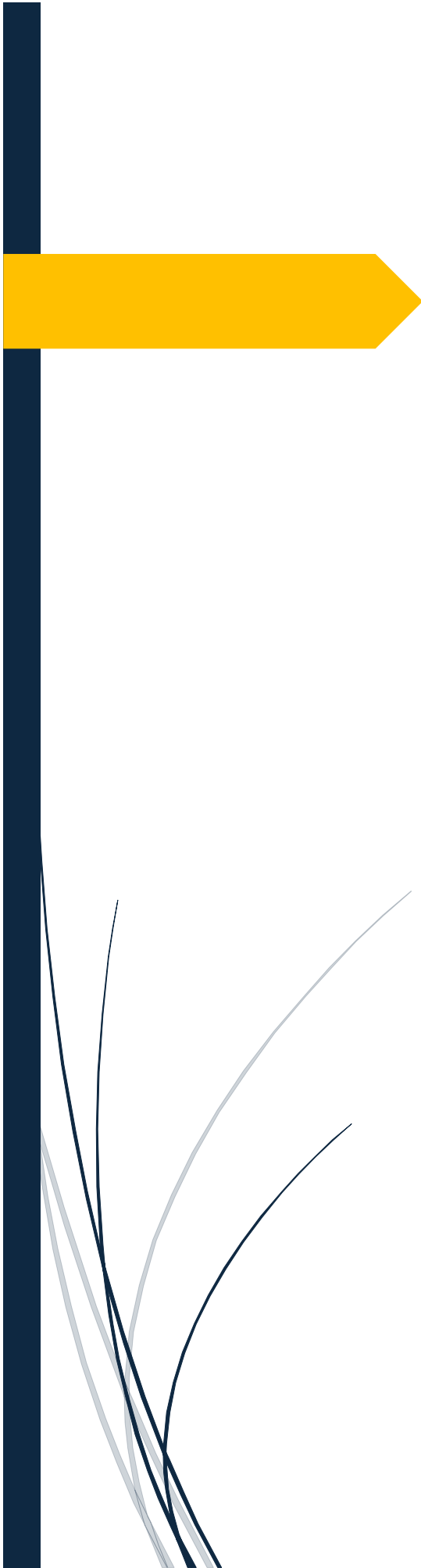




The Couples Manifesto

A Field Guide for Me | We | Us

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The **Couples Manifesto** is not meant to be a step-by-step “how-to” manual. Instead, it serves as a clear and grounded roadmap that helps couples recognize the common traps, obstacles, patterns, and opportunities that naturally arise in relationships. It’s designed to shine a light on the terrain you’ll both inevitably navigate together such as misunderstandings, emotional mismatches, unmet needs, attachment dynamics, and the habits that pull you closer or push you apart.

Rather than telling couples *what* to do, the manifesto helps them understand *why* these dynamics show up, *where* they come from, and *how* they influence connection. It offers shared language, shared expectations, and shared insight so partners can better orient themselves. It highlights the places where couples typically get stuck and reveals the openings where growth, intimacy, repair, and meaningful partnership can flourish.

In essence, the **Couples Manifesto** acts as a compass pointing partners toward awareness, empathy, intentional connection, and skillful engagement so they can navigate their relationship with clarity, choice, and confidence. Let your curiosity guide you. Choose curiosity before conclusions.

The Couples Manifesto

Healthy relationships are not built on perfection. They are built through awareness, effort, curiosity, responsibility, and the repeated choice to invest in ME | WE | US.

- **Effort is the currency of connection.**

We will not always get it right. What matters is that we continue to show up, stay engaged, make attempts, and demonstrate through our actions that *you matter, I matter, and this relationship matters*.

- **Maintain a healthy ME to create a stronger WE and US.**

We each take responsibility for understanding ourselves, our needs, emotions, triggers, patterns, boundaries, strengths, and vulnerabilities while recognizing that what each of us brings into the relationship influences the system we create together.

- **Choose curiosity before conclusions.**

Before assuming intent, assigning meaning, defending, correcting, or reacting, we will remain curious. We will ask questions, seek understanding, and remember that our partner's experience may be different from our own without either experience being wrong.

- **Different does not automatically mean deficient.**

We will treat differences in communication, emotion, processing, connection, affection, play, regulation, and needs as variations to understand rather than flaws to correct. The goal is not sameness; it is learning how our differences can coexist within the US.

- **Create safety before demanding communication.**

Productive communication requires enough physical, emotional, cognitive, and contextual safety for both people to remain engaged. When the system becomes overwhelmed, we will prioritize regulation and safety rather than forcing resolution.

- **Make the pattern the problem, not each other.**

Every relationship develops predictable patterns. When ours appears, we will work toward shifting from ME vs. YOU → US vs. THE PATTERN and ask, “*What is happening to us right now?*”

- **Listen. Understand. Validate.**

We will seek to understand before defending, fixing, dismissing, or persuading. Validation does not require agreement. Sometimes the most important message we can communicate is simply: “Your world matters to me.”

- **Give each other the recipe.**

We will not expect one another to read minds. We will work to make our internal experiences more visible by communicating our feelings, needs, expectations, boundaries, and requests. FEELING → NEED → REQUEST. Clarity gives our partner something they can understand and respond to.

- **Conflict is inevitable. Repair is intentional.**

A healthy relationship is not one without ruptures. It is one increasingly capable of recognizing what happened, regulating, taking responsibility, understanding impact, repairing harm, learning, and finding its way back to connection.

- **Catch each other doing it right.**

We will notice more than problems. We will intentionally recognize effort, growth, kindness, follow-through, support, affection, and the small things that are easy to overlook. Small deposits accumulate, and what gets acknowledged is more likely to continue.

- **Protect both connection and individuality.**

A healthy relationship allows us to want one another without requiring either person to disappear into the relationship. We will support closeness while maintaining identity, friendships, interests, boundaries, self-care, and the resources necessary to remain healthy individuals.

- **Maintain the relationship while it is healthy.**

We will not wait for something to be wrong before paying attention to the US. We will periodically ask: How am I doing? How are you doing? How are we doing? We will identify what is working, what needs attention, and what we want to intentionally keep doing.

We are not trying to create a perfect relationship. We are creating a relationship that can learn, adapt, communicate, connect, repair, play, grow, and continue choosing one another.

Metrics of Success

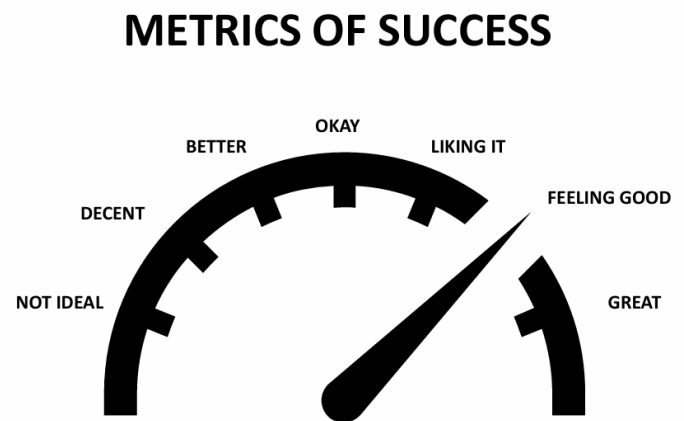
At the heart of every healthy relationship is not perfection, flawless communication, or constant harmony it's **effort**. What matters most is the willingness to **show up, stay engaged, and keep trying**, even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable. Effort is the currency of connection. It communicates, "You matter," "This matters," and "We're in this together."

Trying doesn't mean having all the answers. It doesn't require you to always get it right. What it *does* require is presence, intention, curiosity, and care. When partners consistently put in effort small gestures, honest conversations, attempts to understand one another, moments of kindness, follow-through on commitments they build trust and safety. These penny jar deposits accumulate, signaling reliability and relational investment.

Effort is also the antidote to stagnation. Relationships naturally drift without intentional tending. By simply trying, checking in, timely repair, listening with openness, offering comfort, and being willing to learn you create movement toward one another instead of away. Trying keeps the connection alive, adaptive, and resilient.

Ultimately, effort isn't about being perfect; it's about being present. It's the choice to lean in instead of pull back.

It's the daily act of saying yes to the relationship and to each other.



Me We Us

Healthy relationships are built on interdependence. A balanced blend of individuality and partnership. Interdependence is the middle ground between unhealthy dependency ("I can't function without you") and rigid independence ("I don't need anything from you").

The **ME | WE | US** model illustrates how couples can intentionally cultivate that balance.

ME: Strengthening the Self to Strengthen the Relationship

Interdependence begins with the **ME**, because a relationship is only as healthy as the individuals inside it. The ME phase is about building self-awareness around your personal beliefs, emotional patterns, attachment tendencies, triggers, values, and behavioral habits. It's an honest inventory of who you are, how you operate, and what you bring into the partnership.

Benefits of the ME stage:

- You reduce blind spots that unintentionally harm the relationship.
- You learn how your needs, fears, and histories shape your reactions.
- You become more grounded, regulated, and emotionally responsible.
- You show up with clarity instead of confusion or reactivity.

Interdependence requires a strong sense of self; otherwise, the relationship can collapse into over-reliance or resentment.

WE: Turning Awareness into Understanding and Support

Once you know yourself, the next step is **WE**. The process of translating that internal awareness into communication your partner can understand and respond to.

This stage is about sharing your inner world:

- What you need
- How you experience emotions
- What supports you
- What overwhelms you
- How your history influences your present

It allows your partner to understand *how to love you well*, not by guessing, but through clarity and collaboration.

Benefits of the WE stage:

- Builds empathy and emotional attunement.
- Eliminates mind-reading, assumptions, and misinterpretations.
- Creates a shared language for navigating conflict and connection.
- Helps both partners feel seen, known, and supported.

Interdependence thrives when both partners actively share themselves and allow the other to participate in their care.

US: Co-Creating How You Show Up Together

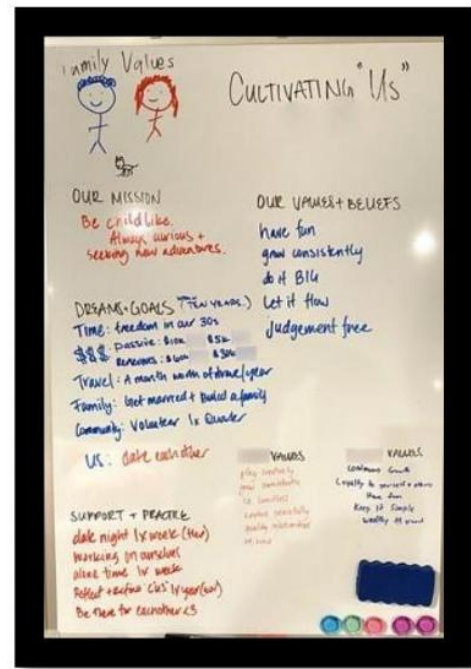
The **US** stage is where individual awareness (ME) and mutual understanding (WE) evolve into shared intention. This is the stage where you co-author your relational identity through tools such as your mission statement, rituals of connection, communication agreements, repair processes, and shared values.

Here, you are designing the *culture* of your relationship.

Benefits of the US stage:

- Clarifies the “Mission Statement” that you’re building together and how to show up as a team.
- Creates alignment so decisions and behavior reflect shared priorities.
- Provides a relational “north star” during conflict, transitions, and stress.
- Supports accountability that is rooted in care, not criticism.

Interdependence becomes fully alive in the US where you function as a collaborative system rather than two individuals trying to coexist.



Why ME | WE | US Creates Interdependence

This framework naturally builds:

- **Trust** through transparency and consistency
- **Safety** through understanding and compassionate communication
- **Accountability** through shared values and agreements
- **Resilience** because the relationship has structure, not just emotion
- **Connection** because both partners feel valued as individuals and as teammates

Interdependence is not losing yourself. It's bringing your best self into a relationship where both people can thrive.

Start with....

Mission Statement

A relationship mission statement serves as the anchor, compass, and guiding ethos for your partnership. It identifies and clarifies the spirit of what your relationship aspires to be not just in ideal moments, but in the everyday realities of life together. It becomes a shared declaration of intention: *This is who we want to be, how we want to operate, and what we want to cultivate.*

At its core, the mission statement represents:

The shared investment in the relationship.

It signals that both partners are committed to something larger than themselves *the us*. It transforms the relationship from something you simply experience into something you intentionally build and protect. It's a way of saying, "We are both choosing this," and that choice becomes the foundation for resilience, teamwork, and longevity.

MISSION STATEMENT

*"In This House We Are
KIND, APPRECIATIVE,
and Always **SEEKING**
to **UNDERSTAND**
What is Different..."*



The daily practice of intentional behavior.

A mission statement is not theoretical; it's behavioral. It translates values into action. It reminds you that a healthy relationship isn't created by accident, it's the result of deliberate choices made over and over: how you communicate, how you comfort, how you repair, how you show up, and how you try again. It sets the expectations for how you aspire to treat each other, especially when emotions run high or patterns reemerge.

A neutral reference point to hold each other accountable.

Instead of relying on personal preferences or reactive emotions, the mission statement gives you a shared standard something both partners agreed on to guide feedback, conversations, and course corrections. It removes blame and shifts the conversation from "you vs. me" to "are we living in alignment with what we said matters?"

It becomes an objective touchstone, not a subjective criticism.

A reminder to offer grace, kindness, and compassion especially when a 'do-over' is needed.

Relationships are full of missteps. A mission statement creates room for imperfection by reminding you of the bigger picture. It encourages patience, gentleness, and recovery. When conflict happens or when one of you falls short it calls you back to your shared purpose instead of getting stuck in the momentary rupture. It helps you reset, repair, and continue forward with humility and connection.

Why it Matters

A relationship mission statement transforms your partnership from reactive to intentional. It creates clarity, shared meaning, and a sense of direction. It strengthens alignment, improves communication, and enhances emotional safety. Most importantly, it ensures you are co-authoring the kind of relationship you both want on purpose.

Prioritize These...

Structure & Process

Structure and process in a relationship fosters healthy behaviors by creating a safe space with reliable scaffolding that supports connection rather than conflict. Choosing the correct **time and place** ensures both partners are present and ready to engage, free from unnecessary distractions.

Predictability and consistency mitigate anxiety and rumination around “when will we talk.” Partners know when a conversation can happen. Partners know what to expect and feel secure in the rhythm of communication versus being surprised by one another.



STRUCTURE & PROCESS

When conversations are **intentional rather than transactional**, the focus shifts from simply exchanging information to truly understanding and supporting one another. It's the time for both to “be seen and to be heard.”

Together, these elements create a safe, predictable, and purposeful space where meaningful dialogue can thrive.

Safety

Before two or more people can communicate effectively, they need to make sure both feel safe physically, emotionally, mentally, and in the environment. Furthermore, there is an additional variable of safety that is often overlooked and that involves inclusive safety.

Safety isn't just about avoiding harm, it's about creating the conditions where everyone involved can listen, share, and connect openly.

- **Physical or Felt safety** offers respect for each other's space and presence.
- **Emotional safety** involves the effort to speak with care, avoid shaming or blaming, and honor each other's experiences and perspectives.

- **Mental or Cognitive safety** means we give each other room to think, honor the neurodiversity that exists, encourage the expression of ideas, and provide the space to be heard without judgment.
- **Environmental or Contextual safety** looks like choosing the right time and place for intentional conversations, setting each other up to be free from distractions, mitigating external stressors when possible.
- **Inclusive safety** which is different for everyone although it may involve a number of unique circumstances that should be translated between partners.

When these forms of safety are in place, communication flows more easily, we can hear each other, respond thoughtfully, and build confidence that productive conversations can take place.

Without safety, even the best communication skills won't land.

So, as you talk, pause and check: Do you both feel safe right now - in your bodies, in your emotions, in your thoughts, and in the space? If not, take a step back and create that safety first.

Trust

Trust is not a single act, promise, or feeling. Trust lives within the relationship system and develops through repeated experiences of consistency, predictability, transparency, empathy, accountability, and repair. Consistency communicates *"your words and actions generally align."* Predictability creates confidence in what partners can reasonably expect from one another. Transparency reduces guessing by making thoughts, feelings, needs, intentions, and boundaries more visible.

Together, these qualities create greater safety and make vulnerability, curiosity, and connection easier. Structure also matters agreed-upon processes, boundaries, follow-through, and relationship guardrails increase predictability, which can increase safety within the system.

Transparency similarly helps move the relationship from ME to WE by translating an internal experience into something a partner can understand and respond to.

Trust is also cumulative rather than perfect. Small moments of reliability, appreciation, encouragement, honesty, responsiveness, and consistent follow-through become deposits that gradually strengthen trust, warmth, and resilience.

Just as importantly, trust is shaped by what happens when the system does not work well. Ruptures are inevitable; productive repair creates new evidence that partners can recognize what happened, regulate, understand one another's experience, take responsibility, repair the harm, and learn from it.

In this way, trust becomes an outcome of ME | WE | US: *I understand and take responsibility for how I show up; we increasingly understand and respond to one another; and together we create an US that becomes more reliable, transparent, predictable, safe, and capable of repair.*

Know Your Patterns

Every relationship develops patterns, predictable ways partners respond to one another when stressed, disconnected, overwhelmed, or trying to get a need met. One partner may pursue while the other withdraws; one may move toward emotion while the other moves toward analysis or solutions; one may seek reassurance while the other needs space.

The individual behaviors are not necessarily the problem. The vulnerability often exists in how those behaviors interact within the system. Learning to recognize the pattern allows couples to shift from ME vs. YOU → US vs. THE PATTERN, replacing blame with curiosity and collaboration: *“I think we’re entering our pattern. What is happening to us right now?”*

System vulnerabilities are the conditions that make those patterns more likely to emerge. Fatigue, stress, poor timing, transitions, unclear boundaries, lack of connection, emotional flooding, scarcity, different needs, or simply not having an agreed-upon process can leave the relationship more vulnerable.

The goal is not to eliminate every vulnerability or never fall into an old pattern. It is to know your system well enough to recognize what tends to happen, identify the early warning signs, understand what each person needs, and intentionally build guardrails, supports, and repair strategies around the places where you are most vulnerable. Over time, the US becomes increasingly aware, flexible, predictable, safe, supportive, and capable of repair.

L-U-V

In every strong relationship, the ability to *L-U-V* each other **Listen, Understand, and Validate** is essential. These three skills work together to create emotional safety, reduce conflict, deepen connection, and help partners feel seen and valued. L-U-V isn’t about agreeing with everything your partner says; it’s about communicating, ***“Your world matters to me.”***

L — Listen: The Doorway to Connection

Listening is the act of being fully present. It means setting aside distractions, assumptions, and the urge to fix, and instead giving your partner your attention and curiosity.

Quality listening communicates:

- “You’re important.”
- “I’m here with you.”
- “I care about what you’re experiencing.”

When partners feel genuinely heard, defensiveness drops and emotional intimacy grows. Listening is the doorway to understanding and connection.

U — Understand: Entering Their Experience

Understanding is deeper than listening. It's the effort to step inside your partner's perspective and make sense of what they're feeling, needing, or fearing. This doesn't require agreement it requires empathy.

To understand, you ask yourself:

- *What is this like for them?*
- *What are they trying to say beneath the words?*
- *What emotions or needs are present?*

Understanding bridges the gap between two inner worlds. It transforms conversations from “me vs. you” into “we're in this together.”

V — Validate: Affirming Their Experience

Validation is the emotional payoff of listening and understanding. It's telling your partner, “Your feelings make sense,” or “I can see why that would hurt,” even if you see the situation differently.

Validation communicates:

- Your emotions are real
- Your experience is understandable
- You are okay to feel the way you do
- I'm not judging you

Validation doesn't assign blame it opens space for the emotional reality of the moment. It softens defenses, repairs ruptures, and builds trust.

L-U-V is the relational version of CPR: it revives connection, stabilizes emotions, and keeps the relationship healthy and responsive. It's simple, but profoundly powerful three small actions that can transform the entire emotional climate of a couple's life together.

Rupture & Repair

Rupture and repair is less about “never fighting” and more about how partners navigate disagreements and restore connection consistently. Rupture and repair is less about “never fighting” and more about how partners navigate disagreements and restore connection.

Two important parts of that process are apologizing and asking for forgiveness. Although closely related, they serve different purposes within repair.

Understanding **apologies** and **asking for forgiveness** is essential to relational health because they are the primary tools couples use to repair ruptures, restore trust, and strengthen emotional safety.

Apologizing without asking forgiveness can feel incomplete or transactional. Understanding the difference helps couples avoid minimizing harm, rushing repair, or using forgiveness as a way to escape accountability.

Apology

What it is:

An apology is an act of **ownership and accountability**. It focuses on acknowledging harm, naming impact, and taking responsibility for one's behavior without conditions. An apology says, *"I see how my actions affected you, and it matters to me."*

Asking Forgiveness

What it is:

Asking forgiveness is an act of **relational humility and vulnerability**. Asking for forgiveness recognizes that healing is not automatic. It respects the other person's **autonomy** to decide when and how they are ready to move forward. This shifts and balances power dynamics. Asking forgiveness says, *"I respect your process and your choice."*

How They Work Together

- **An apology** addresses *responsibility for harm*.
- **Asking forgiveness** addresses *respect for the healing process*

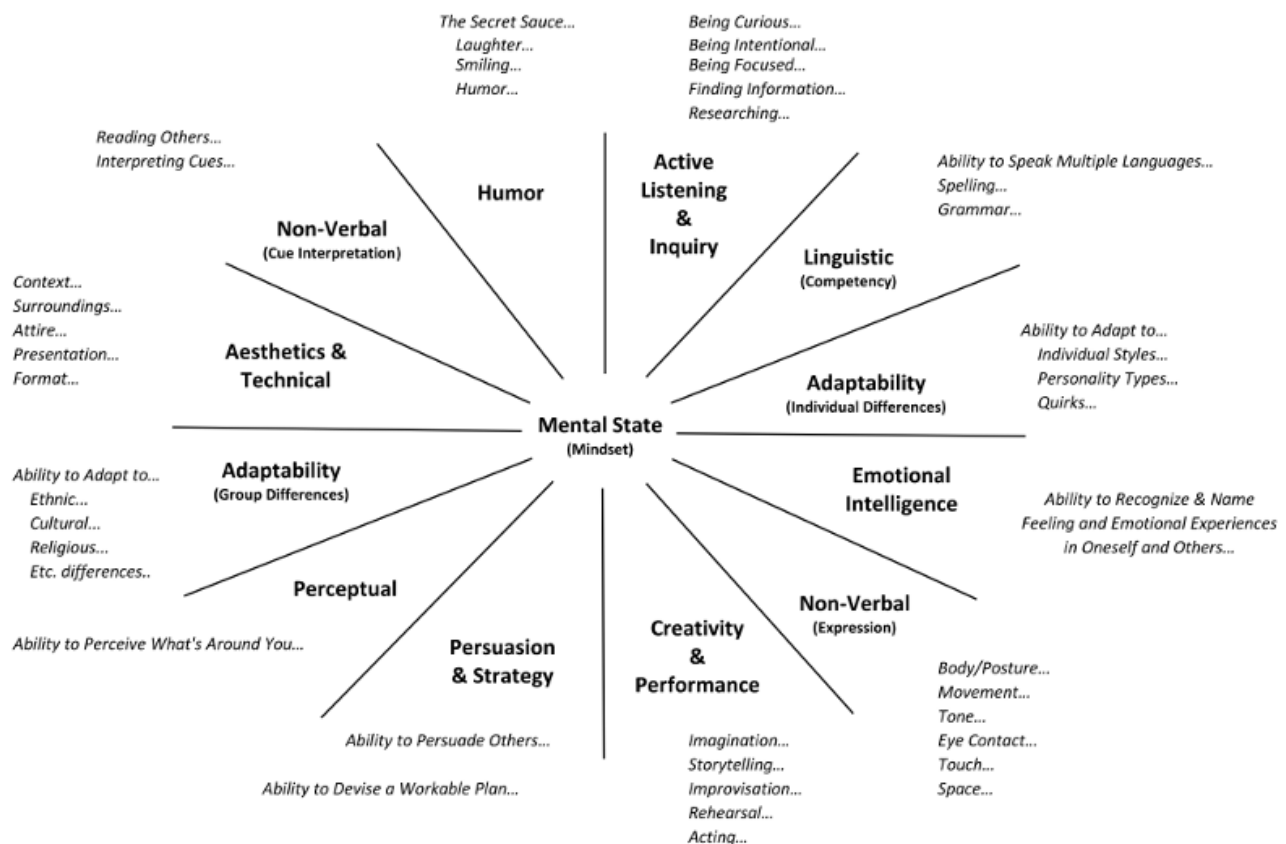
Together, they create a repair cycle where responsibility, empathy, and consent coexist. In healthy relationships, couples understand that conflict is inevitable, but repair is intentional. Apologies and forgiveness are not about erasing the past; they are about learning from it and choosing to reconnect with greater awareness and care.

Communication

Seek to Understand

Communication in a relationship is beautiful because it creates a bridge between two inner worlds allowing partners to feel **seen, heard, and connected**. At the same time, it is challenging because it requires vulnerability, regulation, and the courage to speak honestly while listening openly, even when emotions run high or needs differ. When practiced with care, communication becomes both the work and the reward of meaningful connection. Be curious.

Seeking to understand the diversity of communication within yourself and your partner fosters empathy, patience, and flexibility in a relationship. When differences in expression, timing, tone, or processing style are viewed as **variations rather than flaws**, partners are less likely to personalize misunderstandings and more able to collaborate. This mindset shifts communication from trying to be “right” to trying to be **attuned**, strengthening connection and mutual respect.



Build Awareness

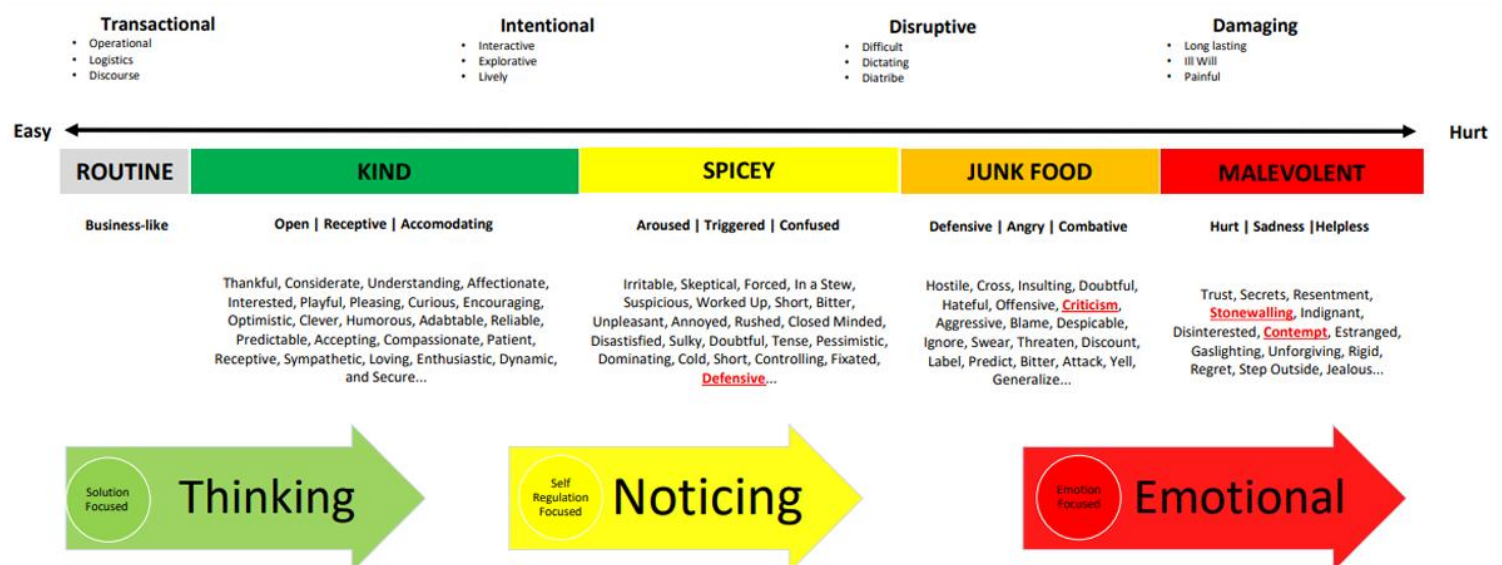
Building awareness in a relationship to understand the range and escalation of communication is critical. Understanding how your conversations go from kind, constructive, and supportive at one end to harsh, malevolent, or harmful at the other is essential for fostering trust and emotional safety.

Awareness begins with recognizing how tone, word choice, body language, and timing influence how messages are received and interpreted. Partners who understand this spectrum can notice early signs of escalating negativity and intervene before communication becomes damaging.

Developing skills to navigate this spectrum involves using solution-focused, self-regulation-focused, and emotion-focused strategies:

- **Solution-focused** strategies help partners stay oriented toward problem-solving and collaboration rather than blame, keeping conversations productive and forward-moving.
- **Self-regulation** focused strategies allow individuals to manage their own emotional reactivity, pause before responding, and communicate from a calmer, more intentional place.
- **Emotion-focused** strategies foster empathy, validation, and connection by helping partners acknowledge and respond to underlying feelings and needs.

Together, these strategies support healthier communication, prevent patterns of harm, and enable partners to engage in conversations that are both authentic and safe, even when navigating conflict or challenging topics.



Styles & Approaches

Each partner enters a relationship with a unique communication style shaped by personality, family of origin, culture, past relationships, and nervous system patterns. One partner may process externally by talking things through, while the other needs time and space to reflect before responding.

Differences can also show up in tone, pacing, emotional expressiveness, conflict tolerance, or how needs are signaled.

These varied approaches are not signs of incompatibility; they reflect distinct ways of making sense of experience.

When partners recognize and respect these differences, communication becomes less about correcting each other and more about learning how to meet in the middle.

Direct	Assertive	Passive	Indirect
Aggressive	Manipulative	Empathic	Passive-Aggressive
Open & Transparent	Reserved & Subtle	Controlling & Directive	Promoter & Encouraging
Supportive	Relater	Thinker & Analyzer	Surface Level
Deep & Meaningful	Authentic	Socializer	Steamroller

Timing & Delivery

Timing and delivery play a critical role in whether communication builds connection or creates rupture in a relationship. Even well-intended messages can miss the mark if they are delivered when one or both partners are emotionally dysregulated, distracted, or outside their window of tolerance.

Attending to *when* and *how* something is shared increases the likelihood that it will be heard rather than defended against.

- **Synchronous communication:** Real-time conversations such as face-to-face or phone discussions—supports immediacy, emotional attunement, and repair. It allows partners to read tone, body language, and affect, ask clarifying questions, and co-regulate in the moment. This is especially beneficial for emotionally charged topics or moments that require reassurance and connection.
- **Asynchronous communication:** Such as texts, notes, or writing offers space for reflection and regulation. It allows partners to organize their thoughts, reduce reactivity, and communicate more intentionally. This approach can be especially helpful when emotions are high, when partners process differently, or when timing does not allow for a productive live conversation.

Healthy relationships often benefit from using both strategies intentionally choosing synchronous communication for connection and repair, and asynchronous communication for clarity and regulation.

Together, they support understanding, reduce miscommunication, and honor each partner's capacity and needs in the moment.

Implementing structure and process in a relationship creates intentional space for meaningful conversations, rather than letting interactions default to transactional exchanges focused only on logistics, chores, or surface-level topics.

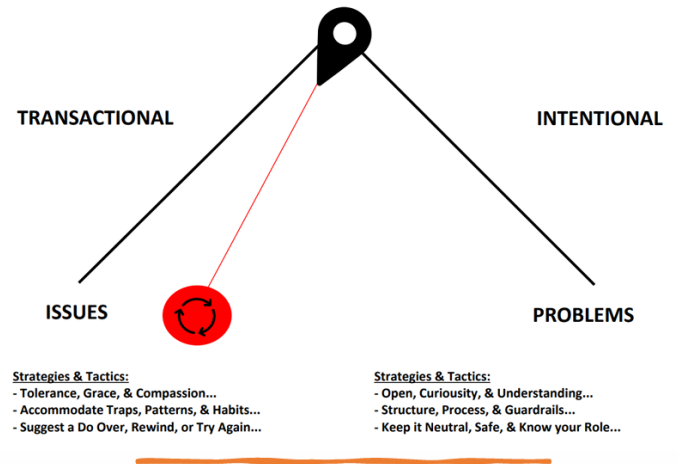
Intentional structure such as scheduled check-ins, agreed-upon conversation frameworks, or mindful pauses signals to both partners that their thoughts, feelings, and needs matter.

Transactional Conversations:

- Focus on tasks or logistics.
- Brief, reactive, and surface-level.
- Emotional needs often unmet.

Intentional Conversations:

- Focus on feelings, needs, and understanding.
- Thoughtful, reflective, and empathetic.
- Strengthens connection and trust.



This approach helps prevent misunderstandings, emotional buildup, and the feeling of being unheard. By contrast, transactional conversations can reinforce distance, create assumptions, and leave emotional needs unmet.

A deliberate process encourages active listening, curiosity, and emotional attunement, allowing partners to engage with one another thoughtfully, co-regulate, and collaboratively problem-solve.

Over time, this cultivates a deeper sense of safety, connection, and relational resilience.

Words Matter

Selecting healthy words and language in a relationship creates a foundation of safety and trust, making it easier for partners to feel heard and understood rather than judged or blamed. Thoughtful language helps reduce defensiveness, clarifies intentions, and fosters emotional connection, even during conflict or challenging conversations.

Practicing Nonviolent Communication (NVC) enhances this by encouraging partners to focus on observations, feelings, needs, and requests rather than evaluations or criticisms. NVC promotes empathy, reduces misunderstandings, and allows each partner to express themselves authentically while remaining attuned to the other.

Over time, this approach strengthens mutual respect, deepens emotional intimacy, and supports collaborative problem-solving rather than escalation.

WARNING LABEL: JUNK FOOD

INGREDIENTS: *CRITICISM, CONTEMPT, BLAME, DEFENSIVENESS, ESTRANGEMENT, RETALIATION, UNFORGIVING, ANGER, NEGATIVITY, LABELING, CATASTROPHISING, DISCOUNTING, GENERALIZING, MIND READING, PREDICTING, SECRETS, IGNORING, AVOIDING, FRUSTRATION, DISTANT, BITTER, JEALOUS, ANNOYED, ETC..*

Practicing **Neutral Language** supports healthy communication by reducing defensiveness and creating space for understanding rather than reaction.

When partners use neutral language, they focus on observations instead of accusations, impact instead of intent, and curiosity instead of conclusions. This keeps conversations grounded in the present moment and signals emotional safety, making it easier for both people to stay regulated and engaged.

How neutral language helps:

- Lowers threat and defensiveness: Describing what is happening without blame prevents the listener from feeling attacked.
- Keeps the focus on behavior, not character: It separates *what someone did* from *who they are*, preserving respect and dignity.
- Invites dialogue rather than debate: Neutral phrasing opens the door to clarification and collaboration instead of escalation.

- Supports emotional regulation: Calm, measured language helps both partners stay within a workable emotional range.

Examples of neutral language:

- Junk Food: "You never listen to me."
 - **Neutral:** "I don't feel heard right now."
- Junk Food: "You're being selfish."
 - **Neutral:** "I'm noticing I need more support in this moment."
- Junk Food: "Why do you always do this?"
 - **Neutral:** "Can we talk about what's happening for us here?"

Over time, consistent use of neutral language builds trust, safety, and mutual respect, allowing couples to address difficult topics without damaging the relationship. It shifts communication from winning a point to understanding each other, which is the foundation of long-term relational health.

Know Your Role

Understanding the role you tend to assume in communication such as fixer, avoider, pleaser, or protector helps interrupt unproductive, habitual patterns that can limit connection. When these roles run automatically, partners often feel misunderstood or unseen, even when intentions are good.

By becoming aware of your default role, you create space to pause, regulate, and choose a response that better matches what the moment and your partner actually need. This shift from reacting out of habit to showing up with presence and intention allows communication to be more attuned, flexible, and responsive supporting deeper understanding, trust, and emotional safety in the relationship.

- **Speaker vs. Listener:**

SPEAKER: Share YOUR Experience and Perspective, Be Specific to Your Wants/Needs, Avoid Generalizing, Steer Clear of Character Driven Statements, Adjust Your Tone - Cadence - Body Language, Focus on Safety & Arousal 1st - Solutions 2nd, and Remember - Your Words Matter...

LISTENER: Know Your Role, What Are You Listening For, Seek To Understand, Be Curious by Probing and Clarifying, Reciprocate to the Speaker Through - Paraphrasing, Validating, Reflecting, Summarize, and Practice the "Magic Words" - *I Wonder, I Notice, I'm Curious, Tell Me More, Help Me Understand, Clarify for Me...*

Frequency Mismatch

A frequency mismatch in communication happens when partners are not aligned in *how often*, *how intensely*, or *in what way* they show up for one another often because they are unaware of their own role or their partner's needs.

When one partner pursues emotional connection while the other withdraws, attempts to fix through practical solutions, minimizes conversations as transactions, or delays to avoid intentional discussions, both can feel unseen or unsafe. Over time, this misalignment can solidify into unhealthy patterns such as pursue-withdraw cycles, chronic defensiveness, emotional shutdown, or resentment.

Without understanding roles and communication needs, partners may interpret differences as lack of care rather than difference in wiring or capacity.

Clarifying roles and adjusting how and when each partner engages helps restore attunement, reduce reactivity, and prevent the relationship from getting stuck in repetitive, unproductive loops.



FREQUENCY MIS-MATCH

Transparency

Transparency is critical because it bridges the gap between internal experience (ME) to shared understanding (WE). When partners are open and clear about their feelings, thoughts, and needs, it allows the other person to truly **see and hear them** - not just guess or assume.

Transparency makes vulnerability safer, turning vague signals into honest expression. This clarity helps partners recognize what it looks and feels like **to be acknowledged, valued, and understood**, while also making it easier to express **wants and needs** without confusion.

Transparency looks like both partners openly sharing what they truly want, need, and feel in a way each partner can clearly understand.

It's like translating a foreign language, although the language is your inner experience translated into words and actions that bridge the gap between your reality and your partner's understanding.

Instead of leaving your partner to guess or assuming they know - offer clarity: "This is what I need to feel supported – this is what it looks like..." or "This is what matters most to me right now and this is how you can show up for me."

- **For the listener**, it becomes a roadmap. The transparency reduces confusion, offers clarity, and makes it easier to determine "if" they can show up.
- **For the speaker**, it can feel empowering knowing your voice has been heard and what you ask for is understood and can be acted upon.

FACT: YES, you do have to ask for what you want and express to others what you need.

"Transparency is giving your partner the recipe instead of expecting them to guess the ingredients."

Needs & Requests

Needs are an important part of understanding **ME**, but they become useful within the relationship when they can be translated into the **WE**. We often communicate the surface-level frustration "*You never spend time with me,*" "*I need you to communicate more,*" or "*I need more affection*" without identifying what is underneath it.

The deeper need may be connection, reassurance, acknowledgment, autonomy, affection, predictability, emotional safety, or simply time to regulate. Understanding the underlying need creates more possibilities for meeting it and helps partners distinguish between something that would be *nice* and the "**minimum dose**" needed to remain healthy and nourished within the relationship.

Once the need is understood, **translate it into a request**. A useful progression is **FEELING → NEED → REQUEST**. "*I've been feeling disconnected → I need some intentional time with you → Would you be open to taking a walk together after dinner tonight without our phones?*"

A clear request gives the other partner something understandable and actionable rather than requiring them to guess what "*connect more,*" "*care more,*" or "*support me*" means. Transparency becomes especially important here: **give your partner the recipe instead of expecting them to guess the ingredients**.

Healthy requests are also **requests not demands**. Communicating what you need does not guarantee that your partner can or will meet every need in exactly the way requested. Instead, it gives the **US** something concrete to work with: *What do I need? What do you need? What can each of us realistically provide? What might need to look different? And what can we intentionally build into our system so both partners receive enough of what matters?*

The objective is not perfect need fulfillment; it is greater **clarity, transparency, collaboration, and responsiveness** between partners.

Process vs Content

In healthy couple communication, balance comes from attending to **both the process and the content** each serving a distinct but complementary role.

- **Process (the *what* and *how*)**

Process refers to *what is happening between partners* and *how the conversation is unfolding*. This includes tone, pacing, emotional regulation, listening, timing, and respect. A strong process creates **psychological safety**, allowing both partners to stay engaged rather than defensive. When the process is healthy, partners feel heard, regulated, and connected—even during disagreement.

- **Content (the *why*)**

Content focuses on *what the conversation is about*—the meaning, motivations, values, needs, and reasons behind thoughts or behaviors. This is where understanding deepens and insight emerges. Exploring the “why” helps partners move beyond surface issues to what truly matters underneath.

The Balance

When couples prioritize **content without process**, conversations can become intense, overwhelming, or conflict-driven. When they focus on **process without content**, interactions may feel calm but avoidant or superficial. Effective communication weaves both together:

- **Process provides the container** that keeps the conversation safe and constructive.
- **Content provides the substance** that allows growth, clarity, and problem-solving.



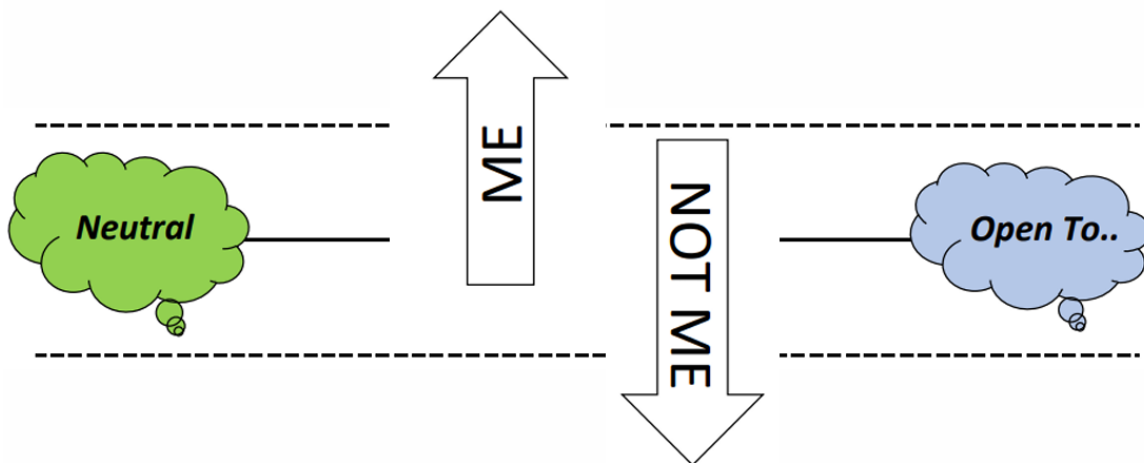
Boundaries

Boundaries create clarity and contribute to safety between partners. By establishing parameters around what each person needs to feel safe, respected, and accepted, boundaries increase transparency, reduce misunderstandings, and help prevent conversations from becoming hurtful or overwhelming.

Boundaries also support self-care and emotion regulation by clarifying what is yours to manage and what is not. This reduces emotional overload, prevents burnout, and allows you to respond rather than react. By protecting time, energy, and emotional capacity, boundaries create the conditions for regulation, self-compassion, and more intentional, value-aligned care for yourself and others.

Boundaries allow each partner to speak openly while feeling secure, and they provide structure helping couples know **when to pause, when to listen, and how to respond** with care.

Transparent boundaries understanding **“ME” versus “NOT ME”** help partners stay connected *without* becoming fused. They allow each person to take responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, while respecting the other’s. This reduces blame and resentment, supports emotional safety, and creates a relationship where closeness is built through **choice and mutual support**, not obligation or over functioning.



When partners can say **“no”, “not right now”, or “give me a minute” and it’s okay**, the relationship becomes safer and more authentic consent, trust, and mutual respect increase, and **“yes”** carries real meaning rather than obligation or resentment.

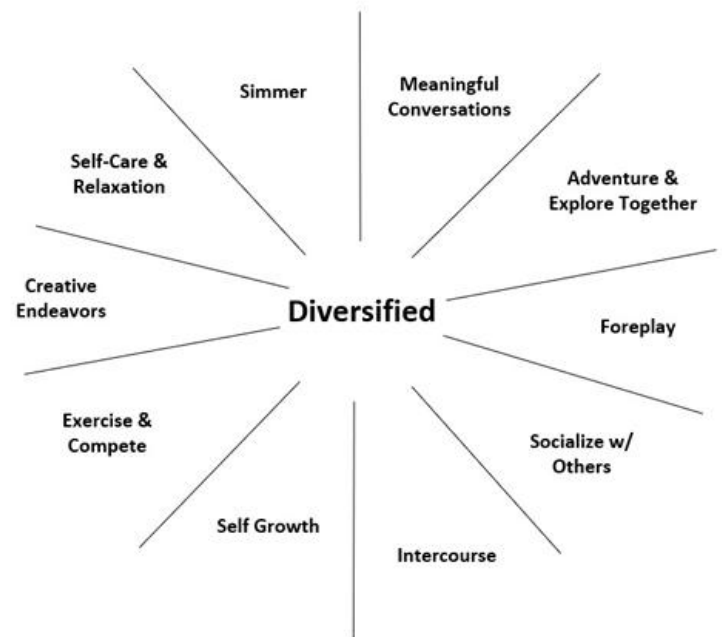
Connection

Diversify

Understanding and diversifying how partners connect strengthens the relationship by expanding the number of pathways each person has to feel seen, valued, and emotionally nourished.

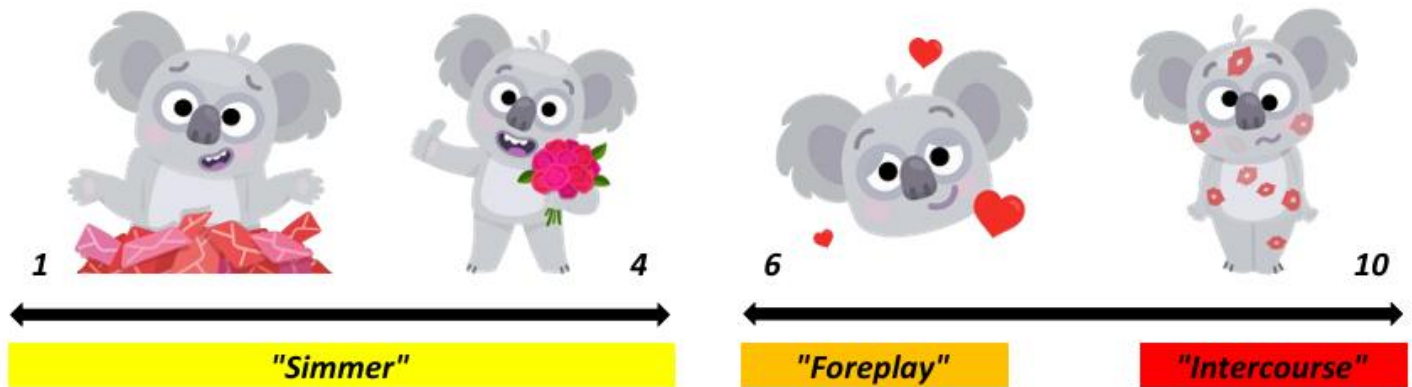
When couples learn the different ways, they each give and receive connection through conversation, shared activities, physical affection, humor, support, or quiet presence they reduce misunderstandings and increase the likelihood that connection “lands” for both partners.

Diversifying connection also builds resilience: if one form of closeness is limited by stress, time, or individual differences, partners still have multiple ways to stay bonded. Ultimately, it helps intimacy across the changing seasons of the relationship.



In a relationship how couples connect exist on a dynamic spectrum that spans **simmering, foreplay, and sex**, each stage playing a distinct role in connection and intimacy.

- **Simmering** includes subtle, everyday expressions of attraction flirting, affectionate touch, playful banter, or suggestive glances that maintain ongoing sexual and emotional tension.
- **Foreplay** builds on this by intentionally creating anticipation, arousal, and focused attention on one another, deepening both physical and emotional intimacy.
- **Sex** is the culmination of desire, offering intense physical connection, emotional release, and hormonal bonding, particularly through oxytocin.



Recognizing connection as a spectrum helps couples see intimacy not as a single act but as a continuum, where small gestures, anticipation, and shared pleasure all contribute to sustaining passion and closeness over time.

Understanding

Each partner connects differently and building insight allows couples to meet one another in ways that feel meaningful, not just familiar. While frameworks like **love languages** offer a helpful starting point highlighting preferences such as words, touch, quality time, acts of service, and gifts.

Connection rituals (from couples therapy approaches like Gottman Method and EFT) highlight the small, repeated behaviors that strengthen bonds over time. **Communication preferences**—such as whether a partner connects through conversation, shared activity, humor, or quiet presence—further shape how intimacy is experienced.

Evidence-based relationship strategies that add deeper layers. Tools from **attachment theory** help partners recognize what creates emotional safety; **emotion coaching** clarifies how to respond to one another’s feelings with attunement; and **curiosity-based communication** (e.g., open-ended questions, reflective listening) reveals what truly fosters closeness for each person.

When partners understand their unique pathways to connection, they reduce misinterpretations, strengthen empathy, and create a relationship where both feel genuinely understood and consistently nurtured.

Emotional	Physical	Intellectual	Spiritual
Experiential	Playful	Familial	Romantic
Companionship	Passionate	Practical	Self-Love
Friendship	Altruistic	Infatuation	Unrequited

Evolution

Connection and intimacy naturally evolve over time, shifting from the early intensity of new love to a deeper, steadier form of bonding. In the beginning, couples often experience **“A-love” (deficiency-based love)** a connection fueled by novelty, desire, and the need for closeness and reassurance. As the relationship matures, it can grow into **“B-love” (being-love)**, which is grounded in appreciation, authenticity, and a genuine interest in the partner’s well-being rather than meeting one’s own unmet needs.

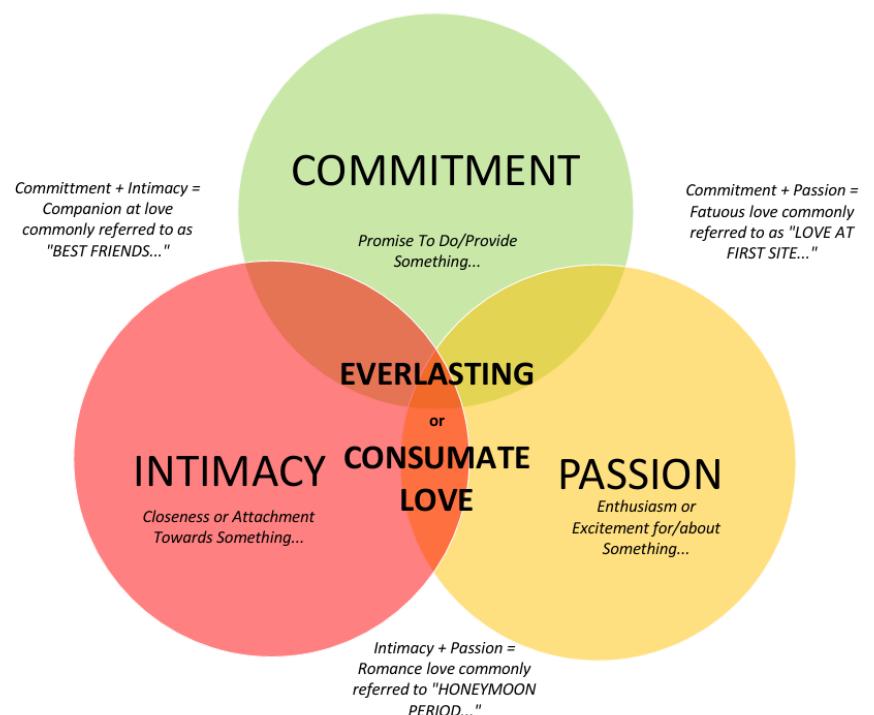
This evolution allows intimacy to become more secure, spacious, and resilient. Partners move from seeking to *get* something from love to actively *sharing* and *creating* it, resulting in a richer connection that is built on trust, understanding, and continued emotional investment over time.

Commitment, passion, and intimacy often described as the three components of Sternberg’s Triangular Theory of Love work together to form **consummate love**, the most complete and enduring form of romantic connection.

- **Intimacy** provides emotional closeness, trust, and the feeling of being deeply known.
- **Passion** brings energy, desire, and a sense of vitality that keeps the relationship exciting and alive.
- **Commitment** offers stability, security, and a shared intention to invest in the relationship over time.

When all three are present and nurtured, partners experience a balanced, resilient form of love that can adapt as they grow.

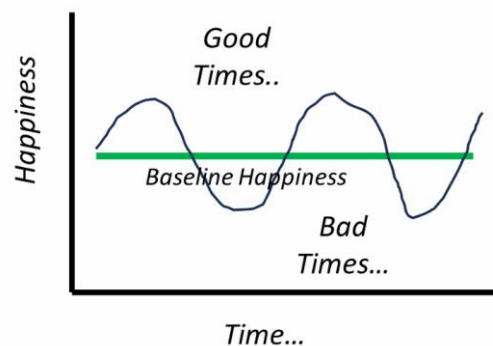
Consummate love lasts not because it is perfect, but because these elements reinforce each other creating a relationship that is emotionally rich, deeply bonded, and sustained by both affection and choice.



Connection Changes

Early intensity naturally changes. Novelty decreases. Familiarity increases. **Change does not necessarily mean the relationship is losing connection; it often means connection needs to be cultivated differently.** Attraction, intimacy, and closeness typically require greater intentionality as relationships mature.

- **Limerence** the intense, obsessive infatuation common early in connection can create excitement but may blur perception, making partners idealize one another or overlook incompatibility.
 - Link: [Love or Limerence](#)
- **Habituation/Adaptation**, which naturally occurs in long-term relationships, reduces the initial dopamine-driven spark as partners become accustomed to one another. While habituation is normal, if not managed intentionally, it can create emotional distance or a sense of monotony.



Together, these dynamics highlight the importance of awareness and intentional connection to maintain emotional closeness, reciprocity, and a realistic, grounded understanding of one another over time.

Scarcity & Abundance

The concepts of **scarcity** and **abundance** influence how partners interpret connection and respond to each other.

A **scarcity mindset** in a relationship believing there isn't enough love, attention, time, or emotional availability can heighten anxiety, comparison, and defensiveness, often leading partners to withdraw or compete for reassurance.

- **Build predictable connection rituals.** Daily or weekly touchpoints such as check-ins, shared meals, or short moments of affection create reliability and counter the fear that connection is limited or inconsistent.
- **Strengthen emotional transparency.** Sharing needs, worries, and internal experiences openly reduces assumptions and helps partners see that their concerns are welcome rather than burdensome.

- **Practice reassurance without over functioning.** Offering genuine reassurance (“I’m here,” “We’re okay,” “Your needs matter”) helps calm scarcity-driven fears, while still encouraging healthy independence.
- **Recognize and interrupt comparison.** Scarcity is often fueled by comparing your relationship to others or to an idealized past. Re-centering on what is working now helps ground the relationship in the present.
- **Expand the “connection menu.”** Identify multiple ways to give and receive closeness—conversation, touch, shared activity, appreciation so partners don’t rely on only one pathway to feel secure.
- **Challenge mindset.** Use cognitive reframing to question all-or-nothing beliefs (“If they’re busy today, it means they don’t care”). Replacing them with more flexible interpretations reduces emotional intensity.
- **Reinforce an abundance perspective.** Actively notice and name moments of care, support, and positivity. This trains the brain toward recognition of connection rather than scarcity.
- **Diversify self-nourishing practices.** When individuals meet some of their emotional needs through friendships, hobbies, and personal grounding practices, they rely less on the relationship to fill every gap.
- **Cultivate trust through follow-through.** Consistency in small actions keeping promises, being on time, responding when needed gradually shifts the nervous system from vigilance to safety.

In contrast, an **abundance mindset** assumes that connection is expandable: affection, appreciation, and emotional resources can grow through intentional effort. This perspective fosters generosity, patience, and openness, making it easier for partners to give and receive love without fear. When couples shift from scarcity to abundance, connection typically becomes more secure, collaborative, and nourishing for both partners.

- **Gratitude** - Practicing gratitude in a relationship helps shift attention from what is missing to what is already present and working, which directly supports an abundance mindset.

When partners intentionally notice and name the small efforts, strengths, and positive moments they experience with each other, they reinforce a sense of emotional richness rather than scarcity. Gratitude also increases feelings of connection, generosity, and mutual appreciation creating a positive feedback loop where both partners feel valued and more willing to contribute to the relationship.

Over time, this consistent recognition of “what we have” fosters greater security, satisfaction, and a shared belief that love, and connection can continue to grow.

Want You vs. Need You

In relationships, connection can take different forms, ranging from unhealthy to healthy patterns. A balance between scarcity and abundance is ideal although, at times, the scales can tip in one direction more than the other creating unhealthy patterns of codependence and/or enmeshment.

- **Codependence** occurs when one partner's sense of self-worth and identity is overly tied to meeting the other's needs, creating imbalance and over-reliance while making boundaries difficult to maintain.
- **Enmeshment** involves blurred boundaries, where partners' emotions, decisions, and identities become overly intertwined, limiting individual autonomy and personal growth.

In contrast, **interdependence** represents a healthy connection, in which partners support and rely on each other while maintaining their individuality. This balanced approach respects boundaries, encourages mutual growth, and fosters trust, shared responsibility, and sustainable closeness.

- **Maintain Identity.** Encourage each partner to pursue personal interests, hobbies, and goals outside the relationship, fostering self-awareness and confidence.
- **Respect Boundaries.** Clearly communicate emotional, physical, and time boundaries, and honor each other's need for space and autonomy.
- **Mutual Support.** Provide emotional, practical, and moral support without taking over the other person's responsibilities or decisions.
- **Open Communication.** Share thoughts, feelings, and needs honestly, while also actively listening and validating your partner's perspective.
- **Shared Decision-Making.** Collaborate on important choices, balancing each partner's preferences and perspectives rather than relying on one dominant voice.
- **Self-Regulation.** Manage your own emotions and reactions before expecting your partner to respond, which reduces dependency and promotes emotional stability.
- **Celebrate Together.** Acknowledge and support each other's personal achievements and development while also nurturing shared goals and experiences.
- **Conflict as a Growth Mindset.** Approach disagreements constructively, focusing on understanding and problem-solving rather than control or blame.

Deposits

Healthy relationships are strengthened not only by how partners navigate problems, but also by how intentionally they notice, acknowledge, and reinforce what is going well. Look for effort, growth, follow-through, kindness, support, affection, thoughtfulness, and the small everyday behaviors that can easily go unnoticed.

Be specific when you recognize them: *“I noticed that,” “Thank you for doing that,” “I appreciated how you handled that,”* or simply, *“That mattered to me.”* This is the practice of catching each other doing it right.

These moments become deposits into the relationship's “Penny Jar.” A thoughtful text, encouragement, affection, gratitude, keeping a commitment, celebrating an accomplishment, offering support, creating time together, or acknowledging effort may seem small in isolation, but repeated deposits accumulate. Over time, they build a reservoir of goodwill, trust, warmth, appreciation, and emotional safety that the relationship can draw upon when stress, conflict, or disappointment inevitably occurs.

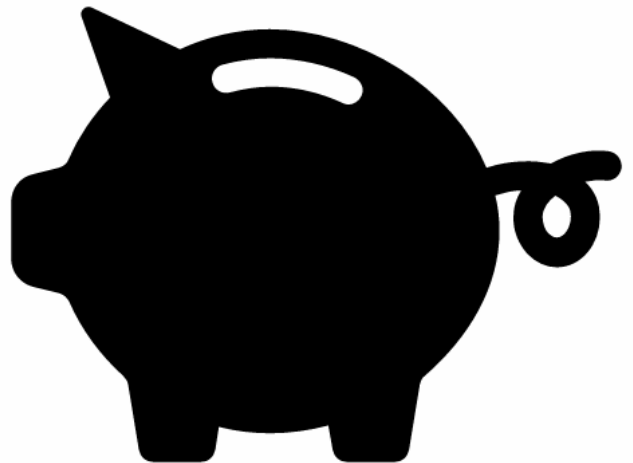
Reinforcement also influences what happens next.

When effort is noticed and appreciated, partners are more likely to continue investing in the behaviors that support the relationship, creating a positive feedback loop:

EFFORT → ACKNOWLEDGMENT → MOTIVATION → MORE EFFORT

The goal is not constant praise or ignoring what needs improvement. It is creating a more balanced relational lens one that notices what is working as intentionally as what is not. Relationships become stronger when partners know that their contributions are seen, their efforts matter, and the things they do to support the US do not disappear unnoticed.

Make deposits. Catch each other doing it right. Reinforce what you want more of.



Play

Play is an important part of a healthy relationship because it gives couples opportunities to experience one another outside the demands of work, parenting, responsibilities, and problem-solving. Play creates space for curiosity, laughter, novelty, movement, creativity, affection, and shared experiences all of which can strengthen connection and help keep the relationship well-resourced. Importantly, people do not all play the same way.

One partner may experience play through competition or physical activity, while another may prefer humor, exploration, creativity, storytelling, social experiences, or simply trying something new. Understanding your own **play style (ME)** and becoming curious about your partner's **play style (WE)** helps reduce the assumption that fun or connection must look the same for both people.

The goal is not for one partner to adopt the other person's style of play, but to intentionally build a shared culture of play within **US**. This may mean taking turns entering each other's world, finding activities that overlap, and experimenting with new experiences until the couple develops forms of play that feel uniquely theirs.

When couples intentionally create room for humor, novelty, shared activities, and play, they develop additional pathways for connection and create positive experiences that can help the relationship remain resilient when life becomes stressful. In this way, play becomes more than entertainment, it becomes part of the ongoing maintenance and identity of the relationship:



“We can have fun together. We can explore together. We can enjoy each other.”

Self-Care

Self-Full

Self-care is not simply about escaping stress or occasionally doing something enjoyable. It is a layered approach to becoming self-full. Intentionally maintaining enough physical, emotional, cognitive, relational, and personal resources to show up well in your life and relationships.

When we continually give from an under-resourced state, we become more vulnerable to fatigue, irritability, emotional dysregulation, resentment, and burnout. Effective self-care helps manage the cumulative load placed on the body and mind while increasing our capacity to regulate, think clearly, communicate effectively, and remain emotionally available to others.

Being self-full also means recognizing that maintaining a healthy ME strengthens the WE and ultimately the US. This can include adequate sleep, exercise and movement, nutritious food, time alone, friendships, hobbies, therapy, reflection, spiritual practices, creative outlets, planned decompression after work, or simply protecting time to do something personally restorative.

Maintaining autonomy such as seeing friends independently, pursuing interests, or having space to reset is not a withdrawal from the relationship; it can help each partner return with greater energy and capacity for connection. Strong relationship systems are supported when both people maintain their own resources rather than expecting the relationship to provide everything they need.

The question shifts from “Have I earned time for myself?” to “What do I need to remain sufficiently full so I can continue showing up as the person and partner I want to be?”



Self-Achievement Activities

Self-achievement activities are small, self-directed actions that create a sense of accomplishment, competence, order, or forward movement even when no one else notices them. They might include making the bed, cleaning the kitchen, organizing a workspace, completing a workout, finishing a small project, tending a garden, practicing a skill, or following through on a personal routine.

What matters is not the size of the accomplishment, but the internal message it reinforces: **“I can act, I can influence my environment, and I can follow through for myself.”**

These quiet wins can strengthen autonomy, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and emotional grounding while reducing stress and helping reinforce a healthy sense of identity.

As a form of self-care, self-achievement is especially valuable because care does not always have to mean rest or comfort. Sometimes what helps us feel more **self-full** is experiencing capability, progress, or mastery.

Developing a variety of these activities gives us more places to experience competence when another area of life is not going well. A difficult day at work, conflict in a relationship, or disappointment in one domain does not have to define the whole self when we can still recognize, **“I struggled there, but I am still capable here.”** Over time, these repeated experiences of effort and follow-through can create a more durable sense of self and reinforce the belief that our actions can influence what happens next.

Transitions

Our attention and focus are constantly under pressure from competing priorities and interests, which can affect our ability to mentally, physically, and emotionally transition between roles and activities.

Understanding how we transition to/from common roles such as work to home or activity to activity are important for effective communication because they allow individuals to shift their mindset, regulate emotions, and reset their attention before engaging with others.

Without this awareness and attunement to oneself regarding what we need – such as a moment to pause, an activity to metabolize stress, a change of place to mitigate distractions, or what to do with leftover energy from the previous activity we can be vulnerable to those variables spilling over into conversations, making it harder to listen or respond thoughtfully, etc.

Often, we default to “old ways” of doing things to get through the moment. Aka – “junk food habits.”

Creating intentional transitions - such as taking a moment to check-in with oneself, conducting a body scan, taking a few deep breaths, writing down what we need to do, taking a short walk, or taking a simple moment of silence can contribute towards being more present and grounded for that next role.

This readiness supports deeper awareness and more intentionality in providing ourselves with the time to transition and have the capacity to show up for self and others.



Emotions

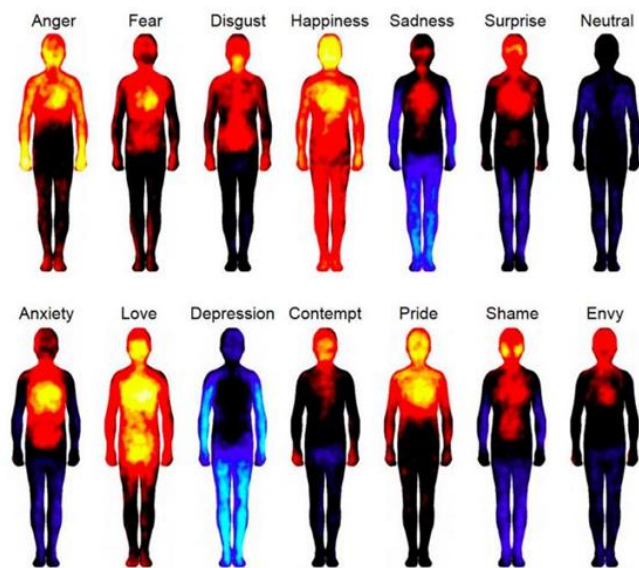
The F-Word

Feelings the dreaded “**F-word**” are not simply things we have to tolerate or get rid of. They provide information about how we are experiencing ourselves, another person, and the world around us. Becoming more emotionally aware means expanding our vocabulary beyond broad labels such as *good*, *bad*, *fine*, *angry*, or *stressed*, and learning to notice **what we are feeling, when it shows up, what activates it, and what it may be communicating**.

That is important **ME work**. When we can recognize our own emotional signals, triggers, sensitivities, and nervous-system responses, we have more opportunity to regulate and communicate rather than unknowingly allowing those feelings to drive our behavior. Emotions often show up in the body before we have fully made sense of them, making awareness of tension, agitation, breathing, energy, or overwhelm another useful early-warning system.

But emotions do not remain within **ME**. They enter the **WE**. How one partner feels influences tone, communication, closeness, withdrawal, defensiveness, reassurance seeking, problem-solving, and ultimately how the other partner responds.

One person may move toward connection when distressed while the other needs space; one may want feelings acknowledged while the other instinctively moves toward analysis or solutions. Neither response is automatically wrong the interaction between them is what can create a vulnerable pattern in the relationship.



Understanding the **F-word** therefore becomes essential relationship work:

ME asks, “What am I feeling and what do I need?”

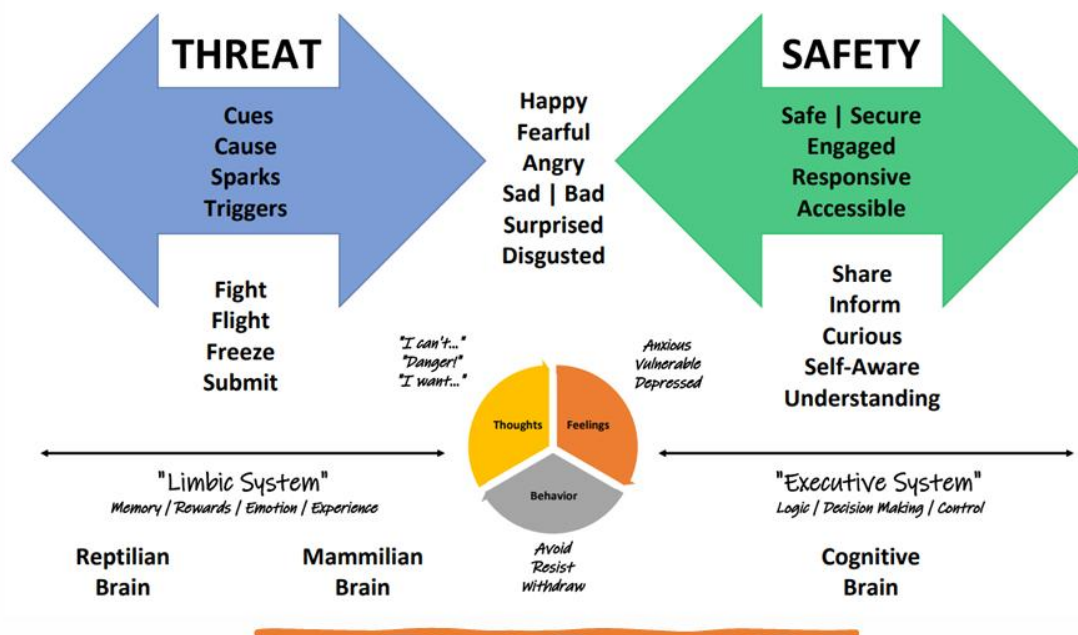
WE asks, “What are you experiencing, and how can I understand it?”

When partners can notice, name, communicate, regulate, and ask for support, feelings become information the system can work with rather than forces that quietly run it.

Nervous System

Understanding the nervous system helps us recognize that many relationship reactions occur **before we have fully thought them through**. Stress, conflict, uncertainty, perceived rejection, or feeling overwhelmed can activate fight, flight, freeze, or fawn/submit responses, influencing how we communicate and behave.

One person may become louder, more urgent, or pursue connection, while another becomes quiet, defensive, shuts down, or needs distance. Learning to recognize our own early signals changes in breathing, muscle tension, agitation, heart rate, energy, or the urge to escape or react is important **ME work** because awareness creates an opportunity to regulate before activation begins driving the interaction.



The nervous system also becomes part of the **WE and US** because two nervous systems continually influence one another. A partner's pursuit can intensify another's withdrawal; withdrawal can increase the first partner's urgency, creating a feedback loop neither person intentionally chose.

The goal is not to decide whose response is wrong, but to recognize **where the system becomes vulnerable and what happens when it gets activated**. Couples can then develop guardrails and shared regulation strategies pausing when flooded, communicating the need for space or support, using decompression time, and returning to difficult conversations when both people have greater capacity.

My vs. Our Emotions

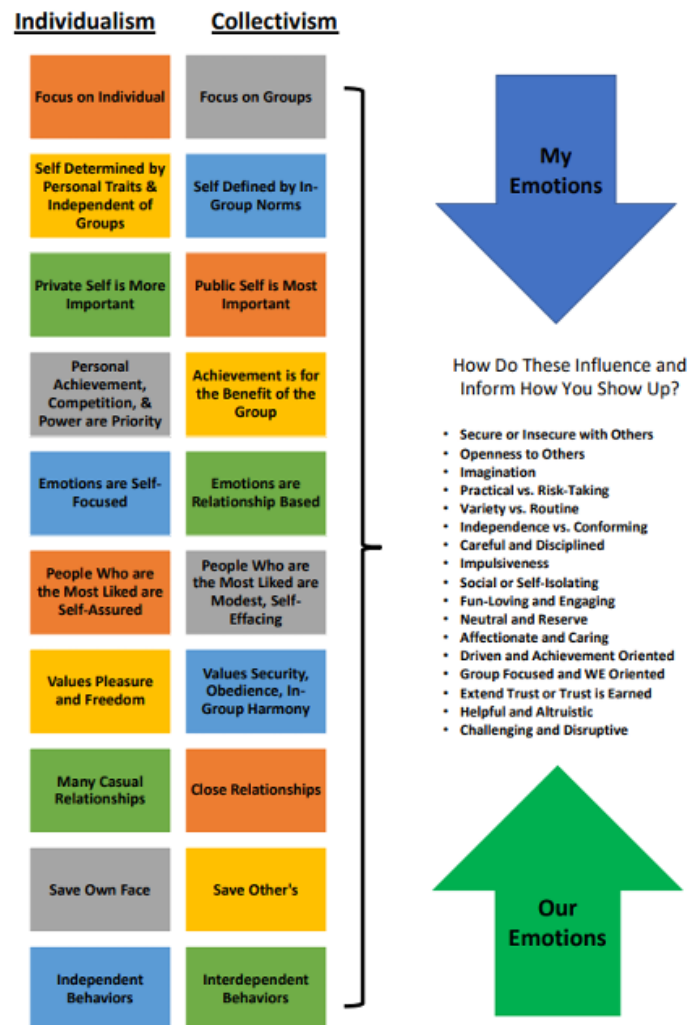
An important duality within relationships is learning to hold both **“MY emotions”** and **“OUR emotions.”** A more individualistic orientation common in Western cultures tends to view emotions as personal experiences: *These are my feelings, I am responsible for understanding and managing them, and my partner is not responsible for making them go away.*

This perspective can strengthen autonomy, self-awareness, emotional responsibility, and healthy boundaries. A more collectivistic orientation emphasizes that emotions also exist within relationships and communities: *How I feel affects you, how you feel affects me, and what happens between us influences both of our emotional experiences.* From this perspective, emotions are not merely private internal events; they are also social and relational processes.

Healthy relationships benefit from holding **both truths at the same time** rather than choosing one over the other. **ME** means developing awareness of my emotions, triggers, needs, regulation, and responsibility for how I respond. **WE** recognizes that once we are in relationship, our nervous systems, behaviors, communication, and emotions continually influence one another.

Too much emphasis on *MY emotions* can become *“Those are your feelings deal with them,”* while too much emphasis on *OUR emotions* can create over-responsibility for a partner’s emotional state or the expectation that harmony must always be maintained. The opportunity is to develop an emotional culture within the **US** that allows for both autonomy and interdependence:

“My feelings belong to me and I am responsible for them and because we are connected, they also matter to us.”



Maintenance

Relationship Check-In

Relationships require **maintenance, not just repair**. It is easy for couples to pay attention to the relationship when something is wrong while overlooking the importance of checking the system when things are going well. Stress, parenting, work, health, finances, intimacy, and life transitions continually change what each partner brings into the relationship.

A regular check-in creates intentional space to notice those changes before small vulnerabilities become larger problems.

The goal is not to constantly evaluate the relationship, but to periodically ask:

- **How am I doing?**
- **How are you doing?**
- **How are we doing?**

Returning to the relationship periodically to identify what is working, where the system is vulnerable, what may be scarce or excessive, what each person needs, and what may need repair or additional practice enables the relationship to address issues before they become problematic.

Use the **ME | WE | US** framework to guide the conversation.

- **ME:** *How am I doing, and what am I bringing into the system right now?*
- **WE:** *How are you doing, and is there anything I need to better understand or support?*
- **US:** *How are we doing together?*

Explore together what is working that we want to keep doing? Where are we feeling vulnerable, disconnected, or under-resourced? What do we need more of or less of? Is there anything that needs attention, repair, or a new agreement?

The check-in should not become another place to inventory failures. It is equally important to identify strengths, acknowledge effort, maintain connection, and intentionally continue the behaviors that are working. Regular deposits of affection, play, gratitude, encouragement, quality time, shared experiences, and consistent follow-through help keep the system well-resourced and build trust, warmth, and resilience over time.

The objective is simple: **Don't wait until the relationship needs repair to pay attention to it.**

Maintain the system while it is healthy and reflecting the **Mission Statement**.