

teacher conference yesterday" or "Thanks for making my sister feel welcome here" or even "You look so hot in that outfit, I'm having all kinds of bad thoughts."

Sometimes couples resist searching for and expressing gratitude for their spouse's positive behavior because, they tell me, doing so feels "phony" to them. But developing a positive habit doesn't "sugarcoat" a relationship. Instead it resets it to a *more realistic* perspective. Just knowing this can make all the difference for couples who are feeling pessimistic about their partner and marriage. Research by Elizabeth Robinson and Gail Price brings home this happy truth. They had objective, trained observers count how many positive acts they witnessed between a couple during the course of an evening. They then asked the spouses themselves to tally their positive interactions. When the researchers compared the scores the couple gave themselves with those of the objective observers, they discovered that couples who described themselves as unhappily married only noticed *half* of the positive interactions that actually occurred. Because they were so used to tuning in to their partner's mistakes, they each missed a full 50 percent of their partner's positive actions.

## FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION QUESTIONNAIRE

To assess the current state of your fondness and admiration system, answer the following.

Read each statement and circle T for "true" or F for "false."

1. I can easily list the three things I most admire about my partner. **T F**
2. When we are apart, I often think fondly of my partner. **T F**
3. I will often find some way to tell my partner "I love you." **T F**
4. I often touch or kiss my partner affectionately. **T F**
5. My partner really respects me. **T F**
6. I feel loved and cared for in this relationship. **T F**

7. I feel accepted and liked by my partner. **T F**
8. My partner finds me sexy and attractive. **T F**
9. My partner turns me on sexually. **T F**
10. There is fire and passion in this relationship. **T F**
11. Romance is definitely still a part of our relationship. **T F**
12. I am really proud of my partner. **T F**
13. My partner really enjoys my achievements and accomplishments. **T F**
14. I can easily tell you why I married my partner. **T F**
15. If I had it all to do over again, I would marry the same person. **T F**
16. We rarely go to sleep without some show of love or affection. **T F**
17. When I come into a room, my partner is glad to see me. **T F**
18. My partner appreciates the things I do in this marriage. **T F**
19. My spouse generally likes my personality. **T F**
20. Our sex life is generally satisfying. **T F**

**Scoring:** Give yourself 1 point for each "true" answer.

**10 or higher:** This is an area of strength for your relationship. Because you value each other highly, you have a shield that can protect you from becoming overwhelmed by any negativity that also exists between you. Although it might seem obvious to you that people who are in love have a high regard for each other, it's common for spouses to lose sight of some of their fondness and admiration over time. Remember that this fondness and admiration is a gift worth protecting. Completing the exercises in this chapter from time to time will help you to reaffirm your positive feelings for each other.

**Below 10:** Your marriage could stand some improvement in this area. Don't be discouraged by a low score. There are many couples in whom the fondness and admiration system has not died but is buried under layers of negativity, hurt feelings, and betrayal. By reviving the positive feelings that still lie deep below, you can vastly improve your marriage.

If your fondness and admiration are being chipped away, the route to bringing them back always begins with realizing how valuable they are. Remember that they are crucial to the long-term happiness of a relationship because they prevent contempt—one

of the marriage-killing four horsemen—from becoming an overwhelming presence in your life. Contempt is a corrosive that, over time, breaks down the bond between husband and wife. The better in touch you are with your deep-seated positive feelings for each other, the less likely that you will act with contempt toward your spouse when you have a difference of opinion.

### Fanning the Flames

There's nothing complicated about reviving or enhancing your fondness and admiration. Even long-buried positive feelings can be exhumed simply by thinking and talking about them. You can do this by meditating a bit on your partner and what makes you treasure him or her. If you're feeling out of practice or have too much stress or anger to do this "free form," the following exercises will guide you. As simple as these exercises may seem to be, they have enormous power. When you acknowledge and openly discuss positive aspects of your partner and your marriage, your bond is strengthened. This makes it much easier to address the problem areas in your marriage and initiate positive changes. Feel free to work through these exercises as often as you wish. They are not intended only for troubled relationships. If your marriage is stable and happy, these exercises are an excellent way to heighten the romance.

### EXERCISE 1: "I APPRECIATE . . ."

From the list below, select five appreciations you would like to express toward your partner in your own words, adding an example of when your partner demonstrated each action or displayed the positive qualities you are appreciating. In my workshops, I can see the benefit of this exercise immediately. Couples who began the session sitting stiffly and awkwardly suddenly relax. The room fills with laughter. Watching these couples while they engage in this exercise, I can tell that they are rediscovering something they had misplaced.

- Thanks for making dinner. It was delicious.
- Thanks for taking care of the kids.
- Thanks for being such a great dad.
- Thanks for cleaning up the kitchen.
- Thanks for doing the laundry.
- Thanks for supporting me when I talked about my stress.
- Thanks for doing the dishes.
- Thanks for listening to how my day went.
- Thanks for being understanding when I talked about that rude person I met.



I really appreciated you being so affectionate lately.

- I really enjoyed the conversation at dinner.
- Thanks for being such a great mom.
- Taking a walk together was really nice.
- I really appreciated your giving me a hug.
- That is a fantastic color on you.
- Thanks for spending time with me.
- Thank you for caring about what I need.
- Thanks for bringing me flowers.
- Thank you for desiring me.
- It matters to me a lot when you are so great with the kids.
- The way you treat my family means a lot to me.
- Thanks for making me feel like I come first in your life.
- Thanks for putting on music that I love.
- Thanks for all the driving you are doing.
- Thanks for working so hard for our family.
- Thank you for taking me out to dinner. That was great.
- Thanks for taking a bath with me.
- You taste delicious.
- Thank you for listening to me.
- Thanks for calling the plumber (electrician, handyman, carpenter, gardener, etc.).
- Thank you for just being there when I felt sad.
- Thank you for being empathetic with me.
- Thank you for being on my side.
- Thanks for taking the kids to the pediatrician.

Thank you for comforting me.  
 Thank you for being gentle with me.  
 I had fun at the party. Thank you for being with me.  
 You are a great kisser.  
 Thank you for holding me.  
 Thanks for spending time with the kids.  
 Thanks for saving money for us.  
 Thank you for laughing.  
 Thank you for telling me what you need.  
 Thanks for driving me.  
 Thanks for giving me some time to myself.  
 I can hardly keep my hands off you.  
 Thank you for greeting me so warmly when I come home.  
 I really appreciate that drive we took.  
 Thanks for taking over the chores.  
 I loved the picnic we had.  
 You look great tonight.  
 Thanks for taking care of me when I was sick.  
 Thank you for telling me how you feel.  
 I love touching you here.  
 I appreciate what a loyal partner you are.  
 You smell so good.  
 Thank you for loving me.  
 Thanks for making our home so beautiful.  
 Thanks for spending time with my family.  
 Thanks for making coffee for me.  
 Those pastries were delicious. Thanks for getting them.  
 Thanks for calling the doctor when I needed an appointment.  
 Thanks for the way you are paying the bills.  
 Thanks for sticking up for me when I got criticized.

## EXERCISE 2: THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Below is a version of the questionnaire that led Rory and Lisa to reconnect with their fondness and admiration for each other. Completing this questionnaire together will bring you face-to-face with the early years of your relationship, and help you remember how and why you became a couple. You will need a few hours of uninterrupted time to complete this exercise. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions—they are merely meant to guide you in recalling the love and perspective on marriage that led you to join your lives in the first place. Be sure to direct your thoughts toward positive memories—you definitely don't want to turn this exercise into a gripe session!

### Part One: Your History

1. Discuss how the two of you met and got together. What were your first impressions of each other? What made your spouse stand out?
2. What do you remember most about beginning to date? What types of activities did you do together? What were some of the highlights?
3. How long did you know each other before you married? Talk about how you made the decision to marry. Was it easy or difficult? Were you in love? Of all the people in the world, what led you to decide that this was the person?
4. Share memories of your wedding and your honeymoon if you had one. What do you each remember most?
5. Recall your first year of marriage. Were there any adjustments you needed to make?
6. What about the transition to becoming parents? What was this period like for each of you?
7. Looking back over the years, what moments stand out as really happy times in your marriage? What is a good time for you as a couple? Has this changed over the years?
8. Many relationships go through periods of ups and downs. Would

- you say that this is true of yours? Can you describe some of these periods?
9. Looking back over the years, what moments stand out as the really hard times? Why do you think you stayed together? How did you get through these difficult times?
  10. Have you stopped doing things together that once gave you pleasure? Explore these with each other.

### Part Two: Your Philosophy of Marriage

11. Why do you think some marriages work while others don't? Discuss two couples you know who you agree have a particularly good or bad relationship. What is the difference between these two marriages? How does yours compare to each of them?
12. Talk about your parents' marriages. Would you say they were very similar to or different from your own marriage?
13. Draw a chart or timeline of your marriage, noting its major turning points, ups, and downs. What were the happiest times for you? For your partner? How has your marriage changed over the years?

Most couples find that recalling their history recharges their relationship. Answering these questions often reminds couples of the love and great expectations that inspired their decision to marry in the first place. This can give couples who thought their marriage was over the glimmerings of hope that lead them to struggle on to save it. Just repeating the two exercises above from time to time may be enough to salvage and strengthen your fondness and admiration for each other.

### Learning to Cherish Your Partner

How often do you think happily about your partner when you're *apart*? Do you reflect with pride on his or her many wonderful traits? Such thoughts comprise *cherishing*, which is a critical component of a couple's fondness-and-admiration system. Cherishing is a habit of mind in which, when you are separated during the course of the day, you maximize thoughts of your partner's posi-

tive qualities and minimize thoughts of negative ones. This active focusing on your partner's merits allows you to nurture gratefulness for what you have instead of resenting what is missing. Many couples do not realize they are neglecting to cherish each other. Fortunately, this is easily corrected. The following exercises can help you get into this crucial habit.

### EXERCISE 3: CHERISHING YOUR PARTNER

**Part One:** From the list below, check ten qualities that you cherish in your partner. For each, note one recent occasion when your partner displayed it. Then say to yourself, "I am really lucky to be with my partner." Keep this list handy, and use it when you are alone to focus on your fond feelings toward your partner and trigger a sense of gratitude.

**Part Two:** Write your partner a love note expressing how much you cherish him or her for these qualities. Read it aloud to your partner during a romantic date.

#### WHAT I REALLY CHERISH ABOUT MY PARTNER IS THAT SHE OR HE IS SO:

Active	Caring	Determined
Adaptable	Cheerful	Devoted
Adventurous	Clever	Diligent
Ambitious	Commanding	Disciplined
Appreciative	Compassionate	Discriminating
Authentic	Confident	Dynamic
Aware	Conscientious	Eager
Balanced	Considerate	Easygoing
Bold	Courageous	Empathetic
Brave	Creative	Energetic
Bright	Curious	Enterprising
Calm	Daring	Ethical
Capable	Dedicated	Exuberant
Careful	Dependable	Fair

Fascinating	Loyal	Self-sufficient
Feisty	Mature	Sensitive
Flexible	Mellow	Sharp
Forgiving	Motivated	Sincere
Friendly	Natural	Skillful
Fun	Neat	Smart
Funny	Nurturing	Sociable
Generous	Observant	Spiritual
Gentle	Open-minded	Spontaneous
Giving	Optimistic	Stable
Gutsy	Organized	Steady
Happy	Original	Strong
Hardworking	Outgoing	Studious
Healthy	Patient	Successful
Honest	Peaceful	Supportive
Honorable	Perceptive	Surprising
Humble	Persevering	Sympathetic
Humorous	Persistent	Talented
Idealistic	Pleasant	Thorough
Imaginative	Positive	Thoughtful
Independent	Practical	Tireless
Ingenious	Principled	Tolerant
Inquisitive	Private	Trusting
Insightful	Problem-solving	Trustworthy
Intelligent	Proud	Truthful
Interesting	Quick-witted	Understanding
Intuitive	Quiet	Unique
Inventive	Rational	Unselfish
Joyful	Reasonable	Upbeat
Kind	Reflective	Vigilant
Knowledgeable	Reliable	Warm
Laid-back	Resilient	Wise
Lighthearted	Resourceful	Witty
Likable	Respectful	Worthy
Lively	Responsible	Other _____
Lovable	Self-confident	
Loving	Self-sacrificing	

### EXERCISE 4: A SEVEN-WEEK COURSE IN FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION

This exercise is designed to get you into the habit of cherishing your partner. If you are angry, stressed, or feeling distant from your spouse, you may tend to focus on his or her negative characteristics. This leads to distress-maintaining thoughts, which in turn leave you feeling ever more distant and isolated in your marriage. This exercise counteracts that tendency by training you to focus on your partner's positive characteristics, even if you aren't having such a great day together.

For each day below there is a positive statement, or thought, followed by a task. Think about each statement, and say it to yourself many times throughout the day while you and your spouse are apart. In some cases, the thought may not seem to apply to your spouse or your marriage, especially if your fondness and admiration have dimmed. Keep in mind that the statement does not have to describe the typical state of affairs between you at the present time. If you can think of a single instant or episode where the statement applied, focus on that memory. For example, if you're not feeling overly attracted to your spouse these days, focus on one area of his or her anatomy that does appeal to you. Also be sure to complete the simple task that follows each positive statement. Do the exercise each day, no matter how you happen to feel about your relationship or your spouse. Don't stop even if you just had a major blowup or are feeling very distant from each other.

Although this exercise might sound silly or hokey, it is based on a wide body of research into the power of rehearsing positive thoughts. This approach is one of the tenets of cognitive therapy, which has proven highly successful in helping people overcome depression. When people fall into a depression, their thinking may become disordered—they see everything in an extremely negative light, which just adds to their sense of hopelessness. But if, over time, they deliberately accustom their mind to a different, positive way of thinking, the sense of hopelessness can be lifted.

This exercise is an experiment in offering the same hope to marriage. What you're really doing is rehearsing a more positive way to

think about your partner and your relationship. Like any rehearsal, if you do it often enough, the words (and more important, the thoughts) will become second nature.

Note: Since most couples spend time apart on Monday through Friday, those are the days that are specified in the schedule below. You can switch the actual days around to better fit your schedule (if, for example, you work on the weekends), as long as you do the exercise five days a week.

### Week 1

#### MONDAY

Thought: I am genuinely fond of my partner.

Task: List one characteristic you find endearing or lovable.

#### TUESDAY

Thought: I can easily speak of the good times in our marriage.

Task: Pick one good time and write a sentence about it.

#### WEDNESDAY

Thought: I can easily remember romantic, special times in our marriage.

Task: Pick one such time and think about it.

#### THURSDAY

Thought: I am physically attracted to my partner.

Task: Think of one physical attribute you like.

#### FRIDAY

Thought: My partner has specific qualities that make me proud.

Task: Write down one characteristic that makes you proud.

### Week 2

#### MONDAY

Thought: I feel a genuine sense of "we" as opposed to "I" in this marriage.

Task: Think of one thing that you both have in common.

#### TUESDAY

Thought: We have the same general beliefs and values.

Task: Describe one belief you share.

#### WEDNESDAY

Thought: We have common goals.

Task: List one such goal.

#### THURSDAY

Thought: My spouse is my best friend.

Task: Think about a secret you've shared with your partner.

#### FRIDAY

Thought: I get lots of support in this marriage.

Task: Think of a time when your spouse was very supportive of you.

### Week 3

#### MONDAY

Thought: My home is a place to come to get support and reduce stress.

Task: List a time when your spouse helped you reduce stress.

#### TUESDAY

Thought: I can easily recall the time we first met.

Task: Describe that first meeting on paper.

#### WEDNESDAY

Thought: I remember many details about deciding to get married.

Task: Write a sentence describing what you remember.

#### THURSDAY

Thought: I can recall our wedding and honeymoon.

Task: Describe one thing about them you enjoyed.

#### FRIDAY

Thought: We divide up household chores in a fair way.

Task: Describe one way you do this on a regular basis. If your partner doesn't share chores, think of other ways he or she contributes. If you don't do your share, decide on a chore you will take on (such as doing the laundry).

### Week 4

#### MONDAY

Thought: We are able to plan well and have a sense of control over our lives together.

Task: Describe one activity you planned together.

**TUESDAY**

Thought: I am proud of this marriage.

Task: List two things about your marriage that make you proud.

**WEDNESDAY**

Thought: I am proud of my family.

Task: Recall a specific time when you especially felt this pride.

**THURSDAY**

Thought: I don't like things about my partner, but I can live with them.

Task: What is one minor fault you have adapted to?

**FRIDAY**

Thought: This marriage is a lot better than most I have seen.

Task: Think of a marriage you know that's awful.

**Week 5****MONDAY**

Thought: I was really lucky to meet my spouse.

Task: List one benefit of being married to your spouse.

**TUESDAY**

Thought: Marriage is sometimes a struggle, but it's worth it.

Task: Think of one difficult time you successfully weathered together.

**WEDNESDAY**

Thought: There is a lot of affection between us.

Task: Plan a surprise gift for your mate for tonight.

**THURSDAY**

Thought: We are genuinely interested in each other.

Task: Think of something to do or talk about that would be interesting.

**FRIDAY**

Thought: We are good companions.

Task: Plan an outing together.

**Week 6****MONDAY**

Thought: There is lots of good loving in my marriage.

Task: Think of a special trip you took together.

**TUESDAY**

Thought: My partner is an interesting person.

Task: Plan something to ask your mate about that interests both of you.

**WEDNESDAY**

Thought: We respond well to each other.

Task: Write and share a love letter to your spouse.

**THURSDAY**

Thought: If I had it to do over again, I would marry the same person.

Task: Plan an anniversary (or other) getaway.

**FRIDAY**

Thought: There is lots of mutual respect in my marriage.

Task: Consider taking a class together (sailing, ballroom dancing, etc.).

Or tell your spouse about a time recently when you admired something he or she did.

**Week 7****MONDAY**

Thought: Sex is usually (or can be) quite satisfying in this marriage.

Task: Plan an erotic evening for the two of you.

**TUESDAY**

Thought: We have come a long way together.

Task: Think of all you have accomplished as a team.

**WEDNESDAY**

Thought: I think we can weather any storm together.

Task: Reminiscence about having made it through a hard time.

**THURSDAY**

Thought: We enjoy each other's sense of humor.

Task: Plan to watch a comedy together.

**FRIDAY**

Thought: My mate can be very cute.

Task: Get very dressed up for an elegant evening together. Or if you don't like that kind of thing, plan another kind of evening out you would enjoy.

By the end of the seven weeks, you're likely to find that your perspective on your partner and your marriage is far sunnier.