



FROM CHAOS TO CONNECTION

A MARRIAGE COUNSELOR'S
CANDID GUIDE FOR THE
MODERN COUPLE

BY: LORI EPTING LCMHC

The Book Club & Discussion Guide

COVID has introduced a whole new level of chaos into our world. We all need a break from virtual learning (so help us all), kids yelling "Mom!" for the 176th time that hour and serving up the millionth quarantine meal. It is my hope you can gather with a small group of friends on a back patio, cul-de-sac or fire pit, share a few beverages and improve your marriage at the same time. If your friends live far away, Zoom it up! Each group may have a different purpose for discussing *From Chaos to Connection*. Think about the purpose of your group and pick accordingly. Once you pick your option, you can pick out the questions that best fit your group's vibe.

~~~

### Option A: Laugh and Chat

We just need a night away from the chaos to chat, laugh, and feel normal and validated as we share our own marriage-with-chaos stories.

### Option B: Laugh, Chat and Learn

We like to learn, share, laugh, and grow together. We also like thought-provoking and introspective questions. We can be light-hearted but also like to go deep.

## Discussion Tips

Discussing issues related to your marriage can be a very personal thing. Here are a few tips to keep the discussion healthy and productive:

- **Focus your discussion on you, not your partner.** This is a time to focus on how you respond to situations in your marriage and where you want to grow as a partner. This is not a time to vent and complain about your spouse (and actually I would set this as a ground rule to start).
- **Share appropriately.** You are amongst friends and peers in these discussions, not a therapist. Use discretion in what you share. Major concerns and issues in your marriage are best shared with your spouse, a one-on-one convo with your best friend, or your therapist—not a group.
- **Give support, not advice.** I hope your discussions help you feel validated and supported. If someone is sharing one of their “the struggle is real” moments, this is a time to say “I feel you” or “me too.” Fight the urge to say “this is what you should do.”

## Discussion Questions

Now all you have to do is choose your discussion questions. The questions below are marked with Option A: questions are lighter; and Option B: questions are deeper. Some are a little of both.

### Ice Breaker

Lori describes her favorite “chaotic” moment involving a babysitter that didn’t show up when she had clients sitting in her waiting room. What is your favorite chaotic moment in your household? How did you react to the chaos? **(Option A, B)**

~~~

In the Introduction, Lori writes about the “modern marriage” and the pressures that fall on parents today. What pressures do we have now that our parents didn’t have? **(Option A, B)**

Lori suggests that the pressures of modern parenting can cause great damage to marriages. She observes that we are more likely to blame our partners for the overwhelm we feel rather than our fast-paced, over-scheduled culture. Are you more likely to feel like your partner is falling down on the job or are you more likely to recognize how much is expected of your family, yourself, and your children in today’s day and age? **(Option B)**

Lori and her husband, Chad, use a communication tool they call “the do-over.” Whenever they use this tool, they are able to restate or clarify whatever they said that just pissed off the other, without being held to their original comment. They get a “do-over.” What is your handy communication tool that you and your spouse use that you can share with the group? **(Option A, B)**

Lori describes how every couple gets on the “crazy train” but that healthy couples can be effective in getting off. Common crazy-train thoughts can be things like “he is so selfish” or “he doesn’t care what I need.” Or, “she is so unappreciative” or “she is never happy with me no matter what I do.” What are your most common crazy-train thoughts? What happens to these thoughts when you feel close and connected to your partner? **(Option B)**

~~~

In her work with couples, Lori observes that empathy is the make-it-or-break-it factor in most marriages. She describes two types of cycles for parents. In short, one is the “My day is harder than yours” cycle and the other is the “Look at all you do for us” cycle. Are you more likely to defend your day to get empathy? Or are you more likely to offer empathy and support to your spouse, which, in turn, can prompt your spouse to do the same for you? **(Option A, B)**

Lori gives an example of a couple, Jessica and Chris, on pages 47–48. Reread the example and share your reactions. What feelings do you have toward Jessica? What feelings do you have toward Chris? Do you have empathy for only one or for both? What do you think of how Jessica ultimately shares her desire for Chris to have empathy for her? **(Option B)**

~~~

Lori expressed a controversial observation—that women are more critical than men in many marriages. In your own marriage, how likely are you to criticize your spouse when they don’t meet your expectations? **(Option A, B)**

Are you and your partner quick to share your hurt or are you more likely to internalize your feelings? **(Option B)**

Share your reaction when Lori writes on page 65 “Ladies—it’s rare to find a husband in my office who does not view his wife’s criticism as a message that he is ‘not good enough.’” **(Option B)**

~~~

Lori writes about how important it is for couples to “find their jam.” It’s the activity, place or experience that you and your partner share that she calls your “sweet spot, when both of you are happy.” What is your jam with your partner? **(Option A)**

On page 102, Lori describes how healthy marriages operate like a pendulum. It's healthy to have a life outside of the marriage but it's also necessary that your spouse feel your "pull" back to the center of the pendulum, or back to home. Are you effective in letting your spouse know your heart is home, even when you are physically away? In what way? **(Option B)**

~~~

This is a hard one. The chapter title alone says it all—You Always Have a Part in the Problem. Do you think this is true? Are you more likely to see the problems in your marriage as one-sided, meaning you are more likely to blame your spouse? Or do you generally believe there are ways you are both contributing to the problem? Share an example. **(Option A)**

Lori writes that seeing your part of the problem gives you the gift of power. What do you think she means? How can seeing your part of the problem give you power in your marriage? **(Option B)**

~~~

Lori helps couples get to the root of their problems. Think of an example you can share where you get caught in the trap of focusing on the perceived problem. Can you share what the root problem is (hint: use the cheat sheet on pages 178–179)? **(Option B)**

~~~

Lori asserts that the ability to find comfort in your partner and vice versa, is the disconnection-killer. Can the experience of seeking and receiving comfort in your marriage really be that important (Lori says yes!!)? Why do you agree or disagree? **(Option B)**.

~~~

Lori writes "When it comes to sex, you are both right." What is she saying you are both right about? **(Option B)**

Lori knows the difficulty in finding time for intimacy when couples are spinning in the chaos of life with kids. She writes "Because let's face it, the struggle is real, with life and kids and jobs demanding attention, and by 9:15 p.m., all you want to do is pass out on the couch." Discuss ways you have found to set aside time for intimacy despite your chaos. **(Option A, B)**

~~~

Is there anything that wasn't discussed that really hit home for you and your marriage? **(Option A, B)**¹