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Relationship Skills Assessment - Explanation

There are four categories of skills that one has to be reasonably good at if a marriage is to get better and better decade after decade, i.e., 1) Damage control (emphasizing learning how to never have arguments), 2) Recreation (having some common interests and being good playmates), 3) Rituals of Affection (regularly communicating and engaging in affectionate body contact) and 4) Conflict resolution (communicating effectively about problems as they arise and negotiating and compromising in the interest of resolving them).

The **Relationship Skills Assessment** is an assessment tool and gives a great deal of detail for what is covered under each of the above broad categories of skills. It is useful for each spouse to fill it out independently. Afterwards, the results should be shared and discussed. The expectation is that the couple will be able to arrive at a consensus on what are the strengths and weaknesses that each partner brings into the relationship.

A few pointers for filling out the Assessment: There is a "Him" column and a "Her" column for assigning grades to each partner and for each skill. For each skill I have provided a description of what someone would be like who gets an "A" in each category. Generally, I'm not usually concerned about the differences between "A"s, "B"s and "C"s because I'm primarily interested in determining what needs to be brought to my attention. Still, if only for entertainment value here is the framework for how to determine how to assign grades for each of the relationship skill categories.

A grade of "A": I define each of the skill categories by describing what someone would be like who gets an "A" in that category. If the description sounds like you then you get an "A" for that category.

A grade of "B": "B" is for those who, while not perfect in a given category are sufficiently good in that category that none of those skills need to be on his or her self-improvement agenda.

A grade of "C": "C" is for skill areas in which a person has one or more deficiencies in a given category that while not warranting the attention of a therapist, ought to be on his or her self-improvement agenda. These items are do-it-yourself projects and would not be expected to come up for discussion in a counseling session.

A grade of "D": If an issue, for example, like your spouse spending money recklessly, turned out to be enough of a problem that, if you happened to already be in marital counseling for some other reason, you would probably go ahead and talk about the spending problem while you are there, then you should grade the spending problem on his or her part as at least a "D". Grades of "D"s and "F"s are reserved for problems that are significantly damaging to the relationship as to warrant being one of the focuses of what gets addressed in counseling.

A grade of "F": If an issue, like a spending problem, is so serious that if not substantially improved, it could sabotage the marriage all by itself regardless of what other problems in the relationship there may be, then that category of relationship skills would need to be scored as an "F".

One final clarification – many of the skill areas include a variety of different but related behaviors or characteristics under a single broad category. For example, under the category of Anxiety I have included 1) Freedom from jealousy, 2) insecurity, 3) feelings of inadequacy, 4) excessive worry, 5) phobias, and 6) obsessive-compulsive problems. Since the inventory is intended as a screening device used to identify any significant problems that might be present you should **not** mentally assign a grade to each of the six issues covered under the Anxiety heading and then report the average of those grades for that category. You should report the **lowest grade** that applies to any of the items within that relationship skill category. You could then circle the item that warranted that grade. Otherwise, significant but isolated problems could be overlooked.