

All of My Heart

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Talk to the group about self-esteem, self-worth and what it means to feel lovable. Discuss with participants how messages from our childhood, society and current life circumstances can affect how we feel about ourselves.
2. Give each participant a construction paper heart and a pen/pencil.
3. Have partners and couples physically separate in the room so that they cannot see what their partners are writing.
4. Ask participants to write the name of their partner on one side of the heart. Ask them to take a few minutes and really imagine life in this person's shoes. Ask them to reflect on the messages he or she received in childhood. Instruct them to make an "x" on the heart for every negative message they can possibly imagine their partner experienced as a child. Make a bigger "x" for bigger wounds. For example, if a partner lost a parent, that is going to be a very big "x". Make sure participants do not write the actual events on the card, just an "x".
5. Next ask participants to think about negative messages their partner may be currently experiencing. Ask participants to think about messages society may give their partner which may affect their self-esteem or self-worth. For example, most women are somehow affected by society's standards for beauty. Many men are affected by society's messages about how much they should provide for their family. Draw an "x" for each one of those negative messages.

Group Size: 1 to 10

Time Needed: 11 to 20 minutes

Goal: To help participants gain empathy for their partner or children and to be more intentional with loving acts toward their partner

Audience: Couples, Parents

Special Considerations: This activity can become very intense emotionally. You will need to be prepared to help people manage powerful feelings. Your group will need to be very bonded and feel safe in order to do this activity. **Please note that this activity will not work well with couples that are hostile towards one another.

Resources Needed:

- ✓ One large heart cut from construction paper
- ✓ One pen/pencil per person

6. Ask participants to consider how personal relationships at home and work may leave their partner with negative messages. For example, a partner may have a very demanding and critical boss. Draw an “x” that is the appropriate size for the negative message.
7. Finally, ask participants to consider negative messages they themselves may be giving their partner. Are they critical or unforgiving? Instruct them to put a very big “x” for those negative messages, as they are probably closer to their partner than anyone else.
8. Give participants several minutes to really imagine what it feels like for their partner to carry around all those negative messages.
9. Ask participants to flip over their hearts and now to think about ways that they can consciously give their partner loving and positive messages. (This can be a good time to talk about how their partner likes to receive love.) Have participants write these down on the positive side of the card.
10. Give participants several minutes to consider what they have written on their hearts. Ask them to pick out one or two that they will do this week without telling their partner (or child).
11. When they are ready, ask them to hand the hearts in to you. Explain that you will not read them, but that you will be disposing of the hearts in a secure manner. The goal is for the person drawing the heart to come to a better understanding of their partner and be able to empathize.

Tips for Discussion and Processing

Empathy is at the heart of all loving relationships, but sometimes when we are mad or hurting it can be very hard to have empathy for another. For most couples, just taking the time to sit and really consider their spouse as a human being with challenges and sufferings of their own can bring about a lot of insight. After completing this exercise, you can talk to your group about the meaning of love. Is it a noun or is it a verb? What does real “loving” mean? Are you only doing nice things for the other person because of what you will get out of it or because you really love your partner? This activity can also be wonderful to use for parents who are struggling with teenagers. It can be good for them to remember what it felt like going through the drama of high school or trying to fit in.