

# **MARET Communication Exercise Packet**

*An Additional Component to the  
MARET Counseling and Assessment Software  
Relationship Assessments  
Containing Relationship Exercises*

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# MARET Communication Exercise Packet

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# **Introductory Information**

## **Introduction to the MARET Communication Exercise Packet**

This packet contains all of the *Exercises* that are located as separate documents elsewhere. Those documents are included in the section titled *The Communication Exercises*. This *MARET Communication Exercise Packet* will 1) give you a summary of each of the *Exercises*, 2) teach you how to incorporate the *Exercises* with the *MARET Relationship Tools*, and 3) extensively train you on the uses of each of the specific communication *Exercises* themselves.

In particular, this packet will help you to incorporate the *Communication Exercises* with the customized *Workbooks* and the comprehensive *Treatment Planner* – both of which are part of the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package. Those instructions will be included in the chapter titled *A Comprehensive Treatment Plan for Relationships*.

It is essential that the therapist, counselor or pastor master each of the *Communication Exercises*. Having each of these tools available during actual counseling sessions will be a great help in developing appropriate communication in the couple's relationship. These *Exercises* can be combined with the customized *Workbooks* and the actual *Workbook* questions might be used as topics of discussion. Specific items found on the comprehensive *Treatment Planner* may also be incorporated into the *Communication Exercises*.

The best way to incorporate the *Exercises* with the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package is to read through this *Communication Exercise Packet* completely from beginning to end. After you have read through this *Packet*, you will need to read through the actual *Communication Exercises* enough times so that you have a mastery of what their purpose is and how to perform them.

# Summary of Communication Tools and Their Uses

## Introduction

This chapter gives the therapist, the counselor or the pastor a general idea of what each of the *Exercises* will do for the couple. Each of the *Exercises* has a specific end goal in mind. This chapter is designed to familiarize the therapist with the *Exercises* without getting into too much detail. After completing this chapter, the therapist should understand the general concepts associated with each of the *Exercises* and the purpose or goal of the *Exercises*. The details associated with each of the *Exercises* will be explained fully in the second section of this document.

## Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise

The purpose for using the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise* is to teach the individuals how to communicate without using words or phrases that create friction, cause defensiveness, or arouse anger in the other person. The couple will learn words that are *Permitted Words* and words that are *Off Limits*. This is a written *Exercise* that is designed to be reviewed by the therapist and spoken by the couple to each other.

It is expected that it will take a number of attempts for the couple to thoroughly learn how to perform this *Exercise* correctly without using the *Off Limit Words*. The therapist will likely need to help each individual reword their statements until they are satisfactory and do not contain *Off Limit Words*.<sup>1</sup>

Once a couple can perform the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise* on their own; other *Exercises* may begin to be employed. It is suggested that the therapist at least try each of the other *Exercises* with the couple so that the couple is able to use each at home when they feel that it is necessary or appropriate.

The *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise* is the key to all other *Exercises*. Throughout the other *Exercises* the couple should endeavor as much as possible to refrain from using the *Off Limits Words* in favor of using *Permitted Words*. While this may not always be possible, it should become the norm in all communication.

## Backup a Minute Exercise

The *Backup a Minute Exercise* is designed to lessen or eliminate the affects of negative body language. This is most important when one or both of the individuals tend to use excessive body language in a negative communicative manner – especially when that body language is used as a “*tool*” to influence the communication of the other person.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *Permitted Words* and *Off Limit Words* will be thoroughly explained in the second section when the therapist is actually learning how to use the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise*.

In this *Exercise*, the couple sits back-to-back while communicating on an assigned subject. Thus, they are unable to see the body language that is being exhibited by the other individual.

### **Two-Minute Talk Exercise**

Many times, one individual will tend to dominate a conversation – especially when that conversation centers on a passionate subject. The *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* is designed to eliminate conversation domination.

During this *Exercise* each individual only has two minutes to get their point across. When the two minutes have expired, the speaker must stop their conversation and must yield to the other individual. This tends to equalize the conversation and prevent the use of conversational domination by one person or the other. As a by-product, it also causes both individuals to focus their thoughts, since they only have a short period of time to talk.

The *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* is designed to be used in a manner that allows the couple to completely talk out an entire subject – one two-minute segment at a time. So, this *Exercise* may go on for an hour or so before a conclusion is reached. That conclusion, if reached, should be written down by the therapist or the couple.

As much as possible, the therapist should discourage (and point out) the use of *Off Limit Words* learned in the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise*. Sometimes their use cannot be avoided. However, both individuals should endeavor to avoid those words whenever they can.

### **Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise**

Another common maladaptation in communication skills is when a person begins to speak prior to allowing the other person to fully end their thought. In the worst of cases, one individual will interrupt the speaking of the other person in mid-sentence.

This *Exercise* is designed to correct and prevent that maladaptation. This *Exercise* is good to use in conjunction with the *Two-Minute Talk Exercise*, although it can be used alone. Essentially, one person is allowed to speak. It is best to set an allotted time limit for their speaking (although that doesn't need to be done if there is no communication domination). When one person finishes talking, the other person must wait a full fifteen seconds prior to issuing any response at all. If they do not wait for the full fifteen seconds to transpire, then they forfeit their turn to speak.

As much as is possible, *Off Limit Words* should be avoided. The therapist may wish to impose some type of sanctions on a speaker who continues to abuse *Off Limit Words* by either ending their talk time or stopping the individual to correct them. Throughout all of these *Exercises*, *Off Limit Words* must be thought of as “poison” to communication; And, the more volatile the topic, the more critical it is to avoid these words. These words only cause strife and further argumentation. Individuals must learn to think out what they are going to say before they open their mouths to speak.

### **Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise**

The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is designed to be one of the last *Exercises* performed. Although the therapist, the counselor or the pastor may use the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* prior to the couple experiencing all of the other techniques, it is to the advantage of the couple to have all of the tools necessary and available prior to engaging in this intensive (and potentially emotionally charged) *Exercise*.

The core of the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is the *Emotional Expressions Workbook Exercise*. So, at least, the couple must have that *Exercise* mastered. During the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* the couple will spend thirty minutes filling out the *Emotional Expression Workbook* sheets in relation to as many significant conflicts that they can think of in the relationship. The couple should be separated by significant physical space while they are filling out these *Workbook* sheets so that there is no influence or pressure from the other person while the sheets are being completed.

The thirty-minute period of time is followed by a fifteen-minute period of time in which the conflicts that have been placed on the table during the preceding thirty minutes can be sorted and categorized. While no issues are actually dealt with during this *Exercise*, this *Exercise* is designed to get out all of the conflicts that need to be dealt with. This will allow the therapist to sort through those conflicts and prioritize treatment. This process will likely reveal volatility regarding specific conflicts, in some cases.

# A Comprehensive Treatment Plan for Relationships

## Introduction

The *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package already contains substantial tools to aid the therapist, the counselor or the pastor who is engaged in a marital or a premarital counseling situation.<sup>2</sup> The tools contained within this packet are designed to be used in conjunction with the already-existing tools incorporated in the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package.

These *Communication Exercises* are designed to help the therapist, the counselor or the pastor gain focus for the couple on specific issues and conflicts that have been raised during the *Assessment* process (whether the *Marriage Inventory* was used or the *Premarriage Inventory*). The customized *Workbooks* produced by the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* will factor into this whole process to a substantial degree.

Most couples that come to a therapist for some type of counseling have issues with communication skills. All of the *Communication Exercises* are designed to help the couple develop communication skills more appropriately. The *Exercises* will hopefully diminish inappropriate communication skills and enhance more appropriate behaviors.

## Things to do prior to Using the Communication Exercises

The previous chapter presented a general overview of all of the *Communication Exercises*. The last half of this document actually contains all of the *Communication Exercises* in their entirety. After reading the previous chapter you should have a fair comprehension of what each of the *Communication Exercises* can do to help a couple overcome communications deficiencies and bad habits. In the second half of this document you will be thoroughly instructed regarding each of the *Exercises* individually. You will learn how to comprehensively use each of them in actual therapy situations.

## The Marriage and Premarriage Inventories

The *Communication Exercises* have been designed to be used in conjunction with the *Marriage Inventory* or the *Premarriage Inventory*. Therefore, you should administer the appropriate *Inventory* to a couple prior to doing any type of therapy with them. Furthermore, the *Communication Exercises* have been developed for use with the customized *Workbooks* and the comprehensive *Treatment Planner*.

After you have administered the appropriate *Inventory*, you should review the results of the *Inventory* both by viewing the graphic results in the computerized version of *MARET* and by reading through the combined printout generated by the results. This will give you a very good idea of what needs to be accomplished to create a healthy relationship for the couple.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to gain access to these relationship tools, the therapist must be using version 2.2.96 or above of the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package. Contact *MARET* for details regarding upgrades.

During this process you should take note of all areas in the relationship that have elevated scores. This will present you with a general idea of the issues, concerns, and conflicts that must be resolved in the relationship to make it a healthy relationship.

## Creating Workbooks for the Couple

After you have reviewed the graphic results and the printed results, you should generate customized *Workbooks* for each individual. The customized *Workbooks* are generated based on the skews from the actual *Inventory* that the individual took. The *Workbooks* are generated from the most strongly elevated areas on the *Inventory* results. Thus, when you use the customized *Workbooks* in actual therapy you will be dealing with exactly what each individual needs to deal with. Each *Workbook* will likely be different than the other.

To generate customized *Workbooks* follow these steps.

- Run the ***MARET Counseling and Assessment Software*** and login using your therapist login ID.
- Click on the ***Client Mgmt*** option (near the top of the program screen)
- In the “*Begin Typing Last Name*” box, end the first initial of one of the individual’s in the couple. It does not matter if it is the male or the female.
- When you have located the appropriate individual, double-click on the small gray box next to their name. This will load all of that client’s data.
- On the right-hand side of the screen, locate the tab that says, “*Combined Results*” and click on that tab.
- In the middle of the “*Combined Results*” box, you should see another location in which you can begin typing the last name of the individual. In that box, enter the first initial of the last name of the other individual in the couple.<sup>3</sup>
- Once you have completed this process you should notice that both individuals’ names appear in gray bars. You should also see the test that has been administered to them. (If you have administered more than one *Marriage Inventory* or *Premarriage Inventory* you will need to manually select which one you wish to use).
- Once you have both individuals’ names appearing and you have a test attached to each person, click on the “*View*” button.
- The *View* button will take you to a graphics screen that contains summary information regarding the state of the relationship.
- Most every box that contains a number or a bar graph also contains a description of the scoring information represented in the box. To view the description, simply roll your mouse over each of the numbers in the boxes. A brief description of the score will appear. The same is true with the *Crisis Bars* at the bottom of the screen.<sup>4</sup>
- The “*View Report*” button will open a comprehensive *Microsoft Word*<sup>®</sup> document that correlates the results of both individuals in a single report. You will find that this report is very comprehensive and covers each of the areas measured by the ***Assessment***.
- In order to print the customized *Workbooks*, we recommend that you print one *Workbook* at a time. To print *Workbooks*, click on the button that says, “*Open Workbook*.” That option will take you to the *Workbook* printout screen.

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<sup>3</sup> If for some reason the input box for the person’s last initial does not appear, click on the Start Over button and that should bring up the appropriate box.

<sup>4</sup> The therapist will also note that the numerical scores in the boxes are multi-colored. There are actually three different colors that are used: lighter gray indicates a score in an acceptable range, dark black which represents a moderately elevated score, and red which indicates a strongly elevated score. These different colors immediately add to the interpretive concepts of this summary screen.

- Select one individual to print a *Workbook* for. In order to select only one individual, you should have a checkmark in the box of the individual that you wish to print for. To deselect an individual click on a checkmark and the checkmark will go away. It is best to only have one checkbox selected at a time.<sup>5</sup>
- After you have printed a customized *Workbook* for one individual, deselect that individual and select the next individual. Click on the “*Print Workbook(s)*” button to print the *Workbook*.
- [Once you have printed *Workbooks* for both individuals you have “*free*” access to the comprehensive *Treatment Planner*.]

## Using the Customized Workbooks with the Communication Exercises

Once you have printed customized *Workbooks* for the couple, carefully read through each of the *Workbooks*. You will notice that the first section of questions is always the same. This will likely be the only portion of the *Workbooks* that will be the same. These are general questions regarding the condition of the relationship that are always good to ask.

As you read through the *Workbooks* you will note that some customized *Workbooks* are quite lengthy. Others, however, may be quite short. The customized *Workbooks* are generated in relation to the score elevations located on the results for the actual *Inventory*. The fewer elevations that a person has, the shorter their customized *Workbook* will be.

The *Workbooks* can be distributed to the couple in one of two ways. We generally recommend that you choose the second option, unless the customized *Workbook* is quite short. 1) You may give each individual their complete *Workbook* and ask them to begin working through each of the questions in the *Workbook*; or, 2) you may give each individual only one section of the *Workbook* at a time. Each section covered by the *Workbook* is separated into logical page breaks so that you can distribute only one issue at a time, if you choose.

Distributing only one section at a time is best when the *Workbook* is larger in size. To give an individual the complete large *Workbook* is often too overwhelming for them. Thus, it is easier to break it down into smaller sections. This also allows the individual to focus on only one issue at a time so that the issue might be more comprehensively resolved.

Many of the sections of the *Workbook* are issues that will need to be discussed between both individuals in the couple. There are a few issues of personal concern that do not involve the other individual. But, most of the issues are issues that are of a concern to both individuals in the couple.

As individuals work through each section of their own customized *Workbook*, you may choose to employ many or all of the ***Communication Exercises*** included in the second part of this document. Doing this will accomplish two tasks: 1) It will instruct them practically in proper communication techniques; and, 2) it will help resolve each issue that is indicated in the customized *Workbooks*. Thus, while they work through their issues at the same time they learn to communicate more effectively.

## Using the Treatment Planner

In the educational portion of the ***MARET Premium*** website we will be instructing you in advanced techniques regarding the uses of the relationship tools. During that instruction we will discuss ways that

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<sup>5</sup> There are two reasons that we recommend that you only print one *Workbook* at a time: 1) so that you do not overload the buffer in your printer; and, 2) so that you do not confuse the printout results from one person to another.

the therapist may include issues raised on by the comprehensive *Treatment Planner* by employing some of the same *Communication Exercises*. That, however, is beyond the scope of this document since it requires extensive education regarding the *Treatment Planner* itself.

# **Communication Exercises**

## Expressing Emotion Caused by a Conflict with another Person Marital Communications

### Explanations of the Uses of *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*

#### Introduction

When dealing with any conflict resolution situation there are certain things that can be said and certain things that cannot be said in order to positively and proactively resolve the conflict. If the proper things are said the individuals involved in the conflict are more likely to resolve the conflict as “equals.” When a conflict is resolved in this manner, there is less of a likelihood that the same conflict will resurface in the future.

If, however, certain words that are “*off limits*” are used, then the conflict cannot be resolved in a healthy way; although, the conflict may reach some sort of a resolution. When improper words are used and a conflict is indeed resolved, then one party has “won” over the other party by force. This creates a parent/child relationship that will likely result in continuation of the same or similar conflicts and continuation of poor conflict resolution skills. Future conflict is likely to result in a self-generating cycle of dysfunction. In some cases, the dysfunctional problem solving mentality may spread to other areas of conflict and improper relational styles. Massive relational breakdown is not outside of the question when this process ensues.

This document focuses largely on a simple (but difficult) exercise that is found at the end of the document on a separate sheet of its own. That document is titled the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*. The *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* may be reproduced by the owner of the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* for purposes of conflict resolution within 1) your organization, 2) for marital counseling, 3) for premarital counseling, or 4) for any other situations in which conflict between two or more “opposing” groups or parties has arisen.

The materials that appear prior to the actual *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* explain the uses and applications of that form. You are encouraged to look at the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* while reviewing this educational information so that you become completely familiar with it. Expert use of the *Worksheet* is required in order for your employment of it to be effective in therapy situations.

When these techniques are learned and consistently practiced, they will result in significant reduction of argumentation regarding issues that involve differences of viewpoints. While this form doesn't necessarily always lead to resolution of conflict, it helps to clarify both the emotion involved in the conflict and the desired direction that both parties would foresee as reasonable for a resolution in the future. A different and slightly more complex *Worksheet* is needed to resolve issues that are not simply resolved by this *Worksheet*.

## Overview of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*

### General Information

There are certain words that act as negative emotional “*triggers*” when attempting to resolve a conflict in a relationship. Since both parties in the conflict usually feel quite strongly regarding their positions in the conflict, it is commonplace to use those “*trigger words*” to establish a battle line in the conflict. This immediately causes an impasse in proper and fair communication. Throughout this literature we call these trigger words “*Off Limit Words*.” They are not allowed to be used in the construction of any statements related to the resolution of any argument, disagreement, or conflict. Both *Permitted Words* and *Off Limit Words* are listed on the actual *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* for the convenience of the individual filling out the sheet.

While the use of “*trigger words*” initially appears logical, at the same time their use is also largely – if not completely – ineffective. In fact, in more cases than not, their use can be completely contrary to resolution of a conflict and may result in significant breakdown in other areas of the relationship. Thus, we must learn the “*triggers*” and we must avoid the triggers at all cost. That is simple to say; it is, however, hard to perform in the real world. Conflict causes emotion. Emotion arouses a desire to “*win*.” It also generates a fear of losing. That generates the “*need*” to use the forceful (and very negative) triggers (often words that should be considered as *Off Limits* in any conflict resolution).

### Words that Help and Words that Hurt

The *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* is structured so that the user (the individual engaged in any conflict) should fill in the blank lines with appropriate phrases. Those appropriate phrases may not include any of the *Off Limit Words*. They may only include *Permitted Words*.

Below you will find an incomplete list of *Permitted Words* and *Off Limit Words*. There are certainly others that can be added to the list and the user is encouraged to think through the philosophy of this practice and add words to either side as appropriate to specific situations.

Generally, words that appear on the *Off Limits Words* list are words that single out the other party in the conflict. When another party is singled out, that process usually results in the creation of defensiveness. Defensiveness immediately shuts down the process of fair and open communication – the key to conflict resolution.

Contrarily, the *Permitted Words* are all words that focus on the individual that is speaking. This leads the listener to assume that the party speaking is taking responsibility for their feelings and actions to some degree. *Permitted Words* are words of self-expression and are not seen largely as attacking, condemning or isolating the other party.

The therapist, counselor, or pastor should understand that this exercise will be quite difficult when a relationship has largely or completely been structured around the use of *Off Limit Words*. Individuals will have a hard time not using *Off Limit Words* in their “*fill in the blank*” statement constructions. The therapist will likely need to give significant aid to those individuals to help them formulate their statements so that *Off Limit Words* are not used. The therapist should also be ready for an individual to object to the exercise. That is not uncommon when an individual has a temperament that leads them to believe that they are right and the other party is absolutely wrong. This might present a significant problem for the therapist that will need to be worked through.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon that an individual will try to use action words – verbs – in the first “*fill in the blank*” statement. This may not be done. Only feelings may be expressed in the first line – nothing else.

## **Unifying the Conflict Resolution Sheet**

Prior to filling out the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*, the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* needs to be completed. If only one individual is stating that there is a conflict, then that individual will fill out the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* from their own vantage point without outside influence or input from the other individual. That statement will essentially become the statement of conflict. Both individuals will then proceed to completion of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets*. Both parties will have full access to the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* during the process of working through the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets*.

If, however, both individuals are confessing that there is a conflict that revolves around roughly the same issue, then both individuals will need to fill out their own separate *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*. Neither individual will examine the contents of the other person’s *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* while they are compiling it and there may not be a mutual compilation of the material while the sheets are being filled out. Each person must clearly state what the conflict is in their own words without influence from the other person.

## **Reconciliation of Two Conflict Resolution Sheets**

Once both individuals have completed a *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* (in the case of perceived mutual conflict) then the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* need to be reconciled into a single *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*. There may be only one *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* per perceived conflict.

This process may require some compromise on the part of both individuals. There may be points on each of the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* that conflict or are quite divergent from points on the other individual’s sheet.

Here are some pointers regarding the amalgamation of information from the two different *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*. If these points are followed carefully, there should be little effort in amalgamating the two separate *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*.

- First of all, the section immediately below regarding “*How to Write a Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*” should be followed very carefully. This will prevent most amalgamation issues.
- Second, all points on each of the two sheets that are similar or exactly the same should be recorded. These are known factors in the conflict.
- Third, points of difference should be carefully examined. The following questions should be asked: 1) Are divergent points really related to the current conflict as seen in the common points? 2) Is there another conflict that has been incorporated into the current conflict that should be dealt with separately? 3) Is there extraneous material in one of the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* that is unnecessary material pertaining to the current conflict? And, 4) Are there valid points from one person or another that need to be included in the current conflict?

The result of these efforts must be a comprehensive and single *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*. Without such, work cannot begin on the actual conflict.

## How to Write a Conflict Resolution Sheet

The *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* must be exactly that: It must be a *summary* and not a novel. Later, we will discuss *Permitted Words* and *Off Limit Words*. While we have not yet discussed those issues, the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* must abide by all of those rules. The *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* may not contain *Off Limit Words*. It may only contain *Permitted Words*. Learn those words well prior to even beginning the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*.

Take these factors into consideration when creating the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*.

- Make every attempt to keep the *Conflict Resolution Summary Statement* to one sentence clearly stating the problem in general terms.
- If needed, use two sentences. However, those two sentences should be directly connected to each other informationally.
- As a last resort, go on to the third sentence. This begins to “muddy the waters” regarding the conflict. However, sometimes situations are complex and a third sentence is needed. If you need more than three sentences then you need to think harder and consolidate. Are you beating a dead horse? Are you including two conflicts and attempting to combine them as one? Are you violating the *Off Limits Word* rule? In short, simply and plainly state the conflict in easy-to-understand terminology. Then, stop.

## Examining the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*

Before moving to the actual *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*, we must say that only one conflict at a time may be included on this *Worksheet*. If there is more than one conflict that needs resolution, then more than one sheet must be used. This *Worksheet* must be used solely and completely for only one conflict. The conflict must be well-defined prior to the expressions that are stated on the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*.

Finally, only one conflict should be addressed at a time. Everyone that is involved in the conflict must agree that one and only one conflict will be discussed without the discussion “drifting” toward other issues of conflict that also must be worked out. One at a time! Only the conflict listed on the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* should be allowed for open discussion.

Derailing the process of conflict resolution by attempting to side-track into another (maybe somewhat related) conflict is a tactic that is often used by an individual that feels that their defenses are weak when it comes to resolving the current conflict that is “*on the table*”. This must not be allowed and therapists should not allow individuals to practice these techniques on their own until the derailing process no longer exists in practical office visits. An individual who consistently derails the current conflict discussion may need additional, individual counseling. Their behavior is not only non-constructive, but it is actually harmful to the development of strong communication skills.

Below is a simple list of some of the *Permitted Words* and some of the *Off Limit Words*. Other words certainly apply and should be added by either the therapist or the individual (with agreement of the therapist).

Permitted Words	Off Limits Words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I</li> <li>• We</li> <li>• Our</li> <li>• Us</li> <li>• My</li> <li>• Me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You</li> <li>• Your</li> <li>• You are</li> <li>• You're</li> <li>• Proper names of any individuals</li> <li>• They (when referring other relational entities; e.g., parents, children, etc)</li> <li>• Verbs of any type for Blank #1</li> <li>• My spouse/significant other</li> </ul>

### The Actual Emotional Expressions Worksheet without Comment

I feel (1) \_\_\_\_\_

When (2) \_\_\_\_\_

In the future / next time, can we (3) \_\_\_\_\_

### Explanation and Use of Blank (1)

**Blank (1)** should be filled in with a feeling or emotive word *only*. It may not be filled in with an action word (e.g., a verb) in any way or for any reason either as a primary or a secondary word. No action words (verbs) are allowed – only feeling words.

Why is this? It would appear (and might be true) that an action has aroused an emotion in the individual. Why not get right straight at the action that caused the emotion? Simply, because the emotion is the “object” that is interfering in the relationship. The emotion and not the action has caused the conflict. It is the emotion that must be resolved – even if that emotion was caused by a logical action (verb word). The individual suffering from the conflict is suffering from that conflict because an emotion has been evoked. Thus, the first thing we need to address is the emotion that has been triggered. It must be identified before a behavioral solution can be achieved.

The individual filling out the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* must be meticulous in avoiding the *Off Limit Words*. They cannot occur in the **Blank (1)** line at all. They are completely banned! This line is reserved only for the emotions that the individual is experiencing. That’s it. Only personal emotions can be expressed.

When *Off Limit Words* are used, we are attributing those emotions to another individual’s actions (directly or indirectly). However, like it or not, our emotional reactions and our emotional states belong to

us – not to the direct or indirect actions of another person. We make a conscious or an unconscious choice to exhibit an emotion related to the action of other people.

For example, someone may choose to call us a derogatory name – maybe a really bad name. We have the choice to react with negative emotion to that name or to not react with negative emotion to that name. Practice leads us to react in appropriate ways so that negative emotions are not aroused when others do or say things that are totally inappropriate. No one has control over our own emotional state – no one other than us. We choose our own emotional reactions. Thus, **Blank (1)** must express the (usually) negative emotional reaction connected to the “when” statement to be discussed next.

We must take charge of our emotional reactions and learn positive means of dealing with others so that their actions and statements don’t arouse those negative emotions. At the same time, we must take responsibility for the negative emotions that continue to be aroused. The emotion aroused in the “I” person (**Blank (1)**) must be the first thing that is expressed since it is the emotion that is causing the real conflict – not the action. The action is secondary and will be dealt with under **Blank (3)**.

Therefore, the first statement (**Blank (1)**) must include only emotions without any action words at all (especially actions words that are attributed to the other person). Probably the most often used action word that is used in **Blank (1)** is the word “make.” “You *make me* (*make* is an action word) ....” Wrong. No other person can “make” us feel a certain way. We choose to feel the way we do based on past maladaptations and miscommunications in the relationship. No one makes us feel anything that we do not want to feel.

Here are some good examples of how **Blank (1)** can be completed:

- \* I feel (1) angry *when* (2)....
- \* I feel (1) frustrated *when* (2)...
- \* I feel (1) depressed *when* (2) ...
- \* I feel (1) isolated *when* (2) ....
- \* I feel (1) trapped *when* (2) ...

Notice that each of these statements focuses on the “I” person and that every following statement is a statement related to emotion – not to the actions of the other person.

Here are some poor examples of how **Blank (1)** can be completed. These are unacceptable and must be rejected by the therapist and corrected by the individual.

- \* I feel (1) **you make me** angry *when* (2)....
- \* I feel (1) **you make me** frustrated *when* (2)...
- \* I feel (1) **you make me** depressed *when* (2) ...
- \* I feel (1) **you** isolate me *when* (2) ....
- \* I feel (1) **you** trap me *when* (2) ...

Highlighted words use **Off Limits Words** that must be excluded from the **Blank (1)** statement. The therapist must help the individual correct these statements so that they are more in line with appropriate statements as indicated in the good examples section.

## Explanation and Use of **Blank (2)**

We have sufficiently explained the information that needs to be included in **Blank (1)**. Clients should demonstrate expertise in filling in this **Blank** before they move forward to **Blank (2)**. **Blank (2)** gets

increasingly more complex and logically leads the individual toward the use of *Off Limit Words*. *Off Limit Words* are still off limits when filling in **Blank (2)**. This really presents a challenge. This challenge is most significant since **Blank (2)** is associated with *when* the **Blank (1)** emotion occurs. It is logical to say, “I feel angry when *you*...” (Which is an *Off Limit Word*...)

However, the focus must remain on the individual who is speaking and not on the other person. When the blame or focus is shifted to the other person, then the speaker is no longer taking responsibility. They are shifting responsibility to the other person. This cannot be allowed. A word of caution to the therapist: This will take some time (and probably some frustration on the part of the individuals) to learn how to do this correctly. They will actually need to think before speaking! What a novel idea!

Here are some poor examples of how **Blank (2)** can be completed. These are all common and very natural occurrences. Throughout this section we will put (OLW) after any *Off Limit Words* that are used. This will show you the “mistake” that has been made in communication.

- \* I feel (1) angry *when* (2) **you** (OLW) treat me like a child.
- \* I feel (1) frustrated *when* (2) **you** (OLW) cut me off in the middle of a sentence.
- \* I feel (1) depressed *when* (2) **you** (OLW) stay out later than you say you were going to stay out.
- \* I feel (1) isolated *when* (2) **you** (OLW) make me go places that I don’t want to go.
- \* I feel (1) trapped *when* (2) **you** (OLW) tell me what I have to do.

In each of these examples, the individual has chosen to use the “*you*” *Off Limit Word*. This immediately points a finger of blame at the other person and makes them completely responsible for the feelings that have just been expressed. “*My feelings are not my fault, they are your fault!*”

Now, let’s turn it all around and look at the right way that the statements above should have been worded. Throughout this section we will put (PW) after the *Permitted Word* that has been used instead of the previous *Off Limit Word*.

- \* I feel (1) angry *when* (2) **I** (PW) am treated like a child.
- \* I feel (1) frustrated *when* (2) **I** (PW) am cut off in the middle of a sentence.
- \* I feel (1) depressed *when* (2) **our** (PW) agreed upon time barriers are broken.
- \* I feel (1) isolated *when* (2) **I** (PW) am coerced into going places that **I** (PW) don’t want to go.
- \* I feel (1) trapped *when* (2) **I** (PW) am told what **I** (PW) have to do.

You will notice that in each of the above cases, the focus remains on the speaker. The other individual is not indicted in any way as the cause of the feelings or the (sometimes sublimated) actions. “*I feel that I...*” rather than “*I feel that you...*”

It is very helpful at times for the speaker to use the passive voice (rather than the active voice) when completing **Blank (2)**. It doesn’t always work, but many times it does. Filling in **Blank (2)** will take some practice on the part of even the individual who is sincerely desirous to make a communication change. For the individual who really doesn’t think they need to change, or doesn’t want to change, the alteration in speaking mentality may be nearly impossible. Personal counseling may be the best route to choose if that impasse is encountered since it appears that the individual may have other personal issues to deal with.

### **Explanation and Use of Blank (3)**

In **Blank (1)** we learned to express feelings. Some of those feelings – probably most of them – stem from some action on the part of another person. In **Blank (2)** we learned how to express a “hint” of the action

that brought about the negative feeling expressed in **Blank (1)**. Now, in **Blank (3)** we will come to our own personal suggested resolution to our negative feelings (**Blank (1)**) brought about by the actions stated in **Blank (2)**. It is important that this **Blank** is always filled with a future outlook. That is why we use the phrases “*next time*” or “*in the future.*” It is also important that **Off Limit Words** are not used.

Using these phrases subtly “*hints*” that the “*past is the past*” and that the speaker is willing to forgive and forget it. We should endeavor to forget the past and move on to the future. Any individual who is willing to hold grudges and to use them is incapable of proper communication. They can only manipulate. All of their communication – in fact their whole lifestyle – will be self-centered.

We will begin, again, with some negative resolution statements. Each one of these statements contains an **Off Limits Word**. That **Off Limits Word** will be followed by (OLW). The core statements for **Blank (1)** and **Blank (2)** are from the positive statements above. So, they are OK. It is the **Blank (3)** statement that is improperly stated.

- \* I feel (1) angry *when* (2) **I** (PW) am treated like a child. (3) In the future, I want **you** (OLW) to treat me like an adult rather than a child.
- \* I feel (1) frustrated *when* (2) **I** (PW) am cut off in the middle of a sentence. (3) Next time, I don't want **you** (OLW) to cut me off in the middle of a sentence.
- \* I feel (1) depressed *when* (2) **our** (PW) agreed upon time barriers are broken. (3) In the future, I would appreciate it if **you** (OLW) lived up to your time commitments.
- \* I feel (1) isolated *when* (2) **I** (PW) am coerced into going places that I don't want to go. (3) In the future, I would appreciate it if **you** (OLW) didn't force me to go places I didn't want to go.
- \* I feel (1) trapped *when* (2) **I** (PW) am told what I have to do. (3) In the future, I don't want **you** (OLW) to tell me what I have to do.

While all of these suggested corrections might be technically correct (we are not here to argue one way or another) the way that they are stated puts the secondary party – the one receiving the statement – in a very negative response mode. There are right ways to say things and there are wrong ways to say things.

When the right response is given, however, it always leaves an opening for the secondary party to respond. That means that there may have to be further discussion and deliberation regarding issues. Compromises might need to be made. In fact, maybe the desires of person #1 (the speaker) are illegitimate and that individual may have to concede that they are wrong in feeling the way that they do. That prospect will leave person #1 with the need to deal directly with the feelings that they have had and they will need to make personal changes so that they no longer have the negative feelings that they have. Maybe their feelings are unwarranted and due largely to control issues rather than real relationship issues. [More will be discussed about this issue in the next section.]

Before we get to that section, however, let's turn the improper statements above around and word them in a more appropriate manner so that party #2 (the party being spoken to) is not under indictment. We will put (PW) next to each appropriate response, as was the case in the previous section.

- \* I feel (1) angry *when* (2) **I** am treated like a child. (3) In the future, **I** (PW) want to be treated as an adult rather than a child.
- \* I feel (1) frustrated *when* (2) **I** am cut off in the middle of a sentence. (3) Next time, **I** (PW) would appreciate being able to complete **my** (PW) sentences.
- \* I feel (1) depressed *when* (2) **our** agreed upon time barriers are broken. (3) In the future, **I** (PW) would appreciate more communication about **our** (PW) time commitments.

\* I feel (1) isolated *when* (2) **I** am coerced into going places that I don't want to go. (3) In the future, **I** (PW) would appreciate more communication about **our** (PW) mutual engagements and **my** (PW) involvement in them.

\* I feel (1) trapped *when* (2) **I** am told what I have to do. (3) In the future, **I** (PW) want to be able to run **my** (PW) own life.

You will notice that the “*I* person” in each of these cases has successfully expressed an emotion that bothered them, expressed why the action of the other person bothered them without condemning or indicting the other person, and has suggested a solution from their own viewpoint that does not involve “forcing” the other individual to accept that viewpoint.

The table is now open for discussion....

### **Open Communication and Debate**

Once one side or both sides have stated their opinions on a specific conflict, there should be room for open discussion. This will be a difficult endeavor since it will be easy to fall back on the “blame game” and begin to use the *Off Limit Words*. The therapist should help the couple develop the skills to stay away from this type of behavior and to develop assertive personal statements regarding self and self-interest, rather than attempting to make the other individual feel guilty.

Future **MARET** communication tools will add to this tool. Those tools will actively engage therapy methods that create a healthy debate format so that individuals will be able to work through the initial issues laid out by this simple exercise.

## Summary Statement for Users

This process may at first seem cold and way too calculated. Sometimes education does take some time and sometimes education – especially reordering the way we think and feel about a specific subject – is mechanical. However, as time goes on and you continue to practice the techniques that you learn in this exercise they will become “*second nature*” to you. They will no longer seem like a cold and calculated process. Give the whole process some time. It is not easy to learn new techniques – especially if those techniques require you to expose certain areas of yourself that you have kept “*off limits*” for a while.

You may use this exercise in one of two ways. First, if only one person in the couple believes that there is a significant conflict that needs to be addressed, then that individual will be the only one filling out the ***Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet***. Those pages will be presented orally to the other person. This will probably be the primary means by which this ***Emotional Expressions Worksheet*** will be used.

However, if you and your significant other both agree that there is a mutual disagreement regarding the same or similar conflict, then you will both fill out the ***Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*** that follows. You will take turns expressing the information that is presented on the sheets.

No individual should attempt to use these sheets until they have used them in actual therapy with a counselor, a therapist, or a pastor. Those individuals will teach you the proper techniques to use each of the components of this exercise.

In the case where both individuals are filling out the ***Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet***, then you will need to reconcile those two sheets in the exercise. Both of you will need to continue to refine exactly what the conflict is and come to a single and unified statement regarding the conflict. If you can’t even define the conflict, then you cannot resolve the conflict. Thus, that is the first step. Your therapist will help you learn techniques to accomplish this unified statement.

**Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Conflict # or Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence #1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sentence #2 (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sentence #3 (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Combined Conflict Resolution Statement for Individual** (compiled from the sentences above)

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Emotional Expressions Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Conflict # or Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I feel (1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When (2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In the future / next time, can we (3) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Instructions:

All of the blank spaces may contain *Permitted Words*. None of the blank spaces may contain *Off Limits Words*. Refer to the chart below for *Permitted Words* and *Off Limits Words*.

Permitted Words	Off Limits Words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I</li> <li>• We</li> <li>• Our</li> <li>• Us</li> <li>• My</li> <li>• Me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You</li> <li>• Your</li> <li>• You are</li> <li>• You're</li> <li>• Proper names of any individuals</li> <li>• They (when referring other relational entities; e.g., parents, children, etc)</li> <li>• Verbs of any type for Blank #1</li> <li>• My spouse/significant other</li> </ul>

**Final Resolution to the Conflict**

Conflict # or Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

**Initial Combined Conflict Resolution Statement** (copied from page 15)

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**Agreed Upon Resolution to the Conflict**

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We, the undersigned individuals, agree that the conflict listed above has been successfully and fully resolved between us. Our signatures below indicate that mutual reconciliation of the conflict. This resolution is mutual and no coercion from either party has brought about this resolution.

Significant Other Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Other Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Backup a Minute Exercise

## Introduction

We have all learned the importance of body language. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, but if individuals are facing each other in a room everyone involved in a conversation is communicating something with their posture – the position of their arms, their legs, whether or not they are sitting up or slouching down, how they are using their hands, facial expressions, and so on.

When a couple is attempting to communicate in a relationship, body language can say more than words ever will. A pointed finger is always a threat. Crossed arms means that the person has closed down communication lines or is cowering under too much pressure. A stern look on the face is a threat to many people and will cause them to make concessions that they might not want to make.

All of these are extra added “bonuses” that we need to deal with when we are attempting to get a couple whose communications skills are not up to par. The bonus, however, is usually negative. The body language exhibited by the leader of the couple will often subtly force the other individual to say or even do things that they do not wish to do.

So, why don't we eliminate body language from the communication picture altogether? That should somewhat “level” the playing field. The individual who is the “underdog” in the communications race will have a little more of an advantage. Now they are no longer threatened by the shaking fist, or the flailing hands, or the stern and mean grimace on the face of the bully-gone-wild.

How do we propose to eliminate body language as an effective means of negative communication? We propose to do so by making the communicating couple sit back-to-back. This exercise will teach the therapist how to position the couple in a manner that body language is turned off completely. This may be a very effective tool – especially if it is combined with other exercises.

When the case is substantial and one individual appears to have complete communicative control over the other, then there is a possibility that the combination of *Backup a Minute*, *Two Minute Talk*, and *Fifteen-Second Break* combined together will effectively shut down the bully and allow the other person the time they need to talk. Oh, maybe you should throw in the *Emotional Expressions Workbook* as a final kicker. That should completely finish off the bully....

## How to Do the Backup a Minute Exercise

The following guidelines will help you use the *Backup a Minute Exercise* effectively. Feel free to combine it with other exercises, as needed (see *Other Options* below).

### Items Needed

Two chairs, preferably without really high backs on them.

## **Procedure**

Seat the couple, one in each chair. Establish the rules of communication. Those rules may be whatever you would like them to be. You may establish time limits on talking or anything else that you would like. Observe the couple while they are speaking to make sure that the communication remains verbal only and that one person or the other doesn't attempt to use body language or other methods of communicating.

Note that body language can still be used – even when the couple is back-to-back in a chair. They will be able to move their hands around enough so that the other person can see the hands. They can also do things like bang on the chair or stomp their feet. These are all elements that must be eliminated in the discussion.

The goal is to eliminate every aspect of body language or non-verbal communication. Continue this exercise until body language is no longer an influence in the conversation.

## **Other Options**

This exercise is also easy to combine with the *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* and/or the *Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise*.

# Two-Minute Talk Exercise

## Introduction

When you listen to the communication of a couple, usually you will find one individual who sits quietly and listens. The other individual is the “yapper” – they never shut up. Yap, yap, yap. They must be assured that you as a therapist know that they are there. They must know that you understand their viewpoints. They must speak in such a manner so as to let you know they are right (not all of the time, but mostly).

Communication cannot exist if it is not mutual. That means allowing each individual to get out what they need to get out without the other person “flooding” the conversation with their own stuff. That is hard to do in most cases.

However, we have designed an exercise that will allow equal opportunity for discussion – whether the yapper likes it or not. A word of warning to the therapist: This one is usually hard to enforce since the yapper will always try to stretch out their allotted time to talk. “*Just a minute...I’m almost done...Give me a few more seconds...Oh, this isn’t fair!*” That’s what you should be prepared for. I can almost guarantee that you will hear it, if you have a yapper in the crowd.

This exercise allows each individual to talk for a timed period of two minutes only. After the two minutes, they are done and the other person takes the floor for their allotted two-minute period of time. The therapist must ensure that neither person under any circumstances is disrupted by the “*listener.*” If there is a disruption, the speaker’s time starts over. During the talking time of the current speaker, the listener can engage in only one of two activities – they are the only two activities allowed: They must either be taking notes or their hands must be folded in their lap.

Furthermore, if the listener uses any other methods of disruption associated with body language (speaking, shaking their head, grunting, moaning, rolling their eyes, etc), the therapist should stop the clock and allow the speaker to start over. No interruptions are allowed during speaking time – none. The options are taking notes or folded hands in the lap. That’s it.

## How to Do the Two-Minute Talk Exercise

The following guidelines will help you use the *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* effectively. Feel free to combine it with other exercises, as needed (see *Other Options* below).

### Items Needed

You will need some type of reliable timing device that is able to measure time in minutes. Some timers sold at grocery stores are able to be set for measurement of single minutes up to about 5 minutes. This would be an optimal timer. It would also be nice if the timer had a “dinger” on it so that everyone knew when it went off.

Using a stop watch is a secondary method of timing. The problem with the stop watch is that it is a much more clumsy method of measurement. It usually takes time to set up and therefore a delay will be present prior to the beginning of speaking.

Look around and find the best option for you to measure two minutes as accurately as possible.

Remember, that there is also a *Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise* and a *Thirty-Minute Exercise* included in this exercise series. If at all possible, you will want to purchase a timer that is capable of measuring fifteen seconds, two minutes and thirty minutes accurately. You don't want to have to purchase three different timers.

You might also suggest to clients that they purchase the same type of timer for use at home.

## Procedure

- Allow each individual two minutes to state their initial view(s) on a specific conflict. This two minute talk should incorporate as much of the *Permitted Words* as possible and eliminate the *Off Limits Words*, as much as is possible. There may be absolutely no interruptions with speaking, groaning, or body language from the other individual.
- During the two minute talk time the other individual is allowed to take notes (preferably not able to be seen by the speaker) or they may sit with their hands folded. No other behaviors whatsoever are allowed.
- The speaker must stop at two minutes even if they are in mid-sentence. The other individual is then allowed to speak for two minutes. They may use the notes that they have taken. The other individual must abide by all of the same rules – no speaking, no groaning, or no body language. They may take notes or they may sit with their hands folded.
- This process should continue until a resolution that is fair to both parties has been achieved or both parties agree to table the issue until a further discussion time because of the inability to resolve the issue.
- Outbursts of anger, negative speech, condemnation of the other individual, aggressive body language, or any other verbally-abusive behaviors immediately end the speaker's time.
- If the conversation becomes too intense, it would be wise for the therapist to employ the *Fifteen-Second Rule* and make each speaker wait fifteen seconds prior to speaking again.
- At the end of the conversational session, mutual notes can be compiled from those notes that each individual recorded during the other person's speaking time. This is, however, not mandatory. This compilation of notes results in a record of the progress that has been made on a specific issue.

## Other Options

This exercise is also easy to combine with the *Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise* and/or the *Backup a Minute Exercise*.

# The Fifteen Second Timeout Exercise

## Introduction

Sometimes when a therapist is dealing with a situation where at least one of the individuals is highly aggressive, the therapist will find that as soon as an individual is allowed to talk they will begin speaking. Usually, they do so without thinking, but nevertheless, they begin speaking.

When this happens you may wish to use the *Fifteen-Second Timeout Rule*. That means that when one person stops speaking, the other person must wait at least fifteen seconds before they can begin speaking. This presents an artificial barrier against the aggressiveness of the speaker. They must wait. If they choose not to wait until the fifteen seconds have transpired, they forfeit their right to speak and the speaking then is transferred back to the other person.

This exercise is great to use in conjunction with all of the other exercises but especially with the *Two Minute Talk* exercise. Also, you may plug it in to the *Backup a Minute* exercise.

## How to Do the Fifteen Second Timeout Exercise

The following guidelines will help you use the *Fifteen Second Timeout Exercise* effectively. Feel free to combine it with other exercises, as needed (see *Other Options* below).

### Items Needed

You will need some type of reliable timing device that is able to measure time in seconds. Some timers sold at grocery stores are able to be set for measurement of seconds for about the last two minutes of their timing cycle. This would be an optimal timer. It would also be nice if the timer had a “dinger” on it so that everyone knew when it went off.

Using a stop watch is a secondary method of timing. The problem with the stop watch is that it is a much more clumsy method of measurement. It usually takes time to set up and therefore more than fifteen seconds actually passes.

Look around and find the best option for you to measure fifteen-seconds as accurately as possible.

Remember, that there is also a *Two-Minute Exercise* and a *Thirty-Minute Exercise* included in this exercise series. If at all possible, you will want to purchase a timer that is capable of measuring fifteen seconds, two minutes and thirty minutes. You don't want to have to purchase three different timers.

You might also suggest to clients that they purchase the same type of timer for use at home.

## **Procedure**

The *Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise* is very easy to do. There are only a few rules.

- Allow one individual to speak for an allotted time.
- When the person's time has expired, they must stop speaking even if they are in mid-sentence.
- The other individual is then allowed to speak. However, they must wait a full fifteen seconds prior to beginning.
- If the individual begins speaking prior to the passing of fifteen seconds they lose their right to speak and speaking reverts back to the previous individual.

## **Other Options**

This exercise is also easy to combine with the *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* and/or the *Backup a Minute Exercise*.

# Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise

## (Advanced Writing Exercise)

### Introduction

This *Exercise* is for advanced users only.<sup>6</sup> It *should not* be used during an intake procedure nor should it be used prior to other lesser *Exercises* being mastered. In particular, the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise* must be mastered prior to using this *Exercise* since that *Emotional Expressions Exercise* will factor into this one quite extensively. Do not attempt to use this *Exercise* until you feel that a couple is willing and able to lay all of their issues and conflicts on the table for sorting and discussion and until they have successfully mastered the *Emotional Expressions Exercise*. Mastery of other *Exercises* is most desirable.

The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is designed to discover every (or at least most) of the significant points of disagreement and conflict in a marital or premarital relationship. Though these issues will be discovered during this *Exercise*, they will not be dealt with in this *Exercise*. That process is reserved for further therapeutic procedures. More will be discussed regarding this issue shortly in the *How To* section of this document.

This *Exercise* lays the groundwork for substantial marital or premarital counseling. Its purpose is to discover many of the primary issues that stand in the way of the couple having a strong, mutual and functional relationship. It is also designed to map a course to categorize conflicts and disagreements and to resolve those issues using other appropriate communications skills already learned.

Piled up, muddled, inter-correlated junk is the reason that brings about the need for divorce. Dealing with issues that are presenting themselves on a monthly basis in a relationship prevents the need for relationship crisis and the need for the use of divorce as a means of “*running*” from those issues. Facing facts as a couple is the only logical means of relating in a way that will not result in the need for negativity in a relationship. The couple willing to work on their relationship will use this method monthly. The couple that doesn’t care will simply let their relationship go wherever it goes.

It is highly recommended that all of the other *Exercises* be mastered by the couple prior to engaging in this *Exercise*. However, some of those *Exercises* may be skipped, if the therapist feels that it is appropriate to skip them. The more “*tools*” that a couple has to work with, the more likely they will be to resolve conflicts and issues. The *Exercises* that are contained in this section of the *MARET Premium*

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<sup>6</sup> By this stage, the couple should have learned a number of the other *Exercises* included in this whole system. The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is not a training *Exercise*. The therapist is wise in using non-volatile issues in the process of training individuals how to use each of the other *Exercises*. In fact, rather neutral issues might be used for the learning of the other *Exercises* so that the couple can effectively learn the *Exercises*. Once the *Exercises* are all mastered, they can then be employed with conflicts generated by the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*. Some difference of opinion is good to have for the learning of these *Exercises*, but actual points of conflict in the relationship might interfere with the proper learning of the techniques of the *Exercises*. Keep the learning of all techniques prior to the *Thirty-Minute Scramble* as light as possible and focus on technique, not on resolution of actual issues. At the learning stage, issues become secondary to learning of technique.

*Services* website are designed to give couples significant tools that they can use on their own to resolve issues that arise in the future. That is the optimal purpose for the couple learning these *Exercises* – to take them home and use them whenever needed. Therapy is the training ground for home use of all of these techniques. The couple that does not intend to continue using these techniques at home will gain little or nothing from this series of *Exercises*.

Therefore, the therapist, counselor or pastor is encouraged to teach all of the other *Exercises* included in this packet prior to using this advanced methodology. This *Exercise* is the foundation upon which all other therapeutic sessions will be based. It is only when a couple is ready to get to work on their relationship and when the couple has the tools to work on the relationship, that their specific conflicts and issues should be laid on the table.

In short, this *Exercise* begins the “real work” on the relationship – the sorting and resolution of all of the issues that stand in the way of a mutually beneficial relationship that has open and honest communication as its cornerstone. The remainder of this document will explain the procedures that should be used to effectively use the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

### **How to Do the Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise**

The point of this *Exercise* is to obtain a summary of as many of the conflicts that are a part of the marital or premarital relationship. This *Exercise* is optimally used during actual relationship counseling. The couple must have already mastered the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet Exercise* and the couple must have already taken the *Marriage Inventory* or the *Premarriage Inventory* in the *MARET Counseling and Assessment Software* package (if this *Exercise* is being used during actual therapy).

The following guidelines will help you use the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* effectively. The therapist, counselor, or pastor must understand that this *Exercise* is designed for couples who have mastered most – if not all – of the other *Exercises* in this *Exercise Group*. The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is not for the novice. At a very minimum, the couple must have mastered the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*. That *Worksheet* will be used extensively throughout the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

Once the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* has been completed, other communicative *Exercises* may be employed that will help to resolve the conflicts generated by this *Exercise*. Those *Exercises* will be used (especially in therapy sessions) to deal with each of the conflicts that have been raised by the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* includes a *Conflict Summary Sheet* that should be used by each individual as a preparation for the actual *Thirty Minute Scramble Exercise*. All of these factors will be explained in later discussion about this *Exercise*.

Finally, the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is always followed by a *Fifteen-Minute Closeout Period* designed to sort through the initial paperwork that has been created during the thirty-minute time span. Therefore, this entire *Exercise* will take forty-five minutes to complete. This *Exercise* will potentially create a mountain of paper, if done assertively. The *Fifteen-Minute Closeout Period* is designed to help each individual locate every significant conflict in their relationship (to be explained shortly).

## Items Needed

**Timer:** See other *Exercises* to determine the most appropriate timer to be used. The timer for this *Exercise* must be able to time both thirty minutes and fifteen minutes. It is most logical to obtain a single timer that can be used for all timed *Exercises*.

**Conflict Summary Sheet:** The *Conflict Summary Sheet* is included in this packet (whereas the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets* are included in a different packet). The purpose of the **Conflict Summary Sheet** is to allow both individuals to separately list all of the conflicts that they believe exist in the relationship. This should be considered as a “*scratch*” sheet – something that can be used during the first five minutes (or so) of the thirty minutes to draft the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets* from.

**Emotional Expressions Worksheets:** In order to effectively use the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*, the couple must have already mastered the use of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets*. Those *Worksheets* will likely be a strong component in this *Exercise*. The *Emotional Expressions Worksheets* will help the couple to state issues concisely. Without those skills, the information gathered during this *Exercise* will be a jumbled mess that will take considerable time to sort through. You should have a good number of *Emotional Expression Worksheet* packets ready for them to use. This includes all of the components that are needed to completely fill out the information. The following number of pages from the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* packet should be sufficient (although you should have more available).

- One copy of the *Summary Statement for Users* on page 14 for each individual
- One or two *Conflict Summary Sheets* (included as the last page of this *Exercise*)
- Ten copies of the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* on page 15 for each individual (with more available, if needed)
- Ten copies of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* on page 16 for each individual (with more available, if needed)

**Two different colors of paper:** In addition to the use of the *Conflict Summary Sheets*, the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*, and the *Emotional Expressions Worksheets*, the couple may also append those sheets with additional notes. These notes should be kept to a minimum and should be very short in nature. It would be easier to sort through the maze of paperwork created by the *Thirty-Minute Scramble* if each individual used a separate color of paper. It would also be best if these pieces of paper were less than 8.5 x 11 – say, 5 x 7 note pads. It is not mandatory, however, that the additional notes be placed on separate colored pages.

Items that may not actually be technically listed as “*conflicts*” could be placed on these sheets. Random notes may also be placed on these sheets. Questions raised by the whole process may also be placed on these sheets.

When a person uses a colored sheet, they should make sure that the colored sheet can be easily “*reattached*” to a specific conflict, if it does indeed relate to one. Each of the colored papers should be titled so that it can be sorted more easily.

**Pens/pencils for each individual:** Each individual should have a pen or pencil to complete this *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

## **Initial Writing Procedure – First Thirty Minutes**

**Seating the Individuals:** The best situation possible when performing this *Exercise* is for the two individuals involved to be physically separated in two separate rooms. Sometimes that isn't possible, but it is certainly optimal. If it is not possible to separate the individuals in two separate rooms, they should be seated at tables in such a manner that they cannot in any way communicate or disturb each other. They must be totally segregated so that they can write freely.

**The Conflict Summary Sheet:** The *Conflict Summary Sheet* is located as the last page of this document. Each person should be given one or two copies of that *Sheet*. The *Conflict Summary Sheet* is designed to be used as a list – not as a comprehensive document. Only summary information should be placed on this *Sheet*. It should be used by each individual to complete more comprehensive documentation to be discussed shortly.

The person should begin the thirty minute exercise by listing each point of conflict that they believe exists in the relationship. They should number each conflict uniquely enough so that it is separate from other conflicts. You might suggest, for example, that a person use a number for the conflict followed by their initials. This will separate their #1 conflict from the #1 conflict of the other individual performing the same operation (because of their initials). Individuals are encouraged to spend no more than five minutes on the creation of this list. The *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* should be just that – a scramble!

**The Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets.** The *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* should not be confused with the previously discussed document (even though they are close to the same in name). The *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* are found on page 15 of the *Emotional Expression Worksheet* document. Each person should be provided with enough *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* to fill out one for each of the conflicts that they listed on the *Conflict Summary Sheets*.

After each person has completed the initial *Conflict Summary Sheet*, they should begin the process of transferring each conflict to a specific *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*. They should put their name on each *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*. They should also name the conflict. The best way to do that is to include the number that they used for the conflict on the *Conflict Summary Sheet* and a summary title from the “*Summary or Name of Conflict*” column on the *Conflict Summary Sheet*.

Since the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* should not be conducted prior to a person fully understanding the use of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*, the person should use the skills they have already learned to complete the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*. This process significantly expands upon the listing of the issue on the *Conflict Summary Sheets*.

**The Emotional Expressions Worksheets.** Next in line, the individual should begin the process of completing an *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* for each of the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*. This process should have been learned completely prior to using the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*. It should be the goal of each person to complete an *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* for each specific conflict prior to the expiration of the thirty-minute time allotment. This will require each individual to focus their thoughts and to work as quickly as possible!

**Extra Colored Sheets.** We have mentioned that it might be good to provide additional (colored) paper for each person. It is not mandatory that different colors be used, but it certainly makes the sorting process in the *Fifteen-Minute Cleanup* easier and more logical. You might consider purchasing different colored paper in 8.5 x 11 format and then cutting that paper in half so that you end up with note sheets that are 8.5 x 5.5. The paper size discourages a person from writing too much on any given colored sheet.

Colored sheets should be used sparingly by the individuals. These sheets may contain notes that don't "fit" on the other sheets. They may also include any information that the person didn't choose to include on the actual *Worksheets*. This information may be supplemental to the whole process. It also might get amalgamated into the other sheets. Finally, it might get thrown away during the *Fifteen-Minute Cleanup!*

The couple only has thirty minutes to complete this exercise. The time may not be extended for any reason. Why? Because imposing such a time restriction will force the couple to creatively and selectively include only those issues that most significantly rise to the top of their minds. These will be the bigger issues that need to be dealt with. Since they only have thirty minutes, they will leave smaller issues to fall by the wayside. Not to worry, however, those smaller issues can be dealt with at a later time. We are after the big stuff in the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

Since there is only thirty minutes allowed for this exercise, the therapist may wish to call out specific times as specific time barriers are past. "Twenty-five minutes left," twenty minutes left," fifteen minutes left," and so on.

### **Fifteen-Minute Cleanup**

Well, the thirty minutes have past. The therapist may hear some moaning and groaning that not everything listed on the initial *Conflict Summary Sheet* got put down on paper. The couple hasn't completed everything that they wished to put down. That's OK – and, it is to be expected! Even more, hopefully that will be the case almost all of the time! That's a good thing. We will deal with those issues a little later.

What has been accomplished, however, is that most every major and pressing issue for the couple has been put on paper. The other stuff that didn't get finished won't be thrown out. No way! It will be incorporated into other exercises. But, the therapist now has a collective list from each individual of the most significant issues that the couple faces. That is what the rush is all about. If we let them think all day, they will come up with too much information. The time barrier forces the most significant and pressing needs and issues right to the top!

Each individual is encouraged to work as quickly as possible. That means that they don't organize the "stuff" that they are dealing with when they finish it. They start with the collective *Conflict Summary Sheet*. They will probably want to keep that off to the side so that they can work off of it while they are completing the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets*. They should complete a separate *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* for each of the conflicts listed on the *Conflict Summary Sheet*.

As they complete each *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* they will also need to keep the *Conflict Summary Sheet* handy. With that *Sheet* in front of them, they will work through the "real stuff" contained on the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*.<sup>7</sup> As they work through that sheet other "stuff" – cursory items – may come to mind that they record on a colored sheet. As they complete the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet*, the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet*, the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* and any colored cursory notes should simply be "thrown" into a pile. The *Fifteen-Minute*

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<sup>7</sup> The couple must have a complete listing of all *Permitted Words* and all *Off Limit Words* in front of them. Any *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* that contains an *Off Limits Word* is to be sanctioned. The therapist will need to determine from the content of the sheet itself if he/she will allow re-writing of that sheet or if it will be thrown out. Every individual is to be warned that use of *Off Limit Words* may result in the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* being thrown out at the "will" of the therapist! Any *Off Limit Word* is grounds for the whole *Worksheet* to be discarded. The couple has already learned the importance of not using these words. If they choose to use them, then there is the potential that their "statement" on that *Worksheet* will be discarded. They should already know better!

*Cleanup* will give them the time needed to sort through that pile of information and segregate it into logical groups of issues and conflicts.

OK, so the thirty minutes are up. Each person is looking at a pile of papers in front of them. That pile contains everything from the initial *Conflict Summary Sheet* to *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheets* to *Emotional Expression Worksheets* and colored pieces of random papers that attach to conflicts somewhere in the pile. What a mess!

Each person now has fifteen minutes to organize the mess of papers in front of them. The first thing that they should do is locate the *Conflict Summary Sheet*. They should put that in front of them. It will be their guide to organize all of the other papers that are in the pile.

With the *Conflict Summary Sheet* in front of them, each individual should begin to sort through the papers and place each paper in a separate pile that is coordinated with a specific conflict. When they are finished, they should have separate “*piles*” for each of the conflicts that they were able to finish (maybe they didn’t get through them all). This includes any colored notes that they created for a specific conflict.

Now comes the “tricky” part. The therapist needs to have a separate *Conflict Summary Sheet* of his/her own. He/she needs to begin the process of sorting through the conflicts that are laid out in front of each person. Conflicts that are the same or very similar should be listed on the therapist’s *Conflict Summary Sheet* by a title that the therapist creates for him-/herself. Those sheets should be grouped together initially. It might be best, however, to cross-hatch them so that the individuality of the sheets is not lost.

When the therapist encounters a conflict that is not mutual, they must also record that conflict on the *Conflict Summary Sheet*. They must indicate on that sheet that the conflict is unique to a specific individual so that it is not incorporated as a mutual consideration of conflict. These individual conflicts should be listed after the mutual conflicts (not that they are of less importance – in fact, they may be more important!).

Any individual conflicts that are not mutual should be accepted “*as is.*” Thus, there is no need to amalgamate the conflicting situation. The conflict “*belongs*” to the individual who wrote about it and expressed it. Thus, the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* and the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* should be accepted “*as is*” provided that *Off Limit Words* are not incorporated in the *Sheets*.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Ultimate Job of the Therapist**

After the couple has spent fifteen minutes sorting through their pile of issues, they should have them completely organized into groups in front of them. The job of the therapist at this point is to amalgamate the sectioned sheets. Which ones are the same (or very similar)? Which ones are completely different?

As already mentioned, an issue that is personal and completely different than one presented by the other individual is a relatively “*cut and dried*” issue. This is a personal concern of one individual. That issue must be considered as such. It should not necessarily be relegated to the bottom of the list of issues to deal with. This will be part of the sorting process of the therapist. Some individual issues may rise to the surface as significant enough to deal with prior to corporate issues that both individuals agree on.

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<sup>8</sup> While the therapist has the “right” to throw out any *Sheet* that contains *Off Limit Words*, it is expected that unless the person using the *Off Limit Words* has been vicious in their use of the *Off Limit Words*, that the person will be allowed to re-write the *Sheet* that contains the *Off Limit Words*. If the person objects or puts up some fight about the use of the words, then the therapist should just throw away the whole issue – warning the individual of the throw away prior to doing it. If an individual doesn’t want to play by the rules, then their issue is in the history books!

Corporate issues are a little different. Each individual will have stated the corporate issue in a slightly but significant way than the other person. Nevertheless, the therapist will recognize when reading over the statements in the *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* and the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* that (logically) they are dealing with the same (or a very similar) matter. These issues must be amalgamated. This is not easy – especially during the initial training phase of the process.

The therapist should segregate out personal conflict issues from corporate issues. Personal issues should be placed off to the side. They will be incorporated in the process later. Corporate issues should be laid out logically. It is best to place each individual's sheets one on top of the other (or one over the other).

Each issue should be reviewed with the couple. The therapist should explain to the couple why the issue appears to be the same issue (even though the couple may not initially agree that they are). The end goal of the therapist is to create a single *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* for the conflict. This will take some deliberation (and is outside of the fifteen minute timeframe). That *Sheet* should be created with the aid of the therapist.

Once a unified *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* has been created, the couple should engage the re-writing of the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* for that specific issue. That writing should come from the unified *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* that has been created as a bi-product of the discussion related to the amalgamation of the two separate *Sheets*. Previously written statements created during the *Thirty-Minute Scramble* timeframe should be discarded as the new *Conflict Resolution Summary Sheet* and the *Emotional Expressions Worksheet* are completed.

When all work is completed, the therapist will end up with two sets of documents: 1) Personal issues that only one individual has expressed; and 2) corporate issues that are the same conflict and have been amalgamated through re-working of documentation. Now, the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise* is complete. All of the issues that can be laid out in a thirty-minute timeframe have been laid out. There remains one more task for the therapist. That task is sorting through the issues on the reformulated *Conflict Summary Sheet* in a logical format to deal with each of the issues. This is solely the responsibility of the therapist for therapy purposes.

## **Categorizing Issues**

The therapist needs to make logical decisions regarding which issues are logically more important to deal with than other issues. Dealing with some issues will lay the groundwork for dealing with other issues later in the counseling sessions. This is not a process that neither the novice nor the individual can be included. This is solely the responsibility of the therapist.

The therapist should examine their own reformulated *Counseling Summary Sheet*. They should determine which issues need attention prior to attention being given to other issues. Therapy for each conflict should build upon other issues. The order in which the therapist chooses to lay out the counseling sessions to deal with specific issues of conflict will logically aid in the resolution of issues that follow. This will take some time and consideration on the part of the therapist.

At this point, the therapist should begin therapy on the primary issue selected using the techniques that (hopefully) the couple has already learned.<sup>9</sup> Each issue should be worked through separately and completely before moving on to another issue. The pile of issues will slowly decrease.

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<sup>9</sup> This includes a combination of *Two-Minute Talk*, *Fifteen-Second Timeout*, and *Backup a Minute* techniques. Each should be used on a regular basis. The intensity of the conflict may determine when method is used. Methods may be combined (as is

As sessions go on, there may be a time that the therapist is confident that a couple can work through an issue on their own at home. It is the most optimal condition – the desired end of therapy – to give a couple the skills to work through issues on their own. The therapist should not rush this practice but should certainly work toward it. Prior to a couple being able to work through issues on their own at home, the therapist has not completed their task of vitalizing a relationship to the point of the relationship being able to sustain and deal with conflict on its own. That should be the goal of every therapist. “You don’t need me anymore,” is a good thing for a therapist to hear!

The therapist should continue in therapy dealing with issues until he/she is very confident that the remaining (and other) issues can be dealt with by the couple on their own. All methods possible should be used to creatively help the couple to deal with their issues.

### **Dealing with the “Leftovers”**

“*Leftovers*” are issues that an individual was unable to finish prior to the end of the thirty-minute timeframe. Those issues *should not* be ignored. They should be dealt with separately and outside of the processes that deal with the issues that were completed in the thirty-minute timeframe. Each individual should be encouraged to complete all of the formwork that they were unable to complete prior to the expiration of time. Those issues should be dealt with either in therapy or at home (if the couple has become advanced enough to do so).

### **Other Options**

Concurrently, it is not logical to combine this *Exercise* with other *Exercises* initially. However, the “*fallout*” from this *Exercise* – the concomitant results compiled in the *Fifteen-Minute Cleanup Period* – might indeed be re-sectioned and used with the *Backup a Minute Exercise*, the *Fifteen-Second Timeout Exercise*, and the *Two-Minute Talk Exercise* as separate and individual conflicts. The most appropriate *Exercises* should be used to resolve the conflicts generated in the *Thirty-Minute Scramble Exercise*.

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indicated throughout this literature). The goal of the therapist should be to give the couple the skills that they need to conduct these sessions on their own without therapeutic intervention.

