



Identifying Your Fear Cycle

1. Recall times where you have experienced conflict as a couple. Take a few minutes to jot down the most common conflicts. For the sake of this exercise, imagine yourself back in one or more of these conflicts as you address the following questions.
2. What are the fears or "buttons" that get pushed during the conflict? What feelings do you experience? Check all that apply, and then star the top five feelings/buttons.

✓	Feelings	"During and after the conflict, I believe..."
	Abandoned	My spouse will ultimately leave me and I will be utterly alone.
	Alone	I will be by myself or on my own; I will be without help or assistance; I will be lonely and isolated.
	Betrayed	My mate will be disloyal or unfaithful; My spouse has given up on the relationship; My mate will share or reveal private information with others.
	Controlled	I will be dominated; I will be made to submit; What my spouse "says" goes; I will be treated like a child or my mate will act like my parent.
	Deceived	My relationship will lack truth, honesty, or trustworthiness; Truth will be perverted in order to cheat or defraud me; I will be misled or given false appearances.
	Defective	Something is wrong with me; I'm the problem; I am broken and unlovable.
	Disappointment	I will let others down; I will disappoint my mate; My spouse will be disillusioned by me.
	Disconnected	We will become emotionally detached or separated; There are walls or barriers between us in the marriage.
	Disrespected	I will be treated rudely; My thoughts and opinions will be disregarded; My mate does not respect or admire me; My spouse has a low opinion of me.
	Failure	I am not successful as a husband/wife; I will fall short in my relationship; I won't make the grade.
	Helpless/Powerless	I am unable to do anything to change my spouse or my situation; I am at the end of my power, resources, capacity, or ability to get what I want; Things are unmanageable and beyond my control.
	Humiliated	I will be shamed, degraded and embarrassed; My dignity and self-respect are attacked; I will be made the fool.
	Ignored	My spouse will not pay attention to me; I feel neglected and invisible.
	Inadequate	Others are more competent than I; I am incapable and ineffective.
	Inferior	Everyone else is better than I am; I am less valuable or important than others.
	Insignificant	I don't matter in this relationship; I will be of no consequence to my spouse; I am immaterial, not worth mentioning, trivial in the eyes of my mate.

✓	Feelings	“During and after the conflict, I believe...”
	Intimacy	I am afraid of opening up emotionally to my mate or others; I will be hurt if I allow my spouse past my “walls;” It is uncomfortable to open up the deepest, most essential parts of who I am.
	Invalidated	Who I am, what I think, what I do, or how I feel doesn’t matter.
	Judged	I am always being unfairly criticized or misjudged; my spouse forms faulty or negative opinions about me; I am always being evaluated.
	Misportrayed	I will be portrayed inaccurately; I am described in a negative or untrue manner; My spouse paints a wrong picture of me.
	Misunderstood	My spouse will fail to understand me correctly; He/she will get the wrong idea or impression about me; I will be misperceived or misread.
	Not good enough	Nothing I do is ever acceptable, satisfactory or sufficient; There will always be more “hoops” to jump through; I won’t measure up to my spouse’s expectations of me.
	Phony	I strongly desire to act in accord with who I say I am, yet, I don’t know how to reconcile the contradictions that lie within me; Others will discover those contradictions within me and believe the worst.
	Rejected	My spouse doesn’t want to be with me and does not accept me.; I will be pushed away and discarded.
	Taken advantage of	I will be cheated by my mate; I will feel like a “door mat;” My good will is exploited.
	Unaware	I do not know what is going on in the relationship; I do not have the necessary information; I’m in the dark; I’m clueless; Things feel secretive, hidden or undisclosed.
	Unfair	I will be treated unfairly; I will be asked to do things he/she is unwilling to do (double standard); I will be asked to do things that are unreasonable or excessive; I will be treated differently than others.
	Unimportant	I am not important to my mate; I am of little or no priority to my spouse.
	Unknown	I’m afraid to move forward because the outcome is uncertain; If I am not prepared then I won’t feel secure.
	Unloved	My spouse doesn’t love me anymore; my spouse has no affection, care or desire for me.
	Unwanted	I am not desirable; My spouse is staying in the marriage out of duty, obligation, or because it’s the “right” thing to do.
	Worthless	My value and worth are not recognized; I feel cheapened, less than, or devalued in the marriage; I have little or no value to my spouse; My mate does not see me as priceless.
	Other	

3. What do you do when your “buttons” get pushed? What are the common ways you react when you feel what you indicated above? Check all that apply but “star” the five most important reactions or coping behaviors.

✓	Reactions	Explanation
	Abdicate	You give away or deny your authority and/or responsibility.
	Act-out	You engage in negative behaviors like drug or alcohol abuse, extra-marital affairs, excessive shopping, or overeating.
	Anger or rage	You display strong feelings of displeasure or violent and uncontrolled emotions.
	Arrogance	You posture yourself as superior, better than, or wiser than your mate.
	Avoidance	You get involved in activities to avoid your mate or certain topics.
	Belittle	You devalue or dishonor someone with words or actions; you call your spouse names, use insults, ridicule, take potshots, or mock him or her.
	Blame	You place responsibility on others, not accepting fault; You're convinced the problem is your spouse's fault.
	Broadcast	You share your problems and concerns with people outside of your marriage.
	Caretake	You regularly take on the burdens of others; You find it hard to rest until everyone around you is provided for; You “over function” by taking on the details, tasks and responsibilities of others.
	Catastrophize	You use dramatic, exaggerated expressions to depict that the relationship is in danger or that it has failed.
	Clinginess	You develop a strong emotional attachment or dependence on your spouse or others; You hold tight to your mate.
	Complain	You readily express unhappiness or make accusations.
	Control	You hold back, restrain, oppress, or dominate your mate; You “rule over” your spouse; You talk over or prevent your mate from having a chance to explain their position, opinions or feelings.
	Criticize	You find and verbalize fault in your mate. You bring up what is wrong and focus on negative aspects of your mate or your relationship.
	Cross-complain	You often meet your mate's complaint (or criticism) with an immediate complaint of your own.
	Defensiveness	Instead of listening, you defend yourself by providing an explanation; You make excuses for your actions.
	Demand	You try to force your mate to do something, usually with implied threat of punishment if they refuse.
	Denial	You refuse to admit to or ignore the truth or reality.
	Dishonesty	You lie about, fail to reveal, give out false impressions, or you falsify your thoughts, feelings, habits, likes, dislikes, personal history, daily activities, or plans for the future.
	Earn-it mode	You try to do more to earn others' love and care.
	Escalate	Your emotions spiral out of control; You argue, raise your voice, or fly into a rage.

✓	Reactions	Explanation
	Exaggerate	You make overstatements or enlarge your words beyond bounds or the truth; You make statements like: "You always..." or "You never..."
	Fact Find	You actively seek the facts and details to determine what really happened. You pursue evidence to prove your point.
	Fix-it mode	You focus almost exclusively on what is needed to solve or fix the problem.
	Humor	You use humor as a way of not dealing with the issue at hand.
	Independence	You become independent (separate from your mate) in your attitude, behavior and/or decision-making.
	Innocent victim	You see your spouse as an attacking monster and yourself as put upon, unfairly accused, mistreated, or unappreciated.
	Invalidate	You discredit your spouse's thoughts, feelings, and actions; You give no weight to your spouse's opinions and seek to nullify and refute them.
	Isolate	You shut down and go into seclusion or into your "cave."
	Judge	You negatively critique, evaluate, form an opinion, or conclude something about your mate.
	Lecture	You sermonize, talk down to, scold, or reprimand your mate.
	Manipulation	You control, influence, or maneuver your spouse for your own advantage.
	Mind read	You make assumptions about your mate's private feelings, behaviors, or motives.
	Minimize	You assert that your spouse is overreacting to an issue; You intentionally underestimate, downplay, or soft-pedal the issue or how they feel.
	Nag	You badger, pester, or harass your mate to do something you want.
	Negative beliefs	You believe your spouse is far worse than is really the case; You see your spouse in a negative light or attribute negative motives to him or her; You see your mate through a negative lens.
	Negative body language	Your feelings are expressed through non-verbal cues (facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, etc.) that are noticeable to all.
	Pacify	You try to soothe, calm down or placate your spouse; You try to get them to not feel negative emotions.
	Passive-aggressive behavior	You display negative emotions, resentment, and aggression in passive ways, such as procrastination, forgetfulness, and stubbornness.
	Pessimism	You become negative, distrustful, cynical and skeptical in your view of your spouse and marriage.
	Provoke	You intentionally aggravate, hassle, goad, or irritate your spouse.
	Rationalize	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.
	Repeat yourself	You state your own position again and again instead of understanding your mate's position.
	Replay	You rewind and replay the argument over and over; You ruminate about what your mate does or doesn't do that frustrates or hurts you.
	Rewrite history	You recast your earlier times together in a negative light; Your recall of previous disappointments and slights becomes dramatically enhanced.

✓	Reactions	Explanation
	Right/Wrong	You argue about who is right and who is wrong; You debate whose position is the correct or right one.
	Righteous indignation	You believe that you deserve to be angry, resentful or annoyed with your spouse because of what they did.
	Righteousness	You make it a moral issue by arguing about issues of morality or righteousness.
	Sarcasm	You use negative or hostile humor, hurtful words, belittling comments, cutting remarks, or demeaning statements.
	Self-abandon	You desert yourself; You neglect you; You take care of everyone except you.
	Self-depreciate	You run yourself down or become very critical of yourself.
	Selfishness	You are concerned with you and your interests, feelings, wants, or desires while disregarding or paying little heed to those of others.
	Shut down	You detach emotionally and close your heart towards your spouse; You numb out; You become devoid of emotion.
	Stonewall	You put up walls and stop responding to your mate; You refuse to share or show any emotion.
	Strike-out	You lash out in anger, become verbally or physically aggressive or abusive.
	Stubborn	You will not budge from your position; You become inflexible or persistent.
	Tantrums	You have a fit of bad temper; You become irritable, crabby, or grumpy.
	Vent	You emotionally "vomit," unload, or dump on your mate.
	Withdraw	You pull out of arguments when they become too much; Once you pull out, you rarely if ever revisit the conflict; You get distance, sulk or use the silent treatment.
	Withhold	You hold back your affections, feelings, sexual intimacy, or love from your spouse.
	Yes, but...	You start out agreeing (yes) then you end up disagreeing (but).
	Other	

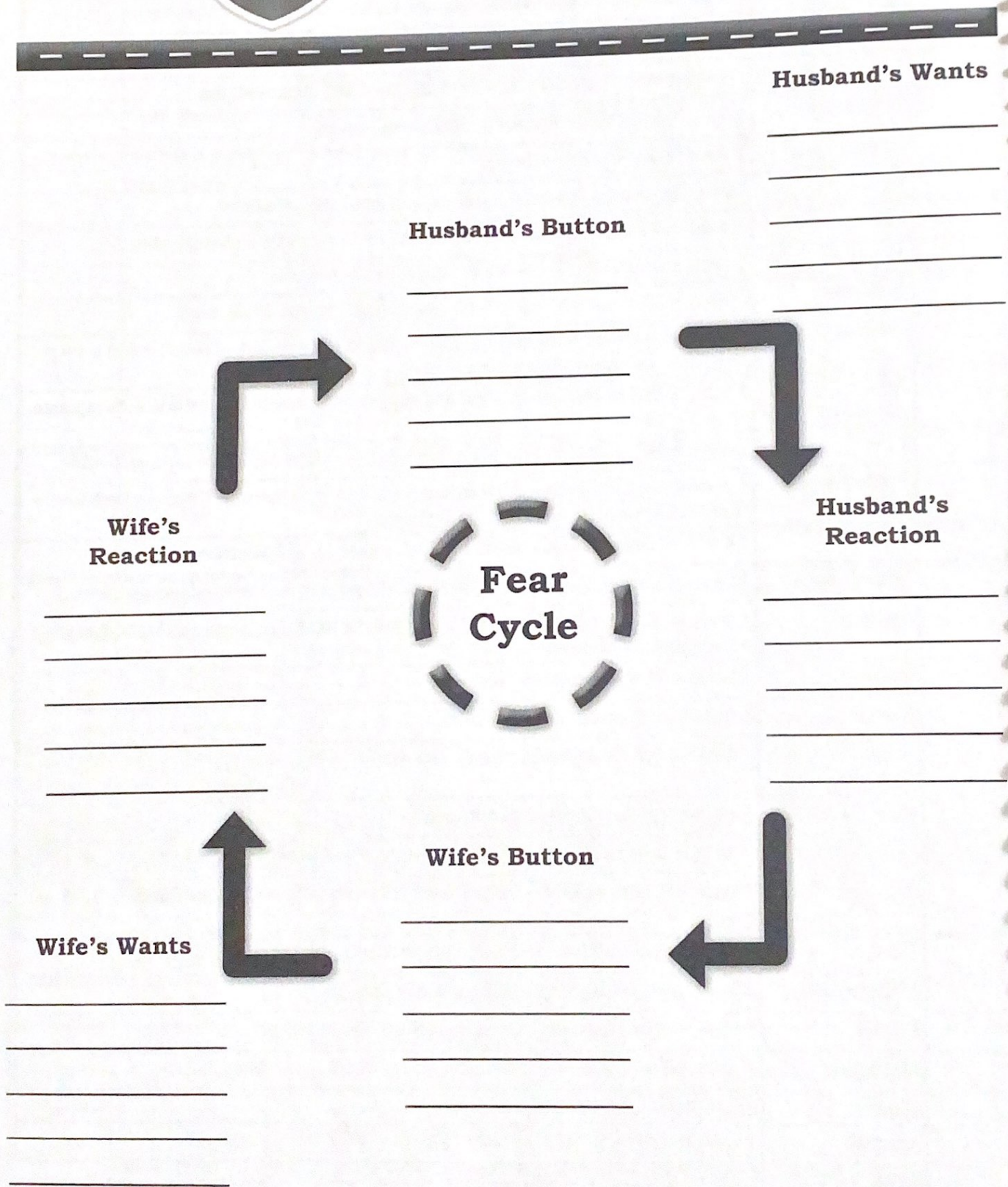
4. What do you truly desire or want to experience in your marriage? Check all that apply—but "star" the five most important wants/desires.

✓	"I want... or I want to be..."	What That Feeling Sounds Like:
	Acceptance	I want to be warmly received for who I am without condition.
	Accurately portrayed	I want to be seen correctly; I want my mate to represent me in a true and accurate manner.
	Adequate	I want to feel like I measure up and am good enough.
	Affection	I want to feel fondness and warmth.
	Appreciation	I want what I do to be noticed, valued and acknowledged.
	Approval	I want to be liked and accepted
	Assistance	I want a helpmate; I want help, support, backing and assistance from my spouse.

✓	"I want... or I want to be..."	What That Feeling Sounds Like:
	Attention	I want to be noticed and attended to.
	Care	I want to know that others care about me and are interested in my well-being.
	Comfort	I want to feel a sense of well-being.
	Commitment	I want to have unconditional security in relationships.
	Companionship	I want to enjoy spending time with my mate and them with me.
	Competence	I want to have skills and ability that bring success.
	Connection	I want to feel close to others.
	Grace	I want something good (i.e. forgiveness) that I don't deserve.
	Hero	I want to be the knight in shining armor; To be my mate's champion.
	Hope	I want confidence that I will get what I love and desire.
	Important	I want to feel relevant, significant and of high priority to my mate.
	Intimacy	I want to open my heart and not have walls in my marriage; I want to feel a deep closeness and connection with my mate.
	Joy	I want to feel lasting satisfaction and happiness; I want to be thrilled with my marriage.
	Love	I want to be loved deeply; I want to know that others experience me as lovable.
	Partnership	I want to feel like I have a teammate or partner for a spouse; I want us both to share equal responsibility for our marriage.
	Passion	I want excitement, fascination, intrigue, romance, and adventure.
	Peacefulness	I want calmness, serenity, and tranquility; I want to feel relaxed in my marriage.
	Power	I want to impact and influence my life and my marriage; I want to know that what I do makes a difference.
	Respect	I want to be admired and esteemed.
	Safety	I want to feel protected and secure.
	Self-determination	I want to have independence and free will.
	Significance	I want to have meaning and purpose.
	Success	I want to experience a sense of achievement and accomplishment.
	Support	I want others to be on my side; I want someone to be beside me through thick or thin.
	Trust	I want to have faith in others and know they are reliable.
	Understanding	I want to be known and understood at a deep level.
	Useful	I want to contribute something valuable to the marriage.
	Validation	I want to feel valued for who I am, what I think, and what I feel.
	Valued	I want to feel honored and treasured.
	Wanted	I want to be sought after; I want to be desirable to my mate.
	Other:	



Fear Cycle





Act with Relational Integrity: Some Options

As part of your care cycle, you have an opportunity to act with integrity toward others. By the time you choose from the list, you have already taken time to be aware of your feelings, accept the feelings and the job for caring for them, and attend to those feelings. You now are in a better place to choose to act in a manner consistent with the whole and complete person you desire to be. The options listed below are an expression of that integrity versus something you have to do or something you typically do in reaction to your fears. Please remember that this list is not exhaustive and perhaps you can come up with some other options that might work and be consistent with being the person of integrity that you desire to be.

Pray

It can be very powerful to go to the Lord in those moments when we could possibly act in a way that would violate our integrity. You might simply ask for His guidance, strength, and mercy. Or perhaps you ask Him to help you view yourself, your spouse and your situation through His eyes.

Scripture to consider: Psalm 139:23-24; Matthew 6:9-13; Matthew 26:41

Extend grace

The truth is spouses make many minor mistakes over a lifetime and so do you. These can easily accumulate into something rather unwieldy. Instead of letting them build, see if you can let go of the minor hurts and pains that were not intentional. Remember that this is not avoiding. It is being aware that something has happened but choosing to let it go.

Scripture to consider: Hebrews 12:14; James 2:12-13

Forgive

There are times when major offenses are committed and it is extremely difficult to get to a place of letting go of the hurt and pain. Fortunately our Lord has given us something powerful in order to cope with the demands and inevitable hurts in relationship—the ability to forgive. Research has shown that forgiveness is very helpful and healthy for the person who offers it. Please remember forgiveness is not excusing, minimizing, or forgetting the offense that occurred. Nor does it automatically lead to reconciliation. It does, however, free you from the burden of pain, anger, or whatever has built up in reaction to the offense.

Scripture to consider: Colossians 3:12-14; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35

Apologize

There is not much that is more humbling yet more powerful than being able to recognize and admit when you have messed up. Something to think about if you go this route: true apology comes from a place of heartfelt sorrow for what you have done and recognition that you don't deserve forgiveness or grace. Here is an example of something you might say, "I was wrong when I did....., I'm sorry for hurting you, I hope you will forgive me in time."

Scripture to consider: 2 Corinthians 7:10; Matthew 5:23-24; Psalm 51:17

Seek to understand your spouse

While caring for yourself you might realize that you are in a place to display caring toward your spouse. You might even discover that you were making some assumptions about your spouse or perhaps you find yourself curious about what happened to them. Approaching your spouse as the listener and trying to tune in to what it was like to be them in that moment can be a wonderful gesture.

Scripture to consider: James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13; Proverbs 20:5

Share your heart

Perhaps you decide while caring for yourself that you want to let your spouse get a glimpse of what was or is going on for you. Because you have spent time caring for you, you no longer need him/her to hear you so that you can feel better. Instead, you can now approach him/her out of a desire to be cared about and open yourself up to your spouse. It is helpful to begin by checking to see if your spouse is receptive and willing to approach your heart in a caring manner.

Scripture to consider: Various Psalms; Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-39)

Choose the opposite

You might have found yourself wanting to do something that is not in line with being the person of integrity that you desire to be. One option is to choose to do the opposite of your initial impulse. For example, in the midst of an argument you might have an urge to yell at your spouse, but after using the care cycle you might decide to speak softly and kindly to them instead. Remember this is done because you are trying to act more in line with the person of integrity that you are. Also, you must guard against expecting anything in return. It is all about being the person God desires you to be. Granted, this one is kind of funny to think about, but give it a try and see what happens.

Scripture to consider: Luke 6:27-36; Proverbs 15:1

Assert yourself

Most people believe it is to communicate in a way that makes a declarative statement that "I matter".

Appropriate assertive behavior communicates the message that, "I matter and you matter." Thus, you never diminish the fact that you have something of value to offer, but you also don't diminish that your spouse might have something valuable as well.

Scripture to consider: Philippians 2:4; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Set a boundary

The purpose of a boundary is to make it safe enough for your heart to remain open—it is not to control another person's behavior. It is imperative that if a boundary is set, you continue to use the care cycle to see if you can continue to be the person of integrity you desire to be. An example of a boundary might be if your spouse uses expletives when talking to you, you might say to him/her, "If you use that language with me I will not be able to continue in the conversation. I will be happy to talk if those types of words are not used." Of course as you set a boundary be prepared to follow through. As you follow through, care for your heart well enough to see whether you are willing to maintain openness toward your spouse.

Scripture to consider: Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 7:6

Choose to bless

No strings attached, just an opportunity to give something to someone else. To offer others something that might feel great to them. There is a good chance that this will bring a blessing to you as well. Remember, it must come out of a place of wanting to act consistent with that person you and God truly desire you to be.

Scripture to consider: Romans 12:20-21; Matthew 7:12