

# Which Parts of Our Relationship Need Attention?

**Read the article first.** This check-in accompanies [What Is a Long-Term Relationship For?](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which describes the functions a long-term relationship serves and how a weakness in one spreads into the others. Search “long-term relationship for” on the site to find it.

A long-term relationship is a network of functions that keep influencing one another, more like a living ecosystem than a machine. This check-in maps where ours feels steady and where it needs attention, and it never adds up to a score. There is no total, and no area is a verdict on the relationship. Each partner fills in a separate copy, and then we compare. A few words per space is enough.

## TWO MARKS PER AREA

How it is, and how much it matters

For each function we mark how it feels now (steady, could use some attention, needs attention now) and whether it matters a great deal to me. Every partnership distributes these differently, so an area can be quiet and still be fine for us.

## READING IT

By degree and context

We look for the places where something matters a great deal and is not alive. Those are the gaps. The question is where we are steady, where we drift, and in which seasons of our life, not whether the relationship passes.

## COMPARING

Different weighting is information

Two partners will weigh the functions differently. That difference is information about two people, not evidence that one of us is wrong.

*Am I treating my need as the starting point, when it may be part of the same system as yours?*

## TRACING

Did it start here?

A weakened area spreads into its neighbors. Couples often arrive arguing about communication when the original injury happened somewhere else. For the largest gap we ask whether it began there or spread from a neighbor.

## THREE CENTERS OF NEED

Me, you, and the relationship

A relationship meets my needs, my partner's needs, and the needs of the relationship itself. The third is the one couples most often miss.

## A WORKED EXAMPLE, FROM THE ARTICLE

### WHAT WE ARGUE ABOUT

“Communication.”

### ONE PARTNER

Romance: needs attention now, and matters a great deal. “I need more sex.”

### THE OTHER

Recognition and attachment: needs attention now. “I need more emotional intimacy.”

### COMPARING

Both are often correct. Emotional intimacy often increases desire, and sexual intimacy often increases bonding. The system is recursive.

### TRACING

Play thinned out first. A decline in play affects romance, romance affects bonding, and bonding affects how safe it feels to be open.

### ONE PLACE TO START

Play, since strengthening it tends to spread into both partners' gaps.

## Connection, care, and the work of a shared life

*Each of us fills in our own copy. For each area, check the one of the first three that fits how it feels to me now, and the fourth if it matters a great deal to me. Then a few words on what I notice.*

### FUNCTION 1

#### Emotional and attachment

Regulation. Consistency and follow-through: if you say you will pick me up, you arrive. Over time our nervous systems relax in each other's presence.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 2

#### Romantic and affectional

Being cherished, desired and pursued. Affection, sexuality, tenderness, and time that pulls us out of planning and worry.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 3

#### Recognition and witnessing

Being seen and known. Curiosity about each other that continues long after we believe we already know each other.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 4

#### Practical and professional

Bills, the home, care, schedules. Labor distributed by capacity, preference and skill. The goal is effectiveness, not equal tasks.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 5

#### Strategic

Naming needs and goals together and organizing ourselves to meet them, so goals don't stay wishes.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 6

#### Growth and development

Feedback, accountability, encouragement and challenge. Stretching beyond our preferred way of being.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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## Play, exploration, family, and meaning

Each of us fills in our own copy. For each area, check the one of the first three that fits how it feels to me now, and the fourth if it matters a great deal to me. Then a few words on what I notice.

### FUNCTION 7

#### Play and enjoyment

Fun, humor and recreation. Meeting each other outside the roles of employee, parent, homeowner and planner.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 8

#### Adventure and exploration

Novelty, travel, learning, physical challenge: experiences that disrupt routine and that we meet together.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 9

#### Family and generativity

Care that flows outward to children, aging parents, extended family and friends.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 10

#### Existential and spiritual

A shared compass: what is fulfilling, what is worth sacrificing for, what kind of life we are building.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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### FUNCTION 11

#### Community and relational

Taking part, together, in friendships, neighborhoods and communities larger than the two of us.

☐ Steady, alive

☐ Could use some attention

☐ Needs attention now

☐ Matters a great deal to me

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#### MY LARGEST GAPS

Areas I marked as needing attention that also matter a great deal to me.

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## Reading it together

Compare copies. We read the results by degree and context, and neither copy is the correct one.

### WHERE WE WEIGH THINGS DIFFERENTLY

*Areas one of us marked as mattering a great deal and the other did not.*

AREAS:

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WHAT I UNDERSTAND NOW ABOUT WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU:

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### DID IT START HERE?

*Choose the largest shared gap and trace it back through its neighbors.*

THE GAP:

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WHERE IT MAY HAVE STARTED (PLAY, ROMANCE, ATTACHMENT, PRACTICAL LIFE...):

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WHAT THINNED OUT FIRST, AND WHEN:

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### THREE CENTERS OF NEED

*Name one need in each.*

MY NEED:

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YOUR NEED:

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WHAT THE RELATIONSHIP ITSELF NEEDS:

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### ONE AREA TO STRENGTHEN

*When we strengthen one area, the benefits often spread through the system.*

THE AREA, AND ONE THING WE WILL DO THIS WEEK:

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WHICH NEIGHBORS IT MIGHT STRENGTHEN:

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*The question shifts from “Why are we fighting?” to “What is our relationship asking of us now?”*