



FROM **Chaos** TO CONNECTION

A MARRIAGE COUNSELOR'S
CANDID GUIDE FOR THE
MODERN COUPLE

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Individual/Couple Study Guide

Use this guide for your own individual journaling or as a way to discuss takeaways from the book with your partner. Like the book, these questions are geared toward helping you reflect on your own behaviors rather than your partner's. The goal here is to help you use the concepts in the book and find ways to directly apply them to your relationship.

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### **The Chaos** (pages 1–13)

1. Recall one of the more chaotic moments in your home. How did you react?
2. Lori observes that our over-scheduled, busy culture wreaks havoc on marriages. How does the chaos tend to impact you and your marriage?
3. When life gets chaotic and overwhelming, do you generally feel like you and your partner are on the same team? Or does it feel like the chaos divides you? Name one way that you and your partner can respond to each other in chaotic moments that would feel more supportive.
4. In what ways are you expecting too much out of yourself and your partner?

## **You Don't Need Good Communication (Gasp!)**

5. Lori states that when couples are in serious conflict, often, they are in a state of life-or-death panic. Name the feelings you have when you and your spouse are in conflict. Pick one strategy that you would like to try in this book to help in those moments (you can come back to this question after reading more chapters).
6. Lori writes that marriages can thrive, even with imperfect communication, but they cannot thrive if there is annihilation (page 25). Be honest with yourself: Are you more likely to communicate imperfectly or destructively?

## **Can't You See? It's Hard for Everyone**

7. 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. What is your cycle?
8. Are you more likely to defend your day and rattle off the laundry list of all the things you had to deal with in order 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?
9. It can be easy to fall into the trap of "My day is harder than yours." Put yourself in your partner's shoes. What are the hardest parts of their current situation? If you are doing this with your partner, take five to ten minutes for each of you to share the tough parts of your arrangement (both working full-time; one stay at home and one sole provider; or some combination of the two).

## **Women Are More Critical Than Men**

10. Lori expressed a controversial observation: 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?
11. When you criticize your spouse, how do they react (internalize, defend, attack)? What do you think they are feeling? For extra credit, ask your spouse.

12. Pick one thing you commonly criticize your spouse for. Think of a way to share your criticism as a need, rather than a complaint. Practice this for two or three other complaints you have about your spouse (pages 71–72).

### **Happy Couples Hurt Each Other All the Time**

13. Do you share your hurt feelings with your spouse? If yes, how? If no, why not?

14. Does your spouse share their hurt feelings with you? If yes, how? If no, why do you think they don't?

15. When your spouse shares their hurts with you, how do you respond? (Spoiler: If you don't respond well, you likely have your answer to the previous question.)

### **Your Spouse Is Incapable**

16. Do you feel supportive of or threatened by your spouse's work, hobbies, and other outlets outside of the home? If you feel threatened, what resonated with you in this chapter? After reading this chapter, can you think of a healthy and productive way to talk about your feelings with your spouse?

17. 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?

18. 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?

### **You Always Have a Part in the Problem**

19. 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?

20. Think of a recurring issue that creates conflict between you and your spouse. What do you think your part of the problem is? What do you think is your spouse's?

21. 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?

### **There Is No Room for Secrecy**

22. Lori writes about the importance of transparency—“the feeling that exists between two people when they are both ‘in the know.’” How do you ensure that things are transparent between you and your spouse?

23. If trust is an issue in your marriage, evaluate how transparent you are with your spouse. How transparent are they with you? As you read this chapter, what comes to your mind that would help the two of you feel more trusting of each other?

### **We All Have Our Own Brand of Crazy**

24. Think of one or two things about you, maybe a painful part of your past, that makes you sensitive at times to your spouse. Does your spouse know this about you? If not, what would it be like to share it?

25. Think of one or two things about your spouse, a painful part of their past that you know about, that may make them sensitive to you. How do you see this show up in your marriage? Do you respond with empathy or something less helpful?

26. If you or your spouse’s sensitivities divide you, think of one way you can respond to each other’s sensitivities, that could bring you together.

### **The Problem Is Not What You Think**

27. Lori writes that an upset spouse often views their partner as the problem or the reason for their distress. On the bottom of page 176, Lori reveals what the real problem is. What is it?

28. Furthermore, Lori writes that discomfort in our relationship can be helpful. What can your discomfort tell you about your relationship? Hint on page 177.

29. Identify one problem in your marriage. Use the examples in the chapter and the cheat sheet (pages 178–180) to identify 1) the real problem, and, 2) your relational need.

### **The Truth About Disconnection**

30. Lori observes that when couples can't find comfort in each other when they are hurt, the divide created can cause two people to feel disconnected from each other. In what ways (healthy or unhealthy) do you seek comfort? Is your spouse one of these ways? Why or why not?

31. Lori describes three categories that couples fall into regarding their abilities to find comfort in each other (pages 199–200). Which category do you fall into?

32. Where do healthy couples find comfort when they feel pain? What would you need from your spouse to seek them out for comfort? What would they need from you to seek you out for comfort?

### **When It Comes to Sex, You Are Both Right**

33. Lori writes “When it comes to sex, you are both right.” What is she saying you are both right about?

34. Lori observes many obstacles to a healthy sex life. What obstacles do you observe in your sexual relationship with your partner? She suggests compassionate and connecting ways that you can use to bring up and talk about these obstacles. What words could you use?

### **Most Couples Come to Therapy Too Late**

35. Evaluate the issues in your marriage. How long have they been a problem? Have your efforts to address them been successful? How would you know that it's time for counseling? <sup>1</sup>

36. Partners fight for their marriage in a million different ways every day! Sometimes these efforts can feel unseen or unacknowledged (holding your tongue not to offend, making your partner's favorite meal, wrangling the kids so your spouse can have a break, etc). List some of the ways (big and small) that you and your partner fight for your marriage. Feel good about these efforts!