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?

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_____

_____
_____

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:

_____

_____

_____

_____

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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.