



# Relationship Workbook



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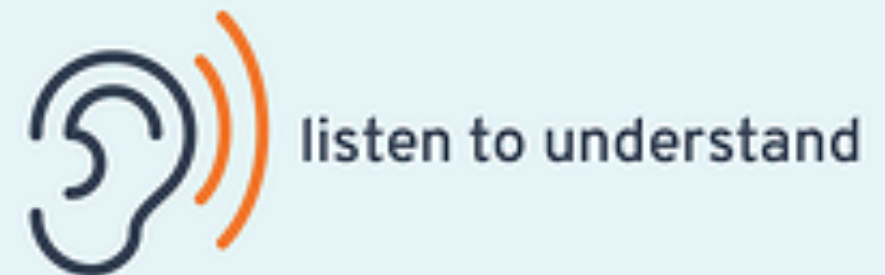
# 1 What is “Imago” Relationship Work?



"In Imago a core belief is that couples come to therapy to experience the joyful aliveness of connection. Pain and problems are just the things that need to be dealt with sometimes because they get in the way of connection. If we focus all of our attention on the problems, that is what will grow. If we focus our attention on the joy that comes from safety and connections, and help our couples wallow in that joyful aliveness... then we are doing Imago Therapy."  
- Sophie Slade, Ph. D., Imago Faculty

## The Imago Dialogue

Dialogue helps people cut through their natural defenses to create a more genuine connection. The structure of the Imago dialogue provides safety, and the first rule is to banish all shame, blame and criticism.



mirror so they feel heard



validate that they make sense

empathize for connection





## The Imago Dialogue The Sender



- 1 **Request an Appointment**  
"I'd like to dialogue.  
Is this a good time?"
- 2 **SHARE**  
Respectfully share what you want to say  
Pause so Receiver can Mirror  
Accept / Correct the mirror as needed  
Keep sending until you've said it all
- 3 **SUMMARY (optional)**  
Partner may offer summary  
1. If a lot has been said, the Receiver may offer a summary. If needed, offer respectful corrections.  
2. If not, and you would like one, simply ask:  
"Could you just let me know the gist of what you've heard?"
- 4 **VALIDATION**  
Partner validates &/or asks for more information  
Accept or Correct the validation as needed  
1. In the Validation step, the Receiver lets you know what parts are making logical sense to them and any parts that need clarification. If needed, make gentle corrections or additions.  
2. If the Receiver does not offer validation, gently ask:  
"Is this making sense to you?"
- 5 **EMPATHY**  
Partner guesses what they think you might be feeling  
Accept or Correct the validation as needed  
1. In the Empathy Step, the Receiver shares what he/she imagines you might be feeling, then checks it out with you.  
2. If the Receiver does not offer any empathy, gently ask:  
"Can you understand how I feel?"
- 6 **END**  
"Thanks for listening"  
"Would you like to switch?"

### NEGATIVE FEELING PROMPTERS

frustrated	sad	rejected	overwhelmed	betrayed
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## IMAGO INTENTIONAL DIALOGUE

# MIRROR

YOU'RE SAYING...

DID I GET IT?

IS THERE MORE ????

# VALIDATE

YOU MAKE SENSE TO ME BECAUSE...

# EMPATHIZE

I IMAGINE YOU MUST FEEL...

During the following sessions, you can expect to:

Sessions 1-2:

- Commit to 12 sessions and postpone making decisions about the relationship
- Learn and practice the “Mirroring Step” of the Imago Dialogue
- Complete the exercise called “Closing the Exit”

Sessions 3-5:

- Learn and practice the full 3-step Imago Dialogue
- Master the process so that you are practicing regularly at home, between sessions
- Learn and practice the Parent-Child Dialogue

Sessions 6-8:

- Focus on deepening the Dialogue
- Dig into more painful feelings that got you stuck in a power struggle

Sessions 9+:

- Feel safe to continue Dialoguing about what is happening btw you
- Feel ready to work on changing your behavior to show love toward the other
- Begin to have more frequent intimate exchanges:  
ie: spend more time touching, cuddling, holding, and so forth.



A romantic relationship is a developmental process made up of 3 stages:

- 1-the romantic phase,
- 2-the power struggle, and
- 3-conscious partnership

The positive projections of the romantic stage are inevitably followed by the negative projections of the second stage:

The power struggle which is launched when:

- 1-partners' childhood wounds, defenses, & character flaws cause frustration in the other
- 2-instead of spontaneous feelings of romantic love, partners grow increasingly frustrated with and negative toward each other
- 3-when frustrated with each other, partners use the unconscious and automatic defensive strategies, or defensive adaptations, that they developed in childhood
- 4-partners use negativity or other forms of coercion to get their needs met by their partner.

During the power struggle, partners unconsciously re-experience and react to each other in the same ways they did toward their imperfectly attuned caretakers during childhood.

Are you stuck in the Power Struggle stage?

## 4 Goals for Imago Relationship Building

1. Becoming present to your partner: This requires a transformation of consciousness in which one discovers the “otherness” of the partner, in which we get that “my partner is not me,” which promotes progress toward the important developmental leap known as differentiation.
2. Learning a new way to talk, that is, turning the conversation from an exchange of parallel monologues into a dialogue. Dialogue creates equality, safety, and connection.
3. Replacing judgment—the destroyer of intimacy—with curiosity, which insures safety and deepens connection, This requires eliminating all negativity, since negativity stimulates anxiety, signals danger, and thus activates defensiveness, perhaps the major barrier to intimacy.
4. Infusing the relationship with positive feelings, such as liking, appreciation, admiration, acceptance, and similar emotions. These deliberate positive verbal expressions (appreciations) are among the building blocks of authentic love, which is, for Imago, the consummation of intimate partnership and the epitome of a relationship that is both safe and passionate, comfortable and exciting.

## 5 Tenets Of Imago Therapy

Imago relationship therapy consists of 5 core principles:

1. Re-imagining your mate as a wounded child.
2. Re-romanticizing your relationship via pleasurable surprises, gift-giving, and displays of appreciation.
3. Restructuring your disappointments and frustrations by changing complaints into requests.
4. Resolving feelings of extreme anger.
5. Re-visioning the relationship as a source of happiness, satisfaction, and safety.



**ICEBREAKERS**



**ABOUT YOUR PARTNER**



**MUSIC SHARE**



**FIVE THINGS... GO!**



**THE GAME OF TRUTH**



**BOOK SWAP**



# Ice Breakers to Learn About Your Partner

Just as we do before a big game, a jog, a work, or school day, we have to warm up.

The “old faithful” activity for bringing people together – icebreakers!

You probably did these in school, or trainings in which strangers are forced to interact with each other. This time, you won’t have to break the ice with a stranger; instead, you will get to know your partner a little better.

Even if you think you know everything there is to know about your partner, asking them some fun icebreaker questions is bound to produce at least one or two new facts about your partner that you didn’t know before.

Try asking them questions like:

1. Tell me something weird about yourself.
2. Tell me your favorite ice cream flavor.
3. Tell me a wonderfully random childhood anecdote (Suval, 2015).

Use this exercise whenever you feel the need to get a little more connected to your partner and be ready to learn some interesting new things!

# The Game of Truth and 5 Things Go!

Although you might enjoy watching Game of Thrones with your significant other, sorry – that doesn't meet the four criteria! However, you can work in a game of another kind – the Game of Truth.

In this game, all you need to do is ask your partner questions and answer your partner's questions honestly. The sole purpose of this game is to enhance your connection, so the content of the questions can range from the lightest topics (favorite television show or celebrity crush) to the heaviest (greatest fear or desire, meaning of life).

For example, you could ask your partner questions like:

1. What's your biggest fear?
2. If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be & why?
3. What's a fond childhood memory that's close to your heart?
4. Which song truly speaks to you?
5. Who is someone who inspires you? (Suval, 2015)

This simple game can get you and your partner sharing intimate and meaningful details with one another, improving your connection and building up your relationship base.



# Music Shares

Music can be a deeply personal and intensely meaningful experience – one that can be difficult to share with others. While it might make you feel overwhelmingly vulnerable to share something so personal with your partner, it's a risk that can pay off in a huge way. The reward may be a deeper and more connected relationship with your partner, something that is surely worth the risk!

Take some time to think about and listen to some of your favorite music. Find songs that resonate with your personal life story, showcase your personality, or articulate some of your most deeply held beliefs. Share these songs with your partner, along with an explanation of how the song relates to you and why you chose it to share with them.

Now, switch! Share what you learned, or anything surprising with your partner.

This extremely personal exercise can leave you and your partner with much better insight into each other, into yourselves, and into your relationship (Suval, 2015).

# Swap Books

Another personal (and possibly scary) activity is to swap favorite books with your partner (Suval, 2015).

What you love to read may convey some important messages about who you are and what you value to your partner and vice versa. No matter how well you know your partner, this exercise can reveal something about them that you never knew before.

Reading their favorite book is like getting a window into your partner's mind; this is especially true in the case of a long-favorite book, or a book from childhood. Diving into something that had a profound impact on your partner in some of their most formative years is a fantastic way to forge a deeper connection.

After reading your partner's favorite book, tell them why your book had such an impact on you and share what you learned about reading their favorite.

Like a Couple's Book Club!



## 3 Exercises to Improve Intimacy



**SOUL  
GAZING**



**EXTENDED  
CUDDLE TIME**



**7 BREATH-FOREHEAD  
CONNECTION**

### 3 Exercises to Improve Intimacy

It may seem strange at first, but let loose, laugh if you need to, but then, settle in.

#### 1. Soul Gazing

This is an intense exercise that will help you and your partner connect on a deeper level. It can have a huge impact on your sense of connectedness, but it's not for the faint of heart!

To try this exercise, face your partner in a seated position. Move so close to one another that your knees are nearly touching, and look into each other's eyes. Hold eye contact for three to five minutes. Don't worry, it's not a competition – you can blink! However, refrain from talking. Simply look into one another's eyes, even if it's awkward at first. If the silence is uncomfortable, choose a song that is pleasant to both of you or meaningful in terms of your relationship and hold eye contact until the song ends (Gray, 2014).

Even popular culture has developed insight into the power of this exercise. Here's one video below by Glamour that may make you cry—in a good way.





GLAMOUR

### 3 Exercises to Improve Intimacy

This exercise is just as simple—and fun—as it sounds! Cuddle more often.

#### 2. Extended Cuddle Time

It's easy to get distracted with a cell phone, tablet, or book at bedtime, but cuddling is actually a much better way to end your day. The chemicals that are released when we cuddle with our partner improve our mood, deepen our connection, and can even help us sleep better.

This exercise is intended to be practiced right before bed, but you can carve out any time of the day to cuddle if bedtime doesn't work for you. The important thing is to get some one-on-one time, show physical affection, and enhance your intimacy with your partner.

Relationship consultant Jordan Gray (2014) suggests cuddling to a music playlist if you have trouble finding or committing to a regular cuddle session. You could also sneak in some cuddle time while watching a movie or first thing in the morning when you both wake up – the point is to work it in however works best for you.

## 3 Exercises to Improve Intimacy

Again, it may seem strange at first, but let loose, laugh if you need to...

### 3. The 7 Breath-Forehead Connection Exercise

This exercise is an excellent way to take your mind off of what is happening around you and focus on your partner.

To begin, either lie down on your side by your partner or sit upright with your partner. Face each other and gently put your foreheads together. Make sure your chins are tilted down so you aren't bumping noses and stay in this position for a few breaths.

Breathe at least seven slow, deep breaths in sync with your partner. It might be difficult at first, but you will get the hang of it before long. If you and your partner are enjoying the exercise, feel free to prolong it – take 20 breaths together, or 30, or simply **breathe together** for a set amount of time. There are no disadvantages to feel connected with your partner, so go for it!

This close breathing exercise will put you and your partner into an intimate, connected space. Practice it whenever you feel the need to slow down and refocus on each other.



## 4 Exercises to Improve Communication:



**UNINTERRUPTED  
LISTENING**



**THE MIRACLE  
QUESTION**



**THE WEEKLY  
CEO MEETING**



**APOLOGIZING  
EFFECTIVELY**

## 4 Exercises to Improve Communication

### 1. Uninterrupted Listening

Another simple but powerful exercise is called Uninterrupted Listening, and it's exactly what it sounds like (Gray, 2014). We all need to feel heard, understood, and cared for, and this exercise can help both you and your partner feel this way.

Set a timer for this exercise (three to five minutes will usually do the trick) and let your partner talk. They can talk about whatever is on their mind – work, school, you, the kids, friends or family, stress – it's all fair game.

While they are speaking, your job is to do one thing and one thing only: to listen. Do not speak at all until the timer goes off. Simply listen to your partner and soak it all in.

While you may not speak during this time, you are free to give your partner non-verbal encouragement or empathy through body language, facial expressions, or meaningful looks.

When the timer goes off, switch roles and try the exercise again. You may find that one partner is much chattier than the other, which is totally normal.

## 4 Exercises to Improve Communication

### 2. The Miracle Question

This exercise is a great way for couples to explore the type of future they would like to build, individually and as a couple. We all struggle at times, but sometimes the struggle is greater because we simply do not know what our goals actually are – asking the “Miracle Question” can help you or your clients to clarify your goals.

This question helps both partners to probe their own dreams and desires, and learn about their partner’s dreams and desires. It can aid a couple in understanding what both they and their significant other needs in order to be happy with the relationship.

For example: “Suppose tonight, while you slept, a miracle occurred. When you awake tomorrow, what changed for the better?”

While either partner may give an answer that is impossible in waking life, your answer is still useful. This discussion helps you envision a positive future in which your problems are addressed. If you are engaging in this exercise without the guidance of a therapist, don’t try to dive too deep into the answer if it is unrealistic or impossible. Instead, use this discussion as an opportunity to learn something new about your partner and plan for your future together.



## 4 Exercises to Improve Communication

### 3. The Weekly CEO Meeting

If you and your partner are leading lives jam-packed with activities, events, and obligations, this exercise will be a great way to connect.

This exercise provides you and your partner with an opportunity to interact as adults (no kids allowed) and without distractions (no phones, tablets, or laptops allowed). Schedule a non-negotiable chunk of time (30m is a good start) once a week to talk about how you are doing, your relationship, and any needs that are not being met.

You can start the exercise with questions like:

- How do you feel about us today?
- Is there anything you feel incomplete about from this past week that you would like to talk about?
- How can I make you feel more loved in the coming days?

The answers to these questions should lead you and your partner in a healthy and productive discussion about your selves and your relationship. Make sure to do this regularly to keep on top of any issues and ensure that things don't get swept under the rug or put on the back burner for too long (Gray, 2014).

## 4 Exercises to Improve Communication

### 4. Five Things... Go! Exercise

Another quick and easy exercise, this exercise can be engaged in anywhere you are together. You only need your words and your imagination!

Come up with a theme for each time you practice this exercise – like “what I appreciate in you,” – and list five things each within this theme.

You could have one partner go first and list all five things, or you can alternate. However, you decide to do it, be creative and don't be afraid to get silly!

Once they finish their list, come up with your own answer to the question, such as, “So I heard you say you'd like it if I fixed the water heater, pulled the weeds, told you how much I love you, and kissed you goodnight each night.”

When you have both finished sharing your list, you can talk about your items, show each other appreciation, ask follow-up questions, or come up with more items together. This exercise is a fun and engaging way to connect with your partner, learn something new, or reminisce over good shared memories.



# Here's a Reminder for Intentional Dialogue

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# Appreciation Inventory

Just like in therapy... we will end with expressing appreciation to each other

Taking a moment to reflect and acknowledge the traits, quirks, successes, potential, values, and strengths of your partner can do a lot to strengthen your bond with each other.

Also, it has a reciprocal effect because your partner will be more willing to recognize the positive things about you.

It will help you remember that you are a team with common goals, desires, and traits.

So, turn to your partner look them in the eyes and tell them only the things that you most appreciate about them, at this moment, or in general.

It can be anything, it can be fun, or silly, but **MUST BE** positive, thoughtful, and caring. Again, with this exercise, you can say one thing and switch, or say all of 3 things at once and switch.

Don't muddy the water, **RESIST** the urge to throw in some negative traits that bother you during this time.