

The Anxious-Avoidant Couple Worksheet

One of you calms down through contact; the other calms down through space. Neither of those is wrong -- but wired together they make a machine: the more one reaches, the more the other retreats, and the more one retreats, the harder the other reaches. Both of you end up doing more of the exact thing that makes the other do more of theirs. This worksheet does not try to change either nervous system. It maps the machine the two of them build, on one page, and then puts two small agreements where the machine usually wins.

Who this is for: Couples where one partner mostly seeks closeness under stress and the other mostly seeks distance -- and both are tired of having the same fight in different clothes.

The five exercises

1. Draw your loop (separately)

Each of you maps the cycle as it looks from your side.

The trigger, as neutrally as I can state it:

Their first move (observable), and my reading of it (what I decided it meant):

My countermove (observable), as they would describe it:

Their reading of my countermove, as best I can guess:

What finally stopped the loop this time?

2. One incident, both ledgers (separately)

Log the same fight from both sides, then read them side by side.

What I felt underneath, honestly (fear-level, not surface-level):

What I showed on the outside (as a camera would have seen it):

What I needed but did not put into words:

After reading theirs: one line in their ledger that surprised me:

One sentence of mine I would rewrite, knowing their inside:

3. The translation table (together)

Build a two-row dictionary between your two dialects.

Their five stress moves, and the translation they give for each:

My five stress moves, and my translations:

The one mistranslation that costs us most (be specific about the incident it caused):

Where the table gets kept (it only works if it is findable mid-argument):

4. Each partner's smallest hard thing (together)

One rep each, chosen so the costs are symmetrical.

The avoidant-side rep, defined exactly (what, when, how often):

The anxious-side rep, defined exactly:

Week one, my own log only -- done/missed each day, and how it felt out of 10:

Weekly compare: what did the other's rep actually do for me?

Adjust the trade for week two (bigger, smaller, different?):

5. The pause-and-return deal (together)

Agree the circuit breaker: how either of you stops the loop, and how you both come back.

Our pause word or signal:

Minimum and maximum pause length we can both live with:

The exact return-time sentence, rehearsed once out loud while calm:

What each of us does during the pause (from our own steadying lists, not the phone):

After first real use: did the return actually happen on time? What needs tightening?

This worksheet is free to print, photocopy and share, including with clients. It is self-reflection material, not a diagnosis, an assessment or a substitute for professional support. If a relationship involves fear, control or coercion, or if working through this raises more than feels manageable, please speak to a doctor, a therapist or a domestic abuse service.