



THE COUPLE CODE



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This booklet is going to help you to create your own Couple Code. Most relationships benefit every now and again from a review of the way their relationship is currently working and to give it a bit of a reboot! One of the most powerful tools we have to ensure our relationship is as healthy as possible is the ability to reflect, then choose a new way forward together. So that is what you are about to do.....

Arguing is a normal part of human relationships, struggling to get on and poor communication are things that most couples experience. You are likely to feel that your relationship feels challenging if you are being exposed to a lot of stress. We live in stressful times.

Arguing + how you respond to it = what happens next

This booklet is going to help you to think about how you respond to each other when you argue and how you can influence in a positive way what happens next. You get to choose what happens next by making better decisions, by thinking about how you acknowledge each other and show respect.

Throughout the booklet there is a theme of 5. It can take just 5 minutes to reflect on a situation and think about how to respond to it in a productive way.

This booklet is not about taking opportunities to criticise or blame each other, neither is it about establishing who is the better partner! So start as you mean to go on and try to approach this time of reflection as a chance to take steps towards a healthier, stronger relationship. In turn this will give your child/ren the opportunity to learn how to do the same for themselves and that is one of the best life skills you can give them.

Listening to learn, not to respond

We often have unspoken ground rules in our relationships, behaviours that have become a common part of the way in which we communicate with each other. That influences how we respond to one another and in turn has an impact on the stability of the relationship.

The way we communicate is not always helpful, so it can be a good idea to reflect on how you speak to each other.

Has it become a bit critical, is there quite a bit of blaming going on?

Have you both become good at making assumptions about what the other person is thinking and feeling, therefore not bothering to ask, just assume you know!

This is common. To break this habit try keeping this in mind

Listen to learn, not to respond

All too often we make the following mistake....when our partner is talking we are busy putting together the next part of our argument, our response to our partner. We are making the critical mistake of not listening to what they are saying. We are more interested in how we are going to respond and we miss the opportunity to learn from our partner what is going on for them. It's a small but vital change to make, *actually listening when they talking!*

Just because you are not talking does not mean you are listening

Listening gives you knowledge and knowledge gives your relationship the power to be stronger

The 5 Love Languages Are

A common mistake many couples make is trying to love their partner in the way in which they would like to be loved....not in the way that their partner wants to be loved. The 5 love languages may help you to understand this better.

The idea is that different people like to be loved in different ways....so are you sure you really know how your partner likes to feel loved by you?

Knowing how your partner likes to feel loved and cared for by you can be the golden ticket to a stronger bond between you.

ACTS OF SERVICE

Run an errand for your partner, cook a meal, complete a household chore

GIFTS

Give thoughtful and meaningful gifts of any size, without an occasion

PHYSICAL TOUCH

hug, kiss, hold hands

QUALITY TIME

Give your partner undivided attention via exclusive time together

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION

Offer verbal compliments and words of appreciation

Gary Chapman 1992

Two things to do here

Reflect on which love language is yours and think of an example you can give to your partner so they can feel confident that they understand.

Find out which one is your partners and ask them to give you an example so you have clarity too.

Now you can move forward with your precious knowledge, knowing how to meet your partners needs in a way that is best for them...and visa versa!

Simple really, understand your partner better and you have just increased your chances of lasting closeness. If you carry on trying to show your partner your love and affection using your love language rather than theirs it is easy for you both to become frustrated with each other.

Let's think about an example.....imagine that your partner often brings home for you your favourite bar of chocolate or picks up your favourite magazine for you on the way home....but if you are honest what you would really like them to do is spend more time with you, proper time when they are not distracted by their phone or the kids.

It's easy to assume that gifts are kind gestures and being given them should make you feel loved. We are not saying they are not kind gestures but if you want to be loved by the giving of time rather than gifts, whilst lovely they are not hitting the spot.

This can cause conflict as maybe the gift giver feels offended that the gift has not had the desired effect, the partner seems ungrateful. When we understand love languages, we learn to recognise that arguments are happening because we have not tapped into what the other person needs to feel loved.

5 things that make your relationship work

Have you ever stopped to think about what makes your relationship work? It's important to recognise the individuality of your relationship.

What makes you tick as a couple, what makes your bond special?

Why does it work, the two of you being together?

Reflect on the this, it's valuable to recognise and appreciate your strengths as a couple. Even when you feel like a lot of the time you are bickering the reality may be that you have each other's back, you are a team, just sometimes one that has a bit of unrest in the changing rooms!

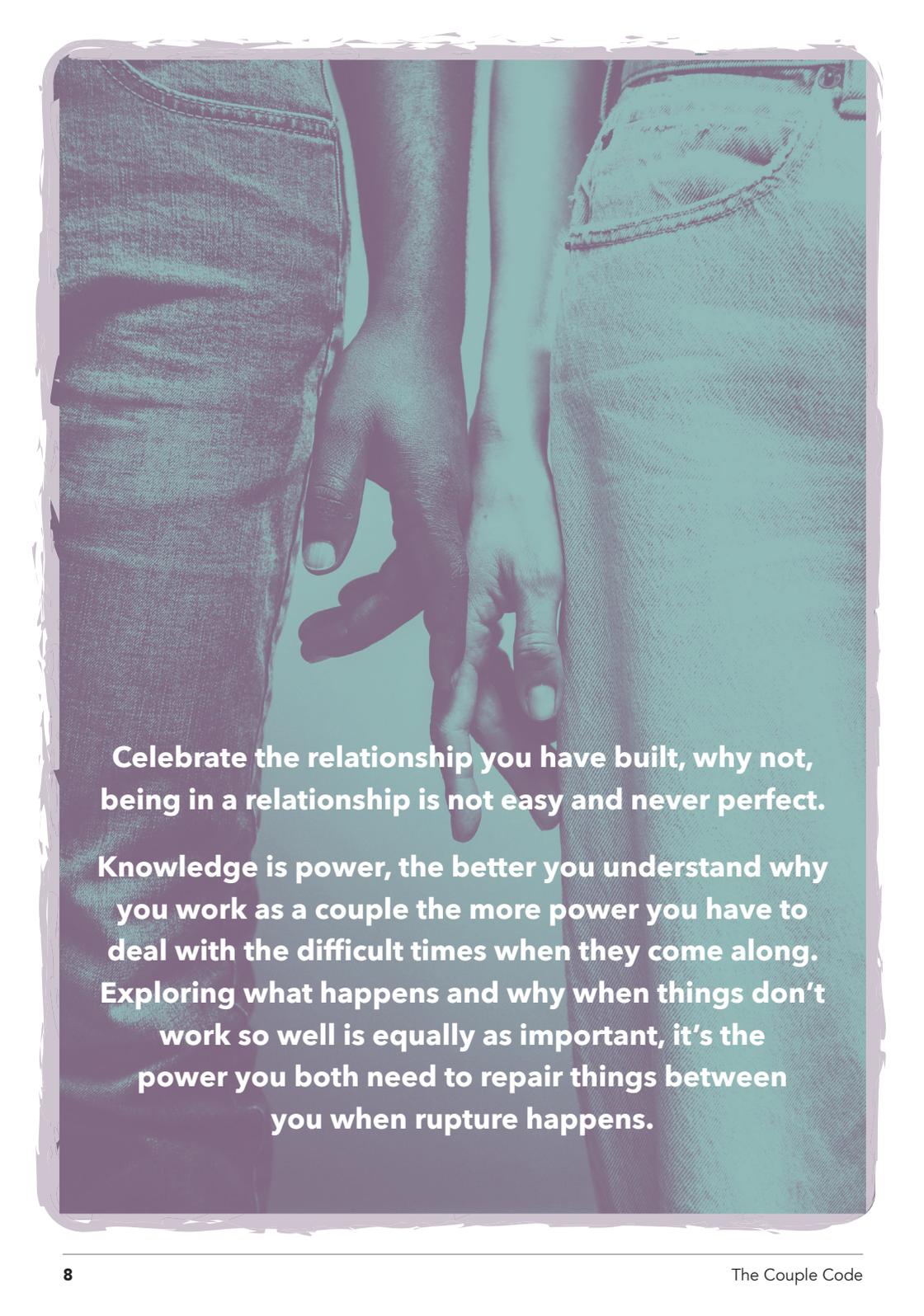
You have made it this far as a couple and when you look back you will be able to identify times that have been stressful and you have had to dig deep to manage and you have. So, build on the strength your relationship already has, even if at times you don't feel that your bond is strong.

It is easy to overlook what makes you work when you are just focusing on what doesn't.

So have a think together about what these 5 things are.

Eg: We share the same sense of humour. We have a similar past etc

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



Celebrate the relationship you have built, why not, being in a relationship is not easy and never perfect.

Knowledge is power, the better you understand why you work as a couple the more power you have to deal with the difficult times when they come along. Exploring what happens and why when things don't work so well is equally as important, it's the power you both need to repair things between you when rupture happens.

5 things we would like to improve about our relationship

Strong healthy relationships are ones that are always changing along with the changes we face in life. Relationships are about making progress together not trying to create perfection. Perfect relationships are a myth. Couples who are able to feel content together have built into their relationship *compassion* and *kindness*.

What is your understanding and experience of compassion and kindness, what difference do you think they make?

A healthy relationship needs empathy.

What is empathy? Empathy is trying your best to see things from another person's perspective, to stand in their shoes and try to respect, recognise and understand what it is they are experiencing.

Let's say you didn't mind being in lockdown, but your partner did. You were happy to watch telly and have the perfect excuse not to be sociable, they on the other hand were really struggling with the lack of social contact with others and the endless zoom calls. Neither person is right or wrong, it's just how they felt, but a lack of acknowledgement of how each partner is feeling can be the cause of many an upset.

It is easy to forget to be curious about what is doing on for your partner. Familiarity can cause us to become a bit lazy, we stop being curious and that can be when we stop making an effort, we assume our relationship is going tick along, looking after itself. But it's like a car, if we need to check the tyres and top up the oil!

So if you think about how your relationship works at the moment, what changes would you feel are realistic to make that you think would improve the quality of your relationship?

Eg: stop talking over each other when we are disagreeing on something or try to spend less time on our phones and more time talking or doing things we are both interested in.

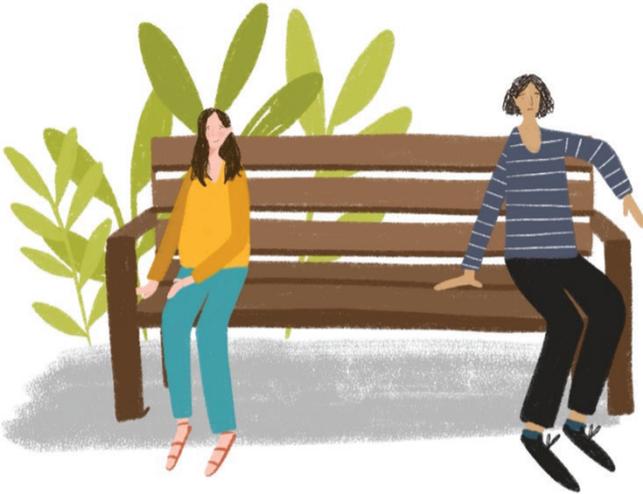
1.

2.

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Building a culture of appreciation

If you can strive to build a culture of appreciation into your relationship, you will have a meaningful connection that will support you when you are going through difficult times.

What does appreciating each other mean to you?

How do you know your partner appreciates you and the things you do?

If you don't feel like you do have a culture of appreciation, what could you do differently to change that?

What commitments are you going to make to each other that will help to build a feeling of mutual appreciation between you?

For example - not taking each other for granted, looking for opportunities to recognise kindness and simply saying thank you for things and gestures.

Use the space below to list the things you have agreed together that you could do to build a culture of appreciation into your relationship.

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5 things our child/children think and feel when we argue

When in the middle of arguing with your partner it can be easy to forget that there is nearly always some kind of impact on your child when you do so and it's not going to be positive if your arguing is destructive.



Thinking about the experience your child is having may not feel comfortable but many people find it a great motivator for change. No one chooses for their child to have a bad experience because of something they have done.

You can choose to do things differently, to keep in mind your child's needs and what they are being exposed to, is it helpful or harmful?

If you're able to be honest, what things do you think your children think and feel when they see you arguing or know that there has been an argument?

Eg; they probably feel anxious and unsure of what might happen next

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Couples often say things like this...

'Well it's ok, we only argue when the children have gone to bed.'

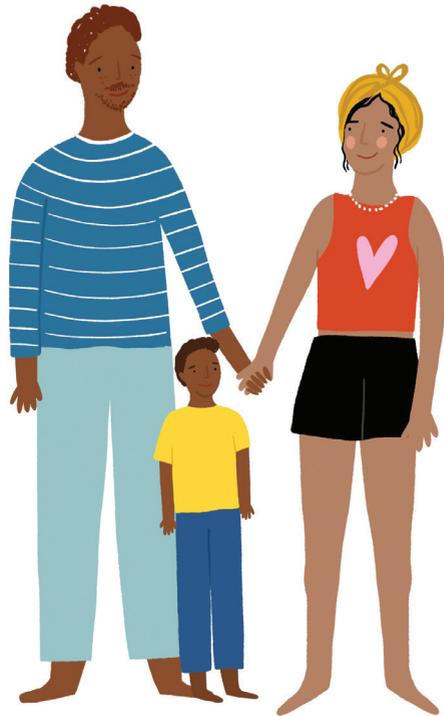
What do you think about that statement?

We know that children pick up on the atmosphere of their parent's relationship, positive or negative. It is often easy to see the impact in their behaviour at home or at school for example.

Children need to learn communication life skills from their parents. How to listen, show respect, accept another person's view even if you don't share it, how to disagree without doing damage to the relationship. They don't need a front row seat to shouting, blaming, criticism and sarcasm, if that's what they see then that's what they learn.

*What we are going to try
and change.....*

*How will we know if we are
communicating in a way that is
more helpful for our children
than harmful.....*



Your Couple Code

By working through this booklet you have taken some time to think about your relationship and now is a good time to agree together on your Couple Code.

In just the same way as everyone has their own parenting style, we have our own relationship styles too. There are many different flavours of relationships and in order to give yours the best chance of thriving it can be helpful to agree what your non-negotiables are. What are the golden rules of your relationship, behaviours that are a given between you in order for you both of you to feel, loved, respected and secure (and for your children to have the chance to feel the same.)

You are going to create your own Couple Code, based on what you know and understand about each other and your relationship together.

Your Couple Code can be as long or as short as you like, it is yours after all!

You need to identify ideas that you would both like to pin up as the way you would like your relationship to function.



To help you get going, here are some examples of what could be in your Couple Code:

- When we apologise for something, not to follow it up with but, what or why
- Check that we are trying to see each other's perspective on things
- Acknowledge what each other is thinking and feeling
- Make sure we listen to understand each other not just listen to respond
- Show we care, small acts of kindness so we are always building warmth and security into our partnership
- Be clear about our expectations of one another, do we know what we each need right now and how to meet that need?
- Try not to blame and criticise each other
- Try our best not to shout in front of the children and if they do hear us argue make sure they understand that we have made up and everything is ok.

You might want to put your Couple Code somewhere you can both refer to it and be reminded of what you agreed.

You may review your Code and come back to it at a later date and make changes to it. For instance, having young children is different to having teenagers and that can effect your relationship so things between you may change as your family does and so your Code may change too.

When you find yourselves struggling and you are bickering and arguing you might find it helpful to remind yourselves of what is in your Couple Code. You have chosen these things for a reason because they will help you to connect in a healthier, more respectful way.

You may even want to think about creating a Family Code too?



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