

IDENTIFY YOUR CORE FEAR

1. **IDENTIFY THE CONFLICT:** Identify a recent conflict, argument, or negative situation with your spouse, friend, child, neighbor, coworker, or whomever – something that really “pushed your buttons” or upset you. Think about how you were feeling and how you wished the person would not say or do the things that upset you. You might have thought something like, *If only you would stop saying or doing _____, I would not be so upset.*

2. **IDENTIFY YOUR FEELINGS.** How did this conflict or negative situation make you feel? Check all the apply-but “star” the most important feelings:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable | <input type="checkbox"/> Frightened |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apathetic | <input type="checkbox"/> Confused | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Puzzled | <input type="checkbox"/> Worried | <input type="checkbox"/> Horrified |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upset | <input type="checkbox"/> Disgusted | <input type="checkbox"/> Disturbed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sullen | <input type="checkbox"/> Resentful | <input type="checkbox"/> Furious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt | <input type="checkbox"/> Fed up | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wearied | <input type="checkbox"/> Miserable | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tom up | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shamed | <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed | |

3. **IDENTIFY YOUR FEAR:** How did this conflict make you feel about yourself? What did the conflict “say” about you and your feelings? Check all that apply, but “star” the most important feeling.

✓ OR *	“As a result of the conflict, I felt...”	What That Feeling Sounds Like
	Rejected	The other person doesn’t want me or need me; I am not necessary in this relationship; I feel unwanted.
	Abandoned	The other person will ultimately leave me; I will be left alone to care for myself; the other person won’t be committed to me for life.
	Disconnected	We will become emotionally detached or separated; I will feel cut off from the other person.
	Like a failure	I am not successful at being a husband/wife, friend, parent, coworker; I will not perform correctly
	Helpless	I cannot do anything to change the other person or my situation; I do not possess the power, resources, capacity, or ability to get what I want; I will feel controlled by the other person.
	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	The other person doesn't care about me; my relationship lacks warm attachment, admiration, enthusiasm, or devotion.
	Dissatisfied	I will not experience satisfaction in the relationship; I will not feel joy or excitement about the relationship.
	Cheated	The other person will take advantage of me or will withhold something I need; I won't get what I want.
	Worthless	I am useless; I have no value to the other person.
	Unaccepted	I am never able to meet the other person's expectations; I am not good enough.
	Judged	I am always being unfairly judged; the other person forms faulty or negative opinions about me; I am always being evaluated; the other person does not approve of me.
	Humiliated	The relationship is extremely destructive to my self-respect or dignity.
	Ignored	The other person will not pay attention to me; I feel neglected.
	Insignificant	I am irrelevant in the relationship; the other person does not see me as an important part of our relationship.
	Other	

4. **IDENTIFY YOUR REACTIONS:** 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 verbal or physical reactions to deal with that feeling. Check all that apply but “star” the most important reactions:

✓ OR *	Reaction	Explanation
	Withdrawal	You avoid others or alienate yourself without resolution; you sulk or use the silent treatment.
	Escalation	Your emotions spiral out of control; you argue, raise your voice, fly into a rage.
	Try harder	You try to do more to earn others' love and care.
	Negative beliefs	You believe the other person is far worse than is really the case; you see the other person in a negative light or attribute negative motives to him or her.
	Blaming	You place responsibility on others, not accepting fault; you're convinced the problem is the other person's fault.
	Exaggeration	You make overstatements or enlarge your words beyond bounds or the truth.
	Tantrums	You have fits of bad temper.

Denial	You refuse to admit the truth or reality.
Invalidation	You devalue the other person; you do not appreciate what he or she feels or thinks or does.
Defensiveness	Instead of listening you defend yourself by providing an explanation.
Clinginess	You develop a strong emotional attachment or dependence on the other person.
Passive-aggressive	You display negative emotions, resentment, and aggression in passive ways, such as procrastination and stubbornness.
Caretaking	You become responsible for the other person by giving physical or emotional care and support to the point you are doing everything for the other person, who does nothing to care for himself or herself.
Acting out	You engage in negative behaviors, such as drug or alcohol abuse, extramarital affairs, excessive shopping or spending, or overeating.
Fix-it mode	You focus almost exclusively on what is needed to solve the problem.
Complaining	You express unhappiness or make accusations; you criticize, creating a list of the other person's faults.
Aggression or abuse	You become verbally or physically aggressive, possibly abusive.
Manipulation	You control the other person for your own advantage; you try to get him or her to do what you want.
Anger and 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.
Numbing out	You become devoid of emotion, or you have no regard for others' 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 the other person is overreacting to an issue; you intentionally underestimate, downplay, or softpedal 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 run yourself down; you neglect yourself.
Other	

5. Look at the items you starred in response to question 3. List the three or four main feelings. These are your core fears:

Core fear #1 _____

Core fear #2 _____

Core fear #3 _____

Remember that most core fears are related to two main primary fears:

1. The fear of being controlled (losing influence or power over others).
2. The fear of being disconnected (separation from people and being alone).

More men fear losing power or being controlled, and more women fear being disconnected from relationship with others.

6. Look at the items you starred in response to question 4. List your three or four main reactions when someone pushes your core fear button.

Reaction #1 _____

Reaction #2 _____

Reaction #3 _____

Your responses to these exercises should help you understand your part of the Fear Dance: your core fear button and your reaction. Remember that it's very common for your reactions to push to core fear button of the other person in the conflict. If the other person can figure out his or her core fears and reactions, you will see clearly the unique Fear Dance the two of you are doing. But even if the other person isn't able to be involved in the process of discovering his or her part of the Fear Dance, you can take steps to stop the dance.