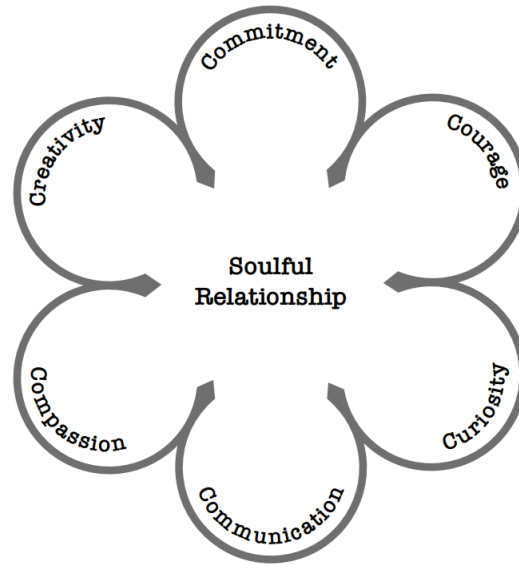


YOUR "LOVE CAPACITY" CHECK-IN

With Dr. Chelsea Wakefield



Instructions: On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 as the lowest level and 5 being the highest, give each of the questions below a rating.

COMMITMENT

Commitment involves not just a commitment to a PERSON, but to a PROCESS, and to PRESENCE.

Sustaining a good relationship means more than just finding a person who meets your needs and deciding that this is “the one.” Needs will change over time, situations evolve, responsibilities mount, and as perfect as your partner may seem at the start, no-one is a perfect match in all situations. Committed relationships are like a garden. They need some tending. That’s why a commitment to the PROCESS of learning, growing, and working together is important. The process piece of relationship can be more challenging than two people initially expected because life happens, needs change, disappointments occur, and vulnerabilities get stirred up. Dealing with differences and disappointed expectations is the most important challenge a couple will face. Many of us don’t have great role models for how to work thru the challenges of relationship successfully. If you need some help with the process of relationship – seek out some good couples therapy.

Beyond your commitment to this person, how committed are you to investing in the PROCESS of creating a relationship that is truly worth being in? _____

To remain in the process, you’ve got to remaining engaged. You have to be PRESENT. You may feel the need to self-protect or disconnect when things get rocky, but lovers who are constantly defensive don’t

connect and those who are conflict avoidant eventually drift onto the rocks. How engaged and present are you with your life partner? How attuned are you to your partner's inner life? Do you know what is meaningful for them, what inspires them, their history, and what they struggle with? Are you engaged enough to understand who they want to become? Can you support your partner in their growth as a person and their dreams in life? Can they count on you to be there for them when they struggle and really need someone?

How present are you? _____

COURAGE

It takes courage to love, and to keep your heart open and allow another person to know you deeply. As you stay the course in a relationship, you will learn more about the person you committed yourself to. All relationships have surprises because we can't possibly know everything about the other person and discuss everything at the start. We come into relationship with assumptions and expectations. Some of the things you will learn about your partner will be frustrating; some may be downright disturbing. Even more surprising is that you will learn things about yourself in an intimate relationship that you would never learn living alone. In addition to facing discoveries about your partner, we must also face yourself, and this can be tough. We all have areas where we could use some growth – both personally and interpersonally. Growth destabilizes old patterns, so growth requires courage.

Do you have the courage to stay "in the process" of the relationship – to face your partner and yourself and to engage in a process of growth? _____

CURIOSITY

One of the most powerful relationship remedies is curiosity. Couples therapist Ellyn Bader is famous for saying, "be curious, not furious." There is much to learn about the person you have committed your life to, even if you think you know the other person really well. Our lives are continually being shaped by new experiences and (hopefully) we are all learning and growing. When you move to curiosity you can learn more about who you are living with. This is particularly important around the conflicts that evolve around differences and disappointments. The key is to stay curious and get into a "learning conversation." Why is this other person doing what they are doing, thinking the way they are thinking, or being the way they are being? What is contributing to it? You also need to stay curious about yourself. Any time you get ruffled or riled up by your partner, before you go after them, BEGIN WITHIN. That means, ask yourself why this matters so much to you. What is the story you are telling yourself about your partner's intentions, what this all means and where it is going? Why this is such a sensitive issue for you – what is the sensitive history in your own life that may be rolling forward into present time?

How well do you employ the love capacity of curiosity – especially in the midst of conflict? _____

How often do you check in to see how your partner is growing and changing? _____

COMMUNICATION

Responsible, conscious, productive communication is probably the most powerful love capacity of all, and one in which we get very little instruction. My book, *The Labyrinth of Love* has a lot to say about how to communicate in an intimate relationship, but here's a few of the high points:

1) As much as possible, speak about your own experience, using "I" language. For example, "This is what I'm going thru about this..." You can even say things like, "At this moment I'm feeling really attacked and defensive." That's alerting your partner, but still owning that it's YOU who is feeling defensive. This is a much better way of handling it than just being defensive. It invites your partner to look inward and see if they are being overly intense or critical. Watch out for starting sentences that begin with "you," and then describe what the other person is doing wrong. This always evokes defensiveness. Even if they are doing something hurtful, talk about the impact it is having on you. If the other person is not practicing good communication, try to use your "translation ears" and hear the needs or vulnerable feelings under what the other person is saying. If you can name the underlying need, it tends to calm the other person down. Any time you yourself have a complaint, couple it with a request - offer a possible solution. Be open to a counter solution offered by your partner. Make a request, not a demand or ultimatum, because no-one likes to be on the receiving end of demand. If you can't find an easy solution, see if you can get into a learning conversation.

How good are you at speaking for yourself, using "I" language, avoiding labeling, or diagnosing your partner, and asking for things clearly and cleanly? _____.

2) If you aren't making progress in resolving something, try to get curious about why the other person might be uncooperative, and if they are oppositional, what is blocking a cooperative response? Stay curious about the other person's intention during these conversations – seeking to understand why something matters to them. See if you can learn something about the history that shaped this upset or what seems like an unreasonable reaction. When you feel upset or confused or stuck, ask more questions – not like an attorney – but as a truly curious person who is seeking to learn something? There will be times when you will say or do something that lands badly in the other person's world and activates their defenses. You will wonder, "what in the world is going on here? What did I DO?!" Know that people with good intentions sometimes have hurtful impact. If the other person's reaction seemed out of proportion, or out of left field, ask some clarifying questions. What did the other person think you intended? Why is this such a sensitive area for them? Where did they fear this was going?

Before getting defensive, can you pause, and move into a learning conversation? _____

3) Listening deeply is an act of love. It is also a skill – the skill of not interrupting, not defending, not over-explaining, and not "fixing." It can be hard to listen to your partner sometimes – especially if they take a long time to get to the point or get caught in chronic negativity. It is also difficult to deal with how differently people view things (They really do)! People come from different backgrounds where things work differently. If you have a partner who tried to get their point across by blaming, shaming, or criticizing you, it can be hard to get to a solution-oriented conversation. Validating the underlying feelings helps. It doesn't mean you agree with their version of the facts. Reflecting back what you think the other person is trying to get across also helps. It doesn't mean you are agreeing with

their point, it just means to get what they are saying. See if you can hear beneath the words (or criticism or blame) into the feelings and needs under the feelings. If you can get at those you can shortcut a lot of negativity. Sometimes that person wants you to fix something... but not always. Sometimes people just need to be listened to with presence and compassion. People who feel listened to, feel loved.

How good are you at listening deeply – especially if you partner is upset? _____

4) When you make a mistake or do something thoughtless or unkind, learn to apologize. When you say, "I'm sorry," make an effort not to repeat the offense. It is also important not to make agreements you cannot keep. Failing to make repairs when you have failed to follow thru on an agreement or done something to injure your partner's heart can erode the trust and the love. It also blocks the passion, and you don't want that! Being accountable for injuries you inflict, and making repairs quickly is a crucial relationship skill.

How are you at making repairs quickly and sincerely? _____

5) Gratitude, appreciation, and encouragement – expressed regularly – create a sense of safety and foster a positive atmosphere in your home. They are the sunshine of love. It is important to catch your partner doing things right and let them know with words of affirmation and appreciation. Understand your partners concerns and what is important to them means you are interested and engaged. Do you speak words of encouragement to your partner? Share positive insights and the growth you are experiencing as a person.

Do you express appreciations and celebrate the good things in life with your loved one? _____

COMPASSION

When people begin to communicate well, they learn a lot about each other. Compassion is a necessary love capacity because we are all imperfect human beings. In an intimate relationship we need a sense of safety – that we can be human and still be loved. Practice communicating with kindness about what you are thinking, feeling, and needing. You can be honest and still be kind. Forgiveness also falls within the scope of compassion – it follows most easily after a sincere apology and an effort to be more conscious and compassionate. However, we all need to exercise some acceptance for each other's humanity and patience with our partner's their "foibles." Everyone struggles in some area, and we all have our sensitivities and vulnerabilities. When we have compassion for each other, we think before we speak and take the other into account before we act. We also need to have compassion for ourselves, to practice self-kindness as we are doing our personal work and seeking to be better partners with deepening love capacity.

Do you practice compassionate towards yourself regarding your personal struggles and imperfections?

How compassionate are you about the struggles and imperfections of your spouse/life partner? _____

When you have something difficult to communicate, do you attempt to be honest but speak with kindness? _____

CREATIVITY

Creativity is not always thought of as a love capacity, however, every couple must engage a process of “co-creating” a relationship that works for both people. A relationship is a third entity beyond the “you and the “me.” It requires some creativity – co-creativity. We draw our creativity from a deep place inside. It can be thought of as a dimension of the soul. When two people are stuck in an impasse, there is often a failure of imagination going on – the box in which both people are thinking about the problem is too small. Growing as people has a mysterious way of dissolving problems that seems impassable before the personal growth of the two people involved. When you expand the box, and grow as people, you come up with solutions that were not possible before you grew – you are now in a new context and the old way of understanding things is transcended. When two people put their creative heads and hearts together, almost any problem can be resolved.

How creative have you been in co-creating a relationship that is rewarding for both people? _____

Have you considered that growing both personally and interpersonally might dissolve a seemingly unresolvable problem? _____

If you have outgrown the original story about who you are and why you are together, are you in the process of writing a new story? _____

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Go back and review your scores. Scores of 4 or 5 mean you are doing pretty well in this area. Scores of 3 mean that some attention and intention in this area would greatly improve your relationship. If you have a lot of scores of 1 or 2, you would be greatly helped by some good relationship therapy. Ask around and get a good referral for a reputable couples therapist, trained to help couples deepen the love, help you communicate, repair past injuries, and create a relationship worth being in.

For more information about how to grow your Love Capacities and move from role-mates to soul-mates, order a copy of *The Labyrinth of Love*.

