

How to Get the Most out of Relationship Coaching

I value your commitment to your relationship, and respect your investment of time, energy, and financial resources. I also take seriously your faith in me as a helper and facilitator for the growth you want in yourself and in your relationship. I very much want your therapy to be extremely successful.

To this end, I have created this handout. I want you to start thinking about your relationship, yourself, and the changes you desire, in ways that will create positive change, even before our first meeting.

In fact, I have some homework for you to do before we meet.

Envisioning Your Future Relationship (Exercise 1):

Please take some time to reflect, and then answer these questions:

- What kind of relationship do you want to create? Think about what your relationship might feel like when you are deeply happy in it. Imagine you are coming home at the end of a long day; you are feeling pure joy and anticipation when you park and enter the house. You are very much looking forward to your time with your partner. Now here's the question: what are the features of the relationship you are excited to come home to? What does that relationship look and feel like, from your perspective?
- When you imagine yourself in that amazing, fulfilling relationship, how are you showing up? What kind of a partner are you being, in your fantasy of a deeply happy relationship?
- How far are you from that ideal right now? Be honest: How are you currently showing up that isn't your best self, and how would you like to be showing up, that would be in accordance with your values, and congruent with the relationship that you want to create?

Putting Relational Therapy and the Change Process in Perspective:

In my experience, the difference between relationship therapy that is effective, and relationship therapy that is not particularly effective, is whether each partner is able to identify meaningful goals for themselves (not for their partner).

What is a meaningful goal? The goals that move therapy forward most effectively have several key qualities:

1. These goals represent how you want to be as a person. They are in alignment with your values, and feel important to you because they represent steps toward your own personal growth objectives.
2. Achieving these goals will benefit you, not just your partner or your relationship. The best goals have a clear payoff directly to you, the person who holds the goal.
3. These goals will also benefit the relationship, or make a difference to your partner.
4. These goals are quite specific, and actionable. If you can't picture a person in a movie performing the goal activity, it isn't specific enough.

Here is an example of a goal that meets the criteria:

I want to listen to my partner without interrupting. This is in alignment with my values because I believe being a good listener is an important quality in a partner, and I aspire to be a good partner. It will also benefit me to listen without interrupting, because then I will get to know my partner, which I would love; I often wonder what they think and feel. I would feel good about myself, and about them, if they told me what they think and feel, even if I didn't agree with everything they say. I also think it will benefit my relationship when I reach this goal, because sometimes my partner tells me they don't feel heard. When I become good at listening, my partner will feel more emotionally safe, and that will definitely benefit our relationship.

Here's another example:

I want to stop being defensive when my partner is telling me something. I don't feel good about myself when I'm defensive, so it is in accordance with my values to stop that behavior. It will benefit me directly, when I stop being defensive, because then my partner will be able to speak freely without getting distracted by my perspective; I will get to know them better. And our relationship will benefit because defensiveness often leads to a fight. When I stop being defensive, we will certainly fight less.

[Notice that these goals do not require that you know how to achieve them.](#) That is where therapy comes in. Your job is to get clear on what you want to change about yourself, and my job as a couples coach and facilitator is to help you get there.

Setting Meaningful Goals for Personal Change (Exercise 2):

- a) [Now it is your turn.](#) Think about what you would like to change about how you show up in your relationship. What might you want to change about yourself, that will make a difference to you, to your relationship, and be in alignment with your values?
- b) Make a list of things you would like to change about yourself. It could be one or two things, or five, or ten. Put a star by the two that you think will make the biggest difference in the quality of your relationship.
- c) Extra credit: for the two changes you think will make the biggest difference, write down how you will feel after you have achieved those changes. What emotions will you experience when you are showing up in the new way you aspire to?

Not to worry, there are no "right" answers other than the ones you choose about improving how you want to show up for yourself and show up in your relationship! —-And that are in alignment with your integrity, that is, choosing goals that YOU are actually invested in pursuing for YOUR personal and relationship health, not just goals to please your partner.

[I would like to request that you each email your answers to the above questions to me at:](#)

mail@TransitionByDesign.com with the subject heading: "GOALS" so that I can search for and find them if they get buried.

[You'll be WAY ahead of the game and save LOTS of money if you can return your responses to me BEFORE our first session. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work!](#)

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This handout is modified from the work of my mentors, Peter Pearson and Elyn Bader, who created the Developmental Model of Couple Therapy and founded The Couples Institute, & Martha Kauppi, Founder of the Institute for Relational Intimacy and an ASSECT certified sex therapist who has developed her own program of training for therapists and coaches. They have given permission for the use of their ideas to TBD Inc. (AASECT: The American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists). Transition By Design & Lori Keegan thank them for their generosity!