

Relationship State of the Union

A Comprehensive Relationship Check-In

The Relationship State of the Union is a structured 60-minute quarterly assessment where couples step back from daily life to evaluate the health of their relationship across key dimensions. Similar to how businesses conduct quarterly reviews, this practice helps you identify strengths to celebrate, weaknesses to address, and goals to set before small issues become major problems. Dr. William Doherty's research on intentional relationships shows that couples who regularly assess their relationship have significantly higher satisfaction and lower divorce rates.

Why Regular Assessments Matter

- **Prevents Drift:** Without intentional check-ins, couples slowly drift apart without noticing until it's a crisis
- **Addresses Issues Early:** Small resentments caught early are easy to fix; ignored, they become deal-breakers
- **Tracks Progress:** You can see how your relationship is evolving and whether changes you've made are working
- **Celebrates Wins:** Acknowledging what's going well creates positive momentum
- **Clarifies Expectations:** Regular reviews ensure you're still on the same page about the relationship

The Seven Domains to Assess

Rate each domain from 1-10 (1=crisis, 5=okay, 10=thriving), then discuss:

1. **Communication & Connection:** How well do we talk, listen, and understand each other? Do we have meaningful conversations regularly? Do we feel heard?
2. **Intimacy & Affection:** Are we satisfied with emotional and physical intimacy? Do we feel desired and close? Is our sex life working for both of us?
3. **Conflict & Problem-Solving:** How do we handle disagreements? Can we repair after fights? Are we addressing issues or avoiding them?

4. Trust & Commitment: Do we feel secure in the relationship? Are we confident in each other's loyalty? Do we trust each other with vulnerability?

5. Shared Life & Partnership: Are we functioning well as a team? Do we support each other's goals? Are household and financial responsibilities fair?

6. Individual Growth & Autonomy: Do we support each other's personal development? Do we have healthy independence? Are individual needs being met?

7. Fun & Adventure: Are we enjoying our time together? Do we laugh? Are we creating positive memories and experiences?

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The State of the Union Process

Part 1 - Individual Reflection (15 minutes): Each person privately rates all seven domains and writes brief notes about what's working and what needs attention. Be honest - this is for your relationship's benefit.

Part 2 - Sharing Ratings (15 minutes): Take turns sharing your ratings for each domain. Notice where you agree and where perceptions differ. Different ratings aren't wrong - they're important information about differing experiences.

Part 3 - Deep Dive Discussion (20 minutes): Choose the 2-3 domains with the lowest ratings or biggest rating differences. Discuss: What specifically needs attention? What would improvement look like? What can we each do differently?

Part 4 - Celebrate & Commit (10 minutes): Acknowledge at least three things that are going well. Then set 1-3 concrete goals for the next quarter with specific actions you'll each take.

Sample Goals Based on Assessments

- **If Communication is low:** "We'll do our Evening Check-In ritual 5 nights per week for the next 3 months"
- **If Intimacy is low:** "We'll prioritize date night every other week and initiate physical affection daily"
- **If Fun is low:** "We'll try one new activity together each month - no phones, just presence"

- **If Partnership is low:** "We'll have a household responsibilities conversation and create a fairer division of labor"

Important Guidelines

No Blame: This isn't about who's wrong. It's about "we have a problem, how do we solve it together?"

Be Specific: "Communication is bad" doesn't help. "I feel unheard when I try to talk about my day" gives something to work with.

Balanced Feedback: For every area of concern you raise, also acknowledge something you appreciate.

Action-Oriented: Don't just identify problems - commit to specific changes you'll each make.

Follow Through: Set a calendar reminder for your next State of the Union and review whether you kept your commitments.

When to Do Emergency Check-Ins

While quarterly is the recommended frequency, schedule an emergency State of the Union if: you've been fighting more than usual, you feel disconnected or lonely in the relationship, a major life change has occurred, or you find yourself thinking "Is this working?" more often. Early intervention prevents crises.

Tracking Progress Over Time

Keep a simple spreadsheet or journal of your ratings each quarter. Over time, you'll see patterns - which areas consistently need attention, which have improved, and whether your overall relationship satisfaction is trending up or down. This data helps you make informed decisions about your relationship and notice positive changes you might otherwise overlook.