Instructor’s Manual

for

IMAGO COUPLES THERAPY

with

PAT LOVE, EDD

from the series

COUPLES THERAPY WITH THE EXPERTS

with hosts

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Manual by

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Instructor’s Manual for Imago Couples Therapy with Pat Love, EdD

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Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during the video and post-viewing.

2. FACILITATE DISCUSSION
Pause the video at different points to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions to the concepts presented. The Discussion Questions provide ideas about key points that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. LET IT FLOW
Allow the session to play out some, rather than stopping the video often, so viewers can appreciate the work over time. It is best to watch the video in its entirety since issues untouched in earlier parts often play out later. Encourage viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What do viewers think works and does not work in the session? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes, and it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

4. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings from Suggestions for Further Readings and Websites prior to viewing. You can also schedule the video to coincide with other course or training materials on related topics.

5. USE THE TOOLS
Hand out copies of the Imago Workup and the Imago Dialogue Process before watching the video, so that viewers can familiarize themselves with these important tools. If you conduct role-plays (see tip #7), participants’ familiarity with these basic elements of Imago Therapy will help them get even more out of their practice.
6. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER

See suggestions in Reaction Paper section.

7. CONDUCT ROLE-PLAYS

After watching the video, organize participants into groups of three, so one person can play the therapist and two people can play the couple client. Assign each group to role-play a couples therapy session using Love’s Imago Couples Therapy approach. The clients may resemble the clients in the video, a current or previous real-life client, someone they know personally, or even themselves. Participants should change roles if time permits.

As a basic instruction, suggest to therapists that they begin the session by asking how they can be of help to each individual in the couple. Then mirror back to each individual what he or she presented in order to model the mirroring process. The therapists can then have the clients complete an Imago Workup, outlined in this manual, or proceed by facilitating the Imago Dialogue Process, also presented in this manual. Begin by having one member of the couple state a concern, then have the other member mirror it back, starting with, “What I hear you saying is…” and ending with “Did I get it right?” and “Is there more?” Be sure to switch roles so each member gets a chance to be Sender and Receiver.

Following the role-plays, have the groups come together to discuss the exercise. First, have the couple clients share their experiences; then have the therapists talk about what the session was like for them. What did participants find most useful about this way of working? What did they find most challenging? Finally, open up a general discussion on what participants learned about using the Imago Dialogue Process with couples.

An alternative is to do this role-play in front of the whole group with one therapist and two people playing a couple; the entire group can observe, acting as the advising team to the therapist. Before the end of the session, have the therapist take a break, get feedback from the observation team, and bring it back into the session with the couple. Other observers might jump in if the therapist gets stuck. Follow up
with a discussion that explores what participants found useful and/or challenging about Love’s approach.

8. WATCH THE EXPERTS SERIES

This video is one in a series portraying leading theories of psychotherapy and their application to work with couples. Each video in the series presents a master couples therapist working with a real couple who has real problems. By showing several of the videos in this Couples Therapy with the Experts series (see the More Videos section for a complete list), you can expose viewers to a variety of styles and approaches, allowing them an opportunity to see what fits best for them.

Other videos in the series use different therapeutic models to explain how couples interact and how change occurs within the couple. We can reflect upon the differences among these models by exploring how each one approaches the main objectives of couples therapy:

• removing, decreasing or modifying symptoms or problems in the relationship
• mediating negative patterns of behavior
• promoting positive growth and development within the family system

PERSPECTIVE ON VIDEOS AND THE PERSONALITY OF THE THERAPIST

Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists may feel put on the spot to present a good demonstration, and clients can be self-conscious in front of a camera. Therapists often move more quickly than they would in everyday practice to demonstrate a particular technique. Despite these factors, therapists and clients on video can engage in a realistic session that conveys a wealth of information not contained in books or therapy transcripts: body language, tone of voice, facial expression, rhythm of the interaction, quality of the alliance, and other aspects of process (as opposed to content) that are critical components of the therapeutic encounter. Because these process variables are so multidimensional,
repeated viewings of the same session can help therapists of all levels of experience detect many different nuances of process and deepen their insight and learning.

Psychotherapy is an intensely private matter. Unlike the training in other professions, students and practitioners rarely have an opportunity to see their mentors at work. But watching therapy on video is the next best thing.

One more note: The personal style of therapists is often as important as their techniques and theories. Therapists are usually drawn to approaches that mesh well with their own personality. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, students and trainees must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fit their own personal style and the needs of their clients.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Because this video contains an actual therapy session, please take care to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the clients who have courageously shared their personal lives with us.
Love’s Approach to Imago Couples Therapy

The word “Imago” is the Latin word for image, and Imago therapy aims to help couples get in touch with the images of their childhood relationships that they bring into adulthood. Specifically, negative images of our caregivers get in the way of and create conflict in our adult relationships. We each come into adulthood with an image of what love means and will pick a partner that provides that same kind of love.

Imago couples therapy helps partners become conscious of these negative images and, through communicating about them effectively, helps partners become healing and corrective agents for each other. This is done through several techniques: Dialogue is a way of communicating that replaces common unhealthy patterns and helps instill listening without defensiveness. Behavior Change Requests are gifts of empathy between partners. The Container Exercise helps partners separate archaic pain from current pain. Positive Flooding helps offset positive interactions from negative ones on a day-to-day basis.

Facilitating differentiation is a key aspect of Love’s Imago couples therapy approach. Differentiation allows couples to recognize separateness without disconnecting. This can happen through the dialogue process: by deeply listening to our partners and mirroring back what they say, we begin to recognize our partner’s difference while we stay connected to them.

Rooted in attachment theory research, Imago therapy was developed by Harville and Helen Hunt Hendrix. They created the approach in a “living laboratory” where they tested their theories and techniques within their own relationship.
The Imago Workup

Love uses this exercise as a quick and easy way to help clients begin the process of identifying how their childhood experiences affect their adult romantic relationships. It also helps the therapist to know what issues are most salient to the couple and how to guide the dialogue process accordingly.

1. Answer the five questions below:
   
   A. Think of three negative characteristics of the people who raised you.
   B. Think of three positive characteristics of the people who raised you.
   C. What did you long for as a child?
   D. How did you want to feel as a child?
   E. How did you respond to frustration?

2. Copy the answers to the five questions above to complete the five statements below.

   A. I am attracted to someone who is…
   B. But I want him or her to be…
   C. So that I can get…
   D. And feel…
   E. But I stop myself from getting the love I want by…
Imago Dialogue Process

Imago Dialogue is a unique three-step process for connection, developed by Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD. The three steps are Mirroring, Validation and Empathy. Below is an outline of how to facilitate these steps with a couple you are working with.

After the couple has completed the three-step process, or if they have gotten as far as they can (this process takes practice!), have the couple switch roles so each partner gets a chance to send and receive.

**Step One: Mirroring**

1. Ask one member of the couple, the Sender, to send a message to his/her partner using “I” language that conveys his/her thoughts, feelings, or experiences. (“I feel,” “I love,” “I need…”) They should avoid shaming, blaming or criticizing their partner, and instead talk about themselves.

2. In response, ask the other member, the Receiver, to echo the Sender’s message word for word or by paraphrasing, using a lead sentence like, “Let me see if I’ve got you. You said…” Encourage the Sender to break up his/her message in small chunks if the Receiver is having a hard time mirroring it back correctly.

3. Then, encourage the Receiver to ask “Is there more?”

4. When the Sender says, “No, that’s all,” ask the Receiver to summarize everything the Sender said: “So, in summary I heard you say that… Did I get it right?”

5. The Sender might then say, “Well you missed this little bit—and it’s quite important to me that you hear it.” Or confirm that the Receiver got it all right.

**Step Two: Validation**

This part of the process can be quite difficult if both partners have very different perspective on things. But to help them connect, it’s
important for each member to recognize what his/her partner says makes sense. In dialogue, it doesn’t matter who is right and who is wrong.

1. After the Receiver has summarized his/her partner, ask them to validate him/her by simply saying “That makes sense to me.” The Receiver doesn’t have to agree, but the goal is to show respect for the other’s reality.

2. If the Receiver can, encourage him/her to go on: “That makes sense to me because…”

**Step Three: Empathy**

In this final step, you encourage the Receiver to imagine what his/her partner might be feeling. You can help by asking the Receiver to use simple words like “angry, sad, lonely, afraid, happy,” etc.

1. Ask the Receiver to say to his/her partner: “I imagine you might be feeling __________ and perhaps a little __________. Is that what you are feeling?”

2. Then have the Sender correct this if it is not accurate and share other feelings, using only “I” language: “I actually feel…” or “I also feel…”

3. Have the Receiver mirror back any correction to show he/she heard.

**Phrases to help the couple along in this process:**

**Sender:**

- I feel…
- I love…
- I need…
- What’s bothering me is…

**Receiver:**

1. Mirroring
   - Let me see if I’ve got you…
   - I heard you say…
   - Am I getting you?
Did I get that?
Is there more about that?
Let me see if I got it all...
Am I getting you? Did I get all of that?
Is that a good summary?

2. Validation
   You make sense to me, and what makes sense is…
   I can understand that… given that…
   I can see how you would see it that way because sometimes I do…

3. Empathy
   I imagine you might be feeling…
   Is that what you’re feeling?

This text has been adapted from Tim Atkinson’s *Imago Dialogue 101*.
http://gettingtheloveyouwant.com/articles/imago-dialogue-101
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Reaction Paper for Classes and Training

Video: *Imago Couples Therapy with Pat Love, EdD*

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the facilitator.

- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards, or use the questions as a way to approach the discussion. Respond to each question below.

- **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video—we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about Imago Couples Therapy? What stands out in how Love works?

2. **What I found most helpful:** What was most beneficial to you as a therapist about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work? What challenged you to think about something in a new way?

3. **What does not make sense:** What principles/techniques/strategies did not make sense to you? Did anything push your buttons or bring about a sense of resistance in you, or just not fit with your own style of working? Explore these questions.

4. **How I would do it differently:** What might you have done differently than Love in the therapy session in the video? Be specific in what different approaches, strategies and techniques you might have applied.

5. **Other Questions/Reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the therapy in the video? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?
Related Websites, Videos, and Further Readings

WEB RESOURCES
Pat Love’s website

www.patlove.com

Imago Relationships International

www.gettingtheloveyouwant.com

Harville Hendrix’s website

www.harvillehendrix.org

RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET
The Angry Couple
Culture-Sensitive Therapy
Couples and Infertility
Couples Therapy for Addictions
Couples Therapy: An Introduction
Emotionally Focused Therapy
Gender Differences in Depression
Harville Hendrix on the Healing Relationship
Internal Family Systems Therapy
Irreconcilable Differences
BOOKS


Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors and facilitators may use some or all of these discussion questions, depending on what aspects of the video are most relevant to the audience. On-screen minute markers are noted in parentheses to indicate where a topic arises in the video and transcript.

LOVE’S APPROACH

1. **Healing Agent:** What do you think about the Imago Therapy theory of love and emotional healing? Do you concur that individuals seek romantic partners with qualities that mirror original caregivers? Why or why not? In what ways do you think individuals in a relationship can be healing agents for each other?

2. **Workup:** Do you see yourself integrating Love’s Imago Workup in your own work with clients? How might the therapy benefit from it? What kinds of insight or mobilization towards change might it provide?

3. **Facilitating Differentiation:** How do you understand the idea of differentiation within the context of couples therapy? Do you see yourself facilitating this process with couples? Other than the Imago Dialogue Process that Love explains, what other ways might couples therapists help facilitate differentiation?

COUPLES THERAPY SESSION

4. **Fear:** In what ways was Love effective in working with Dave’s level of fear and anxiety? How might you work with his anxiety differently than she did? How would you begin work with a couple where at least one member of the couple shows a lot of fear?

5. **Your Worst:** What did you think of Love’s second question to Dave and Kathy about what they are like at their worst? Did you think this opened up necessary fruitful discussion or made the session too problem oriented? What importance do you place on a balance between negative and positive elements
in couples therapy? How would you find that balance?

6. **Colorful Language:** Love responds to Dave’s statements by saying things like: “You have a beautiful way of speaking,” “This is powerful,” “I’m getting chills up my back.” What effect do you think this kind of language had on the session? Can you imagine saying things like this to your clients? What kinds of guidelines do you have regarding the language you use with your clients?

7. **Heart Rate:** What did you think about Love’s interjections about raised heart rate and how the brain operates in a panic state? How is educating clients about these biological issues helpful or not helpful to them? Could you see yourself inserting this kind of information into your sessions with couples? Are there certain couples this information could benefit more than others?

8. **Best for the Relationship:** What reaction did you have to Love’s comments about having sex in a relationship not because one wants to, but because it is best for the relationship? How does this idea sit with you? How might you talk about this issue with your clients? Are there any specific ways in which you might approach this differently depending on the gender of your client?

9. **Self-Disclosure:** What reaction did you have to Love’s self-disclosure about her relationship with her husband? Under what circumstances would you disclose personal information during couples therapy sessions? What are some guiding principles you use when thinking about whether self-disclosure is helpful to your clients?

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

10. **Attention:** Love focuses more of the time in the session on Dave, and less time on Kathy. From what you observe about this couple, how might you divide the time differently, or would you do it the same? How do you approach balancing airtime in couples therapy sessions? What goes into your decisions about whom to focus on when and for how much of the session?
11. Safety: Love comments that safety is one of the tenets of Imago Therapy, and provides a safe structure for trauma survivors to process relationship problems. Can you see yourself using this model with trauma survivors? How would it create the safety that Love proposes? Or do you disagree with her assessment? Do you think the Imago approach would be incompatible with certain clients? If so, which ones?

12. The Model: Do you see yourself using Imago Therapy in your own work with couples? Are there some components of this approach that you find helpful, and others that do not fit so well with how you work with clients? What in particular would you do differently than Love?

13. Personal Reaction: How would you feel having Love as your therapist? Do you think she could build a solid therapeutic alliance with you? Would she be effective with you? Why or why not?
Complete Transcript of Imago Couples Therapy with Pat Love, EdD

Note to facilitators: Throughout the transcript below, we indicate on-screen minute markers that correspond with those that appear in the bottom right corner of the DVD on screen. You will find chapter markers on the DVD at five-minute intervals so that you may easily skip to desired points in the video.

LOVES’S APPROACH

1—1

Jon Carlson, PsyD, EdD: This program is on Imago Family Therapy. Diane, what is Imago Family Therapy?

Diane Kjos, PhD: Well, my sense is that it’s a therapy that really looks at promoting insight among the couple or the family members so that they can better understand their relationship.

Carlson: I think it also relates back to learning. It’s from your families of origin, too. And maybe that’s what the insight is all about. How does this compare with some of the other approaches?

Kjos: Well, when we think of insight we always think of the psychodynamic type of approach. And so I think that might be the closest in terms of that.

Carlson: I’ve been wondering what the word “imago” means, too. I mean...

Kjos: Yeah. Image, maybe, comes to mind, except it’s spelled wrong.

Carlson: Yeah. Let’s bring out our guest, Pat Love, and hopefully she’ll be able to tell us just what “imago” means and more about this theory.

Kjos: Okay.

Carlson: Pat, welcome.
**Pat Love, EdD:** Oh, thank you. Glad to be here.

**Kjos:** Welcome, Pat.

**Love:** Thanks, Diane.

**Carlson:** What is Imago Therapy, Pat?

**Love:** Well, “imago” means image in Latin and Greek, so it makes sense if live in Greece, for example. And what it really talks about is the images that we bring into adulthood from our early experience, so it’s... and how these images get in the way of getting the love you want or keeping the love that you find, so to speak.

**Carlson:** What’s an example of an image? I’m not sure...

**Love:** An image would be... For example, if I looked at my familiar love, or the love that I experienced as a child, it was a very distant love, it was a very anxious love, it was actually a neglectful love. So I brought in those negative images, so that when I get in a relationship, I might even act distant, I might even be neglectful of my partner. Or if my partner is neglectful of me, it feels normal, it feels familiar. But then over time, of course, that builds resentment and you don’t get the connection that you want. So it makes us conscious. You were talking about the really being aware or having the insight. Imago therapy makes you conscious of the images that are from the past that are interfering with getting the love you want in the present.

**Kjos:** So you talked about your childhood experience. What led you to this approach to therapy? What influenced you?

**Love:** Well, I think you hit the nail on the head. I study in this profession for two reasons. One is to better myself, because I’m very aware that some of the advantages as well as the disadvantages that I experience as an adult are rooted in childhood. We don’t come self-assembled—that we really do form our neural pathways through our experience. And some of those are very positive, and some of those need adjustment, so to speak. So part of it is to understand about myself. And of course the act of helping and the act of finding out what really does help—I have an innate curiosity, I’m a lifelong learner. And so I really want to know what helps people to be the best that they can be, and what helps people have the love that they long
Carlson: This Imago Therapy, how was it developed? And is there just like one Imago approach to Imago Therapy?

Love: Okay, that, great question.

Carlson: I guess that’s two questions.

Love: My friends and colleagues, Harville Hendrix and his wife Helen Hunt Hendrix or Helen LaKelley Hendrix Hunt—she has many names, her birth name and her maiden name and her...

Carlson: Sounds like an image issue.

Love: That’s right. And Helen and Harville actually developed this model together, and they were doing on the same journey that I’ve been on, which is trying to create the best, finest love for their family as well as for themselves. And what they really did together is they formed a living laboratory. And during that laboratory, what they would do is they would work on these processes, and then Harville and Helen would write it down. And they developed the Imago model from their own study—they’re both psychologists, they’re both very well read—and from their study, their experience in helping others, they formed this model. And he and I have been together for 20 years, and Helen and I have been friends for that long.

Carlson: So they researched themselves in order to come up with these ideas?

Love: Well, they’re very, very well read, they study research, but also they worked in a living laboratory. Their relationship is a living laboratory.

Kjos: Well, how about cultural differences or, how does this work, have you worked with people of different cultures?

Love: Absolutely. Absolutely. And what Imago is really about, if you had to put it in a sound bite from my point of view, it’s about consciousness, where it… and so the consciousness is an innate attribute for the human being. So it really has less cultural bias than most any model because it’s really about, I just provide the
information that’s coming from my images, regardless of where the images are from. So there are images from the culture, there are images from the family. So the images that I bring are going to be from my family of origin regardless of where that was in the world.

Carlson: So you would tailor your approach, though, for each person you work with?

Love: Well, actually, the person tailors it, because Imago is two things. One, it’s a theory, and the theory is that you will be attracted to someone who represents familiar love to you or holds the imago or the image of what says “I love you” to you—that we each come into adulthood with an imprinting or an image of what love looks and feels like. Now, that’s very different as cultures vary. So depending on your cultural heritage, you will pick a person rather appropriate, appropriate from your culture. So first of all, it’s a theory that you will be attracted to someone who will help you finish this unfinished business of childhood, because the unfinished business of childhood is, I might want, for example, for my imago, which I have distance and neglect and anxious, I want a neglectful person to come in and be close to me. I want a distant person to come in and pay attention and be attuned to me. And yet, because that’s part of my experience, I have a defense around it. So part of it is a theory, but the other part of Imago is a set of techniques about, one is dialogue, talking and listening, you’re going to see in a few moments. Another one is asking for what you want. So, see, it’s not cultural, culture-specific, and you may be more or less inclined, for example, to ask for what you want depending upon your culture, but talking and listening is a part of every culture.

Carlson: So if I had a mother who was really close to me—

Love: Yes.

Carlson: —and I distanced from her—

Love: Yes.

Carlson: —and I had a father who I wanted to get close to who distanced from me, this is going to influence the kind of partner that I’m going to choose?
Love: Yes. Yes. And we know this from research, by the way. It’s not just clinical observation. In fact, attachment theory is the most researched area in psychology. So we know that we’re imprinted. We know that the brain, the neural pathways in the brain are formed through experience, that we come in with a genetic predisposition, but our experiences do affect us, and do influence our behavior and personality.

Carlson: So I chose my wife, or she chose me? I mean, I wasn’t aware of this.

Love: No, no, it’s not conscious. If you just… There’s a neat exercise.

A. Think of:
Three Negative Characteristics of the people that raised you

If you just write down, A, B, C, D, E, and A, if you would just write, think of the three negative characteristics of the people who raised you. Just the three negative characteristics, from a child’s point of view, and you write down the negatives—like I might write, “Distant, neglectful, preoccupied.” I might write those down. And then you write the positives. We also want the positives.

B. Think of:
Three Positive Characteristics of the people that raised you

Supportive, humorous, intelligent—those would be my three. And then you’d begin to think, “What is it that you longed for as a child? What was your heart’s desire?”

C. Think of:
What you longed for as a child

Like in my family, I wanted them to spend time with me. I just never really got enough time. And then you think, “Well, how do you want to feel?”

D. Think of:
How do you want to feel?

What is it that feels good to you? When someone sees you or recognizes you, or when someone actually touches you or helps you
out? What is it that you want to feel?

1—10

Like I wanted to feel safe and calm. Okay? So that was what I longed for feeling. That would be D. E is a real important questions because it’s, “Think about yourself as a child.” And I’ll just ask each of you this question: When you were a little boy or a little girl, and you were frustrated, generally speaking, and this could be frustrated at school, frustrated with your parents, how did you respond to frustration?

E. Think of:

**How did you respond to childhood Frustration?**

What was the way... I mean, did you try harder? Did you get angry? Did you hit your brother? Did you blame yourself? Did you go to your room? How did you respond to frustration?

**Carlson:** When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

**Love:** So you tried harder?

**Carlson:** Oh, for sure.

**Love:** Okay. You just kicked in and got determined, tried harder.

**Carlson:** Stubborn.

**Kjos:** I got angry.

**Love:** You got angry. Okay. And your anger, was it outward or inward, Diane?

**Kjos:** Outward.

**Love:** Outward. Okay. So what we probably will say, if you just take that A, B, C, D, E, and once you write those characteristics down, above A, you could put the lines, “I am attracted to a person who is: angry, distant, whatever.

*I am attracted to a person who is...*

That would be your negative characteristics. But I want him to be: warm, loving, supportive, there for me—

**But I want him or her to be...**
—so that I can finally get—

**So that I can get...**

—For me, to get to feel normal and get somebody to spend time with me and feel safe.

**And feel...**

That’s over the D part. And E is, “But I stop myself from getting the love I want from—

**But I stop myself from getting the love I want...**

—getting angry, trying so hard.” Because just imagine, if you live with someone who is always trying and always working, what’s the downside of that? And we probably could look at your wife’s complaints and you would find the downside of that. Because for me, like for me, when I got frustrated, I became very self-sufficient. I thought, “I’ll just do it myself.” That’s one thing I did. Well, think about... that’s got an advantage just like yours has an advantage and yours has an advantage. Nobody will run over you if you have your strength and your power that comes from anger. But it becomes inconvenient in adulthood and in relationships.

**Carlson:** So does this have a happy ending? I mean, it sounds like all this garbage we had as kids we have to take into...

**Love:** No. You bet. First of all, what we know is, first of all, the older you get, the more of these issues you deal with. And the second thing is, we do deal with them. And the third thing is that your partner can be the most healing agent of your life. It’s not about blaming parents and it’s not about wallowing in childhood. That’s not what this is about. It’s about: Okay, here’s the hand I’ve been dealt. Now, how do we create a context that’s healing and loving and corrective from any deficits we had in... We can’t go back and change the past, but we can change the present. So how do we become one another’s healer or corrective agent, or just a positive agent? How do we create a relationship that’s healing and supportive for both of us?

**Carlson:** So it sounds like it’s really important that you work with couples together.
Love: You bet.

Carlson: I mean, a husband and wife in the same room.

Love: You work with this because, first of all, if you and I are in a relationship, and I get it, that trying harder is what saved your life psychically, that that was a successful coping mechanism for you, first of all I don’t take it so personally. I have another image, another way of viewing your trying, that that saved your life as a little boy. And that probably got you a lot of reward. And if I hear your anger, I could take it personally unless I understand this is Diane feeling some pain or some insecurity, and I see it in a different... And that’s that second-order change we talk about.

Kjos: We just did an email exchange that you pushed, and I blew.

Carlson: Yeah, I noticed that. And I tried harder, though.

Love: There you go. And he doesn’t give up—that’s why I’m here today, I want to tell you that. But see, if you can know that, okay, let’s push rewind and say to Diane, “I wonder what it was that maybe she was feeling uncomfortable prior to the defense. Let’s push rewind. Let’s go back and try to redo this.” I begin to see that in a different... And that’s, again, that second-order change, that paradigm shift we’re always trying for in therapy.

Carlson: So what are the techniques and strategies? I think you’ve kind of touched on some of these, but can you highlight what they are that are used in this approach?

Love: Yeah. You know, when I found Imago therapy, when I met Harville, I was teaching in an AMFT-approved program in marriage and family therapy. And at the time—this was 20 years ago—there were many, many books on theory of, “Oh, here’s why couples get in trouble, blah blah.” But not very many on technique. It’s been so rewarding because the first technique is dialogue.

And it’s really a way of talking that replaces your harmful pattern, because I don’t know what it was like in your early family, but for me it was like there was no information—people shut down or they blew.
It was one extreme or the other. So dialogue—and dialogue facilitates differentiation. It looks like—you’re going to see me do this—it looks like just a simple little playacting exercise, but there’s so much going on unconsciously. So that’s a very important part.

Carlson: So what does “facilitate differentiation” mean?

Love: It means that, let me just say what it is. You talk, and not only do I listen, but I have to say back what you’re saying, and that is a mirror. And what that means is, first of all, I can’t be watching the movie in my head when you’re talking. I am forced to tune into you.

Carlson: Oh, you’ve got to listen.

Love: I’ve got to listen because I can’t say it back if I’m not listening, okay? But here’s what happens. For the sender, when I mirror back, you are experiencing contact, and you’re experiencing the closeness. But when you’re talking and I’m listening, if I truly listen and have to mirror back, it’s going to hit me: “Wow, Jon’s reality is different than my reality.” And that’s what differentiation is. It’s being able to be close, to hold onto yourself, and acknowledging separateness without disconnecting.

Carlson: Okay, so we can be different and yet connected. Okay.

Love: You got it.

Carlson: So that’s one strategy—dialogue.

Love: That’s one strategy. The second one is the behavior change request. You’re going to see me do a form of this. And that means, okay, so often times people dialogue, talk, mirror, mirror, mirror, and then people say, “Yeah, but it didn’t change anything.” At some point the rubber’s got to hit the road. I’ve got to tell you what I want. You’ve got to tell me what I want. In fact, this is a way to short-circuit a blowup, is for you to ask for what you want or, if your partner blows, then you can say, “How can I be of help? What’s one thing I could do right this minute that would be helpful?” And that starts to defuse, and it gives him something to do when you blow. And also if you can feel that, what I call the aura, because I tend to blow also, if I can catch it early, I can ask for what I want instead of blowing. But if I blow, if my partner will just say, “How can I be helpful?” Now, you know,
that takes a lot of maturity, and you may do it further down the line, you know, when we all calm down. So the second one is the behavior change.

**Carlson:** So that’s better than saying, “You’re just like your mother.”

**Love:** Well, it’ll probably get you closer together.

**Carlson:** All right. So we’ve got behavior change request.

**Love:** We’ve got behavior change request.

**Carlson:** Then what?

**Love:** Which is a great one. And then there’s another one that I really like that’s called, and it’s a long exercise, it’s called a container exercise. But what this helps you do—and it’s very sophisticated and powerful—it helps you separate archaic pain from current pain. Now, here’s why it’s important. When you blow, for example, by using the container process, you really begin to understand and recognize if I’m experiencing old pain, pain from my mother, pain from my father, pain from my ex-husband, pain from that teacher who shamed me in fourth grade, whatever it is—because the brain remembers, by the way. It’s all there. You know, you’ve got this neural pathway that is formed and you get in touch with the pain around that. But you begin to delineate or separate and recognize. Now I know I’d say 80 percent of the time, it used to be like two percent of the time, I know I can feel the regression or the archaic pain coming up and I’m like, “Wait a minute.” See, I can stop it early. You probably can relate to this.

**Kjos:** Yes, yeah.

**Love:** If I can catch it early. But if I’m blindsided by an old issue—so the container helps you separate the past from the present. That’s why the two of you really do become one another’s healing agents or therapists.

**Carlson:** If you don’t use the container then it’s the dumpster.

**Love:** It’s the dumpster, and neither, none of us likes to be dumped on.

**Carlson:** Right.

**Love:** Another one is like positive flooding. We know from research
that really, you’ve got to offset the negatives with the positives. That loving couples have hundreds of these positive behaviors a day, and it may just be a smile, or holding that contact with your eyes a little bit longer, it could be the touch of a hand, it could be just acknowledging the richness of the color in your pants. I mean, it’s not taking more time, necessarily. It’s how we spend our time, that we all like to be acknowledged in a positive way. You’re going to hear that on the tape. You’re just going to see this couple illustrate that so well.

Carlson: And that’s what we’re going to do next, is we are going to watch the tape that you did with this young couple. What else should we look for?

Love: Okay. We should look, in this tape we should look for the images that each individual in this tape show, have. You’re going to look for the image that you think he brings into the relationship and the image she brings into the relationship. And also you’re going to look at how the dialogue will keep their conversation calm. And you’re going to look at him come out of his fear. You’re going to see a lot of fear on his face, and you’re going to be able, if you watch real closely, and you’re going to see by using a simple exercise that doesn’t even hardly sound like an exercise the way I’m going to do it, just almost like talking normally, that he’s going to be able to say things to her that he hasn’t said before.

Carlson: What are you doing in this, if we’re going to look at you?

Love: Okay, when you watch me, the main thing I’m trying to do of course is do no harm. But the second thing I’m trying to do is form a positive relationship with these two people. I mean, we’re looking at 45 minutes. I’m really thinking of the realism and how I can honor them, and how can I be ethical in 45 minutes? You know, it’s not just like how to make me look like a great therapist. It’s like, what can I honestly and ethically do in 45 minutes? So I’m going to try to form a positive relationship. The third thing is I’m going to be doing—and this is the big thing—is I’m going to be trying to instill hope. And hope, by getting them to experience what they ask for, I’m going to try to give them what they ask for. And every session I start the same way:
“How can I be of help?” And I try to give the client what they’re asking for. And so what I’m trying to do is give them an experience that will shift their imago, shift their image of how they see each other.

Kjos: We see you do a lot of the reflecting back what you’ve heard.

Love: Yes.

Kjos: And I hope the audience will pay attention to how you do it, because that’s an interesting piece, I think.

Love: Oh, good.

Kjos: It’s not… I was fascinated by that.

Carlson: Well, let’s watch it right now.

Love: Happy to.

COUPLES THERAPY SESSION

2-1

Love: So Kathy and Dave, thank you. Thank you for being here. And knowing that a change can really take place in a short amount of time, and knowing that we have a short amount of time together this evening, I’d like to start with asking each of you, if this time were to be really well spent, if you would walk away from here thinking, “You know, I really got what I came for, that was time that was worth my effort, worth the time getting there,” what would be different, or what would you get, or what could I do, or how could we best use our time together? So if I could give you anything you want in your relationship, what would you leave with here this evening? And I’ll ask each of you that question.

Dave: Me, personally, I think it would enhance our capabilities of, number one, being able to talk together without getting some frustrations, and the amount of time we actually spend together is, it’s very important. And with that little time that we do have, because we work off shifts—

Love: Oh, sure.

Dave: —it really is a major part of our life, and if I could leave here
feeling that, well, Kathy and I can, not get along but, you know, just be able to communicate a little bit better with any kind of flares.

**Love:** Okay. So let me see if I got it, and correct anything I say that’s sort of off. One is that you could communicate better, because you work shift work, the time that’s together you want to be really good or quality time, or very good time—you want that time to be good. And you would like to be able to talk with each other and communicate without the tempers flaring or the frustration flaring. Did I get it?

**Dave:** Yes, that was correct.

**Love:** Okay. So communicate better so that the time you spend with one another is better. Would that be sort of it in a nutshell?

**Dave:** That’s correct.

**Love:** Okay. What about you, Kathy?

**Kathy:** Mine was communication, as well, and then also helping us understand that we’re going to have arguments. You know, part of our problem, I felt, was you know, we had this philosophy, or I felt like Dave did, that there’s no arguments. And then what happens is you don’t express your feeling or your frustration, and then you know, years and years go on and it just builds and builds and builds, and then you start resenting the other one.

**Love:** Yeah.

**Kathy:** So, you know, learning to accept that that’s normal, that that’s a normal part of life, that that’s going to happen, but not getting you know, like, turning each other off, or storming out of the room, and that’s it, and then nothing’s ever resolved.

**Love:** Okay, so knowing that disagreeing or arguing is a normal part of your life, but not letting it build up, and not just repressing it or pushing it down or not saying anything so that resentment builds up, but knowing it’s a normal part of our life and being able to say it without tempers flaring and getting out of hand, so to speak. So it sounds like... Did you have something to add? Anything to that?

**Dave:** I think she hit it right on the button.

**Love:** Okay. So if I’m getting it, if you could walk away tonight saying,
“You know what, I think we could communicate better,” then at least we have used this time well. Would that be okay? Well, that’s pretty simple. Okay. We can do this. I can guarantee you we can do this. But let’s, before we come to that, let me get a flavor of what’s it like, what are you like at your worst? What are you like that you know you do to stop communication, effective communication? I’m going to ask each one of you, not what your partner does, but if you had to say, “You know, at my worst, I think what I do that’s not helpful to us is...” So I’m going to ask you to each own your part here a little bit. What do you do?

2-5

**Dave:** In my case I tend to hold my anger.

**Love:** Okay.

**Dave:** Instead of making a problem for both of us, I make it a problem for myself. So I kind of just suck it up, so to speak, and you know, whenever it does build up and I finally come out and say what’s bothering me, it tends to be, “Well, why didn’t you tell this to me before?” If you feel you did something wrong, you just want to hold it in, say, “I’m not going to tell her that, okay.” Like I made a mistake, I just don’t want to mention it, okay. Something might happen and you know, it’s like, you don’t want any wars.

**Love:** Okay. What goes on inside of you, either your body or your mind or your feelings, when you’re holding that in? What are you like internally, or what goes on inside you?

**Dave:** Sometimes I feel like I’m hurting, okay. It’s as though I feel like, you know, trying to get her advice is kind of like, “Well, maybe I should be able to solve a problem myself.” And if I can’t, and it finally comes out, it’s like, it’s hard. You know, it’s like, to me our marriage is very sacred and I don’t want to build up any kind of failures or something that would, you know, tend to throw our marriage down the spiral.

**Love:** Okay. Now, this sounds real important. I mean, I don’t know about you... I could see you were really interested in what Dave had to say when he was saying that. You have a very beautiful way
of speaking. I mean, I don’t know if this was one of the things that attracted you to him or not, but you do have a very articulate, beautiful way of speaking. So here’s what I’m going to ask you to do. And again I’m going to come back and ask you the same thing, I’m going to ask you that same ownership question, okay?

**Kathy:** Okay.

**Love:** But what you said sounded so important. As I was hearing you say it. I’m going to ask you to say it again. And I’m just going to ask you, Kathy, just to say it back to him. Just word for word, only when he says, “I don’t know when I have a question, or when I don’t know what to do, I don’t know whether to ask you, I don’t want to feel like a failure,” you know, you would just say “you.” You’re just going to mirror it back to him. Because this sounded really, really important. So I’m going to ask you the question again, and like, you spoke with me so beautifully, I’m going to ask you to just tell Kathy what it’s like when you start holding this in. “When I hold things in, here’s what goes on inside of me.” You can repeat yourself, what you said to me, only she’s going to say it back, and if you start, you’re only going to be able to say it back in short piece because he’s going to say a lot. So you just say, “Let me get this part,” and say it back. And just give it to her like you gave it to me, it was so good.

**Dave:** Okay. Kat, I tend to hold a lot of tension, frustrations, and ways I feel that I had failed you, myself. Sometimes it will come back to haunt me. Other times, if I come out and actually say something, you know, well, it’s like, “Why aren’t we being together on this?” And it kind of hurts my feelings just to think that, “Well, what is she going to say? Okay. What is it that I’m going to get back? Do I just, ‘Heck with this, we’ll keep it silent, we won’t say nothing about it?’” And then...

**Love:** Okay. You know what? You’re doing this so well. Because this is taking a risk for you to really express what you’re expressing, here’s a good way to do this. You say everything you have to say about it, and you just take it in, because you’re going to need to hear this more than once. This is powerful. I don’t know if it looks, sounds, feels powerful to you two—it does to me. I mean, I’m like getting chills up my back when I hear this. Because this is what’s the important stuff.
This is what you’re asking for: that we can talk like this and she’s really listening. Why this little technique is good is she has to listen or she can’t say it back. Okay. So now you’re going to give her that same piece in little sound bites so she can say it back to you, which proves to you she’s listening to you. So just start, take it from the top, you don’t have to say the same thing, you’re just going to give it to her in little snippets.

Dave: On some occasions I feel like I’ve failed us. I feel like there’s times where I could have communicated better yet I feared it would cause problems for us.

Love: Okay. Let’s say that much back if you... And if you forget, just say, “Would you say it again?”

2-10

Kathy: Okay. So I hear that you’re saying that, or what I’m hearing is that you feel at times you’ve failed us because you’ve not communicated what’s going on inside, because you didn’t want it to hurt us in the long run. Did I get that right?

Dave: Mm-hmm.

Kathy: Okay.

Love: And is there more?

Kathy: Is there more?

Dave: Not really. Just in short term, that’s more or less what I had to say. Though your opinion sometimes is pretty valid, I just feel that asking your opinion may counter my plans, okay. I have a set idea on something, but your opinion may change that, so if it does change it, how do I handle it?

Love: Okay.

Kathy: Okay, so I guess what I’m hearing you say is that you want to ask my advice but you’re afraid because I’m very opinionated, and what I say might change or alter your original plan, and that you’re having a hard time understanding that and facing up with it if we have difference basically, you know, acknowledging me or approaching me and saying, “You know, that is a good idea, but I still think that this is
a better way.” Rather than letting down your guards.

**Love:** Okay. So I’m going to get you to be like a flat mirror, to only say what he says. Because I don’t know if you noticed—

**Kathy:** Okay, because I was interpreting what he said.

**Love:** —because you were interpreting, and you were editorializing. Like, he never said you had a strong... He said you have a valid opinion. You know, and you said, “Well, I’m very opinionated.” So you can see where you put a spin on it and you can start to work up...

**Kathy:** Because you’re so used, I guess your mind’s going and you’re thinking, like, “What am I going to say next?”

**Love:** Exactly, exactly. And so would I ever suggest that you talk like this in the mirroring? No. As long as you’re hearing each other, you don’t have to talk like this. It’s when something is so important and so powerful as what Dave is saying now that you... And what’s great about the mirror is you can’t play the movie in your head, because if you go on that movie in your head like, “Well, I’m very opinionated,” see, he never said that. It would be great because we have it on video and you can go back and see what he said, then see how she took one little word and went into orbit with it. And we all do that, by the way.

So even though... So this simple little exercise is extremely powerful and here’s why. Because in order for you to mirror him back—and I’m going to ask him to mirror you in a little bit, because this is what you all asked for—so in order for you to mirror him back you literally have to get into his reality. You can’t say, “I’m very opinionated,” because he never said that. You see? So that’s why, even though this is a very simple technique, it’s powerful, it has a big word in systems theory, it’s called differentiation, which is only a function of the neocortex. It takes the highest form of thinking to do what I’m asking you to do, this simple little exercise. So it’s real normal just to go off and, you know, put your own spin on it. But you begin to see, because what happens is, what you said earlier is, “We want to be able to talk and not have tempers flare and not get the frustration.” Because differing is a normal part. Not only is it normal to be different, that’s what gives a relationship its juice and its passion. Okay? So what happens is when
your heartbeat gets to 95 beats per minute, adrenaline is pumped into your system. You can’t help but get angry or shut down. See, your temper’s going to flare or you’re going to shut down and repress and resent, which you were describing. So that’s the… You don’t have a choice. The neocortex isn’t in charge anymore, and you can see where when you put your spin on each other’s words, because if you literally said, “My opinion is very valid—I have, what you’re saying, Dave, is I have a valid opinion,” which is literally what he said, that’s calming. But if you say, “I’m very opinionated,” you see what I’m saying? Okay. So this is great. And this is exactly what y’all were asking for. And again, I’m not expecting you to go home and sit knee to knee and talk, you know, “Please pass the salt.” “What you’re saying is…” No. It’s when things are important, because by using this process or another simple process, it stops the movie in your head. All of us have a preconceived image of what you think he’s going to say, and so you don’t...

2-15

It’s called the shoot-reload method. Like when you’re shooting your statement, I’m reloading my gun. I’m not listening to you—I’m reloading so I can fire mine. And you know, it’s like… Okay. So y’all are doing great. So if you send her one more little sound bite again... And what you did that was so good was, Dave, you said, “Is there more?” And he said, “No, not really.” And you were very patient. And then he went on and told you a whole lot more. So that was a beautiful piece. I don’t know if, and again, you’ll get to see it on tape, because you were patient with him when you said, “Is there more?” And he said, “No…” But because you were still listening, and tuned in to him, he went on and gave you a lot more information. So that’s a real beautiful part of what happened between you there. Okay. So let’s start again. Tell her, “What I’d really like you to hear in this, Kathy, is…” We’ll try to bottom-line it again, and she’s going to mirror it back.

**Dave:** Well, what I’d really like you to hear from this is that sometimes I hold my resentments and sometimes I hold my anger in. And I guess it’s, because I’m a guy, have a tendency of just, “Okay, well, whatever you want to do, let’s just do it, okay, no problem, all right.” Whether,
doesn’t necessarily mean I want to do it, but I just say, “Okay, fine,” you know. However, I wish there were some times where we can actually, you know, accept each other without me worrying about how you’re going to feel.

**Love:** Okay. See if you can mirror that. And I know that was a lot.

**Kathy:** That was a long one.

**Love:** That’s okay. And you make a stab at it, and what you miss, he and I’ll just help you fill in.

**Kathy:** Okay. So what I hear you say is that you’re feeling that you hold a lot of resentment in, and that there’s times when I want to do things, and you just feel that you go along with it rather than trying to accept our differing opinions. That’s where I got lost after that.

**Love:** Okay. Is there more? Or did I get it? Just say...

**Kathy:** Is there more, or did I get it all?

**Dave:** That’s, pretty much.

**Kathy:** Okay, what did I miss?

**Love:** Yeah and tell her, just fill in the piece that you’d like her to get, or maybe you think of something else.

**Dave:** I hope you understand, you know, from this session, it did, where how I feel about us, how I feel that, how much we can do better, I shouldn’t say, being coached like we’re kind of being coached right now, it should sort of be, I mean from day one we should have been I guess a little more honest with each other, though sometimes I feel like, will my honesty hurt your feelings? Or will my honesty fulfill the way I really feel?

**Love:** Okay.

**Kathy:** Okay.

**Love:** Okay. Want to make a stab at that?

**Kathy:** So I guess you’re saying that you’re afraid of... you’re holding a lot in, the resentment, and you’re afraid to state your opinion or state exactly how you’re feeling because you’re hurting my feelings. Did I get that?
Dave: Yes. In a nutshell.

Love: Okay, great. So let me ask you one more question. Then we’re going to switch roles, okay?

Dave: Okay.

Kathy: Okay.

Love: If Kathy were to show you acceptance, what’s one small thing that Kathy could do that would say to you, “Wow, she accepts me. Even though we disagree, she really accepts me”? How could she show that to you? What would be one small thing she could do?

Dave: Well, I tend to like compliments, myself.

Love: Okay, okay.

Dave: You know, when you work real hard to get something done, and you feel that what you’ve done is satisfactory.

Love: Okay.

Dave: And you kind of wait for someone, okay, someone to say something, kind of, “You did a good job, it looks wonderful.” And then you don’t hear that and you’re like, “What did I do wrong? Let me go back and check.” I’m a perfectionist. That’s just the way I am. And I mean, I guess a compliment means that you did a good job. Put an end to it.

Love: Okay. Okay. What goes on inside of you when she genuinely compliments you? What’s that like for you? Just tell her what that’s like for you.

Dave: I kind of get a tingle, thinking, “Okay, this is good. All right,” you know.

Love: Is it a tingle in your stomach or in your... Does it make you feel excited, sort of, or?

Dave: Mm-hmm.

2-20

Love: Okay. Yeah. Now, did you know that you have the power to excite this man?
Kathy: Mm-hmm.

Love: Just by a compliment?

Kathy: Yeah. I’m sure I must have done that Sunday when we finished the bathroom.

Love: Okay. Did she do it?

Dave: Mm-hmm.

Love: Okay. What did you do? I mean, what was that like?

Kathy: We painted and we put up the border Sunday, and just, you know, that was like the finishing touch on the room, and it looked beautiful. And I think I even left him a note Monday.

Love: Yeah.

Kathy: You know, thanking him again, because we were working opposite shifts that day.

Love: So now, is that what you’re talking about, the big projects? Or is it the big projects and the, “Thank you for bringing me coffee,” or “thank you for...”

Kathy: “Picking up a gallon of milk.”

Kathy: Right. The milk, or is it both, or is it the big things you want to be acknowledged for?

Dave: It’s a little bit of both.

Love: Okay. Okay. So one...

Dave: But the big things, for example, there are a few tricks in the trade that I’m learning, okay, like how to do some plumbing, installing some electricity, and this and that, okay. I didn’t know how to do that kind of stuff. I took a stab at it.

Love: I’m impressed.

Dave: I took a stab at it. If it works, it does, okay. At least I feel I’ve tried, okay. And just knowing, “Okay, you put a lot of work into it, that’s good, you know, great.” Not that she doesn’t say anything, I mean. It’s hard work, it’s not easy.
Love: Yeah. Now, do you feel clear about knowing what he likes in terms of compliments? I mean, does that seem real clear to you, or would you like a little more information?

Kathy: Probably a little more information.

Love: Yeah, because I would, if I were sitting in your seat, I would want... So like, give her some more examples. Like, one thing, I’m just making up this. Like, you are, to me, my opinion, are very nicely dressed. You’re very well groomed. You’re a handsome man. But... you take pride in yourself. Now, that impresses me. I don’t know if that’s the kind of thing that you would like—”Golly, your hair looks great, I love the shine in your hair,” or, “Your beard really looks nicely, I love the way it’s been trimmed up,” or, “That necklace really shines nice next to your chest hair.” I mean, I don’t know, is that the kind of thing, too, that would be nice? I’m just wanting more information. She is too.

Kathy: Right, that’s what I am.

Love: Give us a little detail. Give us a little nitty-gritty, or maybe it would be a secret you could tell her when we’re not even on camera. But what is it that keeps that tingle going, the kind of compliments you like?

Dave: Well, I like the fact that she sometimes she makes her compliments in different methods. Like the note that she left inside of my lunch bag saying kind of things like, “Oh, okay, that’s great,” you know? Most of the time I like just, for instance, let’s say I painted that. Just someone to walk by—”Wow, that looks fantastic.” And kind of like, “I didn’t know you could do that. Wow, that’s great.”

Love: Yeah. And this is what keeps that excitement, the juices flowing. Okay, so that would be one form of acceptance. What’s a second thing she could do—this would be totally different than the compliments—that would say, “You know what? We’re different. I disagree, and I really respect your opinion, even though it’s different than mine. Or I respect you or accept you. That that’s okay that we’re different.” How could she show that or let you know that? Can you think of another way?

Dave: That’s a tough question. I don’t know, I guess, it’s hard, I mean...
Love: Let me give you some examples.

Dave: For example, I mean, me being a guy, I’d be kind of, “Okay, here’s a rose, it was great, you did a good job,” right. But in the opposite position, what do you do, you know? It’s like, you know, buy a guy a pound of candy because he did a good job, or...

Love: Right, that’s true. That’s true. What do you do that? That is a very good question. What’s the guy counterpart to bringing a rose or buying a box of candy? What is the counterpart? What is the... This is very good. What says “I love you” to you? Because that’s the traditional female role—bring a flower, bring some candy, do something... But what says “I love you” to you? We know that compliments do it. We know that acknowledging what you do. It could be anything about her encouraging you to spend time alone. Or her giving you that 30 minutes when you come in from work so you have a transition, you know, knowing that you have shift work, letting you sleep... It could be pragmatic, it can be romantic, it can be sexual, it can be touching, it can be any of those things. That there’s a difference between you.

2-25

For example, my husband, where it’s real clear that he’s much more sexual than I am, so I know if I want to make him really feel good and included, I play to his hand, which is I make a sexual innuendo or I make a sexual advance. Now, if he wants to make me feel good, he cleans the garage. Or, you know, he takes my car and gets it cleaned. And that’s just how we’re different. So you’re bringing up a very good point. What is your love language? And that’s something ya’ll can talk about. And it might be, you said, “I would love for us to have some quality conversation and communication,” and that might be, that’s a lifelong detective job, to really be watching. And what do you think says “I love you” to him? You might know better than...

Kathy: Oh, I think what you just said.

Dave: I’ll agree.

Kathy: And I agree with you, I’m the same way. If he cleaned the garage out, that would make my day. We did the, when we did the bathroom and we bordered together, I’m still just elated since Sunday
because the bathroom is done, it looks beautiful, we did it together. Which is a big improvement, you know—we worked together to do it. So we went through the blood, sweat and tears. We laughed a lot. I mean, it was, you had to laugh because it’s not fun.

**Love:** Okay, can we talk here?

**Dave:** That doesn’t guarantee I’ll get some.

**Love:** I was going to say, does it translate in the bedroom?

**Dave:** Ah, not really.

**Love:** You can tell that off-camera. But that’s it. And you’re really onto something because, see, most people show love the way they want to receive love, but you miss the mark. You know, like, she’s doing pragmatic things for you and you’re thinking, “Well, that’s nice,” but it would be like the candy. “Well, it’s nice, but honey, grab me in the bathroom and drag me into the bedroom. You want to make my day? So that’s the thing.” And people often...

**Kathy:** Did I get that right, Dave?

**Dave:** Yes, you did. You certainly did.

**Love:** I don’t think she...

**Dave:** You’ve got to put that down on paper.

**Love:** Get her to sign.

**Kathy:** Sign a contract, right?

**Love:** Exactly. But the thing, we’ve just come through half a century of egocentric culture, meaning, “If I don’t want sex, why should I have sex?” The question is, what is best for your relationship? You know, my hunch is you didn’t get up one morning and think, “Wow! Gonna paint that bathroom! Whoa! Make my day.” That wasn’t like how you did it. How you did it was, you know this touches your wife’s heart. You know it touches her heart. You know it really touches her. And this guy is learning electricity, he’s learning plumbing, he’s doing this, maybe because you want to and that’s nice, but he knows this brings you the tingle. And this the key to being together, is being altruistic or giving, because true giving comes out of fullness. When somebody
is so generous to you, the natural response is not that you owe them. That’s not what it’s about. It’s about a genuine giving. It’s a genuine giving. And so that’s what this conversation is really about, is how do we have altruism or real love in our relationship—not just, “Well, what did you do for me?” And I don’t hear y’all saying that at all, by the way. The energy between you is really, really positive. Y’all have a wonderful, wonderful energy.

But so, okay, we’ve got to switch only because of time. Thank you, thank you, that was wonderful. So. What do you do to stop the communication, you know? He holds it in. He’s not always truthfully honest, he worries a lot. What do you do, Kathy, that probably isn’t helpful to y’all’s relationship? In terms of communication. How do you keep it from flowing nicely, kindly?

**Kathy:** I feel like I ask a thousand questions. Because I feel, you know, maybe I didn’t get the whole story, so it’s like I keep probing for more information and more information. You know, like the thing about the bank statement. And it’s like, “Well, what happened there? I’m having trouble using the ATM card. Do we have trouble with the bank?” And then he’s like, “Oh yeah, I don’t have the balance straight.” And then I felt like there was more to the story, so it’s like, “Okay, what is the balance?” Well, then all of a sudden I get, “Well, we went $25 below our balance so we’re going to get a $25 fee.” But I don’t know if that stops the communication or, I guess I feel like I’m not getting all, you know, the honesty or the answers that, you know. I mean, it’s us, it’s not just your money, we’re not part of this, kind of a thing. So maybe my probing and making him, I don’t know, maybe I make him feel like a kid or something. The way that I ask.

**2-30**

**Love:** Now, okay, let me see if I got it. It’s the probing, and you’re saying, “I ask a million questions and I probe and if there’s one piece of information, well, did we go below...” It almost sounds, now, is it like, is it an accusatory? You said it makes, it might make Dave feel like a kid. Is it like you’re the parent and you’re lecturing, or are you not believing, or...?

**Kathy:** Not believing.
Love: Yeah. Well...

Kathy: Not believing.

Love: It’s like, I call it grilling. Sometimes I grill.

Kathy: Yeah, that’s the perfect word.

Love: It’s almost like you expect the big light to be up here, you know. In fact one of my favorite cartoons is there’s a man in bed with the covers up over his head, and the woman is pulling the covers off his head and she has a high-beam flashlight, shining it in his eyes, and she’s saying, “Is this a good time to talk?” It’s like, no consideration for what it might be like over here in the other chair. And this probing and grilling. And my husband says that I bark orders. Somehow I...

Kathy: I’m the exact same.

Love: Yeah, you know, it’s like I get... So explain to me, and to Dave, what goes on, what’s going on inside of you when you start doing the probing. Like inside your gut or whatever. What’s...Yeah

Kathy: Oh, I feel very upset inside. I feel like, you know, you start to lose trust because you’re starting to feel that he’s not being honest with me.

Love: Okay.

Kathy: You know, and I just felt like, since this affected both of us, that I should have been notified that this was happening, because what if I just went to the ATM machine and drew out more money? We’d be in bigger trouble, you know. And I guess I felt like, “Well, why wasn’t it shared with me?”

Love: Yeah, okay. So. If you wanted to... I’m going to ask you, then, if you could sort of put it in a nutshell what you’d really like Dave to hear and understand about you needing information, or, “When I’m probing what’s really going on inside of me,” or... Just what would you like him to know about this, and I’m just going to get you to mirror it back. And since you had a good process going, why don’t you just say it all and you just sort of listen, and then you don’t have to say it back until we’ll break it into pieces again. So sort of think out loud. I don’t know about you, I tend to think out loud. So think out loud about
this, and you can just take it all in to begin with, and then we’ll break it into pieces for you to mirror. Okay. “What I’d like you to know about this is...”

**Kathy:** Okay. What I’d like you to know about this is that, when I’m asking for more information, that inside I’m feeling that you’re not being honest with me. And I guess honesty is like number one in my book—that if you can’t be honest with each other then how can you be married? Because along with honesty, I guess I feel like when I don’t have the honesty, I start to lose trust in you, and that, can I trust you to handle the bills? Can I trust you to make out the bills? And it makes me feel very uneasy inside. A very uneasy feeling, I’m...

**Love:** So, “When I’m probing, I’m really feeling uneasy.”

**Kathy:** Mm-hmm.

**Love:** Okay, let’s start with that line and I’ll get you to mirror that one back.

**Kathy:** Okay. So when I’m probing and asking more questions, inside I’m really feeling uneasy.

**Dave:** So what you’re telling me is because of your probing technique, that you feel I’m being dishonest or distrustful.

**Kathy:** Yes, that’s...

**Dave:** Is there more?

**Kathy:** No.

**Love:** “And I’m really feeling uneasy when I’m doing that.”

**Kathy:** Right. I’m really feeling uneasy when I do that.

**Dave:** Uneasy.

**Love:** “And what I need from you when I start probing is...” How could he short-circuit this?

**Kathy:** Oh, and stop all the questions?

**Love:** Yeah, how could he stop… Give him a line or an action that if he did this, you’d just start to calm down. What could he do in those moments that would just start to calm you down?
Kathy: What he could do is just if I ask about it, give me the whole story.

Love: Okay. Okay. So just...

Kathy: You know, just basically be honest with me. I mean, we all make mistakes. We... So we overdrew. We did a big boo-boo. That’s fine. I mean, I can accept that, but I guess I just want to know about it. I want you to be honest with me, whether it’s a mistake or not.

Love: Okay. Hold on, I’m going to stop you there just for a second, because I think you heard that. She just wants you to be honest. Tell me, okay, because y’all are doing so well, I’m going to tighten the screw a little bit. If this guy were to be honest with you, now, first of all, how would he stop the probing? How would he stop it, literally? Because I don’t know about you—when I get on a roll, I’m on a roll. Okay. So how... Would he like, say... How would he do that?

Kathy: Or just if he said, or even if you came home... Because usually he comes home and we eat dinner right away. After that, if you said, “You know, I really want to spend 10 or 15 minutes, because I really need to talk to you about our bank statement.”

Love: Okay. Let me see if I got this.

Kathy: Okay.

Love: Okay. Because this would be hard for me, so I’m just throwing it out here. So if he came home, and you realize, okay, that we’re getting low on the account or whatever, so you say, “After dinner, I’d like to share with, just talk to you about the bank statement.” Is that what you’re suggesting?

Kathy: Mm-hmm.

Love: Okay.
Kathy: And the reason I say right when he comes home is because sometimes we don’t see each other for two days because of the shift work.

Love: Sure. Sure.

Kathy: So that’s why I’m...

Love: So you’d sort of put in a bid for that.

Kathy: Right.

Love: Now, could you wait during dinner? Would you really, I mean, would that be a, could you really wait during dinner? I mean...

Kathy: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Love: Okay. So you’d be patient...

Kathy: Oh yes. Because he knows how important dinner is to me.

Love: So y’all would have dinner. And what would be your fear around doing that? What would be your fear? That if I came home, do you even know that there’s a problem with the bank?

Dave: I was notified through the mail.

Love: Okay. So as soon as you know that, what would be your fear of telling her right away?

Dave: Because I’d feel that what she had to say would turn on my defensiveness.

Love: Yeah.

Dave: So you know, I don’t want to get into it, okay. And I don’t need to explain piece by piece what happened if I’m not 100 percent sure what happened.

Love: Okay. Okay, so sometimes you don’t have the information.

Dave: Right.

Love: Okay. Okay. So is that okay to say, “I don’t have all the information?” Or is that hard to say?

Dave: Well, it stems back to the failure part.

Love: Yes. Yes.
Dave: So.

Love: So you begin to see how this feeds into each other. So one of the things I might suggest… So what you’re saying is, “As soon as you know there’s some kind of a problem, come and tell me.”

Kathy: Right.

Love: “And if, and one way to tell me is to, for lack of a better term, make an appointment, meaning, saying after dinner. Or sort of give me a heads-up on it to say, ‘Honey, let me just talk to you about it.’” How can you reassure him? What if he doesn’t understand? You know, he gets it in the mail, he doesn’t have it all figured out. How can he, what can you say to reassure him, knowing that he’s coming to you, that’s going to make, you’re going to feel like a failure—”Well, I’m just telling you there’s a problem and I don’t have the answer.” So what’s your answer to that dilemma for Dave?

Kathy: Oh, even if he just comes to me and says, “You know, we do have a problem. I just received this yesterday in the mail, I’m going to…” And if he, like, has a plan, that I don’t just, being, again, being honest with me, just saying, “I don’t know why this happened but I’m going to need to sit down with somebody at the bank and figure out where we’re going. If you could just refrain from using the ATM machine or whatever, for now, and the debit card, or…”

Love: Okay. Let me ask you this. What is it that you have a hunch that maybe you do that contributes to the defensiveness? If you look at y’all’s patterns, because one of your fears is that, “If I do bring it up, we’ll get into that old pattern and I get defensive,” and then you tend to want to shut down, I think is what you’re saying.

Dave: Mm-hmm.

Love: And then that just feeds into your fear, because my hunch is when he shuts down, you feel it. You start to get that resonance. You feel, “Uh-oh.” And then that makes you want to come in and probe and question. So what is it you do? You said that “I do probe.” What else do you do when he starts to tell you? Let’s say he comes and says, “Honey, here’s this bank balance, I don’t really know but I know that there’s a problem.” Bad behavior: what is it you do that would cause
him to be defensive? Other than probe.

**Kathy:** I would start asking... It’s the probing. It’s just asking and then maybe...

**Love:** Even though he said he doesn’t know, you wouldn’t take that for an answer, maybe.

**Kathy:** Oh, I would.

**Love:** If he said, “I don’t know.” You don’t look... Okay. So in other words, if you did the roller coaster, you know, if you started asking... So if he comes to you, what you’re saying is if he comes to you and says, “Here it is, I don’t have the answer,” you’re saying, “Oh, okay,” and you can let that go.

**Kathy:** No. He would need to, “I don’t have the answer but what I plan on doing...”

**Love:** Okay. What if he doesn’t know what he’s going to do? What if he needs your help? How could he ask for your help?

**Kathy:** Just by saying, “I don’t know what the problem is.” If he could just say, “Maybe we need to sit down together and balance the checkbook together.” Any suggestions.

**Love:** “Could we do this together?”

**Kathy:** Yeah, any...

**Love:** “Could we do this together?”

**Kathy:** Yeah. He can ask for my help.

2-40

**Love:** Is that okay? Because the thing I heard from you is that you really respect her opinion. I really got that. Did you know that he really does respect your opinion?

**Kathy:** No.

**Love:** No, I mean, I...

**Kathy:** No, I didn’t.

**Love:** No, I would put money on that. I really get it. In fact, I started to get the impression a little that maybe you give it so much weight at
times that you even question yourself a little.

**Dave:** I can buy that.

**Love:** Yeah, that’s what it sounded... See, I think, I don’t think you have a clear picture, quite, how much, number one, you mean to this guy, but how much, how important you are. Maybe you know that, but your opinion... My hunch is that you and I might be alike. We talk a lot and we talk out loud, never knowing that our words can be overwhelming. I think he takes you really seriously.

**Kathy:** Sounds that way. I didn’t know that.

**Love:** Yeah, I think he really takes you... I think this man wants to please you, probably more than... I think he gets so much pleasure from pleasing you. Now, I could be totally off the wall, but... that you get pleasure from pleasing her. You want to make her happy.

**Dave:** To some extent. There are some exceptions where I’d rather do something else, but if I’m pleasing her, let’s just go ahead and do it.

**Love:** He likes making you happy. Is that fair to say?

**Kathy:** Mm-hmm.

**Love:** Okay. And he really takes your opinions seriously. So part of it is being careful with your bullets, so to speak, because much as you have great ideas.... You have great ideas. So the key is when you’re talking, and if I were to say, when you leave here, the mirroring is a great technique, but even if you just took turns, even if you left here, so that you could... You know, what, my husband is a head trainer for the University of Texas—he’s like the football coach type guy. What we do, because we’re real strong willed, we actually take a timer and like a two-minute drill, you know? I wrote this up for a little story. We do a timer and he talks two minutes, I talk two minutes. It doesn’t matter, just so you each get to talk and the other one listens. Because interrupting will make you defensive. Withdrawing will make you anxious and make you want to probe. And my hunch is, it looks to me like you have such a beautiful... It sounds like you each came into this relationship with a little bit of image of, “Can I trust him? Can I trust myself?” It sounds like a trust is still... You know, you’ve just been at this a few years. How many years?
Kathy: Four.

Love: Four years. You know. It’s a wonderful journey. So the way you build trust is you say what you’re going to do and you do it. And then you repeat steps one and two. You just say what you’re going to do and you do it. And you go through enough times of talking like this—we’ve talked for 45 minutes. You’ve gotten a lot... You’ve found out that this guy really, really... What you say is so important to him. You’ve found out just by talking and listening, having this process. You know, you got the message across to her real well, how much compliments mean to you. And you got the message from her: “I need information. You don’t even have to have it figured out. You can say to me, ‘Let’s work it out together. I thought we’d sit down and talk about this.’” As soon as you know something, to let her know. Because what happens, the longer it goes on, you intuit it, then your anxiety goes up, and remember, the closer you get to that 95 beats per minute, then...

Kathy: We’re off the wall.

Love: Then you’re off the wall. Then all mature thinking goes out the window and then you’re in fight-or-flight. Anything I can say or do as we sort of wrap this up? Anything that would be helpful for us?

Dave: Your coaching words to us?

Love: Right. Anything you’d like from me as we close this, bring this to a close, since our time is just about up?

Kathy: I don’t know.

Love: Yeah. I’d love to hear from you, see how you work this out, and see if you can just use that simple technique of mirroring or taking turns talking, giving information as soon as you know, giving the compliments as soon as you have the slightest appreciation in your mind. Thank you so much.

Dave: You’re very welcome.

Kathy: Thank you.

Love: I really appreciated your work. This is going to mean a lot to a lot of people. Thanks.
Kathy: Thank you.
Dave: You’re welcome. Thank you.
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