

Session 5

The Impact of Family

RECAP



Tell your partner:

'You're really good at' (choose one)

- prioritising our date night
- meeting my need for... (see 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' on pages 18–19)
- talking about how you feel
- listening to me without interrupting, criticising or offering advice
- saying what you appreciate about me
- discussing the issue rather than attacking me when we disagree
- supporting me by...
- not holding on to hurt and anger
- apologising
- forgiving me

Then say to them:

'I need to work on' (choose one)

- prioritising our date night
- meeting your need for... (see 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' on pages 18–19)
- talking about how I feel
- listening to you without interrupting, criticising or offering advice
- saying what I appreciate about you
- discussing the issue rather than attacking you when we disagree
- supporting you by...
- not holding on to hurt and anger
- apologising
- forgiving you

Session 5 – The Impact of Family

How would you describe your family background?



Family background has a big influence on a marriage

- for some people, the support they receive from their family is good and helpful in building a strong marriage
- for others, it's more complicated and can even be damaging

Leaving and letting go

When we get married, a profound change should take place in our relationship with our parent or parents (or whoever were our main caregivers as we grew up)

- the change from being a child and completely dependent upon them to a healthy independence as an adult
- the significance of leaving is not so much the physical move as the psychological and emotional one
- we create **a new 'centre of gravity'** – our highest loyalty must be to each other

Support each other.

If necessary, put boundaries in place, not to cut yourselves off from your parents but to connect with them as a couple in a new way.

**Listen to parental advice
but make your own decisions
together as a couple.**

For this reason a man [and a woman] will leave their father and mother and be united to [each other]...

– GENESIS 2:24

CONVERSATION 1

10 minutes



CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Talk about your current relationships with wider family members.
- Discuss in what ways these relationships are a source of strength and support in your marriage.
- Then see if you can identify anything that's causing tension and what changes you could make.

Building healthy family relationships

1. Resolve any conflict

Use the same process as in Session 4 to unblock the drain:

- identify and talk about the main issue causing tension
- apologise when you have been wrong
- choose to forgive and move on

2. Consider their needs

Focusing on what irritates us pushes us apart.

Focusing on another person's needs draws us together.

It can be helpful to take the initiative with parents about things like:

- visiting them
- enabling them to see their grandchildren
- working out what holidays you might spend together
- phoning them

Honour your father and your mother...

- EXODUS 20:12

CONVERSATION 2

10 minutes



SUPPORTING YOUR PARENTS

1. How could you express your gratitude towards your parents (and / or your parents-in-law)?

2. How can you best keep in touch with your parents (and / or parents-in-law)? Consider telephone calls, timing and length of visits, and other ways of communicating with them.

3. Consider the needs of your parents and parents-in-law, or other family members. From the list below, tick the relevant boxes for their needs. Beside the boxes you have ticked, write the ways you could help meet those needs.

Husband's parent(s) (or other family members)	Needs	Wife's parent(s) (or other family members)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Advice	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Companionship	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Practical help	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Security	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Need	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Need	<input type="checkbox"/>

Looking at our past

We bring a mixture of experiences into our marriage from our family background:

- what was good (be grateful for that)
- what was different to our partner's experience (be aware that this can cause conflict)
- what was negative (and may be painful)

A healthy home involves providing a **secure base** from which children can explore, and a **safe haven** to which they return to have their emotional needs met.

Buried hurt and anger from our past can come out against our partner.

Is there anything negative from your upbringing that is influencing your relationship with your partner?



If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

– ROMANS 12:18

CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



REFLECTING ON YOUR UPBRINGING

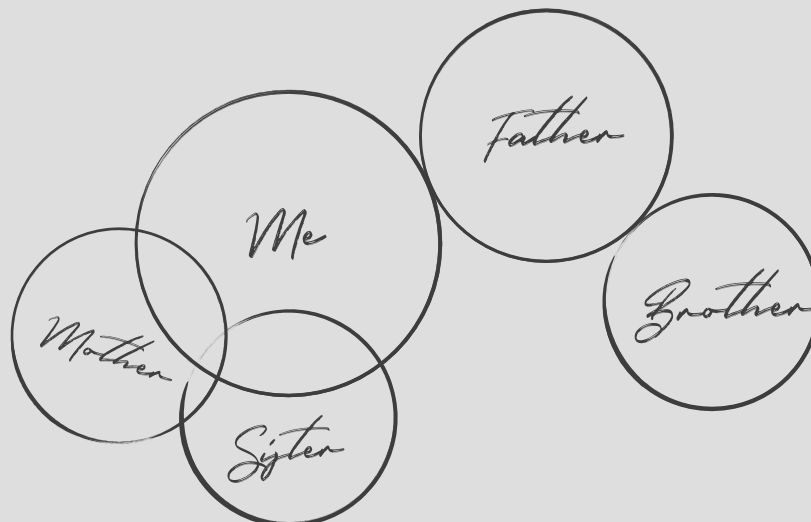
A. Your immediate family relationships

The big circle drawn below represents yourself. Draw circles to represent the relationship between members of your immediate family as you were growing up.

- If there was some relationship (some communication but not close), make the circles touch
- If there was a close relationship (good, open communication and conflict well resolved), overlap the circles
- If there was a lack of relationship (divorced, separated or no communication), separate the circles

Then look at each other's arrangement.

For example:



Please turn over

B. Your parents' / step-parents' (or main caregivers') relationship with you

Please consider the following questions and tick the relevant boxes:

Did your parents or step-parents...	Mother/ Step-mother (tick if Yes)	Father/ Step-father (tick if Yes)
praise you as a child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
meet your physical needs (for food, clothes, home, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you a sense of security?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
respect your uniqueness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
encourage you in your development?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
set clear rules / appropriate boundaries for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you increasing freedom appropriate to your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
comfort you when you were upset?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
take an interest in your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
treat their children equally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
admit their mistakes and apologise when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
forgive you for your mistakes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have realistic expectations of what was appropriate for your age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
accept your friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
help you relate well to your siblings and peers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
establish clear family rules?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give discipline in a consistent, fair way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
spend ample time with you (ie, play with you, talk to you, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show you physical affection (ie, hug you, kiss you, etc)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give you a sense of a 'secure base' to go out from?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
provide a 'safe haven' for you to return to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C. Your parents' / step-parents' (or main caregivers') relationship with each other

Did your parents or step-parents...	Yes	Sometimes	No	Don't Know
have a strong loving relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show interest in each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have fun together regularly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
spend time together on their own?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show each other physical affection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
help each other in small or big tasks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
encourage each other with praise and appreciation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show each other respect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
communicate honestly and directly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
listen to each other without interrupting or criticising?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
resolve conflicts effectively?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
apologise to and forgive each other when appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
agree on the use of their money?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
give each other presents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
have mutual interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show a willingness to negotiate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
remain faithful to each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please turn over

When you've finished A, B and C above, please discuss the following questions together:

- Can you identify aspects to be grateful for from your upbringing?
- Did you have any unmet childhood needs?
- Are you aware of these adversely affecting your marriage?
- Are you aware of benefits to your marriage / family life through imitating your parents / step-parents / main caregivers?
- Are you aware of ways you adversely affect your marriage / family life through imitating your parents / step-parents / main caregivers?

Healing childhood pain

1. Grieve your own and your partner's unmet needs

You may encounter strong feelings as you do this, but recognising and admitting to yourself the hurt you've experienced can be a huge step forward.

Allow your partner to talk about what has been lost and give them the gift of your emotional support.

2. Forgive

Give up continuing expectations and longings of what you have wanted your parents or others to be for you.

Remember, forgiveness is an ongoing act of the will and is essential for healing.

Forgiving someone is not condoning their actions or giving them the right to repeat what they've done. Forgiveness is about being set free from the ways they've hurt you.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

- ROMANS 12:15

Forgiveness can be expressed as part of a prayer:

- nothing is beyond God's power to heal and restore
- pray for yourself and each other
- ask God to heal the sense of loss and to help you to know his love
- dwell on the promises of God in the Bible
- believe God's unconditional love for you as you are now
- do not use childhood pain as an excuse for not meeting your partner's needs

CONVERSATION 4

5 minutes



COMFORTING EACH OTHER

- If this is a hard area for your partner, ask them, 'What's the most painful part for you?'
- Reflect back what they tell you to show you're with them in this.
- Then ask your partner for one way you could support them. If you're comfortable praying, pray for each other. Otherwise, express your support in some other way.

I have loved you with an everlasting love and am constant in my affection for you.

- JEREMIAH 31:3

Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week you made me smile when...



What were the positive aspects of the family you grew up in?



What were the negative aspects of the family you grew up in?

What are the big differences between your upbringings?

I am grateful to you for the ways our marriage has brought healing to childhood loss and pain...



Think about one way you can support your parents, your in-laws or another family member this week.



– For a further conversation about building healthy relationships with your wider families, turn to Appendix 3, page 161.

Conversation starter on your next date:

Tell each other your vision for the kind of relationship and family life you hope to have moving forward?



(This may be very different to the home either of you grew up in.)