

Appreciation Sharing Exercise

Building Love Through Specific Recognition

Overview

Appreciation Sharing is a structured 10-minute exercise where partners take turns expressing specific, meaningful appreciation for each other. Unlike casual thank-yous, this practice requires thoughtful reflection on the unique ways your partner contributes to your life and relationship. Dr. Sara Algoe's research at UNC shows that thoughtful appreciation not only makes the receiver feel valued but also increases the giver's feelings of love and commitment.

The Science of Appreciation

When we express genuine appreciation, several powerful processes occur:

- **Neurochemical Bonding:** Both giver and receiver experience oxytocin release, strengthening emotional bonds
- **Positive Attention:** Your brain begins noticing more positive qualities, creating an upward spiral of goodwill
- **Reciprocity Effect:** Feeling appreciated makes your partner more likely to show appreciation in return
- **Identity Affirmation:** Being seen and valued for who you are strengthens sense of self and relationship security
- **Buffer Against Negativity:** Regular appreciation creates a reservoir of good will that cushions against conflicts

The 5-5 Structure

This exercise uses a '5-5' format: each partner gets 5 uninterrupted minutes to share appreciation. The structure prevents the common pitfall of quick exchanges where neither person really goes deep.

Phase 1: Partner A Shares (5 minutes)

Partner A shares at least THREE specific appreciations. Each should include: (1) What the person did or who they are, (2) How it made you feel, (3) Why it matters to you/the relationship.

Phase 2: Partner B Receives (During A's sharing)

Partner B simply listens, makes eye contact, and receives the appreciation without deflecting, minimizing, or immediately reciprocating. Just say 'thank you' or 'that means a lot to hear.'

Phase 3: Switch (5 minutes)

Now Partner B shares their appreciations while Partner A receives. Use the same format.

Example Appreciations

Specific Action:

"I appreciate that you took time to ask about my difficult conversation with my mom yesterday. You remembered it was happening and checked in. It made me feel like my struggles matter to you, and it reminds me that I have a true partner who pays attention to my life."

Character Quality:

"I appreciate your patience, especially how you stayed calm yesterday when I was stressed and snappy. You didn't take it personally or snap back. It made me feel safe to have a bad moment without damaging us, and it shows me the emotional maturity you bring to our relationship."

Ongoing Contribution:

"I appreciate how you consistently make our bed every morning. I know it seems small, but it creates a sense of order that calms me when I walk into our room. It makes me feel like we're building a life together with care and intention, not just coexisting."

What Makes Appreciation Meaningful

- **Specificity:** "You're great" feels nice but empty. "The way you laugh at my silly jokes" is memorable
- **Timeliness:** Appreciate recent actions or moments - they're more emotionally resonant
- **Effort Recognition:** Notice things that required thought, time, or overcoming difficulty
- **Impact Statement:** Always include how their action/quality affected you emotionally
- **Relationship Context:** Connect it to your shared story, values, or what you're building together

Common Mistakes to Avoid

The Compliment Sandwich: Don't follow appreciation with criticism or requests for change

Comparative Appreciation: Avoid 'You're so much better than my ex' or comparisons to others

Transactional Framing: Don't make it about what you get ('I like when you cook because then I don't have to')

Deflection When Receiving: Don't minimize ('Oh, it was nothing') or immediately redirect ('Well, YOU...')

Generic Platitudes: Skip vague statements like 'You're amazing' without specific reasons why

Receiving Appreciation Gracefully

Many people struggle more with receiving appreciation than giving it. Here's how to receive well:

- **Make Eye Contact:** Look at your partner while they share - it shows you're taking it in
- **Breathe and Allow:** Let yourself feel good rather than immediately thinking about what you should say back
- **Simple Acknowledgment:** 'Thank you,' 'That means a lot,' or 'I'm glad you noticed' are perfect responses
- **Resist Deflecting:** Don't minimize your actions or immediately change the subject
- **No Immediate Reciprocation:** You'll have your turn - don't interrupt their appreciation with yours

Weekly Practice Suggestions

Make this a weekly ritual on the same day/time. Many couples choose Sunday evening to reflect on the week, or Friday evening to celebrate making it through. After 4-6 weeks, evaluate how this practice has affected your relationship. Most couples report feeling more seen, valued, and committed.