

MARRIAGE PREPARATION

II. SKILLS TRAINING - FOR THOSE PLANNING THEIR OWN COURSE



Introduction

During over thirty years of parish ministry, I prepared numbers of men and women for marriage. I am still in touch with a few of them and rejoice to hear news of their happiness.

But like most vicars, I occasionally received a letter from a firm of solicitors which began, "We are acting for who was married in your church. Please would you kindly send us a certified copy of the entry in the Marriage Register". They never stated the reason for their request but it was invariably divorce proceedings. I had always given couples some marriage preparation, but how I wish now that I had done more, and that materials which have been devised in recent years had been available earlier.

Every couple preparing for marriage will be better prepared if there is skills training in their course. It is valuable however suited they seem, however long and careful their courtship and engagement, and especially if they have been cohabiting. It applies to committed Christians as well as to others, and especially if they are in church leadership, or training for it.

Even though there is not much research yet to demonstrate the value of skills training, what there is has shown that couples who have learned some skills will mostly put them into practice in the early years of their marriage, and they will benefit. As time goes on, they will not go through all stages of the methods learned, but they will use the principles involved to solve their problems.

It would be good if more and more people involved in marriage preparation would use PREPARE or FOCCUS. It takes a few hours to learn to use them, but it is time very well spent. PREPARE has follow-up exercises which include some skills training, but there are things in this paper which are not in PREPARE.

Your Own Course

There are several other marriage preparation courses, some of them are described in the page: "Marriage Preparation I: How it can be done".

However, some marriage preparers like to devise their own course, rather than use someone else's course. This page is particularly for them. Care for Family did a survey in early 1998 which showed that 54% of church marriage preparers surveyed devised their own course.

In the realm of counselling, it is very widely accepted that Christians have things to learn from secular methods. The same can apply in the realm of marriage preparation. Most of the methods in this paper are secular methods.

But first a plea about one secularism that has crept in. If you are going to devise your own course, or revise one, it is better to use the word "fiance(e)", as some courses do, rather than "partner". You will probably have some cohabitees on your courses, but you surely do not wish to convey the impression that you expect everyone to be cohabiting. The use of the word "partner" tends to convey that impression.

In preparation for this resource a number of preparation courses have been studied, and ideas will be shared from some of them.

You may already know that there are similar exercises in courses other than those given here as examples. Examples have not been duplicated here. Appendix 1 gives details of some books and courses. I particularly recommend for the key skills the Couple Alive course, together with its leader's guide; (there is a video as well, but I see that as an optional extra, for £30). However recommendation of this course does not imply endorsement of everything in it. You may find one or two find things in the introduction with which you disagree. Do not be put off by that - the sessions themselves are excellent.

There are comments on some of the other resources in Appendix 1 below.

It would probably not be feasible to put into one course all that is covered below; but it is to be hoped that couples' expectations for marriage preparation will grow over the years to come, so that in twenty years time a three month preparation course will be normal. Even that is a rather short training for a lifelong relationship, but at present course preparers may feel they have to pick out what seems to be most important.

A number of courses at present on offer run to about six sessions, taking e.g. six evenings or two Saturdays. Some churches currently find it difficult to persuade couples who may live some distance away to attend more than one Saturday of marriage preparation. That might be resolved by placing more emphasis on it being preparation for a lifelong partnership, and by pointing out how many marriages begun with confidence nevertheless break down. Alternatively, a second Saturday could be offered as an option, and if couples appreciate the first Saturday they would be likely to come for the second.

Another alternative, if the engaged couple are living with or near each other, is to arrange marriage preparation in a church near them. A list of churches willing to do this is found in the page on Marriage Preparation I.

(If, as some research shows, the effect of marriage preparation wears off after some three to eight years of marriage, that is no reason for omitting it. It shows the need to follow it up with a marriage enhancement course after four or five years of marriage - giving marriage a "service" in that way.)

Other Components

Skills training should not be done in isolation, so before coming to it, here are four other components for a marriage preparation course, whether you are preparing a couple on their own, or several couples together.

- 1) **Icebreakers** - easy and perhaps fun items with which to start sessions, at least for the earlier course sessions. The Couple Alive course listed in Appendix 1 has some good ideas.
- 2) **Bible Studies** - When churches are preparing Christian couples they would do well to include Bible study on marriage in their course. Preparing for Marriage, the Oxford Community Churches course (see Appendix 1) helpfully integrates Bible study into marriage preparation. (This is the second of the two courses listed in Appendix I called Preparing for Marriage. The other is commended below.)
- 3) **Awareness-Raising** - Courses need a good amount of awareness raising. Couples need to become more aware of what values and family background and experiences each of them is bringing into the marriage. They also need to be aware of each other's expectations and hopes for the future, and of what will or may confront them in years to come. Appendix 2 - What a Couple Need to Know About Each Other covers a good deal of the ground, but it is not exhaustive. PREPARE and FOCCUS are excellent tools for helping a couple to get to know each other better.

Appendix 3 is an awareness-raising exercise from The Marriage Book from Holy Trinity Brompton. HTB's Marriage Preparation Course is being used by an increasing number of churches. There is a Leader's guide, Guest (participant) manual, DVDs/Videos of the talks, and a Course Leaders' Toolkit (see Appendix 1).

The course is run like an Alpha course, beginning with a meal and then a talk (live or on screen), but instead of the group work in Alpha couples discuss issues on their own.

Appendix 4 is a list of subjects for a couple to talk to each other about from the Couple Alive course.

Appendix 5 is a helpful list of the stages of adult development from the other course called Preparing for Marriage produced by Catholic Marriage Care. That course suggests that couples should think of events that might happen during these seven different stages of adult development. That is half of one of the nine different presentations in that course, each of which are accompanied by four supporting activities, some of them very helpful but others rather lightweight.

The need for awareness raising is well illustrated by a story from a good book for young people by the author of PREPARE, Building Relationships (Appendix 1 has PREPARE's address).

"Mary was married to a male chauvinist. They both worked full time, but he never did anything around the house and certainly not any housework. That, he declared, was woman's work.

"But one evening Mary arrived home from work to find the children bathed, a load of washing in the washing machine, and another in the dryer, dinner on the stove, and a beautifully set table, complete with flowers.

"She was astonished, and she immediately wanted to know what was going on. It turned out that Charlie, her husband, had read a magazine article that suggested that working wives would be more romantically inclined if they weren't so tired from having to do all the housework in addition to holding down a full-time job.

"The next day, she couldn't wait to tell her friends at the office. "How did it work out?" one of them asked. "Well, it was a great dinner," Mary said. "Charlie even cleaned up, helped the kids with their homework, folded the laundry and put everything away." "But what about afterward?" her friends wanted to know. "It didn't work out," Mary said, "Charlie was too tired." "

That's how one husband became more aware of what life was like for his wife.

- 4) **Concluding Relaxation** - Skills training is demanding. Couple Alive has some good ideas for relaxing conclusions to sessions.

Skills Training

Appendix 6 gives a list of skills training topics, with indication where more can be found on some topics in various books and courses.

This page will expand later on the first, second and third on the list, Communication, Conflict-solving, and Confession and Forgiveness.

Before that it will touch on the other topics on the list briefly.

Men, especially, need encouragement to **express their feelings**. Appendix 7 gives some possible starters for this, which could be done using The Speaker/Listener Technique, which will be described below.

Each marriage preparation could begin with a brief time for a couple to **express their appreciation of each other and to thank each other** for things, with a view to encouraging them to do that every time they meet and then every day in marriage.

Appendix 8 will help a couple to discuss **comforting each other**, when necessary.

Appendix 9 comes from a marriage enhancement course, Keeping Marriages Healthy. This is a very helpful course for married couples. Some of it is relevant to marriage preparation. It goes more deeply into how a couple can **meet each other's needs** than any other course. When couples do the exercise in Appendix 9, it is very rare indeed for a marriage partner to guess correctly which are their spouse's top three needs.

Budgeting is a skill which can be learned away from the course. It is good for single people to budget too, and then when approaching marriage to budget together. In church marriage services couples promise to share everything, so it is best to pool all income. Also that way they avoid the problems of who pays for what.

Cooking and **Reading to each other** are not suggestions for a preparation course, but a couple should be encouraged to work at them on their own.

Appendix 10 lists six areas of **unhealthy thinking**, as an introduction to the subject. You will need to read the chapter in Keeping Marriages Healthy to learn how they can be eliminated. The Intimate Encounters book, which is American, from which Keeping Marriages Healthy has been produced, gives more detail on this, and easier exercises.

Dealing with past hurts and forgiving parents are covered well in the chapters of the books listed them in Appendix 6. The section on forgiving parents in The Marriage Book is particularly helpful.

Appendix 4 in The Marriage Book on **praying together** is excellent too.

Setting goals is probably covered in some of the other courses as well as in The Intimate Encounters chapter given.

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Several marriage preparation providers agree that communication and conflict-solving are the key skills to include in a course.

There may possibly be some engaged couples who have not had a real conflict to solve in their relationship, but doing PREPARE or FOCCUS, or some other awareness raising exercises, is bound to bring some issues of contention to the surface. These can then be used in communication and conflict solving exercises.

Communication

This may not be a problem in courtship, but it will be in marriage. A woman once said, "Before marriage, a man will lie awake half the night thinking of something a girl has said. After marriage, he will fall asleep before she has finished saying it!"

The American course PREP, not connected with PREPARE, seems only to be available in the British Isles in a book for DIY marriage preparation called Fighting for Your Marriage (see Appendix 1). However other courses have incorporated things from it, particularly the Couple Alive course. PREP speaks of the Filters through which people hear what their spouses have said, and which lead to messages received being different from messages intended.

There is a longer list of Filters in the Holy Trinity Brompton Marriage Course (NB HTB's Marriage Course, not their Marriage Preparation Course) manual on page 22, including assumptions, expectations, prejudices, memories, feelings and so on. Filters make for major problems in communication.

The Speaker-Listener Technique

The remedy for Filters is found in various courses under various names. It is to discuss issues using The Speaker/Listener Technique, or to give it other titles, Active Listening, or Sharing with Reflective Listening. It works like this.

A couple take it in turns to be Speaker and Listener. The Speaker holds something while it is his or her turn to speak. Some suggest holding a book or a cushion. The best idea has come from the PREP course and is used in Couple Alive. It is to hold a card with the Technique's ground rules on it as a reminder. There is wording for a card in Appendix 11, which you are welcome to copy four at a time on to coloured card (a coloured card can be found more easily when a couple need it).

One person takes the role of Speaker first and, holding the card, expresses their views on a matter, a little at a time. The Speaker then stops for the Listener to respond by saying what they have heard. The Listener does not repeat back word for word, but sums up what they heard. (Various other words have been used for summing up - precisising, paraphrasing, mirroring, reflecting, checking; choose which word you like to describe it).

If the Listener gets things slightly wrong, the Speaker corrects their misunderstanding (gently) and then continues, expressing their views.

This goes on to and fro until the Speaker has finished all he/she wishes to say on the subject. The Speaker then passes the card to the Listener and they reverse roles.

Ground Rules

Most of the ground rules on the card (Appendix 11) are self-explanatory, but the first two need enlarging.

The first ground rule is that the Speaker needs to say clearly what he or she feels about the matter, expressing his or her actual views clearly and gently.

The Couple Alive course helpfully distinguishes between right and wrong uses of "I feel" in this context. If you could say "I am" instead of "I feel" then it is what you feel. For example, "I feel sad that you are sometimes late for meals" is all right because you could say, "I am sad that you are sometimes late for meals". It is a feeling.

But if you could say "I think" instead of "I feel" in your sentence, then it is not what you feel. For example, "I feel that you don't like my cooking" is a guess at mind-reading, not a feeling. You could not say, "I am you don't like my cooking" but you could say, "I think you don't like my cooking". This is an attempt at mind-reading; it is not your feeling, but something of an accusation.

So if "I feel" means "I am" it is all right, but not if "I feel" means "I think"
The "Couple Alive" course has a useful exercise in this, reproduced in Appendix 12.

The second ground rule is about the use of "I" statements, not "you" statements.

"You" statements are often blaming or accusing, like "you made me late for my appointment" and "you left the door unlocked last night".

It is much better to say "I was late for my appointment; please could you help me leave a bit earlier next time?" and "I found the door unlocked this morning. Shall we both check to see we've locked it at night?"

So begin with "I", even if "you" needs to be said later in the statement. Particularly avoid saying "you always....." or "you never" which are blaming statements and probably untrue too.

There is a good exercise in this in Appendix 13 from Marriage in Mind.

Using The Technique

The Speaker/Listener technique is said to solve 70% of disagreements, because a couple now really understand each other's views on the subject. For the other 30% of problems, conflict solving will be necessary.

The Speaker/Listener Technique may seem artificial to some couples until they have tried it out. You may need to tell them that many other couples have found it helpful, in order to encourage them to give it a try.

(There is a cartoon in *Fighting for Your marriage* with Bride and Groom standing facing the Marriage Celebrant, who is saying " And do you promise to use the Speaker/Listener Technique?")

A couple can try it in a course setting, with a non-contentious subject at first, perhaps taking it turns to share something happy about their past, something they have never talked about. (See Appendix 4 for ideas.)

Next time they could try using it on some matter of mild misunderstanding, or to express their feelings (see Appendix 7).

Those exercises could be done in a course with other couples, by spreading them around a room and by playing some music quietly to drown other conversations. There are some helpful suggestions about music in Appendix 2 of *The Marriage Course Leader's Guide* (Holy Trinity Brompton), (not their Marriage Preparation Course).

They could be done with one of the other couples on the course listening in, and helping them keep the ground rules, keeping the issue in confidence. Then they could try the technique on their larger misunderstandings when they are on their own.

Conflict-solving

Most couples have rows; all couples have strong disagreements. Some disagreements will occur in planning the wedding, probably. How the couple handle problems in marriage is crucial to success.

Appendix 15 gives seven poor methods of resolving conflict described in the Oxfordshire Community Churches "Preparing for Marriage" course. They are self-explanatory and could be covered in a talk on a course.

What a couple need to do when a problem occurs, and especially when their voices begin to rise, is to stop and to fix a time later to try to resolve it.

Some courses says that one or the other should say "Stop", "Break" or "Time out". It would be better to say "We need a break". Not "You need a break" but "We need a break".

An outline procedure of solving disagreements is found in Appendix 16 to this paper.

Couples could try this out on your course with a low level issue of disagreement. If any object, you can again tell them that other couples have found this method helpful and encourage them to try it. Then, when they are on their own, they could try it with a bigger issue.

Perhaps again a second couple could sit in with a couple when they are seeking to solve a disagreement, and help them to keep to the method in Appendix 16. The second couple could be course participants, or they could be a couple who had done a previous course. Again, absolute confidentiality between the four of them needs to be stressed.

The PREP course suggests that it is valuable for a couple to tackle the issues on which they differ one by one in this way, perhaps one a week. That will prevent these issues coming up in the context of particular events. For example, the issue of how much a couple visit each set of parents, if they have them, is better resolved before an event like Christmas is on the horizon.

Confession and Forgiveness

Use of The Speaker/Listener Technique and conflict-solving will at times lead to one or other of the couple realising that they have hurt the other.

The subject of confession and forgiveness is covered in several courses. The Keeping Marriages Healthy course is particularly good on this in its Chapter 4. Appendix 14 of this paper is a summary of that, produced by Time for Families.

Forgiveness must be real. Once an event has been forgiven it must never be raised as a complaint again.

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I believe that the essence of success in marriage is that each spouse should help the other to enjoy being married to them. Teaching these skills of communication, conflict-solving and confession will help greatly.

In 1932 an American admiral staged a mock attack on the main US base in Pacific, Pearl Harbour. Instead of doing it the conventional way, with battleships and cruisers, he took only aircraft carriers and smaller escorts. His dummy attack with planes took the defences by surprise and demonstrated what great damage could be done in that way. But other American top brass resisted that lesson in the years following. There were however some Japanese agents near Pearl Harbour at the time. They saw the new method and reported to their masters - the rest is history. May God enable us to be open to new ideas as He guides us.

Edward Pratt

Appendix 1
MARRIAGE PREPARATION - Some Books and Courses

<u>Name of the Course</u>	<u>Brief Description</u>	<u>Obtainable from</u>
Building Relationships	Book on marriage for young people (Teacher's Manual)	John Deagle, Southampton Voluntary Services, Voluntary Action Centre, Kingsland Square, St Mary Street, Southampton SO14 1NW
Couple Alive	6 session course especially on communication & conflict solving	Family Caring, 8 Ashtree Enterprise Park, Newry, Co Down BT34 1BY
Fighting For Your Marriage	PREP USA DIY Marriage Preparation Book	Catholic Marriage Care, 1 Blythe Mews, Blythe Rd London W14 0MW
FOCCUS	Pre-marriage questionnaire	Nick Gulliford, Quel Bec, Cothelstone, Taunton TA4 3ED
Intimate Encounters	16 chapters USA intimate life book (marriage enhancement)	Mrs Christine Mort, Centre for Relational Care, Warwick Gates Community, Heathcote, Warwick CV34 6DZ
Keeping Marriages Healthy	8 chapters UK intimate life book	" " "
PREPARE	Pre-marriage questionnaires	John Deagle, Southampton Voluntary Services, Voluntary Action Centre, Kingsland Square, St Mary Street, Southampton SO14 1NW
Preparing for Marriage	9 presentations, 36 activities on communication, conflict solving and commitment	Catholic Marriage Care, 1 Blythe Mews, Blythe Rd. London W14 0MW
Preparing for Marriage	6 session course, includes Bible study leaders guide	Oxfordshire Community Churches, 53 West Way, Oxford OX2 0JE
The Act of Marriage	Sex and its problems	Christian bookshops
The Act of Marriage after 40	" "	Christian bookshops
The Marriage Preparation Course (Holy Trinity Brompton)	DVD, video & audio sets Speaker Notes CD-ROM Leaders' & Support Couples' Guide Guest Manual, Course Invitations (packs of 50) A3 Advertising Poster, A4 Advertising Poster	STL, Kingstown Broadway, Carlisle, CA3 0QS and Christian bookshops or The Alpha Hotline 0845 758 1278 Email: alpha@stl.org

WHAT A COUPLE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EACH OTHER

See e.g.

Personal differences	See Appendix 3 from "The Marriage Book" below - ("Appreciating Our Differences")
Likes and dislikes	
Family background	Intimate Encounters Chap. 11
Expectations re	See sheet from "Couple Alive" attached - ("Some subjects to discuss with your fiancé(e)")
Jobs, careers, working hours	
Home: size, location	
Roles in home	
Tidiness	
Possessions, pets	
Credit cards	
Celebrations	
Recreation, holidays	
Religious activities	
Romance	
Sex	"The Act of Marriage" (appropriate version)
Faithfulness, loyalty	
Children: number, roles, discipline	
Parents, friends	
Stages of adult development	See Appendix 5 from Catholic Marriage Care course "Preparing for Marriage" below

The Marriage Book

APPRECIATING OUR DIFFERENCES

Mark with your initial where on the line your different preferences lie

For example: (N = Nicky; S = Sila)

Money Spend S _____ N _____ Save

Punctuality Have time in Hand S _____ N _____ Cut it fine

ISSUE:

Clothes Casual _____ Formal

Disagreements Thrash it out _____ Keep the peace

Holidays Seek adventure _____ Seek rest

Money Spend _____ Save

People Spend time with others _____ Spend time alone

Planning Make plans and stick to them _____ Be spontaneous and go with the flow

Punctuality Have time in hand _____ Cut it fine

Relaxation Go out _____ Stay in

Sleeping Go to bed early _____ Go to bed late

Sport Enthusiast _____ Uninterested

Telephone Talk at length _____ Make arrangements only

Tidiness Keep everything tidy and under control _____ Be relaxed and live in a mess

TV Keep it on _____ Throw it out

OTHER ISSUES:

From COUPLE ALIVE

Some subjects to talk about with your fiancé(e)

MALE/FEMALE ROLES

What did I experience and what do I now expect?

Who earned most money/made most decisions/planned holidays?
Who prepared meals/washed up/did any gardening/did repairs/painted and decorated/paid bills/watched the budget/did the shopping/complained about what was bought?
Who took care of the children/picked them up from school/disciplined/played and had fun with them/read stories/did homework/settled them to bed and/or prayed with them?
Who kept contact with friends/entertained people/wrote letters and cards?
Who watched most TV, enjoyed hobbies/sport/reading?
Who went to bed early/late?
Whose parents/relatives/friends were most important?
Who (if anyone) drove a car/was a back seat driver/was slow to ask directions?
Who was light-hearted/stressed?
Who worked (overworked?) outside the home?
Who showed affection to partner/children/friends?
Who sulked/shouted/made up?
Who was moody/bored/depressed?
Who smoked/drank/gambled?
Who had an addiction?

FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

What did I experience and what do I now expect?

What was the comfortable “centre” of my home?
How was time spent at holidays or other breaks?
What was family communication like? Were we close or distant? Lots of attention when someone was ill, or illness made light of?
Was sex discussed or taboo?
Attitude to nakedness/touch/vulgar language/swearing/tidiness/washing?
Food eaten if it dropped on the floor? Presentation of food – grab and eat, or served in three courses?
Tinned food handy – or unthinkable?
Children a blessing or nuisance? What achievements (or children’s achievements) were taken pride in?
Attitudes to religion, prayer, church involvement, community involvement?
Were different opinions, tastes respected?
Who bought presents? Who for? When? Was a gift a surprise or planned?
Who visited, and whose friends were welcome in the home?
Attitude to the pub? The club?
How I feel now about my parents/carers, family upbringing, home?
What do I expect now that is different to what my fiancé(e) expects?

AWARENESS – RAISING

STAGES OF ADULT DEVELOPMENT

1. **Pulling up roots (16-22)**
Autonomy - Self-sufficiency
2. **Provisional adulthood (22-29)**
Select a career - Establish personal relationships - Achieve a place in society
3. **Age 30 transition (29-32)**
Search for personal identity - Reassess future objectives - Search for meaning in life
4. **Rooting (32-39)**
Establish long-term goals - Receive recognition in career/career success
5. **Mid-life transition (40-42)**
Confrontation of gap between aspirations and achievement - Re-examination of career - Re-examination of personal relationships
6. **Restabilisation and flowering (43-50)**
Acceptance of time as infinite - Confrontation of mortality - Autonomy
7. **Mellowing (50-60+)**
Acceptance of what I have - Fewer personal relationships - Examination of present and what it means

Sheehy G (1977) *Passages, Predictable Crises of Adult Life*. Penguin, Harmondsworth

SKILLS TRAINING TOPICS

Communication	} Details in } } the resource
Conflict-solving	
Confession and Forgiveness	"Healing Hurts" - Summary sheet attached Keeping Marriages Healthy Chapter 4 The Marriage Book Chapters 11 & 12
Expressing feelings	Catholic Marriage Care "Preparing for Marriage"- sheet attached
Expressing appreciation and thanks frequently	
Comforting	Catholic Marriage Care - sheet attached
Meeting Each Other's Needs	Keeping Marriages Healthy Chap. 2 Page 17 (attached - "Top 10 Intimacy Needs")
Budgeting	
Cooking: learning, improving	
Reading to each other (if appreciated)	
Eliminating unhealthy thinking	Keeping Marriages Healthy Chap. 7 (sheet attached) Intimate Encounters Chap. 13 also (more detailed)
Dealing with past hurts	Intimate Encounters Chap. 12
Forgiving parents	The Marriage Book Chap. 15 Keeping Marriages Healthy Chap. 6 Intimate Encounters Chap. 11
Praying together (for Christians)	The Marriage Book Appendix 4
Setting Goals	Intimate Encounters Chap. 14

EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Appendix 7

Here are some possible starters for use with the Speaker-Listener technique

- I feel when you go out with your friends
- I feel when you spend time with your family
- I feel when you work long hours
- I feel when we're having a row
- I feel when you are angry or upset with me
- I feel when you say 'I love you'
- I feel when I want to tell you I love you
- I feel when we talk about the future
- I find it hard to talk to you when I am feeling
- I find it hard to tell you how I felt when
- Something I don't like about myself is
- I feel jealous when
- I feel hurt when
- I daydream that
- I when you disagree with me
- I'm really happy when
- I am scared of
- Something I'm a bit ashamed of is
- I wish I was able to
- I'm excited by
- Something I've often wanted to tell you is

Maybe you already talk to each other at this level. If you don't, what you do to help you continue talking in this way to each other?

Maybe some of these bring to mind other issues that aren't listed, but that you'd like to discuss? Plan when you will do that.

COMFORTING

Appendix 8

What I really really want

Different people want to feel they are being supported by their spouse in different ways. Some people like to work through problems alone, some welcome a lot of involvement by other people, some just need a gesture of support. Most of us like a little of each of these.

Do you know what you prefer? Tick the response you would most like to receive from your spouse in the following situations:

I have just come home from a really stressful day at work and flopped on the settee. I would like you to:

- 1) Make me a cup of tea, or run me a bath, but say nothing till I've calmed down.
- 2) Ask why I'm looking glum and then keep out of the way.
- 3) Ask for the full story so we can talk it through together.
- 4) Give me a big hug and try to cheer me up with stories about your day.

I am taking a test or exam tomorrow. I would like you to:

- 1) Offer to test me
- 2) Keep right out of my way until it's all over
- 3) Sympathise with me about my pre-exam nerves
- 4) Make sure everything at home is organised so that I can concentrate without worrying about anything else.

A close relative has just died. I would like you to:

- 1) Take care of the practicalities and be strong
- 2) Sit quietly and let me cry
- 3) Leave me alone to be with that side of the family
- 4) Sit down prepared to talk about my memories and learn more about the person who has died.

I'm very excited at the possibility of a new job. I want you to say:

- 1) Don't count your chickens – I'd hate you to be disappointed
- 2) You're so brilliant it must be in the bag – let's celebrate!
- 3) What's happened? Just calm down and tell me all about it
- 4) Well, I'll keep my fingers crossed.

I've just made a total fool of myself at a social gathering and feel really embarrassed. I want you to say:

- 1) Well at least you weren't as embarrassing as me
- 2) I'm going to have to keep you off the tequila and help you apologise to our friends
- 3) No-one will remember, besides you were hilarious ...
- 4) What came over you? I can't take you anywhere!

Top 10 Intimacy Needs

We all need the above in some measure and especially at particular times. However there will be certain of these relational needs that you will enjoy receiving over and above the others. You are invited to choose which are your top three needs and guess which three needs your marriage partner most enjoys receiving.

Intimacy Needs

Myself		Partner
[]	Acceptance – deliberate and ready reception with a favourable positive response (Rom. 15:7)	[]
[]	Affection – to communicate care and closeness through physical touch (Rom. 16:16)	[]
[]	Appreciation – to communicate with words and feelings a personal gratefulness for another (1 Cor. 11:2)	[]
[]	Approval – expressed commendation; to think and speak well of (Rom. 14:18)	[]
[]	Attention – to take thought of another and convey appropriate interest and support to enter into another’s “worlds” (1 Cor. 12:25)	[]
[]	Comfort – (empathy) – to come alongside with word, feeling and touch; to give consolidation with tenderness (Rom. 12:15)	[]
[]	Encouragement – to urge forward and positively persuade toward a goal (1 Thes. 5:11, Heb. 10:24)	[]
[]	Respect – to value and regard highly; to convey great worth (Rom. 12:10)	[]
[]	Security – confidence of harmony in relationships; free from threat of harm (Rom. 12:16a)	[]
[]	Support – come alongside and gently help carry a load (Gal. 6:2)	[]

Polarising

I see things very much as black and white.

There is a place for everything and everything in its place.

Being perfect in what I undertake is essential to me.

Magnifying

I tend to make mountains out of mole-hills.

Everything seems a major issue.

I seem to over-react to relatively small irritations.

Personalising

I often take things personally.

It's very important to sense others' approval.

If someone in my family is upset, I must have been part of the reason.

Generalising

Past disappointments seem to predict the future.

I just know things won't get any better.

I tend to write people off if they hurt or disappoint me.

Emotional Reasoning

What I am feeling is more important than the facts.

I can't really believe I'm loved unless I feel it.

If I feel unloved, it must be because no one loves me.

Minimising

I often think people make too much of their problems. They should just get over it.

I can handle almost any problem that comes my way. I don't really need much support from anyone.

There's no reason to get so worked up or so emotional.

SPEAKER - LISTENER CARD

As Speaker: I stick to one subject and
express my (views and) feelings clearly

I use 'I' not 'You' statements

I do not mind-read, accuse or blame the Listener

I stop frequently

As Listener:

I sum up carefully

I only ask questions for clarification

I do not answer, argue, criticise or rebut

I conclude 'Is there anything else?'

Both: Conclude with thanking and appreciating each other

RIGHT AND WRONG USE OF “I FEEL”

Managing conflict is not just about learning *techniques*: it has more to do with open communication, including saying how you *feel*. The trouble is that we often use the word ‘feel’ too loosely, and we can even use it to criticise each other – “I feel you nag too much!” Also, some people find it hard to say (or even *know*) how they are feeling. Here is a guideline:

‘I feel... is a feeling when I can use ‘I am ... in its place (but not ‘I think...’)

e.g. I feel worried means I am worried (not I think worried!) I feel angry means I am angry. I feel scared means I am scared. I feel relaxed means I am relaxed.

“I feel...” is NOT a feeling if I can use “I think...” in its place

*‘I feel you’re bullying me’ is the same as ‘I think you’re bullying me’! so it is **not** a feeling – it is an opinion, and a “you” message. (If I want to say how I feel, I might say, ‘I’m **afraid** of you – or I feel **angry** – when you talk to me like this.)*

*‘I feel you’re just right for me’ is the same as ‘I think you’re just right for me’! (I might say instead ‘I feel **happy** in your company, or I feel **lucky** I met you.’)*

*‘I feel you talk too much’ is the same as ‘I think you talk too much’! (I might say instead ‘I feel **bored**, or **sad**, or **frustrated**, when you talk so much...’)*

*‘I feel your parents like me’ is the same as ‘I think your parents like me’! (I might say instead ‘I feel at **ease** and **comfortable** with your parents because I think they like me.’)*

TRY THIS! - Can you decide which of the statements below are not feelings? – and choose some of the following feeling words which could be used instead: (happy, jealous, angry, under the weather, disappointed, sad, miserable).

1. I feel you’re more intelligent than me.
2. I feel really annoyed that you’ve given Joe a key to our house.
3. I feel panicky in an emergency.
4. I feel you don’t even notice me when your friends are around.
5. I’m feeling fed-up today – I don’t know why.
6. I feel I’m a nuisance and a burden to you.

APPLYING THE IDEAS

For a few minutes, take turns to practise giving each other “I” messages, using the openers below. If you find that some of them positive or negative, are difficult to give, tell each other about that.

I feel happy when you... I feel sad when you... I feel encouraged when you... I get annoyed when you... I like it when you... I feel upset with you when... I feel better about myself when you... I feel taken for granted when you... I feel close to you when... I feel shy/awkward/embarrassed when...

There are times when our anger boils over, and we just say the first thing that comes into our heads. Even after this type of “blast” there comes a time when we need to sort out the problem. However, there is a way of speaking honestly without accusing your spouse, by using “I” sentences instead of “You” sentences.

Take it in turns to tell each other things that irritate you about each other, using “I” sentences instead of “You” sentences. This can become quite a fun thing to practise at home.

“You” sentences express judgement of the other – are about your spouse – attack your spouse’s faults

“I” sentences will always express individual feelings – are about yourself – talk about your own emotions

Example:

“You” sentence: “Your driving is going to get us all killed.”

“I” sentence: “I feel scared when you’re driving like this.”

Exercise

Rewrite these “You” sentences as “I” sentences. For example the following “you” sentence “You are always late home” could become “I get very worried when you don’t get in on time because I don’t know what might have happened to you.”

If a genuine emotion is not expressed it is not a good “I” sentence.

- 1) “That’s it, you just roll over and go to sleep like nothing has happened.”
- 2) “Why does your precious work always have to come ahead of your family?”
- 3) “You don’t think of anyone but yourself. At these parties you’re always walking off and talking to everyone except me.”
- 4) “That’s just like you, spending so much money on something we don’t need.”
- 5) “Why don’t you ever listen to me?”
- 6) “You are never ready on time.”

Note: don’t worry if none of the above examples bothers you.

Red Flags

There are one or two words, phrases or sentences that you might find make you and your spouse more angry. These work like a red flag to a bull! Here’s the list: see how many you use!

Always (*You always forget to take out the rubbish*)

Never (*you’re never ready on time*)

Why don’t you ever? (*Why don’t you ever listen to me?*)

Never mind (*Never mind dear, you wouldn’t understand anyway*)

You’re just like your mother (*or father*)

Remember the time (*when you*)

In any relationship, we inevitably hurt each other unintentionally.
Try to deal with these hurts as soon as possible after they arise.

HEALING HURTS THROUGH CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Confessing of HURTS

- 1) Choose one thing you have done/not done; said/not said that has caused hurt to your spouse
- 2) Try to see this hurt from your spouse's perspective – (how did he/she feel?)
- 3) How did YOU feel about causing your spouse pain?
- 4) Express to your spouse your feelings for the hurt you have caused.
- 5) Admit your wrong doing to your spouse.
- 6) Ask your spouse to forgive you.

Steps to FORGIVENESS

- 1) Accept your spouse's confession of wrong against you as genuine.
- 2) Identify and share with your spouse which need was unmet by the wrong doing.
- 3) Choose to forgive –
 - forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling
 - forgiveness is unconditional
- 4) Express a willingness to forgive. You may want to forgive but need more time to think or talk it over further; explain this to your spouse.
- 5) As and when you choose to forgive, reach out and touch your spouse.

*** DO THIS FOR EACH MAJOR HURT THAT NEEDS FORGIVENESS ***

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RESOLVING CONFLICT

Appendix 15

Some poor methods

Have you or your spouse ever used any of the following ways of dealing with a disagreement?

Method	Description	Him	Her
Bury	You bury the problem, hoping it will go away; you hide it, so neither of you can see the problem		
Blast	You go off with a big blast like a bomb, hoping it will destroy the problem.		
Bolt	You bolt off and run away from the problem so that you don't have to face it with your spouse.		
Bargain	You bargain with your spouse and use another problem to put pressure on them about the original problem, and so you never sort it out!		
Be-a-baby	You try to manipulate your spouse by going weak and pathetic.		
Buck-pass	You plead that you couldn't help it, because it was a result of the way you were brought up.		
Blame-Shift	You present a cast-iron case as to why it was 'all their fault'.		

Why are none of these really satisfactory?

.....
.....
.....

Our goal should not be to win or withdraw – but to resolve every conflict

When one arises say " We need a break"

Fix a convenient time later to try to solve the problem.

When the time comes:

Check the time is still OK

(Christians should pray, silently or otherwise, for God's help)

Thank your spouse for something they have done in another area

Use the **Speaker/Listener Technique**, and:

- Keep to one subject: leave other issues for another time.
- Raise everything about the subject: don't hide anything.
- Don't attempt to solve the problem at this stage.
- Don't bring in the parents ('My father thinks you ought...'; 'You're just like your mother')

When the problem has been aired and understood:

Brainstorm for solutions: as many as possible:

- Each suggests solutions, without discussion or criticism
- Write them all down, so all are remembered.

Discuss pros and cons of solutions

- Keep calm and speak quietly
- Try hard to see your spouse's point of view
- Eliminate unacceptable solutions
- Be willing to compromise

Agree on which solution to try

- And for how long before reviewing
- If there are two stark alternatives, agree the one who 'wins' will 'lose' next time

If you cannot agree:

- Go back to Speaker/Listener technique
- Brainstorm again, and discuss again
- If you still cannot agree, discuss 'What are we going to do to protect and enhance our marriage meanwhile?'

Finally:

- Express appreciation of each other
- (Christians pray, silently or otherwise)
- Do something together you both enjoy.