

A COUPLES THERAPY HOMEWORK PACK

Between Sessions

Six communication practices for reducing miscommunication and strengthening repair

Communication is not only about finding the right words. It is also about timing, tone, assumptions, listening, repair, and the willingness to return after a miss. This practice pack gives you several focused ways to work on those skills between sessions.

Choose one or two exercises at a time instead of trying to complete everything perfectly. The goal is not to prove that one person is right. The goal is to notice patterns, build shared language, and bring real examples back to therapy.

Small, repeated practices often build more trust than one big conversation.

START HERE

How to Use This Pack

Work with the exercises when you are settled enough to be curious, not in the middle of a heated argument.

Keep it brief

Set a ten- to fifteen-minute limit. End with appreciation, a clear next step, or an agreement to return later.

Choose low-stakes topics first

Practice with everyday misunderstandings before bringing in the most painful or complex subjects.

Take turns

Let each person have equal time to speak and be heard. One person does not need to carry the whole conversation.

Bring patterns to therapy

Notice what felt easier, what became difficult, and what you want help practicing in your next session.

A note about safety

- *These exercises work best when both people can speak freely and safely.*
- *If either person feels afraid, controlled, threatened, or unable to pause a conversation safely, seek individualized professional support rather than using communication exercises alone.*

CONNECTION PRACTICE

Homework 1: The Daily 10-Minute Check-In

A short, predictable ritual can prevent small disconnections from becoming assumptions and resentment.

Choose a time that works most days. Put phones away if possible. One person speaks while the other listens, then switch. This is not a time to solve every problem. It is a time to stay updated on each other's inner world.

1 Share one feeling

Finish: "One feeling I have carried today is ____." Keep it personal and specific.

2 Share one stressor

Finish: "One thing taking up space in my mind is ____." The listener does not need to fix it unless asked.

3 Share one appreciation

Finish: "One thing I appreciated about you or us today is ____." Be concrete when you can.

4 Name one need or request

Finish: "One thing that would help me tonight or tomorrow is ____." Make the request small and clear.

5 Close with a reflection

The listener says one sentence about what they heard, then you switch roles.

Our preferred check-in time is:

Choose a time that is realistic, not idealized.

The phrase that helps us begin is:

Example: "Is now a good time for our ten-minute check-in?"

The phrase that helps us close is:

Example: "Thank you for telling me. I am glad we checked in."

LISTENING PRACTICE

Homework 2: Speaker and Listener Practice

This exercise slows down the urge to explain, defend, or solve before the other person feels heard.

Choose one small frustration. Partner A gets two minutes to speak. Partner B listens without interrupting, correcting, or telling their side. Partner B then reflects what they heard. Partner A corrects only what was missed. Switch roles after the first turn is complete.

The speaker practices

Using “I” language, naming one specific event, sharing the feeling underneath it, and making one request rather than a global complaint.

The listener practices

Facing the speaker, staying quiet while they finish, noticing the urge to defend, and reflecting the meaning before offering a response.

The speaker can say

“What I want you to understand is ____.” “The part that felt hardest was ____.” “What I need most is ____.”

The listener can say

“What I hear is ____.” “It sounds like you felt ____.” “Did I understand the part about ____?”

After each round, ask

- *What did it feel like to speak without being interrupted?*
- *What did I learn by reflecting before responding?*
- *What was hard to say or hard to hear?*
- *What is one thing I understand better now?*

ASSUMPTION PRACTICE

Homework 3: The Miscommunication Decoder

Miscommunication often grows in the space between what happened, what we assumed, and what we needed.

Choose one recent misunderstanding. Each person can complete their own version before sharing. The purpose is not to prove who had the correct interpretation. It is to separate observable facts from the story your mind added, then make a clearer request for next time.

What happened, in observable words:

Describe what a camera or recording might show. Leave out motives and labels for now.

The story I told myself was:

Name the assumption or meaning you made. Examples: "They do not care," "I am not a priority," or "They are judging me."

The feeling or body signal underneath was:

Try naming emotion, sensation, urge, or need.

What I needed but did not say was:

Clarity, reassurance, space, help, respect, follow-through, comfort, or something else.

A clearer request for next time is:

Use a direct request: "Would you be willing to ____?"

A feeling can be real even when the first story attached to it needs checking.

REPAIR PRACTICE

Homework 4: Practice a Softer Start and a Better Repair

How a conversation begins often shapes whether it stays open long enough for both people to be heard.

Try these language swaps with a low-stakes frustration. The goal is not to soften away your concern. It is to state it in a form your partner can hear, then respond with repair instead of a counterattack.

Instead of	Try
"You never follow through."	"When the plan changed and I did not hear from you, I felt unsupported. Can we make a clearer plan next time?"
"You are overreacting."	"I can see this landed strongly. Help me understand what it brought up for you."
"You do not care how I feel."	"I am feeling hurt and I need to know that my experience matters to you."
"I already said I am sorry."	"I am sorry for the impact. What repair would feel meaningful, and what can I do differently next time?"
"Forget it. It does not matter."	"It does matter, and I need a short pause so I can say it without making things worse."

Practice a complete repair

- "I understand that the impact was ____."
- "My part in that was ____."
- "I am sorry for ____."
- "The next step I will take is ____."
- "Can we check in about this again on ____?"

REGULATION PRACTICE

Homework 5: Pause and Return on Purpose

A pause helps only when it includes a reliable return. Use this exercise to create your shared plan before you need it.

When either partner is flooded, continuing the conversation may lead to more hurtful words or shutdown. A pause is not a punishment or a disappearing act. It is a clear, respectful agreement to regulate and return.

1 Name the need for a pause

Try: "I want to keep talking about this, and I am too activated to do it well right now."

2 Name the return time

Choose a specific time, ideally within the same day when possible. Avoid vague promises to talk "later."

3 Choose your reset activity

Take a walk, drink water, breathe slowly, stretch, shower, write a few notes, or do something that settles your body.

4 Return with one sentence of connection

Begin again with: "I am back. I still care about this, and I want to understand."

5 Use the original topic

Return to the first concern rather than expanding into a list of unrelated hurts.

Our pause phrase is:

Choose language that sounds natural to both of you.

Our usual reset time is:

Write a realistic range, such as 20 to 45 minutes.

Our return plan is:

Name who will initiate, when, and how you will reconnect.

MAINTENANCE PRACTICE

Homework 6: The Weekly “State of Us” Meeting

A brief weekly check-in gives a relationship a place for small repairs before they grow.

Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes each week. Keep the structure predictable and resist using the meeting to launch a major conflict. If a larger issue comes up, write it down and choose another time or bring it to therapy.

Start with appreciation Each person names one quality, action, or moment they appreciated from the week.	Name one stressor Share one personal or practical stressor that may be affecting your availability, patience, or mood.
Make one request Choose a small, specific request for the next week. Make it something your partner can understand and respond to.	Repair one small miss Name a minor disconnection, hear each other, apologize if needed, and choose one repair action.
Plan one point of connection Choose a realistic shared activity, ritual, or moment of rest. It can be simple and does not need to be expensive.	Close with a summary Each person says one sentence about what they are taking from the conversation and what they will follow through on.

Practice	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Notes
10-minute check-in	■	■	■	■	■	
One appreciation	■	■	■	■	■	
Reflect before responding	■	■	■	■	■	
Pause and return when needed	■	■	■	■	■	

Practice Makes More Room for Connection

The goal of couples homework is not flawless communication. It is a growing ability to notice when you miss each other, slow down, ask more clearly, and come back with care.

Start small

One ten-minute practice done consistently is more valuable than a perfect plan that never becomes part of daily life.

Expect some awkwardness

New communication habits can feel unnatural at first. Awkward practice still counts as practice.

Use repair, not shame

A missed exercise or hard conversation is information. Notice it, discuss it, and choose a kinder next attempt.

Bring the real examples

Therapy can be a place to understand the moments that feel stuck and practice a new response together.

A relationship gets stronger each time both people choose curiosity, clarity, and repair over the urge to win or withdraw.

Affirmations for the Work Between Sessions

“We can learn to speak about hard things without making each other the enemy.”

“I can listen for meaning before I defend my intention.”

“I can ask for clarity instead of relying on assumptions.”

“A pause can protect our connection when we agree to return.”

“Repair is a practice we can return to after a miss.”

“Small acts of follow-through build trust over time.”

A Note From Dr. Natalie Ellis

Communication is a skill set, not a trait you either have or do not have. With practice, couples can become better at noticing miscommunication, naming what is underneath it, and building a more reliable path back to one another. Bring what you learn into your next session so the work can keep becoming more personal and useful.

Ready to explore these patterns more deeply?

Schedule a free consultation with Dr. Natalie Ellis, LCSW-QS

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