

The Couples Communication Workbook

Eight simple exercises to feel like a team again

Most couples don't break up over one big fight. They drift, one missed moment at a time. These exercises, inspired by relationship research including the work of the Gottman Institute, help you turn back toward each other in a few minutes a day.

How to use it: start with one or two exercises, not all eight. Expect it to feel awkward at first. That's normal.

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1. The daily stress-reducing conversation

20 minutes a day. Take turns talking about stress from outside the relationship. The listener takes your side, asks questions and gives no advice unless asked.

What stressed me out today:

What helped when my partner listened:

2. Three appreciations

Each evening, tell your partner three specific things you appreciated about them today.

Appreciation 1:

Appreciation 2:

Appreciation 3:

3. Love map questions

Update your knowledge of each other's inner world. Ask and write down the answers.

What is worrying you most right now?

What are you looking forward to this month?

If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?

4. The gentle start-up

Reword a complaint: "I feel [emotion] about [situation], and I need [positive request]."

Complaint as I'd usually say it:

Gentle start-up version:

5. Speaker and listener

Speaker holds an object and talks in short chunks. Listener summarizes without arguing. Swap. Solve only after both feel understood.

Topic:

What I heard my partner say:

6. Taking a break the right way

Agree a break signal. Say when you'll return (at least 20 minutes). Calm down, don't rehearse arguments. Come back on time.

Our break signal:

Things that calm me down:

7. Repair phrases

Agree on phrases you'll both respect mid-argument. Put them on the fridge.

Our repair phrases:

[illegible]

8. Weekly state of the union

Once a week: five appreciations, one issue (speaker/listener), then: "What can I do to make you feel loved this week?" End warmly.

Five things that went well:

Issue we discussed:

What would make you feel loved this week?

A note on safety

These exercises are for relationships where both people feel safe. If you are ever afraid of your partner, please contact a local domestic violence service. For persistent problems, a licensed couples therapist can help. This workbook is general education, not therapy or medical advice.