

Couple relationship audit



Relate

About this resource

Just as we schedule an annual MOT for our cars, it's important to regularly evaluate the health of our relationships as well. This toolkit is designed to help you do just that.

Rather than waiting for significant issues to surface, this resource helps you take a proactive approach. These exercises give you the chance to pinpoint small concerns before they morph into larger issues. They can also be an opportunity to celebrate what's going well in your relationship.

Take a moment when you're ready and energised to explore this resource. Remember, you're in the driver's seat. There's no need to rush through it all at once. Take the time you need to reflect on each aspect of your relationship.

While this tool is designed for independent use, we recognise that successful relationships are not one-sided. They require effort from all parties involved. That means you might want to suggest your partner fills out this resource too. And, if your exploration reveals areas that could benefit from additional support, remember, you're not alone. We are here to support you every step of the way. Discover more about relationship counselling options at [Relate.org.uk](https://www.relate.org.uk). You can count on us to support your journey towards healthier and more fulfilling relationships.

Self reflection

First, you'll start with self reflection, to explore your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in your relationship.

Try to be honest and patient with yourself as you go through this process and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

How do you feel in this relationship?

What are your expectation and needs from this relationship?

(For example honesty, shared appreciation, a satisfying sexual connection)

What are your long-term goals in this relationship?

(For example moving in together, becoming debt free, engaging in shared adventures)

Self-esteem

Self-esteem can sometimes feel like one of those words that, while important, is bandied around a lot, and can end up losing a bit of its meaning. But self-esteem is actually a really significant thing to get your head around. Having good self-esteem means you have a healthy and balanced belief in yourself - that actually, you're ok. And self esteem has a big impact on our couple relationships -- because often we accept the love we think we deserve.

Where does self-esteem come from?

Like much of our adult thoughts and behaviours, how we feel about ourselves mostly comes from how we were taught to feel about ourselves growing up.

If you grew up without much encouragement, or you weren't praised when you got things right, you might come to share this idea of yourself - that you're not all that great, and you're not deserving or worthy.

Working on your self-esteem

Here's our tips for how to develop good self-esteem...



Work on your relationships

Open up a bit more with people you trust and let them know how you're feeling. Letting people in can help relationships feel strong, and that will make you feel stronger too.



Be kind to yourself

Spend time thinking about the things you've achieved in your life, and the strengths and qualities you have as a person.



Talk to someone

There's nothing wrong with getting a bit of professional support. Our counsellors can help you develop your self-esteem.

Figuring out who you are

You'd have thought it would be easy to figure out who you are, given you spend all of your time in your own company. But despite that, many of us struggle to feel like we really know ourselves. It's a totally normal feeling.

Why is it so hard to figure out?



Who we are depends on how we feel.

Different situations bring our different sides of ourselves. Sometimes we feel happy and optimistic, other times not so much.



We're different depending on who is around

We act different around our parents than we do around our friends. And we act differently again around our partner.



Identity shifts over time

Who you are now is different to who you were when you were younger, and it will likely keep changing as you get older too.

Why it's worth doing anyway

Having a better sense of who you are can give you a foundation - a starting point from which you can better figure things out. It can help you measure your emotions and weigh up your decisions. And most importantly in this context, it can help you figure out what you want from your relationship.

How do you do it?

Usually it's a case of trying things out and paying attention to your own reactions. Discovering your identity is all about looking for clues. It can mean trying things out when it comes to relationships. Taking part in an exercise like this is a great first step.

How to tell your partner you're not happy in your relationship

Even this early on in the workbook, it might be becoming clear to you that you're not happy in your relationship. Feeling like this can be confusing, frustrating, and deeply upsetting. But people struggle with their relationships all the time and all relationships have their ups and downs. Sometimes, going through something tough can make you come out stronger on the other side.

Why do you feel unhappy in your relationship?

People reach this point for a range of reasons. Maybe you feel like you've become different people since getting together. There's nothing wrong with that: people change. But it can be hard for a relationship to keep up with the change, especially if you haven't had a chance to talk about what's happening. Maybe you feel like you aren't spending enough time together, or your partner isn't meeting your needs. Or maybe you're just not sure - all you know is you used to like this relationship and now you don't know if you do anymore.

How to figure out why you're unhappy in a relationship

Sometimes the best way to figure out why you're not happy in a relationship is to think about what you want. Luckily, that's exactly what you did in the first section. But there are some other questions to consider, like:

- When did you start feeling this way?
- Are there times when I feel more like this? Or less?
- What would make me feel happier?

Talking to your partner about it

Talking to your partner about this kind of thing can feel scary, awkward or uncomfortable. But it can also be a really useful way of getting to the bottom of what's going on and fixing it together. When you do have the conversation, try the following three tips:

1. Try to focus on your own feelings, and not blame your partner. Use 'I' phrases like 'I think' or 'I want'.
2. Listen to what they're telling you and try to avoid responding until they've finished speaking.
3. Keep calm. If things get heated or emotional, take a break and come back to the conversation later.

Commitment issues

People generally say someone has commitment issues if they seem unable to maintain a long-term relationship -- even when they'd like to. Feeling like your partner has commitment issues can be a stressful and isolating experience, and can leave you seriously doubting the future of your relationship.

What causes commitment issues?

Issues from childhood

Sometimes, early life experiences can have a bearing on how much someone wants to share themselves and their lives with a partner. Feeling rejected as a child might encourage someone to feel they're not worthwhile and fear rejection. Or feeling unable to provide the emotional support a partner would like is another reason why shying away from commitment might seem like a good idea.

A bad break-up

Things like having been dumped by a previous partner or having been betrayed can make it difficult to trust that a new relationship could work out differently. In situations like these, it can feel like the best way to protect yourself is to avoid getting into a position where you can get hurt again.

Fear of losing yourself

Being in a committed relationship does mean giving up some things to accommodate another person. Some people find the prospect of that too daunting. They might just prefer to live life on their own terms.

What if commitment isn't the issue?

Commitment issues are a real thing and affect many couples. However, because of its prevalence in popular culture, the term 'commitment issues' can also be misapplied -- sometimes as a way of avoiding more difficult or complicated truths.

Do they want to commit?

Ask yourself, is commitment really what your partner wants? For some people, that's simply not the end goal - or it may not be something they want at this stage in their life. It can be difficult coming to realise that you and your partner have different ideas and priorities - and even more difficult to accept it - but it's important to be able to have this kind of conversation if you want what's best for both of you.

The timing's off

It might be that you and your partner have different ideas on when commitment should be expressed. For some people, the feeling of being 'committed' is something that emerges slowly, over a long period of time, and may be something they're only able to express after they become well and truly settled in the relationship. If it's still early days, and you're looking for an expression of commitment, you may need to talk about your different expectations and see if there's a way to meet in the middle.

They're just not that into you

As painful as it might be, it may be that your partner's reluctance to pursue a committed relationship might mean that they're simply not as keen as you are on them. If you feel you aren't pushing in the same direction and this isn't likely to change anytime soon, it's important you're able to be honest with each other before unnecessary pain is caused.

What to do about commitment issues

While it can be frustrating feeling like your partner has commitment issues, it's important to remember a couple of things...

They aren't trying to hurt you

They're probably just looking to avoid something that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable.

Change takes time

Your partner might need space, time, and some form of external support before they're able to commit.

Consider your own wellbeing

It can be frustrating, tiring, and upsetting trying to forge a partnership with someone who isn't willing.

They may not know they're doing it

Many of these behaviours are based in subconscious thoughts or emotions

Avoid over-committing

Sometimes it feels like if you can show how committed you are, you'll finally get through to them. But this can go wrong.

Take a break

A break can give you both a chance to think about what you want to do next. That might be looking at what's possible together or apart.

Is this what you want?

Is this relationship the one you want? Or is it more about being with someone?

Are you communicating effectively?

Differences between partners are rarely the problem. It's how those differences are dealt with that's important. That's why it's so crucial that you're able to communicate effectively.

When you talk to a partner in a way that's clear, constructive, and collaborative, you can avoid so many arguments and misunderstandings that might otherwise cause trouble. This quiz helps you work out what your communication strengths and weaknesses are and suggests practical ways you can start to improve.

How often would you say you and your partner sit down to talk uninterrupted in an average month?

- A. Barely. We don't have enough time to sit down and chat.
- B. Occasionally, but not frequently.
- C. We talk about the important stuff when we need to.
- D. We make time to sit down and talk regularly.

Do you have a tendency to steer clear of certain subject areas (eg sex, money, chores) to avoid conflict?

- A. Yes, most of the time. It's easier.
- B. Quite a lot, as talking about these topics can mean we end up arguing.
- C. Occasionally, but I do try to be open about things.
- D. Nothing is off limits between my partner and I.

How easy is it for you and your partner to apologise to each other?

- A. We don't tend to apologise, we let things blow over.
- B. Not very easy. We have a tendency to argue about who should apologise first.
- C. It's not always easy, but we do usually manage it.
- D. We don't sweat the small stuff and tend to say sorry relatively quickly.

When you feel that your partner has treated you unfairly, how do you tend to react?

- A. I go quiet until my partner realises I'm upset.
- B. I tend to get angry and remind them of all the other stuff they've done that has upset me.
- C. I get distressed for a while, but eventually I calm down and let them know what's upsetting me.
- D. I'm specific about what's upsetting me so we can deal with it effectively.

When your partner tells you you've upset them, you tend to...

- A. Shut down and back away until things blow over.
- B. Remind them they're not perfect either.
- C. Get anxious as I don't like confrontation.
- D. Listen to what they are saying, acknowledge their feelings and talk through it.

How much would you say you trust your partner?

- A. Not much at all. They've let me down in the past.
- B. Sometimes I trust them, but there are times when I test them to see if they're telling the truth.
- C. I trust them most of the time.
- D. Trust is the basis of our partnership - and we trust each other to be honest.

When it comes to compromising, how flexible would you say you are with your partner?

- A. It's my way or the highway!
- B. We often end up in a power struggle where neither of us is willing to give way.
- C. Sometimes I give in to make things easier.
- D. More often than not, we try and meet each other halfway.

How quickly do you and your partner tend to resolve disagreements and move forward?

- A. Resentments tend to hang around and we can get stuck in a pattern of not talking.
- B. We can spend a long time arguing about who's right before coming to an uneasy truce.
- C. We don't usually let things drag on and usually just let the argument go.
- D. Quite quickly, we prefer to nip things in the bud rather than let them get out of proportion.

Results

Mostly As or Bs

You may have developed a defensive communication style with your partner.

Your tendency may be to argue first and ask questions later. You may also have a habit of criticising to try to score points, meaning rows often end up going round in circles.

It can be difficult at first, but there are steps you can take towards more effective and rewarding communication with your partner. You have a choice: you can either attack or you can talk. Talking is much more likely to result in the issue being resolved.

When you do talk, try to take responsibility for your own emotions, rather than blame everything on your partner. Use 'I' statements - 'I feel upset about...' rather than 'you' statements like 'you always...' or 'you never'.

If, in the heat of the moment, it all gets a bit much, take a break before you say something you'll regret. And agree to take turns to speak and not to interrupt one another.

Results

Mostly Cs

You work hard to communicate effectively with your partner, but sometimes feel a little anxious tackling more tricky subjects.

One or both of you may feel uncomfortable with confrontation and do all you can to avoid it. As a strategy, this works on the surface - as you both appear to maintain a calm exterior - but underneath there may be worries that just don't get expressed.

Burying feelings is not good for mental or physical health. Honest, constructive communication is about working as a team.

Try setting aside a specific time when you're both feeling relaxed to share any issues. This can enable you to more confidently express your feelings. If you're feeling unsure, try using 'I' statements - 'I feel upset when we fight' - rather than 'you' statements - 'you tend to criticise me'. That way, you're taking responsibility for your emotions and your partner is less likely to feel like they're being attacked.

Mostly Cs

You have developed an open and honest communication style with your partner.

You've got into the positive communication habit of nipping problems in the bud. You make time to talk regularly and you take the time to really listen to what each other is saying.

For you, communication is not about winning arguments or scoring points, it's about responding to each other, nurturing your connection and working as a team so the relationship is rewarding for both of you. Well done!

Communication

Here you'll explore your communication patterns, shining a light on what's working and revealing areas that could use some attention. Remember effective communication isn't just about speaking, but also listening to what your partner has to say.

How effectively do you communicate with your partner?

What are the common conflicts and misunderstandings that arise during communication?

How do you resolve conflicts in your relationship?

How to de-escalate an argument

Arguments are a part of any relationship. It can mean that you and your partner are letting each other know what's on your mind, instead of keeping things inside and growing resentful.

But if your arguments are turning really unpleasant on a regular basis, then over time it can cause real damage to your relationship. How do you get out of these negative patterns? Here are our top tips for de-escalating an argument.

Don't let things get heated in the first place

The best way to avoid an argument is to not let things get to the point where one is likely. On a basic level that might mean trying to recognise and address any negative patterns of communication that you and your partner might have gotten into. One example is the use of polarised language like 'we never', or 'it's always like this'. This can increase the chance of your partner feeling like they're being attacked.

Stop and take a step back

Sometimes avoiding an argument can mean swallowing your sense of pride and putting peace over justice - prioritising resolution over satisfaction. This means seeing what's about to happen and rejecting the temptation to allow it to continue, by walking away until you're ready to approach things again in a more constructive manner. This can be enough to make the difference between a discussion that goes off the rails and one that you're able to bring back under control.

Examine from a distance

One of the techniques practiced in a popular form of therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is attempting to interrupt certain patterns of negative thinking by avoiding engaging automatically with them, before examining them from an objective standpoint. The same principle can apply when it comes to arguing in relationships. When we argue with our partners, it's not uncommon for the actual cause of the argument to be different from the apparent cause. Ask yourself, 'why are we actually arguing?'

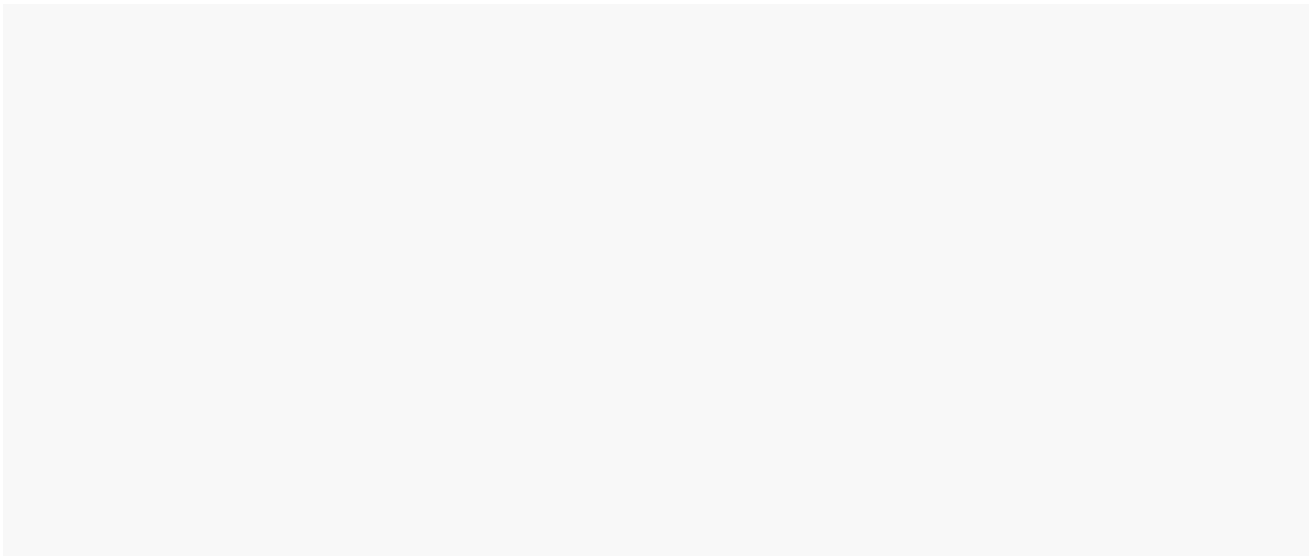
Strengths and challenges

It's time to celebrate your shared strengths and achievements while also acknowledging the challenges in your relationship to create a holistic picture of your journey as a couple. Every relationship has its ups and downs, and understanding these is crucial for growth and resilience.

What are the strengths of your relationship?



What areas of your relationship are challenging?



Values and goals

Here you will explore your individual and collective values, and envision the future you're building as a couple. This is a chance to align, recognising that shared values and goals can provide direction and purpose in a relationship.

What values are most important to you in a relationship?

What values do you believe are most important to your partner?

What shared goals do you have as a couple?

We have different values

Some people worry that having different values or ideas to their partner on things like religion, politics, or morality, means it's likely they're going to run into problems down the line. It's true that having opposing opinions on big subjects can create friction, it's by no means a sign that you can't work as a couple. Often having different opinions can be a great strength in a relationship. Here's some tips on what to do if you have different values to your partner...

Talk about your differences

If you have a disagreement, talk it over and listen to what each other has to say.

Find common ground

Even if your ideas are different, it's likely you agree on certain key things. Make sure you talk about these too.

Are they right?

Sometimes coming up against ideas that are different to our own can be an opportunity to learn.

Don't assume

Sometimes we assume a partner thinks like we do, only to find out further down the line that they don't. Talk about things early.

Try to see where they're coming from

You may understand your partner's opinion better if you understand the reasons behind it.

Don't force things

It isn't healthy to try to impose your beliefs on another person.

Know your boundaries

If you feel like the things you and your partner are disagreeing on are fundamentally important to you, think about how they might affect things in the future.

Agree to differ

Sometimes just acknowledging together that you have different ideas on something and that's okay can be useful.

Trust and security

In this section, you'll reflect on the stability and trust in your relationship.

How secure do you feel in this relationship?

What actions by your partner increase and decrease your trust?

Building trust in your relationship

Being able to trust the people in your life is one of the most important aspects of a relationship. Trust will develop differently within each relationship, but there are ways to ensure you've created a good environment for trust to thrive.

Set boundaries

Agreeing clear boundaries together is a crucial part of developing trust. Boundaries help you define how much space you're comfortable with in a relationship -- emotionally and physically.

Boundaries can be about all kinds of things: how much time you need to yourself, how comfortable you are telling other people details about your relationship, what hobbies you want to share and what you want to keep to yourself.

Talk about your boundaries

Set aside some regular time when you're feeling calm and relaxed and have a conversation about your boundaries.

You'll likely have different views on at least some 'types' of trust and your views may change over time as you share more experiences together. Something that seemed really important when you first met might not seem such a big deal after awhile.

Trust, like love, can develop and deepen over time or it can be destroyed in a few short hours by particular actions or words.

Recognise what you've learnt from other relationships

Most of us carry positive and negative learning from previous relationships or from our families. Recognising what messages we've learnt and the ways in which it may be affecting our behaviour is important in avoiding making the same mistakes over and over again.

Be open about doubts

Many people feel guilty about doubts. But if you do have them, try not to be afraid to speak them out loud. Usually, it's much healthier and more honest to discuss them, rather than bottle them up and hope they'll go away. Often, just saying them out loud will help you understand them better.

When trust is compromised

Every relationship has its ups and downs and you'll undoubtedly get upset by things each other say from time to time. Being able to deal with problems, big or small, is an important skill when it comes to maintaining resilient friendships and partnerships. If your trust in someone has been dented, you might find the following tips useful:

1. Stop and analyse how you're feeling -- Consider how these feelings may be influencing your behaviour and what you need to do to change things.
2. Think about your own part in what went wrong -- While it can be tempting to blame others when there's a disagreement or a fight, we'll usually be able to see there are things we could have done differently too if we're honest with ourselves. Do you need to apologise for your part in what happened?
3. Talk about what happened -- Take turns to communicate how you're feeling about the issue and listen to what each other has to say without interrupting.
4. Make some changes -- Think about what you might need to do differently to stop the same situation reoccurring. Discuss any possible changes together and agree on what you think would work for you both and try to carry out whatever changes you agree to.

How to be vulnerable

Being vulnerable with the people you care about is one of the best ways of developing close and fulfilling relationships. But being able to achieve that level of vulnerability - and understanding and trying to deal with the things that might make that difficult - can be a delicate proposition.

Why is being vulnerable so difficult?

It often means expressing the sides of yourself about which you have the least confidence or certainty, and allowing others to respond to them. It means letting go of some of the control you have over how others see you, and potentially compromising the image they have of you - an image you may have worked pretty hard to maintain!

But it's only by giving up a certain level of control that you can experience a higher level of mutuality in your relationship - a sense of knowing people more honestly, and being able to trust each other more deeply.

How to be more vulnerable

At the heart of the process is getting into the habit of expressing - and listening to - emotions. That might be as simple as, once a day, expressing some element of how you're feeling, sincerely and openly. One of the things that can be tempting if you struggle with being vulnerable is sharing your emotions along with some kind of negative behaviour - like saying how you feel, but then immediately making a joke, or apologising. It's important to try not to do this - but to simply express yourself, and then stay in that moment.

And for the person hearing this, it's important to mirror this process. People who struggle with vulnerability often struggle to accept feelings too. Again, it can be tempting to make jokes or express some sense of awkwardness - or even to respond negatively or say something defensive. But part of getting used to being open is allowing yourselves to sit in the moment and allow it to breathe.

You may find being more vulnerable with your friends makes it easier to do the same with your partner. It can make the habit feel like one you're practising generally - not one you only have to focus on in intense bursts, or when the stakes feel higher.

Feeling insecure

Feeling insecure in your relationship can be really painful and upsetting. You might feel like your partner is about to break up with you all the time. Or you might have trouble trusting them to not cheat on you. Feeling like this is exhausting, and can have negative effects in other areas of your life.

Where does insecurity come from?

If you and your partner haven't been communicating effectively about issues or making an effort to maintain your connection, you might start to feel like you're drifting apart. Insecurity can also stem from changes in your relationship. For instance, if you've moved in together or recently married, you may be feeling all kinds of new strains and pressures. If you aren't able to discuss these together, you can start to feel less confident in your ability to work as a team.

It can also come from issues surrounding self-image or self-esteem. We can sometimes carry feelings from past relationships into our current one – including ones with family members.

What can you do to address insecurity?

Keep things relaxed

Frame things positively to ward against defensiveness.

Say how you feel, not how you think they make you feel

Yep, it's those 'I' phrases again. If you're both blaming each other for everything, you won't get anywhere.

Make a plan

Think beforehand about what you want to say.

Pick the right moment

Try to talk when things are going well, not badly.

Listen

Even if what your partner has to say is difficult to hear, try to stick with it.

Come back to it

These things are rarely solved in one chat. It takes time and effort, so revisit things in a month to see how you're each getting on.

Action plan

Finally, it's time to translate your insights into actionable steps.

Based on your self reflection, what are some changes you want to make?

What are some specific actions you can take to improve your challenge areas?

How can you support each other's individual goals while still fostering your shared goals?

Moving forward...

Strengthening our relationships isn't something we do once. It's a lifelong exercise. Now is a great time to set a date for a future audit, maybe six or twelve months into the future. Decide now what you want to focus on in your next audit. You might even want to set some goals for your relationship in the future, so you can reflect on how far you've gone towards achieving them.

Chat to us

Hopefully this resource has helped you reflect on the state of your relationship.

You might have realised that your relationships need a bit of TLC - and that's totally normal. So if you need a chat, we're here for you.

Head to relatebooking.as.me/OneSessionTherapy to discuss your answers with one of our trained counsellors. Use the code AUDIT for £10 off a 60 minute session.

we can Relate