

Mental Health and Emotional Wellness Tools, Concepts, and Strategies



Thank you both for choosing to work with me regarding your Relationship and Couple Therapeutic Services. All the Best! Lawrence.

I am an experienced and compassionate behavioral health and wellness therapist driven by an authentic desire to guide and support anyone facing challenging individual and or life difficulties. For more than 30 years I have provided therapeutic mental health, addiction, relationship, and family wellness services for adults, couples, families, children, and veterans. I also provide resilience and success coaching to professional athletes, executives, attorneys, physicians, and companies.

Marriage counseling and relationship therapy can help partners cultivate greater joy, connection, and fulfillment in their relationship. To maintain a lasting and intimate bond, couples must prioritize their partnership by fostering mutual admiration, managing conflicts constructively, continuously nurturing their friendship, and embracing a willingness to influence and grow with one another. With a holistic approach backed by 30 years of experience in therapy and mental health, we help couples recover their trust and commitment to the relationship, focusing on integrative relationship strategies

Relationship therapy is a collaborative journey designed to help couples strengthen their bond, resolve challenges, and build a healthier, more fulfilling connection. In my therapeutic work with couples, patients, we focus on iterative methodologies to build and enhance resilience rather than focusing on the negative consequences of stress, anxiety, depression, addictions, and trauma. Powerful conscious and unconscious forces influence our thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and interactions. The first steps in managing and or preventing these emotions and behaviors are self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-direction. Gaining insights into your values, goals, desires, and interpersonal challenges can empower you to make better decisions for yourself, embrace personal healing, increase happiness, build meaningful relationships, influence greater opportunities, and most importantly, live a more purposeful life.

We will use a comprehensive range of therapeutic tools, concepts, and strategies in our wellness methodology to include The Gottman Method-Couples Therapy. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Brief Solution-Focused Therapy, and Somatic Mind/Body Therapy in our therapy work together.

Please be advised that I do not offer therapy services: if the couple is in crisis; experiencing physical conflict/abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, or seeking mediation for ending their relationship. I do not offer expertise specializing in identifying and healing unresolved childhood or individual/family trauma and defer to other therapeutic specialties such as: Psychodynamic Therapy: To explore unconscious processes and early attachment patterns. Attachment-Based Therapy: To address the impact of parental relationships on current emotional functioning. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) trauma therapy.

Marriage & Relationship Services

What To Expect From Therapy & Wellness Care

It is a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to our work together on this important journey to grow in your relationship!

My name is Lawrence, I have 30+ years of healthcare service. My specialty: Master Psychiatric Social Worker with (LCSW, LICSW Licensure) across multiple states. I am an Executive Officer. Entrepreneur. US. Air Force Veteran- Healthcare/Medic.

It is important to clarify what relationship therapy (can and can not do) and to set realistic expectations of therapy while also embracing the value of the therapeutic process. In our sessions you will learn that strong relationships or marriages are built through conscious effort and commitment rather than relying solely on initial attraction or feelings. In healthy relationships, lasting connection comes more from intentional actions and personal virtues of the partners than from spontaneous love or emotional sparks. However, therapy is not a quick fix and requires much iterative effort and commitment from both partners. The strongest relationships are built...

What Therapy Can Do for Couples

- **Improve Communication:** Therapy will help both of you develop healthier communication patterns. You'll learn tools to express yourselves more clearly and listen to each other with empathy.
- **Promote Emotional Connection:** Therapy aims to enhance emotional intimacy by helping you both understand each other's feelings, needs, and vulnerabilities, fostering a deeper sense of connection and trust.
- **Provide Conflict Resolution Tools:** You'll gain techniques to navigate disagreements more constructively, avoiding escalation and finding ways to compromise or resolve issues more effectively.
- **Facilitate Growth and Change:** Therapy will encourage both partners to grow individually and as a couple, promoting healthy changes that can lead to a stronger relationship. It requires active participation and openness from both partners.
- **Establish Boundaries and Expectations:** Therapy will help define clearer values and boundaries and set realistic expectations for each partner, improving the overall structure of your relationship.

What Therapy Cannot Do for Couples

- **Fix" Your Partner:** Therapy isn't about changing or "fixing" one person to fit the other's needs. It's about both of you working together to understand your roles and make mutual adjustments.
- **Provide Instant Solutions:** Couple therapy is not a quick fix. It's a process that takes time, effort, and patience. The benefits will unfold gradually as you practice the skills learned in therapy (5-10 sessions is the average).
- **Guarantee a "Happy Ending":** While therapy can lead to healing and stronger relationships, it does not guarantee that every couple will stay together. Sometimes, therapy helps couples realize that separation may be the healthiest option.
- **Solve All Conflicts:** Therapy won't eliminate conflict, but it will provide tools to handle disagreements in a more respectful and less damaging way. Conflict is a natural part of relationships, but you'll learn to manage it more effectively.
- **Do the Work for You:** Therapy provides guidance, but it's up to both partners to do the work. If one or both of you are not fully committed to the process, the benefits of therapy will be limited.
- **Remove Deep-Rooted Personal Issues:** While therapy may address individual issues that affect the relationship, it isn't a substitute for individual therapy. If either partner has unresolved trauma or mental health concerns, individual services may be necessary.



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**Stronger Relationships Equation: Clear Intentions + Honest Commitment + Positivity =
Increased Couple Trust-Growth-Reduced Conflict**

Power Concept: “The person that cares the least has the most control and power in the relationship.” In some relationships, there may be a power imbalance where one person holds more control or influence than the other. This can occur when one individual is less emotionally invested or reliant on the relationship than the other, giving them a perceived advantage in decision-making and interactions.

Flourishing Marriages Are Made, Not Found.

- Enduring connection in marriage results more from the intentional efforts of the spouses than it does from spontaneous love and emotional spark.
- High-connection marriages have 3 times higher scores on proactive behaviors than low connection couples, specifically in spending meaningful time together (71% vs. 19%), doing acts of kindness for each other (72% vs. 18%), and forgiving offenses (70% vs. 21%).

THE SOULMATE TRAP: Why Embracing Agency-Based Love is the Surest Path to Creating a Flourishing Marriage.

- Soulmate thinking diverts attention away from a fundamental truth of loving and lasting marriage: that the best relationships are made, not miraculously discovered.
- Science against Soulmates, an astonishing number of Americans continue to believe in the idea that they have a “one-and-only soulmate” waiting for them somewhere. A 2021 YouGov poll found that 60% of respondents believe in the idea of soulmates, confirming that the quest to find one’s soulmate continues to play a significant role in our modern dating culture.
- However it is important to understand that soulmate beliefs often diminish the significance of agency and intentional actions in healthy relationships which makes loving and lasting marriages less likely to be formed and sustained.
- The study finds that enduring connection in marriage relationships results more from the personal virtues and intentional efforts of the spouses, than it does from spontaneous love and emotional spark.

Relational connectivity focuses on indicators of the strength of a couple’s relationship.

- Personal virtues are a key factor that promote relational connectivity. Due to the inherent relationship context of dispositional virtues such as commitment, compassion, and other-centeredness, these personal traits are essential in creating a flourishing bond in a relationship such as showing compassion to each other, spending meaningful time together, regularly engaging in acts of kindness, and participating in regular maintenance behaviors to improve their relationship.

Codependency is a learned pattern of chronic neglect of self in order to gain love, approval, or validation.

- Codependency is reoccurring incongruent and unhealthy behaviors and boundary issues in an individual or couple to seek emotional safety and can be trauma responses and or coping mechanisms.
- Codependency in relationships influences us to rely on someone else for happiness, and we can lose our sense of self in the process.
- Codependency spans beyond romance or couples and can occur between parent and child, friends, and family members.

Relationship Tips, many relationship challenges can be prevented if couples follows these practices.

- Be Open and Be Curious. Being open means sharing information about yourself...when your partner knows about you, there's less room for them to misinterpret you. The more you show interest in and learn about the other person, the better shot you have at meeting his or her needs and not misinterpreting them.
- Avoid Giving Mixed Signals. People trust what they see over what they hear. Take Feedback Well.
- Build Trust. "Trust is a peculiar resource; it is built rather than depleted by use."
- Have an "Open-door" Policy in your relationship.
- Only Get Mad or Angry with Intention on Purpose. Expressing anger in appropriate ways communicates your strong feelings and reminds people of the gravity of a situation.
- When You Care, Authentically Show It.
- Don't Avoid the Inevitable. Tackle a Tough Conversation. Challenges and breeches in your relationship will only continue to layer upon layer.
- Acknowledge the Other Person's Feelings. You don't have to agree with the way people are feeling, but you do have to recognize those feelings as legitimate and respect them.
- Explain Your Decisions, Don't Just Make Them.
- Make Your Feedback Direct and Constructive. Constructive feedback has two parts: sharing your opinion and offering solutions for change.
- Offer a "Fix-It" Statement during a Broken Conversation. ...let go of blame and focus on the repair. Do you want to be right, or do you want a resolution.

Based on the Gottman Institute, CDC, NIH research, following are key relationship statistics.

- 70% of all marital problems are perpetual. More than 30% are solvable and resolved.
- The 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse predict early or eventual divorcing depending on acuity. **Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt, Stonewalling.** Emotional withdrawal and reoccurring anger predict divorce.
- Median duration of first marriages that end in divorce: Males: 7.8 years. Females: 7.9 years. There are 746,971 divorces per year. 50% of all divorces occur in the first 7 years. 50% of married couples may divorce within 40 years.
- 75% divorced couples cited lack of commitment as the reason for divorce and the most common cause of a marriage ending, exceeding infidelity. 60% of divorced couples cited infidelity as their reason.
- The average couple waits 6 years before seeking counseling and often too late for recovery.
- The final "tipping point" causing most divorce: Infidelity, Domestic Violence or Substance Abuse.
- Some think they should stay in unhealthy marriages, but there are consequences: There is an increase of contracting a serious illness by 35% and may shorten life span by 4 years or more due to chronic diffuse physiological arousal with associated physical and emotional stress. Stress can contribute to heart disease, anxiety, depression, violence, psychosis, and substance abuse. In healthy marriages, people are more health conscious and seek routine medical and mental health checkups.
- Physiological flooding occurs when the heartbeat is 100 bpm or greater. People cannot think clearly and are likely to do things and says things they later regret. Instead of continuing a discussion, take a break and self-soothe for a minimum of 20 minutes.
- 85% of stonewallers are men. Men react with more signs of physiological stress than women during disagreements, and therefore, men are more likely to withdraw.
- Happy and stable marriages have 5 positives to every 1 negative interaction during conflicts.

Ways to Utilize Relationship Therapy to Enhance Your Relationship and Life Together

Relationship therapy can be a educational resource for couples, whether they're addressing a specific challenge or simply wanting to strengthen their connection. Here are some helpful ways couples utilize relationship therapy:

- **Improve Communication Skills: Expressing Needs and Feelings.** Therapy helps partners learn how to express their needs and emotions more effectively. This often involves learning to use "I" statements and active listening.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Couples often struggle with productive conflict resolution. Therapy provides techniques to resolve disagreements in a healthy way, helping partners avoid negative cycles like blame or withdrawal.
- **Understanding Each Other's Perspectives or Empathy Building:** A therapist can guide partners in seeing situations from each other's viewpoints, fostering empathy and compassion.
- **Enhancing Intimacy and Connection: [Emotional Intimacy].** Therapy can help couples reconnect emotionally, which is often foundational for improving physical intimacy.
- **[Physical Intimacy]:** Some couples may seek therapy specifically to address issues around physical intimacy, like boundaries, mismatched desires or unresolved resentments that create barriers.
- **Addressing Perpetual Conflicts: Identifying Patterns.** Many couples face ongoing issues that seem unsolvable. Therapy helps them identify the underlying perpetual and gridlocked patterns and find ways to approach these conflicts with fresh perspectives.
- **Seeking and Finding Compromise:** Therapy often guides couples toward finding compromises or acceptance around "perpetual issues" (e.g., different priorities or personality differences) instead of trying to force change.
- **Managing Life Transitions Together: Major Changes:** Events like moving, having children, job changes, or dealing with loss can strain a relationship. Therapy provides a safe space to discuss fears, expectations, and adjustments together.
- **Parenting Conflicts:** Many couples seek therapy for help navigating different parenting styles or philosophies, learning to present a united front while honoring individual differences.
- **Rebuilding Trust After Betrayal: Addressing Infidelity or Betrayal.** Couples working through issues like infidelity often benefit from therapy's structured approach to rebuilding trust, accountability, and understanding.
- **Establishing New Boundaries:** Therapy can help couples set healthy boundaries, rebuild safety, and learn strategies to prevent future breaches of trust.
- **Developing Shared Goals and Vision: Creating a Shared Vision:** Therapy can help couples align on a vision for their future, including shared values, goals, and dreams.
- **Life Goals and Planning:** Many couples benefit from goal-setting sessions in therapy, from financial planning to family planning, where they can identify areas of agreement and potential friction.



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The Four Stages of Marriage

Most marriages go through a series of stages:

Romance: is a special time of falling in love with each other, intense feelings begin to develop, life is so wonderful feels as if can't be without the other.

Disillusionment: At some point, little differences that at first were endearing, start to annoy us. We begin to feel bothered by the way our spouse is different in many ways. We realize that our spouse has ideas, values, & goals that may not align with our own.

Misery: Many couples stick with and try to work through their problems and may seek the counsel of family, friends, clergy and marriage counselors. Quickly, but most often gradually, the pain of gradual growing apart or constant disagreement & fighting brings misery. Often the marriage deteriorates more deeply due to alcohol or other addictions, or infidelity, such as an online relationship, pornography addiction, or an affair that may cause severe anguish and grief. This stage is marked by a widening separation of distance, frustration, anger and an obvious absence of closeness, acceptance, and love.

Awakening to Joy: Learning to have a relationship with unconditional acceptance & feel valued for who you are can change the way you live together, speak to each other, and interact with each other daily. **It is the realization that while love is not perfect, we are not perfect & that is resilient and your relationship can be stronger than ever.** Due to elevated divorce rates, many couples never make it to the 4th Stage of Awakened Joy.



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The Gottman Method Cheat Sheet:

What Would John & Julie Do?

THE SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE THEORY

This is the foundational framework of the Gottman Method, which visualizes a strong relationship as a house with several levels:

- **Build Love Maps:** Understanding your partner's inner world, including their hopes, dreams, and everyday experiences.
- **Share Fondness and Admiration:** Expressing affection, respect, and appreciation regularly.
- **Turn Towards Instead of Away:** Recognizing and responding positively to your partner's bids for emotional connection.
- **The Positive Perspective:** Maintaining a positive view of your partner and the relationship, especially during conflicts.
- **Manage Conflict:** Handling disagreements constructively, including accepting influence, finding compromise, and dialogue about problems.
- **Make Life Dreams Come True:** Supporting each other's aspirations and finding ways to make them a reality.
- **Create Shared Meaning:** Building a sense of shared purpose, values, and rituals of connection.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The Gottmans identified four negative communication patterns that are highly predictive of relationship breakdowns if not addressed:

1. **Criticism:** Attacking your partner's character rather than addressing specific behaviors.
2. **Contempt:** Showing disrespect, mocking, or belittling your partner, which is the most damaging of the four.
3. **Defensiveness:** Responding to complaints with counter-attacks or playing the victim to deflect blame.
4. **Stonewalling:** Withdrawing from interaction and becoming emotionally unavailable.

THE ANTIDOTES TO THE FOUR HORSEMEN

To counteract the Four Horsemen, the Gottmans recommend specific antidotes:

- **Criticism Antidote:** Use a gentle startup by focusing on your own feelings and needs without blaming.
- **Contempt Antidote:** Build a culture of appreciation and respect by expressing gratitude and admiration.
- **Defensiveness Antidote:** Take responsibility, even for a small part of the issue, to diffuse tension.
- **Stonewalling Antidote:** Practice physiological self-soothing to stay emotionally present and calm.

THE MAGIC RATIO

The Gottmans emphasize the importance of maintaining a positive interaction ratio of 5:1 – five positive interactions for every negative one. This balance helps to keep the relationship resilient and happy.

BIDS FOR CONNECTION

Recognizing and responding to "bids for connection" is crucial. Bids are attempts to gain attention, affirmation, or affection from your partner. Turning towards these bids strengthens emotional bonds, while turning away or ignoring them can harm the relationship.

LOVE MAPS

Building and maintaining detailed "love maps" involves knowing your partner's world – their likes, dislikes, preferences, dreams, and fears. This deep understanding fosters intimacy and connection.

EMOTION COACHING

Helping partners to become "emotion coaches" for each other involves understanding and validating each other's emotions, which enhances emotional intimacy and trust.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The Gottman Method distinguishes between solvable and perpetual problems. Solvable problems can be resolved with effective communication and compromise, while perpetual problems require ongoing dialogue and understanding since they often stem from fundamental differences in personality or values.

CREATING SHARED MEANING

Developing shared rituals, goals, and values helps couples build a deeper connection and a sense of purpose in their relationship.

REPAIR ATTEMPTS

Recognizing and making repair attempts during conflict is vital. These are efforts to de-escalate tension and reconnect, which can include humor, apologies, or affectionate gestures.

TRUST AND COMMITMENT

Building trust and demonstrating commitment are essential elements. Trust is built through consistent positive interactions and reliability, while commitment involves investing in the relationship and prioritizing it. workshops.

GENTLE STARTUPS

A gentle startup involves approaching a conversation or conflict in a calm, respectful, and non-accusatory manner. It typically includes "I" statements, expressing feelings and needs without blaming.

Examples of Gentle Startups:

1. Expressing a Need Without Blame:

- "I feel overwhelmed when the house is messy. Can we work together to find a solution?"
- "I feel neglected when we don't spend time together. Can we plan a date night soon?"

2. Expressing a Feeling:

- "I feel hurt when you raise your voice. Can we talk about this calmly?"
- "I feel worried when you come home late without calling. Can you let me know if you're going to be late?"

3. Requesting a Change:

- "I feel stressed when the bills pile up. Can we create a budget together?"
- "I feel misunderstood when you interrupt me. Can you please let me finish speaking?"

4. Acknowledging the Partner's Efforts:

- "I really appreciate it when you help with the kids. Can we discuss how to share responsibilities more evenly?"

Scripts for Gentle Startups:

- "I feel [emotion] when [situation]. I need [specific request]."
- Example: "I feel anxious when I don't hear from you all day. I need us to check in with each other at least once during the day."
- "I've been feeling [emotion] about [situation]. Can we talk about it?"
- Example: "I've been feeling overwhelmed about our finances. Can we talk about how to manage our budget better?"
- "I'd like to talk about [issue]. I'm feeling [emotion] and I need [specific request]."
- Example: "I'd like to talk about our weekend plans. I'm feeling a bit left out and I need to feel more involved in the decision-making."

Source: Pinterest Media/Image

The Sound Relationship House Theory

Developed by John Gottman, Ph.D., and Julie Gottman, Ph.D.

Pioneers in relationship science, Drs. John and Julie Gottman have revolutionized our understanding of marriage, relationships, and couples therapy. They draw upon over four decades of breakthrough research with more than 3,000 couples. The Sound Relationship House Theory is the foundation of the Gottman Method, which uses a practical approach to help couples break through barriers to achieve greater understanding, connection, and intimacy in their relationships. The Gottmans will share insights about predicting whether couples will stay together or separate, and will teach you the tools you need to make your relationship work.

What Can You Do Now to Make Your Relationship Work?

Nurture the Friendship in Your Relationship

Build Love Maps

- Maintain awareness of your partner's world

Share Fondness and Admiration

- Make deposits into the Emotional Bank Account

Turn Towards Instead of Away

- Accept bids for emotional connection

Maintain a Positive Perspective

The Positive Perspective

- A positive perspective occurs when the friendship of your marriage is strong

Learn to Manage Your Conflict

Manage Conflict

- Accept influence from your partner: be open to compromise
- Discuss your problems: take turns listening to one another about perpetual issues
- Practice self-soothing: keep yourself calm

Honor Each Other's Life Dreams

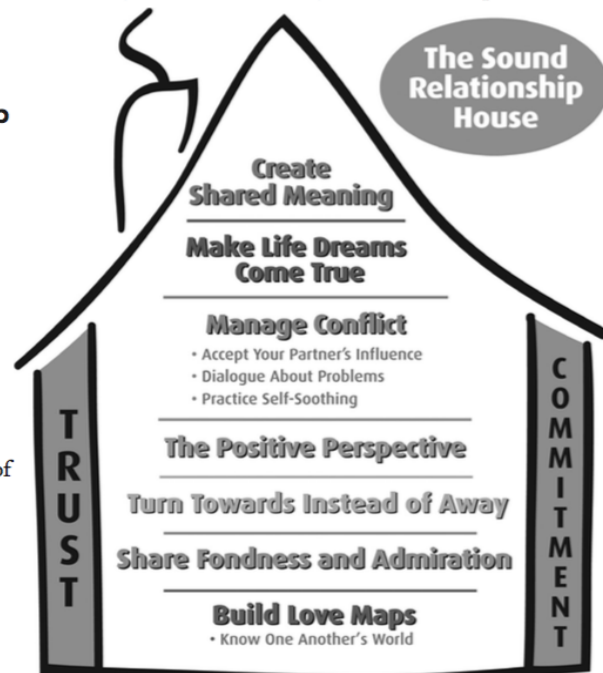
Make Life Dreams Come True

- Find ways to support each other's life goals and dreams

Create Shared Meaning in Your Relationship

Create Shared Meaning

- Build a shared sense of purpose. What is your mission and legacy?



What About Trust and Commitment?

5 ways to build trust, love, and loyalty in your relationship:

1. Make trustworthiness a main priority in your relationship
2. Act to maximize your partner's well-being
3. Know that trust is built in small positive moments
4. Avoid negative comparisons
5. Generate frequent thoughts and acts that cherish your partner's positive qualities and minimize your focus on their negative faults

Source: Gottman Media/Image

Dr. John Gottman's 7 Principles of Successful Relationships

- 1. Enhance your love maps.** You know all of your partner's relevant information, from life dreams to favorite movies, as a best friend would.
- 2. Nurture fondness and admiration.** You have a positive view and deep appreciation of your partner, and express it.
- 3. Turn toward your partner instead of away during times of stress.** "You want your partner to be that confidante," Gover says.
- 4. Let your partner influence you.** You shouldn't make important life decisions autonomously, as a single person would.
- 5. Solve your solvable problems.** All couples have solvable and perpetual problems, but long-term couples solve those they can and understand there will always be perpetual problems.
- 6. Overcome gridlock.** What often underlies perpetual problems are unfulfilled dreams. Talk about those dreams with the goal of making peace with the problem.
- 7. Create shared meaning.** Develop the big and small rituals that help build the bond with your partners. Rituals range from hosting an annual party to having coffee together in the morning.

<http://www.gottman.com>

DR JOHN GOTTMAN'S

7 PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS

ENHANCE YOUR LOVE MAPS

You know your partner's inner world, from life dreams to favorite movies, as a best friend would.



TURN TOWARD EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF AWAY

State your needs, be aware of bids for connection, and turn towards them.



SOLVE YOUR SOLVABLE PROBLEMS

All couples have solvable and perpetual problems, but long-term couples solve those they can and understand there will always be perpetual problems.



CREATE SHARED MEANING

Develop the big and small rituals that help build the bond with your partners. Rituals range from hosting an annual party to having coffee together in the morning.



NURTURE FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION

You have a positive view and deep appreciation of your partner and express it.



LET YOUR PARTNER INFLUENCE YOU

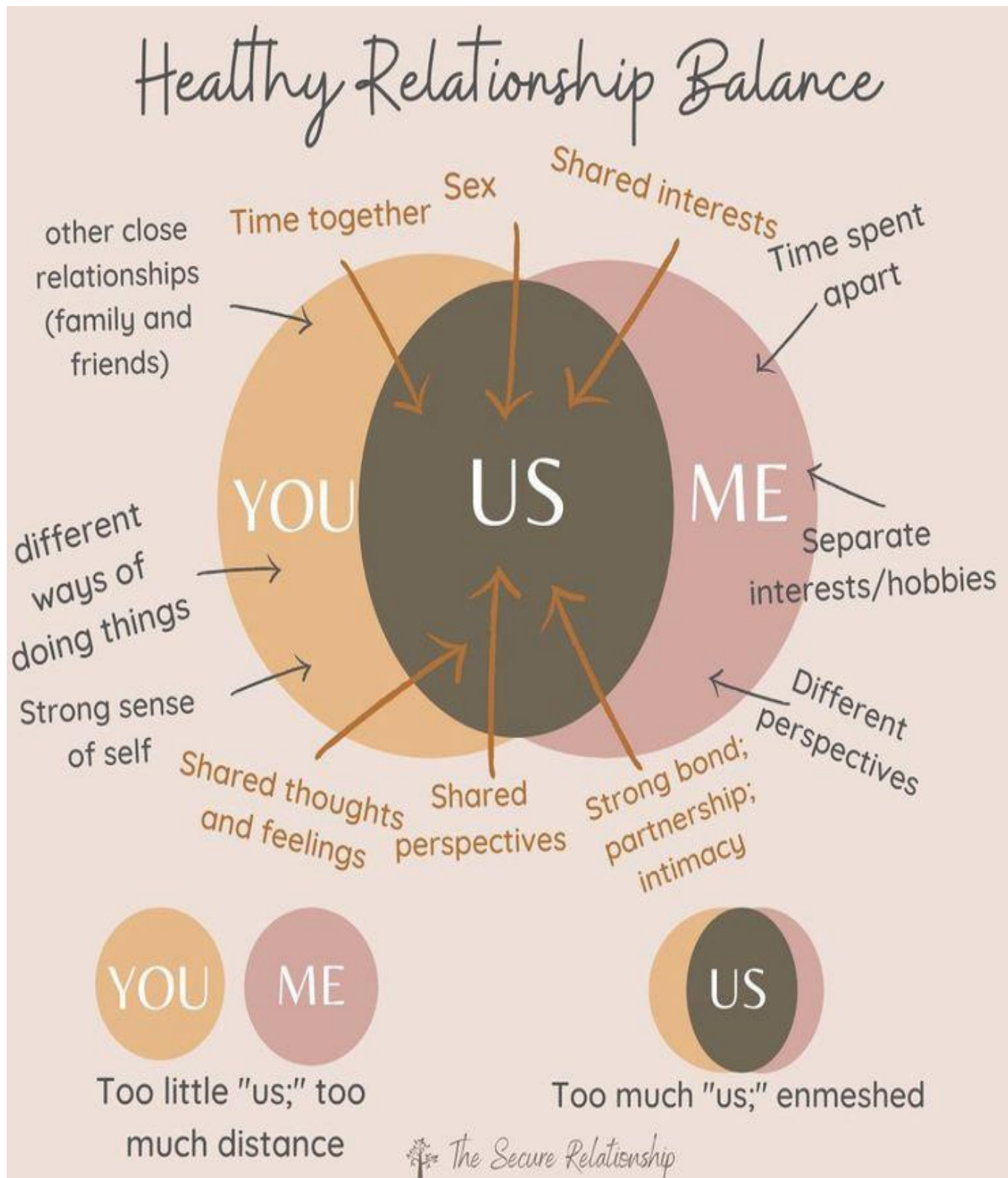
You shouldn't make important life decisions autonomously, as a single person would.



OVERCOME GRIDLOCK

What often underlies perpetual problems are unfulfilled dreams. Talk about those dreams to make peace with the problem.





The 5 Types of Couples:



Conflict Avoiders

Minimize persuasion attempts and instead emphasize their areas of common ground.



Volatile Couples

Passionate and love to provoke, but their discussions are often punctuated with lots of laughter.



Validating Couples

Put emphasis on supporting and understanding their partner's point of view, preferring to find a compromise.



Hostile Couples

Show high levels of defensiveness on the part of both partners and during conflict, each partner reiterates their own perspective.



Hostile-Detached

Engage in a mutually frustrating and lonely standoff with no clear victor, only a stalemate.

The Gottman Institute

BASED ON RESEARCH BY DR. JOHN GOTTMAN



Healthy Vs. Unhealthy relationships

Healthy

- Empathy and kindness.
- Reliability and commitment.
- The ability to work together as a team.
- Similar values and goals.
- Accepts Endings
- Allows for individuality
- Welcomes affection & closeness
- Does not try to control the person
- Does not try to change a person
- Offers great support
- Invites growth in person
- Good communication
- Enjoy each other's company
- Mutual Respect and trust
- Happy for you
- Good Self- Esteem
- Comfort & Acceptance
- Boundaries & Consent
- Kindness & Appreciation
- Joy & Contentment

Unhealthy

- Obsessive Behavior
- Control.
- Hostility.
- Dishonesty.
- Disrespect.
- Dependence.
- Intimidation.
- Physical violence.
- Sexual violence.
- Insulting or degrading comments
- Gaslighting
- False Accusations
- Manipulating, lying, or denying it
- Emotional Rollercoaster
- Self-Doubt
- Unhappy when you reach your goals
- Jealousy
- Anxious & On Edge
- Low - Self Esteem
- Unkind
- Disrespect
- Belittling

@themindfulcoach

**Adapted from the
Gottman Institute**



Take the initiative to **set up a future time** to continue the conversation



Long-term solutions:
Create a culture of **appreciation**,
psychological safety, and **mutual respect**

Codependency, Interdependency & Avoidance

The terms “codependent”, “interdependent”, and “avoidant” describe relationship dynamics. These terms are not intended to label individuals, rather the relationship pattern itself. Relationships are layered, and complex with the ideal being striking the balance where individuals feel respected, supported, and valued.

CODEPENDENT

Codependency refers to a relationship dynamic where one person excessively relies on another for their sense of self-worth, identity, and emotional well-being. Codependent individuals may have difficulty setting boundaries and often prioritize the needs of others over their own. This can lead to an unbalanced and unhealthy relationship.

- Fears being alone/ being abandoned
- Values others over self
- Identity: Couple
- Self-sacrificing: few interests outside of relationship
- Other-reliant: needs other person to function, feel secure
- Blurred boundaries: no self, no boundaries
- Need to be the “one”, needy, unconsciously controlling, manipulating

INTERDEPENDENT

Interdependence is a healthier relationship dynamic where both individuals maintain their own identities and are able to rely on each other for support and collaboration. In an interdependent relationship, both partners respect each other's boundaries, communicate openly, and share responsibilities. This allows for a balanced and mutually beneficial partnership.

- Secure alone and in the relationship
- Values self and other
- Identity: Self & Couple
- Healthy compromise of life in and outside of the relationship
- Mutual reliance while maintaining responsibility for self
- Healthy boundaries
- Healthy closeness, a balance of autonomy and closeness

AVOIDANT

Avoidant refers to a relationship dynamic where one or both individuals have a tendency to avoid emotional intimacy and closeness. Avoidant individuals may struggle with vulnerability and may prioritize independence over connection. This can lead to difficulties in forming and maintaining intimate connections and relationships.

- Fears of dependency, fears of being smothered
- Values self over others
- Identity: Self
- Self-sufficient: invested in self more than relationship
- Self-reliant: fears relying on others or accepting help
- Strong boundaries
- Emotionally distant: closeness triggers rejection/suffocation

Source: Pinterest Media/Image

WHAT IS CODEPENDENCY?

BY SHARON MARTIN, LCSW

- You focus on other people and their problems (caretaking, fixing, advice giving), doing for others even when it negatively impacts your mental health, physical health, finances, etc.
- You're extremely self-critical
- You feel responsible for everyone and everything
- You experience high levels of guilt and shame
- You absorb other people's feelings
- You're a people-pleaser, afraid of disappointing or upsetting others
- You have trouble setting boundaries and being assertive
- You ignore your own feelings and needs, possibly numbing them with food, alcohol, or drugs
- Intimacy, open communication, and trust are difficult
- You act like a martyr, taking care of everyone else, giving without receiving, and then feeling angry, resentful and taken advantage of
- You're a perfectionistic
- You tend to overwork and overschedule yourself
- You can be controlling, nagging, and critical of others
- You crave predictability, structure, and certainty



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TYPES OF *Intimacy* IN RELATIONSHIPS



Emotional Intimacy

- Sharing deeply personal emotions with your partner
- Knowing you will not be judged for your vulnerability and dark sides
- Making your partner feel safe in sharing their vulnerabilities with you
- Building trust by enabling unhinged freedom of expression



Intellectual Intimacy

- Communicating beliefs, perspectives, opinions and ideologies
- Knowing that differences in opinions will not lead to conflict
- Respecting each other's values
- Engaging in stimulating conversations and learning from each other



Physical Intimacy

- Being comfortable in physical proximity
- Expressing love through physical acts like holding hands, kissing, cuddling, etc.
- Engaging in consensual sex
- Making "touch" their love language by playing with their partner's hair, offering a massage, etc.



Experiential Intimacy

- Experiencing things together
- Sharing inside jokes and stories
- Working as a team towards a common goal
- Knowing how the other functions through experience



Spiritual Intimacy

- Sharing similar existential philosophies
- Believing in similar concepts of spirituality
- Bonding over deeply moving experiences
- Practicing spiritual activities together

INTIMACY IS NOT JUST SEX IT ALSO

- Dreaming together
- Finding ways to connect
- Sharing vulnerabilities
- Communicating openly and honestly
- Supporting each other's goals and aspirations
- Creating memories together
- Being emotionally present for one another
- Showing affection and appreciation
- Building trust and understanding
- Respecting each other's boundaries
- Growing and evolving together



1. Dreaming together: Picture sitting together, sharing your wildest dreams and feeling the excitement of aligning your visions for the future. It's about supporting each other's aspirations and knowing that you have a partner who believes in your dreams as much as you do.

2. Finding ways to connect: Think about those moments when you engage in activities that bring you closer, whether it's cooking together, going for a hike, or simply enjoying each other's company. It's about creating a special connection that is unique to your relationship.

3. Sharing vulnerabilities: Opening up about your deepest fears, insecurities and weaknesses, knowing that your partner will embrace your vulnerabilities with love and understanding. It's about creating a safe space where you can be your true self without judgment.

4. Communicating openly and honestly: Having a heartfelt conversations where you express your thoughts and feelings openly, knowing that your partner listens attentively and seeks to understand you on a deeper level. It's about building a foundation of trust through genuine and transparent communication.

5. Supporting each other's goals and aspirations: Cheering each other on as you pursue your personal and professional goals, offering unwavering support and encouragement during both triumphs and challenges. It's about being a source of strength and motivation for each other.

6. Creating memories together: Recall the shared experiences, adventures and special moments that have woven a tapestry of memories unique to your relationship. It's about cherishing these moments and using them to strengthen your bond and create a sense of togetherness.

7. Being emotionally present for one another: Being there for your partner in times of need, offering a listening ear, a comforting embrace, and unwavering support. It's about showing empathy, understanding and compassion in moments of joy and sorrow.

8. Showing affection and appreciation: Picture expressing your love, gratitude, and admiration through small gestures, heartfelt words, and acts of kindness that make your partner feel deeply valued and cherished. It's about nurturing a sense of appreciation and affection in your relationship.

9. Building trust and understanding: Envision establishing a strong foundation of trust, honesty, and mutual respect, where you deeply understand each other's needs, boundaries, and values. It's about fostering a deep connection built on respect and understanding.

10. Respecting each other's boundaries: Imagine acknowledging and honoring each other's personal space, boundaries, and individuality, creating a sense of respect and autonomy within your relationship. It's about valuing each other's uniqueness and creating a space where both partners feel safe and respected.

11. Growing and evolving together: Supporting each other's personal growth, learning from shared experiences, and navigating life's changes as a united team. It's about evolving together, embracing challenges, and growing stronger as a couple with each passing day.

Source: Pinterest Media/Image

LIVING OUT THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES AT HOME

Love Language

Actions

Communication

Avoid

Words of
Affirmation

Spoken words
Written cards and
letters

Encouraging words
Compliments
Affirming spirit

Emotionally
harsh words
Undue criticism

Quality
Time

Running errands
Taking trips
Doing things together
Going on walks
Sitting/talking at home

Quiet places
with no interruptions
Undivided attention
One-to-one
conversations

Too much
time with friends
or groups
Isolation
Gaps of time between
meetings

Receiving
Gifts

Giving gifts
Giving time
Remembering
special occasions
Giving small tokens

Private giving
of gifts
Pleasant facial
expressions

Materialism
Forgetting
special events

Acts of
Service

Assisting with house
chores
Ongoing acts of
helpfulness
Exchanging of chores

Say:
"What can I do for you?"
"I will stop and get..."
"Today, I did... for you."
Making a checklist

Forgetting
promises
Over
commitment
of tasks
Ignoring

Physical
Touch

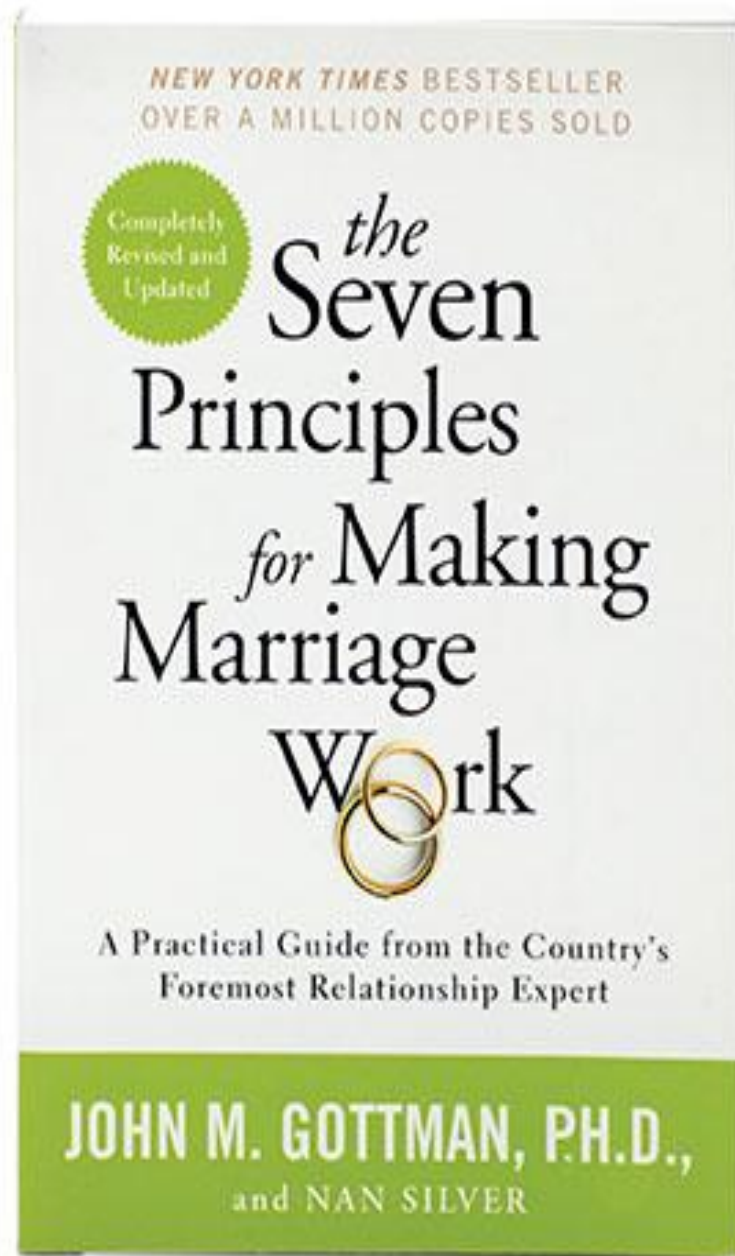
Hugs
Pats
Touches
Sitting close

Pleasant facial
expressions
Mostly non-verbal

Physical abuse
Corporal
punishment
Threats
Neglect

* Taken from Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages of Teenagers*





Emotional Intelligence Tools, Concepts, and Strategies

- In my therapeutic work with patients, we focus on iterative methodologies to build and enhance resilience rather than focusing on the negative consequences of stress, anxiety, depression, addictions, and trauma.
- Each therapy session presents infinite possibilities for exploring and personal growth opportunities, bravery is needed to explore what troubles you!
- **Seize the therapeutic opportunity:** every challenge or failure can teach us something, what did, or can you learn?
- **Resilience may be the most powerful and effective tool and strategy for overall wellbeing!** The success of our resilience lies in our capacity to self-regulate and optimize our lives across multiple life domains.
- **Focus on your "Now". Only the present is important because nothing ever occurs in the past or future; your life is a continuous stream of present moments.**
- **Embrace discomfort and difficult situations, as opportunities to learn, adjust and grow.**
- **Your Self-actualization and Life Purpose Formula = 1-Personal Growth. 2-Self-Acceptance. 3-Autonomy. 4-Positive Relationships. 5-Environmental Mastery. 6-Integrity. 7-Courage. 8-Patience. 9-Persistence. 10-Empathy.**
- **Your Emotional Fitness Triad: Distress Tolerance, Emotional Regulations/IQ and Interpersonal Effectiveness.**
- Focus on defining & continually enhancing: **Values, Boundaries, Habits, Goals.**
- **Emotional Fitness Challenge: Focus on 1% better per month in all 10 Wellness Dimensions.**
- **Focus on what you can Control and less on what you can not Control.**
- **Challenge your thoughts and emotions, check for evidence on what you are thinking.** Stay composed under pressure, choosing calm over chaos.
- **2 Ears and only 1 mouth for a reason...** Listen more to understand, not just to respond, and pause before reacting, avoiding emotional outbursts.
- **The brain** seems to be good at learning from bad experiences, but bad and inept at learning from good experiences.
- **Past behavior** is the most reliable predictor of future behavior. Pay attention not to words and promises but to actual behaviors.
- **Drift—allow yourself to wonder freely with your emotions and inner creativity. Postpone inner criticism and explore both proximities and adjacencies for new clarity.**
- **Allow Change:** Allow both positive and negative challenges and events to change you and be willing to grow from every experience.
- **Growth** is different from something that happens to you, you produce growth. The prerequisites for growth: the openness to experience events and the willingness to be changed by them.
- **STAR Concept/Behavior Control: Stop – Think before you -Act or React = decision stabilization.**
- **G-I-V-E is a communication tool. Be Gentle – no attacking, threatening, or judging. Act Interested in what is being said. Validate what is being said; Use an Easy manner.**
- Dr. Livingston- On therapy and healing: After decades of treatment, **I don't have a clear idea of what people need to do to try and make themselves better. I am, however, able to sit with them while they figure it out.**



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Sustainable Behavior Change

Iterative Mindset focuses on continuous and adaptive improvements through the practice of building and refining behaviors, goals, boundaries, and values.

The focus is treating behavior change as a series of progressive & stacked experiments to develop and maintain sustainable results through trial & error and practice.



Intrusive and Brooding Rumination Your Harmful Cycle of Repetitive Thinking

The latest research clearly identifies rumination as: (racing thoughts, excessive worry, negative thinking, or brooding). Rumination can influence significant distress and numerous mental health disorders including: anxiety-panic, depression, disruptive and impulsive behaviors, sleep issues, alcohol or substance misuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harming or violent behaviors, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and relationship challenges.

Rumination is a mental compulsion and frequently deliberate regardless of the significant emotional pain and damage it influences everyone.

Rumination doesn't make you feel better and can leave you feeling out of control. Rumination can act as a form of avoidance by thinking about difficulties rather than confronting them directly in the real world and thereby avoiding the risk of failure and negative outcomes. Hence, rumination can become reinforced by escape and avoidance.

Intrusive Rumination: almost always involuntary and trauma-based or caused by an acute stressor(s).

Brooding Rumination: purposely engaging in and getting stuck passively experiencing the same negative emotions thoughts again and again in an unproductive loop.



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4 Types of Rumination

How to Instantly Calm Your Mind



 Matty Piazzi

Automatic Negative Thoughts

How to Handle **Black-and-White Thinking** with Socratic Questions

1

Question the evidence

What evidence supports this thought?

What evidence contradicts it?

2

Explore alternatives

Are there other ways to look at this?

What would I tell a friend in this situation?



3

Consider the implications

How does this thinking affect my feelings and actions?

How might this impact my future choices?

4

Evaluate a balanced perspective

What's a more balanced way to see this?

How can I view this with both pros and cons in mind?



Matty Piazzi

The Brain-Body Connection- The Vagus Nerve. Linking Physiology and Cognition

Functional Mental Health- my integrative services focuses on the Brain in the context of the whole body. What we “think” we “feel” and what we “feel” we “think”.

The Polyvagal Theory or (CNS) Central Nervous System response explains the various states created by nervous system and how they impact our daily emotions, behavior, and physical health.

The Vagus Nerve is a cranial nerve and longest nerve of the body. It is a major conduit of the autonomic and parasympathetic nervous system, and it is extremely powerful, branching off to every major organ system in the body and influencing their function. The vagus nerve oversees a vast array of crucial bodily functions, including control of mood, immune response, digestion, and heart rate. It establishes connections between the brain and the stomach and colon and sends info to the brain.

Vital communication between the body and the nervous system is called **Interoception** and it allows the brain to sense internal states, such as hunger, pain, or heart rate. The vagus nerve is an important part of Interoception that can have a profound effect on how we are feeling, even influencing emotions such as anxiety and depression.

- **Ventral vagal:** Associated with feelings of safety, calmness, and social engagement. This state is associated with higher-level cognitive processes.
- **Sympathetic:** Activated when a threat is perceived, preparing the body for fight or flight. This state is associated with emotions like anger, fear, anxiety, and panic.
- **Dorsal vagal:** Triggered when a person feels hopeless or helpless, leading to shutdown, collapse, or numbness. This state helps conserve energy and protect from overwhelming pain

Psychoneuroendocrinology (PNE) interdisciplinary fields of psychology, psychiatry, neurobiology, endocrinology, immunology, and neuroscience to study the interactions between mind, brain, behavior, and numerous hormone/endocrine and immune systems functions.



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WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

The window of tolerance and different states that affect you



HYPERAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of increased responsiveness
- Feeling anxious, angry and out of control
- You may experience wanting to fight or run away



DYSREGULATION

- When you start to deviate outside your window of tolerance you start to feel agitated, anxious, or angry
- You do not feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet

SHRINK your Window of Tolerance

Stress and trauma
can cause your
window of
tolerance to
shrink



Meditation,
listening to music,
or engaging in
hobbies can
expand your
window of
tolerance

EXPAND your Window of Tolerance



DYSREGULATION

- You start to feel overwhelmed, your body might start shutting down and you could lose track of time
- You don't feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet



HYPOAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of decreased responsiveness
- Feeling emotional numbness, exhaustion, and depression
- You may experience your body shutting down or freeze

NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION CHEAT SHEET

UNDERSTANDING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):

- Activates the "fight or flight" response.
- Increases heart rate, respiration, and adrenaline levels.

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):

- Activates the "rest and digest" response.
- Promotes relaxation, reduces heart rate, and conserves energy.

SIGNS OF DYSREGULATION

Sympathetic Dominance:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Shallow breathing
- Muscle tension
- Sweating
- Feeling jittery or on edge

Parasympathetic Dominance:

- Fatigue
- Low energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling disconnected or numb

QUICK REGULATION TECHNIQUES

Deep Breathing:

- Box Breathing:
 - Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds.
- Diaphragmatic Breathing:
 - Breathe deeply into your belly rather than your chest.

Grounding Techniques:

- 5-4-3-2-1 Method:
 - Identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.
- Feet on the Ground:
 - Feel your feet firmly planted on the ground to bring your focus to the present moment.
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation:
 - Tense and then slowly release each muscle group, starting from your toes and moving up to your head.
- Cold Exposure:
 - Splash cold water on your face or hold an ice cube to activate the dive reflex and calm your nervous system.

LONGER-TERM REGULATION STRATEGIES

Mindfulness and Meditation:

- Practice mindfulness meditation to increase present-moment awareness and reduce stress.
- Use apps like Headspace, Calm, or Insight Timer for guided meditations.

Physical Activity:

- Engage in regular exercise, such as walking, yoga, or strength training, to help regulate your nervous system.

Healthy Sleep Habits:

- Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- Create a bedtime routine and sleep-friendly environment.

Balanced Diet:

- Eat a balanced diet rich in whole foods, and avoid excessive caffeine and sugar.

Social Connection:

- Spend time with loved ones and engage in meaningful social activities.
- Practice active listening and open communication.

COGNITIVE TECHNIQUES

Cognitive Restructuring:

- Challenge and reframe negative thoughts and cognitive distortions.
- Use a thought record to track and analyze your thoughts.

Self-Compassion:

- Practice self-kindness and recognize that everyone makes mistakes.
- Use affirmations and compassionate self-talk.

SENSORY & SOMATIC TECHNIQUES

Sensory Input:

- Use soothing sensory inputs like soft textures, calming scents, or gentle sounds to help calm your nervous system.

Somatic Exercises:

- Practice somatic exercises like body scans or gentle movement to release stored tension and stress.

EMERGENCY TOOLKIT

Portable Items:

- Carry a small bag with items that help you feel grounded and calm, such as a stress ball, essential oils, or a small piece of fabric with a comforting texture.

Quick Access Techniques:

- Have a list of quick access techniques (like deep breathing or grounding exercises) readily available on your phone or in your wallet.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Therapy:

- Consider seeking help from a therapist trained in techniques like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), or somatic experiencing.

Medical Consultation:

- Consult with a healthcare provider if you have chronic stress or anxiety to explore additional treatment options, including medication if necessary.

SELF-REFLECTION AND TRACKING

Journaling:

- Keep a journal to track your emotions, triggers, and effective regulation techniques.

Reflective Questions:

- What were the triggers?
- What techniques worked best?
- What can I try next time?

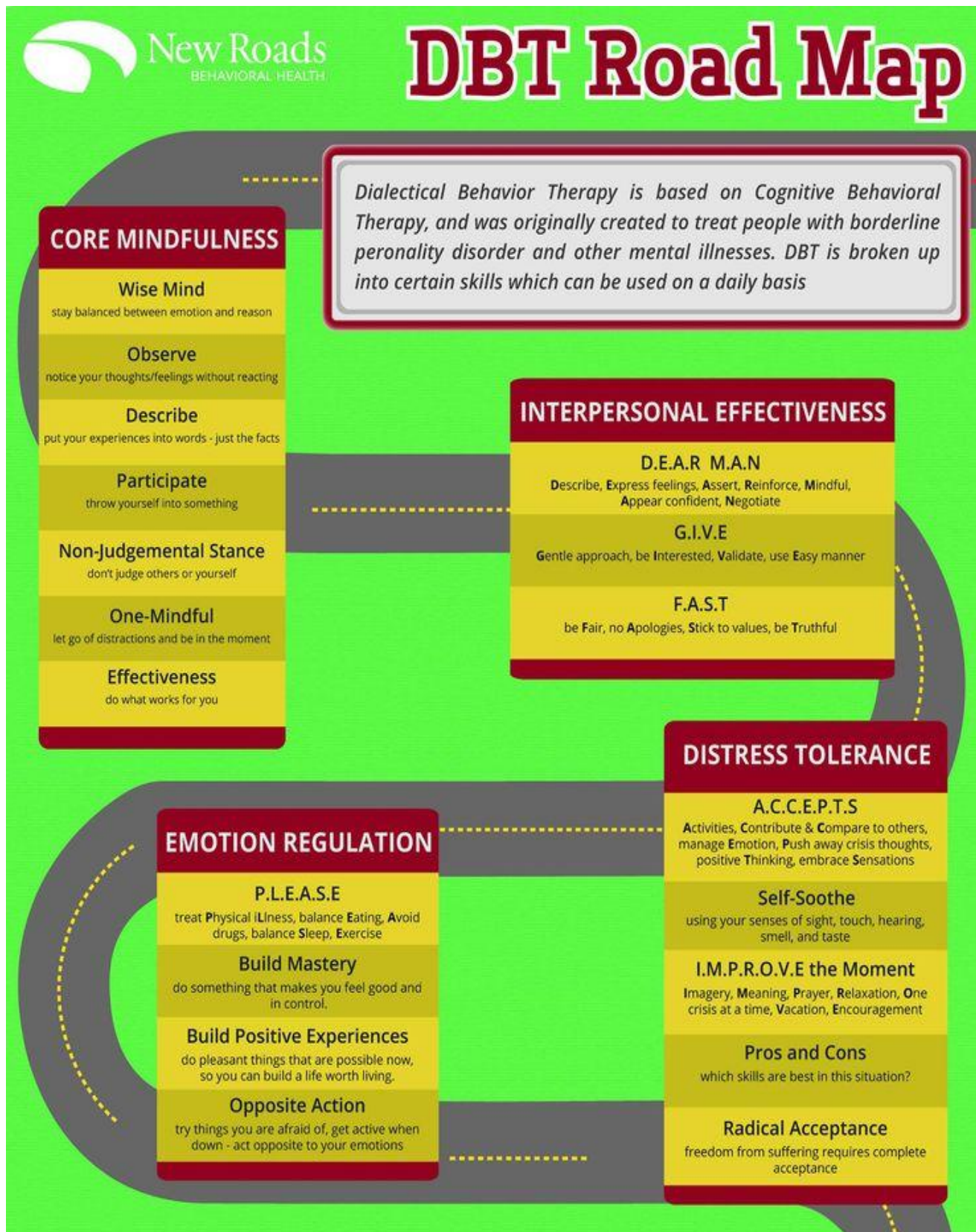
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Core DBT Skills

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is a type of therapy that focuses on teaching individuals skills to manage difficult emotions, improve relationships, and cope with distress. Below are some core DBT skills:

- 1. Mindfulness:** The practice of being fully present in the moment, observing and accepting thoughts, feelings, and sensations without judgment.
- 2. Distress Tolerance:** Skills to help tolerate and manage distressing situations without making things worse. This includes techniques like self-soothing, distraction, and radical acceptance.
- 3. Emotion Regulation:** Strategies to identify, understand, and manage emotions effectively. This includes techniques like identifying and labeling emotions, increasing positive emotions, and reducing vulnerability to negative emotions.
- 4. Interpersonal Effectiveness:** Skills to improve communication, assertiveness, and relationships. This includes techniques like setting boundaries, expressing needs, and resolving conflicts.
- 5. Core Mindfulness:** Techniques to develop a non-judgmental and accepting attitude towards oneself and others. This includes skills like observing, describing, and participating fully in the present moment.
- 6. Wise Mind:** The integration of emotional and rational thinking to make balanced and effective decisions. This involves accessing both the emotional mind and the rational mind to find a wise and balanced approach.
- 7. Self-Validation:** Recognizing and acknowledging one's own emotions, thoughts, and experiences as valid and understandable.
- 8. Radical Acceptance:** Fully accepting reality as it is, without judgment or resistance, even if it is difficult or painful.
- 9. Opposite Action:** Acting opposite to an emotion or impulse when it is not effective or helpful. This involves intentionally choosing to behave in a way that is opposite to the emotion being experienced.
- 10. Problem-Solving:** A systematic approach to identifying and solving problems in a constructive and effective manner.

Source: Pinterest Media/Image



RADICAL ACCEPTANCE CHEAT SHEET

DEFINITION:

Radical acceptance is a concept from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) that involves fully and completely accepting reality as it is, without resistance or judgment. It's about accepting reality on your own motivations for change.

STEPS TO PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE:

1. Acknowledge Reality:

- Identify what you are resisting and recognize it as part of your reality.

2. Understand the Cause:

- Understand the cause and context of the situation, even if you don't agree with it.

3. Embrace Feelings:

- Allow yourself to feel the emotions that come up without trying to suppress them.

4. Let Go of Control:

- Accept that you cannot control everything, especially other people's actions and external events.

5. Use Coping Statements:

- Use affirmations like "It is what it is" or "This moment is exactly as it should be, given what has happened before it."

6. Practice Self-Compassion:

- Be kind to yourself during the process. Understand that acceptance takes time and effort.

7. Reflect and Adjust:

- Reflect on how acceptance changes your emotional and mental state.
- Adjust your approach as needed.

KEY CONCEPTS:

1. Acceptance vs. Approval:

- Acceptance does not mean you approve of or condone the situation.
- It simply means acknowledging reality without trying to change it.

2. Reality is as it is:

- Recognize that the present moment is a result of many uncontrollable factors.
- Fighting reality only intensifies suffering.

3. Letting Go of Resistance:

- Resistance to reality often manifests as anger, denial, or frustration.
- Letting go of resistance can reduce emotional suffering.

4. Mindfulness:

- Stay present and observe your thoughts and feelings without judgment.
- Use mindfulness techniques to ground yourself in the current moment.

5. Emotional Regulation:

- Accepting reality can help regulate intense emotions.
- It allows you to respond to situations in a more balanced and thoughtful manner.

6. Non-Judgmental Stance:

- Avoid labeling experiences as "good" or "bad."
- Focus on what is, rather than what should be.

BENEFITS OF RADICAL ACCEPTANCE:

- Reduces emotional suffering and distress.
- Enhances emotional regulation and resilience.
- Improves relationships by reducing conflict and increasing understanding.
- Helps in dealing with past traumas and current stressors. Encourages a more balanced and peaceful mindset.

CHALLENGES OF RADICAL ACCEPTANCE:

- Initial discomfort and resistance to the idea.
- Misunderstanding acceptance as resignation or passivity.
- Requires consistent practice and mindfulness.

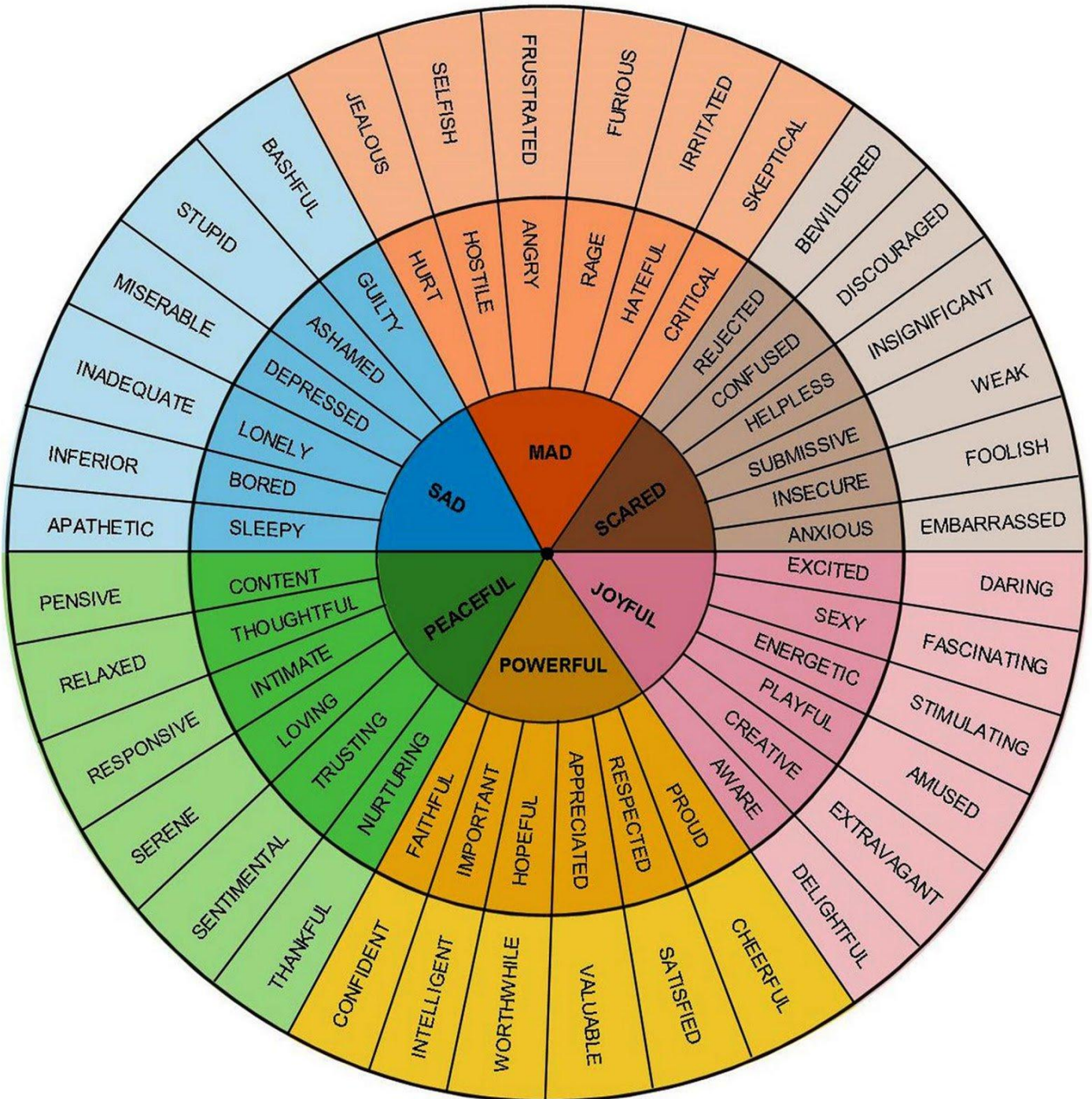
TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Start small; practice with minor annoyances before moving to bigger issues.
- Incorporate mindfulness and meditation into your daily routine.
- Seek support from a therapist or support group if needed.
- Practice self-compassion and patience with yourself.

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Source: Pinterest Media/Image



Source: Pinterest Media/Image

Anger is the tip of the iceberg.

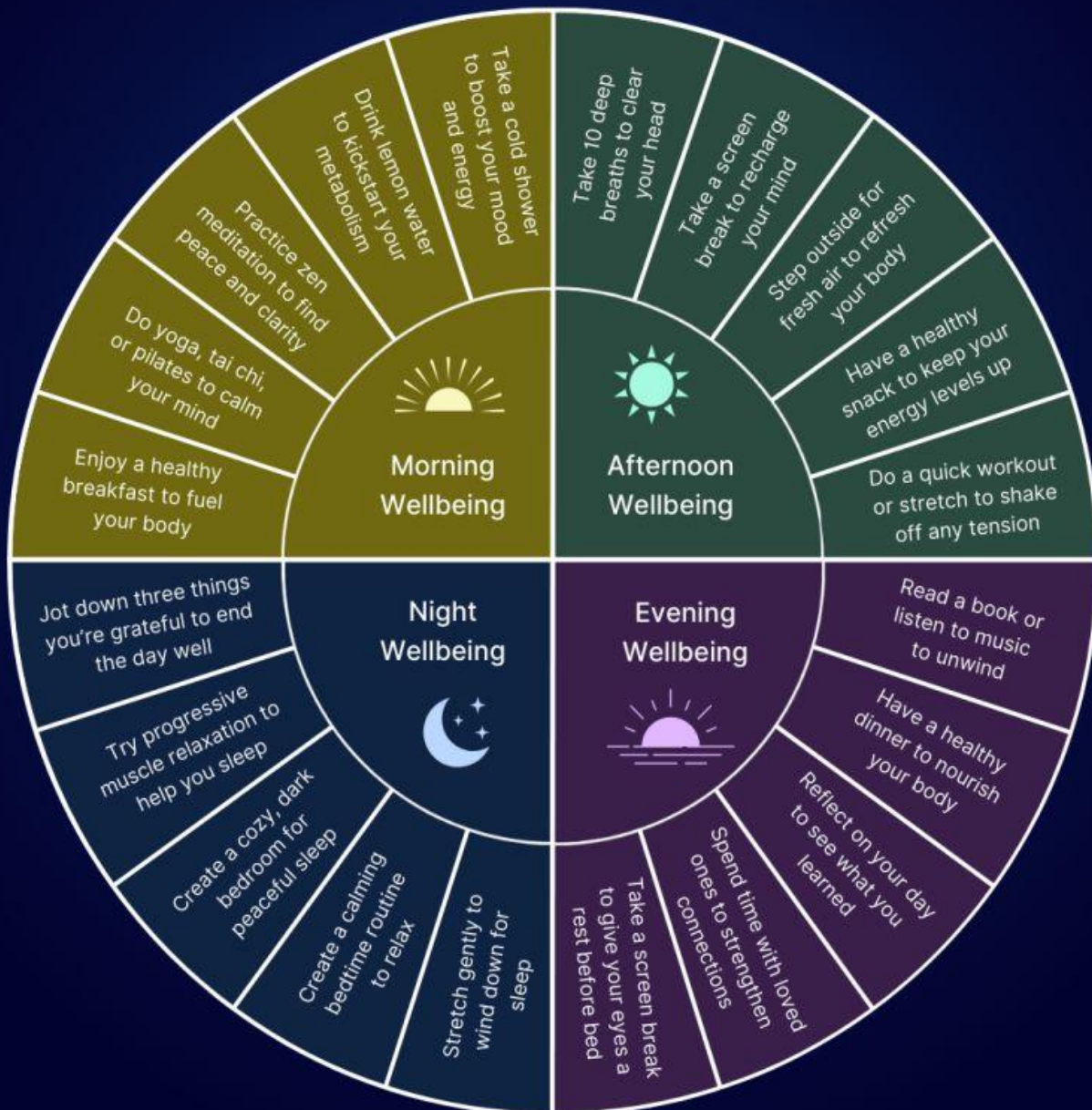


There is some sort of emotional pain or discomfort that is not getting dealt with directly and is getting turned into anger.

Ann Silvers, MA

annsillers.com

How to Create Your Daily Wellbeing



 **Matty Piazzi**

HEALING YOURSELF IS
HEALING YOUR
CHILDREN,
GRANDCHILDREN &
GENERATIONS YOU
WILL NEVER SEE.
DYSREGULATION &
DIS-EASE ARE PASSED
DOWN UNTIL
SOMEONE DECIDES TO
BREAK THE CYCLE,
FEEL IT FULLY & HEAL.

DR. WILL COLE

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.