

Mapping Our Cycle: Sex and Intimacy

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.

STAGE ONE 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.
STAGE TWO Interpretation	Mostly unconscious. We rarely notice ourselves interpreting, so we work backward from the feelings in stage one. <i>Given what I felt, what must I have believed was happening?</i> <i>What does this moment resemble, and when have I felt this before?</i> <i>What was I afraid would happen next?</i> <i>If it were true, what would it mean about me, or about us?</i>
STAGE THREE 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.
STAGE FOUR Return and recataloging	How the body settled, how the moment resolved, and what each of us learned to expect the next time.
THEN 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

THE STIMULUS	A reach for closeness at bedtime, and a partner who turns away.
ACTIVATION	Hurt, embarrassed, lonely.
INTERPRETATION	Worked backward: I am not wanted, and asking will only bring more rejection. It resembles reaching for someone who was often unavailable.
THOUGHT	“If I stop asking, at least I will not feel this.”
BEHAVIOR	Rolling over, a short answer in the morning, keeping score.
RECATALOGING	Distance feels safer, so reaching becomes rarer on both sides.
A REPAIR	“I felt hurt last night, and I still want you. Can we talk about what works for both of us?”

First turn

THE STIMULUS

The moment that started it:

A declined invitation, a comment about frequency, a night one of us reached and the other turned away.

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: rejected, undesirable, embarrassed, lonely.

STAGE TWO

Interpretation

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

For example: I am not wanted. Asking leads to rejection.

STAGE THREE

Conscious thought and behavior

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

For example: going quiet, keeping score, a sarcastic comment, pursuing harder.

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: distance feels safer than asking again.

A REPAIR I COULD HAVE OFFERED

For example: I felt hurt tonight and I still want you. Can we talk about what works for both of us?

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: pressured, guilty, criticized, relieved and ashamed of the relief.

STAGE TWO Interpretation

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

For example: my body is a duty. Saying no will cost us closeness.

STAGE THREE Conscious thought and behavior

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

For example: defending, explaining, avoiding bedtime, going to sleep early.

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: this subject is a minefield, so we stop bringing it up.

A REPAIR I COULD HAVE OFFERED

For example: I turned you down, and it was not about you. Can we find time this weekend?

TOGETHER

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

What we want the next cycle to catalog: