange a special time to be together, Sunday mornings.
 - Maintain a regular date night.
 - Do a project together.
 - Recognize special days.
- Decide to attend to your partners daily struggles and victories and validating them on a regular basis.
 - Publicly recognize your partner and your relationship
 - Learn to take risks to show the softer side of yourself and the side that you’ve learned to hide.
 - Confess your fears of loss and isolation.
 - Create a new narrative
- Change the music!