

We Both Want to Stay. What Has to Change?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *Should We Stay Together? How to Ask for the Couples Counseling We Actually Need* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com. Search “should we stay together” on the site to find it.

Deciding to stay does not end the discernment. Two people who definitively want the relationship still have to find out what they are supposed to be working on, and it is not always attachment. This sheet sorts the work into injuries to heal, patterns to change, needs that are going unmet, and what each of us would have to grow into. Separate copies first, then compare.

INJURIES What accumulated	The degree of injury is proportional to the work required to reverse it. We name the specific injuries rather than the general feeling, because specific injuries can be repaired and general feelings cannot.
PATTERNS The cycle we keep running	Most of the damage is done by a repeating pattern rather than a single event: one of us pursues and the other withdraws, one criticizes and the other defends. We name ours in one line.
NEEDS What is not being met, and how I would know	Touch, conversation, friendship, play, sex, being chosen. Each of us feels important in particular ways. We say which ways, and what it would look like to receive them. <i>Am I asking my partner to love me in my way, or assuming my way will translate?</i>
GROWTH What I would have to change	Wanting the relationship to feel different while requiring ourselves to remain the same is not a workable arrangement. This row is about me, not my partner.
WHICH MODEL FITS It may not be attachment	The trouble may be practical (two tired people who need concrete ideas for romance), or values nobody ever learned to name, or a home that never learned to play. Each asks for different work.

A WORKED EXAMPLE, FROM THE ARTICLE

INJURY	“I needed a friend for the last eight years and you were not here.”
PATTERN	One partner raises it, the other hears criticism and goes quiet, the first escalates, both withdraw.
UNMET NEED	Touch. “We have not had sex, or held each other, in a decade.”
WHAT I WOULD HAVE TO CHANGE	Stay in the room when my partner is upset instead of solving or leaving.
WHICH MODEL FITS	Part attachment, part practical. Nobody has had a free evening in three years.

Injuries and patterns

My own copy. Specific is better than complete.

INJURIES

What accumulated

The two or three injuries that still live in the tone of an ordinary question.

PATTERN

The cycle we keep running

When it goes wrong, what do I do, what does my partner do, and what happens next? One line is enough.

I TEND TO

MY PARTNER TENDS TO

HOME

Has the relationship become the trigger?

In a secure relationship, coming home makes the day easier to carry. Right now, when I walk through the door:

☐ My body settles

☐ It depends

☐ My body braces

HOW MUCH WORK

0 is a season of effort, 10 is more than I can see the far side of.

Healing the injuries above

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

Changing the pattern above

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

Trusting that the next interaction will not match the last hundred

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

Needs, growth, and the work ahead

My own copy, then compare.

MY NEEDS

How I feel
important

Touch, deep conversation, being chosen, play, being helped, being left alone when I ask. Which of these matter most to me, and what would receiving them look like this month?

GROWTH

What I would
have to change

The capacities I may be missing: staying present when someone is upset, asking without attacking, being close without disappearing, saying what I want before I resent not getting it.

WHICH MODEL FITS

Check what the trouble is mostly made of. More than one is normal.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Attachment: we do not feel safe with each other | ☐ Practical: no time, no energy, no plan for romance |
| ☐ Communication: we talk past each other | ☐ Values: we never learned to name what we each believe in |
| ☐ Play: we have forgotten how to enjoy each other | ☐ Sex and desire: mismatched or unspoken rules |

COMPARING COPIES

What my partner named that I had not seen, and the one thing each of us will change first.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM YOUR COPY:

THE ONE THING I WILL CHANGE FIRST:

WHAT WE WILL ASK THE COUNSELOR TO HELP WITH:

Repair requires change. That is not a verdict on anyone's worth. It means the relationship cannot improve while both people remain committed to staying the same.