

EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT EXERCISE

The purpose of this exercise is to give input to, and receive from, your partner those areas of your lives which could benefit most from more emotional connection. Below is a long list of activities that some couples do together – everything from washing dishes to going bowling. Choose the three that you most wish your partner would do with you. You can also circle an item if you and your spouse already do it jointly but you would like for them to do so more frequently or your spouse was more there emotionally during the activity. Avoid making this a competition, or a “tit for tat.” The goal is to focus on what YOU can do to improve your marriage – not on what your spouse should be doing but isn’t.

1. Reunite at the end of the day and talk about how it went.
2. Shop for groceries. Make up the shopping list.
3. Cook dinner, bake.
4. Clean house, do laundry.
5. Shop together for gifts or clothes (for self, kids, or friends).
6. Go out (no kids) for brunch or dinner, or to your favorite haunt or bar.
7. Read the morning paper together.
8. Help each other with a self-improvement plan (e.g., a new class, exercise)
9. Plan and host a dinner party.
10. Call and/or think about each other during the workday.
11. Stay overnight at a romantic hideaway.
12. Eat breakfast together during the work week.
13. Go to a church, mosque, or synagogue together.
14. Do yard work, shovel the walk, do home repairs, car maintenance, and washing.
15. Perform committee work in the community (e.g., volunteering).
16. Exercise together.
17. Go on weekend outings (e.g., picnic, drives)
18. Spend “everyday” time with kids – bedtimes, baths, homework.
19. Take the kids on outings (e.g., zoo, museum, dinner).
20. Attend school functions (e.g., teacher conferences).
21. Stay in touch with/spend time with kin (parents, in-laws, siblings).
22. Entertain out-of-town guests.
23. Travel together (plane, bus, train, car).
24. Watch TV or videos.
25. Order take out.
26. Double-date with friends.
27. Attend sporting events.
28. Engage in a favorite activity (e.g., bowl, go to amusement park, bicycle, etc.)
29. Talk or read together by an open fire.
30. Listen to music.
31. Go dancing or attend a concert, nightclub, jazz club, or theater.
32. Host your child’s birthday party.
33. Take your child to lessons.
34. Attend your child’s sporting events or performance (recital, play, etc.)
35. Pay bills.
36. Write letters or cards.

37. Deal with family medical events (take kids to the doctor, dentist, or emergency room).
38. Work at home, but still be together in some way.
39. Go to a community event (church auction, etc.)
40. Go to a party.
41. Drive to or from work together.
42. Celebrate milestones in your children's lives (confirmation, graduation, etc.)
43. Celebrate other milestones in your lives (promotion, retirement, etc.)
44. Play computer games, surf the Internet.
45. Supervise your children's play dates.
46. Plan vacations.
47. Plan your future together. Dream.
48. Walk the dog.
49. Read out loud together.
50. Play a board game or a card game.
51. Put on plays or skits together.
52. Do errands together on a weekend.
53. Engage in hobbies (painting, sculpting, making music, crafts, etc.)
54. Talk over drinks (alcohol, coffee, or tea).
55. Find time to just talk without interruptions – find time for spouse to really listen to you.
56. Philosophize.
57. Gossip (talk about other people).
58. Attend a funeral.
59. Help out other people.
60. Hunt for a new house or apartment.
61. Test-drive new cars.

Now, share your top three choices with each other so you both know how best to turn toward each other and accrue points.

Warning: Sometimes this exercise generates conflict because one or both spouses will focus on the shortcoming or deficiencies of the other. To avoid this remember that this exercise should be done in a spirit of flattery (that you're telling your spouse that "I want more of you.") Rather than be critical of shortcomings in the past, focus on what you would like to have happen now.

The real benefit comes when you both look at the three items your partner chose and follow through by committing to do one of them.

(modified from John Gottman, Ph.D. *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*)