

The Relationship Therapy Group

www.trisf.com | 415-519-6446 | relationships@trisf.com

Core Negative Image Exercise

Helps Couples: End vicious and repetitive cycles

Target Behavior: To evaluate consistent and re-occurring thought patterns and relate them to your early childhood experiences. This tool will educate your partner on your projective process to stop unwanted behaviors and thoughts that support them.

Credit: Terry Real, LCSW

Description

A Core Negative Image (CNI) is your negative fantasy of your partner. It is who your partner becomes to you in the irrational, least loving moments. Each partner has a CNI, and each CNI reinforces the other. For example: The more she believes he's lazy, the more she cleans up after him. The more she cleans up after him, the lazier he becomes. Often times, your CNI is a direct carry over from childhood.

Learn how to work with the CNI – it can be the single most transformative aspect in relationship change. It will serve as your relationship compass. Even if your partner doesn't respond well – you are still disrupt the vicious cycle.

Step 1: Make the CNI Explicit

- **In a paragraph, write your CNI of your partner.** List out adjectives that describe your partner when he/she is at their worst. List out adjectives such as “lazy, stubborn, lazy,” etc
- **What would your partner's CNI be of you?** Write down what you think he will write about you.
- **Is there a childhood link of your CNI to your childhood experience growing up? If so, put a “check” next to each adjective**
 - **Example:** Does my CNI of my partner remind me of characteristics of my parents? Did I see any behaviors connected to my CNI experience in childhood? Did I see these behaviors growing up? Did anyone behave like this to me? Does what I want from him what I wanted from my parents?
- Write what your partner would say about the above
- In a safe and respectful manner, share the material. Journal what you heard

Step 2: Acknowledge the Truth of your CNI

- **This can be liberating.** Instead of denying the truth of your partner's CNI – think to yourself that it is not completely fabricated. Instead, consider it an exaggerated version at your absolute worst.
- **It does not acknowledge you at your best, or normal day.** Try on the idea exaggerated version is never the less, true. It's when the most immature parts of you grab hold of you.

Step 3: Identify CNI Busting Behaviors

- On a page of paper, and draw a line down the center. On one side, write out “CNI confirming behaviors” and on the other side, write “CNI busting behaviors.” Bulleted lists of each.

Step 4: Use CNI as a Compass

- This is your operating instructions that you will ever receive for your partner. Use it. Every time you behave in the CNI confirming behaviors, you will reinforce the CNI.
- *Any time you behave in times that emphatically different,* your behaviors reassure your partner. It has the potential to deeply touch your partner – you might be giving him/her what they didn't get growing up. That is profound.

Step 5: Set up Dead-Stop Contracts:

Relies on both partner's cooperation. An agreement to end the CNI vicious cycle. Whenever you hear that signal, you will come to a dead stop, whether you agree to my perception or not. You pledge to honor your side of the contract.