

## Caring behaviours: instructions for couples (based on Jacobson and Christensen, 1996)

Relationships don't take care of themselves. They need time, care and attention. This exercise is designed to help you both do some simple relationship maintenance by increasing the number of positive interactions between you to improve the way that you feel about each other on a day-to-day basis. The exercise is in three parts that we will carry out over the next few sessions. The work will involve both of you doing things at home, and then discussing these activities in counselling.

### Part 1

Between now and our next session I would like each of you to come up with 10 things that would increase the day-to-day happiness of your partner. Make the actions you choose simple, low cost (in time and money) and meaningful to your partner. Your list could consist of a mixture of things that you already do that you think it would help to do more often, things you used to do that it would be nice to start doing again, or entirely new ideas. Try to be specific, so that your partner can easily identify the actions when they are performed. Do not attempt to put any items on your list into action before we meet again.

**Do not discuss your lists before the next session but do bring them with you.**

### Part 2

At the next session I will talk through your list with each of you in turn. This is to clarify each item and to make sure that the tasks you have chosen are specific, acceptable and manageable. Whilst I am going through your partner's list with them I would ask you please to remain silent and not show any signs of how you feel about any of the proposed caring behaviours. This exercise is designed to give each of you a chance to think about what you could do for each other. We don't expect to get everything right straight away so it's best not to pour cold water on an idea before it's had a chance to succeed.

After going through your lists I would like each of you to choose one or more items to carry out. You are under no obligation to pick any particular item, but don't pick an item that will be too difficult for you to do at this stage.

- Don't tell the other person what you have chosen.
- Carry out the item and observe your partner's reaction to these changes in your behaviour.
- Bring your lists back to the next session and we will discuss how things went.

### Part 3

In the next session I will ask you both to discuss how the exercise went. Specifically I would like us to find out:

1. Which items did you attempt?
2. Which ones did your partner notice?
3. Which ones left you feeling more cared about or connected?
4. How costly it was for you to carry out your caring behaviours?

Next I will ask each of you to comment on other's list, and to say whether each of the attempted tasks was:

- A "keeper"
- Minor, but still pleasing
- Off the mark

Finally I will ask each of you to suggest items for the other to add to their list. Each of you adds the extra items but is not under any obligation to perform any particular one. This information should help you decide which caring behaviours to choose over the next few weeks. I will then ask you to try the exercise again taking into account this new information. At the next session we will again check how much this has helped you both feel more cared about and connected.