



# Elevate

*Taking Your Relationship to  
the Next Level*

COUPLE WORKBOOK



[www.nermen.org](http://www.nermen.org)

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ELEVATE was developed by colleagues in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Auburn University, and in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at the University of Georgia, who are experienced in family life and relationship education.



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## My Action Plan



***What will you do to ELEVATE your love?***

### Empower Yourself

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### Lay the Foundation

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### Enlighten

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## Value

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## Attach

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## Tame

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## Engage

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***Take your relationship to the next level!***

# Heart-Brain Connection

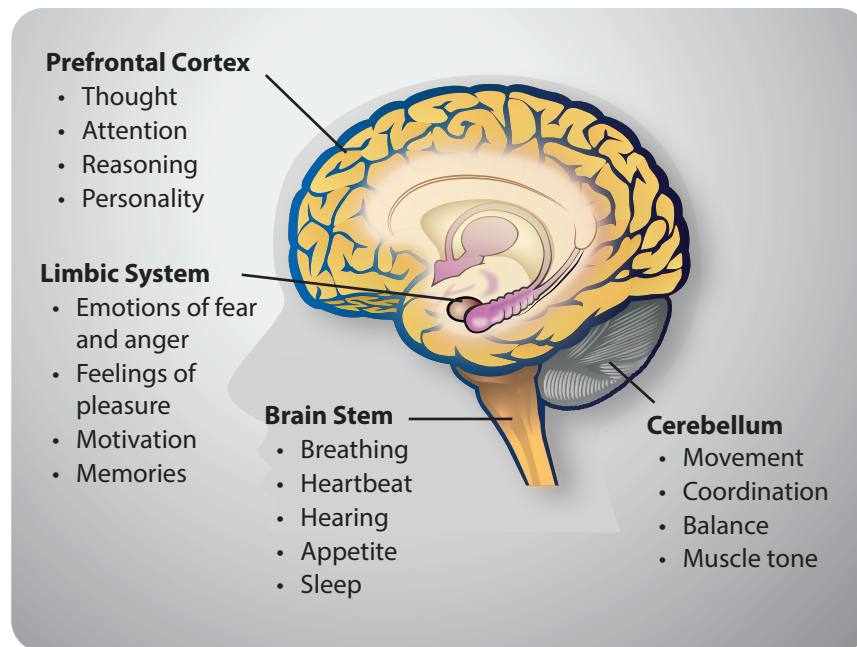


## What is the heart-brain connection?

The brain's emotional reaction to something drives heart rhythm patterns. The variation in time between heartbeats should be steady instead of irregular; this is known as heart rate variability (HRV).

## What are the areas and functions of the brain?

The brain is organized into four main areas and each area is responsible for different functions:



## What is the optimal heartbeat for clear thoughts and actions?

The heart rate you experienced when your mother was carrying you. Beginning during pregnancy, a mother's heart instills a pattern in her child. The average resting heart rate is 80 beats per minute (BPM). For most people, throughout our lives, this maternal heart rate remains a soothing rate and is established as a key rhythm in life. A heart rate for healthy adults can vary between 60-100 BPM, so your specific soothing rate may be different.

## How do emotions influence the heart-brain response?

Negative emotions can decrease the abilities of the immune system, increase stress levels, and put unnecessary strain on the heart's functioning. Positive emotions keep the heart at a healthier baseline rate and allow us to think more rationally than negative emotions would.

## How does the heart-brain connection affect couples?

Learning the appropriate skills to cope with emotional distress can help couples decrease angry outbursts and increase communication since their minds and hearts remain calm. When your heart rate is lower you are able to access your highest levels of thinking in your prefrontal cortex. You will think before you act.

# Heart-Brain Connection



	Pulse (15 seconds) x 4 = Heart Rate	Emotional State/Mood
Ex.	Pulse <u>20</u> x 4 = <u>80</u>	<i>happy</i>
1	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
2	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
3	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
4	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
5	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
6	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
7	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	

Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4
15	60	19	76	23	92
16	64	20	80	24	96
17	68	21	84	25	100
18	72	22	88	26	104



# Being a Mindful Couple



## What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an open attention to and awareness of the present moment, both internally and externally. It is used to help individuals and couples pay attention to thoughts and feelings in the moment. This also helps one to act skillfully, instead of emotionally, in stressful situations.

## Why is it important to practice mindfulness?

Research shows mindfulness can improve physical health (i.e., memory, pain, skin problems, headaches, etc.) and mental health (i.e., depression, anxiety, sleep, etc.). Generally, participating in mindfulness helps individuals cope with stress better, leading to decreases in overall stress.

## Why is it important to practice mindfulness as a couple?

Practicing these exercises as a couple allows you to develop an understanding of thoughts and feelings in the present moment with your spouse or partner. Also this empowers couples to act skillfully and not emotionally in stressful situations. Research suggests practicing mindfulness combined with having a healthy intimate relationship and social support may be as important as diet and exercising when it comes to maintaining good health.

## How do these practices help couples?

- Promotes unity, connection and closeness within relationships
- Allows couples to approach stressful situations as challenges
- Increases empathy in individuals
- Encourages acceptance and less avoidant behaviors
- Improves mental and physical health
- Permits couples to better cope with stressful situations

## How does somebody practice mindfulness?

There are many ways to engage in mindful practice including meditation techniques (i.e., loving kindness, body scan, attitude change, etc.) and active techniques (i.e., yoga, mindful walking, mindful eating, etc.). *Some examples that you can practice are provided on the back.*



## Where can I find further information about mindfulness?

- <http://marc.ucla.edu/>
- <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx>
- *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- *Calming Your Anxious Mind* by Jeffrey Brantley

## Practicing Mindfulness

### PARTNER CONNECTION

*(Can be used to help regulate emotions.)*



- Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts
  - Shift attention to your breathing. Breathe deeply in-and-out. Do not worry if one breath is deeper than another, just focus on the breathing.
  - If your mind wanders away from your focused breathing, don't worry. Just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- *AFTER 5 Minutes of Breathing continue*
- Now think of a memory which is full of joy or gratitude towards your partner. This memory should bring you positive emotional feelings.
  - Maintain the memory and the emotions for as long as possible.
  - Shift attention to your breathing for a few more minutes.

### LOVING-KINDNESS

*(Can be used to maintain loving- acceptance.)*



- Take a moment to relax and focus on your breathing.
- When you are ready repeat this thought to yourself:
  - May I be filled with loving-kindness,
  - May I be well,
  - May I be blessed,
  - May I feel peace, balance, and forgiveness,
  - May I be happy.

► **Now fill in the blank saying your partner or spouse name**

May \_\_\_\_\_ be filled with loving-kindness,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be well,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be blessed,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ feel peace, balance, and forgiveness,  
May \_\_\_\_\_ be happy.

### ATTITUDE CHANGE

*(Can be used when experiencing conflict with your partner.)*



- Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts
  - Shift attention to your breathing. Breathe deeply in-and-out. Do not worry if one breath is deeper than another, just focus on the breathing.
  - If your mind wanders away from your focused breathing, don't worry. Just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- *AFTER 5 Minutes of Breathing*
- Now think of a memory which is full of joy or gratitude towards your partner. This memory should bring you positive emotional feelings.
  - Now ask yourself: "What words or actions should I change within the relationship at this time?"
  - Take note of those thoughts and emotions so that you can follow through.

# Tips For a Healthy Relationship



**EMPOWER YOURSELF**—Individual health impacts the health of couple relationships. Taking care of yourself first can help improve the wellness of your relationship. Below are some ways that you can *Care for Self* and help your relationship:

- Eat healthy and exercise regularly.
- Set regular sleep and wake times for yourself.
- Notice and appreciate the small, good things in your life to help you find greater happiness and satisfaction.
- Find ways to use your strengths to serve your community.
- Look for the positive meaning in your life.
- Learn to manage stress in more healthy, effective ways.



**LAY THE FOUNDATION**—Are you making deliberate and conscious decisions about your relationships? It is important to be intentional when establishing and nurturing healthy relationships. Here are some ways to show how you *Choose* to strengthen your relationship:

- Make the decision to enter into a relationship rather than sliding into one.
- Commit and provide effort in the relationship.
- Focus on each other's strengths, and what each of you brings to the relationship.
- Avoid thoughts and behaviors that could potentially be hurtful to one another.
- Find positive and effective ways to grow your relationship.
- Envision and set goals for a healthy future together.



**ENLIGHTEN**—How well do you know your partner? Sharing and developing an understanding with your partner creates stability and increases awareness of your partner and the relationship. Here are some ways you can get to *Know* your partner better:

- Ask about your partner's life, thoughts, and feelings to get to know them better.
- Be sensitive to your partner's worries and needs.
- Think back on positive experiences you have had together.
- Express sincere interest in what is happening in your partner's life.
- See situations through your partner's eyes to gain a better understanding of how they look at things.
- Discuss what you expect in a relationship with one another.



**VALUE**—Keeping a relationship healthy is the responsibility of each person in that relationship. What do you do to show support, affection, and respect for your partner? Here are some ways to show that you *Care* for your partner:

- Show respect by expressing caring actions towards your partner instead of crabby reactions when they have had a stressful day.
- When communicating, be open and listen to your partner.
- Focus on the good in your partner.
- Accept and value the differences that you and your partner share.
- Give love in the way your partner likes to be loved.
- Show appreciation as a way to make a deposit in your relationship account.
- To maintain a strong relationship, make time for togetherness and moments of connection.



**ATTACH**—Developing and maintaining your friendship with your partner helps build couple identity. Learning and growing together as a couple further establishes this friendship. Use these tips to *Share* together when developing couple friendship:

- Schedule meaningful time together as a couple doing something you both like.
- Figure out common interests and activities you share as a couple.
- Create couple traditions and rituals that promote togetherness.
- Set and work towards common goals with one another.
- Nurture positive interactions with your partner.
- Send clear and positive messages when communicating.
- Embrace and turn toward your partner's bids for connection instead of against.
- Envision yourselves as a "team"!



**TAME**—Dealing with differences in healthy ways can minimize friction among couples. Problems in healthy couple relationships may never be resolved, but they can be managed in effective ways. Here are a few tips on how to effectively *Manage* differences in your relationship:

- Understand and accept that there cannot always be an agreement between partners when in conflict.
- Share concerns with one another in a calm, respectful tone to avoid tension.
- Avoid criticism and defensiveness that could be insulting to your partner.
- Learn to stop conflict before it escalates out of control.
- When need be, take "time outs" during conflict, but make sure that you come back to talk.
- Soothe and support one another.
- Be open to forgiveness.
- Maintain emotional and physical safety with your partner.



**ENGAGE**—Engaging in a supportive, positive social network can be beneficial to any couple. Maintaining these relationships can act as safety nets that provide security to couples during good and challenging times. Here are some ways that couples can *Connect* their relationship to others:

- Grow and maintain extended family relationships.
- Develop and be a part of a supportive network of friends that can set and be examples to you as a healthy couple.
- Jointly engage in community organizations and services that can bring you and your partner together.
- Seek out resources to strengthen your relationship.

For additional information about healthy couple and marital relationships and other resources offered through Cooperative Extension, visit [www.nermen.org](http://www.nermen.org).

Based on T.G. Futris & F. Adler-Baeder (Eds) (2013). *The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model: Core Teaching Concepts for Relationship and Marriage Enrichment Programming*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Available at <http://www.nermen.org/NERMEN.php>



**Empower Yourself** While better health is a consequence of healthy couple relationships, attending to one's physical, mental, and emotional well-being also fosters healthier couple and marital relationships.



**Enlighten** To develop and sustain healthy relationships partners must develop and maintain intimate knowledge of each other's personal and relational needs, interests, feelings, and expectations.



**Lay the Foundation** A strong, healthy, long-lasting relationship does not just happen by chance but, instead, through deliberate and conscientious decisions to be committed, intentional, proactive, and strengths-focused.



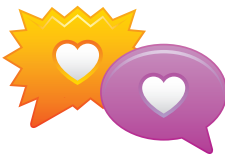
**Value** Individuals who express kindness, use understanding and empathy, demonstrate respect, and invest time to be available and open to their partner are able to maintain stable, healthy couple relationships.



**Attach** Being a healthy couple involves spending meaningful time together and fostering a shared sense of couple identity in order to sustain a close, enduring friendship based on trust and love.



**Engage** The connections that couples develop with their family, peers, and community offer a source of meaning, purpose, and support that influence the health and vitality of their couple relationship.



**Tame** Problems and conflicts are a normal part of relationships. Healthy couples use strategies to see their partner's view, accept differences, and manage stress to ensure emotional and physical safety.