GREAT RELATIONS

THERAPY PACKAGE

RESTORE CONTACT



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INTRODUCTION

Restore Contact

With the therapy package, you gain access to a selection of conversation exercises, reflection tools, fun activities, and games that you can offer your clients to use between your therapy sessions.

This will enable more effective therapy, allowing you to work more deeply because reflection will take place that supports your work and allows you to guide your client in exploring personal themes at varying paces.

In this way, you contribute to the client gaining a deeper understanding of their own challenges and opportunities when reflection time and dialogue are practiced between sessions.

Your client will have a felt experience that what succeeds in therapy with you can be transferred to succeed at home, even when you are not present.

This package includes:
Restore Contact contains 9 different conversation guides and 2 exercises for couples who have drifted apart or have difficulty engaging in deep conversations and showing interest and commitment to one another. The purpose is to create shared reflection and restore close contact



HOW TO USE THE PACKAGE

Get the most out of each therapy session

Read all the guides first

All exercises, dialogue guides, and games can be used as part of a therapy process. We recommend that you go through all parts of the package yourself as a therapist, so you can determine for each client when the person is ready to take one or more exercises home. Exercises can be used in both individual therapy and couples therapy, but are not suitable for children or teenagers

STEP 1

Give the specific guide to the client as homework. You can either send a screenshot of the digital version, print the entire therapy package, or, for example, set your printer to print only page 5, etc. Go through the exercise with the client so they understand it

1

STEP 2

The client does the exercise at home during the time interval before the next session

2

STEP 3

In the next session, you discuss the insights the client has reached

3

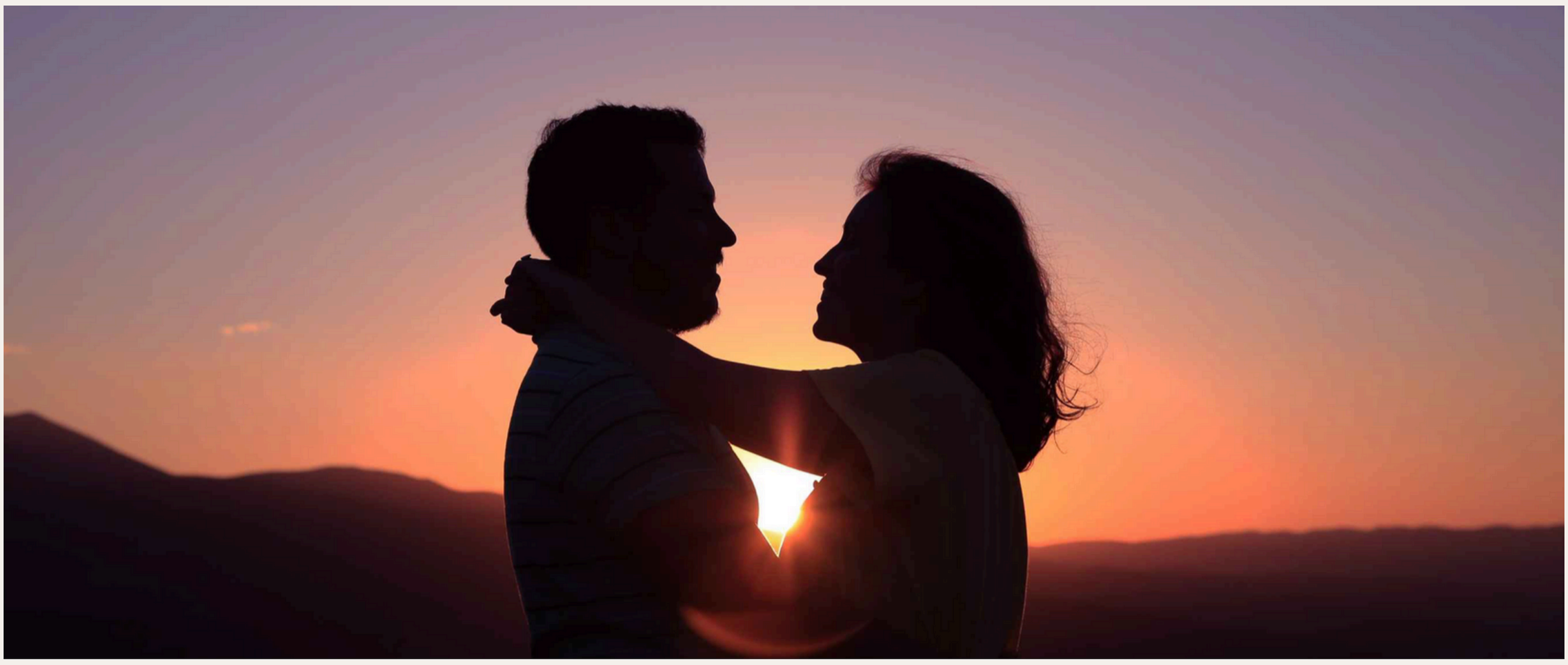
CONVERSATION 1

Conversation: Identify your patterns

It is the 'dance' or the pattern that is the 'enemy' in your relationship and creates distance between you. This means that there is nothing wrong with either of you as individuals or as a couple for that matter.
It is the dynamics that arise between you in specific situations that cause you to feel a loss of emotional contact with each other.

Task:
Try to summarize the pattern that invades your relationship by completing the following sentences. Once you can identify these negative patterns and realize that they trap you both, you are ready to learn how to step out of them.

Share your answers with your partner.
I feel our relationship is most challenged when...
I notice that distance grows between us when...
I realize that what creates the distance between us is...
I can feel that I become angry/sad/lonely when...
I believe things started to go wrong when...



CONVERSATION 2

Conversation: What triggers you?

Can you pinpoint the moment in your current relationship when you suddenly felt out of balance, when a reaction or lack thereof seemed to change your sense of security with your partner, or when you became completely consumed by reacting in ways you knew would pull you into a negative pattern? Perhaps you reacted by becoming angry or numb.

- What happened in the relationship?
- What happens in your body when your own sore spot is hit?
- What does your brain decide all of this means? What do you tell yourself when it happens?
- What did you do then? How did you act?

See if you can tie all these elements together by filling in the blanks in the sentences below.

Task:

- In that situation, what triggered my deeper feeling of...
- On the surface, I probably showed...
- But deep down, I just felt... (sadness, anger, fear, grief, surprise?)
- What I longed for was...
- What I told myself about our relationship, about myself, or my love was...
- What do you think are your partner's sore points?

Imagine sharing your vulnerability with your partner – what is the worst that can happen?

Share your thoughts with each other. In this exercise, it is most important to listen when the other speaks, rather than having a response or comment ready. This conversation is about becoming aware of your own and each other's sore points

CONVERSATION 3

Conversation:
Visit and repair the past

The purpose of looking back on a painful experience is to de-escalate the conflict. This way, you can better understand your reaction patterns and respond more appropriately in future conflicts. Conflicts cannot and should not be avoided. Conflicts are excellent for creating an even closer bond if we know how to navigate through them and use the lessons learned from the conflict effectively.

Testing and Exploration:

- Choose together with your partner a recent frustrating episode (but not one of the worst) from your relationship that occurred within the last two to three weeks.
- Now, create a simple description of what happened, as an observer would have seen it. Hopefully, you can both agree on this description. If not, listen to each other and accept each other's perspectives on the episode, but try to describe it as factually as possible without your individual feelings.
- Now, simply describe the steps you took in this episode.
- Now it’s time to add the feelings you each had and how each of you contributed to creating the emotional reaction in the other.
- What might you have said to each other at the end of the episode if you had been able to stand together and conclude it in a way that would have left you both feeling secure?
- How would that have felt for you?
- What would you have felt for each other and for your relationship?

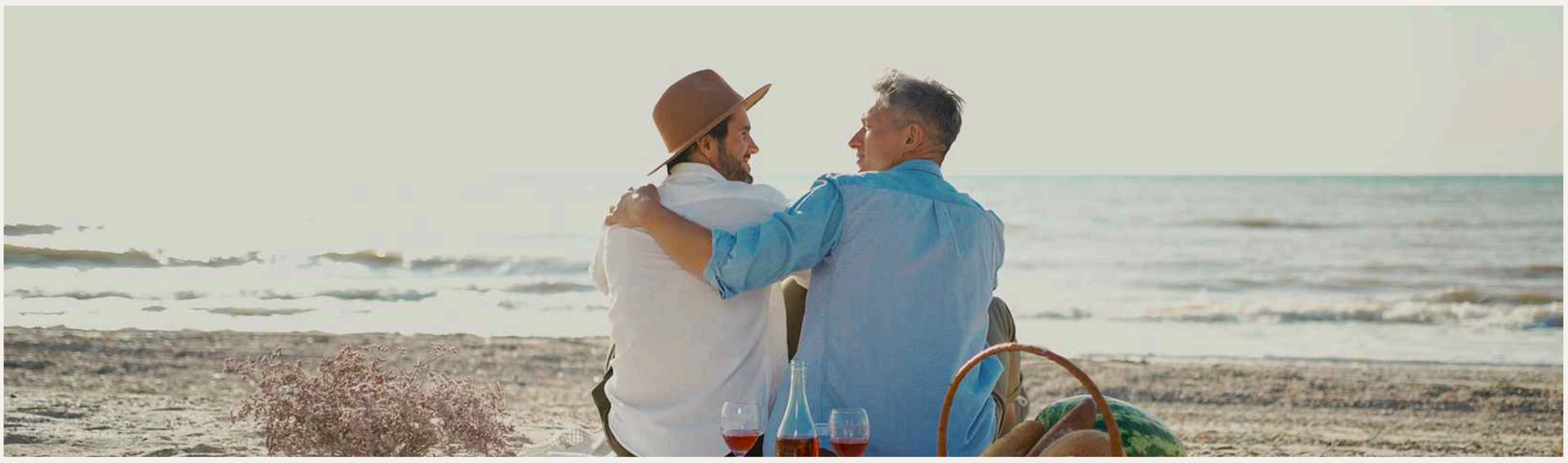
CONVERSATION 4

Conversation: Example of mindful communication

In order to achieve a strong, loving, and healthy relationship, it is not enough to be able to shorten negative patterns and to see and accept each other's vulnerabilities. You must also be able to create positive conversations that develop the ability to be accessible, responsive, and engaged: TRE. But what does that mean? Being TRE means that you become capable of seeing the underlying needs in each other's maladaptive behaviors, showing understanding, and offering your help and care. This way, you become a team in handling difficult emotions.

Task:

Think about what you need most to feel safe and loved. Write it down, and start this conversation with your partner.
If you are the partner who listens first and feel unsure about how to respond, or if you are too nervous to answer, just share that. Being present is the key here, and it is not about responding in a certain way to avoid attack or to please the other. A first positive step is to confirm that you have heard your partner's message and that you appreciate them sharing it with you.
If you need inspiration for how to start your conversation, look at the next page for a list of some of the sentences that couples typically use in this type of conversation



CONVERSATION 5

Conversation: Create intimacy

In the beginning of a romantic relationship, passion arises easily. Almost every word, glance, or touch vibrates with desire. This is nature's way of bringing us together. But once the initial enchanting rush of desire has faded, how much does sex occupy your relationship? Beyond drawing us into the partnership, can sex help us stay together and build a lasting relationship? Absolutely yes. In fact, good sex fosters a strong experience of being connected more closely together.

Task:
Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you generally feel emotionally safe and connected when you have sex? What contributes to that feeling? Or what do you remember once gave you that feeling?
- What are the most important expectations you have for the sexual aspect of your relationship?
- When would you like to be more touched or held? And how?
- What helps you become emotionally and physically ready for sex?
- What excites you the most before and during intimacy?
- What makes sex most satisfying for you?
- When do you feel closest to your partner?

If you can share the above with your partner, that’s great. If not, you might start with a conversation about how difficult it is to share this kind of information. You can begin with a simple question and avoid looking at each other while speaking. This will feel less vulnerable and give you the courage to continue. It’s a good idea to take a walk side by side or lie together in the dark so you don’t have to look each other in the eye while expressing your innermost desires



CONVERSATION 6

Conversation:
4 small exercises with big impact

The following four tasks are questions you can ask yourselves and discuss with each other regularly to ensure you stay on course. With time and practice, it will become natural for you to talk this way, making it a pleasant and informal conversation you have while doing the dishes in the evening, in the car, or during some other time. This way, investing time and energy into your relationship doesn't have to be stiff and formal; it can simply be something you do continuously as a natural part of your everyday life. Perhaps you can set aside time once a month for this type of conversation until it becomes natural for you to do so regularly.

Task 1: Are there currently any warning signs brewing in your relationship, echoes of sore spots or concerns? What would alleviate and calm you, and stop the development of a negative cycle that is brewing? Can you share this with your partner?

Task 2: Can you identify small positive moments in your relationship? They can be very small. They count as long as they touch your heart and bring a smile to your lips. Does your partner also know about these moments? Tell him/her about them.

Task 3: Can you point to a moment in your relationship where it moved to another level, or where you or your partner dared to take the risk and became more open and receptive? How did that happen?

Task 4: What small thing can you do every day that can make your partner feel that you want to be in loving contact with him/her? Ask your partner what impact this would have on your relationship



CONVERSATION 7

Conversation: The hard conversation

PREPARATION AND EXAMPLES

Three-Step Model for Difficult Conversations

It can sometimes be challenging to have vulnerable conversations with the people who mean the most to us. Therefore, we present a three-step model to help you prepare for conversations that may evoke deep emotions.

This method was developed by Vibeke Hartkorn and is taken from her book A Visual Guide to Communication at All Levels – Getting Others to Follow You.

Before the Conversation

- **Provide a Clear Message:** Give a short and precise message about why you need to talk together: What is the topic, how long will it take, and what type of conversation do you want to have?
- **Avoid Soothing Language:** Avoid words like "just," "only," and "maybe" – these are terms we use to reassure others when we know that the content of the conversation may trigger an emotional reaction. However, they can also make the recipient think that it is a less serious conversation, leading to unpleasant surprises.
- **Set a Concrete Framework:** It is more reassuring to have a concrete framework for the content of the conversation. Be careful that this does not become the conversation itself; avoid going into details. Instead, ensure that the invitation is brief, providing just enough information to understand and remember what it's about. Be direct without beating around the bush; do not sugarcoat the purpose. Your partner or other relation should have a real opportunity to mentally prepare for the discussion.

The conversation exercise continues on the next page



CONVERSATION 7

Conversation: The hard conversation

INVITATION AND EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT

Example 1: Romantic Relationship

"Peter, I'd like to talk to you about how we manage the logistics around the kids. My wish is that we can find solutions together for how our cooperation regarding the children can improve. What I hope to achieve is to understand what we each need and to realistically align our expectations of what we can each contribute. Do you agree that it would be beneficial for us to address this so that we can avoid so many arguments? Could we set aside an hour to talk after dinner?"

Example 2: Friendship

"I've been thinking a lot since our conversation in the car yesterday – it affected me deeply. I'd like to share my thoughts with you and hear if we have the same experience and what you think? You are my best friend, so it would mean a lot to me that you hear what I have to say. Would you help me with this? I think it will take a good half hour – maybe less – to reach a shared understanding, and perhaps even a solution to the issues we see differently. When would be the best time for you?"

THE CONVERSATION:

During the conversation, stick to the purpose, time frame, and content you invited to as a starting point for the discussion. On the next page, we will show a method for how to approach the difficult conversation.

The 3 Steps

Now see the model on the next page that explains the three steps that can help you conduct the difficult conversation. Remember, it's about being open without being accusatory. Here's an example of dialogue, but the three steps remain the same.

The conversation exercise continues on the next page

CONVERSATION 7

Conversation:
The hard conversation

SITUATION

First, repeat what you want to talk about. Then, explain how you feel about what has happened between you. Avoid using emotionally loaded language, being judgmental, criticizing, or mentioning what others think about the person. Focus only on your own feelings and experiences

EXPERIENCE

Describe in specific and factual terms how your experience affects you—what you are feeling internally

WISH

Express a wish for how your conversation partner could react differently or change their behavior next time, and explain what that would mean for you. Request a response right now regarding what you have suggested

Situation: Factual Description

What do I see and hear?

"I feel like we don't have contact—it's as if you disappear—when I know something is bothering you or you've had a bad day. You don't say anything to me even though I'm talking to you."

Experience: Exemplifying

How does it affect me?

"I don't feel that you come and share what's happening inside you. This can leave me confused, making me think I've done something wrong. Because you don't tell me what's behind your mood, I find it difficult to know how to best support you. One example is..."

Wish: Concrete and Forward-Looking

What is my wish for you?

"My wish is that you would share how you feel and what you expect from me in that situation. What would it take for that to happen?"

The person responds:

"Just give me half an hour of peace and quiet when I come in the door, and I'll be fine again."

You reply:

"I'm fine with waiting a bit to talk, but can we also agree that you give me a kiss so we have good contact before you retreat into yourself?

CONVERSATION

Conversation: Conversation about the past

Become a Team—Together in Challenges

The journey towards a healthy and strong relationship is about being an equal team when facing challenges: by showing interest, understanding, and supporting each other. You cannot do this unless you understand the baggage each of you has brought into the relationship. This understanding helps you comprehend both your own actions and those of your partner. The sooner you work on becoming a team that values interest and empathy, the more sustainable your relationship will be.

First, here's a question you can ask, but only if you have hurt each other in the past:

- What have I discovered that echoes from the past when I think about how we have interacted?

Or start here:

- An example of something I experience that can trigger issues in our relationship is...
- What do I believe I carry in my baggage that can cause me difficulty in our relationship?
- How did the adults in my upbringing resolve conflicts in their relationships?
- What have I learned about how to repair conflicts in a relationship?
- What can I do that will help you when you feel triggered?

The conversation exercise continues on the next page



CONVERSATION 8

Conversation: Conversation about the future

An Example:

An example of how this type of conversation can be effective—when you dare to open up about the difficult past and find solutions in the present—is a couple that struggled with escalating conflicts.

One partner had been in a very unhappy marriage and continued to react as if the new partner was behaving like the old one. This was far from the truth, but mistrust and fear ran so deep that it unfairly affected the new partner, who was a decent person.
The divorced partner said, “I know it’s not fair to you, but it evidently takes time for me to trust that you mean well. I’m aware that you’re not like my previous partner, but I seem to have difficulty changing my behavior. Then I end up yelling and accusing you. It helps when you take me in your arms, calm me down, ask me to breathe deeply, and say, ‘It’s me who is here with you now, not your ex. Everything is fine; I am right here for you. You are safe now.’”

Helpful reminders for each other before starting the conversation:

- Allow each other to finish speaking. Do not lose patience.
- Avoid interpreting the other person's perspective on what the past means.
- Avoid dismissing the other person's experience of what is happening between you, but instead ask curiously about why and how, so you can gain more insight.
- Be aware that discussing the past can activate difficult emotions. Help each other stay present with those feelings: use gentle touches, physical closeness, deep breathing, or take a walk in fresh air while you talk.
- Repeat the essence of what you hear the other person saying—it calms the other person's nervous system and builds trust that it is safe to open up.

CONVERSATION 9

Conversation: Create new positive patterns

In this conversation, you will work together to set the direction for how you want your relationship to be.

For example, talk to each other about:

- What values are important to us in our relationship?
- What can we do to change the patterns we have?
- How can we bring out the sides of ourselves in the relationship that show vulnerability and our innermost desires?
- How do we define being together as a team?
- How can we support each other if doubt and pain arise again?

The most important thing to remember is to be present when expressing your needs and wishes, and to dare to be honest. When you provide each other with the experience that you can handle the truth and openness while still being there for each other, your nervous systems will relax, and you will find it calm and connecting to have these types of conversations. At first, it may feel artificial, but this will diminish the more you practice it. Eventually, it will feel completely natural to communicate in a way that fosters connection, presence, and acceptance.

On the next page, you will find examples for inspiration regarding the conclusions you can reach in your dialogue about:



CONVERSATION 9

Conversation:
Create new positive patterns

Below is an example for inspiration regarding the conclusions you can reach in your dialogue about:

Our values:

- Loyalty, honesty, community.
- We are loyal to each other by prioritizing one another first.
- We are honest, even when it might hurt.
- We make decisions together and prioritize time spent together.

What can we do?

- We agree on a fixed day each month when the kids are taken care of, or when we won't work late, so we can do something alone together.
- We will address challenges and problems in a constructive manner when they arise and not "sweep them under the rug."
- We can express our opinions without fear of being judged or criticized by the other.

How can we support each other if doubt and pain arise again?

- We agree that you will come home from work if I feel insecure and need you to be here.
- We agree that you can ask me what I need so I can feel that you prioritize my needs, even if you can't always fulfill them.
- We agree to look forward and take joint responsibility for having a healthy relationship.

Remember that it often takes very little to meet your partner's needs

EXERCISE 1

Exercise:
Take a good look

You obviously look at each other every day. But do you truly see each other—really?

This exercise is very simple, yet it can feel overwhelming for some. It simply involves sitting across from each other and maintaining eye contact for two minutes. You may hold each other's hands if you wish.
You might be thinking right now that it seems silly to just sit and stare at each other without saying anything. However, eye contact is incredibly important for us humans to establish bonds of trust. Think about moments when you felt uncertain about someone or a situation—did you look away or seek eye contact? Often, we find it difficult to maintain eye contact if we are unsure about the person we are talking to. Thus, eye contact can be a way to build trust, and we are less likely to become angry with someone we have just shared two minutes of eye contact with.

Some couples begin to cry. Others start to laugh. And then there are those who realize (and are surprised) that they actually find it quite challenging to maintain eye contact with their partner for an extended period. Some feel that it is very powerful to look deeply into each other's eyes, and emotions that have been buried may surface, as you are "forced" to truly see each other.

Talk to each other about what you felt during the two minutes you looked at one another. For example: warmth, joy, sorrow, frustration, love, loneliness, connection, indifference?

EXERCISE 2

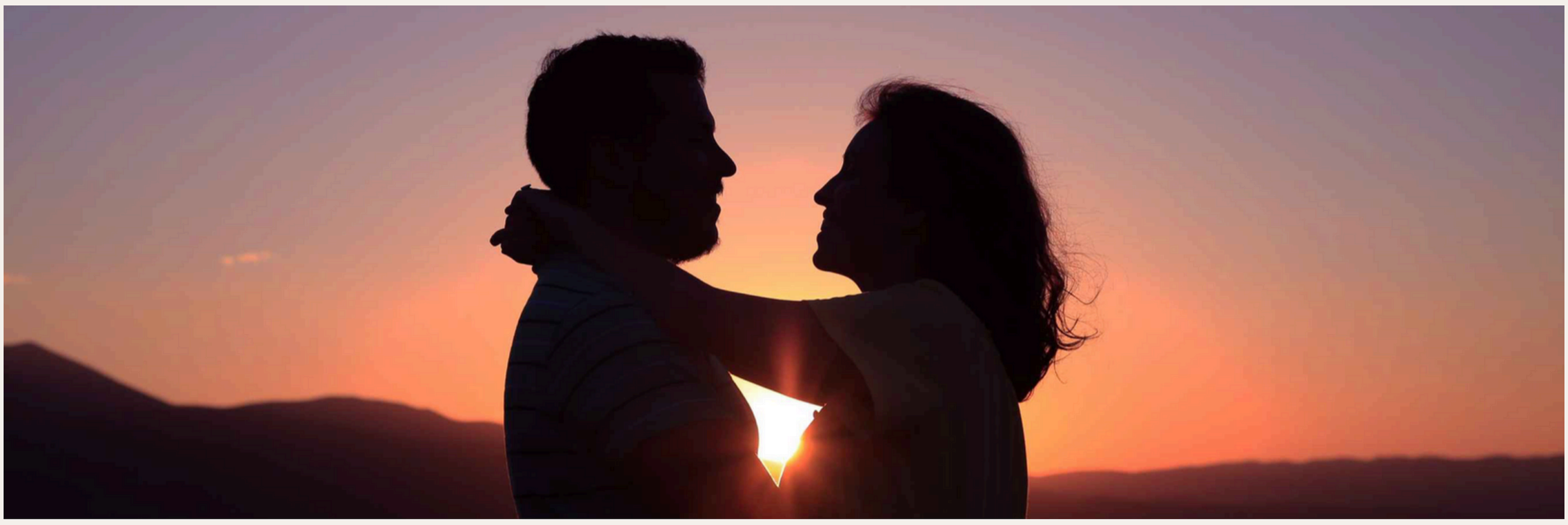
Exercise:
The “shower”

To achieve an emotionally strong connection, it is important that we feel valued and understand what we contribute to the relationship and the family.
In everyday life, we can often leave these sentiments unspoken because we think our partner knows how much they mean to us. Conversely, we may be quick to point out our partner's negative traits and focus on what isn't working. What you focus on will also occupy the most space in your relationship, making it essential to remember to acknowledge one another for the positive experiences as well.

In this exercise, you will take turns showering each other with compliments. You will alternate sitting in the "hot seat" for 2 minutes.

Tell your partner what you believe they excel at, the positive qualities they possess, what they mean to you, and how well they fulfill their roles as a parent, friend, or member of the community. After that, you will switch places.

It may feel awkward at first, and many of us have not learned how to accept praise and simply listen without feeling the need to respond. Nevertheless, try to be present in the moment and make it sincere. It can certainly be fun, and if you feel like finishing the exercise with a literal shower together, that would only be a bonus!



CONCLUSION

Good Luck!

Thank you for your interest in utilizing these communication guides from Great Relations, which we have created for you as a therapist to support your work with your clients. We wish you all the best in conveying them further.

We welcome your feedback, so feel free to share how you have used the package and whether it brings value to you and your clients. We also appreciate constructive criticism.

GREAT RELATIONS

