

Miles Apart but Close to the Heart:

A workshop on building communication and connection in long-distance relationships



Long Distance Relationships Workshop

- ❖ Introductions and Expectations / Rules
- ❖ Emotional Flooding
- ❖ Building Connection When Far Away
- ❖ Questions / Comments

Group Rules

- ❖ Be mindful of people's privacy.
- ❖ Be aware of time and space you take in group.
- ❖ Please minimize Cross Talk.
- ❖ Please silence cellular phones.
- ❖ Be respectful of people's differing points of view.

Communication

- ❖ What are some of the communication challenges you experience in your relationship?
- ❖ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ3I6KfFTR0>

What is Emotional Flooding?

- ❖ Flooding is your physiological reaction to a perceived threat. The threat can be real, it can be an old tape replaying itself (a pattern), or it can be imagined. Automatic, instinctive, and reactive processes (emotions) rush in to protect you from the threat.

Flooding in Long-Distance Relationships

- ❖ Challenges of time
- ❖ Expectations when having shared time
- ❖ Challenging when there is a technological barrier where non-verbals cannot always be accurately seen.

Flooding Questionnaire

- ❖ If you answered “yes” to more than 4 of the statements, this is a strong sign that you are prone to feel flooded during conflict with your partner. Because this state can be harmful to your relationship, it is important to let your partner know how you are feeling. The antidote to flooding is to practice soothing yourself and your partner. This will help change how you perceive your partner’s negative reactions. Instead of getting overwhelmed by your partner’s angry tone or words, try to see them as simply the underliner - a way for your partner to emphasize something they are feeling rather than a personal attack.
- ❖ Gottman, J. (1994)

Mindful Communication

- ❖ Be **aware** of where you are at before the conversation. Do you need to de-flood? Are you feeling particularly needy, lonely, happy, irritated? What kind of energy do you bring to this conversation?
- ❖ What do you **need** in this conversation/Skype date/text message? What would you like to be heard? Is this realistic given the time frame, environment, context, etc.?
- ❖ Managing your **expectations** around how your partner responds. What is your or their level of self disclosure and self awareness? Is this realistic given the context?
- ❖ Can you **connect** with your partner and give what they are needing in the interaction? What contribution are you making to enrich the discussion? Is this realistic given the context?
- ❖ Meta-Communication: Saying what you really need vs. suggesting/hinting.
- ❖ Use of “I” statements (rather than “you”).
- ❖ Don’t over-interpret or give unsolicited advice. Validate, reflect and express curiosity rather than judge or react.

The Couples Dialogue

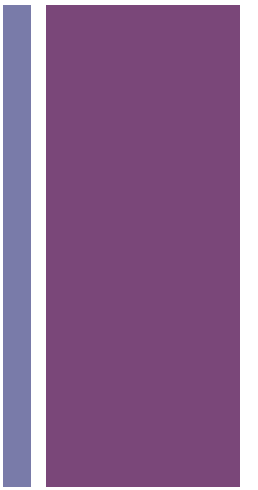
Notes to the SENDER	Notes to the RECEIVER
Be mindful that your own safety depends on your partner feeling safe with you. Speak from your own experience!	Be mindful that your own safety depends on your partner feeling safe with you.
Remember that how you react is largely influenced by your own history and experiences with others.	Remember that how react is largely influenced by your own history and experiences with others.
Be aware that validation DOES NOT require agreement or immediate change in the behavior. Two realities can be equally valid at the same time.	Be aware validation DOES NOT require agreement or approval, nor does it require you to abandon your own reality or perspective.
Patience is key. Allow the possibility that validation may take several dialogues with your partner.	When mirroring your partner, say back without judgment the content of what is being said; offer it as a reflection so your partner can verify its accuracy or restate it so you will understand it as your partner wants it to be understood
Be mindful of how you express your concern to your partner. When you find yourself using negative statements or criticisms to make a point, PAUSE and reflect on what the actual goal and need is from your partner. REFRAME what you are saying in a more positive form to reflect care.	Let your main objective be to achieve awareness and appreciation of your partner's unique reality or point of view to the issue being discussed. With your partner's assistance, you are striving to validate your partner's world.
Assume goodwill. Don't create stories beyond what you are actually feeling in the moment. This can raise your anxiety as well as your partners.	If you start to feel criticized by your partner's expressions, simply mirror it without defensiveness or counter-criticism.
Show empathy to your partner and whenever true, validate that you care about your partner's feelings even though you may see things differently.	Let go of your belief that you know it better than your partner. This will allow you to understand your partner, and allow your partner to evolve a better understanding of themselves. Show genuine interest in their perspective.
Begin with statements like "it would feel good to me if you would..." making a request rather than a demand.	Contain your own responses of defense or disagreement. You will share your perspective later. Learn their side.



Building Connection



Characteristics that can help create happy couples



- Treat each other with respect, affection, and kindness
- Make allowances for the fact that you are each imperfect human beings who are doing the best they can to make the world work
- No putdowns, no name-calling, and no demands for perfection
- Be genuinely interested in each other and in the world around you (find out about their life and their day-to-day, their favorite coffee shop and friends they hang out with)
- Talk to each other about your interests, ideas, and dreams
- Share your discoveries and enjoy playing together. Use humor!
- Notice and address problems as those problems arise so you do not build resentment

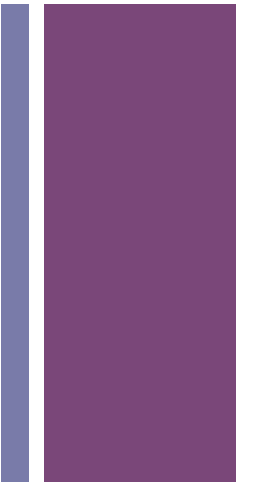


Find the good things/ the things that **ARE** working and compliment them!

- Assume goodwill
- My partner jokes, “Men are like dogs. We need treats!”
- When your partner is doing something right tell him/her! Acknowledge the little things, compliment and encourage
- Try not to focus only on the bad, acknowledge the good things that are going on so that the behavior can be repeated.



No multitasking

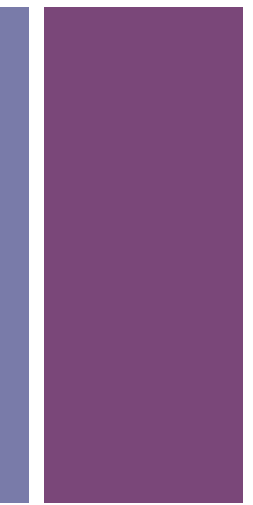


- Do activities together like watch the same movie or try a new recipe
- Give one another your full and undivided attention and for a long enough period of time to connect (this may be different for everyone)
 - Turning towards
 - Bidding
- Agree on when and how often you want to talk. Carve out time for one another so the relationship feels like a priority.
- Know what works for you: if something is not working don't force it, try to find something else. If it isn't a good time to talk acknowledge that and set up a different time



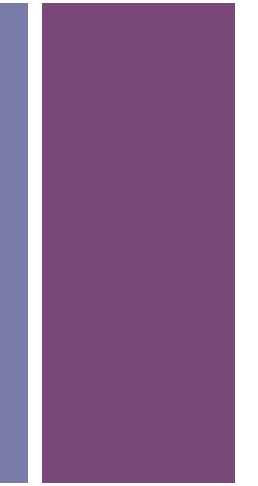
Build a sense of Shared Meaning

- Within your couple develop your own culture
- Discuss your values, family traditions, and cultural influences
- Begin to create your own traditions
 - Every Sunday morning go out to brunch and read the paper then share your experience
 - Try a new exercise class
 - Go see the same matinee
 - Send handwritten letters or cards
- Start each phone call with something that you are thankful for about the other person/the relationship/ life in general
- Be true to yourself and to your partner





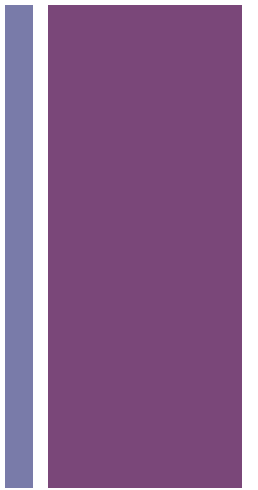
Some tips to think about



- Don't try to pretend that things are fine if they're not. If you are unhappy, take responsibility for expressing what's wrong without blaming each other for real or imagined wrongdoing.
- Each be aware of but not responsible for each others' happiness. You will sometimes hurt each other, but never deliberately. When this happens, don't make excuses or defend your actions. Apologize for the inadvertent hurt and usually attempt to avoid it in the future.
- Be quick to forgive each other. Don't hold grudges.
- Time apart can be an opportunity to develop yourself and invest in your interests. Do this... and then share it with your partner
- Accept that you are two different people -- allow and appreciate the differences.



When you do connect in person

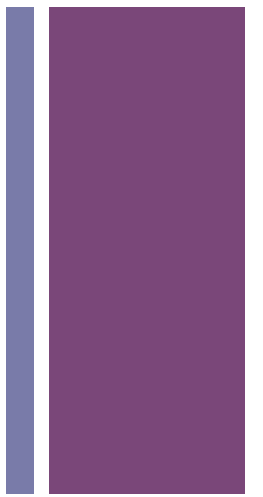


- Have realistic expectations
 - It may not be perfect, it may take some time to feel normal
 - Each interaction is not a make-it or break-it scenario
- Plan activities that help the other person to understand your world so you can talk and share it when you are apart
- Plan something for yourself to do when your partner leaves
- Try each journaling about the time spent together and then share it or send a letter to the other person highlighting the experiences shared



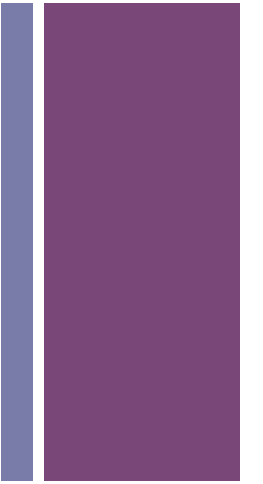
Technology and Others Ways to Connect:

- Facetime on iphone or ipad
- Google Chat on android
- Skype
- Whats App
- Text
- ichat/ivideo
- Email
- Letters and cards
- Care packages





Couple Apps



Pair (now known as Couple)

- Are you overly attached to your significant other? Then Pair is the perfect app for you! Pair's purpose is to link your phone with your partner in order to send private messages such as video's, pictures, and drawings. Now you can do so much more than just texting everyday. Pair also has another feature that's borderline stalker. It uses your built-in GPS to let your partner privately see where you are. . . all the time. So men, if you already have a hard time finding "me-time" in your relationship, I suggest you never mention this to your partner. However, if you think the [overly obsessive girlfriend is kind of cute, then go all the way and download this app.](#)

Avocado

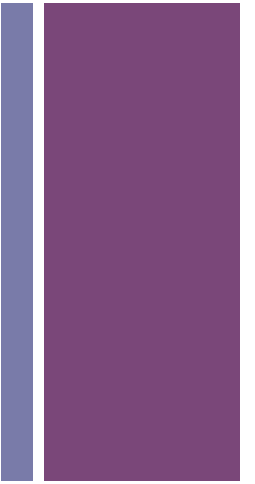
- Probably the best couples app yet! Unlike most "couples only" apps, this app is actually productive. Avocado doesn't just let you send private messages but also lets you create and share to-do lists, set date reminders, even post twitter statuses as a pair, as well as many other apps. But don't worry, it also has cutsie features like sending a virtual hug or kiss, where you actual hug or kiss the phone. All the events, photos, messages, hugs, and other things you send are all documented into a private Avocado timeline, much like Facebook except it can only be viewed by two people. This is a must have for any couple. Document you're entire relationship in a fun and easy way without your friends yelling at you for showing too much [PDA.](#)

+Cupple

- This app seems to be very famous among a lot of people and I don't know why. It has all types of private messaging, cute features, and can document your exchanges. Everything about this app is good, it's just not as good as Avocado which has much more features.

Feel Me

- Feel Me is a neat little app that lets two user see where and when each other is touching their phone screen. The purpose is to give a more direct connection when using less direct communications such as texting. The coolest thing about this app is if the two users touch the same spot at the same time (in respect to each other's phone) the phone vibrates, as though you have virtually touched your partner. Now those adorable moments when you and your partner say the same thing at the same time can be equally adorable (or equally disgusting depending on who you ask) when you touch the same spot. Although feel me is not a fully released app, it is on the verge of being one. If you wish to be one of the first people to get this app once it's released sign up on their e-mail list [here](#).

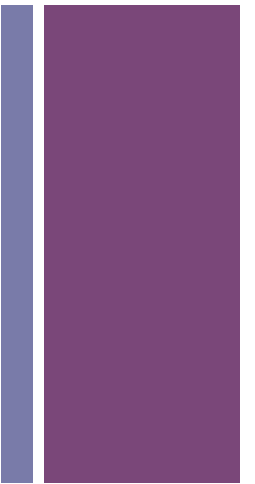




Simply Us

- Want a synced planner for you and your partner but don't want all the fancy feature? There's an app for that. Simply Us is basically just a calendar that two people are linked to instead of one. Users can set reminders for dinner parties, vacation, or anything else and the other user will be able to see it. An additional benefit to this app is that it can be linked to other calendars such as Google or Yahoo. So now you don't have to check two calendars when making plans with your best buddy.

Snap Chat – Snap Chat is not a “couples only” but it easily can be. If you are not aware, the app let's you send pictures to someone who will be looked at for 10 seconds or so then deleted permanently. Set a chat with just your partner and you two can send each other cute messages all day long. There are some [rumors that snap chat was developed for a different reason originally. If you're into that, fine, but we didn't tell you to do it!](#)



Resources

- ❖ www.lovingfromadistance.com
- ❖ The Long Distance Relationship Workbook by Michelle and Frank at www.lovingfromadistance.com
- ❖ The Long-Distance Relationship Guide: Advice for The Geographically Challenged by Caroline Tiger
- ❖ The Long-Distance Relationship Survival Guide by Chris Bell and Kate Brauer-Bell
- ❖ The Idiot's Guide to Long-Distance Relationships by Seetha Narayan

Resources at UCSF

- ❖ UCSF Student Health and Counseling [http:// studenthealth.ucsf.edu](http://studenthealth.ucsf.edu)
- ❖ UCSF Faculty & Staff Assistance Program; [http:// ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/ index.php/ assist/](http://ucsfhr.ucsf.edu/index.php/assist/)