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Ci2i Factor Facts

....things you may want to consider as you review your report results

FACTOR 1: Work

Most of us spend a great deal of our lives performing some kind of work. Whether we work at home or away from home, we are usually engaged in some activity(s) that help sustain us and improve our home base. The beliefs you each have about work and home life integration impact your relationships and are worth understanding well. The reason: the quality of your work and home lives are inextricably intertwined whether you are conscious of it or not.

Circumstances and your choices related to work usually change over time. Individual and joint satisfaction with those circumstances and choices has a significant impact on our every day lives. How satisfied you are with your work and home life matters a great deal. As important as this factor is, it is often not discussed fully between partners.

At the start of your relationship, it is likely you found many ways to make time for each other- to talk – to get to know each other – to grow your trust and love. Later on, you may have chosen to spend more time on work or other things and less time on your relationship. If the two of you agree about what those changes should be and for how long, then changes can make you stronger as a couple. If you do not agree about the changes, there can be heightened friction. It is important to honestly and respectfully discuss these issues and any differences in what you each want and need.

Individual definitions of what is valuable “work” may vary greatly from person to person, so understanding and respecting personal definitions is critical for every couple. Competition about “who works the hardest” or “who contributes the most” can be a common area of conflict between partners. In fact, feeling/behaving in a competitive manner about anything in a love relationship can be destructive, and in the work arena, it can create a wedge between you. When all is well, or not well, at work or at home, the feelings you each have in one place or the other, will often “drip” over into both arenas, no matter how much you try to “compartmentalize” your lives and keep them separated. While it is true that some people choose to draw a line between their work and home lives, it is rare for anyone to keep the two worlds completely separated.

Partners need to be able to speak their truth about feelings, values, hopes, dreams, fears, etc. regarding the integration of work and home on a regular basis, particularly as feelings, needs, or circumstances change. It is important for couples to talk about what motivates each of them, how their beliefs and actions about work impact the relationship, and most importantly, what work-life integration choices each person is making--- that helps or hinders achieving both joint and personal goals.

FACTOR 2: Finances

We all know that money plays a role in many of our relationships, like it or not. That relationship could be parents with their children, employer with employee, and certainly partner with partner. Here, we focus on couples. Few things are more volatile or more rewarding than having negative or positive experiences with finances within a couple's relationship.

Expectations play a significant role with couples' finances. If the partners trust each other's handling of money and share similar values around decision making, their life together will be far, far more enjoyable than if they do not. That is simply common sense, yet so often people assume they are "on the same page" and if they discover they are not, they have difficulty discussing the differences. The first thing to know, is are you or are you not on the "same page," and why is that so?

The questions in this FACTOR ask you to examine your conversations and understanding about the handling and use of those funds you identify as joint. Some couples never join their funds but agree to contribute funds based on their own formula to meet joint financial commitments for things they share like home, savings, food, car, vacations, etc. Others co-mingle their funds and agree about how to expend them. This arrangement could change over time. The success of implementing changes often depends on excellent communication of the situation and of each partner's expectations and needs.

Money has very little meaning all by itself; it is simply a means to an end. However, it takes on great meaning when we agree or disagree about its value, its use, and when we *assume motivation* of its use by the other person. In these questions you can examine how well communication on the subject of money happens within your relationship.

One of the four questions within this group has a focus to which you may want to pay particular attention. "*Financial matters are a serious part of my life and love decisions.*" The answers here may generate a very useful dialogue even if the couple finds themselves answering in the same way. This question asks each person to consider how much of a role money plays in your choices.

If you answer this question in the same way – ask yourselves if that's a positive or not so positive indicator about your relationship. If you answer very differently – STOP! First check to see if you each *interpreted the question* in the same way. If not, clarify. If yes, then please examine what those differences are and how they came to be. It is not necessarily a problem if one partner is in agreement with the question and one in disagreement, but it could become so unless both people understand the context and meaning for each other, and then consciously work toward a mutually satisfying understanding.

FACTOR 3: Religion/Spirituality

The term, “body, mind, and spirit” is known by nearly everyone. We often pay attention to the body and the mind and forget the importance of the spirit. This is a very personal issue, and often provides an important part of a person’s sense of self and connection to others on the planet, particularly family and community members. One’s beliefs about spirituality are closely tied to one’s value system, and therefore to the decisions we make every day of our lives.

Many couples have different religions, beliefs, and even their degree of commitment to those beliefs, but overcome those differences because of mutual respect and appreciation for each other. Other couples have a much more difficult time of reconciling differences, and find it to be a source of contention. If you and/or your partner are pressured by the other person, by peers, family, etc. in uncomfortable ways, there will likely be tension between you. Finding ways to overcome this is essential for a healthy relationship.

The weaving of faith, spirit, traditions, values, and one’s beliefs together is very personal and often private activity. That weaving process helps create a sense of stability and wholeness within oneself. This is true whether you are an Atheist or follow an Orthodox faith. In some relationships, the church, synagogue, mosque, or temple are foundation blocks for a relationship. In others, they are part of the “timber” of the joint spiritual “house.” In yet other relationships, there is little in common, but there is a healthy respect for each other’s beliefs with no interference or criticism when each is practicing her or his beliefs. If none of these scenarios apply to you and your relationship, you should consider discussing what is happening, how you each feel, and how you can find a common “honoring” ground, or the differences will likely drive you apart in ways that matter to you.

For the purpose of this instrument, the most important things to consider are a) how well you communicate your needs in this arena with each other, and 2) how much mutual respect and honoring of each other’s beliefs is happening – whether you share the same beliefs or not.

FACTOR 4: Sex

While all adult, consensual, love relationships *do not* require a sexual component, most do. Generally, we are attracted to another person physically at the first blush, and then move beyond the physical attraction to the character attraction. In many cases these happen at the same time, but the physical is often a driving force that keeps you learning about one another. You may never have touched, kissed, or had any physical contact, per se, but something about your partner's physical being attracted you to him/her and him/her to you.

Couples that have or wish to have a physical relationship should answer these FACTOR questions. If you do not already have a sexual relationship, but expect to have one eventually, answer the questions slightly differently. Answer them in terms of the conversations you have about sex, about what you hope for, about how important sex is to each of you in the relationship.

If you do have a sexually intimate relationship, the goals of these questions are to focus on 1) how well you communicate your needs, and 2) how well you work together to create sexual pleasure for each other. The final focus here is the weight you each put on the importance of this aspect of your relationship.

There are no right or wrong answers here. What kind of sex life you have together is irrelevant. All that matters in this FACTOR is *how much agreement you have or do not have* about open communication, enjoyment, and importance of this very intimate topic.

For instance, one of you may enjoy sexual chatter with your partner, and the other does not like it. One may feel sexy in the morning and the other at night. Both of you might like to run home at lunchtime and make love in the kitchen. One may enjoy frequent intimacy, the other less frequent. These are the kinds of things that need loving discussions to keep your sexual relationship fulfilling, fresh and honest, over the years. If you choose not to discuss your sexual life together, if it is a "taboo" subject, you need to at least understand why you feel that way, and decide how healthy it is for each of you to continue to keep it a closed subject.

FACTOR 5: Emotions

Emotions let us know we are alive. What a tragedy to live a life without feeling anything at all – no love, anger, trust, joy, fear, sadness, elation, pride, fun, tenderness, stress, etc. In fact, people with certain types of brain damage resulting from an accident or other trauma, can actually lose some or all of their ability to feel emotions themselves and sense emotions in others. They exist in an emotional dead zone. We think most people would agree that going to that dead zone would not be a first choice option! Yet, as critical as emotions are to our overall wellbeing, we generally spend very little time or effort trying to understand our own and others' emotions. We try to deny them, push them away, over or under indulge them, judge them, diminish them, get consumed by them, etc. They will not go away, so wouldn't it be a good thing to acknowledge, respect, and learn to manage (not control) our emotions?

The four questions in this FACTOR deal with the way you and your partner express emotions within your relationship, and once expressed, how you manage them.

You may have observed in your own life, that some emotional responses have happily or unhappily surprised you. You may also have observed that you or others may react in ways you did not understand. After thinking, and perhaps discussing, why the reaction happened – you may have been able to identify the “feelings” that drove the reaction. But whether you were able or not, it's a sure bet, that strong emotions are at the heart of any strong response.

Emotions are very real, often invoking a physical reaction (blushing, tensing, hyperventilating, goose bumps, spine shivers, etc.) and they are a critical part of all our relationships. Whether we like this fact or not, express our emotions or not – we all feel – at home and at work.

All of us also think. A frequent disconnect can occur when we mix things up such that: *we think with our emotions and feel with our thoughts.*

For instance –if you are about to make an important decision about getting a new pet and all you consider is how you *feel* about it, you are leaving out all the objective information you could be using to make a well thought out decision. Conversely, if an emotion you are feeling is “really worried” and it's about your partner's health, but you only express what you “think” about his or her eating habits, the message of caring, love, and worry is lost. All your partner will hear is your “critical thinker” and nothing about your concern or care.

The most important things to consider with your answers to these questions are 1) how much do you believe you can safely express your emotions, 2) in high and low times are you and your partner's emotions within reason, and 3) how honest can you be with each other about your feelings?

If you see that you can be open with each other, it is likely all the rest of the emotional questions can be reasonably discussed and understood. If you find that you are not open with each other, then this is an important issue to understand, discuss, and resolve.

FACTOR 6: Communications

Communications is a topic that is a lot like an 'elephant' - we need to look at it one piece at a time to get the whole picture. Many of the situations that go right or wrong among people, and certainly, couples, can be traced back to effective or ineffective communication between the parties.

Most people want more than anything else, to feel HEARD, and heard with respect. This means that it is not enough to simply let someone's words waft over you with the hopes that it will all sink in. What is required of each other is active and careful listening when you are on the receiving end. When you are on the giving end, non-judgmental communication is required - and stated in ways that are thoughtful about how it will be received. We know, but often forget, how much of our communication is wordless. Body language, eye movement, tone, actions, behaviors – all contribute to the beliefs about whether or not either the sender or the receiver is sincere about communicating effectively and whether or not each is prepared and willing to participate in a true dialogue.

We know we are not listening when:

- We are **finishing** someone's sentences
- We are **thinking about something or someone else**
- We are **doing something else** (email, reading, looking around, watching the clock, daydreaming...etc.)
- We are **judging** what the person is saying and making
- We have little or **no empathy** for his/her feelings within the words
- We are **rehearsing** an answer to "fix" them and then try to "fix" them
- We **assume** we know where they are going or what they mean before hearing the whole story
- We immediately turn the **conversation to ourselves** rather than focusing on the other person
- We are in **competition** with the other person's story and find ourselves "one upping"
- We feel compelled to tell them why **they are wrong** and **we are right** – often sounds like "yeah, but..."
- We are **not willing to 'take in'** something the other person needs us to hear about ourselves

If any of the above sound like part of the "dance" you do as a couple, then your communications are relatively easy to repair. Simply stop doing those things – catch yourselves – and find ways to give each other clues when any of those things happen – buzz words, pulling on your ear, etc., and you will become much, much more in tune with each other. Put the word "stop" in front of each of the above behaviors and start paying attention. When we need to share difficult information or even wonderful information with our partner, we often can't find the words or the way to share it specifically and mindfully. When it's difficult information, we can create havoc, defensiveness, or sound like we are placing blame. There are proven ways to provide **constructive feedback** such that the other person can and usually will hear the message and participate in solving the issue. The goal is to improve communication, not find fault.

Visit our Ci2i Tool Box for assistance with listening, constructive feedback and conflict resolution.

FACTOR 7: Self-Esteem

Healthy self-esteem is critical to healthy relationships. One must feel whole to give to another in positive ways over time. A big part of how much we feel valued by the other has to do with trust, and very little, if anything is more foundational than the degree of trust each partner has in the other.

Co-dependence is a cavity that never gets filled, an empty space with a leak that requires a huge amount of energy to maintain, and there is no relief from the work because co-dependence signifies individual lack of self-esteem. Enabling behaviors in response to demands or weakness in the other simply leads to a break down in trust and in health – often both literally as well as figuratively.

Trust is not an activity or event; trust is an outcome resulting from thousands of little, and a few big, experiences we have with one another over time. In a partnership, trust can truly be the ‘make or break’ factor.

Having shared values is an important piece of trust building and couple building. When you believe that you can trust that your partner will respond in certain ways to life’s many situations because of shared values, you will likely feel safer, more confident, and more able to devote positive energy to other parts of your relationship. If you don’t feel this way, it’s important to find out why, and talk to each other about differences in values and responses to life’s events that are different between you.

For this factor, take the time to focus on how you really feel about yourself in this relationship. Do you feel like you are absolutely “authentic” with your partner – no games – just you? Do you feel trusted and trustworthy? Do you feel you are perfectly capable of getting on with life with or without your partner – but that you choose to be with him/her?

And how valued do you feel? Is there a sense of being accepted and loved for exactly who you are, or do you feel you have to “prove” yourself or be blamed for being “less than or different than” your partner wants you to be?

Trust is as much the issue in this factor as self-esteem, but self-esteem is necessary to build trust from an honest and whole place. Taking this into account will help you discuss the issues addressed in this factor.

FACTOR 8: History

All of us have a history – we didn't just appear on the planet the day we met our partners. We have family and relationships that have impacted who we are in many different ways. The focus of this factor is to determine how honest you are with each other about your separate histories, and to ask you to consider the impact your histories have on your relationship.

Some people tell all which can be problematic when we bring other lovers into our current relationship. Some tell very little, keeping much a mystery. Most people tend to share a fair amount with each other as trust grows over time. Little bits and pieces, and sometimes, big chunks of one's story come rolling out when it seems right. There is no magic formula for what is best in your relationship, however, it is highly unlikely that you were together for long before you shared your family ties and at least some of the stories – even the colorful ones - involving other family members.

The key to this factor is to understand where you are in the sharing and whether or not it feels like a good place for you. Other relationships have impacted and will continue to impact each of you, so being aware of this and keeping others in the right space and place that works for both of you, is a very important part of belonging to more than just the two of you.

We have what we call little 'tapes' that pop up our memories. We have parent tapes, x-lover tapes, boss or teacher tapes, friend tapes, and certainly our own mish-mash of self-esteem tapes. At times these will push our emotional buttons before we even know what has happened. Our families play a big part of how we see ourselves in the world. Now that our partners are an integral part of our world, there is little chance that the past and the present can be or even should be kept completely separate in our hearts and minds.

It is important to pay attention to what feelings are about the past and about other people, and what feelings are about the two of you and the dynamics of your relationship. **When in doubt, check it out.** Is it a 'now' response for a 'now' event with my partner...or is it a conditioned or 'tape' response to something that happened a long time ago? If you can identify the difference and talk with each other about what triggers various reactions, you can get past just about anything and anybody who shouldn't be 'living' with you and your partner. On the other hand, those values and beliefs you each hold dear – things that are truly and important and an authentic part of who you are today – will need to be honored by each other or you'll find a growing dissonance between who you really are and who your partner either thinks you are or wants you to be.

Many people clearly influence us, from birth. Some of those relationships had a very positive impact; some had a negative impact. For couples to enjoy their lives together, the past needs to be recognized but not dwelled upon, such that each person can feel safe and loved for who he or she is today and what he or she is contributing to the relationship.

FACTOR 9: Home

The old saying “home is where the heart is” couldn’t be more accurate. There are many traditional and non-traditional home life styles for couples today. Some people travel a great deal; sometimes one partner stays in the same location and the other commutes at long distances; some have one home as a base, and another as a get away. There are too many choices to list, and pointless because it makes absolutely no difference what option you have determined is “home” for the two of you.

This factor is all about whether or not there is agreement between you regarding how you use and live in your home(s). **It IS important how you each feel about the way home life in your relationship is working for you.**

Whether you live together or you don’t, there will be things you do together in a home environment. You will likely entertain, sleep, eat, own things together, keep house in some way, and create one or more homes for your time together. You are likely to be sharing living space somewhere, at least part of the time. Do you share belongings? Do you feel the other respects those belongings that are separate and those that are shared? How do you operate together when you are in a shared space? How are decisions made about your home territory? The question is: is it working for each of you? If not, why not?

How we feel when we are home has a substantive impact on all our relationships, not the least of which is our love relationship. If we feel safe, loved, secure, trusted, non-chaotic, peaceful, and joyful, relaxed at home, we are more likely to feel more comfortable outside of the home. Even if we don’t feel terrific outside our ‘nest’, home becomes a sanctuary – a place where we can really ‘let our hair down’ and be authentically ourselves. When it’s working for us, and we open the door, we feel a sigh of relief that, if said out loud might sound like, “Ah, it’s good to be home again.”

Wherever ‘home’ is, it must feel right to each partner, and if it does, this adds immeasurably to the relationship and to each individual. If it does not, something is wrong, and that something requires honest conversation to correct.

When answering these questions, think about how you feel when you are at home, and why. Consider when it feels the way you want it to feel and when it does not. What are the differences, and what are the events or situations that lead to your feeling one way or the other? These are clues to help you improve one of the most important factors in your emotional and physical life – a factor that impacts all your relationships.

FACTOR 10: Decisions

On every team, the ways we decide-how-to-decide is a key factor in the success of the team. We need to know who makes decisions and how they will be made to feel secure, trusting, and aware of those things that impact us. **A couple is a team of two.**

Decisions are being made every moment; the question is have you ever taken a good look at how and if it's working well for you in your relationship? We all prefer to be involved in decisions that impact our lives and our environment. If partners take this into account before making family, social, financial, business, etc. commitments and decisions, this usually indicates the couple has worked out a system for input, checks and balances that brings them both satisfaction. If this is not the case, it is highly likely that this factor is contributes to tension, loss of trust and respect, and certainly can create a sense of feeling under-valued by our partner.

Decision-making happens so often in our daily lives that we simply can't allow it to be unconscious. Awareness about decisions and the impact of those decisions is something every couple either has or will have to come to grips with sooner or later.

Couples run into trouble when one partner makes decisions for the two of them without the other's consent. It could be as benign as dinner plans, or agreeing to any activity or event without checking with the other for preference or schedule conflicts. It could be as devastating as unilaterally committing one's partner to do something without asking him or her, just to 'force' the person into something that is intended to be 'good for you.'

The question to ask yourself is – how much control do I feel I have about decisions that impact me and my life and happiness? The other question to ask is – how much control do you attempt to exert over your partner's decisions? Then ask yourself why you feel this way. When this factor is working well for couples, each person feels respected for his or her opinion and preferences, even when you disagree. Decisions about things that impact your life are discussed openly, feelings expressed without fear or anger, and together you come to conclusions you can both live with and support – even when a decision the two of you make may not be one or the other's first choice.

Many people have found it helpful to 'weigh' the importance of a decision for each partner and allow the decision to go where the 'energy' is. This works when one partner may disagree somewhat, but he or she doesn't hold a strong opinion one way or the other. It doesn't work if partners disagree and both feel strongly about the matter. The latter is a situation that demands each to understand why the other believes or feels the way he or she does, so that a mutually acceptable conclusion can be reached.

The questions in this factor are focused on joint decision-making and the feelings associated with them. Pay attention to how empowered you feel about the decisions that impact you in your relationship, and consider how empowered your partner may feel as well.

FACTOR 11: Humor

Couples who laugh a lot together are far more likely to stay together. In fact, when you share a sense of what is funny and what is not, other people may actually perceive you as having your own special “language.” This is fairly common among long term couples who have come as close as we usually get to “reading each others’ mind.”

Humor that is joyful and non-hurtful is so healthy it can actually impact one’s physical health in positive and measurable ways. Laughter is an indicator of how much intimacy has grown among the members of any group. Couples are a group of two!

Finding ways to keep from taking yourself and each other too seriously is a way to get through tough times, misunderstandings, and tense moments. It’s just so much easier to laugh than to live in an angry or depressed state – and it adds so much positive energy to the relationship and to those around you. Finding the light side of things is good for keeping life in perspective. We can all fall into the trap of taking the world and ourselves too seriously for too long. Joyfulness is a lot more fun than sorrow. Both of these feelings happen in our lives, but the more we can focus on what IS working and enjoyable, the more we gain strength for the difficult times we all face.

Take a moment when you are answering this factor to think about the last time the two of you really laughed together. How often, what happened, is it normal or unusual for the laughter to happen between you in healthy ways? Does the humor you share help or hurt? Just think about it, and then talk together about what you can do to maintain frequent funny moments or to increase them.

FACTOR 12: Hobbies/Interests

Play is similar to humor, in that it adds lightness to our lives, which are often very complex and busy.

Hobbies and interests are things that “feed the soul” and distract us from the “noise” in the world and allow us to focus on those things that are fun, and bring us joy outside of work (inside or outside the home) and routine home responsibilities.

This factor asks you to consider how much the two of you play together and/or play apart at things you enjoy that are not work related.

There is no right or wrong answer about play. The question is, do you do it, and if you do it, do you respect and honor your partner’s playtime? Some couples have shared hobbies and some have very different ones. Some have interests that are compatible or similar to one another. Again, it really does not matter except to pay attention to play as a factor in your lives together.

Pets are discussed in a question in this factor because many couples have pets or talk about having or not having them. This can be quite a loaded issue for some people. There are those for whom pets are essential to their happiness, and those who cannot live with pets. There are those who treat pets as though they were more human than not, and those who think this is outrageous behavior. Because the subject of pets can create significant harmony or tension between partners, it’s important to measure how similar or different your feelings are about having pets in your lives. It’s also important because with pet ownership comes responsibility – another opportunity for harmony or tension.

FACTOR 13: Friends

It is rarely the case that a couple isolates themselves from all others. Chances are pretty good that we, as social animals, will have social lives that include one or more circles of friends, colleagues, old and new.

This factor asks each partner to think about those circles and how the other “fits” into them and reacts to them. Does it work pretty well or are there tension points about specific people or time spent away from one’s partner?

We think it is fair to say that jealousy is often a cancer in any relationship. Therefore, take a hard look at your real feelings about your partner’s relationships and why you feel good or not good about them. What is it that works or doesn’t work for you?

There are times when people feel someone else is living within their relationship aside from the two who are a couple – and one or more friends are present during much of the couple’s down time. There are situations when one partner is far too dependent on the other and has not created friendships outside the relationship. These are two extremes of unbalanced friendship scenarios. Ask yourselves if there is balance or imbalance with friendships for either of you and what is the impact either way.

Since one person cannot possibly be all things for another, it is a good practice to have some friends and colleagues outside the primary relationship with whom one can share experiences, have fun, and expand horizons. The way these friendships work should strengthen, not weaken the couple’s relationship. If this is not the case, then it’s very important to discuss this factor and find a way to make different and positive choices.

FACTOR 14: Children

While some people treat their pets like children when they have no children, human children add a quantum leap of complexities into any relationship. This factor asks each member of the couple to take a hard look at how the topic of children plays out in their lives.

The questions focus on communication around feelings about children, raising children, and behaviors involving children. Most humans are very protective and have strong feelings about caring for children. We also get exhausted, frustrated, and angry with children and with our partners.

When couples integrate children into their lives, whether they are their own or not, belong biologically or adoptively to one or the other, or any other possibility (fostering, inheriting from a relative's illness or death, etc.) children have a HUGE impact on the couple's resources. Those resources are time, money, food, home space, energy, and love.

This factor asks you to let go of any assumptions and be very honest about how much the two of you agree about kids. We didn't ask you about whether or not children have come between you or if they have brought you closer together. A discussion about how well you are integrating the topic of or the reality of children into your relationship is likely to happen naturally. We hope it does, because there are few things that can knock a couple for a loop more than the impact of miniature humans entering our lives! And at the other end of the spectrum is when one partner wants children and the other does not, or when child raising philosophy and behaviors are dramatically different between partners.

It's very important to discuss where you are on the agreement scale in this factor and spend the time needed to have those conversations if you are in disagreement.

FACTOR 15: Food

Without food we die. Therefore, food matters to us on a very deep and primal level. Because most of you who are answering Ci2i questions have never starved, it is not surprising that we take the availability and presence of food for granted. However, the absolute necessity of continuously needing to feed ourselves keeps us consciously and unconsciously focused on food many times a day.

These factor questions ask each of you to think about how you interact with food within your relationship. There are a lot of long held rituals associated with food gathering and preparation, even though we are not primitively tribal or nomadic in many of our societies. Humans have always had food rituals and developed traditions. Fairly recently in our history, we have come to consider the traditional turkey for Thanksgiving in the USA as a symbol of the meal and celebration. Of course there are all the religious traditions about what one can and cannot eat, when, where, how cooked, how gathered, how blessed, etc. Given the deep meaning we humans attach to food beyond mere sustenance, it is important to ask how you manage food issues as a couple.

What are your rituals, traditions, and feelings about the way you and your partner gather, cook, and eat your food? How do you share duties? Is there anything about the way your partner eats that bothers you? Why?

And finally the question of “I feel I can eat whatever I like when I am with my partner.” This question is very important to help you understand how safe and authentic you feel with your partner. If you can eat whatever you like and not give it a second thought, that’s a good place to be. If you can’t, then it’s important to get that out in the open. For you to remain in an uncomfortable place about food with your partner often leads to resentment, anger, secrets, and negative energy about something that should be nourishing and live giving.

We have a lot of emotions attached to food and refreshment – and it’s easy to understand why. It’s not always so easy to talk about why. Your Ci2i answers can help you have those conversations if they are needed.

FACTOR 16: Entertainment

Similar to the Friends factor, entertainment asks you to think about the way you socialize. The emphasis here is more about the ways in which you socialize together, not how you integrate friends into your relationship.

People have very different needs, styles, tolerances, preferences, etc. regarding socialization. Some people prefer to have just a few close friends involved, some prefer a large party, some prefer to stay home to entertain, and others like to go out on the town. Some people could go out every night while others need more alone time. And there are many more differences. The question here is really trying to help you understand what your similarities and differences are and to see how much you understand and accommodate each other's needs and wants without giving up your own.

The other emphasis is about being entertained together...does it work? Are you comfortable with the way you and your partner mingle with others, connect, are together and yet with others? And is it fun? If not, then you'll need to figure out what is getting in the way.

Lastly, the issue of social circles is indeed more significant than many realize. People generally bring friends and acquaintances with them when they enter new relationships, and couples may join those friends at times or create new ones together, etc. Nevertheless, it is usually a strength for each to feel comfortable within one's partner's circle of friends and family. In this factor, we focus on the non-family social circle. If there is not a fit – such as “I can't stand your friends or your friends won't talk to me!” then something will surely give eventually, and if the friends are long time and close, it is likely they will outlive the couple's relationship. Whenever we choose to give up all of our history for one relationship, we risk losing part of ourselves, and most people won't do it or if they do, they resent it, and that is a killer for love relationships.

It is always good to discuss this topic and keep the lines open as your lives and interests change over time. Ask yourselves what each of you like to do for entertainment, and how your social circles interact with you as a couple.

FACTOR 17: Substances

Agreement levels within this factor are going to tell you both a great deal about whether your use or non-use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products is a problem in your relationship or not. The answers will not likely be a surprise, but at least you now have specific questions to focus in on so you can have a reasoned discussion about a topic that can give rise to high emotion. It is essential for your relationship's well being to have a very clear understanding about how each of you feels about this topic.

If you talk openly but still disagree, then keep talking and get whatever help you need as a couple. If you have differences but work together for a solution, that means you are still open and talking. If you have the same values about whether or not to use substances, that will likely bring you closer.

If there is a great deal of difference in this factor between you, it is important to discuss in ways each of you can feel heard and understood. Because this topic is so loaded with the opportunity for judgment and anger, and yet must be discussed, we would suggest you consider third party assistance, such as counseling, clerics, therapy, etc. if you cannot get to a good place on your own. It's worth the effort to get this factor on the table and worked out.

FACTOR 18: Vacations

This factor is about fun and play like the Hobbies and Entertainment factors, but with a different emphasis. Vacations have other characteristics that are not just about fun and hobbies. Normally vacations are longer periods of time that a couple is spending together (or apart); more planning goes into vacations; more money may be spent on a vacation than normal entertainment, and vacations can give couples the opportunity to spend a lot of quality time in each other's company.

Take the time to recall your vacations as a couple. How did you plan them? Who was in charge of what aspects of the vacation? Did each of you get to enjoy the vacation the way you wanted to, if so, why – if not, why not? And be honest about whether or not the vacation was more play than work or more work than play. If it was more work than play for either or both of you, it's important to discuss the reasons you feel this way before you invest time and money in the next vacation.

It is so important for individuals to take time away from normal routine and "recharge" emotional batteries. Do you take that time for yourself, for your relationship? Do you vacation on your own or together, with others, a combination of options? Again, there is no right or wrong way to vacation; what matters is that you do get the break from time to time, and that when you take that break, you feel good about it individually and as a couple.

FACTOR 19: Health

We all know that our health is a precious thing that we can lose at any time, but that we hope to be healthy as long as possible. This factor is about the way the two of you interact around health issues.

Asking if you agree that your partner would “be there” for you is an indicator of your sense of confidence in the depth of commitment you have for each other. If you have never considered the question, it’s important to at least discuss what you feel with your partner about your perceptions of them in helping you, and how you believe each of you would respond to a serious health scenario.

Part of loving one another is paying attention to the well being of each other. It is one thing to care, and another to nag. The question about encouraging health in positive ways is asking you to think about how you encourage. The question also assumes positive motivation but asks about impact. For instance, it is not uncommon for someone who loves us to want us to get more exercise, or see a doctor about chronic headaches, or stop smoking...etc. The issue here is how do we provide that encouragement? Is it through pro-active and positive means that have no judgment, or do we nag and bluster and judge?

Of course, the ways in which one person in a relationship responds to concern impacts the other person. The last question in this factor addresses whether or not you talk about health issues, healthy or unhealthy behaviors, and the impact of those behaviors on each other. Again, effective communication is the key to understanding each other’s fears, concerns, abilities, and impact regarding your beliefs, values, and emotions about health issues.

FACTOR 20: Beliefs

Partners do not have to share all the same beliefs to be happy together, but they cannot be in complete disagreement about belief systems and hope to sustain a relationship over the long haul. This is a very deeply ingrained factor for most people. We form our beliefs from our families and upbringing, our culture, our experiences, and in finding our own way in the world as adults. What we believe and how important things are to us are likely to change somewhat over time; this is a natural part of life's journey through many paths...education, information, relationships, work, community, and the unavoidable daily experiences in our world.

This factor focuses on a few belief areas – ones that tend to crop up in our normal daily lives as we work and live within our larger society. The questions here can and should generate a good conversation about all kinds of beliefs. If there are areas where you disagree, the most important thing is not your area of disagreement, but how much you each honor the beliefs of the other even when they are different than your own.

FACTOR 21: Violence and Anger

The world we live in can feel unsafe at times and certainly be unsafe for us if we experience violence and rage personally. This factor focuses on the role, if any, that violence and anger play inside your relationship. Here, we also ask you to examine how similarly you feel about violence.

Anger is not a bad thing at all. It's a natural, normal feeling among the multitude of feelings we experience as humans. The issue with anger is not about feeling it or even expressing that you feel it; the issue is about HOW that happens.

We also ask you about safety. Do you or don't you feel emotionally and/or physically safe – with your partner? If not, you absolutely must deal with this issue – together and/or with third party help. The vast majority of violent crimes in the USA are between people who actually know each other, and many of those are “crimes of passion” involving people who are or have been in a love relationship. If this is an area of concern, do not assume “it won't happen to us” – assume instead “it could happen to us” if we don't get help.

Once again, trust is a key to the sense one has of feeling safe. It is normal and natural for all of us to occasionally say and do things that are hurtful to our loved ones. The question is – do you believe that the intent was unintentional or intentional? Motivation makes a great deal of difference when we hurt one another.

FACTOR 22: Commitment

Commitment is a word most of us understand; yet we may mean different things when we use the word. This factor is an opportunity for you, as a couple, to clarify what each is thinking and feeling when you talk about commitment.

The questions in this factor focus on helping you look at the word and feelings around commitment in a few ways. Does your relationship come “first” and what does that mean, to come “first?” For some, it means that if one must make a choice between the relationship and another person/activity/desire, we will choose the relationship. For others, it may mean something else. What does it mean to each of you?

Fidelity is a touchy subject for many people. Bringing it up here is purposeful because it is important that you both agree about fidelity – no matter what it is you agree upon. You might have an “open” sexual agreement; you might have a very clear line drawn about flirting, socializing with others, and sexual fidelity. Again, Ci2i has no opinion to offer, just questions to ask. The question here is “are you on the same page about what fidelity means to each of you?”

Love is a pretty big deal in a committed relationship. Of course we will never have the perfect definition of love – so whatever love is to you, that’s good enough for answering the last question in this factor. If you believe you are loved, great. If you don’t know or don’t think so, that’s not so great, but it sure is a good idea to get that on the table and either celebrate those feelings with your partner or discuss them and get to a better place together or individually.

FACTOR 23: Shared Values

There are 8 questions in this factor rather than 4. While values have certainly been part of nearly every factor, there are some questions that, if they stood alone, would have created confusion, or were not easily combined with other factors.

While these are self-explanatory for the most part, here are a few thoughts for you to consider.

Do you feel good about or do you feel angst about how much effort and responsibility each of you carry in the relationship?

Do you compete? Competition tends to wreck havoc in a love relationship because it sends the message that the love is “conditional” and that one partner isn’t supporting the other, but in fact, trying to beat the other. This isn’t very conducive to feeling emotionally safe or committed to the other’s success.

The habit of ‘fixing” and “controlling” again send the message that love is conditional, and that “I am smarter than, more competent than, better than...you.” Even though the intent may be the opposite of this, the impact is negative.

You know if you have the same sense of right and wrong – you’ll know it the first time a choice has to be made that has a right and wrong component. This is about deeply held values and can make or break a relationship if the beliefs are very different.

It’s amazing how many people fight over time issues – particularly being “on time.” Take a look at how this works in your relationship and discuss it, what creates the tension if there is any, and what emotional weight you give to this topic.

Can you keep secrets for each other? If so, great. If not, why not? Are the secrets you keep ones that honor the other person, protect them, or enable them in unhealthy ways? Again, take a look at how this plays out in your lives and discuss what’s working and what’s not.

Judgment – there is that word again. Judgment and blame are close cousins – one usually follows the other into the fray. This asks about political views, but again, this is simply another way to ask you what role judgment plays in your relationship, because we often judge others when we have a value that tells us “we need to be right” even if it means “making the other person wrong.” This happens so much in life and in relationships, without our realizing it, so we’ve emphasized the question in Ci2i.

FACTOR 24:

These questions are focused on “what happens when...” regarding our own “stories” that we tell ourselves about ourselves and our partner. Whether it is good news or not good news, we can easily get caught up in ascribing motivation to our partners and judging him or her as well as ourselves.

Some people find these questions to be useful when working with a counselor, but they can also be helpful for, at a minimum, some introspection about the action → reaction cycle that may occur within your relationship.

The answers to these questions are only found at the end of the Full Report.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

These 3 questions are intended to provide the opportunity for each of you to talk about or emphasize or even clarify things that did or did not come up in the Factor questions.

When speaking about those things you most appreciate in your relationship, be specific, give examples, and let your partner know why these things are meaningful and important to you. You might begin your sentence with, “I so appreciate the times when...because...” Be sincere and make sure you share your feelings about things that your partner can understand and feel good about.

When speaking about those things that frustrate you, again, be specific, give examples, and without blaming or judging, let your partner know why these things might be getting in the way of fully appreciating and/or enjoying one another. The goal here is to raise awareness so the relationship grows stronger. The goal is NOT to point out everything your partner does that might irritate you.

The last question is intended to give you the opportunity to clarify or bring attention to items that you feel did not get enough emphasis in the rest of Ci2i. It is also a place to express in writing what may be difficult for you to say out loud. Use as much space as you like, but **keep the points to the point** and leave the rest for conversations together after you’ve both completed Ci2i.

This could be anything at all, but here is a fictitious example: “even though I realize we have different ways of getting things done, and I sometimes get impatient with your way, I trust that you will do whatever you promise to do.” Or, “It is really important to me that you fully hear me out and listen to my ideas before you disagree or try to improve upon them.”

If you have any FEEDBACK for us that would improve the questions or FACTOR FACTS, please let us know through the FEEDBACK link. Your information comes to us anonymously – as “feedback@ci2i - so your opinions are safe with us! Thank you.