

The Same Fight *Worksheet.*

For couples who keep circling the same argument and want a better way back to each other.

PRACTITIONER

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Most fights wear different costumes.

Most couples don't have 47 different fights. They have one or two core patterns that keep changing costumes. The topic may be dishes, money, sex, parenting, phones, tone of voice, or who forgot to do what. Underneath, the fight is usually asking a deeper question:

Do I matter? Can I count on you? Are we still a team?

This worksheet is influenced by practical couples-therapy frameworks, including Terry Real's work on losing strategies¹, Ellyn Bader and Peter Pearson's Initiator-Inquirer process², and Gottman's distinction between solvable and perpetual problems³.

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this.

- This is not for proving who is right.
- Pick one recurring fight, not the entire relationship.
- Do it when you are both regulated enough to stay respectful.
- If either of you is scared, unsafe, or being threatened, pause this worksheet and seek appropriate support.

REMEMBER

The goal is not to win the argument. The goal is to understand the pattern.

¹ Relational Life Therapy — Level 1 Training (Five Losing Strategies) — <https://relationallife.com/level-1-training/>

² Couples Institute — Initiator-Inquirer Process — <https://www.couplesinstitute.com/utilize-the-initiator-inquirer-process-in-couples-therapy/>

³ The Gottman Institute — Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems — <https://www.gottman.com/blog/managing-conflict-solvable-vs-perpetual-problems/>

What does this fight look like on the outside?

Pick one recurring argument. Don't try to capture every version. Keep it specific. If you can't name it in a sentence, you're probably still inside it.

The fight usually starts when...

The topic looks like...

The sentence I usually say is...

The sentence I hear from my partner is...

We have had some version of this fight about...

COMMON TOPICS · CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

☐ Money

☐ Chores

☐ Parenting

☐ Sex / intimacy

☐ Phones / screens

☐ In-laws / family

☐ Work stress

☐ Tone of voice

☐ Time together

☐ Emotional support

☐ Other _____

What do each of you do when the heat goes up?

These are protective moves we reach for when we feel threatened, dismissed, or alone. Most of us have two or three favorites. Be honest about yours.

When I feel activated, I tend to...

- ☐ Prove my point
- ☐ Try to control the outcome
- ☐ Say everything I feel without filtering
- ☐ Get even or punish indirectly
- ☐ Shut down, leave, or go cold
- ☐ Over-explain
- ☐ People-please
- ☐ Keep score
- ☐ Bring up old evidence
- ☐ Pretend I'm fine

When my partner feels activated, they tend to...

- ☐ Prove my point
- ☐ Try to control the outcome
- ☐ Say everything I feel without filtering
- ☐ Get even or punish indirectly
- ☐ Shut down, leave, or go cold
- ☐ Over-explain
- ☐ People-please
- ☐ Keep score
- ☐ Bring up old evidence
- ☐ Pretend I'm fine

A NOTE ON THESE MOVES

These are protective moves. They may make sense in the moment, but they usually create more distance. Therapist Terry Real calls these “losing strategies”¹ — they protect your position, but they push your partner away².

¹ Relational Life Therapy — Level 1 Training (Five Losing Strategies) — <https://relationallife.com/level-1-training/>

² Terry Real — Ebooks & Worksheets — <https://terryreal.com/ebooks-worksheets/>

Underneath the fight, there's usually a fear.

Roughly 69% of couples conflict is perpetual¹ — meaning it reflects real, lasting differences in how each of you is wired. That's normal. The point isn't to eliminate the fight; it's to understand what each of you is protecting underneath it.

Underneath my reaction, I may be afraid that...

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ I don't matter. | ☐ I'm alone in this. |
| ☐ I can't count on you. | ☐ I'm failing. |
| ☐ I'm too much. | ☐ I'm not wanted. |
| ☐ I'll be controlled. | ☐ I'll be abandoned. |
| ☐ I'll never get what I need. | ☐ I'll lose myself. |

What I wish my partner understood is...

What I think my partner may be trying to protect is...

¹ The Gottman Institute — Solvable vs. Perpetual Problems —
<https://www.gottman.com/blog/managing-conflict-solvable-vs-perpetual-problems/>

Stop describing what's wrong. Start asking for what you need.

A complaint tells your partner what they did. A request tells them what you actually want. Most fights stay stuck because the complaint is loud and the request is missing. Shifting from complaint to request is a core move in Relational Life Therapy¹.

COMPLAINT

"You never help."

"You don't care about me."

"You always shut down."

REQUEST

"Can you take over dinner cleanup on Tuesdays and Thursdays?"

"Can we sit together for 15 minutes tonight without phones?"

"Can you tell me you need a 20-minute break and then come back?"

My complaint is...

The request underneath it is...

A specific, reasonable next step would be...

¹ Terry Real — Ebooks & Worksheets — <https://terryreal.com/ebooks-worksheets/>

One person speaks. The other listens to understand.

Ellyn Bader and Peter Pearson's Initiator–Inquirer structure¹ gives couples a way to stop competing for who gets heard first. One person speaks; the other listens to understand. Then you switch. It works because differences are normal and don't have to be disastrous².

INITIATOR

The one bringing it up.

- One issue only.
- Use "I" statements.
- Describe your experience without blame or name-calling.
- Stay open to learning something about yourself.

INQUIRER

The one listening to understand.

- Listen and recap before responding.
- Ask questions to understand feelings, thoughts, and desires.
- Respond with empathy before problem-solving.
- Self-soothe instead of defending immediately.

TRY THESE SENTENCE STARTERS

Initiator

"When _____ happened, I told myself _____, and I felt _____. What I need you to understand is _____."

Inquirer

"What I'm hearing is _____. Did I get that right? Can you tell me more about _____?"

¹ Couples Institute — Initiator–Inquirer Process — <https://www.couplesinstitute.com/utilize-the-initiator-inquirer-process-in-couples-therapy/>

² Couples Institute — A Developmental Model for Healthy Couples — <https://www.couplesinstitute.com/a-developmental-model-for-healthy-couples/>

One small change beats a perfect plan.

Don't try to fix the whole pattern in one conversation. Pick one ownable thing, one specific ask, and one small experiment for the week ahead.

One thing I can own is...

One thing I want to stop doing in this fight is...

One thing I can do differently next time is...

One thing I'm asking from you is...

One thing we can try for the next 7 days is...

OUR 7-DAY EXPERIMENT

What we're trying. When. How we'll know it helped.

Some patterns won't loosen on their own.

If most of these feel familiar, the pattern may be bigger than what one good conversation can shift. That's not a failure — it's information.

- ☐ The same fight keeps escalating.
- ☐ One or both of you shuts down for hours or days.
- ☐ The topic changes, but the emotional pattern stays the same.
- ☐ Conversations turn into blame, contempt, or icy silence.
- ☐ One of you is starting to feel checked out.
- ☐ You want to work on it, but you can't slow it down on your own.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

You don't have to wait for crisis.

Rogue Haven Counseling offers practical, direct couples counseling and focused couples intensives for couples in Denton and across Texas who want to stop circling the same fight and start rebuilding connection.

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This worksheet is educational and not a substitute for therapy, diagnosis, or crisis care. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. If you are in emotional crisis, call or text 988 in the U.S.