



RELATIONSHIPS

Sharing Dreams and Goals: Creating an Emotional Connection

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Introduction

Remember a time early in your relationship when it felt like you and your partner were on a shared journey? You may have started out with shared goals and a clear sense of direction for your relationship and future together. Sometimes relationships are like a journey on a ship with two co-pilots. At the beginning of the journey, both co-pilots agree on what direction they want to take and where they want to end up. But as the journey progresses, one co-pilot (or maybe both of them) may change course unexpectedly, to the complete surprise of the other co-pilot.

Relationships over time can start to feel like a ship with two co-pilots who have very different ideas of which direction to head. How do you regain that sense of connection and of shared dreams and goals? How do you regain the sense of shared values for the future of your relationship?

Talking with your partner about the dreams, goals, and values you have for your life and relationship can help strengthen the emotional connection. It can give you and

your partner an opportunity to hear each other's perspectives and to honor what each of you brings to the relationship. These conversations can help you and your partner become co-pilots who are charting the same course together in their relationship journey.

Before you begin such a conversation with your partner, it is important to clarify for yourself how you feel and what your thoughts are. One way you can explore these questions is to consider a few topics and questions at a time and to write down your thoughts in a journal. You can use the journal to organize and review your thoughts and feelings, and then share them with your partner. When you have an idea of what you want to share with your partner, you can also follow the guidelines for creating conversations in the fact sheet "*Making Time to Talk With Your Partner*," HHS-743-W. Below are some questions and topics for you to consider and explore before initiating a conversation with your partner.

Goals

List two or three goals that you have for yourself, for your relationship, for your children, or for starting a family.

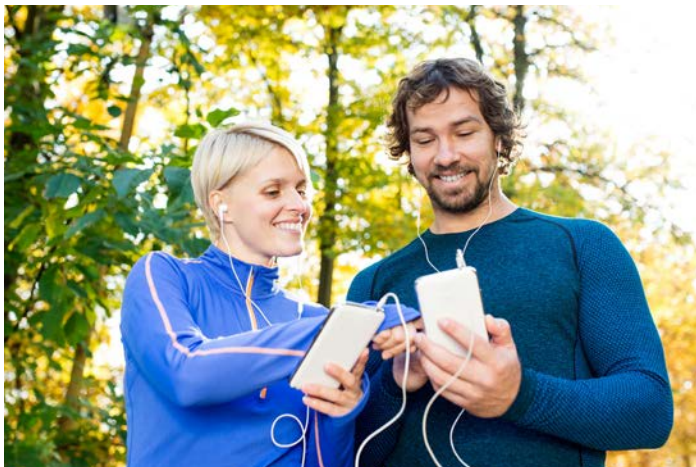
- What is the time frame in which you hope to achieve these goals?
- What do you need from your partner and from your relationship to achieve these goals?
- Think of short-term and long-term goals, and list these in separate categories.
- An example of a short-term goal might be having a set date night with your partner every two weeks. An example of a long-term goal might be to start a college savings fund for each of your children.

Dreams

- Do you have a dream or a wish list of things you want to do in the next year or so? In five to 10 years?
- Make a wish list and rate each wish or dream on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very unrealistic and unachievable and 10 being very realistic and achievable.
- An example of an easily achievable dream would be to take yoga classes. An example of a more difficult dream to achieve would be taking a year off to travel the world.
- List the kinds of things you would need from your partner and relationship to achieve your dreams, such as emotional support, help with housework or child care, etc.

Activities

- Make a list of activities that are sources of strength for you and that help you feel recharged. An example of an energizing activity for you might be exercising daily.
- What is it about those activities that helps you feel recharged?



- What do you need from your partner and your relationship to engage in those activities on a regular basis?

Family identity

- What does it mean to be a member of your family?
- What is your family's role in the larger community?
- How do you want your family to be perceived by others?

Family history

- Make a list of memories and stories your parents told you or stories that you tell, or plan to tell, your children about your family.
- Make a list of important events and points in time that matter to your family.
- List why these events are important to you.

Home

- What does the word "home" mean to you?
- What physical qualities do you want your home to have? An example might be a large family room where everyone can hang out together.
- What emotional qualities do you want your home to have? An example might be a place where family members can feel safe.
- List what is similar and different about your home and the home you grew up in.
- List what you would like to have in your home that you had in the home you grew up in.
- List the things you would like to have different from what you had in the home you grew up in.

Spirituality

- What is the role of religion or spirituality in your home, relationship, and family?
- What role would you like it to have in your home?
- How important is it to you?

Rituals

- What rituals do you have as a couple and family for holidays, vacations, mealtimes, goodbyes and greetings, or when there is a loss in the family?
- What rituals did you have for these events when you were growing up?
- List the rituals from your childhood that you want to include in your relationship and family now.

- Some examples of rituals: going out for a special dinner on a family member's birthday; always giving a hug or a kiss when you greet or say goodbye to a family member; or going on at least one vacation a year that includes just your immediate family.

Family roles

- What does it mean to be a spouse/partner in your family?
- What roles do you play as a spouse/partner?
- What does it mean to be a mother or father in your family?
- What roles do you play as a mother or father?
- What roles do each of your children have in the family?
- What roles did family members play in the family you grew up in?
- What do you want to do differently in your current family?
- Examples of roles family members might play: your role as a parent might include being employed and/or caring for older parents; an older child in the family may play the role of caregiver to younger siblings.

Other roles

- List other roles you have in your life.
- How important are these roles?
- How do you feel about these roles?
- What do these roles bring to your life?
- How do you balance these other roles with the roles that you have in your family?
- Examples of other roles: sister, brother, employee, community leader, volunteer, etc.

You can explore and review these topics and questions through journaling and reflection. As you clarify for yourself your thoughts and feelings on some of these topics, you can share these with your partner. The list suggests just a few ideas for topics to reflect on. As you do this activity, you may come up with more topics that are important to you and that you can share with your partner.

Sharing your reflections, feelings, and thoughts on these topics with your partner can provide a way for you to stay connected with each other. It can help you understand each other's values and worldviews, and help you appreciate and honor what each of you brings to the relationship. Sharing and connecting in this manner can help you and your partner move your relationship in the same direction once again.

Activities to help you share dreams and goals

The exercises/activities will help you start thinking about how to implement the suggestions and strategies from this fact sheet. In addition to the ideas suggested above, keep a journal of other topics and issues that you want to share with your partner on a regular basis. Refer to these topics for conversation with your partner during the time that you set aside for your relationship conversations.

Online resources

www.gottman.com/

The Gottman Institute: A Research-Based Approach to Relationships. Website provides information on John Gottman's research on couple relationships, media resources, books, workshops, and training for the public and for professionals.

www.smartmarriages.com/

Smart Marriages: The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education. Website provides information on strengthening marriages and on marriage-related issues such as domestic violence and effective communication.

www.aamft.org/

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Website provides links for professionals on issues related to family and couple relationships. Provides information on resources, current issues, and professional development opportunities.

References and resources

- Gottman, J. (1999). *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
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- Gottman, J. & Silver, N. (2015, Second Edition). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert*. New York, NY: Harmony Books.
- Johnson, S.M. (2020, Third Edition). *The Practice of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy: Creating Connection*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S.M. (2010, Third Edition). *Fighting for Your Marriage: Positive Steps for Preventing Divorce and Preserving a Lasting Love*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
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Successful relationships with an intimate partner require nurturing and attention. There are no quick fixes or fast-track methods to satisfaction and happiness in a long-term relationship. Most strategies for enhancing your relationship require repetition and practice over time. Six fact sheets from Purdue Extension – Health and Human Sciences address six areas of couple relationship challenges. The information in the fact sheets is based on research by prominent marriage and couple researchers such as John Gottman, Sue Johnson, and Howard Markman.

The titles in this series are:

HHS-742-W, *Handling Conflict with Your Partner and Staying Emotionally Connected*

HHS-743-W, *Making Time to Talk With Your Partner*

HHS-744-W, *A Fine Balance: The Magic Ratio to a Healthy Relationship*

HHS-745-W, *Increasing the Positives in Your Relationship*

HHS-746-W, *The Art of Complaining: Getting Your Concerns Across Without Criticizing*

HHS-747-W, *Sharing Dreams and Goals: Creating an Emotional Connection*

These publications are available at *Purdue Extension's Education Store*: edustore.purdue.edu