1. Describe a recent conflict, argument, or negative situation with your spouse—something that really “pushed your button.”

2. How did you feel in response to this conflict or situation? How did that conflict or argument make you feel? Check all that apply - but “star” the most important feelings:

___ Unsure  ___ Disappointed  ___ Disgusted  ___ Embarrassed  ___ Other:
___ Apathetic  ___ Weared  ___ Resentful  ___ Frightened  ___ Other:
___ Puzzled  ___ Torn up  ___ Bitter  ___ Anxious  ___ Other:
___ Upset  ___ Shamed  ___ Fed up  ___ Horrified  ___ Other:
___ Sullen  ___ Uncomfortable  ___ Frustrated  ___ Disturbed  ___ Other:
___ Sad  ___ Confused  ___ Miserable  ___ Furious  ___ Other:
___ Hurt  ___ Worried  ___ Guilty  ___  

3. How did this conflict make you feel about yourself? What did the conflict say about you? What was the “self” message - the message that it sent to you? What were the “buttons” that got pushed? Circle all that apply, but “star” the most important feeling you felt about yourself.

“As a result of the conflict, I felt…”  What That Feeling Sounds Like

Rejected  My spouse doesn’t want me; my spouse doesn’t need me; I am not necessary in this relationship; my spouse does not desire me; I feel unwanted.

Abandoned  I will be alone; my spouse will ultimately leave me; I will be left alone to care for myself; my spouse won’t be committed to me for life.

Disconnected  We will become emotionally detached or separated.

Like a failure  I am not successful at being a husband/wife; I will not perform right or correctly; I will not live up to expectations; I will fall short in my relationship; I am not good enough.

Helpless/powerless  I cannot do anything to change my spouse or my situation; I do not possess the power, resources, capacity, or ability to get what I want; I will be controlled by my spouse.

Defective  Something is wrong with me; I’m the problem.

Inadequate  I am not capable; I am incompetent.

Inferior  Everyone else is better than I am; I am less valuable or important than others.

Invalidated  Who I am, what I think, what I do, or how I feel is not valued.

Unloved  My spouse doesn’t love me anymore; my spouse has no affection or desire for me; my relationship lacks warm attachment, admiration, enthusiasm, or devotion; I feel as if we are just roommates—that there are no romantic feelings between us.

Dissatisfied  I will not experience satisfaction within the relationship; in our marriage, I will exist in misery for the rest of my life; I will not be pleased within my marriage; I feel no joy in my relationship.

Cheated  My spouse will take advantage of me; my spouse will withhold something I need; I won’t get what I want.

Worthless/devalued  I am useless; I have no value to my spouse.

Don’t measure up  I am never able to meet my spouse’s expectations of me; I am not good enough as a spouse.

Unaccepted  My spouse does not accept me; my partner is not pleased with me; my spouse does not approve of me.
Judged: I am always being unfairly judged or misjudged; my spouse forms faulty or negative opinions about me; I am always being evaluated; my spouse does not approve of me.

Humiliated: This marriage is extremely destructive to my self-respect or dignity.

Ignored: My spouse will not pay attention to me; I will be unknown in my marriage; I feel neglected.

Unimportant: I am not important to my mate; I am irrelevant, insignificant, or of little priority to my spouse.

Other: __________________________________________

4. What do you do when you feel ____________________________ [insert the most important feeling from question #3]? How do you react when you feel that way? Identify your common coping strategies to deal with your “buttons” being pushed. Check all that apply—but “star” the most important reactions:

Withdrawal: You avoid others or alienate yourself without resolution; you sulk, use the silent treatment.

Escalation: Your emotions spiral out of control; you argue, raise your voice, fly into a rage.

Earn-it mode: You try to do more to earn others’ love and care.

Negative beliefs: You believe your spouse is far worse than is really the case; you attribute negative motives to your spouse.

Blaming: You place responsibility on others, not accepting fault; you’re convinced the problem is your spouse’s fault.

Exaggeration: You make overstatements or enlarge your words beyond bounds or the truth.

Tantrums: You have a fit of bad temper.

Denial: You refuse to admit the truth or reality.

Invalidation: You devalue your spouse; you do not appreciate who your partner is, what he or she feels or thinks or does.

Defensiveness: Instead of listening, you defend yourself by trying to provide an explanation.

Clinginess: You develop a strong emotional attachment or dependence on your spouse.

Passive–aggression: You display negative emotions, resentment, and aggression in unassertive passive ways, such as procrastination and stubbornness.

Caretaking: You become responsible for others by giving physical or emotional care and support to the point you are doing everything for your spouse and your partner does nothing to care for himself or herself.

Acting out: You engage in negative behaviors or addictions like drug or alcohol abuse, extra-marital affairs, excessive shopping or spending, or overeating.

Fix-it mode: You focus almost exclusively on what is needed to solve the problem.

Complain/criticize: You express unhappiness or make accusations; you present a “laundry list” of faults about your mate.

Striking out: You become verbally or physically aggressive, possibly abusive.

Manipulation: You pursue your mate to get them to do what you want; you control your spouse for your own advantage.

Anger or rage: You display strong feelings of displeasure or violent and uncontrolled emotions.

Catastrophize: You use dramatic, exaggerated expressions to depict that the relationship is in danger or that it has failed.

Emotionally shut down: You numb out emotionally; you become devoid of emotion, or you have no regard for other’s needs or troubles.

Humor: You use humor as a way of not dealing with the issue at hand.

Sarcasm: You use negative humor, hurtful words, belittling comments, cutting remarks, or demeaning statements.

Minimization: You assert that your spouse is overreacting to an issue; you intentionally underestimate, down play, or soft pedal the issue.

Rationalization: You attempt to make your actions seem reasonable; you try to attribute your behavior to credible motives; you try to provide believable but untrue reasons for your conduct.

Indifference: You are cold and show no concern.

Abdication: You give away responsibilities.

Self-abandonment: You desert yourself; you neglect you; you run yourself down.

Other: __________________________________________
Step 1: My Core Fear Buttons
(Insert the most important feelings from question 3)

Step 2: My Reactions
(Insert the most common coping strategies from question 4)

Step 3: My Spouse’s Core Fear Buttons
(Insert the most important feelings for my spouse from questions 3)

Step 4: My Spouse’s Reactions
(Insert my spouse’s most common coping strategies from question 4)

Step 5: Discuss how this dance plays out in your conflicts.

If your marriage is in crisis, contact Focus on the Family’s National Institute of Marriage, www.nationalmarriage.com, (866)875-2915

Excerpted from The DNA of Relationships by Gary Smalley, Dr. Greg Smalley, Dr. Robert S. Paul and Michael Smalley
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