



GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CONFLICTED AND DEVITALIZED COUPLES

- Since “Conflicted” and “Devitalized” couples are often more aware of, and more focused on their “growth areas”, it is important to bring attention to, and build upon their strengths.
- If couples do not have strengths at the “category” level (Communication, Finances, etc.), look within each category to find Positive Couple Agreement at the item level. Help them reconnect with these positive aspects of their relationship.
- Provide encouragement and hope by normalizing “seasons” of unhappiness in relationships. Studies have demonstrated that when couples are followed for five years, majorities of those who report being “unhappily married” later report being “happily married”.
- Make note of how each partner responded to questions on commitment and consider asking your couple what they believe the connection may be between commitment and relationship satisfaction. In PREPARE/ENRICH Research, 95% of “vitalized” couples report high relationship commitment, whereas only 23% of “devitalized” couples report the same.
- Conflicted and devitalized couples have a high risk of divorce and often need more feedback sessions and/or more intensive intervention to improve their relationship.
- It is always important to know your limitations and this may be more important when working with conflicted or devitalized couples. Based on your level of training and experience, know when to refer couples for further help.

DIFFICULT ISSUES THAT REQUIRE COUNSELING FROM A PROFESSIONAL THERAPIST

- Substance abuse or addiction
- Physical abuse
- Sexual addictions or abuse
- Ongoing infidelity
- Serious mental health concerns such as depression, bipolar disorders, etc.

- Creating a Wish List Using Assertiveness and Active Listening
- Ten Steps for Resolving Conflict
- How to Take a Time-Out
- Seeking and Granting Forgiveness



COUPLE EXERCISE CREATING A WISH LIST



COMMUNICATION

*"It is a luxury to be understood."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

CREATING A WISH LIST

In this exercise, you will each individually make a Wish List of things you would like more or less of in your relationship. Next, take turns sharing your Wish Lists with each other.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and ask for what you want in your relationship.

Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.

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.

Make a Wish List of three things you would like more or less of in your relationship.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

SHARING YOUR WISH LIST

Take turns sharing your Wish List with each other, keeping in mind the following:

- Speaker's Job:
 - Speak for yourself ("I" statements e.g. "I wish...").
 - Describe how you would feel if your wish came true.
- Listener's Job:
 - Repeat/summarize what you have heard.
 - Describe the wish AND how your partner would feel if the wish came true.

COUPLE DISCUSSION

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

- How good were each of you at being assertive?
- In what ways did you each effectively use active listening skills?

