

What Helps Me Feel Important?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *What Makes Your Partner Feel Loved? The Pathways to Importance* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which lays out sixteen ways people experience mattering, the loneliness that grows when each one goes missing, and why maintenance matters more than repair. Search “pathways to importance” on the site to find it.

People feel secure when they consistently experience that they matter, and we do not all experience mattering the same way. Each partner fills in their own copy, about themselves. Then we trade copies and choose one act for the week. Nothing here sorts a couple into matched or unmatched. The pathways are expected to differ, and the difference is the work. A few words per space is enough.

STEP ONE The pathways	Sixteen ways a person can feel important. Each has a present side, how it feels when it is there, and a shadow, the specific loneliness that grows when it is chronically missing. We check the ones that help us feel most important, then mark where each has been lately.
SET APART Three kinds of physical	Sexual desire, sensuality and affection, and felt safety are three different hungers. They do not substitute for one another. Meeting the wrong one, however generously, does not register as the right one.
STEP TWO The golden rule check	Most of us love a partner the way we ourselves want to be loved. The intention is good and the result is often inaccurate. We name how we show love, and whose pathway it actually speaks.
STEP THREE The trade	We swap copies, circle our partner's top three, and pick one that does not come naturally to us. The choice is not between hiking and not hiking. We can make the day about the hike, or about making our partner feel important. <i>What helps you feel important?</i>

A WORKED EXAMPLE: THE BOOKED HOTEL

HER PATHWAY	Predictability and structure. She grew up in a good deal of chaos and feels safe through a plan thought through in advance.
WHAT COMES NATURALLY TO ME	Landing in a new country and finding a hotel when I arrive.
GOLDEN RULE CHECK	Gifts are nice and do almost nothing for my security. Touch and shared time are close to everything. Neither is her language.
THE ACT	Making sure the hotel is booked. Meals near the time we said. Plans actually communicated.
WHAT IT SAYS	“I see how you're built, and I arranged the world a little so you could feel safe in it.” It looks like logistics. It is attachment.

Maintenance before repair: Speaking a partner's pathways reinforces security long before a crisis has a chance to form, and most of what couples eventually come to repair is maintenance no one was doing.

My pathways, part one

Check the box beside each pathway that helps me feel most important. Then mark where it has been lately in this relationship, between its shadow and its presence.

THREE THINGS WE CALL PHYSICAL

	THE SHADOW		LATELY		PRESENT
☐ Sexual desire	Undesired, rejected, sexually invisible	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Sensuality and affection	Cold distance, touch-starved	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Felt safety	Braced or on edge when nothing is wrong	☐	☐	☒	☐

Filling this in on a screen: click a dot and type the letter for the mark.

BEING MET

	THE SHADOW		LATELY		PRESENT
☐ Emotional attunement	Dismissed, minimized, misunderstood	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Being seen as myself	Managed, engulfed, remade into who they need	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Intellectual engagement	Intellectually alone	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Shared aptitude	No true teammate	☐	☐	☒	☐
☐ Playfulness	A relationship gone airless and functional	☐	☐	☒	☐

WHICH OF THESE PHYSICAL NEEDS AM I REACHING FOR MOST?

Desire, affection, and felt safety ask for different things. Naming which one helps a partner meet the right one.

A SHADOW I HAVE FELT LATELY

Name it plainly, without a verdict on either person.

My pathways, part two

Same directions: check what matters most, then mark where each has been lately.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

	THE SHADOW	LATELY	PRESENT
☐ Shared experience	Living parallel lives ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Adventures, rituals, moving side by side	
☐ Acts of service	Carrying life alone ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Practical help, a load lifted	
☐ Predictability and structure	Uncertainty, disorganization, broken trust ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Plans made and kept, chaos held at bay	
☐ Appreciation	Invisible or taken for granted ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Gratitude and recognition for what I carry	
☐ Protection and loyalty	Exposed or abandoned ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Someone beside me when it is hard	

BEYOND THE TWO OF US

	THE SHADOW	LATELY	PRESENT
☐ Participation in my world	Alone in the things I love ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	A partner entering my interests, family, traditions	
☐ Shared meaning and values	Purposeless, or my values do not count ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Building toward something larger than us	
☐ Shared wonder	A life together with no sense of the sacred ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐	Awe and reverence noticed together	

MY TOP THREE

The checked pathways that matter most to me right now. Pathways change, so this is a list for now.

1.

2.

3.

ANYTHING MISSING FROM THE LIST?

The categories are a doorway, not a map. Structure and planning are missing from the familiar lists, and they mattered.

The golden rule check and the trade

Fill in the first box alone. Then swap copies and fill in the rest.

GOLDEN RULE CHECK

How I show love

Two ways I most often show love, and whose pathways they speak.

WHAT I DO

WHOSE PATHWAY IT SPEAKS (MINE, THEIRS, BOTH)

AFTER THE SWAP

My partner's top three

Copied from their sheet, in their words.

THE GROWTH

One that does not come naturally

Which of their pathways is hardest for me to speak, and what makes it hard?

ONE SPECIFIC ACT FOR THIS WEEK

Specific enough that both of us would know it happened. Maintenance, before anything needs repair.

THE ACT:

WHEN:

WHEN WE WILL ASK AGAIN

People change, and so do their pathways. Pick a date to ask the question again: what helps you feel important?
