

Guidelines for Couple's Feelings Meetings

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

How to Establish A Routine of Couple's Feelings Meetings

- Hold feelings meetings daily.
- Schedule couple's feelings meetings as the same time of day, so that it becomes routine and a normal part of your daily schedule.
- Pick a time that you won't be interrupted (e.g. kids are in bed).
- Feelings meetings should be about 30 minutes long.
- Turn off all the electronics--TV, ipad, phones, computer, etc.
- Maintain direct eye contact; make a physical connection with your partner (e.g. hold hands).
- Take turns sharing feelings about things thoughts, observations, and events of that day.
- Keep it positive.
- Take responsibility for your own feelings.
- Accept the other person's feelings. Don't try to fix them.
- Use "I messages". Avoid "You messages".
- Use feelings words- FEAR, ANGER, SHAME, GUILT, HURT, SAD, LONELY, HELPLESS, JOY, HAPPY, EXCITED, LOVED, ETC.
- "I feel as if..." and "I feel that...." are not feelings. They are "thinking" statements.
- Talk only about yourself.
- Practice active listening. Tell the other person what you heard (e.g., "What I hear you saying is...."). Don't interpret. Just tell them what you actually heard.
- **Don't use feelings meetings as a problem solving vehicle. Hold special problem solving sessions to work through problems.**

The purposes of Couple's Feelings Meetings are to:

- ~establish a routine of taking risks with partner,
- ~practice allowing your partner into your "inner" world,

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- ~prevent miscommunication and misunderstandings,
- ~improve feelings of closeness
- ~restore a sense of "us"
- ~restore the ability to see the positives in the relationship
- ~restore the belief that the two of you together can effectively deal with problems that arise in life.

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<http://www.peggyferguson.com>

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"The Honey Jar" is a conversation starter for couples. It consists of 250 sentence stems, each one serving as an open-ended prompt to generate discussion. The Honey Jar is more than a jar of sentence stems. The Honey Jar was field tested by real couples for therapeutic value. It can assist couples in restoring a sense of self-confidence in re-establishing their connection and commitment. As couples use their time, attention and willingness to take risks with each other, a close, loving connection can re-emerge.

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By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

www.peggyferguson.com

www.stillwatermarriagecounselor.com