



3900 WEST BROWN DEER ROAD, SUITE 200
BROWN DEER, WI 53209
PHONE: 414.540.2170 • FAX: 414.540.2171
WWW.SHOREHAVENBHI.COM

Three Challenging Tasks to Improve Your Couple Relationship

Don Rosenberg
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Marriage counselors, also called Marital Therapists or Couples Counselors, use a number of measures and a number of tasks to help you improve your relationship. Here are three such tasks that we often recommend.

I. 10 Ways My Partner Shows Love

Here is a task that seems simple on the outside, but can be challenging. By yourself, list 10 ways that you know that your partner loves you. Then separately list 10 ways that you are showing love to your partner in your own way. The first list can be shared without going into the second list.

Because intimate talk about their relationship is not something they're all that used to do, some people find this to be a challenge. But try it.

The second list, 10 ways that you show love, needs to be shared carefully because your partner may not see it at all the way you do!. Those ways you love your partner may not match his or her way or his way of being loved. Your partner may need love ways that are not the same as your way of showing it. This is not an occasion to be defensive, but to be completely open to a hearing what love means to your partner.

Lastly, look at the kind of items on your lists. They say something about what love means to you. You may put down mainly things your partner does for you. You may put down more emotional expressions and loving words. It is important to listen and use these various lists in order to learn new ways to show love.

II. What You Want to Keep

Let me give you another task. List as many items as you possibly can that you would like to keep in your relationship. We ask you this because so many people are concerned with the things they don't like in the relationship. Usually those are a small fraction of all the things that are happening in the relationship. So focus on building from the things you do want to keep period, no matter what. If you want to share this with your partner, again do that without any hint of defensiveness or a need to explain yourself. Just share with an open mind. This is a task that comes from the Solution-Focused school of therapy.

III. Why We Fell in Love

What happens to most couples is that the ups and downs of life get in the way and turn us in directions that pull us away from the foundational and fundamental qualities that we valued, the qualities that got us into this relationship in the first place.

For a third task, go back to the days when you first met and go back to the days when you decided to form a commitment. List as many qualities of your partner as you can remember that made you believe that this was someone that you would want as a partner. Also list as many characteristics of your relationship together as you can remember valuing – all that gave you the belief that this would be a good relationship to which to commit yourself.

As a relationship grows, more and more qualities may be added to the list. In couples counseling we are concerned with those bumps in life that have taken us away from all of those qualities that we have most valued in the relationship. So, we can help people get back to the place that they value and cherish.

When you do these exercises, we hope they get you in touch with all that really matters and all that has helped you to accomplish all the best things you have done in the relationship.

Sadly, these exercises may clarify for some couples that continuation of the relationship is untenable. They may find the demonstrations of love are hard to list. Those may have stopped. The partners may find what they want to keep has dwindled. They may find they have no foreseeable path back to the foundation of their original love. In a way, that is a success as well; it clarifies the current impasse in the relationship.

A couples counselor will commit to seeing if repairs are possible and realistic, and what it may take to get back on a positive relationship trajectory.