

Forever Us: Notes

Week 4, Session 7

Carrie Stubbs

Raw Spots

Core Fears (Q3 from “Discovering Your Core Fear” Handout)

Responses (Q4 from “Discovering Your Core” Fear Handout)

Empathy & Responsibility

Empathy

Responsibility



7 Steps to Emotional Connection



1: Name and Stop the Cycle/Dance

What it is:

Spouses name the core fear cycle they are playing out.

Why it matters:

Naming it together helps shift focus from "you vs. me" to "us vs. the pattern."

What it sounds like:

- "We're slipping into that blame-and-shut-down game again."
- "This is the way we disconnect."



2: Name Your Own Moves

What it is:

You identify and name what you are *doing*. The behavior at the top of the iceberg.

Why it matters:

Fosters self-awareness and helps shift from a reactive response to a mindful one.

What it sounds like:

- "I'm starting to raise my voice."
- "I'm getting quiet again."
- "I can see that I am becoming defensive."



3: Name Your Own Core Fears and Feelings

What it is:

You move from describing your spouse's actions to naming your own *internal emotions*.

Why it matters:

It shifts the interaction from blame ("you never listen") to vulnerability ("I feel invisible and afraid I don't matter").

What it sounds like:

- "Part of me is really angry."
- "Another part of me feels hurt and lonely."
- "I am not feeling valued."



4: Own How You Contribute to Your Partner's Feelings

What it is:

Acknowledge how your own behavior (i.e. verbal tone, withdrawal, defensiveness, etc.) affects your partner's emotions.

Why it matters:

It counters defensiveness and signals awareness of your influence on the emotional tone of the relationship.

What it sounds like:

- "I can see how my silence makes you feel abandoned."
- "I know when I criticize, you feel ashamed and shut down."



5: Ask About Your Spouse's Deeper Feelings

What it is:

You're inviting them to explore their deeper emotional experience. To explore what is *really going on* underneath the surface.

Why it matters:

This shifts the dynamic from *reactivity to curiosity*, and shows genuine care and attunement.

What it sounds like:

- "What's going on for you beneath your words?"
- "What raw spot got hit for you just now?"



6: Share Your Own Deeper Feelings

What it is:

Once curiosity is open, you share your own underlying emotions—fear, longing, shame—that fuel your reactive response

Why it matters:

It fosters deep emotional connection by bringing vulnerability into the conversation.

What it sounds like:

- "I'm scared that I'm not enough for you."
- "I really just want to feel close to you again."



7: Stand Together

What it is:

This final step involves uniting as a team to define the relationship as the shared priority—"us vs. the cycle."

Why it matters:

It replaces accusation or avoidance with partnership and shared purpose.

What it sounds like:

- "Let's agree the cycle is the real enemy—how can we do this differently?"
- "We're in this together; our relationship matters more than winning."

the DNA of RELATIONSHIPS for COUPLES

discovering your core fear

1. Describe a recent conflict, argument, or negative situation with your spouse—something that really “pushed your button.”
2. How did you feel in response to this conflict or situation? How did that conflict or argument make you feel? Check all that apply - but “star” the most important feelings:

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure | <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgusted | <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Wearied | <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> Frightened | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Puzzled | <input type="checkbox"/> Torn up | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset | <input type="checkbox"/> Shamed | <input type="checkbox"/> Fed up | <input type="checkbox"/> Horrified | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sullen | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Disturbed | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Miserable | <input type="checkbox"/> Furious | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> Worried | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty | | |

3. How did this conflict make you feel about yourself? What did the conflict say about you? What was the “self” message - the message that it sent to you? What were the “buttons” that got pushed? Circle all that apply, but “star” the most important feeling you felt about yourself.

“As a result of the conflict, I felt...”

What That Feeling Sounds Like

Rejected

My spouse doesn't want me; my spouse doesn't need me; I am not necessary in this relationship; my spouse does not desire me; I feel unwanted.

Abandoned

I will be alone; my spouse will ultimately leave me; I will be left alone to care for myself; my spouse won't be committed to me for life.

Disconnected

We will become emotionally detached or separated.

Like a failure

I am not successful at being a husband/wife; I will not perform right or correctly; I will not live up to expectations; I will fall short in my relationship; I am not good enough.

Helpless/powerless

I cannot do anything to change my spouse or my situation; I do not possess the power, resources, capacity, or ability to get what I want; I will be controlled by my spouse.

Defective

Something is wrong with me; I'm the problem.

Inadequate

I am not capable; I am incompetent.

Inferior

Everyone else is better than I am; I am less valuable or important than others.

Invalidated

Who I am, what I think, what I do, or how I feel is not valued.

Unloved

My spouse doesn't love me anymore; my spouse has no affection or desire for me; my relationship lacks warm attachment, admiration, enthusiasm, or devotion; I feel as if we are just roommates—that there are no romantic feelings between us.

Dissatisfied

I will not experience satisfaction within the relationship; in our marriage, I will exist in misery for the rest of my life; I will not be pleased within my marriage; I feel no joy in my relationship.

Cheated

My spouse will take advantage of me; my spouse will withhold something I need; I won't get what I want.

Worthless/devalued

I am useless; I have no value to my spouse.

Don't measure up

I am never able to meet my spouse's expectations of me; I am not good enough as a spouse.

Unaccepted

My spouse does not accept me; my partner is not pleased with me; my spouse does not approve of me.

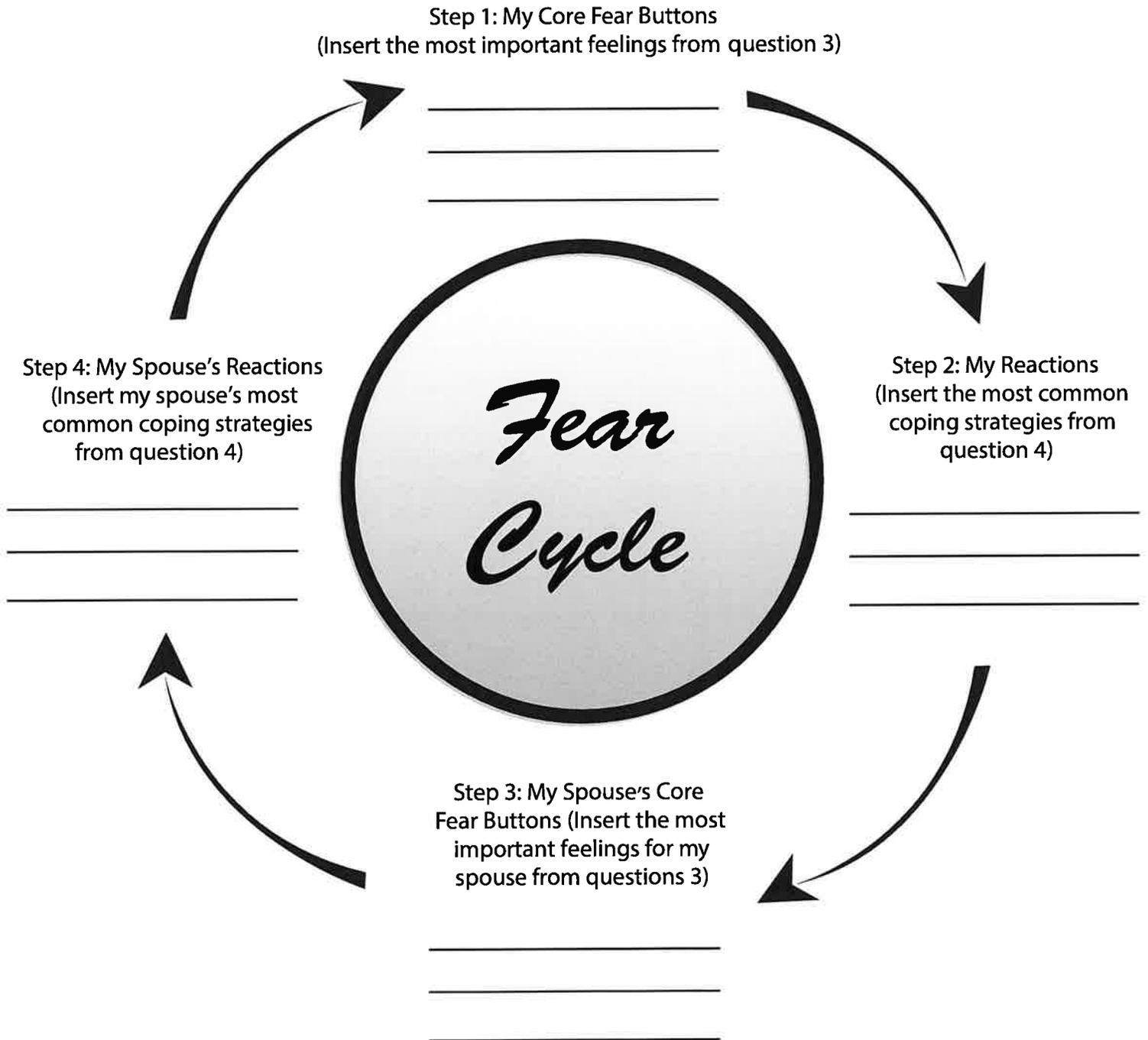
Judged	I am always being unfairly judged or misjudged; my spouse forms faulty or negative opinions about me; I am always being evaluated; my spouse does not approve of me.
Humiliated	This marriage is extremely destructive to my self-respect or dignity.
Ignored	My spouse will not pay attention to me; I will be unknown in my marriage; I feel neglected.
Unimportant	I am not important to my mate; I am irrelevant, insignificant, or of little priority to my spouse.
Other:	_____

4. What do you do when you feel _____ [insert the most important feeling from question #3]? How do you react when you feel that way? Identify your common coping strategies to deal with your "buttons" being pushed. Check all that apply—but "star" the most important reactions:

Withdrawal	You avoid others or alienate yourself without resolution; you sulk, use the silent treatment.
Escalation	Your emotions spiral out of control; you argue, raise your voice, fly into a rage.
Earn-it mode	You try to do more to earn others' love and care.
Negative beliefs	You believe your spouse is far worse than is really the case; you attribute negative motives to your spouse.
Blaming	You place responsibility on others, not accepting fault; you're convinced the problem is your spouse's fault.
Exaggeration	You make overstatements or enlarge your words beyond bounds or the truth.
Tantrums	You have a fit of bad temper.
Denial	You refuse to admit the truth or reality.
Invalidation	You devalue your spouse; you do not appreciate who your partner is, what he or she feels or thinks or does.
Defensiveness	Instead of listening, you defend yourself by trying to provide an explanation.
Clinginess	You develop a strong emotional attachment or dependence on your spouse.
Passive-aggression	You display negative emotions, resentment, and aggression in unassertive passive ways, such as procrastination and stubbornness.
Caretaking	You become responsible for others by giving physical or emotional care and support to the point you are doing everything for your spouse and your partner does nothing to care for himself or herself.
Acting out	You engage in negative behaviors or addictions like drug or alcohol abuse, extra-marital affairs, excessive shopping or spending, or overeating.
Fix-it mode	You focus almost exclusively on what is needed to solve the problem.
Complain/criticize	You express unhappiness or make accusations; you present a "laundry list" of faults about your mate.
Striking out	You become verbally or physically aggressive, possibly abusive.
Manipulation	You pursue your mate to get them to do what you want; you control your spouse for your own advantage.
Anger or rage	You display strong feelings of displeasure or violent and uncontrolled emotions.
Catastrophize	You use dramatic, exaggerated expressions to depict that the relationship is in danger or that it has failed.
Emotionally shut down	You numb out emotionally; you become devoid of emotion, or you have no regard for other's needs or troubles.
Humor	You use humor as a way of not dealing with the issue at hand.
Sarcasm	You use negative humor, hurtful words, belittling comments, cutting remarks, or demeaning statements.
Minimization	You assert that your spouse is overreacting to an issue; you intentionally underestimate, down play, or soft pedal the issue.
Rationalization	You attempt to make your actions seem reasonable; you try to attribute your behavior to credible motives; you try to provide believable but untrue reasons for your conduct.
Indifference	You are cold and show no concern.
Abdication	You give away responsibilities.
Self-abandonment	You desert yourself; you neglect you; you run yourself down.
Other:	_____

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RELATIONSHIPS
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the fear dance



Step 5: Discuss how this dance plays out in your conflicts.

If your marriage is in crisis, contact Focus on the Family's National Institute of Marriage, www.nationalmarriage.com, (866)875-2915

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