

**DAY THREE**

**HANDOUTS**

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**Questionnaire** *(a separate copy should be completed by each partner)*

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I understand that in completing and submitting this questionnaire, I consent to Complete Couples holding and processing my personal data in accordance with their stated policies and procedures.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**email:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Tel.:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Partner's name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Number of children living with you:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer the following questions** *(by default, your counsellor will not share answers with your partner without your agreement. You may choose to share answers with your partner if you wish):*

1. What time have you spent with your partner in any of the following ways?

(a) Dating \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Living together \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Married/As Civil Partners \_\_\_\_\_

2. What did you initially find attractive about your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What was the very beginning of your relationship like? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What was your first disillusionment? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What have you found most fulfilling about your relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. In what significant ways are you similar to your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. In what significant ways are you different from your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you spend time in activities away from your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. How are relationship conflicts handled/resolved? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How would you describe the communication in your relationship?

\_\_\_\_\_

11. How safe do you feel in expressing your innermost thoughts and feelings to your partner?

\_\_\_\_\_

12. How do you feel about sexual contact with your partner?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. In what ways do you think you might contribute to your relationship difficulties?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. On a scale of 1-10 (10 = highest), how motivated are you to address the above?

\_\_\_\_\_

15. What would you like to achieve through counselling? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16. What are your expectations as to the likely effectiveness of counselling?

\_\_\_\_\_

17. What days/times would you be able to attend counselling?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. Have you ever previously attended either individual or couples counselling?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions:**

1. Have you ever been formally diagnosed with a personality disorder (e.g. Borderline)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you currently have any addictions (e.g. alcohol, pornography, gambling)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you currently using any recreational drugs (e.g. marijuana, cocaine, heroin)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever instigated an act of physical aggression against your partner?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Has your partner ever instigated an act of physical aggression against you?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you ever self-harmed? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Have you ever seriously considered, or attempted suicide? \_\_\_\_\_
8. If you answered 'yes' to any questions in this section, would you feel safe to discuss these topics in counselling with your partner? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return completed questionnaires via email to: [info@completecouples.com](mailto:info@completecouples.com)**

## **Attachment Questions for Couples Counselling (adaptation of Adult Attachment Interview<sup>1</sup>**

1. Please describe your relationship with your parents as a young child starting from as far back as you can remember. Just write two or three sentences.
2. Choose four adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood--as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine.
3. Choose four adjectives or words that reflect your childhood relationship with your father, again starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood--as early as you can go, but again say, age 5 to 12 is fine.
4. To which parent did you feel the closest, and why? Why isn't there this feeling with the other parent?
5. When you were upset as a child, what would you do?
  - Can you think of a specific time that happened?
  - Can you remember what would happen when you were physically hurt?
  - Again, are there any specific incidents (or, do any other incidents) that come to mind?
  - Do you remember being held by either of your parents at any of these times--when you were upset, or hurt, or ill?
6. What is the first time you remember being separated from your parents?
  - How did you respond? Do you remember how your parents responded?
  - Are there any other separations that stand out in your mind?
7. Did you ever feel rejected as a young child?
  - How old were you when you first felt this way, and what did you do?
  - Why do you think your parent did those things--do you think he/she realised he/she was rejecting you?

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<sup>1</sup> For full interview please see:

[http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/measures/content/aai\\_interview.pdf](http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/measures/content/aai_interview.pdf)

8. Were your parents ever threatening with you in any way - maybe for discipline, or even jokingly? Some people say for example that their parents would threaten to leave them or send them away from home.
  
9. Some people have memories of threats or of some kind of behaviour that was abusive.
  - Did anything like this ever happen to you, or in your family?
  - How old were you at the time? Did it happen frequently?
  - Do you feel this experience affects you now as an adult?
  - Does it influence your approach to your own children, if you have them?
  - Did you have any such experiences involving people outside your family?
  
10. In general, how do you think your overall experiences with your parents have affected your adult personality?
  - Are there any aspects to your early experiences that you feel were a setback in your development?
  - Are there any other aspects of your early experiences, that you think might have held your development back, or had a negative effect on the way you turned out?
  
11. Why do you think your parents behaved as they did during your childhood?
  
12. Were there any other adults with whom you were close, like parents, as a child? Or any other adults who were especially important to you, even though not parental?
  
13. Did you experience the loss of a parent or other close loved one while you were a young child--for example, a sibling, or a close family member?
  - Would you say this loss has had an effect on your adult personality?
  - Where relevant, how does it affect your approach to your own children?
  
14. Did you lose any other important persons during your childhood?
  
15. Have you lost other close persons, in adult years?

16. Other than any difficult experiences you've already described, have you had any other experiences which you should regard as potentially traumatic? perhaps an experience which was overwhelmingly and immediately terrifying.
17. Interim and Current relationship with parents (if still alive).  
Were there many changes in your relationship with your parents (or remaining parent) between your childhood and your adulthood?
18. What is your relationship with your parents (or remaining parent) like for you now as an adult?
- Do you have much contact with your parents at present?
  - What would you say the relationship with your parents is like currently?
  - Are there any (or any other) sources of dissatisfaction in your current relationship with your parents? any special (or any other) sources of special satisfaction?
19. If you have a child or children:
- How do you respond now, in terms of feelings, when you separate from your child / children?
20. If you had three wishes for your child (or unborn child) twenty years from now, what would they be? For example, the kind of future you would like to see for your child.
21. Is there any particular thing which you feel you learned above all from your own childhood experiences? Or something you feel you have gained from the kind of childhood you had?
22. Looking to the future.  
What would you hope your child (or, your imagined child) might have learned from his/her experiences of being parented by you?



## **Working with Different Hostile and Conflict-avoidant Partner Combinations**

As the therapist, how would you approach each of these different scenarios? Use any techniques you would like to try out (maybe some from the first weekend). What seems effective/ineffective? Note how you respond internally to hostility/avoidance, and any issues or dilemmas that emerge for you as you work.

When playing the clients, be as creative as you like while doing your best to embody the essence of the partner positions. How might they be feeling? Notice your therapist's interventions. How do you imagine the character you are playing might experience them? Which position feels more like your personal stance in relationship?

### **Hostile with Conflict-avoidant Partner (classic pursuer/alooof)**

Helen has instigated counselling with her boyfriend, Alan, to 'get him to communicate'. She thinks it's time they took a step forward in commitment and get a place together. However, she's at her wit's end trying to discuss this with Alan, as he constantly deflects, withdraws and seems unable to make a decision.

Alan says he's fine to come to counselling if that's what Helen wants, but doesn't really see any issues in their relationship. Helen's style of communication is aggressive; Alan is rather silent.

### **Two Conflict-avoidant Partners**

Anna and Andy are in their early 50s. They reluctantly present for counselling as a last resort, with an issue around sex that's been threatening their marriage for some time. However, both are very afraid that what might emerge through counselling could equally threaten their marriage.

Anna says she has a low sexual desire and so never initiates, but worries about how unhappy Andy is. Andy gave up initiating some time ago because Anna would always make excuses. Now they sleep in different rooms. They both present in counselling as deflective, silent and avoidant.

### **Two Hostile-escalating Partners**

Harry and Huang are a cross-cultural gay couple in their early thirties and have been together for three years. Huang comes from a traditional Chinese family and is not out yet to them. He doesn't think his family need to know and would rather keep his sexual orientation private. Harry came out to his friends and family when he was 18. He thinks Huang should be more open, and doesn't want to have to pretend to be his 'friend' when his family visit.

Whenever they both speak about this issue, they both flare up and aggressively confront each other, both thinking their way is the right way. They also present in therapy as argumentative and confrontational.

## A TIME OUT ROUTINE FOR COUPLES

### WHEN TO INITIATE TIME OUT

1. When you feel emotionally upset, overloaded, or angry;
2. When you sense the other person is becoming so emotional or withdrawn that there can be no productive dialogue;
3. When you hear yourself or the other saying the same thing over and over;
4. When you sense or hear the emotional intensity rising;
5. When you notice ANY warning signs that emotional overload lies ahead.

### HOW TO INITIATE TIME OUT

1. Use a silent, pre-arranged signal such as a T-sign;
2. Do not discuss it!
3. Turn immediately and leave to a pre-designated place without further dialogue.

### WHAT TO DO IN TIME OUT

1. Write. Define the problem you were discussing;  
List the points you wanted to make;  
List the concerns you heard the other person saying;
2. Do something soothing:  
Write in a journal  
Take a walk  
Take a bath  
Listen to your favourite soothing music  
Tend to your garden  
Meditate, visualise a safe place  
Do deep breathing exercise  
Do some normal, mechanical routines

## WHEN AND HOW TO RE-ENGAGE AFTER TIME OUT

1. The default interval after a Time Out is 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, the person who called the Time Out needs to 'check in' with their partner;
2. 'Checking-in' means either in person or by phone. You can check in and tell your partner you need more time. With each extension the time-out interval gets longer. The recommended length between check-ins is:
  - Twenty minutes
  - One or two hours
  - Half a day
  - A whole day
  - Overnight
3. When you are ready to move back into contact with each other, do not discuss the topic that started the Time Out. After 24 hours have passed, either partner can raise the topic again. If the topic proves too tricky to talk about calmly, save it for a therapy session.

4. When re-engaging, remember:

If you are the Speaker, ask for a dialogue by inviting your partner to listen to you with curiosity and an open heart. Stick to one topic, talk in small chunks.

If you are the Listener, take a few deep breaths, remember in your partner's world it's their story. Practise mirroring what they say; ask neutral questions; summarise as you go along; empathise.

## HOW TO EXIT

1. No door slamming;
2. No parting comments or name calling;
3. Sooner is better than later;
4. Focus on your own exit, not on what the other is doing or not doing;
5. NEVER block the other from leaving;
6. Remind yourself that this is TIME OUT, not a permanent separation.

## **Setting Limits on Conflict**

In every couple relationship it is important to define the limits and boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable behaviour during a fight.

First, in points 1 and 2 below please define these limits for yourself in clear specific terms. Ensure that you cover areas such as physical behaviour, tone of voice, ending a fight and what you don't want your partner to say.

Second, compare your lists and then at point 3, list what you negotiate as limits and boundaries for both of you (a joint list).

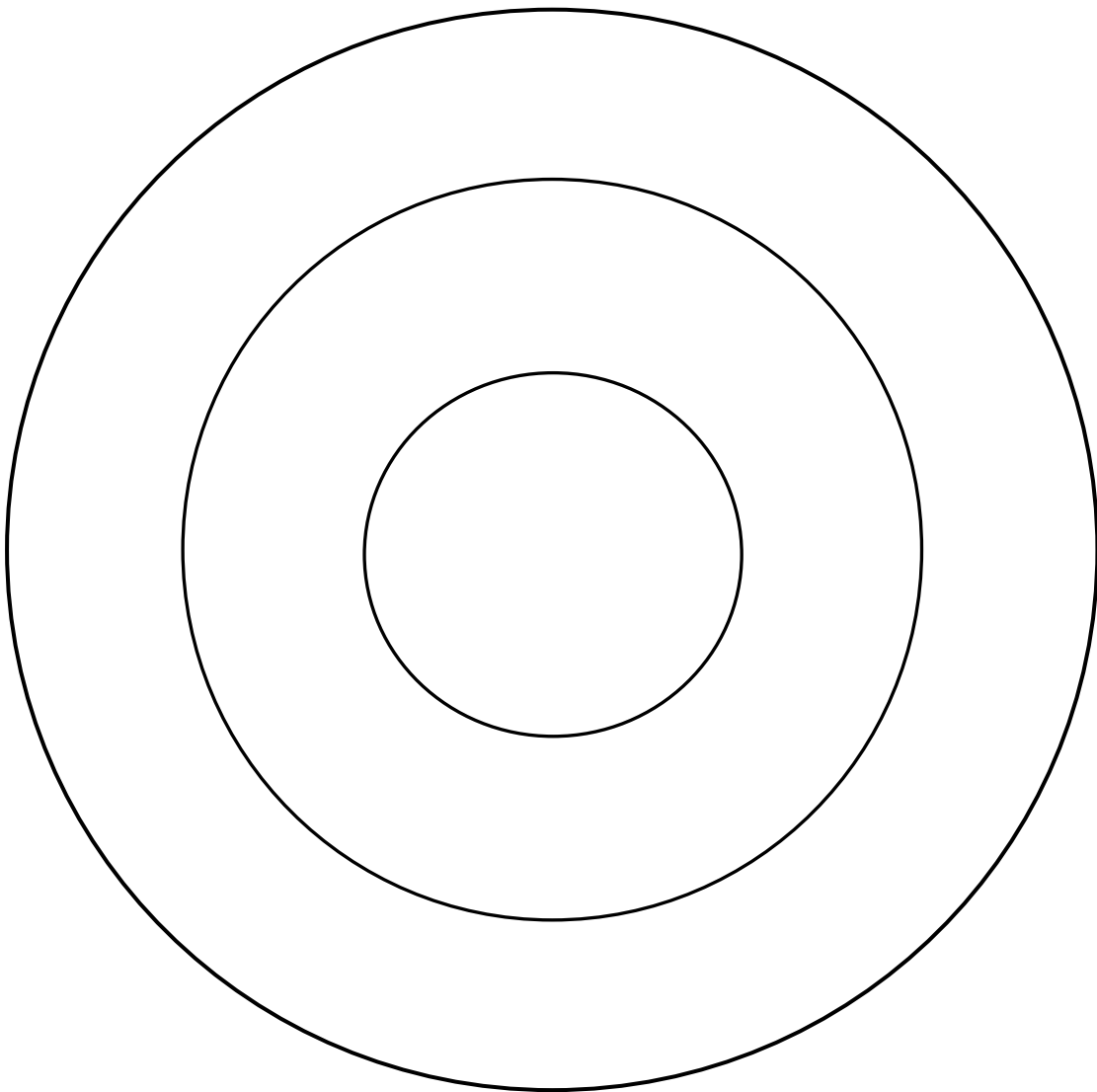
1. For me, it is acceptable to do the following during a fight:

2. For me, it is not acceptable to do the following during a fight:

3. Joint list of what is acceptable and not acceptable:

## Three Circles<sup>2</sup>

1. Outer layer; when I am at my worst in a difficult situation with my partner, what I do is...
2. Inner layer; the feeling that is hardest to let my partner see when I am at my worst is...
3. Middle layer: what I want to do instead of being at my worst is...



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<sup>2</sup> 2009 The Couples Institute ([www.thecouplesinstitute.com](http://www.thecouplesinstitute.com))

## Ineffective behaviours Partners Use to Cope

Blame

Always have to be right

Defend

Name calling

Pout

Sulk

Withdraw

Drink too much

Deny

Intimidate

Keep secrets

Belittle

Dominate

Diagnose

Escape to work

Stonewall

Make fun of

Sarcasm

Yell to drown each other out

Be judgemental

Talk about each other's (family) relations

Leave

Walk out without taking a time out

Tell your partner what they feel

Use the silent treatment

Attack

Comply

Lie

Get Stubborn

Use contempt

Bring in the kids

Abuse drugs

Provoke Guilt

Shame my partner

Interrupt

Nag

Be condescending

Compete

Bring up old issues

Micro manage

Cry

Get impatient

Reject

Change Subject

Distract

Put down

Dismiss Partner

Criticise

Manipulate

Interrupt<sup>3</sup>

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## **Emotionally Intelligent Thought Record: Getting in touch with your inner world**

Choose one emotional situation that occurs this week and answer the following questions:

### 1. Situation

What is going on around you, in your environment, right now? Where are you? Who is with you? What are you doing?

### 2. Physical Sensations

In this situation, what physical sensations do you notice yourself experiencing in your body?

Where in your body do you feel such sensations?

### 3. Emotions

Using one word, describe and “label” this emotion that you are feeling in this moment. How

intensely would you say you are feeling this emotion on a scale of 0–100?

### 4. Thoughts

What thoughts are going through your mind in this situation?

### 5. ‘Learning To Stay’

If you catch yourself in the experience, take this opportunity to learn to stay with your experience, just as it is. Follow the flow of your breath. Write down any observations you may make about this.

### 6. Responding ‘Inside’

How might you best respond or have best responded to your thoughts and emotions in this moment? What would a self-compassionate, rational, and balanced response be or have been?

### 7. Responding ‘Outside’

In this situation, are there any actions in the world that you need to take to pursue your needs and/or values? If so, what would these actions be?