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## Couples Check-in Dialogue

This is a daily communication tool that can be used by couples to help reduce conflict and increase connection and understanding. It was inspired by ‘The Daily Temperature Reading’, created by Virginia Satir, a famous American psychotherapist.

You can play around with the structure, but I recommend always including the first two steps along with ‘New Information’. If it helps you can put a timer on each person and just stop when the timer goes off to avoid one person over sharing.

This is a ‘deep listening’ exercise, where one person speaks without being interrupted, and the other listens actively. When your partner is speaking, listen with your ears, but also with your eyes and your body language too. Try to be as present as you can and see their world without attempting to fix, question or judge, even if what they are saying seems to be irrational or illogical to you.

It is a simple task in itself, but it works much more effectively when couples intentionally create a time when they can be fully attentive to each other, without interruption. This can be transforming for a relationship and many couples really enjoy the opportunity to connect in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Times and situations that often work well are before dinner, out on a walk, on a long car journey. I recommend using this at least every other day to start with.

Here are the 5 Discussion Points:

### 1. Appreciations

a) Tell your partner 2 things that you appreciate about them. These can range from simple things such as: "you have such a great sense of humour" or "you have a really nice smile", "thank you for picking up your wet towel from the bathroom floor"; to the more complex, such as "I really appreciate that that you trusted me to handle that situation with our daughter without directing me". It can be a nice surprise to realize just how much our partner notices and appreciates.

b) You might like to add any appreciations relating to self. This could be anything that you have done for yourself, your relationship, your job or at home. Many people find this one difficult but we don't often stop to take stock of all the things we do on a daily basis or the progress we have made.

c) If you wish you can also say 3 things that you are grateful for in general, about life itself or about other people.

## **2. How am I feeling?**

Check in with yourself here. Take a few moments and ask yourself 'how do I feel?' Try to step out of your busy head and ask your heart / feelings / body what is going on? If you are not sure, maybe you are confused and that is a feeling in itself, so say this. You may notice that you are feeling a mixture of emotions that is fine too. You can also answer the question from the point of view 'this is how I have been feeling lately'.

Try not to go into a long story about why you are feeling this way, you can mention why this is the case, but if you go into story the likelihood is that you will go into 'victim' role if you are feeling bad and if your partner is involved you may start to blame them or they may feel the urge to fix. Try to keep this judgement free if possible.

You may like to use this as a starter "I notice that right now I am feeling .....and in general today/this week I have been feeling....."

## **3. Wishes, Hopes, and Dreams**

What are you hoping for in the short and long term? I.e. spending a weekend alone with your partner; running the marathon; planning a holiday; changing your career; feeling more peaceful in general.

A partner who understands your dreams can support you in making them happen. Our hopes and dreams often change as we go along and it's good to keep each other up to date. It can also be nice to have a more in depth chat sometimes, otherwise it gets to always be about the children or the less important daily going-ons.

## **4. New Information**

We often forget to update our partner about a change in plans or circumstances. We tell people at work or a family member and think we've told our partner. Make the daily updates a ritual. Information like "My brother is coming to visit next week," or "I am going for a massage tomorrow at 5pm," is crucial to staying in-synch and feeling connected.

**5. Niggles** (use this only once you have got used to using the above 4 discussion points)

If you feel that anything is getting in the way of a loving connection between you, now is the time to acknowledge it and set a time / day to explore the conversation further.

Here, you may also like to clear-up big or little mysteries before they become suspicions, jealousy, false assumptions, or resentments. Many will have simple explanations.

Try to express any niggles in a non-confrontational way. Start with how you felt or feel, rather than “you made me feel,” at the end of the day we are all responsible for what we do with our feelings even if we get triggered by our partner.