

SO, YOU'RE SEEING AN IMAGO THERAPIST...

*A Guide for Couples working on their relationship
with an Imago Relationship Therapist*

A photograph of a rustic wooden log bridge crossing a river. The bridge is made of many parallel logs and has a railing of two horizontal logs supported by vertical posts. The river is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a peaceful outdoor setting.

ANNIE GURTON, MA

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Annie Gurton, MA

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Contents

Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) Offers	vii
Observations	ix
Introduction	xi

Chapters

1 How an Imago Session Works	1
2 The Imago Theory of Attraction	13
3 The Classical Pattern of Relationships	16
4 Attachment Theory	19
5 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)	26

Appendices

Appendix i	A Brief History of Imago	29
Appendix ii	10 Characteristics of a Conscious Relationship	35
Appendix iii	Brief Imago Work-Up	39
Appendix iv	The Turtle and the Hailstorm	45
Appendix v	The Appreciation Dialogue	49
Appendix vi	The Full Imago Dialogue	51
Appendix vii	Zero Negativity	55
Appendix viii	Your Relationship Vision	57
Appendix ix	'Getting The Love You Want' Workshops	59
Appendix x	Responsibilities of the Clients	61
Appendix xi	Responsibilities of the Therapist	63
Appendix xii	Tips for Couples	65

Reading List ·····69
Acknowledgements ·····71
About the Author ·····73

Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) Offers

- An engine for change
- More understanding of what has happened to your relationship
- Greater understanding of the part each of you has played in the problems
- An explanation of why you are attracted to each other
- Skills and techniques you can use to keep your relationship healthy
- Knowledge that you can carry with you into the future
- The tools for you to become your own relationship expert
- An environment within which you can have safe conversations
- A future within which you co-create the healing of your childhood wounds.

Imago can be used to help repair a rupture in the relationship except when:

- One partner has made a final decision to end the relationship and only wants counselling to encourage the other spouse to accept that decision
(A Conscious Uncoupling or 'Goodbye' dialogue is possible if both agree.)
- One partner is coercing the other to participate

Annie Gurton, MA

- There is a danger of domestic violence, or there is ongoing violence or abuse
- There is an active and ongoing affair. That is, one partner is emotionally engaged in another relationship. (Imago is highly recommended for reconciliation and healing after an affair.)

Observations

- We come into this world whole and undamaged.
- It is mainly in childhood that we experience the pain that affects our ability to connect as adults, and form healthy intimate adult relationships.
- Relationships are not just welcome additions to our world, they are what human existence is all about.
- We are intensely social creatures, perpetually in relationships with others.
- It is through deficits in the nurturing we receive, compounded by the repressive messages of socialisation, that we hide or lose the ability to access parts of ourselves.
- In order for our species to survive, we need to form meaningful relationships with others, and ensure that these relationships survive.
- Everyone wants safety, connection and passion.
- In adulthood we go on a search for healing and growth. We unconsciously seek the right partner to help restore us to our wholeness.
- Conflict is healing and growth in action.
- Many relationships are 90% fine and it is only a dysfunctional 10% that needs work. Unfortunately its like having a toothache: it may be a small thing but it causes an overwhelming pain.
- When we feel safe, we can be our best selves.

Introduction

You are probably reading this book because you are about to have your first session with an Imago Relationship Therapist (IRT). Or maybe you have just had your first session and your Imago Relationship Therapist has suggested that you read it.

We can probably assume that the relationship with your partner is in difficulty. Statistics show that couples have come to therapy on average about seven years after the problems started. Fortunately, an increasing number of couples seek help from an IRT earlier, sometimes even long before there is any serious trouble.

But whether you have only recently met or have been in this relationship for many years, the following pages will explain the theory and practice of Imago sessions. You will learn some of the underlying theories and knowledge that explain why we are attracted to certain people, how relationships unfold, as well as what to expect in Imago sessions.

A session with an IRT is not like any other relationship guidance or couples counselling. Instead of the couple sitting opposite the therapist, you sit facing your partner and the therapist sits to one side halfway between you. The therapist functions as a coach or facilitator rather than as an expert on your relationship. An Imago therapist aims to teach you both to communicate, so that you can learn to 'listen so the other can talk and

talk so the other will listen'. An IRT gives you a structure which you can use when it is just you two together. After all, the therapist is only with you for a few hours a week and the remainder of the time you are on your own. You are acknowledged as being the experts in your particular relationship and the Imago Relationship Therapist is your coach leading you towards a more fulfilling relationship experience.

The only requirement is commitment, to the relationship and to the process. Many couples work with an Imago therapist for a while then get on with life and perhaps come back every year for a 'top-up'. This intermittent approach works well. Some couples have been seeing an Imago therapist for years, returning regularly when things arise in their relationship. Many others, having learned how to dialogue, find that they are able to resolve their conflicts themselves.

Welcome to the rest of your relationship.

How an Imago Session Works

While all therapists are different, all Certified Imago Therapists work in a similar way and the sessions will become familiar.

All Imago Relationship Therapists take on the role of facilitator and coach and do not pontificate on your relationship. They recognise that you know more about your relationship than they ever will. However they are expert facilitators of the process of change. Their aim is to empower you to become better skilled in managing your relationship. Their role is to help you both to communicate better and to facilitate a safe conversation. Their skill lies in helping you to deepen your connection in the space between you, increase your vulnerability to each other, and in this process restore greater intimacy. Imago sessions are like a rehearsal for the optimum way to function within your relationship. You will find that courage is often required. While its not easy to expose yourself and go through the work, the rewards can be profound and long-lasting.

The Initial Imago session is likely to start with a short set of questions, which might include:

1. "Is either of you on medication?"
2. "Has there been any physical or emotional abuse or violence?"

3. The therapist might say, "If I was to ask the other what your contribution to the tensions in the relationship have been, what would they say?"

The therapist will then ask your partner if you have got them right, and invite them to add any other major issues that they have not mentioned.

The therapist might ask your partner to rank them according to which is the most problematic for him/her.

Then the same question is posed to the other partner.

4. "How would you like things to be?" The IRT is asking you to state your goals from the Imago therapeutic process and sessions. The therapist might say, "Assume you have finished therapy and have had the best therapy possible and you now have the best committed relationship possible. Describe that relationship to each other."
5. The therapist might ask, "What's missing from your relationship, which if you had, would give you the relationship you want?"
6. The therapist might ask, "Is there anything else that I should know?" such as, that you are living apart, or that there has been an affair.

Note that the Imago therapist does not generally do a long 'intake process' (although there are some exceptions). It is not regarded as necessary because there is an assumption that you two know all the factual details about the relationship, and that it would take valuable time to recount absolutely everything. The IRT might ask how long you have been together, and whether there are any children. Any other crucial issues will emerge during the dialogue process.

This initial interview will reassure each of you that this is a safe, confidential space where you can work on your relationship and re-establish connection with each other.



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The therapist will invite you take the 'dialogue position' where you sit opposite your partner, probably not more than 30cm apart. The therapist will want to take you straight into the Imago Dialogue process, and encourage you to take turns and mirror each other. They will not want to talk to each of you about the other.

The therapist will take a few moments to focus and 'centre' you, that is, to bring your awareness into the room, to let go of any stresses from the outside world, to increase focus on the work ahead, and to become aware of 'the relational space' which is the space between you, where the healing happens. You can keep your eyes open or close them for these few moments, and you are invited to take a moment to feel the calmness and safety of the space that has been created and held by the therapist. The therapist will reassure you as to the safety of the space and the process.

The therapist will explain a little about how everyone has a different perspective on situations, and that it is important that we recognise that everyone's viewpoint is valid. While we may not agree with what the other says, we can acknowledge that we accept that they see things differently. It's important to acknowledge that you and your partner can want different things and see things from a different perspective. We can view the same event but have a different way of describing it and experiencing it. To acknowledge the other person's viewpoint does not mean that we agree with them.

We start with a short Appreciation Dialogue, to express our appreciation of something that our partner does, or some aspect of their personality, and to practice the skill of 'mirroring'. When we mirror someone we do not need to agree with what they say. We simply repeat back what we have heard them say. This Appreciation Dialogue, as with all Dialogues, will start with the Sender using the phrase, 'I'd like to have an Imago Dialogue with you. Is now a good time?' The Receiver has the option of saying 'No', and scheduling a later time for the Dialogue to take place.

Then the therapist will guide you through your first full Dialogue, based on a real issue or frustration between you. One of you will be the Sender, one the Receiver, and the therapist will guide your dialogue through four distinct phases:

1. The receiver will **mirror** exactly what they hear the sender say. The sender will talk in short bursts (we only have around 8 seconds of short-term memory, so the 'sends' need to be brief otherwise the receiver forgets what's been said) and the receiver reflects them.
2. The receiver will **summarise** what they have heard, in their own words. They'll check that they have heard correctly.
3. The receiver will **validate** the sender's words by expressing what made sense to them.
4. The receiver will **empathise** by expressing how they imagine all that must make the sender feel.

Then the receiver becomes the sender and responds with their thoughts about this same issue or frustration. The person who was previously the sender becomes the receiver, mirroring, summarising, validating and empathising.

The therapist will guide you through these stages, using 'lead lines' or 'sentence stems' which will start the sender on a train of thought.

These lead lines or sentence stems might include:

When that happens I feel ...

Is there more?...

I feel disappointed that ...

I feel so sad when ...

My hope is that

The thing that hurts me most is ...

Why it hurts me so badly is ...

What I'm afraid of is ...

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

And if that were to happen ...
When I think of that I feel ...
It scares me when ...
What that reminds me of is ...
I'm sorry that ...
Please forgive me for ...
It is understandable that ...
My intention is
I regret that ...
I understand that ...
I want to ...
I forgive you for ...
Thank you for ...
I appreciate you because ...
I love you because ...

There are many other possible lead lines. A trained and skilled IRT will ensure that the best lead lines are used.

You will probably also be asked your intention and/or your hope for the Dialogue - what changes would you like to see as a result of going through the process.

At the end of the session, the therapist may guide you through another Appreciation Dialogue, perhaps based on what happened in the session.

SUMMARY OF FIRST SESSION

After this session you are likely to have done some things that you may not have done for a while with your partner, such as:

- looked each other in the eye for a relatively long time
- talked in a calm way
- said what you felt you needed to say without raising your voice

- felt heard
- listened to what your partner is really saying.

Dialogue may feel frustrating at first because you'll be trying to explain to your partner how you feel. Until you become fluent, it may seem clunky. Trust the process and you will find that it provides the perfect scaffold for your personal and relationship development.

The process may leave you feeling vulnerable and raw, yet close to your partner.

It is important that you take away the learnings from the sessions. So,

- try to give each other an appreciation once a day
- and if you have something that you want to say to your partner, try to follow the basic dialogue.

Start by saying, 'I'd like to have an Imago Dialogue with you, Is now a good time?' If it is not, to make an appointment for some time in the near future (same day or next day).

The Imago Dialogue creates the ability to have a safe conversation. The highly intense reactivity which may have characterised your everyday interactions will probably be defused. The difficult, confused feelings when you express yourself will be reduced or removed. Dialogue is a structured way of talking and listening that builds connection between you and your partner. It is not just a healing tool, it is the healing that repairs your developmental wounds.

The Imago Dialogue can move you both

- from reactivity towards intentionality
- from despair towards hope
- from fear towards vulnerability

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

- from helpless towards strength
- from isolation towards empathetic connection
- from blame towards acceptance
- from criticism towards valuing
- from irritation towards celebration
- from tolerance towards celebration
- from compromise towards celebration
- from complaints towards requests
- from stuck towards possibilities

OTHER DIALOGUES

In later sessions, you may do other dialogues. As well as the Appreciation Dialogue and the Imago Dialogue, there is the Behavioural Change Request Dialogue, the Parent/Child Dialogue and others that your therapist may introduce you to. If there has been an affair, there is a Dialogue for repairing the rupture. If you decide to end your relationship, there is a Dialogue to help you say goodbye.

As you can see, an Imago session is unlike a traditional couples counselling session. The Imago therapist acts more like a coach or a facilitator, training you how to 'listen so the other can talk and talk so the other will listen'. You will be able to do this at home whenever you have an issue that needs discussion, or you want to communicate. When you are better able to communicate, connection follows.

THE RELATIONAL SPACE

Between the sender and receiver there is the relational space, the interpersonal space, and the Imago process allows us to construct a bridge across it. It flows from the receiver to the sender. The receiver has to let go of their world, and cross the bridge into the sender's world.

The purpose of the bridge is to place the contents of the dialogue in common, neutral and safe space. We cannot just jump into the other's world, and we cannot force the other to come across the bridge. It is

a conscious decision of presence that creates an open and welcoming invitation to 'Come to be with me and visit my world'. The visitor, the receiver, brings his/her presence slowly, respectfully and consciously.

We are all in relationships - with our partners and with many others in our lives, in fact our lives as social creatures comprise of relationships. When we are in relationship with someone, we are said to be held in 'relational space', that is, how we all stand in relation to others.

Furthermore, when we are in a relationship, there is 'You' and 'Me'. The important part of that is the 'and'. It is in the space between us that the relationship resides, where it is held. If we want to work on a relationship, to improve it, we need to work on that relational space - the gap between us.

Imago work focuses on this space 'between' where the relationship resides. Imago concerns itself with connection and individuation rather than autonomy and separateness. It is within our relationships that we can heal our childhood wounds, by allowing the adult other to provide what was missing from our childhoods. At its most basic, this is usually safety.

MORE ON RECEIVING

When you are the receiver you have to mirror, summarise, validate and empathise with your partner.

When you are mirroring, it is important to use a 'clear mirror' and not interpret or give inferences or tone to what you are hearing. It may be that what your partner says triggers you, and you want to respond with anger or contradiction. You will get your chance later.

In your imagination, visualise a bridge between the two of you. As the Receiver you are going to cross that bridge into your partners world. You

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

leave behind your world, and any judgement, explanation, thought or triggered reaction that might arise in your mind as your partner is speaking.

The Receiver should:

- be a clear mirror, reflecting back exactly what's said
- not react defensively
- use a 'pause button' to stop the sender when their memory is full (we have a very short short-term memory, often only 8 seconds)
- be open to the other's reality
- cross the bridge into your partners world, without judgement

Mirroring helps the sender feel seen and heard rather than judged and criticised. It gives space for a safe conversation to happen. It also allows the listener to have some time to think and digest what is being said, without having to think of an immediate retort.

MORE ON SENDING

When you are sending you are able to express yourself fully and deeply. This is your opportunity to really say what you have been thinking and feeling, without fear of interruption or judgement.

It is important that you don't 'rant' uncontrollably. You 'send' in short chunks - no more than 8 to 10 seconds-worth at a time - allowing time for your partner to mirror you back.

Your partner will ask you 'Is there more?' and you can continue on the topic until you have said everything that you want or need to say.

Being the Sender is not an opportunity to attack, criticise or blame, but it is a chance to really say what you want, in a safe space within a safe conversation.

The Sender should:

- focus on one topic at a time
- use no blame, shame or criticism
- not speak contemptuously
- use 'I' statements
- share your reality

MORE ON VALIDATION

Validation is when we make a statement that acknowledges the validity or truth in what the other says. It can be very hard to validate each other. This is because we might think that when we validate, we are implicitly agreeing, but this is not so. Or, you might think that to validate the other means that you're saying they're right, and that means you must be wrong - not so.

There is often a belief that we share the same reality. However, we can see the same situation in many different ways. There is commonly a sense that 'We are one, and I am the one'. Often people who are in love assume that this also means that you will share the same tastes, wants, feelings, outlooks, values and dreams.

Just because we are all connected does not mean we are all the same, or that we see things the same way. There is no right way or wrong way to see things. There are just different ways.

Often arguments are frustrated people attempting to convince the other that their way is the right or only way. To hear the other repeat back what you say (mirror) and then confirm that something about the comment makes sense to them, is hugely powerful.

It can deflate an argument, remove anger and frustration, allow someone to feel that at least, they are being heard and properly understood.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

In validating what the other says, you are saying 'I hear what you say and some of it makes sense but that doesn't mean that I agree with you.' When you validate you are saying, 'I have listened very carefully,' and 'I follow what you are saying,' and 'your perspective is important to me,' and 'You make sense to me'. You are not necessarily agreeing or saying that your perspective is any less valid.

THE WARNING ON THE PACKAGE

Your IRT may warn you that things may not be plain sailing.

You may experience:

- relapses into high conflict
- new difficulties
- discouragement
- resistance
- other problems.

Change is hard - probably harder than you think. Its not always permanent. Sometimes its three steps forward and two back.

We know that the Imago approach can work like magic, enabling couples to listen so the other can talk, and talk so the other will listen. Being heard, acknowledged and appreciated can act like a salve on a conflicted relationship, giving you time, space and respect to work things out.

HOMEWORK

Your IRT is likely to ask you to do some homework.

1. You will probably be asked to have an Appreciation Dialogue every day.
2. You may be asked to undertake some loving behaviours.

Annie Gurton, MA

3. You may be asked to agree to regular (probably weekly) Relationship Meetings, where you sit in a calm way and discuss what has been happening and what needs to happen in the coming week. Once you have learned to dialogue successfully, you do these in the Meeting. You can also arrange date nights, express regret and appreciations.
4. You may be asked to maintain Zero Negativity for a month (see Appendix vii)

2

The Imago Theory of Attraction

Imago helps you to understand coupledness and the forces of attraction that explain how and why you chose your partner, why you relate to them as you do, and the higher purpose of your relationship. Learning the Imago approach is a powerful way to understand conflicts within relationships and to learn ways to move forward towards understanding and connection.

All humans yearn for connection with others, and with one special individual in particular. In popular culture and the media this is known as 'The One'. In fact we meet many people with whom we can form this close relationship. We yearn for recovery, reconnection and peace, and these can be achieved best through an intimate relationship (although many people who are un-partnered are also able to achieve these goals. A relationship is the optimum route but not the only way to find contentment.

The problem is that our fear of intimacy can be greater than our fear of disconnection. So we are often inclined to separate or divorce rather than confront and enhance our intimate relationships if that seems like a difficult thing to do.

The key is to have a relationship that feels safe. When we feel safe we experience a felt sense of connecting, our neural pathways have a sense

of joy and our blood stream is full of endorphins. If our relationships are difficult and negative, the felt sense of connecting is replaced by isolation and aloneness. Our interactions become transactional rather than connective, our neural pathways are flooded with anxiety and our blood stream is polluted by cortisol. Life shifts from technicolor to black and white and suffering becomes an inhabitant in our world.

It all starts at the beginning of our attraction to each other. While there are sometimes some times when we experience unrequited love, in Imago we are finding someone who is a match to us. (Imago means 'image' in Latin.) We now know that our choice of partner is heavily influenced by our unconscious. Rather than having complete freedom of choice, we are in fact restricted to being attracted to **people who have similar childhood woundings to ourselves, but who may have coped in a different way.** This match with someone who compliments us is called our Imago match. (Imago is Latin for image.)

This explains several things. For example, we meet many people - hundreds and thousands a year - but we believe we only meet a few people in a lifetime (sometimes only one, or none) who we really fall in love with. (In fact while we meet many people who have similar woundings to ourselves, there are often other factors that cloud our choice, like values and lifestyle.) Also, some people fall in love by catching each others' eyes across a crowded room, even before they have spoken to each other. We can have a deep, visceral knowledge that this person is 'the one' when we barely know them. This is Mother Nature encouraging us to form a Romantic Bond with someone whose woundings are similar but whose adaptive strategy (the way they coped) is often the opposite to ours. You Imago Relationship Therapist will be able to explain this further.

We are all emotionally 'wounded' as children. No-one goes through childhood unscathed, and it is very normal. Our woundings are necessary

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

to help us develop resilience to the buffeting of life. However, some people have abnormally deep woundings that cause that cause them pain and internal disturbances. (See Chapter Four for more on this.)

The Imago Theory of Attraction says that the partner we choose not only experienced very similar woundings to ourselves, but can also be very similar to our primary caregivers - usually the one who caused us most pain or we are most alienated from. How often do you hear people say that their partner reminds them of their mother or father?

The needs that we want met in our adult relationships are those that were not met in childhood. We will use all kinds of strategies, usually those we learned in childhood, to try and get those needs met. This is important when we begin to look at the behavioural patterns of the relationship. The way we respond to each other is often the same as the way we responded to our caregivers. We are wounded at different stages of our development, at different levels, and we can respond as children in different ways. For more on this, see Chapter Four.

Our partners are going through exactly the same process in reverse. To your partner, you also represent the most damaging and difficult parent and unmet childhood needs.

3

The Classical Pattern of Relationships

The fact is that humans are extremely complex, and living in a close intimate relationship is very hard.

The first stage of all relationships is called The Romantic Phase. At this point, when we first meet, fall in love and for some months or years afterwards, we overlook things that irritate us, or find them endearing, think that the overwhelming feelings are going to last forever, swear undying love, and commit to the other in an exclusive relationship.

When we enter a relationship we enter a contract to a secure, safe space for the other, and to be there for them. We agree to try and be as un-annoying as possible, and to change our behaviour if it aggravates the other. We agree to watch the other's back, to be non-judgemental, non-critical, not to blame or shame, and to prioritise the relationship

Love is an unrealistic state, and it is also temporary. Even if it is life-long, it changes.

Sooner or later we come down to earth and then we are faced with living with someone who can be very annoying. This is called The Conflict Phase also known as The Power Struggle. It is supposed to happen. It

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

is normal and it is a growth struggle. It is when our relationship starts to shift from the unconscious to the conscious, from the reactive to the intentional. We fail to understand that we are with an 'other', and to the other, we are the other! We yearn to be heard but the other is not listening, so concerned are they with getting heard.

We have expectations, illusions, impulses and reactions but lack the understanding or skills to know what is happening, or how to deal with the stages. No-one is easy, even though we like to think that we are easy to be with. Everyone is different and we all have different goals and habits, different likes and dislikes. There's no such thing as a low-maintenance person - everyone who is in a relationship is high maintenance. A happy relationship is a skilful balance of keeping our own identity and getting our needs met and meeting the needs of the other.

In this conflict phase, the most mundane domestic spats become metaphors for deeper issues. An argument may arise over who puts the trash out, the correct way to wash the dishes or how to lay a table. Couples will blame, shame, criticise, speak in absolutes, give harsh responses, be defensive, be contemptuous, use mimicry, patronise, ignore bids for connection, be resentful, not prioritise the relationship or create a gridlock or impasse. The result is hurt and a feeling of lack of safety, and the relationship can quickly spiral downwards.

In fact what is going on is that couples are relating core traumatic scenes from childhood in order to repair them. Your skilled and trained IRT will help you to move from these apparently superficial conflicts to a discussion about the deeper relational issue that underlies the conflict.

Traumas created in our primary relationship (in childhood) are transmitted to the committed relationship (relationship), where we seek to heal them. If we are unable to heal the wounds because we are unable to recognise what's happening and respond properly, the adult intimate

relationship degenerates and the couple often separates (or lives in unhappiness). If they separate, it is common for individuals to re-partner with someone similar, repeating the pattern.

If we can get through The Conflict Phase we move into a Deeper Love phase, where we recognise that the other is separate from us, and we value their needs and wishes as highly as our own.

No-one is trained in how to manage relationships. Its not an innate skill. We need to learn how to be honest, vulnerable, revealing and supportive. The thing is not to end the relationship but to work at understanding, acceptance and change.

Imago helps to create a successful couple. When we are in a successful relationship we feel safe, secure and able to go forward and fulfil our potential in a happy, positive way.

Attachment Theory

First, a bit of basic neuroscience: Our brains are comprised of three parts: 1. an old, reptilian core which controls our basic functions, 2. our modern thinking, decision-making neocortex, and 3. the limbic system which connects the brain stem with the amygdala and decides whether incoming signals need to be responded to at our leisure and with thought, or super fast with the Fight, Flight or Freeze response.

When our brain perceives a dangerous or threatening situation it becomes vigilant and if an unsafe situation persists it becomes hyper-vigilant, and perpetually on the lookout for danger. When our brain is calm, input from our ears, eyes and other sources goes through our neocortex and we are able to think. The 'listening brain' is in a completely different state from the threatened brain. One listens to hear, the other listens to fear. And the brain remembers what happened to us as children.

Our limbic system is programmed from a very early age to respond in a way which will keep us safe. If we have a childhood in which we were shouted at, or abused or neglected, our brains learned to protect us by responding in a way that seemed to work at the time. Our brains remember this, at a deep, deep level. When we feel that same situation or the same triggers when we are adult, we can't help but respond in a similar way, by-passing the thinking decision-making brain which needs to be calm in order to work clearly. Although it is possible to change this programming

through therapy, most of us have patterns of behaviour which were established from babyhood and childhood.

Things that happen to us as children literally get under our skin and can change our physiology. This doesn't mean experiences like losing a game or feeling jealous, but abuse or neglect, or being controlled to the point where the child wonders whether they have any power or competency, or growing up with a parent who struggles with depression or addiction and is therefore 'absent' at least some of the time. These experiences effect us profoundly. Exposure to adversity in childhood, while may be helpful in small amounts to help us develop resilience, will cause changes in the brain and a degree of hyper-vigilance which affects our ability to make healthy adult relationships.

Now some basic psychology: Attachment theory explains how our first relationships shape our adult relationships. People whose primary carers were constantly there for them and met all their early needs and made them feel safe, wanted and respected, grow up to be emotionally secure adults. These are popular, successful, calm and wise people who achieve their potential. A good childhood makes us resilient and able to cope with the ups and downs of life.

However everybody at some point or another in their childhood and to some degree or another, experiences pain, loss or trauma. Even the most secure child has, at some point, experienced a parent not being there for them when needed. If they are emotionally resilient they will cope, and learn from the experience without being scarred. Actually, everyone needs a bit of pain, loss or trauma in their early lives to help them become well-rounded adults, but not too much. Mostly, we need encouragement, support and guidance but not everyone gets that. Most of us have some kind of dysfunction in our backgrounds which amounts to an emotional 'wounding', which we are seeking to repair and heal in our adult relationships.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

Most people have good-enough childhoods and are able to navigate these 'woundings' successfully. They are resilient and go on to have reasonably well adjusted lives and relationships. Their adult relationships may have ups and downs, but they can cope.

Some people do not develop sufficient or healthy resilience, and go on to find adult relationships challenging. They may find that their lives and relationships are chaotic, or that they can't avoid becoming engaged in behaviours which are at odds with what they really want. Our woundings can mean that we are reluctant or unable to be vulnerable in our intimate relationships, or need to be in control all the time, or have debilitating low self-esteem.

The problem lies with the reptilian part of our brains, and our limbic system. When we experience pain and fear in our childhoods, the memory embeds itself extremely deeply in our brain and we respond in a way that a) seeks to protect us but b) also seeks to establish connection in relationships.

The Imago Dialogue allows us to explore that wounded part of us, in a safe conversation with someone who was also wounded in a similar way (for that is who we are attracted to). Imago not only allows you to understand your partner better, it enables you to understand yourself. It forces you to be honest, makes you vulnerable, and can shake you to the core. And, more than anything, it fosters better connection and allows for a sense of understanding.

Everyone wants to feel safe, and when we do feel safe we are able to fully express ourselves, and relax. If we don't feel safe and we find it difficult to trust, all kinds of problems can arise which need expert help to resolve.

Imago Therapy focuses on collaboratively healing childhood wounds that the couple share. Our primitive old brain has a compelling non-

negotiable drive to restore the feeling of aliveness and wholeness with which we came into this world. Imago therapists believe that a person's brain constructs an image of characteristics from their primary caretakers comprised of their best and worst traits. The brain's unconscious desire to repair the damage done in childhood as a result of needs not being met is to find a partner who can give us what our caretakers failed to provide. The traits of a person's parents will be found in their partner. The brain unconsciously creates this image of a partner to seek healing, and to leave the wounds of childhood in order to grow. The wounds a person has with a parent will unintentionally be repeated by their partner, which unconsciously for the person triggers old emotions. Both people in the relationship will learn how to heal one another, and appreciate them for the person they are. The conscious part of the brain may not be able to see it, but the unconscious believes that this person who can heal your wounds can let love come into your life again.

When we are children, we go through various stages of development. These often overlap, can be of variable length and are rarely progress through them in a simple linear way. But we all go through them in one way or another, and at some stage of our development or another.

For each stage there is a corresponding wound. Some people transition through many or most stages without problem, except perhaps one. Other people experience parental deficiencies at all stages. Some people are able to be resilient and cope with parental deficiencies while others are deeply wounded by something that another person or sibling takes in their stride. There are no rules. But there are guidelines.

From birth to 18 months (roughly) we are going through the Attachment stage when we need to be sure that our primary carers are there for us. If they are not, we become wounded. The parent may be inconsistent and cold, in which case the child will grow up with a deep sense of feeling unwanted. They often experience a loss of self, and/or a feeling of being

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

annihilated. Their behaviour in relationships is often as detached, distant and careless. If the parent is available and warm but inconsistent (perhaps because of addictions, grief, depression, other siblings, marital or employment problems - it might be all kinds of issues), then the child will grow up with a deep fear of being abandoned. These people often have low self-esteem and a poor sense of self-worth, and have a deep fear in their adult relationships of being abandoned which can emerge as needy, clinging behaviour. They may feel that they'll never get it right, and will never be good enough.

From 18 months to 4 years (roughly) we go through the exploration stage when we go out into the world around us. If the attachment stage has been healthy then we are confident to explore, knowing that our primary carers are reliable and will be there for us, but if our parents were overprotective and possessive we can feel smothered and unsure of our own resilience, and we can fear being independent. We cope by learning to be happy being isolated. If, at the exploration stage, our parents were neglectful and under-protective, we are constantly seeking to find their protection, and as adults can be someone who constantly pursues our partners.

From 4 years to 12 years (roughly) we are in the competency stage, when we are learning to be effective and efficient in the world around us. If our parents ignore our achievements or offer us no instructions, we feel that our achievements are devalued and can feel helpless and useless. These people learn to be manipulative to get their emotional needs met. If our parents had high expectations of us in this stage, and gave only selective or contingent praise we can end up feeling guilty or punished and feel inferior, which we may deal with by being highly competitive.

From 12 to 18 years we are in the teenage identity stage, when we are trying on different ways of being in the world, and experimenting with appearance. If our parents are controlling and invasive we can feel invisible

and powerless, and can develop a deep fear of being shamed. If, at this stage, our parents were alternatively critical or supportive, selectively rather than non-judgementally accepting us, we can feel unworthy and dominated, and have a deep fear of losing our parents love. This will manifest in our adult relationships as an uncertainty about who we are, and a need for approval.

The structured and safe Imago Dialogue allows for all developmental needs to be met. When we are mirroring we allow the sender to feel heard, when we are validating we allow them to feel respected and when we are empathising we allow them to feel understood. And in a healthy relationship with someone who was wounded at a similar stage we will work through the unresolved issues of childhood, thereby developing and maturing as adults and enriching the relationship.

MAXIMISERS AND MINIMISERS

Imago explains how not only are we attracted to someone who experienced a similar wounding but, paradoxically, to someone who dealt with it in the opposite way. This contrast in behavioural styles leads to two different types of personality: maximisers and the minimisers, and while many are a combination of both, some are clearly and constantly one or the other.

If we experience our parents as being over-involved, intrusive, invasive, controlling and invalidating we often become maximisers. As children they are 'expanding energy' and are often loud, cryers, pursuers, who whine, cling and attract attention.

An adult maximiser is someone who appears strong but perhaps difficult. They are loud, start arguments, and push the boundaries. Their tendency is to express themselves, to push loudly for what they want, to attract attention and create conflict.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

If we experience our parents as being avoidant, neglectful, unavailable, withdrawn or disinterested, for whatever reason, we often become minimisers. As children these people 'constrict energy' and appear withdrawing, detached and avoiding arguments.

An adult minimiser will avoid arguments, wants things to be peaceful and aims for a quiet life. Their tendency is to hold themselves, to withdraw, detach, shut down and resist.

But both are acting from a place of fear. Both want to feel safe, but use different strategies to achieve it.

Couples often comprise of a minimiser and a maximiser, although sometimes a couple are both the same, and we can all be the opposite from time to time.

There is an Imago story which explains this, called 'The Turtle and the Hailstorm' (see Appendix iv for the full story). The turtle withdraws into its shell and avoids conflict while the hailstormer rains down full force on the turtle, each one feeling unsafe to change behaviours, and each one provoking the other into more of the same behaviour. For the turtle and the hailstorm to change, each needs to begin to feel safe and the way to start is with a safe conversation in an Imago Dialogue.

5

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. What is it about Imago that makes it so effective?

A. Apart from the empirically-based bio-psycho-social approach and underlying theories, Imago uses a unique structure which means that it can be learned and applied in practice, even when emotions and tempers run high. It includes a process, both in the dialogue structure and within the individuals involved in the relationship. It offers containment and creates a safe space so that even couples who are hyper-vigilant and feel highly activated are able to communicate calmly. And it provides a safe conversation in which both parties know they are being heard. As the biggest hurdle to intimacy can be being able to share the truth about oneself without fear, this is a hugely powerful and effective connective tool.

Q: My partner and I can barely talk without arguing - How can a process that relies on talking work for us?

A: An Imago session is calm and safe. The therapist knows what to do and is in control. The processes that you will go through will reassure you and help you to feel contained. In this sort of atmosphere, you will find it easier to talk, better when you realise that you are being heard, and calmer when you see that you are safe and don't have to shout or argue.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

Q: Why is it so important to mirror each other?

A: Mirroring is an important part of the healing process, because

- it ensures that the other feels heard
- it meets our need for contact
- it repairs ruptures in our connection
- it repairs deficits in our attunement to each other
- it facilitates differentiation
- it creates connection.

Q: Why is the Dialogue at the heart of Imago?

A: There are several concepts and practices at the heart of Imago, such as the ideas around attraction, the recognition of the importance of the relational space and the importance of conflict as a mechanism for growth and healing. However the Dialogues are key for keeping the space calm and for enabling penetrating and surprising thoughts and feelings to emerge.

The Dialogues provide a safe 'container' for the exchange of difference and replace conflict with the co-creation of outcomes. They replace judgement and criticism with acceptance. They improve the quality of interaction between partners, and encourage healthy differentiation. They allow for 'otherness' and recognition of a two person reality. They also utilise the relational space between a couple and recognise its power as the heart of the relationship.

The first Dialogue you learn is the Appreciation, and once you both feel comfortable using Dialogue with Appreciations, you will be ready to use the process for more difficult issues.

Q: My partner is reluctant to come to couples therapy.

A: We often find that there is a 'drager' and a 'dragee' with one partner keen and the other reluctant. It is often helpful to try and attend a two-day 'Getting the Love You Want' workshop. These are intense introductions to the theory and practice of Imago. They represent good financial value,

Annie Gurton, MA

and often fast-track the process so that a partner who was reluctant can feel the benefits and see the potential in a short time. They are structured so that there is a balance of lecture and practical exercise, and couples do not have to work with others, or 'share' with the group. Google for your nearest Getting the Love you Want Workshop.

Q: We have both had a series of affairs. We are only staying together for the children. Can Imago help us?

A: Provided that there is no ongoing extra-marital affair, and provided you both have good intention and hope, Yes, Imago can be exactly the process to learn to forgive and forget, and move back together towards a connected, conscious and richer relationship.

Q: There is a two day 'Getting the Love you Want' workshop in our area. Should we do that or continue with our IRT?

A: It is usually recommended that couples do the GTLYW workshop before or in the early stages of working with an IRT. You will fast-track yourselves through the underlying theory and get to a point of deep change faster. Research has shown that there are strong benefits of doing the workshop as well as working with an IRT. (See Appendix ix)

Appendix i

A Brief History of Imago

Harville Hendrix, PhD, describes the genesis of Imago Relationship Therapy:

'The construction of the theoretical system which became Imago Relationship Therapy began in 1975 with my answer to the question from a student, 'Why do men and women have so much trouble being together?'

By applying some intuitive, though random thoughts about a possible connection to unresolved childhood issues, I put forth the tentative hypothesis: 'It appears that we tend to marry people who are similar to our parents, with whom we struggle over issues that we were unfinished in childhood.' This became a tenet of IRT.

I spent a lot of time reading and thinking about the functions of projection, transference, and unconscious perception in the selection process and developed the thesis that romantic love was a response to the unconscious perception of the similarity between certain traits in the personalities of one's parents and the selected partner. It was much later that I discovered the parallel role of projection and the limited role of transference in the selection process.

In 1977, two years after the classroom event, Helen and I met at a party and began a personal relationship. Our mutual interest and training in psychology, personal experience of divorce, and skeptical attitude towards rerepresentation sparked a conversation about relationships, which we continue to this day. In addition to our graduate psychology training, both of us had studied Transactional Analysis and Gestalt Therapy.

Our relationship became very complex and conflicted, providing the perfect but unplanned laboratory within which we incubated ideas and invented behavioural processes, which we tried to practice with each other. We spent many hours talking about our childhoods, trying to figure out our mutual vulnerabilities, was the development of the concept of the wounded child, which, we theorised, had to be healed in relationship. We debated the issue of whether this healing could occur in therapy or whether it could only happen in a committed partnership. We finally came to the conclusion that, since the wounding occurred in relationship with one's parents, logic required that the healing could occur only in a context which reactivated the wounds. The idea was born that relationship, conducted with the aim of mutual healing, is the most effective form of therapy

Sometime during 1978, Helen made a suggestion that led to the development of two procedures that became foundational in Imago therapy. The first, which we called 'mirroring', is essentially the Rogerian reflective listening technique. In a heated argument in which both of us were talking and neither was listening, Helen stopped the argument and proposed that we take turns, one of us talking while the other listened. We agreed to the rule that one of us could talk only after reflecting what had been heard, but not before. Since both of us remembered a childhood in which we were not listened to, that process had a salutary effect on our relationship. Reciprocal listening had such a healing and bonding effect that couples experienced immediate improvement in their relationship.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

In the meantime, I continued to reread the writings on love and relationship by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Eric Berne and Fritz Perls. I discovered that, for the most part, they all viewed relationship as a transference experience of infantile expectations, directed toward one's spouse, which had to be resolved. Resolution from their point of view, consisted of obtaining insight, differentiating one's spouse from one's parents, and surrendering one's childhood expectations. I understood from this that in order to mature, we must wean ourselves from the yearning of childhood, grieve the loss of unmet childhood needs, and get on with the business of adulthood. Then we could have a happy relationship.

In 1979, Helen moved to New York, while I remained in Dallas. We both thought our relationship was over since neither of us wanted a long distance relationship, but we kept in contact long distance and occasionally visited one another. Our conversations continued, and our relationship seemed to endure the separation. I developed the workshop for couples, and some therapist couples began to attend the workshops and became interested in what I was doing. Although I did not know where I was headed with this work, I began articulating my insights and receive feedback from interested and competent professionals.

Around this time several people began encouraging me to write a book. Initially I resisted because I felt I did not yet understand my subject, and had limited time and increasing activity. Later, with Helen's encouragement, I undertook the project and secured the services of a writer to help organise the structure of the book and translate my opaque, academic language into recognisable pose. Imago Therapy as a system, however, was in utero and not ready to be born until ten years later.

In 1982 Helen and I married and I moved in with her in New York. That same year, we created The Institute for Relationship Therapy in New York, and the New York professional community and helped me to establish a training program and clinical practice.

Meanwhile, I continued to work on the book, and after we completed it in 1988 we decided to assign the term A Conscious Relationship to the type of relationship that could be created by couples who used the Imago process. The first title of the book was *The Conscious Relationship: Journey to Wholeness*. After completing all the edits, Helen and I took a trip to Indonesia. While in Bali, the publisher called with a request to change the title, since they had done market research and discovered the title would make it a poor seller. In desperation I said: 'Well, call it 'Getting The Love You Want'' which they thought was a good idea, did market research on that title and found it to be a potential best seller. The book now had a title and went to press.

The publisher's publicity department sent the book to The Oprah Winfrey Show and the response to the aired show prompted Oprah to contact me later and suggest we film the workshop and show some excerpts of sessions. The 1989 airing of that two-hour series, which won Oprah an Emmy Award for its socially redeeming value, put *Getting The Love You Want* on the New York Times best seller list. In 1992, *Keeping The Love You Find: A Personal Guide* (originally *A Guide for Singles*) was published by Simon and Schuster, and also became a New York Times best seller.

The theory and practice of Imago Relationship Therapy continued to evolve and mutate. Mirroring evolved from a one-level exercise to the three-stage Couples Dialogue/Intentional Dialogue process comprised of mirroring, validation and empathy. Theory developments included a meta-theoretical proposition of human essence as essentially pulsating energy, influenced by quantum theory and the psychological work of Core Genetics, developed by John Pierrakos. I also developed a systematic, detailed description of the stages of human development by synthesising the theories of Margaret Mahler, Daniel Stern, Harry Stack Sullivan and Erik Erikson.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

(taken from *The Evolution of Imago Relationship Therapy: A Personal and Professional Journey*, by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. See the full article at http://imagorelationships.org/pro/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/02/The_Evolution_of_Imago_Relationship_Therapy-published_version.pdf)

Appendix ii

10 Characteristics of a Conscious Relationship

1. **You realise that your love relationship has a hidden purpose - the healing of childhood wounds.** Instead of focusing entirely on surface needs and desires, you learn to recognise the unresolved childhood issues that under-lie them. When you look at relationships with this x-ray vision, your daily interactions take on more meaning. Puzzling aspects of your relationship begin to make sense to you, and you have a greater sense of control.
2. **You create a more accurate image of your partner.** At the very moment of attraction, you began fusing your lover with your primary caretakers. Later you projected your negative traits onto your partner, further obscuring your partner's essential reality. As you move toward a conscious relationship, you gradually let go of these illusions and begin to see more of your partner's truth. You see your partner not as your saviour but as another wounded human being, struggling to be healed.
3. **You take responsibility for communicating your needs and desires to your partner.** In an unconscious partnership, you cling to the childhood belief that your partner automatically intuits your needs. In a

conscious partnership, you accept the fact that in order to understand each other, you have to develop clear channels of communication.

4. **You become more intentional in your interactions. In an unconscious partnership, you tend to react without thinking.** You allow the primitive response of your old brain to control your behaviour. In a conscious partnership, you train yourself to behave in a more constructive manner.
5. **You learn to value your partner's needs and wishes as highly as you value your own.** In an unconscious partnership, you assume that your partner's role in life is to take care of your needs magically. In a conscious partnership, you let go of this narcissistic view and divert more and more of your energy to meeting your partner's needs.
6. **You embrace the dark side of your personality.** In a conscious partnership, you openly acknowledge that fact that you, like everyone else, have negative traits. As you accept responsibility for this dark side of your nature, you lessen your tendency to project your negative traits onto your mate, which creates a less hostile environment.
7. **You learn new techniques to satisfy your basic needs and desires.** During the power struggle, you cajole, harangue, and blame in an attempt to coerce your partner to meet your needs. When you move beyond this stage, you realise that your partner can indeed be a resource for you - once you abandon your self-defeating tactics.
8. **You search within yourself for the strengths and abilities you are lacking.** One reason you were attracted to your partner is that he or she had strengths and abilities that you lacked. Therefore, being with your partner gave you an illusory sense of wholeness. In a conscious partnership, you learn that the only way you can truly recapture a sense of oneness is to develop the hidden traits within yourself.

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

9. **You become more aware of your drive to be loving and whole and united with the universe.** As a part of your nature, you have the ability to love unconditionally and to experience unity with the world around you. Social conditioning and imperfect parenting made you lose touch with these qualities. In a conscious partnership, you begin to rediscover your original nature.

10. **You accept the difficulty of creating a lasting love relationship.** In an unconscious partnership, you believe that the way to have a good relationship is to pick the right partner. In a conscious partnership you realise you have to BE the right partner. As you gain a more realistic view, you realise that a good relationship requires commitment, discipline, and the courage to grow and change; creating a fulfilling love relationship is hard work.

Appendix iii

Brief Imago Work-Up

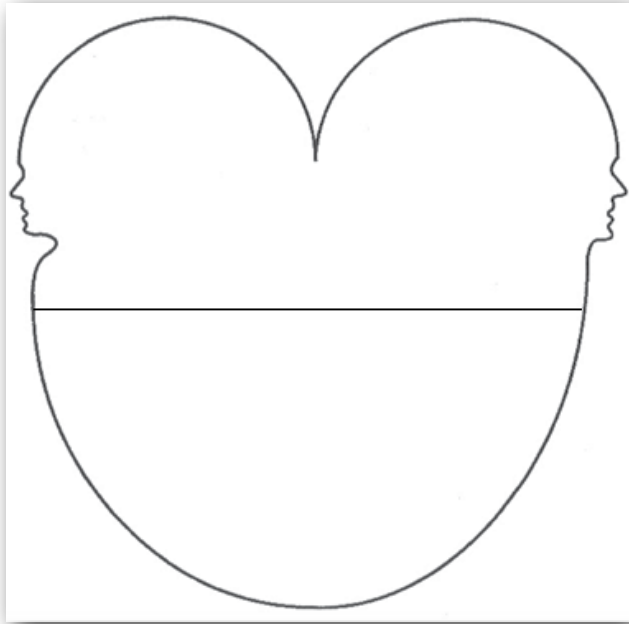
WORKING OUT YOUR PERSONAL IMAGO

Traits of Childhood Caregivers

1. **The figure below is divided into two parts representing the positive and negative characteristics of each caregiver or authority figure who took care of you growing up. On the top section, list all of the negative characteristics of each caregiver. On the bottom, list all the positive characteristics.**
2. **It is important to list the characteristics as you recall them from childhood. Think as a child. Do not think of your caregivers as they are today or as they became later in life. Use such adjectives as "kind", "distant", "warm", "loving", "angry", "cold" and/or phrases such as "never there", "always dependable", "never touched me", etc.**

Include all your caregivers, female and male.....

(A)
**Negative
Characteristics**



(B)
**Positive
Characteristics**

(C). What I wanted and needed most as a child was

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Positive Memories of Childhood

List below the positive memories of childhood and your responses associated with the memories

Memories	Feelings
	(What you felt) (D)

Childhood Frustrations

List below any recurring frustrations of childhood (e.g. "didn't get listened to", "no touching"); and then list your reactions to the frustrations (i.e. how you felt and what you did).

Frustrations	Reaction(s)
	(What you did) (E)

My Personal Imago

(This is a synthesis of the information you have gathered so far.

Fill in the blanks from the previous pages)

I am attracted to / at times perceive my partner to be a person who is (Insert your list from A)

I am also attracted to / at times perceive / or attempt to get my partner to be a person who is (Insert your list from B)

so that I can feel (Insert your list from C)

and experience (Insert your list from D)

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I sometimes (Insert your list from E)

These are the behaviours that sometimes keep me from experiencing what I am longing in my adult intimate relationship.

Appendix iv

The Turtle and the Hailstorm

Once upon a time there was a hailstorm and a turtle, and they fell in love.

They knew that they were very different from one another, but resolved to love one another and to help each other. They had three children. One was a turtle, one was a hailstorm, and one was a little of both.

When things were going well, the hailstorm and the turtle were quite happy. But things didn't always go well, if there was strife, there was a strong likelihood that the turtle would withdraw into its shell, or the hailstorm would hail with fury. Whichever one acted first, the likelihood was that the other would resort to its normal defence—hail or withdraw.

After several years, the hailstorm could sometimes sense that the turtle was in the process of withdrawing. This would make the hailstorm angry and hail was immediately forthcoming. Usually, this would accelerate the withdrawal process by the turtle. Likewise, the turtle could sometimes smell hail in the air. If so, the turtle would not wait for the thunder, but would withdraw immediately.

Over time, this resulted in the hailstorm hailing and the turtle turtling on a regular basis. There were fewer days where the two could be friendly and cooperative, and more days where they found themselves in their

stereotypical roles. This angered and disappointed both. Each thought that the other was at fault, and that the other should change. The Turtle said, "If only the hailstorm would hail less frequently, I would not have to withdraw so much, and I could enjoy the hailstorm's company." Similarly, the hailstorm complained "If that turtle would stop withdrawing at every raindrop, we'd both be much happier."

Just when it seemed that there was no solution to this dilemma, a Wizard appeared. The Wizard was very knowledgeable about the ways of the heart, especially in regard to turtle-and-hailstorm relationships. (It turned out that there are many such relationships, and the Wizard had seen dozens of them.) He explained that the two were in a relationship to one another for a reason and discovering that reason would unlock many blessings and opportunities for the two.

"Thank God you're here!" said the turtle. "Perhaps you can tell the hailstorm to stop hailing on me."

"That's not the problem!" said the hailstorm. "The problem is that you keep withdrawing and that hurts me."

Each turned to the Wizard for a verdict. But he smiled and remained silent for a moment. After a diplomatic pause, the Wizard spoke. "Each of you thinks that if the other will change, everything else will sort itself out. If the hailstorm will stop hailing, Or if the turtle will stop turtling, then the other will be happy. But it's not that easy – and yet it is!"

Now they were both confused. "Well, what good are you, then. I see only two options – one or the other of us must change, and neither of us wants to. As a turtle, I don't see why I should become something else just because the hailstorm says so. After all, it's my hard turtle shell that protects me from all that hail."

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

"Well, my hail is just as much a part of me as your shell is of you. Why should I have to stop being my full, uninhibited self?"

"The solution," responded the Wizard, "is not either/or. It is both/and. Turtle, your hailstorm is in your life to help you grow out of your limitations and withdrawing. And hailstorm, your turtle is in your life to help you learn to contain your hail from doing damage. Each of you is as you are for a reason having to do with your survival. But somehow, each of your survival actions has gotten out of hand. Instead of making you happy, they deprive you of the happiness to which you are entitled."

"Who goes first?" they asked.

"Both go first," responded the Wizard. Every day and in every way, Turtle has to begin finding occasions to come out and stay out of its shell. And Hailstorm must begin containing the hail. As each progresses, each helps the other to continue progressing. Turtle, by staying out of your shell, tells Hailstorm that it doesn't require a barrage of hail to get Turtle's attention. And Hailstorm's holding back the hail makes it safer for Turtle to stay out of the shell for increasingly longer periods of time."

"Now no one needs to do anything. You can both go on as you have. Or you can both make the necessary move toward growth, and each will benefit from the mutual transformation that occurs."

"So now the secret is out. I have no magic. I am not a wizard. You two have all the magic needed at your disposal. You can choose to grow by overcoming your instinctive actions, and instead choosing to cooperate. In doing so, you each grow, as does your relationship. So have it all."

"Not so fast," said the turtle. "You're still saying that I must change my instinctive reaction in order to make Hailstorm happy and..."

“No!” said the Wizard, emphatically. “You don’t change to make Hailstorm happy. You change to make YOU happy. You become more fulfilled by being able to experience the world more fully. Hailstorm is simply here to help you do that. And Hailstorm, Turtle is in your life to tell you that not every situation calls for hail. You thus can conserve your energy for when it’s truly needed. It just so happens that, in the symmetry of things, you will each become happier both because you have changed and the other has changed. But neither of you will be happy if this mutual transformation does not occur.”

“So where do we begin?” asked the Hailstorm.

“By doing! There’s nothing to wait for. Turtle, you begin sticking your neck out right now, and at every opportunity, without waiting for your partner to make the first move. And Hailstorm, you begin by deliberately choosing to contain your hail, without waiting for Turtle to extend all the limbs. And both of you must resist the temptation to blame the other. You got here together.”

“Each of you – together – begins by beginning. NOW! There is no further signal that will be forthcoming. Just do it!”

Appendix v

The Appreciation Dialogue

Sit down face to face with each other. You may want to hold hands or not. Take a deep breath and relax, letting your eyes close, if you choose. Take a moment to reflect on a time, possibly early in your relationship or over the past week, when something your partner did or said touched you, something you would like to appreciate. It may be something you always value and admire – a character trait, or it may be fleeting, a special moment in time – a look, a touch, a word. Pause and enjoy the memory and then when you are ready, open your eyes and when your partner’s eyes are also open, connect first with your eyes, sending the appreciation first with just your gaze. Then, when you are ready, decide together who will be the first to express their appreciation verbally, the first “SENDER”

SENDER

I would like to express an appreciation. Is this a good time?

One thing I appreciate about you is...
(Keep going, elaborating on this. Keep the appreciation clean of all negativity or comparisons)

RECEIVER

Yes, I’m available.

Mirror

Mirror

Annie Gurton, MA

When you did that I felt... Mirror

Optional: How that is similar to or different from my childhood is... Mirror

Thank you for

- a) reminding me of that special feeling from my childhood, or Mirror
- b) helping me to experience a feeling I don't remember from my childhood.

Switch Roles

NEW SENDER

NEW RECEIVER

What touched me about what you said was... Mirror

One thing I appreciate about you is... Mirror
(Continue as above)

When you have mastered mirroring, validation and empathy, these can be added prior to switching roles.

Appendix vi

The Full Imago Dialogue

SENDER

Make Appointment

1. **I would like to have an Imago Dialogue about... Is now okay?**

3. *Send, using 'I' language. When talking about your partner, describe specific behaviours or words*
e.g. **When you...I felt... or I experienced...**

Check accuracy of the mirror and resend or modify any parts not clearly received.

RECEIVER

If not now, make a suitable time later

Mirror

4. *Using hand like a pause button, mirror word for word:*
**What you're saying is...
Is that what you're saying?
Or Did I get that?
Is there more?**

Summarise

5. *Summarises:*
**In summary, what you're saying is...
Is that a good summary?**

SENDER

RECEIVER

6. *Listen to the summary and give accuracy check.*

Yes, that's a good summary... or You got most of it... (or some of it)...the part you missed that I want you to get is... Resend.

8. *Listen to and receive the validation.*

10. **Yes, I am feeling... or No, I am not feeling...**

12. **Yes, I am also feeling...or No...**

2. **Yes, now is okay.**

11. **Are there other feelings?**
Mirror other feelings

If the sender resends some of the summary, mirror that.

Validate

7. **I follow what you're saying and what you're saying makes sense to me.**

And what makes sense is...or It makes sense that...

e.g. It makes sense that when you experience me..... you.....

Empathise

9. **I imagine you might be feeling . . . or**

I imagine you might have felt . . .

And the receiver makes one or two 'feeling' guesses (one word feelings) and checks it out by saying,

Is that what you're feeling?

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

Switch Roles. Now the receiver becomes the sender.
Receiver begins with **"I would like to respond now."**
And responds about the same topic. Go through #2-11 again.

Appendix vii

Zero Negativity

Agreeing to a period of Zero Negativity can help break a stalemate and shift your relationship into more positive habits.

When practising Zero Negativity, there will be no criticism, stonewalling, shaming or blaming for a specific time period - usually a month.

It may be that you will be asked to take turns at being 'The Keeper of the Relationship', and take particular care not to criticise, shame, blame or stonewall and to look out for these in the other. Other behaviours to stop are: speaking in absolutes, using a harsh response, being defensive, being contemptuous, mimicking, ignoring bids for connection, resentment, and not prioritising the relationship.

You may be given a wall calendar to use.

When you are working on a Zero Negativity relationship, you will still have negative feelings but you don't express them in anyway except in an Imago Dialogue, when you are mirrored, summarised, validated and your partner empathises with you.

Zero Negativity leaves a space - the zero is a big empty void, a hole that is to be filled with

- love
- expressing appreciation
- checking availability
- listening
- empathy
- new behaviours

Appendix viii

Your Relationship Vision

1. Each of you write a series of short sentences that describe your personal vision of a deeply satisfying relationship. Include qualities that you already have that you want to keep, and qualities that you wish you had. Write each sentence in the present tense, such as 'We are great parents' or 'We are affectionate to each other' or 'We are both willing to initiate sex'. Use positive statements, such as 'We settle our differences peacefully' rather than 'We don't fight'.
2. Share your sentences, and underline the items that you have in common (the words needn't be exactly the same, just the sentiment). If your partner has something on their list that you like, add it to your list.
3. Review your expanded list and mark those which are most important to you, and those which you think might be difficult to achieve.
4. Now work together to design a mutual relationship vision, marking those which you both agree might be difficult to achieve and which need to be worked on. Put the list on the fridge.

Your list might look like this:

OUR RELATIONSHIP VISION

We have fun together

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We settle our differences peacefully
We have satisfying and beautiful sex
We communicate easily
We are each other's best friend
We trust each other
We have satisfying careers
We live near our parents
We have similar views on parenting
We share important decisions
We exercise separately
etc

Appendix ix

'Getting The Love You Want' Workshops

In most places around the world where you find a Certified Imago Relationship Therapist, you will find that there are 2-day workshops called 'Getting the Love you Want'.

The trainers on these workshops are certified and authorised by Harville Hendrix, PhD. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD., the founders and creators of Imago Relationship Therapy.

Couples who attend the workshops say that they are an excellent opportunity to deepen their understanding of the underlying Imago theories, and to work together in an intense way.

The workshops give couples a clear picture of the overall theory and practice of Imago Relationship Therapy, and this makes your work with your IRT therapist easier and more rewarding because you understand what's going on.

They are also good value - they are two full days of intense work, interspersed with lectures, activities and role-play. You do not have to 'share' with the group, and you only work with your partner.

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Research has shown that couples who attend a GTLYW workshop resolve their issues far more quickly than those who do not, come to understand the underlying principles of Imago, and learn to use the Dialogue process more quickly and efficiently.

You are strongly encouraged to attend a 'Getting the Love you Want' workshop if you possibly can.

Appendix x

Responsibilities of the Clients

Clients should commit to:

- Being as honest about your feelings and thoughts as you can
- Being willing to be open and curious about your partner's reality
- Being willing to take responsibility for your part in the situation
- Being respectful of your partner, in and out of session
- Expressing upsets to your partner or your therapist, rather than to family or friends
- Not using material from the sessions against your partner
- Taking the risk to be vulnerable
- Giving and receiving repairs as soon as possible
- Becoming your partners advocate
- Keeping appointments (unless a postponement is agreed) on time and paying the full fee as requested.
- Attending sessions once agreed with the therapist. If you want to end, you should inform the therapist and allow for one last session.

Appendix xi

Responsibilities of the Therapist

Your therapist will be committed to:

- Keep all information confidential with 3 exceptions:
- unless a child under 16 is at risk
- unless you are at mortal risk to yourselves or others
- unless discussing cases (anonymously) with a Supervisor
- Being neutral and not taking sides
- Finding a balance between setting boundaries and showing compassion
- Trying to keep the couple within the Dialogue process as much as possible
- Providing psych-education when necessary, so that the clients are informed
- Encouraging a balance between symbiosis and differentiation
- Interacting in a non-judgemental, non-shaming, congruent and supportive manner
- Focusing on the health and successes that exist or have existed within the relationship
- Holding the vision of the couple's goodness and positive intent, even when they can't
- Encouraging caring, loving behaviours
- Being present and focussed for sessions
- Being on time, and to end sessions on time

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- Being clear about the fee.
- Not holding secrets between the couple. Sometimes Imago therapists give individual sessions to the partners, and this can only be on the understanding that the therapist is neutral and transparent. Although they will keep things said in the therapy room confidential, they cannot keep things that one has said in private from the other. They also cannot advocate for one to the other. They can, however, help you to say things that you are afraid to say in a way that your partner can hear you.

Appendix xii

Tips for Couples

Tip # 1

If you have something important you want to discuss with your spouse or partner, start by asking “Is now a good time to talk?”. It gives the other person a “heads up” that you want their undivided attention, that this is important to you, that you want them to really listen to you. It also shows that you are respectful of their time and are not assuming that they are available on your time schedule. If your partner or spouse says no, it’s not a good time, accept that and ask for an appointment within 24 hours when he/she will talk to you.

Tip # 2

Hugs are very important! Couples who hug and cuddle regularly are more satisfied with their relationship. They feel more emotionally attached to their spouse/partner. Make the effort to hug each other every day, your relationship will benefit. I sometimes give couples a homework assignment to give each other a thirty second hug daily.

Tip # 3

Take a few minutes each day to ask each other “What was the best part of your day?” It will give you an opportunity to connect with each other in a positive way.

Tip # 4

Differentiation and togetherness are both important in a relationship. You need time as a couple and you need time as an individual. There will be activities you do together and ones you do separately. There will be values you share and values that are important to one of you but not the other. Learn to accept and respect both.

Tip # 5

Use sentences that start with "I" rather than "you." For example, I feel invisible when I come home and you ignore me; I feel angry when I see your clothes on the floor; I would appreciate it if you would call me if you are going to be late so I don't worry about you.

Tip # 6

Make "moments of connection" special. Research shows that certain moments in your day, as a couple, do matter. These are: when you first awake, when you leave for work, when you return home and when you say good-night. Take the time to greet each other, hug, kiss, look at each other eye to eye or anything else that helps you two feel connected.

Tip # 7

Understand that we all make mistakes. Be patient with your spouse/partner when they make a mistake.

Tip # 8

Negativity kills the safe, loving connection between two people. It's like throwing water on a fire to put it out. Try to reduce or eliminate the negative comments you make to your spouse/partner. Can you stop being negative for a few hours, a day, a week? Start wherever you can and watch what happens to your relationship.

Tip # 9

Ask yourself – am I trying to meet my partner/spouse's need for sexual intimacy? To expect him/her to be faithful when you are consistently

So, You're Seeing an Imago Therapist ...

unwilling to be sexually intimate often causes a rupture in a relationship that grows deeper over months and years. If you are not being sexually intimate, ask your self why and discuss it with your partner/spouse. Seek professional help if you can't resolve this on your own.

Tip # 10

Ask your partner/spouse - how am I doing at meeting your needs? Listen without becoming defensive and try to do at least one thing this week that will better meet your partner/spouse's needs.

Tip # 11

Dr. Pat Love, psychologist and Imago therapist, says that 80% of women do not feel like having sex until they ARE having sex. If you are a woman, try saying yes when you partner/spouse initiates sexual foreplay and see if you become aroused. Many women I work with are surprised that they do feel like having sex once they allow themselves to engage in sexual foreplay. If you are a man, try asking your partner/spouse if she would be willing to engage in foreplay to see if she becomes aroused and give her the option of proceeding to intercourse or not depending on how she feels.

Tip # 12

Be more cooperative with each other. If your spouse/partner asks you do to something, say yes and do it; don't make a face or complain or put it off.

Tip # 13

Make a list of your spouse/partner's positive qualities and each day tell them one quality you appreciate.

Tip # 14

In Imago therapy we believe "conflict is growth trying to happen." When a couple disagrees about the same thing over and over, it is often because one person needs to stretch/grow to meet an important need of their spouse/partner and this is hard to do. When we stretch to meet our

spouse/partner's need, it not only helps our partner to heal but also helps us to grow as a person.

Tip # 15

A strong sense of commitment helps love to grow. Let your partner/spouse know that you are determined to stay in your relationship and to do whatever it takes to make it work.

Tip # 16

Good communication also helps love to grow. Set aside time each day to talk just the two of you, use "I" sentences, listen to each other without judging, be supportive and respectful.

Tip # 17

Treat your partner with the respect you would give to a guest. Do this, even if you have been with your partner for a long time. The other person always deserves your full respect. Reverence is the nature of love.

Tip # 18

Being vulnerable with each other increases feelings of emotional intimacy and attachment. We are vulnerable when we express how we truly feel, when we share secrets, when we show our weaknesses.

Tip # 19

You can cultivate healthy passion by pursuing an activity you both enjoy. Engaging in exhilarating activities strengthens your connection with each other.

Tip # 20

Look for ways to express your interest, support and enthusiasm. This will also strengthen your connection with each other.

Tip # 21

All beings want to be loved and accepted. This is something you can give to your partner. Love completely, unselfishly, and unconditionally.

Reading List

Getting the Love you Want - A Guide for Couples, Hendrix, Harville, (2007) St Martins Press, New York, New York.

Keeping the Love you Find - A Personal Guide, Hendrix Harville, (1992) Pocket Books, New York New York.

Making Marriage Simple - 10 Relationship-Saving Truths (2013) Helen LaKelly Hunt and Harville Hendrix, Harmony Books, New York.

Teal Swan <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0wAs-u4A2E&feature=youtu.be>

The Evolution of Imago Relationship Therapy: A Personal and Professional Journey, Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. at http://imagorelationships.org/pro/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/02/The_Evolution_of_Imago_Relationship_Therapy-published_version.pdf

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Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT)
is a bio-psycho-social solution-focused approach
to coupledom, combining psychology, sociology,
anthropology, cosmology, neuroscience, interpersonal
neurobiology and trans-generational science.



IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY is the work of Harville Hendrix, PhD. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD.

This book is intended to supplement and complement, not replace, publications and trainings certified by Harville Hendrix, PhD. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD.

Readers are recommended to seek a Certified Imago Relationship Therapist to work with, in conjunction with this book.

For your nearest Certified Imago Therapist, go to www.imagorelationships.org or your national Imago site such as AIRTA (Association of Imago Relationship Therapists Australia) www.imago.org.au.

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