

**PURPOSE**

Begin building a shared understanding of each other and your relationship

**MATERIALS**

TWO big sheets of paper and some coloured pens or pencils

**TIME**

About an hour, depending on how much detail you put in.  
It doesn't all have to be done at once

There is a lot of research that has tried to identify the areas where there are differences and exactly how these differences are expressed. Some areas that are particularly relevant are personality, the way people take in and process information, decision making styles, how they prefer to be told that they are loved and the meanings that they have attached to words and ideas.

**PERSONALITY**

There are many personality tests with more or less theoretical backgrounds. Like many things in the scientific area, the various theories are hotly debated.

There is not a consensus yet, but one scheme that seems to make sense to a lot of people and that has a good deal of support in the scientific community is the Big Five theory. It integrates a lot of other research.

*The personality dimensions are:*

**NEED FOR STABILITY** - the degree to which a person responds to stress

**EXTRAVERSION** - how easily a person copes with external stimulation

**ORIGINALITY** - the degree to which we are open to new experiences

**ACCOMMODATION** - the degree to which we give way to others

**CONSOLIDATION** - the degree to which we work towards goals

The information for this section was accessed at - [www.centacs.com/quickstart.htm](http://www.centacs.com/quickstart.htm). There is a lot more information there with good links if you want to learn more.

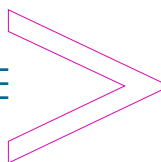
For a free analysis of you and your partner do the test at [www.outofservice.com/bigfive/](http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/). They use slightly different words but the information they give is clear.

The important understanding is that people REALLY ARE DIFFERENT and it is best to accept them as they are, try to understand their perspective and to broaden your understanding using the insights you gain from them.

**REMEMBER:**

No matter how foolish another's thoughts or actions may seem, they make perfect sense within their understanding of the world.

### ACTIVITY ONE



### DISCOVERING OUR PREFERENCES

*Give directions as if to a stranger for a trip that you do often, such as going to the supermarket, going to work or picking up the children from school. Take turns giving the directions to each other and then share your experience.*

#### VISUAL

A person with a visual preference will draw a map and describe visual landmarks. These people process information in small chunks and are able to deal with each chunk of information separately. They can access information quickly.

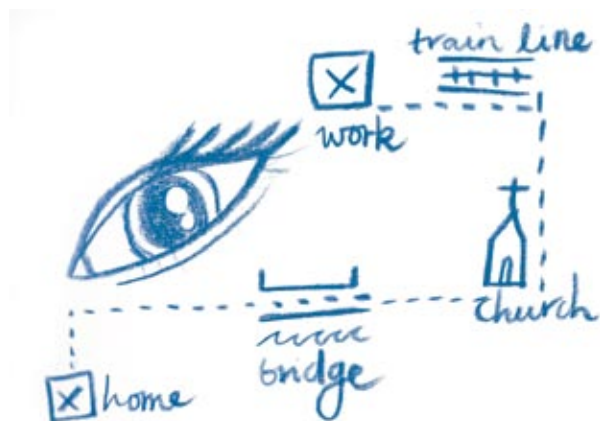
#### AUDITORY

A person with an auditory preference will tell you in great detail and might even be able to describe you the entire trip from beginning to end. People with an auditory preference access information as a whole and will need to go through the entire sequence to get to the needed information.

Most people have a similar experience when trying to remember a particular line from a song. They sing the entire verse or song to get to the right line and then it is easy to remember.

#### KINAESTHETIC

A person with a kinaesthetic preference will move through the sequence of turns and use gestures to describe the trip. These people excel at physical tasks and are excellent at anything involving movement and practical skills. They can struggle with information that can't be stored through movement or converted into a physical code. People with a kinaesthetic preference often jiggle as they sit and prefer to pace and move as they think or talk.

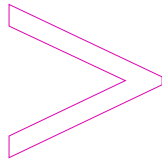


There is a broad consensus that people use different pathways to access and process information. (See any books by Richard Bandler and John Grinder for more information about this area.)

The three most common pathways to take in information are visual – through eyes, auditory – through ears and kinaesthetic – through movement and gesture.

Unless they have a physical impairment, people use all three and also their smell and taste which are generally less important. However, everyone has a preference. This is revealed when people are asked to give directions.

## ACTIVITY TWO



## DECIDING ON PREFERENCES

*Discuss what the directions you gave reveal to you. What would you guess is your preference?*

### DECISION MAKING STYLES

The way people make decisions can be added to the list of personal differences that affect relationships.

There seem to be two decision-making processes:

- 1 Gather lots and lots of information by looking up the internet, talking to people, reading magazines and doing other research, think carefully about the pluses and minuses, come to a decision and only consider the decision again if new important information comes to light.
- 2 Gather a little information, form an opinion and then review it as new information comes along until a decision has emerged.

While people have tendencies towards one style, they tend to change which process they use depending on the situation, how secure they feel about a particular matter and how big the consequences are for getting it wrong.

If partners are using the different processes to decide about the same thing, there is the distinct possibility that there could be some difficulty.

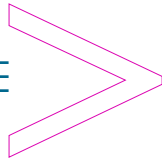


The person who is gathering lots of information can think that their partner is not taking the matter seriously. The person who is comfortable to come to an opinion with little information can think that their partner is dragging the matter out and being indecisive.

When the second process is used it can seem that they are flighty and not making a decision at all. They seem to change their mind every two minutes. Using the first process can seem to be taking forever to make a decision, closed to new information and stodgy.

Both of the methods are valid ways of making decisions and if you match your partner there is no concern. If you don't, it requires a lot of patience and acceptance of their process.

## ACTIVITY THREE



## DECISIONS, DECISIONS, DECISIONS

1 *Individually, think about the last time you had to make a big decision that you were concerned would have an important impact on your life. How did you go about the process of making the decision?*

2 *With your partner, share the information and find out whether they agree.*

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## "I LOVE YOU" PREFERENCES

'He never says he loves me.'

'I don't get it, I tell her I love her, but she just looks at me blankly and says, "It doesn't feel like it since you never spend any time with me."'

Perhaps it is the result of the factors above, or family background or perhaps something else, but it seems that people also seem to get the message better when they are told in the way that is best for them.

Gary Chapman, in his book *The Five Love Languages*, suggests that there are five ways to let someone know that you love them. When we are first in love, we tend to use all five. Then, as we settle into the comfort of our relationship we revert to the one that suits us for everyday use and we occasionally use one of the others.



WORDS OF AFFIRMATION	Say it – I love you, I think you are great, you are the best, I can't wait to be with you.
QUALITY TIME	Set aside time to really pay attention. Nothing else should be happening – no TV, no computer, no tasks, no mobile phone. Give them priority. Pay attention.
GIFTS	Small tokens that indicate that you are thinking of them and love them. Something quirky that costs a little is as good as something much more expensive – it really isn't the money, it's the thought.
ACTS OF SERVICE	Bring them a cuppa in bed, massage their feet, do the chore they normally do.
PHYSICAL TOUCH	Cuddle, massage, hold, stroke, hug and everything else. It doesn't have to be sexual – just warm and present.

Which of these do you think you are?  
One way to tell is to think about what you do naturally for your partner.

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What is your partner's preference? How do they express their love to you?

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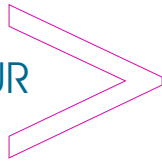
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**SHARE** what you think.

## ACTIVITY FOUR



## COMMUNICATING YOUR LOVE

*Use each of the methods above to express your love for your partner as soon as possible.*

*Then, over the next week pay attention to how you communicate your love for each other. Check whether your first impression is right.*

## LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

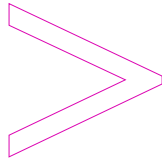
Many misunderstandings and judgements resulting in coldness between partners happen because there is a wide spread assumption that people use language in the same way and the same words said by different people mean the same.

It is assumed that when I hear someone say something it means exactly what it would mean if I said it. This assumption is not true. There are huge differences even between people from the same family in how people understand the simplest things.

Every person has a frame that they put on all communication. Some of the frame comes from their personality and experiences and some from their gender. It influences how they understand the intention of what is being said and even what particular words mean. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tannen D., 1990

## ACTIVITY FIVE



## WORDS AND THEIR MEANINGS

*Individually, write down what the following word means to you. Go deep, try for at least four aspects of the meaning of the word to you -*

TIME OFF	
WORK	
PETS	
UNIVERSITY	
EXCERCISE	
RESPECT	

With your partner, share the meanings you wrote down.

What was the same, what was different?

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How do you think this affects your relationship?

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## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE

Another important group of differences that many couples find themselves dealing with is gender differences in talking styles. The difference that really matters is that men and women have different goals when they are communicating.

There is very solid research across a number of fields that has identified differences between women and men in what they hope to achieve when talking with others. <sup>2</sup>

It is fairly safe to assume that in most encounters woman are trying to build feelings of intimacy and connection and men are trying to build feelings of competency and independence.

This does NOT mean that men never want to achieve intimacy and that women never want to feel independent. It DOES mean that there are real differences to take into account when encountering issues in a relationship.

The following generalisations have held up in research and give a small insight into the difficulties surrounding this area. <sup>3</sup>

- Women don't mind asking for help, men do.
- Men don't mind presenting themselves as more competent than others, women do.
- Women share their troubles and feel better without getting to a solution; without a solution there is no point talking about it for men.
- Men don't apologise unless they are taking responsibility, women say sorry without necessarily taking responsibility, they are just indicating that they understand there is a difficulty.

“Intimacy is key in a world of connection where individuals negotiate complex networks of friendship, minimise differences, try to reach consensus and avoid the appearance of superiority which would highlight differences.

In a world of status, independence is key, because a primary means of establishing status is to tell others what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status.

Though all humans need both intimacy and independence, women tend to focus on the first and men on the second.”

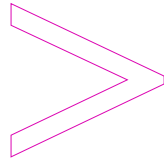
Of course, these differences are also affected by how people are brought up and other experiences they have.

It is not necessary to learn off by heart all of the possible differences. It can help to approach difficulties knowing that some of the problem might be the language and how it is being used. By paying attention to possible misunderstandings there is more chance that things can easily be sorted out.

<sup>2</sup> Tannen 1990:26

<sup>3</sup> Tannen, D 1990:26

## ACTIVITY SIX



## GO FOR GOAL

*Focus on differences between men and women in asking for help, claiming competence, troubles and solutions and apologising. Remember, these are generalisations that don't absolutely apply to everyone, but they are still worth considering and keeping in mind.*

ACTIVITY	MEN	WOMEN
ASKING FOR HELP	Prefer not – would rather be lost than ask directions	Feel comfortable asking for help or directions
CLAIMING COMPETENCE	Feel good about being more competent than someone else	Feel uncomfortable with being singled out as better
TROUBLES & SOLUTIONS	If there is a trouble then it needs a solution – just listening with out offering a solution is leaving the job half done	Just sharing is enough, being offered solutions without listening is being short changed
APOLOGISING	A man's apology means he is taking responsibility – on the whole men apologise a lot less than women	A woman's apology means that she recognises there has been a difficulty and hopes you feel better. Women apologise a lot

Do any of these remind you of situations that have happened in your relationship?

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**SHARE** with your partner.