

Identity Personal Challenge Activity

TEST # 5: IDENTIFY YOUR CORE FEAR

This test to help you understand your core fears that accelerate conflicts.

← Taken from the DNA of Relationships by Gary Smalley →

Core Fears

The destructive dance that everyone engages in usually stems from fear. Every person struggles with some core fear. The two most common core fears are losing power with others or circumstances (feeling controlled) and the threat of disconnect with others. Most women have a core fear related to disconnection (separation), which is fear of not being heard, not being valued, losing the love of another or being alone. Most men have a core fear of helplessness (losing power), feeling controlled, fear of failure, or getting stepped on or misused.

- Most women have a core fear related to **DISCONNECTION**-they fear not being heard, not being valued, somehow losing the love of another.
- Most men have a core fear of **HELPLESSNESS** or feeling **CONTROLLED**-they fear failure or getting stepped on.

The Fear Dance

Identifying your core fear is important because fear is the music that starts the relationship dance. When we try to stop the other person from making us feel our core fear, the other person is simply revealing what our core fear is. In reality they are giving us an opportunity to choose a better course a better course of action that will allow us to deal with our core fear in a healthy manner.

The Steps in the Fear Dance

In essence, the cycle begins when your feelings are **hurt** or you experience that heart, gut emotional pain. Then you **want** to stop feeling this emotional and want the other person to stop treating you in such a way that “causes” you to feel the pain. You **fear** they won’t change, so you **react** and try to motivate them to change. In doing so, you start the same process in the other person. They hurt, want, fear and react. And the dancing begins. Remember, the issues that started the conflict are rarely the problem at all. The fear dance can start with money, room mate disagreements or anything. The problem is our core fears that keep the argument going and escalating.

Step 1- “You Fear”

You want to connect, be accepted, respected, etc. but you fear the other person will not change and treat you in ways that reduce your emotional pain. You want control but you fear you are powerless.

Step 2- “You React”

People fall into patterns of reacting when their buttons are pushed. Most people use unhealthy reactions to deal with fear. Most of us try different ways to change the other person’s words and actions so that we will feel better. As a result, our relationships are sabotaged. It’s how you choose to react when your fear button is pushed that determines harmony. (use the beginning story here to illustrate how they both reacted.)

Breaking the rhythm of the Fear Dance.

Once you identify your core fear, the solution often suggests itself. In most cases, all it takes is a true understanding of the real underlying problem...you own fears. The best solutions are realizing that your fear is yours and it is solved by turning to God and working with Him alone. You can use books, counselors and friends, but the solution does not involve changing the other party who “causes your pain.” No one or nothing “causes” your fears. You have them inside of you and they are yours alone.

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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:

- Unsure Apathetic Puzzled Upset Sad Hurt Disappointed
 Worned Tom up Shamed Uncomfortable Confused Worried Disgusted
 Resentful Bitter Fed up Frustrated Miserable Guilty Embarrassed
 Frightened Anxious Horrified Disturbed Furious Sullen
 Other: _____ Other: _____ Other: _____

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.

| X 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. |

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| X OR * | "AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICT, I FELT..." | WHAT THAT FEELING SOUNDS LIKE |
|--------|--|---|
| | 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. |

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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:

| X 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. |

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| X OR * | REACTION | EXPLANATION |
|--------|----------------------------|---|
| | 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. |
| | Passive-aggressive | You display negative emotions, resentment, and aggression in passive ways, such as procrastination and stubbornness. |

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| X OR * | REACTION | EXPLANATION |
|--------|-------------------------|--|
| | 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. |
| | Abdication | You give away responsibilities. |
| | Self-Abandonment | You run yourself down; you neglect yourself. |

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:

- a. The fear of being controlled (losing influence or power over others).
- b. 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.

Stopping the Dance

1. Identify your core fear or fears.
2. Accept your core fears as your own and stop trying to keep others from pushing your "fear buttons."
3. Move your blaming finger in towards yourself.
4. Thank God that you see your own fears and seek Him alone to work with you on your fears.
5. Mature or complete love will drive your fears from you (1 John 4:18)