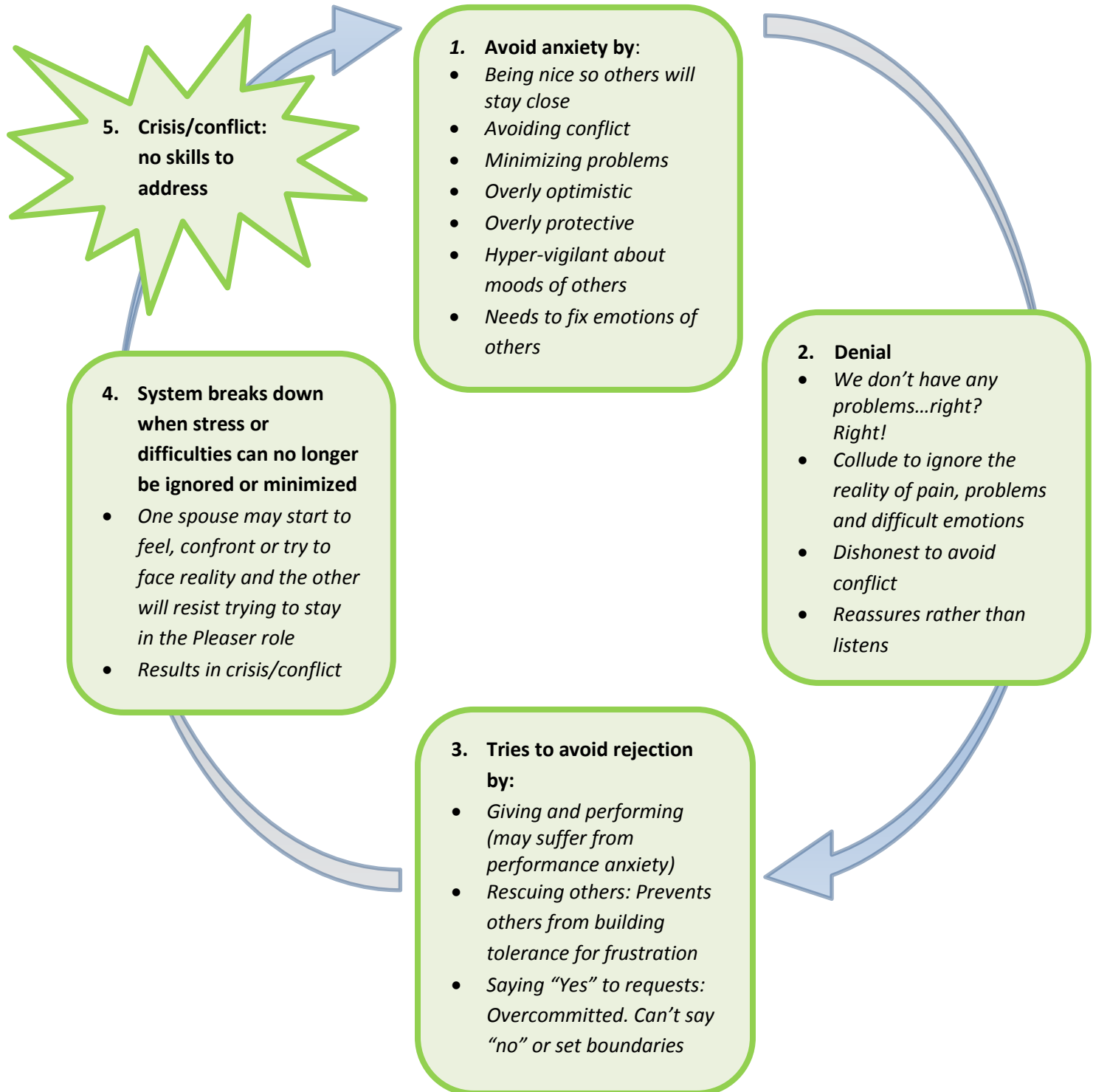


ATTACHMENT CORE PATTERN THERAPY™

PLEASER/PLEASER CORE PATTERN

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Attachment Core Pattern Therapy™ Interventions

Pleaser & Pleaser

The PLEASER

- For most (or all) of my childhood I could have been described as the “good kid.”
- I feel very anxious if someone is upset or annoyed with me so I am good at “keeping the peace.”
- I seek connection and avoid rejection by anticipating and meeting others’ needs.
- One of my parents was either fearful or critical and I tried hard to win approval and keep them happy.
- At times, I’ve had difficulty tolerating physical or emotional distance from my spouse.
- Conflict makes me uneasy and I prefer to deal with disagreement by giving in or making up for it and quickly moving on.
- I worry a lot.
- I have difficulty confronting or saying no and sometimes it makes me less than truthful.
- I generally don’t feel angry; if I do, I get busy or try to think about something else to get rid of it.
- Sometimes I inwardly resent giving more than I get and feel like a doormat.
- I don’t often ask for help and feel uncomfortable when others try to give me assistance.
- When I sense others are upset or distancing, I pursue and try harder to win them back.

Initial Attraction:

Although this pattern isn’t as common, it’s easy to see why two Pleasers would be attracted to one another. Nice would be the descriptive word of this relationship. Conflict would be happily avoided by both people and each would be trying hard to make the other content. This is the couple that announces to their friends, “We never fight.” From outward appearances, it looks like the perfect marriage.

Overview of the Core Pattern:

This pair takes the risk free route as much as possible and has difficulty making decisions. They may be overcommitted to activities as both have difficulty saying no or including self-care as a part of their routine. Since both spouses lack boundaries, minimize problems and avoid conflict, things seem to go along quite smoothly until a crisis hits that forces the acknowledgment of painful realities. Neither is skilled at dealing with difficult emotions, or comforting, rather than reassuring. A strong, feisty child can throw this duo into a tailspin as neither would be good at holding boundaries and each has an aversion to dealing with strong emotions or protests from a spirited child. Teen years can be difficult on parents who are both Pleasers for the same reasons.

When there is finally a situation or event that forces difficult feelings to surface, often one spouse is ready to face reality, while the other wants to stay in the Pleaser mode. At this point, resentment can build as one person deals with more than their share of the family's problems.

When stuck in this Core Pattern, each person feels:

- We have a great marriage because we never fight.
- Love means making sure no one in the family is ever stressed so it's important to always help others when they have difficulties or feel frustrated.
- Anger is an unkind emotion and should be avoided.
- It's better to sweep a problem under the rug than let things drag on and on.
- It's okay to be dishonest if the truth would hurt someone, get me in trouble, or cause conflict or confrontation.

If a crisis polarizes this couple, the Pleaser who is facing reality will feel:

- My spouse refuses to live in reality.
- My spouse puts a positive spin on everything and tells me I exaggerate problems.
- My spouse is busy helping everyone else and ignores the problems at home.
- My spouse leaves it to me to make all the hard decisions.
- My spouse tries to appease me when what I want is for them to hear my problems.
- I feel like my spouse refuses to admit we are in a crisis.

Individual Growth Steps for the Pleaser (see How we Love Workbook)

1. **Own anxiety.** I will own my anxiety underlying much of my Pleaser behavior. I will see my worry and overprotection as a problem rather than labeling it as love.
2. **Self-awareness:** I will work on becoming aware of my own feelings instead of continually focusing on the mood of others.
3. **Receive:** I will think about and ask for what I need and learn to be a receiver as well as a giver.
4. **Boundaries:** I will learn to have boundaries and say no to anger that is expressed with harsh tones or mean words.
5. **Over-commitment:** I will learn and rehearse a no speech rather than be over-committed. "Thanks for asking but my schedule is too full to accept that job (offer, obligation, invitation, request)."
6. **Tolerate rejection:** I will stop believing the lie that I can make everyone happy. I will not try and fix people or change their mood when they are upset with me. I will remind myself conflict is a normal part of life.
7. **Direct honest words.** I will own my tendency to be indirect and dishonest to avoid conflict. I will learn to speak with direct honest statements rather than minimizing. If necessary I will write my feelings and read them to my spouse.

8. **My own triggers:** I will tell my spouse when their anger triggers me and ask for a few minutes to calm down and gather my thoughts. Then I will reengage and ask about the feelings in my spouse that underlie the anger. "I can see how upset you are and I want to hear about the feelings you were having before you got angry."
9. **Anger:** I will attempt to identify and express my own anger instead of minimizing or disregarding it. I will learn to express my anger in appropriate ways.
10. **Being alone:** I will practice being alone and learn to enjoy time by myself.
11. **Difficult emotions:** Instead of fixing, minimizing and pacifying difficult emotions, I will lean into these emotions and *find out more* instead of doing something nice or distracting to make them go away.
12. **Quit rescuing:** Making sure no one ever has a bad feeling is not love. It's rescuing. We all have to learn to cope with stress. Doing for others what they could do for themselves makes weak family members.

Identifying and Exiting the Core Pattern

In Part 3 of our book, How We Love (2006), we discuss Duets that Damage How We Love. When harmful love styles combine in close relationships, (especially marriage) a destructive, repetitive Core Pattern is created that blocks emotional intimacy and makes resolution of conflict difficult. These reactive patterns are at the root of many complaints and struggles, so learning to identify and exit the Core Pattern is critical to moving toward a secure connection as a couple. Each person must own and work on their harmful love style and use the Comfort Circle as a new and healthy format for connecting as a couple. (For more on the Comfort Circle, go to howwelove.com).

See Pleaser/Pleaser Core Pattern Diagram

The diagram on page 1 explains the circular Core Pattern. Each step of the Core Pattern is represented by Steps 1 through 5. What is happening in each step is explained under the section **What's going on?** Then, *individual action steps and couple action steps* are listed that either Pleaser spouse would have to do to pull out, or exit, the Core Pattern. The Comfort Circle is useful in that it requires each person to listen to the other without interrupting, defending or fixing. At any point in the circle, steps can be taken to exit the Core Pattern by either spouse.

Overview of the Core Pattern: What's going on at each point in the circle?

Step 1: Anxiety avoided:

1. **Avoid Anxiety by:**

- *Being nice so others will stay close*
- *Avoiding conflict*
- *Minimizing problems*
- *Overly optimistic*
- *Overly protective*
- *Hyper-vigilant about moods of others*
- *Needs to fix emotions of others*

What's going on?

- Pleasers are anxious and their goal is to reduce that anxiety. Interestingly, many times Pleasers don't recognize their anxiety as it seems normal to them. Many of the Pleaser's beliefs, actions and behaviors (including compulsions) serve the purpose of reducing their worry.
- Pleasers are anxious, proximity seekers. Pleasers are optimistic and **ignore reality**, rarely getting angry.
- Pleasers reduce anxiety by being nice, overly optimistic, avoiding conflict and evading risk.
- They desperately desire to keep people close in order to comfort the distress they feel when others are not happy with them or when their spouse separates emotionally and/or physically.
- Pleasers are hyper-vigilant about the moods of others and are quick to fix or provide solutions in an attempt to garner the favor and attention of others.
- People sense this desperation and dependency and, over time, view the Pleaser as weak and begin to lose respect for them.

Step 2: Pleasers denial:**2. Denial**

- *We don't have any problems...right? Right!*
- *Collude to ignore the reality of pain, problems and difficult emotions*
- *Dishonest to avoid conflict*
- *Reassures rather than listens*

What's going on?

- This pair colludes to ignore reality and minimize problems and difficult emotions. Reality produces anxiety. Avoiding reality reduces anxiety.
- Pleasers will try to provide a quick fix for any difficult emotions and tend to offer superficial reassurance rather than delving in and understanding challenging emotions.
- This couple will report a peaceful marriage since they don't face conflict and have difficulty expressing anger. At some point, life gets too challenging to hold up this façade and the defenses break down. This may take years.

Step 3: Avoiding rejection:**3. Tries to avoid rejection by:**

- *Giving and performing (may suffer from performance anxiety)*
- *Rescuing others: Prevents others from building tolerance for frustration*
- *Saying "Yes" to requests: Overcommitted. Can't say "no" or set boundaries*

What's going on?

- Pleasers protect themselves from their anxiety about anger and rejection by always trying to keep others from feeling angry. When they sense tension or discord rising, they:
 - Create distractions: “Hey, let’s all go to McDonalds!”
 - Overextend: “I got up early and made your favorite breakfast!”
 - Perform: “I remembered you being irritated about the mess in the garage, so I spent the whole day cleaning so you could get out of your car more easily!”
- Because Pleasers perform to gain approval, they are often plagued with performance anxiety. Being scrutinized may bring displeasure or feelings of rejection which terrifies the Pleaser. Being evaluated (i.e. test taking), increases their anxiety so Pleasers dread being in these situations.
- Wishing to keep others close to make them feel more secure, Pleasers tend to show love by rescuing others from problems and stress. While this may feel like *love* to the Pleaser, rescuing keeps others from taking responsibility and growing. A Secure Connector can tolerate disappointment, distress and making mistakes. Someone who has been constantly saved from consequences doesn’t learn to be responsible or build up tolerance for frustration. Sometimes, love means letting someone face a consequence or struggle and learn from the experience.
- Fearing disapproval as a result of disappointing others, Pleasers have a difficult time saying no to any request and are overcommitted as a result.
- Fearing separation, Pleasers are softies and with enough badgering by a child or a spouse, they will eventually cave in and back down from household rules, respect for authority or requirements placed upon others. Their inability to hold strong boundaries causes the spouse and children not to take them seriously. As a result, Pleasers end up losing respect in the eyes of others. If family members subsequently treat them unkindly, the Pleaser often tolerates the abuse and disrespect.

Step 4: The system breaks down:

4. System breaks down when stress or difficulties can no longer be ignored or minimized

- *One spouse may start to feel, confront or try to face reality and the other will resist trying to stay in the Pleaser role*
- *Results in crisis/conflict*

What's going on?

- When this couple hits a crisis or faces a difficulty where painful feelings or circumstances can no longer be denied, the brittle façade of their pretend world is shattered.
- The emotionally weaker spouse usually resists change by pushing to remain in status quo, while the other may start to become more honest and squarely face the difficult emotions generated by the crisis. When this happens, the couple will begin to polarize and the spouse who has chosen to face reality will be frustrated with their mate who remains entrenched in the Pleaser mode.
- As tensions further develop, a new secondary set of emotions will begin to materialize which further complicates the Core Pattern.

Step 5: Crisis**What's going on?**

- Cast into a state of disarray, this couple has just entered a new and foreign world where they are lost, disoriented and may realize they are lacking the skills to address the crisis or successfully face reality.
- Frustration and anxiety levels will markedly increase in both of the Pleasers and one or both of them may experience anxiety levels leading to panic attack. Seek professional help if this happens.
- Life is challenging. Sooner or later this couple will have to learn new skills to dive into difficult topics and process painful feelings.

Growth Steps to exit the Core Pattern:

Now that you understand the pattern, how do you get out of it? In this section we will give the Pleasers and ideas and actions steps for exiting the Core Pattern. In addition we will include how this couple can utilize the Comfort Circle to exit the Core Pattern

Exiting the Core Pattern at Step 1: Pleaser avoids anxiety

Step 1: Pleasers: Action steps to exit the Core Pattern:

For more detail please see the HWL Workbook chapter on growth goals for the Pleaser.

- Become more aware of your anxiety. Track this for one week by keeping a chart and rating anxiety levels three times a day using a one to ten scale (one low and ten high).
- Observe how frequently you take the emotional temperatures of those around you and seek to directly or indirectly fix any sign of displeasure or conflict. Use the Soul Words List to become more aware of your own feelings, rather than focusing on others.
- Notice your body, your breathing and places of tension. What happens in your body when someone is upset, angry or rejecting? Pay special attention to the feelings experienced when you refrain from fixing others.

Step 1: Couple action steps to exit the Core Pattern: (Comfort Circle)

- Download the Soul Words List and the Guide for the Listener (freebies on the website).
- Invite your spouse to go around the Comfort Circle and attempt to trace the roots of your anxiety your families of origin. Use the listener guide. Take turns listening to memories that relate to caretaking, pleasing and feeling unseen. Why did you play the role of the “good kid”?
- Use the Comfort Circle, take turns being the listener asking the following questions:
 - “How were emotions handled in your childhood home?”
 - “Did you learn to read other’s moods when you were growing up?”
 - “Did you take responsibility for another’s mood?”
 - “When you were separated from your family emotionally or physically, how well did you tolerate being alone?”
 - See HWL workbook for more questions.
- Use the Comfort Circle to listen to how each partner rated daily anxiety in the above exercise. What made them anxious?
- Use the Comfort Circle to increase awareness about how you each determine if you or your partner is stressed. Each of you has a stress response. What behaviors can you observe in yourself or spouse when anxiety rises? What might they need during stressful times? Use the format: I feel _____. I need _____.

Exiting the Core Pattern Step 2: Pleasers’ denial.**Step 2: Pleasers: Action steps to exit the Core Pattern:**

- Make a list of the important people in your life and the places where you interact with people. (Church, school, work etc.) Use the Soul Words List to expand your awareness and range of emotions by finding words that describe your feelings around different people and places. (Download the Soul Words List under *Freebies* at howwelove.com or see page 291 in *How We Love*).

- Go through the Soul Words List and circle the feelings you have most often and put an X through the feelings you rarely or never experience. Journal/contemplate your responses.
- Choose one problem you minimize or ignore. What are your fears about addressing this problem? Write in your journal something you would like to say to your spouse if you were braver.
- In order to build the practical skills needed to express your feelings or to set boundaries, practice out loud standing alone in front of a mirror.

Step 2: Couple action steps to exit the Core Pattern: (Comfort Circle)

- Discuss the level of honesty in your childhood home.
- Discuss the level of vulnerability in your childhood home.
- Discuss your fears about being honest or hurting one another.
- Make a list of problems that you may have minimized or ignored as a couple and the fears that have kept you from being honest.
- Read your journal entries aloud to each other and ask each other questions about what you each shared.

Exiting the Core Pattern Step 3: Pleaser avoids rejection

Step 3: Pleasers: Action steps to exit the Core Pattern:

With your journal in hand, write down your responses to the following questions:

- Can you relate to the idea of performance anxiety?
- How were mistakes handled in your family growing up?
- Did someone rescue you as a child or teen? In other words did a parent do for you what you should have been doing for yourself? What were the consequences for you?
- Contemplate and list the ways you rescue others. Use the Soul Words List to determine how you feel if others have to face consequences or suffer through something without your intervention or help. Write down some thoughts as to how your spouse might be able to help you deal with these feelings. Confession is a great start on the road of recovery.
- Many Pleasers are very frightened about rejection. What small step could you take that you have been resisting due to fear of rejection?
- Use the Soul Words List to determine what feelings occur when you face even the possibility of rejection.

Step 3: Couple action steps to exit the Core Pattern: (Comfort Circle)

- Use the Comfort Circle and talk about ways you can comfort, support and pray for one another when performance anxiety is an issue.
- Discuss with your spouse examples of rescuing your spouse, kids or others. Not rescuing means dealing with your own anxiety. How can you take these feelings into your

relationship with your spouse and get help to manage this anxiety? Simply sharing with one another can bring great relief.

- Share with one another ways you behave to avoid rejection. What confrontations have you avoided and/or what mistreatment have you endured to keep the peace?
- Write a short statement saying no to a request. For example: "I am sorry my calendar is full and I cannot help."
- Role play this with your spouse and have your spouse pressure you to change your mind. Stick to your "No," by repeating the line over and over WITHOUT explaining any further why you cannot help.

Exiting the Core Pattern Step 4: The system breaks down

Step 4: Individual action steps to exit the Core Pattern for the spouse who is facing reality:

- With your journal and Soul Words List in hand, write the feelings that are emerging when you can no longer avoid reality. Looking back into your childhood, ask yourself if these emotional states are *old* and *familiar*. Journal a childhood experience in which the feelings were similar to what you are feeling now.
- As you observe the resulting minimizing with your spouse, write down your fears about the marital dynamic and the catastrophic outcomes that you imagine may occur.
- Consult the Soul Words List and examine the angry emotions that you are feeling toward your spouse. Write a brief journal entry to them describing how angry you really are and what they have done to make you feel that way. Be sure to include a childhood experience that evoked similar emotions in you as well as any catastrophic worries that haunt you.
- As before, read your journal responses aloud in a mirror so you get used to verbalizing your feelings. Perhaps a safe friend would be willing to allow you to read your journal thoughts to them so you can practice face to face with someone before speaking to your spouse. (Note: Never use one of your children as a confidante as this puts them into an unhealthy role.)

Step 4: Couple action steps to exit the Core Pattern: (Comfort Circle)

- Instead of the normal pattern of avoidance, ask for a "do-over" and invite your spouse to sit down with you and share your journal entries.
- Attempt to face the immediate crisis or problem long enough to thoroughly listen to each other's strongest emotions and fears.
- Request advice from another couple or trusted leader to help you walk through the most urgent issues that need to be addressed. This will be challenging as Pleasers are the helpers, not the ones needing help. In reality, life is difficult and we should be taking turns as the giver and receiver.

Exiting the Core Pattern Step 5: Crisis with few skills to address it

Step 5: Pleasers: Action steps to exit the Core Pattern:

- Take responsibility for your anxiety and if necessary, get help from a professional physician, psychologist or therapist who can help. It's okay to need help.
- Antidepressants, sleep aids and special medications for acute panic can work wonders to help calm an overly anxious nervous system. With the hyper-arousal turned down to normal levels, a person can begin to have the emotional strength to face the stresses of the crisis.
- Commit to joining a 12 step co-dependency group to help you face your history of fear.
- Commit to joining an assertiveness training group so you can learn to develop your own opinions as well as an adult voice to share them.

Step 5: Couple action steps to exit the Core Pattern: (Comfort Circle)

A crisis can provide an opportunity for personal growth. It may require outside help. Find a pastor or couple you can confide in. Use the Comfort Circle as a way to explore feelings and give each other holding times when one of you is struggling.

- Inquire about your spouse's emotional state and ask them how you can support them in their individual action steps. Use the Listener Guide for the Comfort Circle and Soul Words List. (freebies on howwelove.com)
- When you recognize the pattern of denial, both of you can vocalize this and ask for a "do-over," seeking to listen to honest feelings and fears.

Milan & Kay Yerkovich

A note from Milan & Kay:

Due to our Christian beliefs, we often speak in churches and our faith is deeply intertwined with our work. We believe one of the most important interventions to bring healing to relationships is prayer. The Christian gospel is the story of rupture, repair and restoration. God sent his Son, Jesus, to provide payment for our sin so we can enter into a relationship with a holy God, clean, forgiven and restored. The offering of this gift involved *initiation*. Jesus entered our messy, broken world with a willingness to experience our sorrow and pain. The gift of His loving presence involved *sacrifice and pain*. Jesus's death on the cross expresses the magnitude of His sacrificial love. As we accept this gift of love, we enter into a secure connection with God, becoming a member of his family, with a promise we will never be abandoned.

This serves as a model for healing our relationships. Overcoming these Core Patterns means we must *initiate* and move towards pain, not away from it, with a focus on restoration and redemption. We must be willing to *sacrifice* and embrace the *pain* of taking on our own wounds as well as the injuries of our mate learning to repair ruptures. This kind of love and commitment builds a deep trust and bond. Over time, our marriage can become our most secure connection and provide a charted path to lead others into healing, freedom and joy.

Praying as an individual and as a couple is a powerful intervention at any point around the Core Pattern as we seek to escape the pull of the destructive dance and find the freedom of secure connection. Our prayers are with you and for you on this journey.

Blessings, Milan and Kay