

The Relationship Institute

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Evaluating the relative strengths and weaknesses in your marriage

The checklist below will help you determine the relative weaknesses and strengths in your relationship, and the choices you and your partner have to strengthen and affair-proof your relationship.

1. Do you and your partner disagree?
 - a. never; we're very compatible
 - b. yes, but usually one of us will give in.
 - c. yes, but the same disagreements often come back up.
 - d. Yes, but we hang in there and work them out eventually with mutual solutions.

2. How do you resolve your disagreements:
 - a. By one of us giving in and dropping the topic because no solution is obvious or agreeable to both us
 - b. By continuing to argue until eventually "s/he with the most intensity wins."
 - c. Drop it and hold resentments that you express later in more indirect ways such as with sarcasm
 - d. Talk it out and continue to discuss the topic over time until a mutually agreed upon solution is arrived at,

3. How do you handle previous solutions that no longer work for you?
 - a. I usually hint at what I need or ask if we can change the agreement and ask what I can offer him/her in exchange for the change.
 - b. I bring up my unhappiness and try to convince my partner that it's time to change or that the agreement isn't fair.
 - c. I talk about what I don't like and insist that fairness is important and point out how I've been fair to him.
 - d. I talk about how I do not feel good about the solution and ask if we can discuss alternatives and then offer some for discussion.

4. How do you express your anger with your partner?
 - a) I either do not because I do not believe anger is appropriate or I bring it up indirectly.
 - b) I bring it up directly and with intensity so that s/he knows that I am serious.
 - c) I vary between avoidance and blowing up, unfortunately.
 - d) I try to bring up my anger calmly and ask my partner for a good time to discuss it and I make it clear that it is important to me to talk about it.

5. Do your disagreements last for more than a day?

- a) Never; I'm too uncomfortable with unresolved arguments or disagreements.
 - b) Sometimes depending on how intensely we each feel about the topic. We each want to convince the other that we're right.
 - c) Usually we'll stop talking to each other or avoid one another and then one of us will give in or we'll just drop the topic. It's too hard to keep fighting. But, I hate it that I'm usually the one who apologizes or offers the solution.
 - d. Sometimes when the subject is important to both of us and we can't find a mutually agreeable solution.
6. Are you open to your partner's feelings-both positive and negative?
- a. Yes, but I do struggle when I feel criticized or when s/he is angry or disappointed with me.
 - b. Most of the time. I try to listen, but often feel that s/he focuses more on the negative than the positive.
 - c. I try to and I think I am sometimes more open to the negative than s/he is.
 - d. It is my goal to be open to both the positive and the negative, but when I find myself reacting defensively I work hard to listen and not take it personally.
7. When your partner views you in a way you find hurtful and untrue how do you respond?
- a. I cry or withdraw silently and hope that s/he will eventually realize how wrong or hurtful s/he is being.
 - b. I immediately stand up for myself and try to set him/her straight.
 - c. I try to listen, but as the mistaken assumptions continue I get more and more riled and finally try to set him/her right.
 - d. I struggle to listen to how my partner sees me. I try hard not to get defensive and continue to listen. I ask my partner more questions to find out how long s/he has felt this way. I have to constantly work to respect his/her negative feelings or view of me.
8. Do you share both your positive and negative feelings with your partner?
- a. Yes or mostly, but I always make sure s/he knows that "they're just feelings" and we don't need to argue.
 - b. Yes, but the negative can be tricky and lead to fights. S/he doesn't always want to hear what I'm feeling; especially if it's negative.
 - c. I try to but sometimes I just keep the negative to myself.
 - d. I try to even though I am sometimes anxious about the outcome. In those cases I ask for a good time to talk with my partner and start by saying that the topic is hard for me and that I need his/her help listening.
9. How many years have you been in your relationships?
- a. less than 3 years
 - b. 4-6 years
 - c. 7-10 years
 - d. 11+ years
10. Would you describe your relationship as good and you're hopeful that it will get better over time?

- a. Yes.
- b. Yes and no, but I'm not sure what is realistic to expect of a relationship.
- c. No, but I can't seem to make headway on the necessary relationship changes.
- d. Yes and no. I'd like to see us find a way out of our same old arguments and rediscover some of our original fun and enjoyment of each other.

Interpreting your results:

-A endorsements:

If you answered yes to 5 or more of **questions 1-7** by endorsing answer **a** then you are a partner who is uncomfortable with differences or tension in your relationship. In response to disagreements you try to "steady the boat", ease the tension and often will deny your own needs and feelings directly.

All **d** answers that you endorsed indicate strengths in your ability to deal with conflict and tension in your relationship.

Review the **d** answers for the items that you answered with **a** endorsements. The groundwork for an affair is often laid when couples are unable or unwilling to work through their conflict successfully. Questions 1-7 indicate how successfully you both navigate inevitable relationship differences or what we call Conflict Intimacy. Your tendency is to avoid or minimize inevitable relationship differences. Review your responses and note what answer **d** suggests.

Relationship weaknesses in the area of self awareness or what we call **Self Intimacy** is indicated when any of us are not in touch with our own feelings and thoughts – especially the negative or difficult ones, and then do not share them with our partner. Question 8 is indicative of your willingness and comfort being Self Intimate. See the **d** answer for a more Self Intimate way of responding to your partner.

If you answered **c** or **d** to **question 9** your relationship may be at risk for an infidelity. Review the **d** answers and push yourself and your partner to be more Self Intimate and Conflict Intimate.

If you answered **a** or **b** and your partner expresses a great deal of anger, your relationship may be at risk. Review the **d** answers for ways to move your relationship onto firmer ground.

If you answered **b**, **c** or **d** to **question 10** you will benefit from reading the **d** answers as you want more from and in your relationship. Having realistic expectations and wanting more and what is best for both you and your partner are ways to contribute to the relationship's strength and resilience.

-B Endorsements:

If you answered yes to 5 or more of **questions 1-7** by endorsing answer **b** then you are a partner who responds to relationship differences and tension by becoming defensive. While you will argue, you are not necessarily comfortable with disagreements, but you are very reactive to criticism. When you cannot talk your partner out of his/her feelings you will dig your heels in and either explode or withdraw.

All **d** answers that you endorsed indicate strengths in your ability to deal with conflict and tension in your relationship.

Review the **d** answers for the items that you answered with **b** endorsements. The groundwork for an affair is often laid when couples are unable or unwilling to work through their conflict successfully. Questions 1-7 indicate how successfully you both navigate inevitable relationship differences or what we call **Conflict Intimacy**. Review your responses and note what answer **d** suggests.

Arguing is not usually productive and it is often destructive to the trust and resilience of your relationship. Often arguing leads to either partner feeling alone, angry or fearful. Any of these three feelings can contribute to the relationship weakening and become infidelity vulnerable. Also, if you answered **question 10** with **b** or **c** the relationship may be at-risk for an infidelity. Your anger or your partner's fuels relationship weaknesses. It is important that you learn how to express your anger and hear your partner's in a more constructive way.

Relationship weaknesses in the area of self awareness or what we call **Self Intimacy** is indicated when we are not in touch with our own feelings and thoughts – especially the negative or difficult ones, and then do not share them with our partner. **Question 8** is indicative of your willingness and comfort being Self Intimate. See the **d** answer for a more Self Intimate way of responding to your partner. When we do not share our feelings in an open and constructive way, we erode our confidence and trust in our partner and, conversely, our partner can experience us as distant, self absorbed or disinterested. By being aggressive or defensive rather than open and caring in your sharing of your negative feelings, you increase the chances that you will become resentful of your partner and vice versa. Without greater Self Intimacy the relationship is restricted in its ability to be closer and affair-proof.

The number of years you have been together is not necessarily predictive of an infidelity when there is much anger between a couple. Aggressive or argumentative anger is always a toxic and erosive component in a relationship and can lead to an infidelity at many points in the relationship or not.

-C answers:

If you endorsed **c** on 5 or more of **questions 1- 7** you vary between avoiding conflict and arguing. In both cases you do not necessarily like arguing, but you do not know how to

resolve differences effectively with your partner. You then range between feeling angry and feeling powerless. This is a toxic soup for the relationship.

All **d** answers that you endorsed indicate strengths in your ability to deal with conflict and tension in your relationship.

Review the **d** answers for the items that you answered with **c** endorsements. The groundwork for an affair is often laid when couples are unable or unwilling to work through their conflict successfully. Questions 1-7 indicate how successfully you both navigate inevitable relationship differences or what we call **Conflict Intimacy**. Review your responses and note what answer **d** suggests.

Arguing and avoiding or minimizing differences is not usually productive and it is often destructive to the trust and resilience of your relationship. Arguing leads to either partner feeling alone, angry or fearful. Any of these three feelings can contribute to the relationship weakening and become infidelity-vulnerable. Also, if you answered **question 10** with **b** or **c** the relationship may be at-risk for an infidelity. Your anger, resentment or avoidance and/ or your partner's fuels relationship weaknesses. It is important that you learn how to express your anger and hear your partner's in a more constructive way.

Relationship weaknesses in the area of self awareness or what we call **Self Intimacy** is indicated when we are not in touch with our own feelings and thoughts – especially the negative or difficult ones, and then do not share them with our partner. **Question 8** is indicative of your willingness and comfort being Self Intimate. If you answered by endorsing option **d** you have greater Self Intimacy and this will strengthen your relationship. If, however, you endorsed option **b** or **c** then your relationship may be at risk. Because when we do not share our feelings in an open and constructive way, we erode our confidence and trust in our partner and, conversely, our partner can experience us as distant, self absorbed or disinterested. By being aggressive or defensive rather than open and caring in your sharing of your negative feelings, you increase the chances that you will become resentful of your partner and vice versa. Without greater Self Intimacy the relationship is restricted in its ability to be closer and affair-proof.

The number of years you have been together is not necessarily predictive of an infidelity when there is much anger between a couple. Aggressive or argumentative anger is always a toxic and erosive component in a relationship and can lead to an infidelity at many points in the relationship or not. If, however, you and your partner are able to negotiate your differences, and you endorsed **d** for question 8, then you are on the right track to strengthen your relationship and help it to become more resilient and reduce the risk.

-D responses:

If you endorsed **d** on 5 or more of **questions 1-7**, you realize that differences are inevitable in relationships and you have developed some effective ways of resolving differences. The balance in your resolutions is such that you can respect both your partner's views and your own. Congratulations, your relationship is on firm relationship

footing! All **d** answers that you endorsed indicate strengths in your ability to deal with conflict and tension in your relationship.

The groundwork for an affair is often laid when couples are unable or unwilling to work through their conflict successfully. Questions 1-7 indicate that you successfully navigate inevitable relationship differences or what we call **Conflict Intimacy**. Being able to work through your differences in a respectful and caring way rather than arguing and avoiding or minimizing differences leads to relationship resiliency and can affair-proof your relationship.

Also, if you answered **question 10** with **b** or **c** this indicates that you have high standards for your relationship. Relationship shows that couples, who discuss their standards, agree to them and do not lower them over time, report having very happy, loving relationships

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The number of years you have been together is a tribute to both of you. As you grow individually and as a couple it is expected that you will continue to increase your capacity for Conflict Intimacy and Self Intimacy. Consequently your relationship will grow stronger as the sweetness and sensuality between you, what we call Affection **Intimacy** will also grow. For more information on how to deepen the affection and resilience in your relationship review all **d** answers.