

PODCAST #207 Outline & Couple's Exercise ***Cooperation: Relationship Renewal Stage 4***

“This road to recovery has not been easy in any way. The affair was a huge crisis in our lives and we are still learning to deal with it. There is much to understand, talk about, process, and accept. It isn't a cakewalk but it has to be done. We both want to do it together.” (forum post)

IMPORTANT NOTE: This step of relationship renewal should be considered in its context—coming after the steps of exposure, reaction, and renewal. A couple cannot jump into this stage before doing the other important work. While this stage does not focus on the affair, it does not ignore it, either. The ongoing effects of betrayal are addressed in the last section (One More Thing) of this chapter.

Your ultimate goal is to experience satisfying connection and secure trust as the norm in your marriage. But before you become good lovers, you may need to practice being better partners.

The Cooperation Stage focuses on strengthening your partnership. To do that, you need to take an honest look at the pattern of your marriage, the “norm” of your relationship, that existed even before the affair.

1. First Step: Assess Your Relationship Patterns

- a. The Attack-Retreat Pattern
- b. The Mutual-Retreat Pattern
- c. The Mutual-Attack Pattern
- d. The Mutual-Pursuit Pattern

2. Second Step: Identify Your First Project

3. Third Step: Learn Together

4. Fourth Step: Commit to a Weekly Check-In

5. One More Thing: You're probably in an unequal partnership.

Cooperation Exercise

Purpose: To help couples effectively cooperate as partners and work successfully toward a relationship goal they have identified (a supplement to the chapter, Stage 4: Cooperation).

Each spouse should complete these steps individually:

1. Identify your pattern of conflict.
Three negative patterns of interaction are defined in the *First Step: Define Your Relationship Pattern* section of this chapter. When you experience disappointment, disagreement, or disconnection with your spouse, which pattern is the most common result: Attack-Retreat, Mutual Attack, or Mutual Retreat?
2. What is your most natural response to a negative encounter in your marriage: attacking (any of these: aggressive, angry, critical, sarcastic, argumentative, insisting, etc.) or retreating (any of these: leaving, shutting down, refusing to talk, becoming guarded)? Think of a recent example of this and be prepared to talk about it (accepting responsibility without blaming).

3. List 2-3 issues in your marriage that tend to consistently move you into this pattern?

Discuss together:

1. Take turns reviewing your answers to the questions above.
2. Decide on ONE problem/issue that will become your first project. Don't start with something that is likely to be extremely hard, or one that will be overly easy. If you can't make up your mind, let the betrayed spouse decide.
3. From the ideas presented in Third Step (Learn Together), come up with a resource or plan that you will use together. What will it be?

4. Commit to a time & place for your first Weekly Check-In and then do it!

Day: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____