

Couple Checkup



Married Discussion Guide

David H. Olson, Ph.D.
Peter J. Larson, Ph.D.

www.couplecheckup.co.uk

Foundation for the Couple Checkup is the Popular PREPARE/ENRICH Program

Over 2 million couples have taken the popular and highly effective PREPARE/ENRICH Program nationally. The goal of the program has been to build stronger marriages. It has been used by over 65,000 counselors and clergy with premarital and married couples. National studies have demonstrated that the program is highly effective in helping couples develop their strengths and overcoming their ongoing issues.

This Couple Checkup is based on the PREPARE/ENRICH Program. As such, it provides you with a wealth of useful information about how to improve your couple relationship.

DEVELOPERS OF THE COUPLE CHECKUP

David H. Olson, Ph.D.

David H. Olson is the president of Life Innovations and developer of the PREPARE/ENRICH Program. He is also Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota, where he has researched and taught in the Family Social Science Department for over 25 years. He is a Fellow with the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association for Marital and Family Therapists (AAMFT).

Dr. Olson has been elected as the president of the National Council on Family Relations and has received many national awards including Cumulative Contributions to Family Therapy Research by the AAMFT and the 2004 Impact Award from Smart Marriages. He has written over 100 articles and chapters on various topics related to marriage and family life.

He has also written or edited over 20 books, including *Empowering Couples*, *Building Relationships*, and *Marriages & Families*. His Circumplex model of marital and family systems has been used as the theoretical foundation for over 1000 published studies. He has appeared on many national television shows including NBC's Today Show, the CBS Morning Show, ABC's Good Morning America, and Oprah.

Peter J. Larson, Ph.D., LP

Peter Larson is the Vice President of Life Innovations, Inc., the international headquarters of the PREPARE/ENRICH inventories and Program. He is a licensed psychologist in the state of Minnesota. He received his doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, and has specialized in marriage therapy for many years. Before joining Life Innovations, he was the Director of Research and Clinical Services for the Smalley Relationship Center. He has published several articles in professional journals and has co-authored the *PREPARE/ENRICH Marriage Mentor Program* (2004) and the *Building Strong Families Program* (2005).

Couple Checkup Discussion Guide for Married Couples

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Communication: Assertiveness & Active Listening Skills	6
Conflict Resolution: Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict	8
Financial Management: Budgeting & Goals	10
Sexual Relationship	13
Spiritual Beliefs	15
Relationship Roles	16
Couple Map: Closeness & Flexibility	17
Personality Scales– SCOPE	19
<u>Supplemental Categories:</u>	
Blended Family Issues	20
Personal, Couple, and Family Goals	22

Communication Exercise: Creating and Sharing a Wish List

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things that you would like your partner to do more often. Next, you will be asked to take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

In sharing your Wish List with your partner, you will be demonstrating your **assertiveness skills**. In giving feedback to your partner about their Wish List, you will be demonstrating your **Active Listening skills**.

- **Assertiveness** means your ability to express feelings and ask for what you want.
- **Active listening** is the ability to listen accurately and repeat back to the speaker the message you have heard.

Make a Wish List of three things that you want your partner to do more often.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

After completing the Wish List Exercise, discuss the following questions:

- **In what ways are you good at being assertive? Where could you improve?**
 - **In what ways do you effectively use active listening skills? How could you improve?**
-

Communication Tips that will Increase Your Intimacy:

1. Look for the good in your partner and give him/her a compliment.
2. Praise your partner as much as possible.
3. Take time to listen to each other.
4. Listen to understand -- not to judge.
5. Use active listening, which involves summarizing your partner's comments before you share your reactions or feelings.
6. Be assertive. Share your feelings by using "I" statements (i.e. I feel... or I think...).
7. When issues arise, avoid blaming each other and seek solutions.
8. If problems persist, use the Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict.
9. If problems still continue, seek counseling before they become more serious. Doing so will make it easier to find solutions.
10. Give your relationship the same priority and attention you gave it when you were first dating.

Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict

"Marriage is a team sport. You either win together or lose together."

Every couple has differences and disagreements. But healthy couples find ways to resolve disputes without turning them into relationship wars. Couples who accept and appreciate the fact that their partner has independent feelings and opinions tend to reach successful and satisfying resolutions.

In some cases, conflicts involve hurt feelings where one partner offended the other through their words or actions. In these cases, the Assertiveness and Active Listening Skills, taught in the last section, can help you "clear the air" by listening and understanding.

When you have issues that are ongoing and require a decision or solution to resolve, use this Ten Step approach to deal with them. The exercise below may boost your success in ending issues that resist resolution. As simple as the Ten Step exercise looks, remember it is not a game. Take time to work on all of the steps. Focus on one issue at a time and you will discover new solutions to old problems.

- 1. Set a time and place for discussion.**
- 2. Define the problem or issue of disagreement.**
- 3. How do you each contribute to the problem?**
- 4. List past attempts to resolve the issue that were not successful.**
- 5. Brainstorm. List all possible solutions.**
- 6. Discuss and evaluate these possible solutions.**
- 7. Agree on one solution to try.**
- 8. Agree on how each individual will work toward this solution.**
- 9. Set up another meeting. Discuss your progress.**
- 10. Reward each other as you each contribute toward the solution.**

Ten Steps for Resolving Couple Conflict Worksheet

- 1. Schedule a specific place, date and time for a couple meeting within the next week.**

Allow at least 30 minutes.

Meeting Place: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

- 2. Select one important issue you would like to resolve. List the specific issue or problem for discussion below:**

- 3. How do you each contribute to the problem? Without blaming each other, list the things you each do that have not helped to resolve the problem.**

Male:

1) _____

2) _____

Personality SCOPE

Exploring your personality can be a fascinating and fun process. It can also point out challenges for couples who love one another, but have very different preferences and approaches to life.

Question: Do “opposites attract” or do “birds of a feather flock together”?

Answer: Both are true.

There is no right or wrong combination of personality traits to form a successful relationship. While some couples may have an easier time and others will face challenges, in the end, how you communicate, respect, and work with one another’s differences can determine your relationship compatibility.

A common misperception is that you can change personality traits if you don’t like them. While there may be slight transitions throughout the life cycle, personality is pretty much set in childhood. Don’t fall into the trap of criticizing one another’s personality traits, or trying to change someone to be something they are not. Instead, identify and discuss your similarities and differences and create solutions that allow you to work with one another rather than against one another. Remember, your personality differences can be advantageous as you each bring unique abilities and perspectives to the relationship.

Discussion Questions

First, Review the personality SCOPE section of your report.

- 1. In what areas are your personalities similar?**
 - a. How might the similarities affect your relationship positively?
 - b. Are there any drawbacks to being alike in these areas? (i.e. both score low on organization?)
- 2. In what areas are your personalities different?**
 - a. How might the differences impact your relationship, both positively and negatively?
- 3. Do the roles you expect to fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths** (i.e. Is an individual who scores low on organization being asked to manage the checkbook)?

Tips for Couples

- Don’t try to change your partner’s personality. It won’t work!
- Remember the positive aspects of your partner’s personality that attracted you to them in the first place.
- Consider where you may be out of balance in your own personality and behavior. Think of strategies that could bring more balance to your life.