



## **Blog**

### **Transforming Relationships with "Getting the Love You Want"**

In "Getting the Love You Want," authors Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt offer a transformative look at relationships, providing a roadmap for couples seeking to strengthen their bond and deepen their connection. This influential book serves as a guide for couples to not only discover the hidden dynamics of their relationship but also to develop a more loving and supportive partnership. In this blog post, we'll dive into the core concepts of the book and explore how its insights can be applied to everyday relationships.

#### **Understanding the Imago Relationship Theory**

At the heart of Hendrix and Hunt's approach is the Imago Relationship Theory, which suggests that the frustrations we experience in our romantic relationships stem from unresolved conflicts from our past, particularly from our childhood. According to the theory, we subconsciously choose partners who reflect the characteristics of our primary caregivers, including their negative traits. This unconscious image—our "Imago"—guides us in our partner selection in an attempt to resolve these past conflicts.

#### **The Power of the Imago Dialogue**

One of the book's most powerful tools is the Imago Dialogue, a structured way of communicating that shifts couples from blame and reactivity to understanding and empathy. The dialogue involves three steps: mirroring, validation, and empathy. By practicing this form of communication, partners learn to truly listen to each other's needs and emotions without judgment, fostering a deeper emotional connection and understanding.

#### **Exercise: Practicing the Imago Dialogue**

- **Mirroring:** When your partner shares something, repeat back what you heard without adding your interpretation. This shows you are listening and absorbing their perspective.
- **Validation:** Acknowledge that your partner's feelings make sense from their viewpoint. This does not mean you agree, but that you see their logic.
- **Empathy:** Try to understand and reflect back the emotions your partner is feeling about the situation.

#### **Healing Childhood Wounds**

"Getting the Love You Want" emphasizes the importance of addressing childhood wounds within the safety of a committed relationship. The authors argue that romantic partnerships have



the potential to be healing relationships where old emotional injuries are healed. By understanding how these past wounds play out in your current relationship, you can begin to heal them together, leading to a healthier and more satisfying partnership.

### **Creating a Conscious Relationship**

Moving from an unconscious to a conscious relationship is another key theme of the book. This means recognizing the automatic behaviors and patterns that dominate your relationship and actively working to change them. A conscious relationship is characterized by intentionality, where both partners commit to nurturing their connection and growing together.

### **Implementing Change**

The final part of the journey that Hendrix and Hunt lay out involves turning insights into action. They provide exercises and activities that help couples apply the principles of the book in their daily lives. These exercises not only reinforce the theoretical learning but also strengthen the couple's ability to work as a team.

### **Conclusion**

"Getting the Love You Want" is more than just a book; it's a manual for transforming your relationship through deliberate intention and emotional healing. Whether you're struggling with communication issues, feeling stuck in a cycle of conflict, or simply want to deepen your connection with your partner, Hendrix and Hunt provide both the insights and the tools necessary for making lasting changes. By applying these principles, couples can achieve a more fulfilling, loving, and resilient relationship.

For any couple looking to understand the deeper workings of their relationship and how to cultivate a more harmonious bond, "Getting the Love You Want" is an indispensable resource. At CoupleStrong, we encourage couples to explore these principles together, fostering growth, healing, and, ultimately, getting the love they truly want.



## **Overview**

"Getting the Love You Want" by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., is a transformative book that has revolutionized the way couples understand and improve their relationships. First published in 1988 and continuously updated to reflect contemporary insights and advancements, the book draws from the rich fields of psychology and relationship counseling. Hendrix's work provides a structured guide for couples wishing to deepen their relationships through improved communication, emotional healing, and personal growth.

## **Introduction: The Foundations of "Getting the Love You Want"**

Harville Hendrix introduces his core thesis by explaining how our early childhood experiences shape our expectations of love and relationships. He elaborates on the concept of the "Imago," a composite image of people who influenced us most strongly in early life, usually our caregivers. According to Hendrix, we subconsciously seek partners who reflect this Imago, because our psyche is trying to recreate the conditions of our upbringing in order to heal unresolved issues.

This premise lays the groundwork for understanding why so many relationship issues seem intractable. Hendrix argues that these conflicts are not just interpersonal but are deeply rooted in unresolved childhood wounds. The central promise of the book is that through understanding the nature of these conflicts and employing specific communication techniques, couples can transform their relationships into a source of healing and personal growth.

## **Part One: The Unconscious Marriage**

The book begins by distinguishing between what Hendrix calls the "Conscious Marriage" and the "Unconscious Marriage." Most couples start in an unconscious marriage, driven by an unspoken agreement to fulfill each other's unmet childhood needs. In this stage, love is romanticized and idealized, but without awareness, it sets the stage for disappointment and conflict as these subconscious expectations are not met.

Hendrix explains how romantic attraction is rooted in an unconscious desire to fix our childhood wounds, making our partner choice predictable once we understand our Imago. The initial phase of intense attraction and seeming compatibility inevitably gives way to frustration as partners trigger each other's deepest vulnerabilities.

## **Part Two: The Imago Dialogue**



A significant portion of the book is dedicated to teaching couples the Imago Dialogue, a structured way of communicating that enables each partner to express their feelings and needs without criticism or blame. This method consists of three main components:

- **Mirroring:** Listening to your partner and repeating back what they said to ensure you have understood them correctly.
  - **Validation:** Acknowledging that your partner's feelings make sense from their perspective.
  - **Empathy:** Attempting to feel what your partner is feeling and reflecting back those feelings.
- Hendrix provides detailed instructions and practical exercises to help couples learn and practice this dialogue. The aim is to move from a state of conflict to a state of connection and understanding, using communication as a tool for healing.

### **Part Three: ReRomanticizing the Relationship**

After couples have begun to understand and implement the Imago Dialogue, Hendrix guides them on how to re-infuse their relationship with romance and caring behaviors. He introduces exercises designed to help couples reaffirm their commitment to nurturing each other's happiness. These include caring behaviors, affirmations, gifts, and gestures that are specifically tailored to meet each other's love needs, as informed by their understanding of each other's Imago.

### **Part Four: Becoming Passionate Friends**

Here, Hendrix discusses how couples can evolve their relationship into one of "passionate friendship." This stage is marked by mutual respect, joy, and emotional connection. Couples are encouraged to support each other in achieving personal growth and fulfilling their individual potentials, thereby enhancing their shared life.

### **Part Five: Achieving a Conscious Marriage**

In the final section, Hendrix elaborates on the concept of the Conscious Marriage, where both partners are fully aware of their childhood wounds and actively work towards helping each other heal. This involves a deep commitment to creating a relationship that serves as a source of support, healing, and growth. The Conscious Marriage is presented as an ongoing journey, not a destination, requiring continual effort and recommitment.

### **Conclusion: A Roadmap for Relationship Transformation**

"Getting the Love You Want" is more than just a book about relationships. It is a roadmap for personal transformation through the context of intimate relationships. Hendrix not only illuminates the path to understanding one's partner and oneself but also provides the tools and techniques necessary to travel this path. Readers are left with a profound understanding of how relationships work, how they can falter, and most importantly, how they can be made to thrive.

Throughout the book, Hendrix's compelling blend of professional insights and accessible, practical exercises offers couples a powerful framework to transform their relationship into a lasting source of love and mutual growth.





## Couples Handout: Enhancing Your Relationship with "Getting the Love You Want"

**Introduction:** Welcome to your journey towards a deeper and more fulfilling relationship! This handout is inspired by Harville Hendrix's groundbreaking work in "Getting the Love You Want." Here, you'll find key insights and practical exercises to improve communication, resolve conflicts, and reconnect in meaningful ways.

### Key Concepts:

- **The Imago Relationship Theory:** Understand that your partner is often unconsciously chosen based on how they reflect aspects of your caretakers. This reflection is called the "Imago."
- **Conscious vs. Unconscious Relationships:** Transition from an unconscious state, where old wounds dominate, to a conscious relationship, focused on healing and growth.
- **The Imago Dialogue:** Learn a communication technique that fosters understanding and connection, rather than conflict.

### Exercises and Discussions:

#### 1 Exploring Your Imago

- **Purpose:** Identify traits of your parents or caretakers that may influence your current relationship.
- **Activity:** Each partner writes down positive and negative characteristics of their early caretakers. Discuss how these traits might mirror what you are drawn to or challenged by in each other.
- **Reflection Questions:**
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  - How do these characteristics affect our relationship?
  - Are there conflicts in our relationship that can be traced back to these traits?

#### 2 Practicing the Imago Dialogue

- **Purpose:** Enhance communication to ensure both partners feel heard and understood.
- **Activity:** Choose a topic or issue. One partner shares while the other listens, mirrors back what was said, validates the perspective, and empathizes.



- **Reflection Questions:**

- How did it feel to be heard and understood?
- How did it feel to fully listen to your partner?

### 3 Re-Romanticizing Your Relationship

- **Purpose:** Strengthen your emotional and physical connection by re-introducing romantic gestures.
- **Activity:** Each partner lists specific actions, words, or gestures that make them feel loved and appreciated. Swap lists and commit to performing at least one action daily.

- **Reflection Questions:**

- How did these actions change the mood of our relationship?
- What new discoveries did I make about what makes my partner feel loved?

### 4 Developing New Relationship Visions

- **Purpose:** Create a shared vision of your ideal relationship.
- **Activity:** Independently write down your vision for the relationship, including aspects like communication, intimacy, personal space, and shared activities. Share and discuss how to merge these visions into a cooperative plan.
- **Reflection Questions:**
- What are the common goals we both believe are important?
- Where do we need to make compromises to support each other's needs?

**Conclusion:** This handout is a starting point for you and your partner to explore deeper relational dynamics based on "Getting the Love You Want." Regular discussions and revisiting these exercises can help maintain and grow a loving, supportive, and conscious relationship. Remember, the goal is not to change each other but to understand and grow together, creating a partnership that is mutually satisfying and healing.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- Suggest scheduling regular check-ins using the Imago Dialogue.
- Recommend further reading or workshops on Imago Relationship Therapy.

By actively engaging with these concepts and exercises, couples can not only navigate their relationship more effectively but also transform it into a source of profound personal and mutual growth.







## **Couples Assessment: Understanding and Growing Together with "Getting the Love You Want"**

**Instructions for Participants:** Each partner should individually complete the following questions, using the rating scale provided. After completing the assessment, discuss your responses together to better understand each other's perspectives and identify areas for growth.

- **Rating Scale:**

- 1 (Strongly Disagree)
- 2 (Disagree)
- 3 (Neutral)
- 4 (Agree)
- 5 (Strongly Agree)

### **Assessment Questions**

#### **Section 1: Awareness of Imago**

I understand the concept of "Imago" and can identify traits in my partner that reflect this.  
I recognize behaviors in our relationship that stem from my childhood experiences.  
I am aware of how my childhood affects my current relationship needs and reactions.

#### **Section 2: Communication**

I feel comfortable and safe expressing my deepest fears and desires to my partner.

My partner and I successfully use techniques like the Imago Dialogue to resolve misunderstandings.

We regularly dedicate time to discuss our relationship and personal feelings without distractions.

#### **Section 3: Conflict Resolution**

In conflicts, we focus on resolving the issue rather than winning the argument.

We can discuss past hurts or conflicts without escalating into new conflicts.

After a disagreement, we take steps to understand each other's perspective and work towards reconciliation.

#### **Section 4: Emotional Connection**

I feel emotionally connected and supported by my partner.



We both make efforts to maintain and enhance our physical and emotional intimacy.

I feel appreciated and valued by my partner in daily life.

## **Section 5: Growth and Healing**

We actively work on healing each other's childhood wounds through our relationship.

Both of us are committed to personal growth and supporting each other's growth.

We have shared goals and dreams for our future together and actively discuss how to achieve them.

## **Scoring Key and Interpretation**

- **15-45: Emerging Awareness** - Indicates a need for deeper exploration and understanding of relationship dynamics, especially related to Imago and communication skills. Consider workshops or counseling focused on these areas.
- **46-75: Growing Connection** - Shows a developing strength in communication and emotional connection but highlights areas where conflict resolution and mutual healing could be improved.
- **76-105: Deep Understanding and Commitment** - Reflects a strong, healthy relationship dynamic with active and effective communication, deep emotional connection, and mutual support for personal and relational growth.

## **Recommendations for Improvement**

- **Low Scores in Awareness of Imago:** Engage in activities or therapy that help reveal how past experiences influence your relationship. Reading materials or exercises designed to uncover deeper childhood influences can be beneficial.
- **Low Scores in Communication:** Practice structured communication techniques like the Imago Dialogue. Regularly schedule times to discuss relationship dynamics without external interruptions.
- **Low Scores in Conflict Resolution:** Focus on developing fair fighting rules and conflict resolution skills. Workshops in conflict management can provide practical tools and strategies.



- **Low Scores in Emotional Connection:** Plan regular date nights or activities that both partners enjoy. Small daily gestures of appreciation can strengthen the bond.
- **Low Scores in Growth and Healing:** Set mutual goals for personal and relationship growth. Support each other's interests and passions as part of your relationship's journey.

This assessment can help couples identify key areas of strength and areas that need attention, fostering a deeper understanding and healthier interactions based on the principles outlined in "Getting the Love You Want." Regular revisiting of these issues will help maintain and enhance the relationship's growth and satisfaction.



## **7-Day Couples Challenge: Deepening Connection Using "Getting the Love You Want"**

### **Day 1: Discovering Your Imago**

- **Activity:** Each partner writes a list of traits from their parents or early caregivers that might unconsciously influence their expectations in the relationship.
- **Purpose:** Helps both partners understand the origins of their attractions and reactions within the relationship.
- **Discussion:** Share your findings with each other and discuss how these traits appear in your current interactions.

### **Day 2: Practicing the Imago Dialogue**

- 5 **Activity:** Choose a topic about which one partner has some concerns or feelings to share. Practice the Imago Dialogue, focusing on mirroring, validation, and empathy.
- 6 **Purpose:** Enhances communication and ensures both partners feel heard and understood.
- 7 **Discussion:** Reflect on the experience and discuss how this method can be used in future conversations.

### **Day 3: Re-Romanticizing the Relationship**

- **Activity:** Each partner thinks of and executes a small surprise or gesture that the other would find meaningful and loving.
- **Purpose:** To reintroduce acts of love and appreciation into the daily routine.
- **Discussion:** At the end of the day, share how these gestures made you feel and why they were meaningful.

### **Day 4: Addressing Power Struggles**

- **Activity:** Identify a recurring conflict or power struggle. Discuss this issue using the Imago Dialogue, focusing on understanding each other's deeper vulnerabilities and needs.
- **Purpose:** Moves the relationship from conflict to compassion and understanding.
- **Discussion:** How can you support each other in areas where you feel vulnerable or misunderstood?



### **Day 5: Creating Shared Visions**

- **Activity:** Independently write down your vision for the future of your relationship. Include aspects such as family life, career goals, personal development, and adventures you hope to share.
- **Purpose:** To align on shared goals and dreams.
- **Discussion:** Share your visions and find common themes to create a unified vision for your future together.

### **Day 6: Daily Gratitude**

- **Activity:** Each partner keeps a note of things they appreciate about the other throughout the day. At the end of the day, exchange these notes.
- **Purpose:** To foster positivity and appreciation in the relationship.
- **Discussion:** Discuss how focusing on positive aspects affected your view of each other and the relationship.

### **Day 7: Commitment to Continuous Growth**

- **Activity:** Discuss and commit to an ongoing weekly or monthly ritual that incorporates elements of this challenge, such as regular Imago Dialogues or gratitude exchanges.
- **Purpose:** To maintain and build on the growth achieved during this challenge.
- **Discussion:** Set specific goals for your relationship's growth and discuss how you plan to achieve them.

**Closing Reflection:** At the end of the week, reflect together on what you've learned about each other and how the relationship has grown. Discuss any changes you've noticed in how you communicate and connect. Commit to integrating these tools into your daily life to continue nurturing your relationship.

This 7-day challenge is designed to help couples actively engage in improving their relationship by applying the practical and insightful methods from "Getting the Love You Want." Through daily activities and discussions, couples can develop deeper understanding, enhance communication, and strengthen their emotional connection.