

Module 12: Possible Exercises for the Couples (Copyright by Eckhard Roediger)

Goal of this module: Transfer the skills learned in sessions into everyday life.

A major problem in all therapies—including couple therapy—is transferring experiences, insights, and skills from the sessions into daily life. One helpful element can be *audio recordings of the sessions*, which the couple (together or individually) listens to between sessions. This can bring much of the content and the encouraging atmosphere of the therapy into everyday life.

Ideally, no couple should leave a session without knowing what they are supposed to practice until the next one. These exercises both challenge and strengthen the Adult Mode and make it clear from the start that therapy success depends crucially on the couple's active participation. Exercises should therefore be introduced right from the beginning.

Possible Exercises (roughly in the order of when they are typically introduced):

Recognizing and Stopping the Mode Cycle (Harm Reduction):

- Recognize and stop the mode cycle and, if needed, go into separate rooms (from the very first session).
- During a timeout, remain standing and imagine yourself and your partner on two chairs as if seen through a camera. Which “leg” is each of you standing on? Then switch to a “wide-angle perspective” and place the current conflict in the “big picture,” asking questions like: “*Why are we actually together? How will I look back on this situation in a week?*”
- Use the Mode Cycle Clashcard to understand the current cycle and reconnect with both “needs legs” (for example, during a timeout).

Small Bonding Interventions (*cost virtually no time but lift the mood*):

- Give each other at least one positive piece of feedback or a *compliment* every day (i.e., “deposit into the joint relationship account”).
- Develop rituals such as *hugs and eye contact* when leaving the house or coming home (check-in).
- Spend “*5 minutes of quality time*” each day, sitting together quietly and asking: “What was important to you today that you want to share?” Just *sharing*, no problem-solving!
- Create a list of your partner's *positive qualities*: “Why I want YOU!”

Behavioral Activation Exercises (*require more time but aim to create positive shared experiences*):

- *Quality time analysis.* Each partner creates a pie chart showing how they spend their weekly time. Then compare: How much quality time do we spend as a couple (just the two of us)? How much do we want to invest? What could we cut back?
- Spend *one evening per week* and half a day on the weekend together in a connecting activity (without children). Not TV! This may not work right away, but only after the mode cycles are interrupted. Each partner takes turns suggesting an activity the other should go along with—this way, both learn something from the other's world of experiences.
- On shared evenings, listen to a *recording* from therapy.
- Look at *old photos* together from “the good old times.”
- Find shared *hobbies* to practice regularly (sports, dancing, etc.).
- Conduct two *Connection dialogues* (30 minutes each) per week—which only works once the couple can communicate in a balanced way.
- Spend a whole *weekend* together (without children!).
- Each partner writes cards with *sexual activities* they would like to try with the other. Cards are introduced alternately at a suitable (to be created!) opportunity. (Usually more relevant toward the later stages of therapy.)
- And much more ...

Motto: Nothing good happens unless you do it!