

Enrich Your Marriage: Reactive Cycle Inventory

Recall times where you have experienced conflict, tension or awkwardness 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.

- 1. IDENTIFY YOUR FEARS/TRIGGERS/BUTTONS:** What are the fears or “buttons” that get pushed during the conflict? What *feelings* do you experience?

Check all that apply, then “star” your TOP 5 most important/common feelings.

✓ or ✱	Feelings	“As a result of conflict, tension or disharmony, I’m concerned...”
	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 spouse will be disloyal or unfaithful; my spouse has given up on the relationship; my spouse 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 deceive, 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.
	Disappointed	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 will be 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 at being a husband/wife; I will fall short in my relationship; I won’t make the grade.

✓ or ✱	Feelings	“As a result of conflict, tension or disharmony, I’m concerned...”
	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 me; 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.
	Intimacy	I am afraid of opening up emotionally to my spouse 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 am misinterpreted or misread.
	Not good enough	Nothing I do is ever acceptable, satisfactory or sufficient for my spouse; there will always be more “hoops” to jump through; I won’t measure up to my spouse’s expectations of me.
	Phoney	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 spouse; I will feel like a “doormat;” my goodwill is exploited.

✓ or ✱	Feelings	“As a result of conflict, tension or disharmony, I’m concerned...”
	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; I’m ignorant or uninformed.
	Unfairly treated	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 spouse; I am of little priority to my spouse.
	Unknown	My spouse does not know me; it’s like I’m a stranger to my spouse; I am nameless or anonymous to my spouse; I am unfamiliar to my spouse.
	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 or devalued	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:	

Look at the feelings you starred in response to **question #1**. List your top 5 feelings that you experience when you start feeling conflict, tension or disharmony.

Feeling #1 _____

Feeling #2 _____

Feeling #3 _____

Feeling #4 _____

Feeling #5 _____

2. IDENTIFY YOUR REACTIONS: 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, then “star” your TOP 5 most important/common reactions or coping behaviours.

✓ or *	Reactions	Explanation
	Abdicate	You give away or deny your authority and/or responsibility.
	Act out	You engage in negative behaviours like drug or alcohol abuse, extramarital 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 spouse or certain topics.
	Belittle	You devalue or dishonour someone with words or actions; you call your spouse names, use insults, ridicule, take potshots or mock him/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.
	Care take	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 expression 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 spouse from having a chance to explain their position, opinions or feelings.
	Criticize	You find and verbalize fault in your spouse; you bring up what is wrong and focus on negative aspects of your spouse or your relationship.
	Cross-complain	You often meet your spouse’s complaint (or criticism) with an immediate complaint of your own.

✓ or ✱	Reactions	Explanation
	Defensiveness	Instead of listening, you defend yourself by providing an explanation; you make excuses for your actions.
	Demand	You try to force your spouse to do something, usually with implied threat of punishment if they refuse.
	Denial	You refuse to admit, or you 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.
	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.
	Humour	You use humour as a way of not dealing with the issue at hand.
	Independence	You become independent (separate from your spouse) in your attitude, behaviour 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 do not give weight to your spouse's opinions and seek to nullify and refute them.
	Isolate myself	You shut down and go into seclusion or into your "cave."
	Judge	You negatively critique, evaluate or conclude something about your spouse.
	Lecture	You sermonize, talk down to, scold or reprimand your spouse.
	Manipulation	You control, influence or maneuver your spouse for your own advantage.
	Mind read	You make assumptions about your spouse's private feelings, behaviours or motives.

✓ or *	Reactions	Explanation
	Minimization	You assert that the other person 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 spouse 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/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 behaviour	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 behaviour to credible motives; you try to provide believable but untrue reasons for your conduct.
	Repeat yourself	You repeat back your own position over and over instead of understanding your spouse's position.
	Replay	You rewind and replay the argument over and over; you ruminate about what your spouse 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 become dramatically enhanced.
	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.

✓ or *	Reactions	Explanation
	Sarcasm	You use negative or hostile humour, 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-deprecate	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 by stopping responding to your mate; you refuse to share or show any emotion.
	Strike-out	You lash out in anger; you become verbally or physically aggressive or abusive.
	Stubborn	You will not budge from your position; you become inflexible or persistent.
	Tantrums	You have fits of bad temper; you become irritable, crabby or grumpy.
	Vent	You emotionally “vomit,” unload or dump on your spouse.
	Withdraw	You pull out of arguments when they become too much; once you pull out, you rarely if ever revisit the conflict; you create distance, sulk or use 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:	

Look at the items you starred in response to **question #2**. List your top 5 reactions that you do when you experience your feelings as a result of conflict, tension or disharmony.

Reaction #1 _____

Reaction #2 _____

Reaction #3 _____

Reaction #4 _____

Reaction #5 _____

3. IDENTIFY YOUR WANTS: What do you truly desire or want to experience in your marriage?

Check all that apply, then “star” your TOP 5 most important desires/wants.

✓ or ✱	“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.
	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 spouse and them with me.

✓ or *	“I want... or I want to be...”	What that feeling sounds like:
	Competence	I want to have skills and ability that bring success.
	Connection	I want to feel close to others.
	Grace	I want something good (e.g., forgiveness) that I don’t deserve.
	Hero	I want to be my spouse’s champion, to be my mate’s knight in shining armour.
	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 spouse.
	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 loveable.
	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 and thin.

✓ or *	"I want... or I want to be..."	What that feeling sounds like:
	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 honoured and treasured.
	Wanted	I want to be sought after; I want to be desirable to my spouse.

Other:

Look at the items you starred in response to **question #3**. List the top 5 things you want to occur as much as possible in your marriage.

Want #1 _____

Want #2 _____

Want #3 _____

Want #4 _____

Want #5 _____

Download the Reactive Cycle worksheet and fill in you and your spouse's wants, buttons and reactions.