

# Mapping Our Cycle: A Remodel or Big Project

**Read the article first.** This worksheet accompanies *What Is Cycle Work in Couples Therapy?* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which explains the four stages, walks through full examples, and shows how cycles move toward conflict or connection. Search “cycle work” on the site to find it.

A cycle is the circle two people create when each person's response becomes the other's next stimulus. Inside every turn, each partner moves through four stages. Choose a conversation that felt like a three or a four out of ten, not a nine. Each partner fills in their own turn. A few words per space is enough.

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|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>STAGE ONE</b><br>Activation                       | Start here. Name what arrived in the body, usually more than one feeling at once. Stage one is the easiest place to begin and the best evidence for stage two.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>STAGE TWO</b><br>Interpretation                   | Mostly unconscious. We rarely notice ourselves interpreting, so we work backward from the feelings in stage one.<br><i>Given what I felt, what must I have believed was happening?</i><br><i>What does this moment resemble, and when have I felt this before?</i><br><i>What was I afraid would happen next?</i><br><i>If it were true, what would it mean about me, or about us?</i> |
| <b>STAGE THREE</b><br>Conscious thought and behavior | What we told ourselves once part of the moment reached awareness, and what we did. The thought and the action belong to the same stage. Whatever the behavior was protecting also points back to stage two.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>STAGE FOUR</b><br>Return and recataloging         | How the body settled, how the moment resolved, and what each of us learned to expect the next time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>THEN</b><br>A repair                              | A repair names what was underneath, owns a part, or asks for what matters. It can be offered at any turn.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## A WORKED EXAMPLE

|                       |                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>THE STIMULUS</b>   | The kitchen tile arrives, chosen without me.                                                                                              |
| <b>ACTIVATION</b>     | Dismissed, deflated, anxious about the budget.                                                                                            |
| <b>INTERPRETATION</b> | Worked backward: my taste does not count, and I will carry the cost of decisions I did not make. It resembles being overruled growing up. |
| <b>THOUGHT</b>        | “If I do not push back now, the whole house will be yours.”                                                                               |
| <b>BEHAVIOR</b>       | Vetoing the next three choices, criticizing the tile once it is in.                                                                       |
| <b>RECATALOGING</b>   | Every decision becomes a negotiation, and building something together gets recorded as a fight.                                           |
| <b>A REPAIR</b>       | “I felt left out of the tile decision. Can we pick the next few things together?”                                                         |

## First turn

### THE STIMULUS

The moment that started it:

*A budget overrun, a design choice made alone, a contractor delay, a weekend lost to the project.*

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How hard did it feel? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

### STAGE ONE

#### Activation

What arrived in my body first? More than one feeling is common.

*For example: overwhelmed, dismissed, anxious, excited and deflated.*

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### STAGE TWO

#### Interpretation

Working backward from stage one: what must I have believed was happening? What does this resemble?

*For example: my taste does not count. I carry every decision.*

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### STAGE THREE

#### Conscious thought and behavior

What did I tell myself, and what did I do?

*For example: vetoing, taking over, criticizing the finished work.*

THE THOUGHT

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THE BEHAVIOR

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### STAGE FOUR

#### Return and recataloging

How did it settle, or not? What did I learn to expect from us next time?

*For example: building something together turns into a fight.*

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### A REPAIR I COULD HAVE OFFERED

*For example: I made that call without you. What matters to you about this room?*

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## Second turn

*The first partner's stage three is now the second partner's stimulus.*

What my partner said or did that I responded to:

### STAGE ONE Activation

What arrived in my body first? More than one feeling is common.  
*For example: criticized, exhausted, unappreciated.*

### STAGE TWO Interpretation

Working backward from stage one: what must I have believed was happening? What does this resemble?  
*For example: nothing I do is good enough. This will ruin us financially.*

### STAGE THREE Conscious thought and behavior

What did I tell myself, and what did I do?  
*For example: withdrawing from decisions, defending the choice, working late on it alone.*  
**THE THOUGHT**

**THE BEHAVIOR**

### STAGE FOUR Return and recataloging

How did it settle, or not? What did I learn to expect from us next time?  
*For example: it is easier to decide without asking.*

#### A REPAIR I COULD HAVE OFFERED

*For example: I am worn out and I took it out on the project and on you. Can we pick the next step together?*

#### TOGETHER

What each of us found in stage two, said out loud to the other:

What we want the next cycle to catalog: