

We Love Each Other and Want More

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.

Not every couple in counseling is deciding or repairing. Some love each other, have nothing broken, and want a better relationship than the one they have, or a relationship built for the chapter they are entering. The discernment here is which dimension needs the work, and it is rarely the one we would guess. A securely attached couple may need better sex. A couple with great sex may need better diplomacy. Separate copies, then compare.

TWO MARKS

Where it is, and where the next chapter needs it

For each dimension we mark how it is now (strong, could grow, the one that is thin) and whether the chapter we are entering will ask more of it. A dimension that is fine today and about to be asked for much more is where to look.

THE STAGE

What is changing around us

A first child, a last child leaving, retirement, a career change, a move, aging parents, an illness, a windfall, a loss. The relationship that worked for the last chapter is not automatically built for the next.

What is the next ten years going to ask of us that the last ten did not?

NOT A REPORT CARD

Strong is allowed

Most of these will be strong. That is why we are on this sheet and not the repair sheet. The point is to find the one or two that are not, without turning a good relationship into a problem.

ONE FIRST

Grow one dimension at a time

Strengthening one dimension tends to spread. Better play tends to improve sex. Better conversation tends to improve the shared plan. We pick one, and the counselor helps us with that one.

A WORKED EXAMPLE, FROM THE ARTICLE

THE COUPLE	Securely attached, good friends, co-parent well. Youngest leaves for college next fall.
STRONG	Attachment, friendship, practical life, communication.
THIN	Sex and desire. Play. “We have not been alone in a room without a child in eighteen years.”
THE STAGE	Empty nest. The next chapter asks more of romance, play, and a shared plan than the last one did.
ONE FIRST	Play, since it tends to open the other two.

Eight dimensions of our relationship

My own copy. For each dimension, check one of the first three for how it is now, and the fourth if the chapter we are entering will ask more of it.

DIMENSION 1

Attachment and safety

Feeling calmer and more ourselves in each other's presence than alone.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 2

Sex and desire

Wanting and being wanted. Frequency, variety, and whether we can talk about it.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 3

Communication and diplomacy

Raising hard things without a fight. Repairing after one. Saying what we want before we resent not getting it.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 4

Play and adventure

Fun, humor, novelty, meeting each other outside our roles.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 5

Friendship and conversation

Being each other's company. Curiosity that continues after we believe we already know each other.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 6

Existential overlap

A shared sense of what a life is for and what is worth sacrificing for.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 7

The shared plan

Where we are going in the next chapter: money, work, place, family, health, time.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

DIMENSION 8

Practical partnership

The house, the money, the schedule, the care of others. Labor distributed by capacity, not by habit.

☐ Strong

☐ The thin one

☐ Could grow

☐ Next chapter asks more

The stage, and the one to grow first

My own copy, then compare.

THE STAGE

What is changing
around us

The chapter we are entering, and what it will ask of the relationship that the last one did not.

THE THIN ONE

Where I marked
the thin one, and
what it would
look like grown

Specific. Not "better sex" but what we would actually be doing in three months.

MY PART

What I would
have to grow into

Even in a good relationship, growing a dimension asks something of each of us. This row is about me.

COMPARING COPIES

Where our marks differ, and the one dimension we will grow first.

WHERE YOU MARKED THIN AND I MARKED STRONG, OR THE REVERSE:

THE ONE DIMENSION WE WILL GROW FIRST:

WHAT WE WILL ASK THE COUNSELOR TO HELP WITH:

Every relationship that lasts has to do this more than once. The question is not whether the relationship is good. It is what the next chapter needs it to be.