

Session 4

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Raw Spots

- Hypersensitive emotional areas leftover from earlier relationships (childhood, family, or past romantic relationships) or from repeated painful moments with your current spouse.
- Raw spots are tied to core fears. Examples of core fears include being rejected, abandoned, not good enough, unloved, worthless, humiliated, unimportant, etc.
 - Examples found in question 3 of the “Discovering your Core Fears” handout.

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With understanding our core fears (Q3) and our responses (Q4) to them we can hold

Empathy & Responsibility

at the same time. **FOREVER
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Empathy

When our core fears (Q3) are labeled and our responses (Q4) are understood, we can begin to offer genuine compassion to ourselves and to our spouses.

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Personal Responsibility

You are in charge of your behaviors, of regulating your own emotions, and of understanding your wounds and how they impact others. It is not your spouse's job.

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Core Fears and Responses Example

Wife

- Core Fear (Q3): Ignored
- Response (Q4): Caretaking

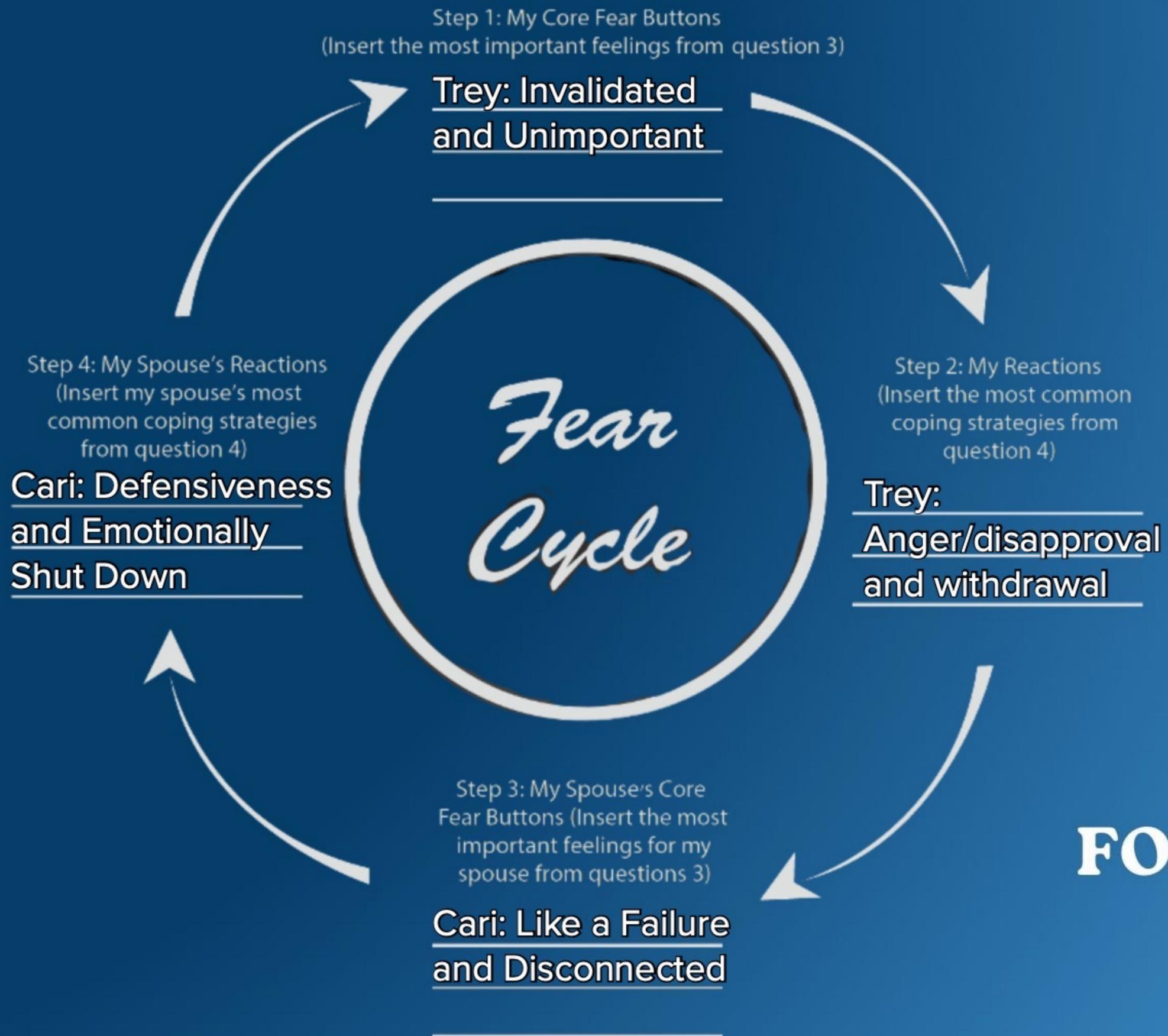
Husband

- Core Fear (Q3): Like a Failure - not good enough
- Response (Q4): Withdrawal

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When Chick-fil-A Wasn't a Pleasure: Core Fear Conflict Example





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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."

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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."

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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."

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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."

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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?"

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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.”

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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."

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Final Tips

- Practice in low-stakes moments
- Use "I notice" statements to pause escalation
- Set a pause/break phrase
- Reflect on "what raw spot got touched?"
- Rehearse standing together
- Make it a habit

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