

# 20 ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

for a

*Loving & Lasting Relationship*

From master couples therapist and  
New York Times best-selling author, Terry Real

# 20 practices for everyday life

## 1. Appreciating Your Partner

### a. Appreciate each other at least once a day.

At the end of the day, tell your partner three things you appreciate, either about something current, or something more long-standing, *“I really appreciate your listening to me earlier this evening”* is one example. But so is, *“You have always had the most beautiful eyes.”*

### b. Develop an Attitude of Gratitude.

Throughout the day notice and shift all victim thinking. If you don’t like something, change it, leave it, or embrace it. If you choose to neither change nor leave, then own your choice and appreciate the good qualities in the situation.



## 2. Boundary Practice

Take a moment to visualize setting your boundaries at the beginning of each day. Throughout the day take a moment to reset them through visualization. Take stock of where you might be at a given moment and correct if necessary, softening walls and strengthening appropriate containment and protection.

Try avoiding all boundary-violating behaviors by staying on your side of the line. Speak from the “I,” not the “you” or the “it.” Remember there is nothing that you need to say that cannot be said from the “I” with practice.

# Learn to cherish your partner

## 3. Cherishing

The deliberate cultivation of your capacity to take pleasure in and celebrate what you have. Cherishing your partner's progress by giving him specific positive feedback is the best way to engender more of the behaviors you'd like. You cherish your relationship by making time and putting energy into it, also by giving your partner gifts in word and deed that demonstrate your care.

You cherish yourself through active self-care. You cherish your commitment to continued growth and relationship practice by becoming partners-in-health, sharing inspiration.

And you can cherish abundance by stepping into your particular passions and gifts with no attempt to either own or disown them, but rather with joy and respect for your own success and a wish to contribute to the world.



## 4. CNI-Busting Behavior

With your partner, draw up a list of CNI-Confirming and CNI-busting behaviors. These are behaviors that are like or unlike your partner's negative expectations - core negative image, of you.

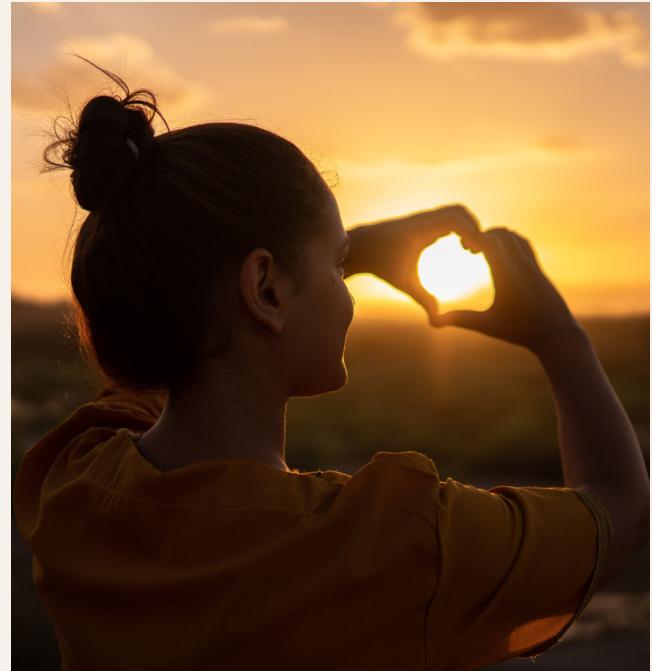
This list serves as your relationship compass, as specific operating instructions for how best to please your partner.

Decrease CNI-Confirming behaviors and increase CNI-busting behaviors.

# Stand up for your wants & needs

## 5. Coming to “Center”

Use the relationship grid to provide a snapshot of where you are, and correct for any imbalance by doing self-esteem and boundary work.



## 6. Contracting

Making explicit contracts protects you, the contractor, in two ways, by:

- a. Making it difficult for the other person to take a victim position, since he's agreed to the contract
- b. Making each other's expectations and commitments clear. Contracts always concern behaviors, not attitudes or feelings, and are best when they're specific and close-ended.



## 7. Cultivating a Sense of Abundance

In both ordinary moments and when upset, stop, either look down or close your eyes for a few seconds and breathe. Feel the sweetness of a good, deep breath. Feel the warmth or coolness of the air on your skin. Feel the beauty of your surroundings, the sun, or the sight of trees outside the window.

Remember that your life is abundant, that this moment is abundant, and that a particular disruption in your relationship or your circumstances will never take that abundance away.

## 8. Daring to “Rock the Boat”

In even the healthiest of relationships, getting what you want often involves assertively going after it. If something is important to you, and your partner doesn't "get it," you may need to stand up for your wants and needs by fighting for them.

This means being willing to behave in ways that your partner will be uncomfortable with – acting as unhappy as you are about the issue, and, while remaining moderate and respectful, not backing down.

# Listen. Appreciate. Acknowledge

## 9. Dead-Stop Contracts

A deadstop contract is an agreement to interrupt the vicious cycle of CNI-meets-CNI. The agreement goes like this:

*"If I feel rightly or wrongly that you are behaving in ways that reinforce my CNI of you – if I feel, for instance, that old, horrible feeling of being bossed around by you – I will signal a deadstop. And promise in advance that if you hear that signal, understanding that your behavior is CNI triggering, you will come to a dead stop – whether you agree with my perception or not."*

When you use a *Dead-Stop Contract*, nothing short of physical safety takes precedence over your goal of stopping your repetitive pattern, no matter what you think of your partner's perception or motivation.



## 10. Helping Your Partner Succeed

Once your partner has responded by acknowledging and giving, you:

- Appreciate what you've been offered**
- Ask what you might do to help**

If your partner describes something you might do differently, it is now your turn to acknowledge and give what you can.

## 11. Listening to Understand

Remember the speaker role and the listener role are two different roles. As the listener, listen.

Focus on your partner and not on your rebuttals, explanations, or concerns, either spoken or merely thought. Turn points of connection into points of curiosity.





## Remember to love, first

### 12. Making Requests

Instead of focusing on what your partner has done wrong, discipline yourself to focus on what he could do now or later that would be right.

You shift from a negative/past focus to a positive/future focus. Don't criticize – ask!

### 13. Meeting Immaturity with Maturity

On those occasions when your partner is obviously operating from an immoderate, childish part of himself, hunker down and stay moderate yourself.

Try two or three times to help your partner reseat himself in his functional adult self, as in,

*"Honey, I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to put you down. All I meant was..."*

If, after a few such efforts, it becomes clear that your partner is simply behind a wall and not listening politely and respectfully, then disengage. Don't bother getting indignant or hurt, but also stop banging your head against the wall.

Don't argue, reason, or cajole. Just let go and give your partner space to figure it out!

### 14. Remembering Love

Before bringing up a difficult topic, recall that the person you're about to speak to is someone you care about and that your goal in speaking is to make things better.

Keep your eyes on the prize!



# Be Responsible with Love

## 16. Responsible Distance Taking

In contrast to unilateral or provocative distance taking, responsible distance taking always includes two elements:

- a. An explanation
- b. A promise of return or a proposed alternative

You don't simply say, "I don't want to talk," you say, "I don't want to talk right now. Here's why, and here's when I can."

Anytime you say no to someone, you are taking distance, and should do so responsibly. Shift from a negative/past focus to a positive/future focus.

Don't criticize – ask!

## 17. Self-Esteem Practice

Check to see where you are – one down, one up, or same as and correct if necessary.

In your mind's eye, reach down if you are in a toxic shame state and visualize pulling yourself up into your body so that you look squarely out of your eyes at the other person, from a level, same as, position.

In your mind's eye, reach up if you are in a grandiose state and visualize pulling yourself down into your body so that you are looking squarely at the other person, from a level, same as position.

## 18. Smart Generosity

Giving your partner more of what he's asking for by asking yourself, "What will giving this cost me?" Things that aren't difficult to give but that mean a lot to your partner, such as remembering an important date, admitting when you were wrong, or agreeing to do something you intended to do anyway, are lowcost, highyield investments.



# Time-outs essential to regroup

## 19. Taking Time-Outs

When either partner calls a timeout – by saying the word “timeout,” by using the “T” hand signal, or by using any agreed upon sign – the interaction comes to an immediate stop.

The spoken or gestured signal understood by both partners to be an abbreviation of the following words:

*“Dear partner, for whatever reason, right or wrong, I am about to lose it. If I stay here and keep this up with you I am liable to do or say something stupid that I know I’m going to regret. Therefore, I am taking a break to get a grip on myself and calm down. I will check back in with you responsibly.”*

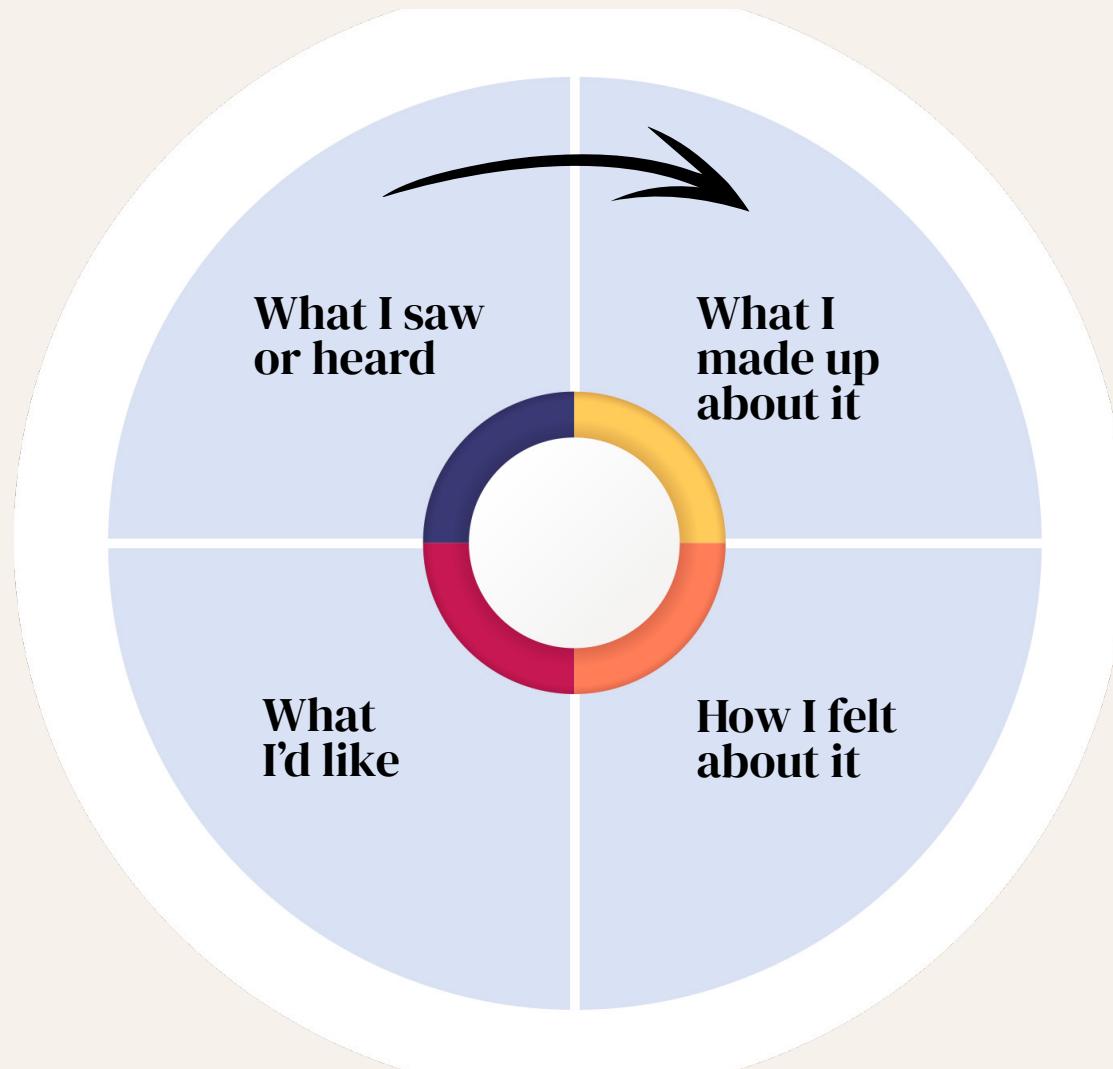
The default interval for a timeout is twenty

minutes. Checking in does not necessarily mean getting back together. You can check in, either in person or by telephone – and tell your partner that you need more time. With each extension, the timeout interval gets longer.

The recommended length between checkins is:

- 20 minutes
- 12 hours
- Half day
- Whole day
- Overnight

When reconnecting after a timeout, you must take a 24 hour moratorium on the subject that triggered the initial fight.



## Relationship essentials - feedback wheel

### 20. Using the Feedback Wheel\*

- a. Contract with your partner to do the process. Don't just dump
- b. Remember Love
- c. Use these four steps of the feedback wheel:

1. *What I saw or heard*
2. *What I made up about it*
3. *How I feel about it*
4. *What I'd like*

- d. Let go of the outcome

\* Adapted from Janet Hurley and Pia Mellody. Wheel Design by: Tracey Navrides



# ABOUT TERRY

*Speaker, Author, and Couples Therapist &  
Professional Trainer for 25+ Years*

Terry Real is the best-selling author of *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*, *the Straight-talking How Can I Get Through to You? Reconnecting Men and Women*, and *The New Rules of Marriage: What You Need to Make Love Work*. His work has been featured on NBC Nightly News, Today, Good Morning America, and Oprah, as well as in *The New York Times*, *Psychology Today*, *Esquire*, and numerous academic publications.

**Couples Work:** Terry leads couples on a step-by-step journey toward greater intimacy and more personal fulfillment.

**Professional Training:** He provides on-line training courses, workshops and certification program for therapists.

*Learn more at [www.terryreal.com](http://www.terryreal.com)*