

Breaking the Cycle of Bickering and Unmet Needs

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This worksheet will help you:

- ✓ Recognize **your personal emotional triggers** in conflict.
 - ✓ Identify **what you and your partner truly need** in tense moments.
 - ✓ Communicate **in a way that fosters connection rather than defensiveness**.
 - ✓ Create small but **powerful trust-building habits** in your relationship.
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Step 1: Recognizing Your Triggers

Think back to the last argument you had with your partner.

- What was the surface-level issue? (Example: "They didn't help with the baby.")
- How did you feel in that moment? (Frustrated, unheard, rejected, overwhelmed?)
- What deeper fear or unmet need could have been underneath? (Example: "I feel alone and unsupported, like I always had to take care of myself as a child.")

☐ **Write 2-3 common situations where small conflicts arise and reflect on the deeper emotions behind them.**

Step 2: Identifying Your Core Needs

Often, we argue about **symptoms** rather than addressing **the root needs**.

- When I get upset, what am I actually needing? (Emotional reassurance, support, validation, autonomy, safety?)
- How can I express that need directly instead of reacting?
 - Example: Instead of “You never help!” → Try: “I feel overwhelmed and would love some support right now.”

☐ **Write one need you often feel in conflict and brainstorm a way to express it constructively.**

Step 3: Creating Connection Instead of Conflict

Next time tension arises, try this **3-step approach**:

1. **Pause before reacting** – Take a breath and recognize the emotions coming up.
2. **State your feelings and needs clearly** – “I’m feeling [emotion] because I need [core need].” Check the lists at the end of this worksheet for suggestions.
3. **Invite connection** – “How can we support each other right now?”

☐ **Practice this: Rewrite a past conflict using this method.**

Step 4: Small, Daily Trust-Building Actions

Building a **secure relationship** happens through small, **consistent** actions. Try adding **one of these habits** daily:

- **Check in emotionally** – Ask, “How are you feeling today?”
- **Use supportive touch** – A quick hug, hand squeeze, or shoulder touch can create safety.
- **Express gratitude** – “I appreciate that you [something small they did].”
- **Use “we” language** – Shift from “me vs. you” to “**How can we handle this together?**”
- **Repair quickly** – If you notice tension, ask: “Can we start over?”

☐ **Write down one small action you can commit to daily.**

Emotions

Pleasant

- Joy
- Love
- Gratitude
- Contentment
- Curiosity
- Excitement
- Hope
- Inspiration
- Relief
- Pride
- Peace / Calm
- Tenderness
- Awe / Wonder
- Playfulness

Unpleasant

- Sadness
 - Grief
 - Loneliness
 - Fear
 - Anxiety
 - Worry
 - Anger
 - Frustration
 - Resentment
 - Shame
 - Guilt
 - Hopelessness
 - Numbness / Emptiness
 - Overwhelm
 - Irritation
 - Jealousy
 - Envy
 - Despair
 - Confusion
 - Powerlessness
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Core Needs

Safety and Security

- Physical safety
- Stability
- Predictability
- Shelter, food, warmth
- Protection from harm

Connection and Belonging

- Love
- Acceptance
- Emotional attunement
- Friendship
- Community
- Understanding
- To be seen, heard, valued
- Intimacy (emotional & physical)

Autonomy and Freedom

- Choice
- Independence
- Personal space
- Self-expression
- Authenticity
- Respect

Meaning and Purpose

- Contribution
- Growth and learning
- Creativity
- Spirituality / transcendence
- Direction / goals
- To matter, to make a difference

Play and Joy

- Fun
- Lightness
- Humor
- Exploration
- Spontaneity

Rest and Nourishment

- Rest / sleep
- Relaxation
- Comfort
- Nourishment (food, water)
- Movement / exercise
- Touch

Competence and Achievement

- Mastery
- Accomplishment
- Progress
- Recognition
- Confidence

👉 A simple way to remember the relationship:

Emotions = signals.

Needs = what the signal points to.

For example:

- **Loneliness** → points to a **need for connection, belonging, or being seen.**
- **Anger** → often points to a **need for respect, fairness, or boundaries.**
- **Joy** → signals that a **need is being met** (connection, creativity, play, etc.).

Final Reflection

✓ What was your biggest takeaway from this exercise?

✓ What's one thing you'll do differently next time conflict arises?

Keep this worksheet handy and revisit it regularly as you strengthen your relationship! For more reflections and free resources like this one, visit fromcentowholeness.com