

Conversation Starters

Think you know everything about
your partner?

Try this...



Read silently. Do not look ahead or thumb through this booklet.

What follows is a series of open-ended statements intended to help you examine your relationship and practice new ways of interacting. The discussion you have should occur in the context of safety with both partners agreeing to confidentiality.

One of the underlying assumptions of this exercise is that all relationships need periodic renewal. This exercise provides an easy and nonthreatening structure to help you take time out from everyday living to look at yourselves, at who you are, and at where your relationship is going.

One of the most important elements of a good relationship is good, clear communication. In order to facilitate this, listening checks have been placed at appropriate intervals. A listening check involves repeating your partner's statement in your own words, in order to assure that you have heard it correctly.

Opportunities have also been provided for you to talk about your feelings and to express yourself nonverbally as you go through the exercise.

It is important that you

- be open and accepting of your partner's responses. Try not to judge.
- talk about your own feelings. Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements.
- feel free to skip any item.
- use this activity to share information, rather than solve problems.
- be willing to take risks.

Again, it is important that you do not look ahead since the exercise is based on the assumption that spontaneous, here-and-now answers are best. Thinking ahead for an answer will block your ability to be present with your partner and clearly hear his/her response.

Directions:

Both partners are to complete each statement. You are encouraged to amplify the discussion by adding to your responses. Don't limit yourself to one word, simple responses. Allow for longer, in-depth conversation. Make sure you alternate who initiates each response, e.g., you respond first to item 1, your partner responds first to item 2. If your partner is finished reading, go on to the next page and begin.

The first time we met was. . .

The length of time we have known each other is. . .

The kind of relationship we have is. . .

One adjective to describe our relationship would be. . .

One way in which we are alike is. . .

One way in which we are different is. . .

If our relationship were a movie, it would be called. . .

A particularly memorable, happy experience in our relationship was . . .

A place I would like to share with you is. . .

I find your friends to be. . .

When we meet new people I. . .

When I am with you in a social situation, I feel. . .

One of the most "fun" things we ever did was. . .

The needs you satisfy in me are. . .

Some of my needs that are not being completely satisfied are. . .

Right now I feel. . .

A song that reminds me of you is. . .

The amount of time we spend alone is . . .

Listening check: "Are you saying that....?"

One of your greatest assets is. . .

I am proud of you when . . .

Something you have helped me learn about my self is. . .

One of the feelings I have the hardest time expressing is . . .

The way I deal with troublesome feelings is . . .

Listening check: "What I hear you saying is. . ."

I feel indecisive when. . .

I am most "suspicious" of you when. . .

I assume you know that. . .

If I could make you over, I would never change. . .

You are most helpful when. . .

Express to your partner how you are feeling right now without using words.

I am afraid. . .

I like it when you. . .

You really annoy me when you. . .

One thing I regret having done is. . .

A habit of mine that bothers me most is. . .

Your greatest strength is . . .

I do not like it when you. . .

Something I dislike about you that we seldom talk about is. . .

I have the most fun with you when. . .

If I had all the money in the world, I would. . .

A frequent fantasy I have about you is. . .

When we have an intellectual conversation. . .

You tend to talk a lot about. . .

When I don't want to answer questions I. . .

When I can't express something to you I. . .

This experience makes me feel. . .

If you need to interrupt this activity, this is a convenient place to do so.

A thing that is helping us to grow closer is. . .

The things I most like to do with you are. . .

I tend not to tell you about. . .

Something I am usually reluctant to discuss is. . .

Something I have always wondered about is. . .

I think you avoid me when. . .

An area in which I would like to feel more equal to you is. . .

I feel inferior to you when. . .

I feel rebellious when. . .

I need you most when. . .

To keep from being hurt, I. . .

It hurts me when. . .

When I hurt you I. . .

I get discouraged or frustrated when. . .

I think you are unfair when you. . .

When you are pouting I feel. . .

Listening check: "It sounds to me as if you are saying that. . ."

The things that hold us together are. . .

The habit you have that bothers me most is. . .

I become most defensive when you. . .

I was most angry with you when. . .

When we fight. . .

When I feel as if I have lost I. . .

Right now I am feeling. . .

I think that you do not give me a chance to . . .

An important thing or issue between us right now is. . .

Listening check: "What I think you are saying is. . ."

I find that being open with you is. . .

One thing I have always wanted to talk more about is. . .

I wish you would let me know when I. . .

I think it would be fun to. . .

If I wanted to make you laugh I would. . .

A pattern I see in our relationship is. . .

The part of my body that I like most is. . .

The part of my body that I like least is. . .

What I like most about your body is. . .

The ways I like you to touch me are. . .

Right now I am feeling. . .

My attitude about extramarital sex is. . .

I feel jealous when. . .

I feel most tender towards you when. . .

Listening check: “I think I hear you saying that. . .”

One of the times that bothered me most in our relationship was. . .

What I like best about our relationship is. . .

In the future, I would like our relationship to become more. . .

The type of relationship I do not want to develop with you is. . .

The thing I value most in life is. . .

I believe in and am committed to. . .

In five years I see us. . .

Take a few moments to be with your partner in silence. Allow yourself to feel grateful for all you’ve revealed and learned through this exercise. When you’ve given yourself a few moments to absorb all what you’ve learned, express our gratitude to your partner nonverbally.