



DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR
COUPLES

PREPARE  ENRICH.

The Discussion Guide is a complement to your Couple Checkup results and it provides additional insights and discussion prompts about various relationship topics.

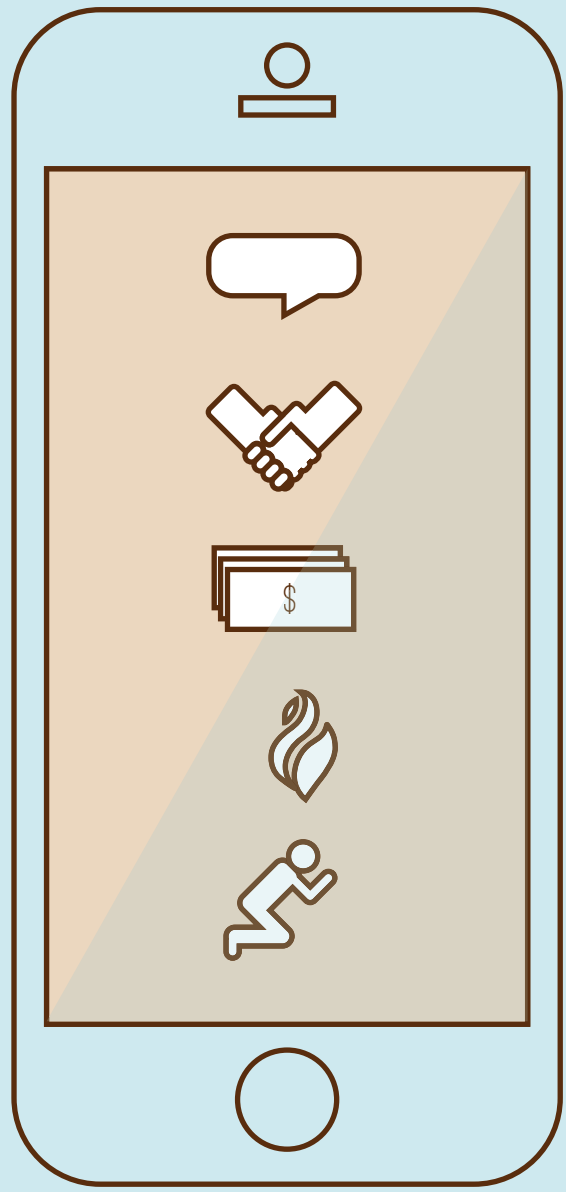
To get the most out of Couple Checkup, we recommend first reading through the following sections: Preparing for Discussion, Checking Out Your Results, and Defining the Journey. We suggest you then make your way through the three central relationship topics: Communication, Dealing with Conflict and Personality (noted in green). You can choose which of the remaining topics (noted in orange) you work through and in which order. If you and your partner disagree whether or not to discuss a topic, we suggest discussing it.

Since this is not a workbook, there is no need to print it out or write out your answers to questions. Though, if you prefer to journal or keep notes on your discussions, grab a notebook!

Each topic area has a discussion section where you'll find questions or prompts to encourage conversation. Remember, you and your partner are controlling the discussion, so whether you want to answer one question or all the questions, it's up to you and your partner to decide what feels right. For the questions you decide to discuss, it doesn't always explicitly instruct both partners to answer, but we would encourage you to reciprocate if your partner answers. If you don't have an answer, talk about the fact that you don't have an answer.

To avoid one partner dominating the conversation, take turns reading the questions, or at least take turns answering first. You don't have to be technical and tally your responses, but just keep in mind these little things that help set the tone for fairness.

The final and most important thing to consider when embarking on this journey with your partner is application into your actual life with one another. We want to make sure you are equipped to apply new insights and learnings to your life in a responsible way. Try making small changes to better connect with your partner instead of changing everything at once. And of course seeking help from a professional is a great option.



checklist



Communication



Dealing with Conflict



Personality



Balancing I and We



Commitment



Expectations



Family & Friends



Forgiveness



Free Time



Intimacy



Money



Parenting



Roles



Spirituality

PREPARING

FOR DISCUSSION

PREPARATION
REQUIRES EFFORT
AND THINKING
AHEAD, BUT IT
INCREASES YOUR
ACHIEVEMENT IN
THE LONG RUN.



By preparing to discuss with your partner, you are setting your journey up for success. We want you to make sure you and your partner are both ready to discuss your Couple Checkup results and to work through the discussion questions for each topic.

Before you sit down to look at your Couple Checkup report and this Discussion Guide, check if you are ready.

check yourself

EMOTIONALLY

What kind of day have you had? Have your emotions been fairly neutral? Or have you experienced any high levels of sadness, anger, or joy? We recommend having discussions about your relationship on days where your emotions have been calm.

MENTALLY

Are you open to change? Are you comfortable practicing communication skills such as active listening and assertiveness? Is your mindset welcoming to honest discussion? There is no sense in trying to have a discussion if you've already made up your mind about everything related to your relationship.

check your space

ENVIRONMENTALLY

Do your kids require your attention? Is the TV on? Is your phone on the highest volume? Is your computer/tablet within reach? Is the oven timer about to beep, signaling dinner is ready? Neutralize as many distractions as you can. Try to occupy your kids with other activities, turn off the TV, put your phone on silent and flip it over so you can't see notifications, put away your computer/tablet, and maybe try discussing after dinner. Of course, it's okay to keep a device at hand if you're using it to read through this Discussion Guide. 😊

PHYSICALLY

Where are you going to discuss? Sitting at the kitchen table or on the couch? While on a walk through your neighborhood? Find a location that is comfortable and somewhat private so you can have those honest discussions. We suggest placing yourselves shoulder to shoulder instead of knee to knee, as it promotes the idea that you are on the same team. It will feel less confrontational than being across from each other.



am I ready?



Move forward when both you and your partner can confidently answer: Yes. Only you can decide if you are ready or not, but we have provided some thoughts to consider.

**If you decide
you are ready to
move forward
with reviewing
your Couple
Checkup report
and working
through the
Discussion Guide
—that’s
awesome.**

If you decide you need to make some adjustments before discussing – that’s awesome too! The goal of this Discussion Guide is to get you talking to your partner, even if that conversation doesn’t happen right away.

CHECKING OUT

YOUR RESULTS

Congratulations! By taking Couple Checkup, you have taken steps toward building a stronger and healthier relationship. The act of completing an assessment primes you to be more open and motivated to discuss relationship topics with your partner. Make sure you and your partner celebrate this effort!

First things first, let's talk about how it felt to take the Couple Checkup. Reflect on your experience and then share with your partner. Here are **some feelings you might have experienced:**

- * Nervousness
- * Joy
- * Support
- * Judgement
- * Motivation
- * Pride
- * Embarrassment
- * Relief
- * Excitement
- * Anxiousness
- * Anticipation
- * Curiosity

Couple Checkup might have even felt like a test, but we promise it isn't. It's an assessment of your relationship across several categories. To give you a deeper understanding of what that means, let's talk about **what Couple Checkup IS and ISN'T.**

Couple Checkup **IS**

- ✓ A momentary snapshot of your relationship
- ✓ A catalyst for discussion between you and your partner
- ✓ Proven to lower your risk of divorce
- ✓ An accurate, research-based report of your relationship strength and growth areas
- ✓ A valid and reliable source of relationship enrichment

Couple Checkup **ISN'T**

- ✓ A reflection of what your relationship historically has been or will be in the future
- ✓ A compatibility report or a test you can pass or fail
- ✓ A guarantee for a successful relationship
- ✓ A measure that indicates you should break up or get married
- ✓ A replacement for professional relationship counseling

You know you can't pass or fail Couple Checkup and yet you probably noticed categories labeled as strength and growth areas. Let's define those terms, along with others, so you can unpack your **results**.

Throughout the Discussion Guide, you'll see terms defined in the sidebar just like this.

A **strength area** has high couple agreement whereas a **growth area** has low couple agreement. **Positive couple agreement** happens when both you and your partner answer in a healthy direction.

Near the end of your results, you'll find a map. The map represents the closeness and flexibility in your family or couple relationship. **Closeness** balances separateness and togetherness while **flexibility** balances stability and change. The healthiest positioning on the map, for each individual, is in the center indicating a balanced relationship between closeness and flexibility.

Your results conclude with the **personality SCOPE**. Each personality dimension is defined alongside your results. It's important here to focus on all 5 dimensions together instead of only focusing on dimensions that are high or low. For SCOPE, a high level does not indicate a strength just as a low level does not indicate needing growth.

If you and your partner ever feel overwhelmed by your results, we encourage you to seek out professional support.

◆ DEFINING ◆

THE JOURNEY

When you put effort towards something, it can be helpful to foresee outcomes. Whether you work through your Couple Checkup results and this Discussion Guide in its entirety or section by section, articulating outcomes now and being mindful of them along the way will help guide you and your partner to find success through this journey.

Accountability (or lack of it) can be the reason you reach (or fail to reach) a particular outcome. Write down a few outcomes and put them where you and your partner can see them. Maybe it's a shared calendar or on a note taped to the bathroom mirror. Keeping these visual reminders present during the time you are working through the Couple Checkup Discussion Guide will help remind you of the energy you are putting into your relationship.

Use the example outcomes as inspiration. When you create your own, make sure they are realistic and clearly stated.

OUR GOALS

- ✓ Gain awareness of our relationship's strength and growth areas
- ✓ Be more realistic about areas we need to work on in our relationship
- ✓ Celebrate our strengths
- ✓ Communicate more!

If you are unsure of what outcomes to commit to, take some time with your partner and talk through what you want to get out of this experience. Increased satisfaction? Greater understanding? More support? Enrichment?

Reflect on the outcomes you've set for your relationship and consider how you each will contribute.

Revisit your list desired outcomes when you are done working through the Couple Checkup Discussion Guide. Assess where progress was made and consider articulating relationship (and family) outcomes to continue the momentum.

COMMUNICATION

If you read *Preparing to Discuss*, then you're already aware of some tips on how to have great communication in discussions with your partner. Sure, we communicate with our partners, but the quality (which really matters) is not always a concern. Productive, supportive, positive communication is vital to relationship health.

FOCUS ON THE GOOD

When communicating with your partner, try to avoid blame, criticism, and judgement. Instead, focus on the good!



Give praise to your partner and share affirmations which help increase the overall quality of communication.

There are two skills that will help shape a positive environment for communication in your relationship: **assertiveness** and **active listening**. To be assertive, it's important to take responsibility for your thoughts and feelings by using

Assertiveness is expressing your feelings and asking for what you want in the relationship.

“I” statements instead of starting with “you.” The process of active listening lets the speaker know if their message was accurately received. It's imperative for the listener to acknowledge the content and the feelings of the speaker.

Active listening is listening attentively without interrupting and restating what was heard.

DISCUSSION

// Consider attention—How do you give your full attention when your partner is speaking? What distractions make it difficult to concentrate on your partner? How do you know you have your partner's full attention when you are speaking?

// Think about what is going on in your mind when your partner is speaking. How do you show you are truly processing the message they are sending versus already formulating a response?

// When is it difficult to communicate with your partner? What makes it easy to communicate with your partner? How is the subject matter an indicator of difficulty or ease? How do other environmental factors (time of day, etc.) play a role?

// What are other ways you communicate with your partner outside of verbal interactions? What non-verbal ways do you and your partner communicate? Brainstorm new ways to communicate with one another (a note left by their keys, a wink across the room, a kind text message, etc.).

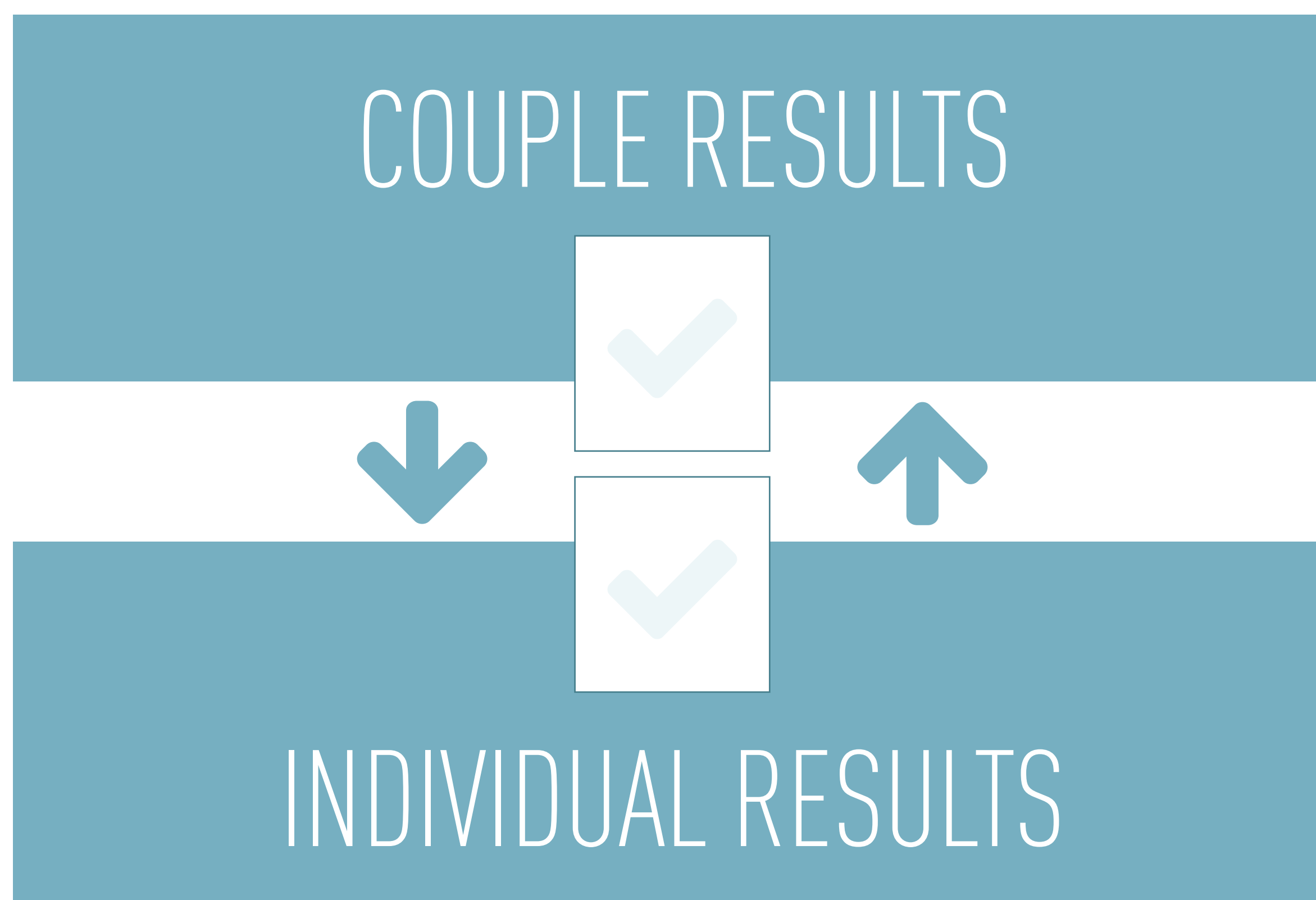
// What are your partner's needs? What are your needs? How do you advocate for your needs? How can asking about their needs and advocating for your own help your relationship?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the Communication section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about communication in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Communication is the foundation of your relationship; you and your partner rely on healthy communication skills to productively work through both celebrations and struggles in your relationship.

APPLICATION

Focus on the good in your relationship every day by giving your partner a compliment or sharing an appreciation. Have some fun with this and get creative, but make sure to always be genuine.

NEXT STEPS

Plan a specific time to check in with your partner about your relationship and life together.

Don't use this time to decide who is going to pick up your daughter from soccer practice or whose turn it is to go to the grocery store.



Use this time to communicate about aspects of your relationship you overlook or take for granted.

Try to check in daily for a period of time and see the impact it has on your overall communication.

Let's be honest—you and your partner are going to have disagreements. Sometimes they'll be small (What movie should we watch?), but sometimes they'll be more serious (When are we going to have children?).

“Pick your battles”

is often given as advice for avoiding unnecessary conflict, but if you apply this advice to serious issues, it can be detrimental to your relationship. Pride, bias, and defense mechanisms prevent us from dealing with conflict in a healthy, productive manner. But it doesn't have to be that way. There are strategies you and your partner can use to effectively deal with conflict in your relationship.

When conflict arises, **avoid using blameful language** towards your partner as that invites negativity into the situation.

Communicate assertively, take responsibility for your own feelings and actions, and focus solely on the issue at hand.



It's important to resist the urge to bring up past experiences that have already been resolved and reopen them for discussion. Acknowledge the current disagreement and work through the conflict by actively listening to your partner. Respect your partner, remember you are on the same team, and know it's okay to take a time out if you need to. While embracing the conflict and dealing with it can be uncomfortable, it can ultimately bring you closer as a couple.

DISCUSSION

// What are your automatic negative responses when conflict arises? Anger? Withdrawal? Defensiveness? How do these reactions affect your ability to resolve issues respectfully? What can you do to counteract these reactions?

// How can you show your partner respect in the midst of conflict? What do you need to feel respected? Why is it important to be conscious of respect?

// What does “take responsibility for your own feelings” mean to you? What does it feel like to recognize your feelings in the situation? Are you relieved? Do you feel more vulnerable? Do you feel proud? How does this help emotionally charged situations?

// Consider conflict resolution vs. conflict management – What is the difference between resolving an issue and managing an issue? Is it a failure if you and your partner can't resolve a conflict? Are there some conflicts that need to be managed because they can never be completely resolved?

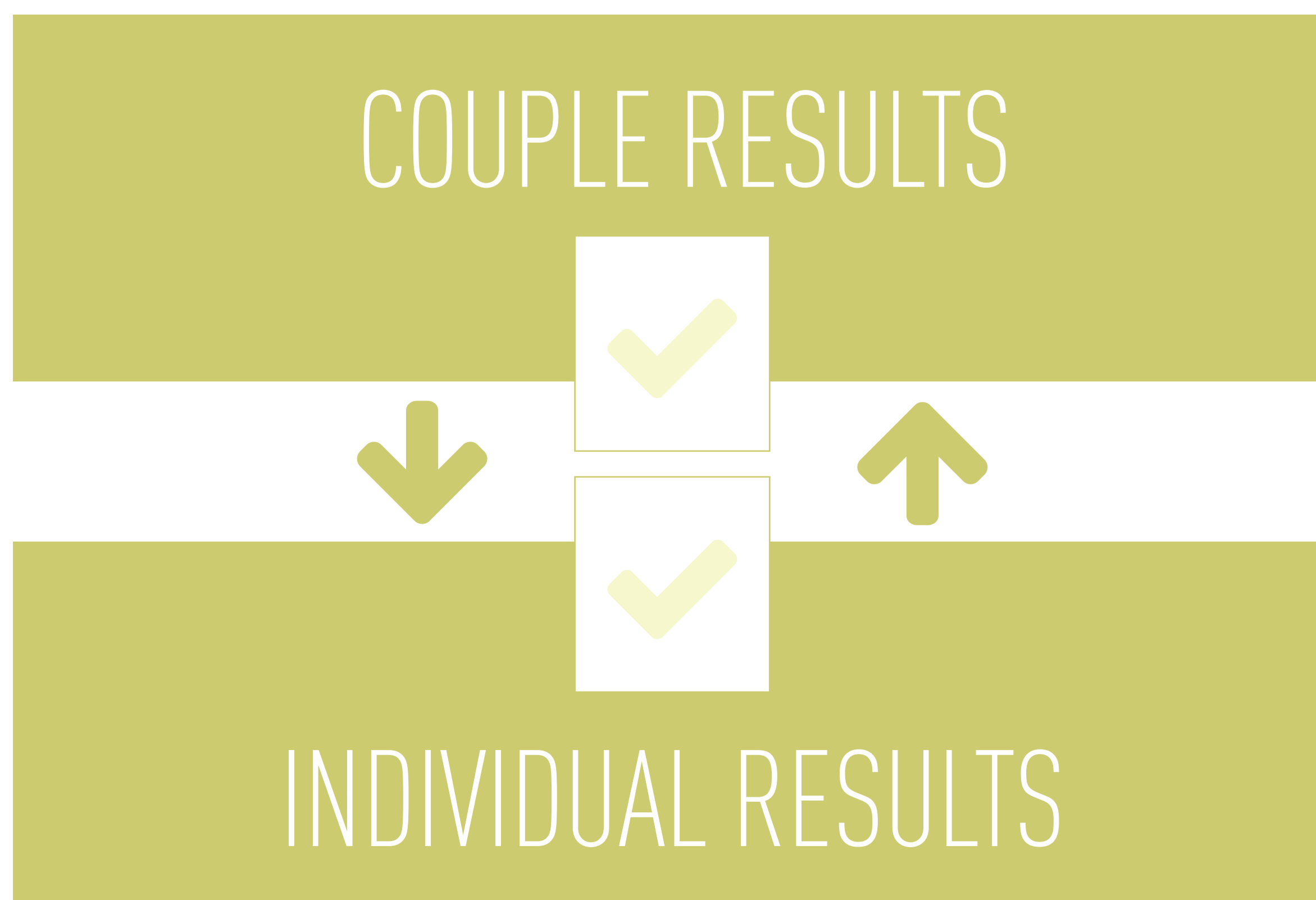
// How does non-verbal communication contribute to dealing with conflict? What are non-verbal cues that you give your partner or that your partner gives you that influence the direction of the discussion? Ask your partner what they often observe as you might not notice your own non-verbal cues, but remember to be respectful.

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the Conflict Resolution section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about dealing with conflict in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Conflict is inevitable in relationships, but if dealt with in a healthy, productive, and respectful way, it can bring you closer as a couple and make your relationship stronger.

APPLICATION

The next time you find yourself on the verge of an argument, focus on using “**I statements**” to take responsibility for your own feelings—“I felt _____ when _____”.

NEXT STEPS

Since it often takes time to learn new strategies and because conflicts organically develop, make a commitment to evaluate your next conflict.

Agree that the next time a conflict comes up, you'll take time to discuss how you dealt with the disagreement. Think of it as reviewing your performance.

Take note of what new strategies helped and where you each need to be more mindful. By doing this, you and your partner are being accountable for the application of these skills into your life and thus strengthening your relationship.

PERSONALITY IS
SIMPLY UNDERSTOOD
AS THE **SET OF**
CHARACTERISTICS
THAT LEAD TO
CONSISTENT
PATTERNS OF
FEELING, THINKING,
AND BEHAVING. IT
IS ONE OF THOSE
THINGS IN LIFE THAT
YOU CAN'T CHANGE
AND IT TENDS TO STAY
STABLE OVER TIME.

Some might argue you can change aspects of your personality, or your partner's, if you try hard enough. However, this is largely a misconception. What you can do is begin to understand your own personality as well as your partner's. **Insight into personality can help when you and your partner work on strengthening relationship skills.**

Your personality frames how you approach life. For some couples, having very different personalities can bring challenges.



There are many personality theories and concepts that can help you understand your own personality and your partner's.

Couple Checkup uses

SCOPE to help individuals see how high or low they score on each of the five factors of personality (Social, Change, Organized, Pleasing, Emotionally calm).

With SCOPE, it is possible to score high on all five factors (or low), and it isn't negative to be high or low on a particular factor.

You might want to consider seeking professional help if a particular factor is so extreme it is interfering with daily life.

We encourage you to embrace each other's personalities and continue to build relationship skills.

DISCUSSION

// How have you or your partner tried to change aspects of each other's (or your own) personality in the past? What was the motivation behind trying to encourage change?

// How do you and your partner's personalities complement each other? How do you and your partner's personalities challenge each other?

// Which of your partner's personality traits first attracted you? Were you attracted to the same trait or a different one?

// For each of you, which behaviors positively contribute to your relationship? What personality differences can you use to strengthen your relationship?

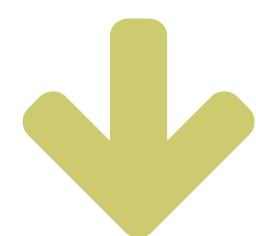
// While both "opposites attract" and "birds of a feather flock together" are true, which is the case for your relationship?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *SCOPE Personality* section of your report.

Do the roles you and your partner fulfill in your relationship match your personality strengths? (e.g. Does the person who scored high on organization manage the bills?)



Are you surprised by how you scored on a particular dimension or do the results accurately reflect how you perceive your personality?

TAKEAWAY

Personality is stable throughout life; don't expend energy in your relationship trying to change your partner's personality, instead put in effort to understand each other's personality factors as well as your own.

APPLICATION

Begin acknowledging aspects of your personality, as well as your partner's, in everyday life. For example, if one of you scored high on Social (extrovert) and the other scored low (introvert), consider this when planning weekend activities. Maybe this means you go to a friend's dinner party on Saturday and spend Sunday at home doing house projects.

NEXT STEPS

If personality is an area of your relationship you want to continue to explore, there are a variety of other assessments and theories that will give additional insight into each individual's personality.

Maybe spend an upcoming date night taking another personality assessment to continue learning even more about each other.

BALANCING
I AND WE

We all know *that one couple* who **does everything together** – he tags along to book club, she comes with to watch the game. They share every leisure activity and rarely attend activities independently. Conversely, you know *that other couple* that seems to **live completely separate lives**—different friends, hobbies, and ways of spending their free time. We can recognize this variety and acknowledge there is no perfect way to balance being together and apart from your partner.

COUPLES EXIST ON A
SPECTRUM BETWEEN
"I" AND "WE"; THE KEY
IS TO STRIVE FOR A
HEALTHY BALANCE
THAT STRENGTHENS
YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

Working toward or maintaining balance between togetherness and separateness requires healthy communication.

Talk to each other about what balance feels like for each of you. **It won't always be equal** and it will change throughout your life together.

Maybe you and your partner are engaged or newly married and you are happy, in love, and feel more connected than ever

– you're more on the “we” end of the spectrum. Perhaps you recently welcomed your third child to the family and you have gone back to work full-time. Your household is hectic and you and your partner rarely get to enjoy quality time – you're more on the “I” end of the spectrum.

Regardless of where you are, address your current balance and take initiative in the direction you and your partner would like to move.

DISCUSSION

// How much time, on average, do you spend with your partner during the week? Does this feel like too much, not enough, or just right? How does the quality of your time together impact the good it brings to your relationship?

// What does it feel like when you have a stretch of time when you barely see your partner? In what ways do you stay connected if you can't spend time with your partner? Do you ever look forward to time apart from your partner?

// What are the benefits to having interests and commitments independent of your partner? Does it help bring you closer to your partner?

// How can the balance of togetherness and separateness improve in your relationship? What do you need to feel close to your partner and still feel independent at the same time?

// Consider judgement – Do you ever feel that your family or friends judge you and your partner for spending too much time together or apart? What does it feel like when you recognize this judgement? Does this impact your decision to spend more or less time with your partner?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Map of Couple Relationship* section of your report.

Take a look at the map; keeping in mind the center square indicates ideal balance. **Where are you plotted with regard to closeness?**



Read through the descriptions of how you each perceive the level of closeness in your relationship. Do you feel the descriptions accurately reflect how you experience closeness in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

It's critical to nurture closeness and intimacy in your relationship, but don't forget to maintain your own sense of independence and identity; communicate with your partner to find an appropriate balance for your relationship.

APPLICATION

Start small. If you and your partner decide you are too connected – schedule time to do activities independently, even if just for an hour. If you and your partner decide you are apart too much – make quality time a priority by putting a weekly date night on the calendar or scheduling Saturday morning as time spent exclusively with each other. If you and your partner want something different, try adding scheduled time together and apart.

NEXT STEPS

When your partner brings up an event they want to attend, instead of assuming you should or shouldn't go, have a conversation with your partner about each other's preferences. Decide based on the situation and what is best for a healthy balance of being together and apart.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Free Time** or **Intimacy** next.

COMMITMENT

If you took Couple Checkup and are working through this Discussion Guide, not only are you committed to strengthening your relationship, but you are committed to your partner. Maybe you formally committed to each other by accepting a proposal six months ago or by exchanging vows at your wedding 46 years ago. Maybe it's something less formal, but just as meaningful. You might

even have an unspoken commitment to your partner. Either way, if you are reading this, you have some grit and passion in you to push through and achieve the long-term goal of a successful relationship.

Commitment can be clear when we say statements like, “till death do us part,” but the way in which we show commitment to our partner is much less clear.

Commitment is the foundational agreement of a relationship stating, “no matter what comes our way I will always be here for you.”

We've all heard the cliché "actions speak louder than words," and in the case of commitment, it may be true. The discrepancy between what we say and what we do comes when we fail to see how our partner chooses to display their commitment. It's crucial to understand your partner may be trying to show you they are committed, and you may just not be seeing it. Your partner's level of commitment and your opinion or observation of their commitment could easily be two different things.

Showing commitment in a variety of ways can help confirm your commitment, whether it is formally spoken or not.

DISCUSSION

// How do you show your partner your commitment? What actions show you your partner is committed to you?

// How does your commitment to your partner vary over time? What situations cause you to evaluate your commitment? When do you feel most committed to your partner?

// Consider commitments you have to your partner – Which commitments have you verbalized and which commitments are unspoken?

// Have you ever questioned your partner's commitment to you or your relationship? What situations cause you to question commitment? How do you address this when it comes up?

// Is it easier to be committed in a happy relationship or is it easier to be happy if you are in a committed relationship?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Summary of Strength and Growth Areas* section of your report.

Notice which areas are labeled as strengths and which are labeled as growth areas. Is there any topic in particular that you are surprised to see listed as a strength or growth area?



Presently, are you more committed to working on the strengths in your relationship or the growth areas? How has this been true over the length of your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Commitment is not just a verbal exchange; it is a way of living out your relationship through meaningful actions that honor your verbal exchange.

APPLICATION

Notice ways in which your commitment to your partner and your relationship are on display for others to honor. Acknowledge that the ring on your finger tells everyone you are committed to your partner. Maybe it's the manner in which you speak about your partner to your kids. Or maybe it's even the pictures displayed on your virtual and real walls that capture the interactions you have had with your partner over the years. Take notice because more than likely, others do.

NEXT STEPS

Commitment is rarely discussed; and when it is, it is usually being threatened. Take action now and make it a point to talk about how commitment fits into your everyday life with each other. Pick an activity to do in the near future that will reaffirm your commitment to one another. If you exchanged vows at your wedding, do something frugal like handwriting your vows out for each other and keeping them somewhere special or do something more extravagant like plan a vow renewal ceremony. Choose a way to honor your commitment to each other and your relationship (although, taking the Couple Checkup and working through this Discussion Guide is a great start!).

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Spirituality** or **Forgiveness** next.

EXPECTATIONS

There are certain expectations you put on your partner, and while that's not a bad thing, it can become detrimental to a relationship if expectations are unrealistic or even worse, uncommunicated.

If you expect something from your partner that is completely outside of their ability or if you don't tell them what your expectation is – how can your partner come even close to meeting it?

**This scenario is
unfortunate because
your level of happiness
or disappointment
in life depends on
how often your
expectations are met.**

Unfulfilled expectations often become the source of conflict because preconceived notion distorts the actual experience.

Acknowledging expectations is the first step to managing them effectively in your relationship.

Once you and your partner both know each other's expectations,

adjustments can be made based on the how realistic they are. In doing this, it's important to remember not to compromise the integrity of your original expectations. Instead restate them to better set you and your partner up for success.

DISCUSSION

// Which of your partner's expectations is most important for you to fulfill? When you are not able to meet one of your partner's expectations, how does that affect to your relationship? Additional conflict? Resentment? Disappointment? A new level of compassion? Understanding?

// Do expectations always have a definitive completion point? Are some expectations clearly met at a specific time interval while others are on-going? What happens if you believe you met an expectation and your partner disagrees? What is your definition of fulfilled and what is your partner's?

// Which is harder for you – not meeting your partner's expectations or not having your expectations met? Why?

// How does fulfilling expectations bring you and your partner closer? What happens when you meet each other's expectations?

// Consider effort – How do expectations require different levels of effort? Are some expectations more worthy of being met? Which type of expectation is most important to meet for the sake of your relationship health? Which expectations are the easiest (or hardest) to fulfill?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Communication* and *Conflict Resolution* sections of your report.

How do your communication and conflict resolution patterns contribute to expectations in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Expectations can negatively impact your relationship if they are unrealistic or uncommunicated to your partner.

APPLICATION

The next time you or your partner feel disappointed because of an unmet expectation, talk about it. Try to identify why the expectation was not met. Was it too high to achieve? Was it not communicated? Did the expectation change over time without one partner knowing? Gaining some understanding and resolution out of the experience can help both of you meet future expectations.

NEXT STEPS

Identify your expectation filter and begin to understand its impact on your relationship. Take a few moments at the end of the day to reflect on expectations you had for your partner and evaluate your partner's expectations that you met. Journal this reflection each night for a period of time to notice patterns – your expectation filter will become clearer. If you and your partner do this individually, you can discuss what you discover together to better understand how expectations impact your relationship.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Roles** or **Parenting** next.

FAMILY
& FRIENDS

Family and friends are part of a larger system that can provide encouragement to your relationship, but that larger system can also be detrimental to your relationship if there is a significant lack of acceptance and support.

Your partner's family and friends, as well as your own, will impact your relationship in some way.

You want them to like your partner and you want your partner to like them. This happens naturally for some couples while others need to monitor these relationships so that the influence and interference on your relationship is appropriate.

If you are struggling to connect with your partner's friends or family,

take time to learn
and understand the
values they hold.

This might allow you to leverage a connection that leads to acceptance, support, and encouragement. If there are differences, don't compromise your own values, but strive to understand. If you already connect with your partner's family and friends, work with your partner to set appropriate boundaries to monitor the influence and interference family and friends have on your relationship. Your partner will appreciate the extra effort you put into managing the relationships.

DISCUSSION

// How do you know your relationship is accepted by your family and friends? How do you know your relationship is accepted by your partner's family and friends? How do you know the boundaries of your relationship are both respected by family and friends as well as your partner and yourself?

// Do family and friends cause conflict in your relationship? If so, how is this type of conflict normally identified and addressed? Do you or your partner become defensive when the topic of family and friends is brought up in discussion?

// How has a life transition (marriage, children, illness, etc.) impacted how you and your partner relate to family and friends?

// What boundaries do you currently have in place with regards to family and friends and your relationship with your partner? How can boundaries be adjusted to allow for more or less influence from others outside the relationship?

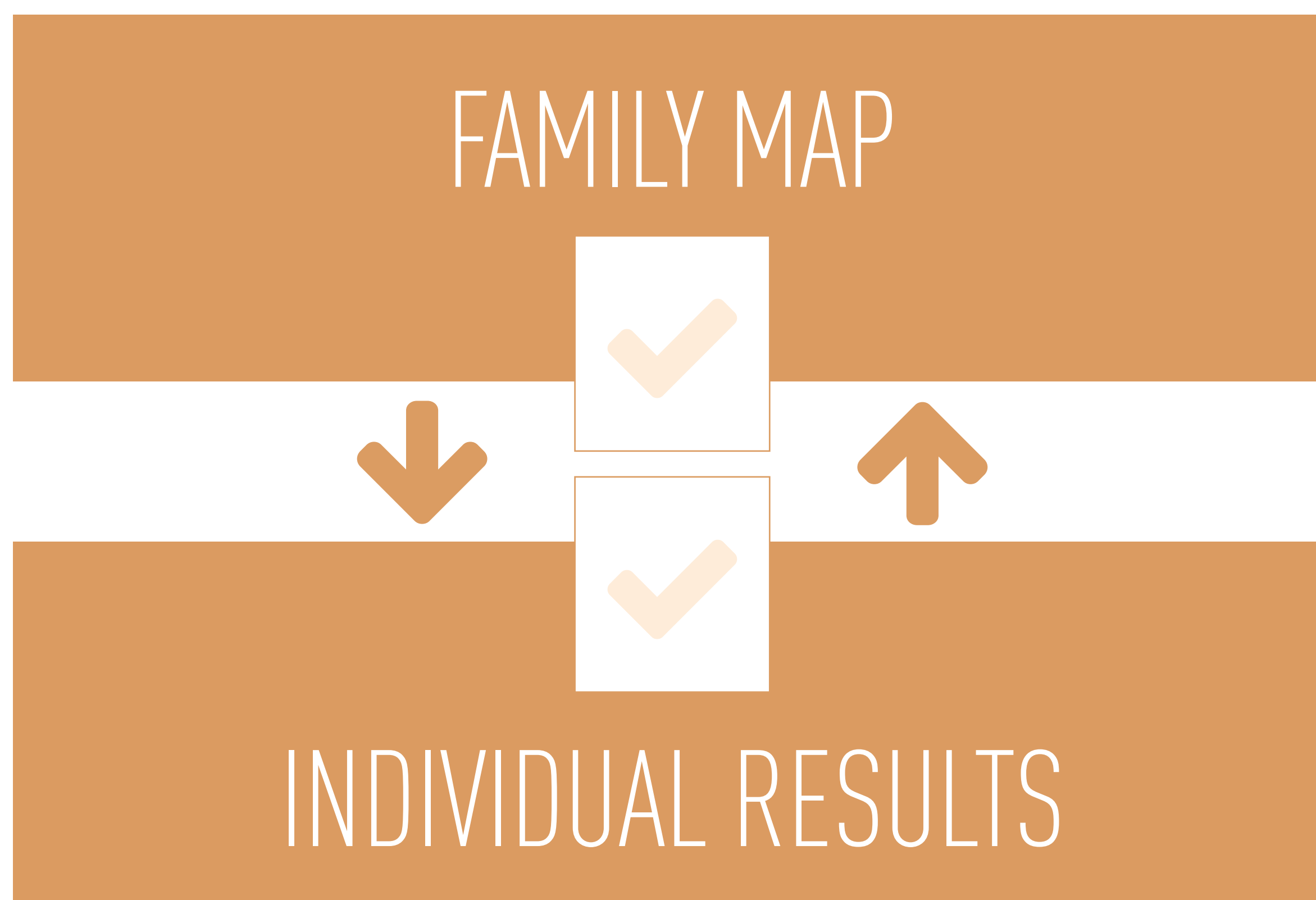
// Consider your definition of "normal" – How much involvement from family and friends is normal? How does this change throughout your relationship? How is your definition of normal similar to your partner's? How is your definition of normal different than your partner's?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Family & Friends* and the *Family Map* sections of your report.

Take a look at the Family Map, keeping in mind the center square indicates ideal balance. Where are you plotted in relation to your partner?



Look at your individual results in the Family & Friends section – Does this accurately reflect how you feel about these relationships?

TAKEAWAY

The health of you and your partner's relationships with each other's family and friends contributes to the health of your relationship with your partner; it is important to nurture lifelong relationships with each other's family and friends.

APPLICATION

Reminisce about the first time you and your partner introduced each other to family and friends. Consider how far your relationships with family and friends have come, for better or worse, and recognize the effect it has had on your relationship with your partner.

NEXT STEPS

Making new friends can be hard, but developing new friendships with other couples can help build your own relationship with your partner. Try to connect with other couples in your community and make new friendships. Perhaps seek out new connections through your faith community, neighbors, or volunteer opportunities.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Parenting** or **Money** next.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is crucial to the health of a relationship.

Since we experience hurt and forgiveness differently, it can be a challenge to apply new methods when we need to forgive one another.

Instead of retraining you on how to forgive, we want to encourage you to think about it differently. Forgiveness is often associated with healing a **deep hurt**, and while this is important for those situations, that scenario is not applicable to relationships that are not working through significant issues. You can begin to identify forgiveness in daily life by recognizing everyday lapses in thoughtfulness that require you to forgive your partner and for your partner to forgive you. An everyday lapse in thoughtfulness can be as simple as when you forget to notice your fiancée's new haircut, or when your partner of 10 years forgets to bring the garbage can to the curb this week, or even when your partner of 50 years washes your new white shirt with his red sweater. These simple lapses in thoughtfulness can be acknowledged, addressed, and forgiven with small conscious effort.

A **deep hurt** refers to a situation in which a significant level of forgiveness is required such as infidelity.

Unfortunately, there will be times in your relationship when you will need to put more effort into forgiveness. In preparation for those times, we want to remind you what **forgiveness** is and what it isn't.

Forgiveness is a process that promotes healing and is a starting point for reconciliation.

Forgiveness isn't forgetting, condoning, or perpetuating injustice. It isn't granted on demand and it doesn't automatically guarantee reconciliation.

If forgiveness seems unachievable, it's okay to seek professional help.

Forgiveness is the decision or choice to give up the right for vengeance, retribution, and negative thoughts.

A NOTE ABOUT SELF-FORGIVENESS

Don't forget to forgive yourself! We often think of forgiveness from the perspective of the victim forgiving the transgressor, and while this is often the case, you will never truly feel healed until you forgive yourself. If you take responsibility for your actions and abandon any remaining self-resentment, this will help prevent that hurt from finding a way back into your relationship years down the road.

DISCUSSION

// Consider forgiveness – How does forgiveness currently play a role in your relationship? Have you and your partner ever reflected on forgiveness? Did you reflect individually or together?

// Identify a few everyday lapses in thoughtfulness you are responsible for that might impact your partner and vice versa. How does this acknowledgement help your relationship? What healthy ways can you start talking about everyday lapses in thoughtfulness?

// How are unforgiven issues currently impacting the health of your relationship? Is there a cluster of unacknowledged everyday lapses in thoughtfulness causing resentment? Is there a significant hurt that needs attention?

// When you forgive or are forgiven by your partner, do you experience a sense of relief? If so, describe to your partner what this sense of relief feels like.

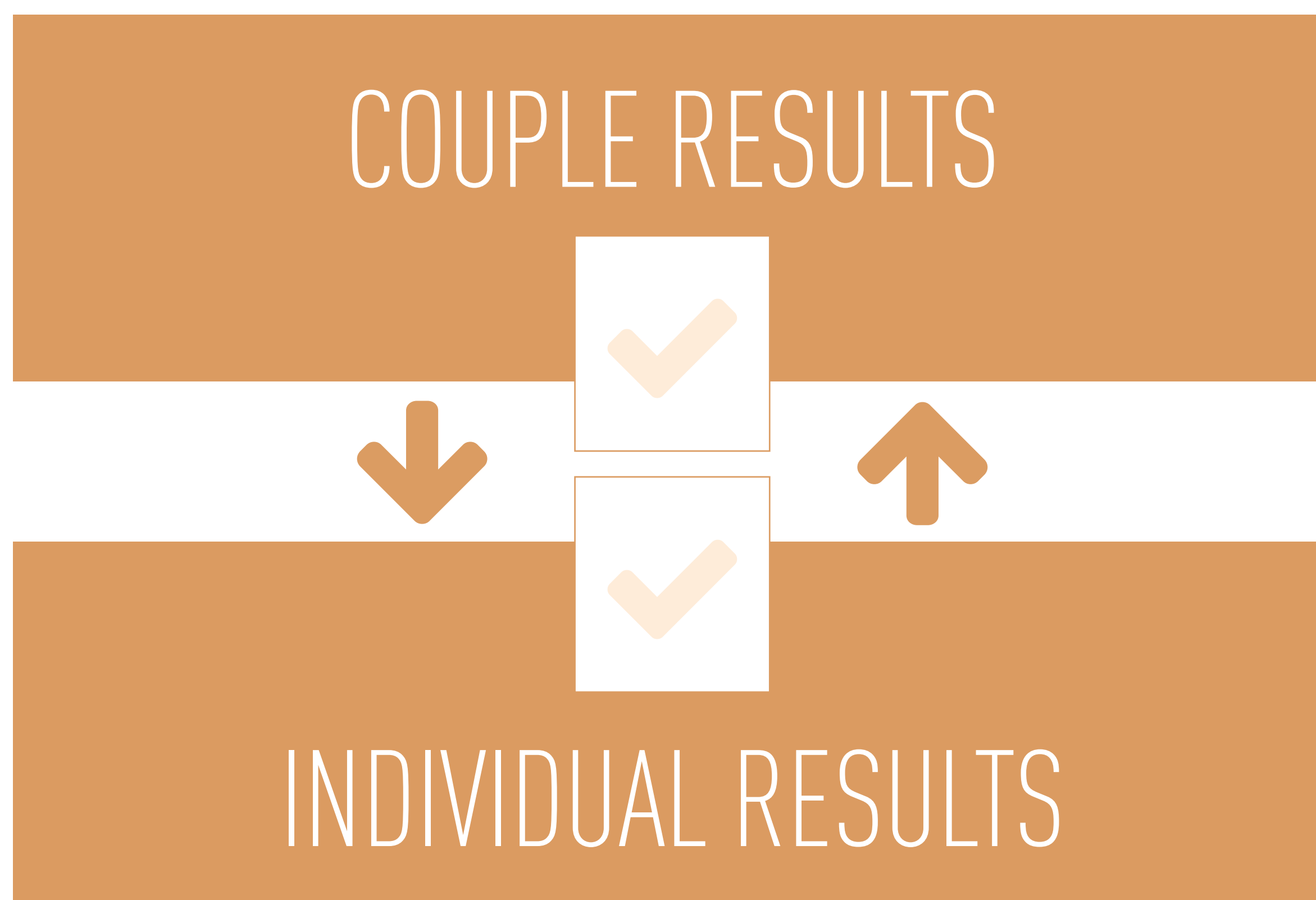
// Discuss what the most difficult part of forgiveness is for you. What are the easiest things to forgive and what are the hardest? How is forgiving your partner different or similar to forgiving another member of your family?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Conflict Resolution* and *Spiritual Beliefs* sections of your report.

Look at your couple results for both sections – Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Look at your individual results for both sections
– Does this accurately reflect how you feel in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Recognize the role forgiveness plays in your relationship by identifying its presence in daily life and its healing power when working through deep hurts.

APPLICATION

Exaggerate the act of forgiving in your relationship for a period of time, even just a week, to see how often it happens. Here's an example: you forget to start the dishwasher after dinner and there are no clean coffee cups for your partner to drink their morning coffee from – take responsibility for your action. Your partner should acknowledge your efforts and forgive you, and then you should forgive yourself. By going through the amplified motions, you'll see how effortlessly you already incorporate forgiveness into your relationship.

NEXT STEPS

If the day comes when a more significant hurt needs to be forgiven, both partners should revisit the discussion points above to prime your interaction. This will help each of you work through seeking and granting forgiveness.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Intimacy** or **Commitment** next.

FREE TIME

"FREE"TIME

is just that – time free from commitments, obligations, and requirements. It is self-defined; it can be whatever you want it to be. Depending on your stage of life, there are factors that determine just how much free time you have. Work, children, and other responsibilities dictate how much time is left over.

It is important to acknowledge that you probably can't change the amount of time you have in the free category, but **you can change how you choose to spend it.**

Now, consider your free time through the lens of your relationship. When you have free time available, **you have a choice to choose an activity you do with your partner or an activity you enjoy without your partner. There isn't a bad choice here. Both are healthy because relationships thrive on balance.** Remember, balance doesn't mean it has to be equal. To ensure you keep a healthy balance, **talk with your partner about expectations and the reality of the choices you each make regarding your free time.**

DISCUSSION

// Discuss what external (time, money, etc.) and internal (energy level, interest, etc.) resources are required for you and your partner to spend time together. Consider what resources are needed to spend time separate from each other.

// What are barriers to spending time together? What are the barriers to finding time apart from each other?

// On average, how much free time do you and your partner each have in a week? What outside factors impact the amount of free time each of you have?

// Have you discussed preferences for how you and your partner enjoy spending free time together? Or do you rely on assumptions from how you have historically enjoyed time together? How have you and your partner's preferences changed over time?

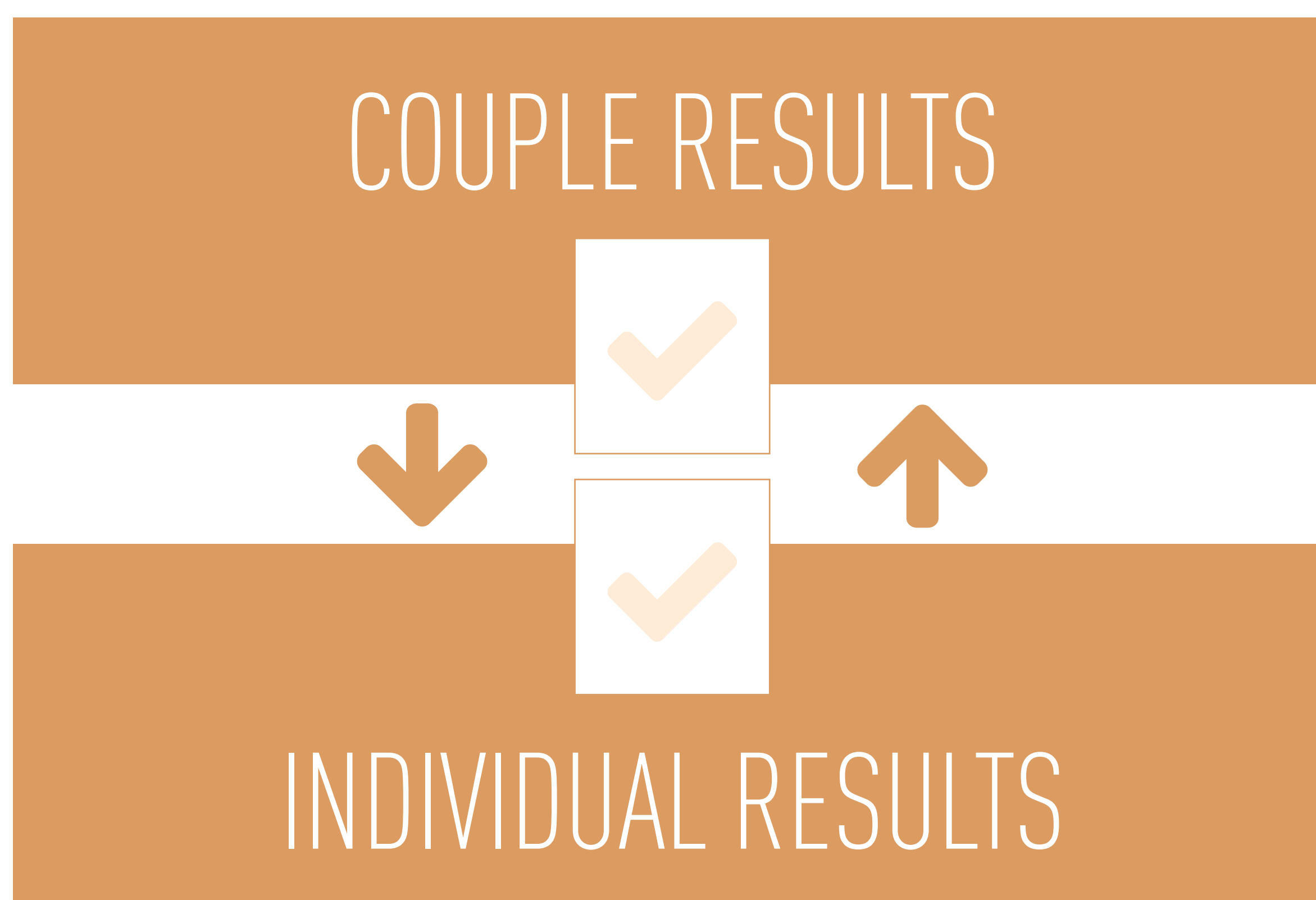
// Is the free time you and your partner spend together quality time? How is "quality" defined? Are there times when quantity is favored over quality?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Leisure Activities* (married couples) and *SCOPE Personality* sections of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Look at your individual results for Leisure Activities
– Does this accurately reflect how you feel about spending time with and without your partner?

Review how you and your partner scored on each dimension of the SCOPE Personality. How does personality impact how you spend free time?

TAKEAWAY

Discuss expectations for free time and strive for a balance between spending time together and apart.

APPLICATION

Decide on a time frame – 1 week, 30 days, or whatever is manageable for your schedules. Now try to schedule free time together and free time apart – yes, actually write it down or add it to your calendar on your phone! It will seem silly to add this to a calendar, but it will increase the likelihood of it actually happening.

NEXT STEPS

Pick a time to review this topic again. Maybe it's the first Saturday of next month when you drink coffee and read the paper together before the kids are up? Or maybe it's before your next date night? Whatever feels right to you. The key here is to establish a time to discuss free time again, thus creating some accountability for both you and your partner.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Money** or **Expectations** next.

INTIMACY

We use many terms when referring to intimacy (affection, sexual relationship), yet **intimacy** encompasses more than a physical relationship.

You might think a deep connection translates to a thriving physical relationship and vice versa. While this can be the case, it's not always true.

Each couple experiences intimacy differently and it might vary between partners as well.

This is why it is so important to talk about it!

Intimacy is the deep connection we have with our partner emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc.

When discussing intimacy, **it is crucial to call out the ‘compare and contrast’ model we often hold to our expectations.** Comparing and contrasting your intimate relationship to anyone else’s relationship (your previous relationships included) or even previous versions of the relationship you are in, is not a healthy perspective.

INSTEAD, WE
ENCOURAGE
YOU TO GAIN
UNDERSTANDING BY
BREAKING DOWN
HOW YOU RELATE
TO INTIMACY IN
YOUR RELATIONSHIP
AND **BUILD**
SKILLS TO MORE
OPENLY DISCUSS
INTIMACY.

DISCUSSION

// Consider affection – How do you and your partner like to receive affection from one another? How do you like to show affection? Are affectionate acts verbal or nonverbal in your relationship? How do you both respond to affection? Where did you and your partner learn about affection?

// Do you consider other areas of closeness in your relationship to be intimate? How is a close spiritual connection intimate? How is a close emotional connection intimate?

// Consider your sexual relationship – What do you and your partner need from each other to feel comfortable discussing your sexual relationship? Have you discussed preferences with regards to sex?

// When do you and your partner feel most intimate with one another? What barriers keep you from feeling close to each other?

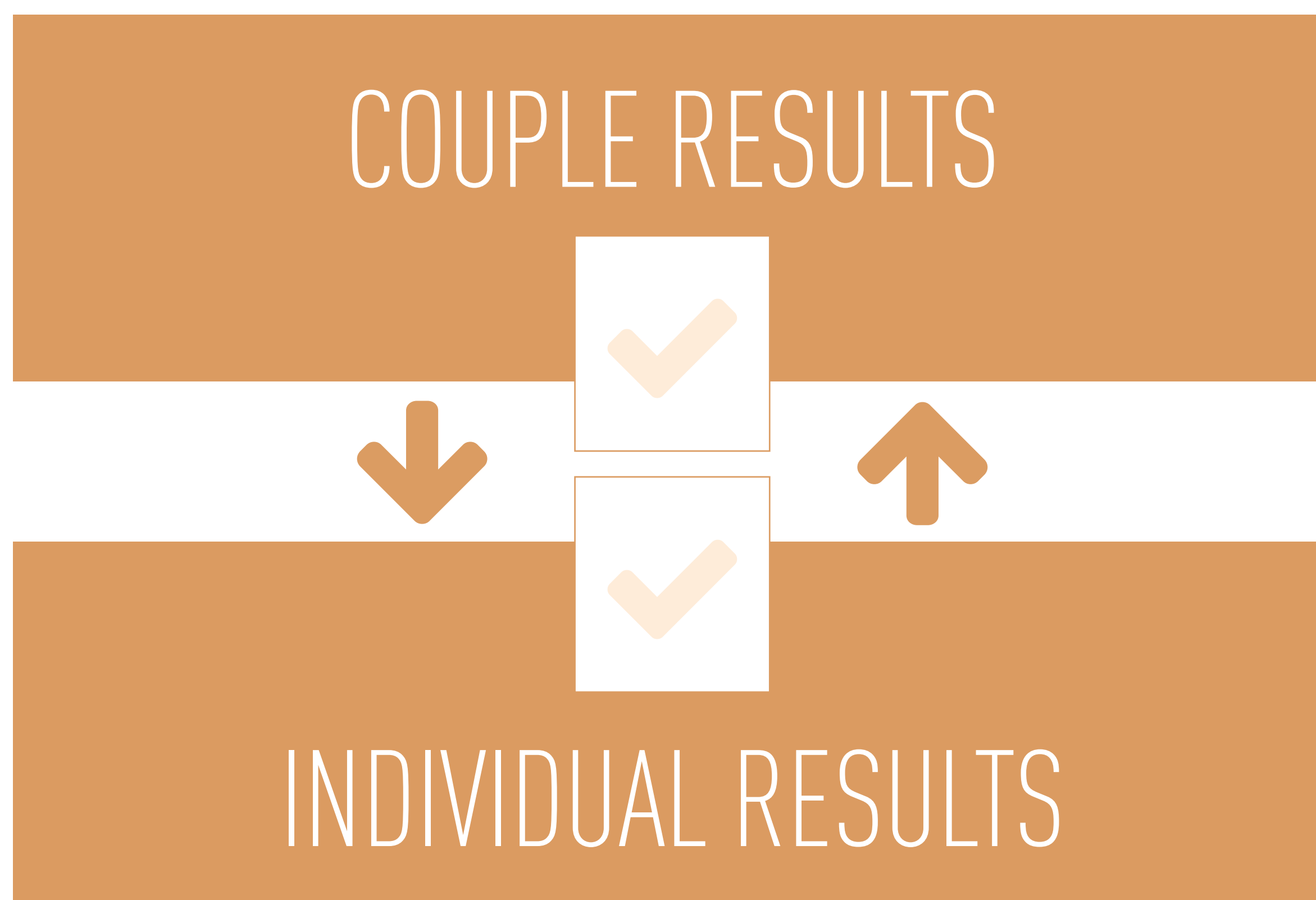
// How has intimacy changed over the length of your relationship? What outside factors impact intimacy (kids, job, other family members, health, money, etc.)?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Sexual Expectations* (dating/engaged couples) or *Sexual Relationship* (married couples) section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about intimacy in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Intimacy is more than sex and affection; it's a deep connection that weaves throughout the entire relationship.

APPLICATION

Begin to recognize how each of you nurture intimacy in your relationship. Take note of when you feel that deep connection and when you feel it is missing. Communicate about feelings, preferences, and expectations regarding intimacy.

NEXT STEPS

If your goal is to increase intimacy in your relationship, you'll need to take some steps to get there. Decide on a time in the future to have a conversation about your level of connection. The key is to establish a time to discuss progress for the sake of accountability.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Balancing I and We** or **Spirituality** next.

MONEY

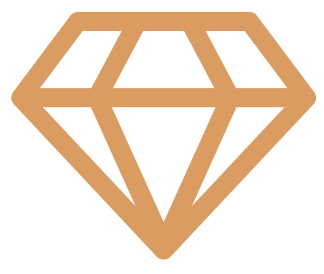
Financial management is often a **source of conflict** for couples.

Money causes tension when there isn't enough, when it isn't allocated correctly, and when there are different ideas surrounding its purpose.

The conflict grows out of a lack of understanding and communication around money and how it relates to your relationship.

If you need assistance getting out of debt, practical budgeting advice for today, or saving for the future – there are many resources available specifically to help couples improve their financial management skills.

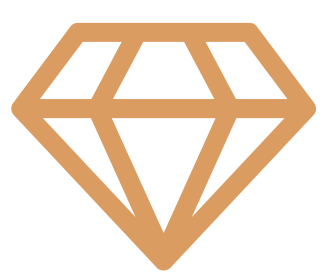
The goal here is to help you understand how money impacts your relationship with your partner.



The first step to gaining understanding is to be aware of your own experiences with money. We first learn about money from our **family of origin**; it's where we learn how to spend, how to save, and what money means. These ideas may change throughout life, but the influence of first impressions is significant.

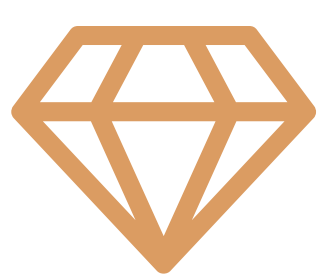
Practicing assertive communication with your partner about emotions you have surrounding money (fear, joy, anxiety, etc.) is important because it helps your partner begin to understand how you relate to money.

If your partner is actively listening to your message, they will be primed to acknowledge your feelings when making financial decisions in the future and vice versa.



Another step towards understanding how money impacts your relationship is to discuss the practical aspect of money – income vs. expenses – and the responsibilities that come with it.

The balance that works for your relationship may not be completely equal, but that's ok; the key is finding a balanced distribution to which you agree.



A final step to understanding is recognizing the way in which money can strengthen your relationship, perhaps through generosity and giving.

Family of origin refers to the group of family members with whom you grew up which often includes parents and siblings.

DISCUSSION

// What aspects of your relationship does money control? What specific financial situations have a direct effect on the satisfaction of your relationship? When it's payday, does this translate to an extravagant date night? When you have to pay the monthly bills, does this often prompt an argument? Explain how it feels to carry guilt associated with money (earn too much/little, have more in debt, etc.).

// What are your financial goals as a couple? Are your goals **short or long term**? How do you and your partner each contribute to reaching goals? What are your individual financial goals independent of your partner?

// Discuss the unexpected – What is your plan for the unexpected? Who is responsible for reaching out to a trusted resource if finances become a serious concern?

// What financial lessons did you learn from your family of origin? Which financial practices or habits have you kept and which did you change? What did money mean to you as a child (status, security, enjoyment, control)? Do you still believe that?

// How does financial generosity contribute to your relationship? How does the act of giving strengthen your relationship? How much financial support will you and your partner provide to family members (aging parents, adult children, etc.) if needed?

// Consider the future – What is your plan for how you will financially prepare for new phases in your life together (children, retirement)? In what ways will a new phase of life have financial implications? What are your and your partner's ideas around inheritance and estate planning?

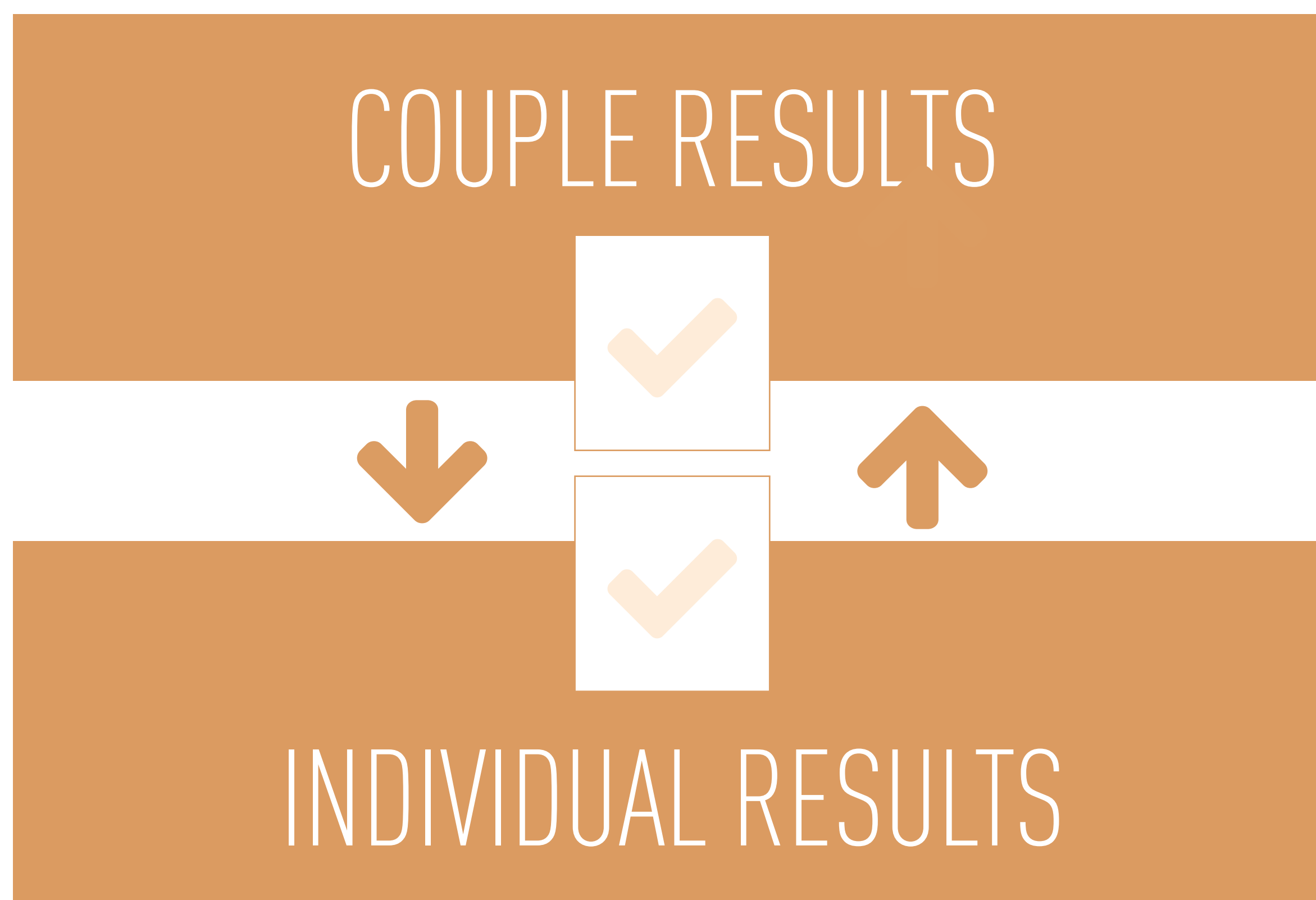
The length of a **short term goal** is typically six months to one year, while the length of a **long term goal** is one to five years.

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Financial Management* section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about money in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Money has the potential to become a point of contention in your relationship; be proactive and begin to understand how money influences the relationship you have with your partner.

APPLICATION

Begin to understand how you and your partner relate to money – and how that in turn impacts your relationship – by asking “Why?” Ask to understand, not to judge yourself or your partner. Ask yourself why when you choose to pay more than the balance due on your student loans each month; ask why your partner felt it is important to give to local charities. The idea is to identify the reasoning behind the financial decision and apply that learning to all around more awareness of the impact of money.

NEXT STEPS

Be more mindful of your money by learning something new with your partner. Find a local class to attend on a financial management area that interests you and your partner (investing, debt reduction, budgeting, etc.). Plan to have a discussion afterwards about money and your relationship in the context of the new learning.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Forgiveness** or **Roles** next.

PARENTING

If you're a parent, you probably agree parenting is incredibly challenging, but ultimately it's worth it. Since it is such a rewarding experience, parenting can really have an impact on you as a person.

Parenting can also significantly impact the relationship you have with your partner.

Research has shown that having a child often adds to an individual's happiness, but more often than not a couple experiences a decrease in **marital satisfaction** after the birth of a child.

Acknowledging how parenting can affect your marriage is the first step to minimizing the negative impact.

Marital satisfaction refers to each individual's level of satisfaction with the marriage.

You and your partner might parent using different styles and you might even find yourself parenting each child with a different style. That's okay, but it might cause frustration and conflict. A variety of theories and explanations of parenting styles exist, but the **democratic, or balanced, style** has been known to be most effective for children. The key here is to understand the differences in style that exist between you and your partner and overall – aim for balance, agreement, and unity.

In addition to understanding each other's parenting style, it's important to support each other's parenting efforts.

An easy way to increase confidence in parenting is to work on strengthening parenting skills and receive encouragement and support from your partner.

The **democratic parenting style** balances age-appropriate child autonomy and parental control. Parenting is nurturing, discipline is consistent, and according to research this balanced style tends to have the best outcomes for children and teens.

DISCUSSION

// Consider your relationship before and after having kids – What are the significant differences regarding communication, intimacy, conflict, or other topic areas? Discuss the differences you appreciate at each stage and the ones you'd like to work on.

// What parenting myths have you heard? How do these myths influence your parenting style? What myths are tempting to believe?

// How well do you support your partner as a parent? How can you provide additional support and encouragement of his/her parenting style? How can your partner support and encourage you? Discuss how more support and encouragement add to the “you’re on the same team” mentality.

// Consider other parental figures who influence your child(ren) – grandparents, step-parents, co-parents, etc. How do these other “parents” affect the effort you and your partner put into parenting? Discuss how you and your partner can work together to find balance and consistency amongst various parental figures.

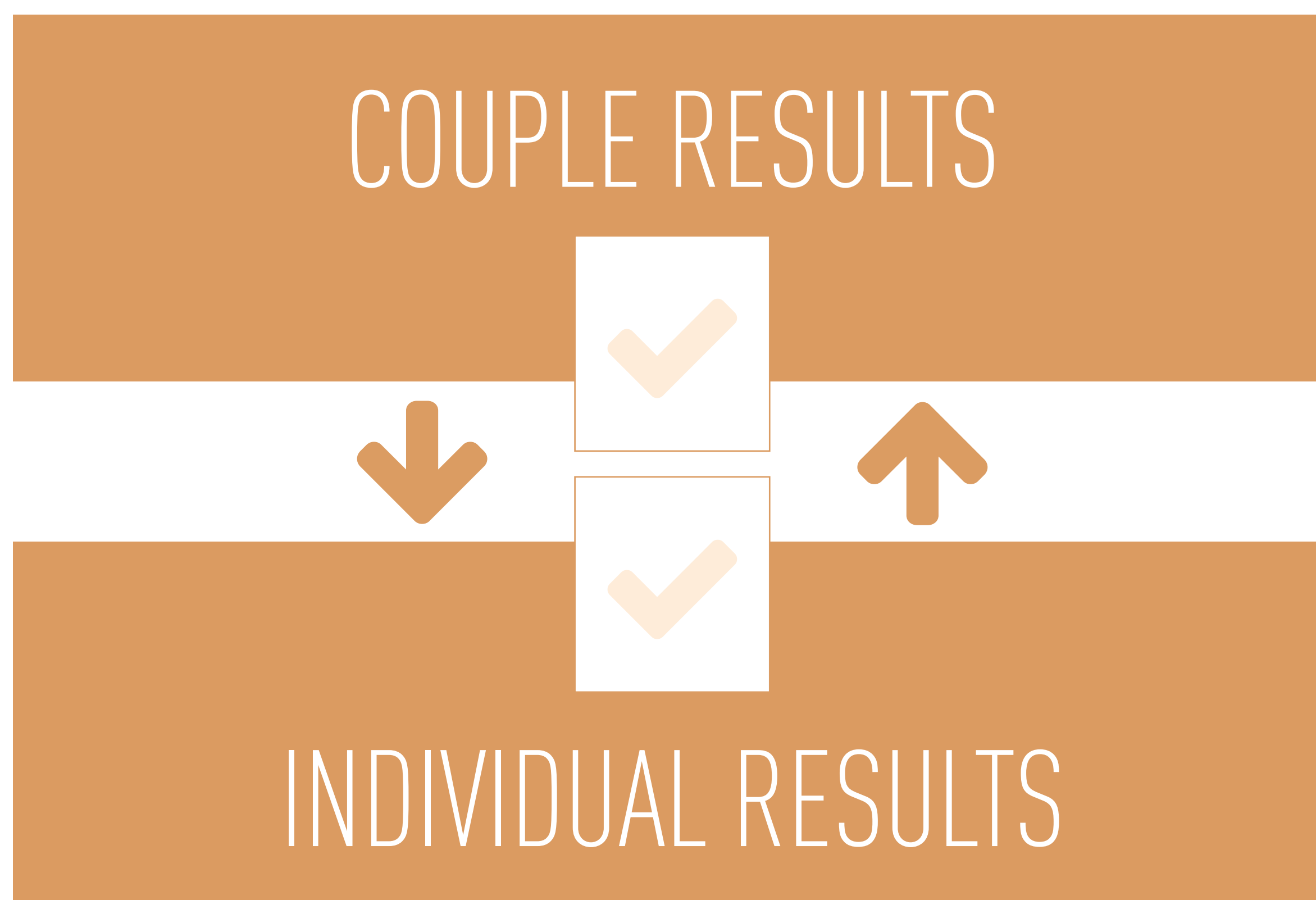
// Examine how you prioritize parenting and your relationship. Discuss how you currently balance these two important parts of your life. What are your expectations for finding balance? How are your partner’s expectations different than yours?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Children & Parenting* or *Step-Parenting* sections of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel you and your partner handle parenting?

TAKEAWAY

Cultivate an understanding of how you and your partner each parent your children, and how you can support each other to become better parents, while also considering the impact it has on your relationship.

APPLICATION

Set aside a few days and document (in a notebook, in your phone, etc.) your parenting interactions with your child(ren) and simultaneously document your relationship satisfaction. Identify any patterns to better understand how your parenting and relationship relate. If you are curious about your parenting style – research the different styles and use your documented interactions as examples to help you figure out which style you gravitate towards.

NEXT STEPS

If you are looking to strengthen your parenting skills, check out what your community has to offer as resources. Take a class or join a group of other parents to work on your skills and gain support. If you are interested in understanding more about your relationship and parenting, consider locating a PREPARE/ENRICH Facilitator in your area and taking the Parenting Version of PREPARE/ENRICH.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Family & Friends** or **Balancing I and We** next.

ROLES

Whether you loathe or enjoy household tasks, they need to be completed. **The distribution of who does what can have a significant impact on your relationship.** The responsibility of household tasks falls on both partners, even though one partner might accomplish “more.” As individuals we take on certain household tasks based on interest, ability, or obligation.

To ensure a distribution of household tasks that strengthens your relationship, become aware of what roles both you and your partner have.

It's normal to evaluate the fit of those roles periodically. By reevaluating, you may find you two enjoy status quo, or you might uncover some previously unknown resentment.



Roles are most likely already assigned in your relationship: someone takes out the garbage, someone else does the laundry, etc. But do you know every chore your partner does to contribute to the entire household? Probably not. There are household tasks we complete routinely that go unnoticed. When you become more aware of which tasks you and your partner complete, you can evaluate the quality of the distribution. Interest can change over time as well as ability; it is natural to make adjustments along the way.

JUST REMEMBER,
YOU AND YOUR
PARTNER ARE
WORKING TOGETHER
AND CONTRIBUTING
YOUR EFFORTS
TO THE SAME
HOUSEHOLD – THE
SUM REALLY IS
GREATER THAN ITS
PARTS WHEN YOU
WORK AS A TEAM.

DISCUSSION

// Are roles divided based on interest and ability or obligation per traditional gender roles? How did you and your partner originally divide the roles? Was it an explicit conversation about role distribution, an unspoken agreement, or a combination of both?

// How are household tasks allocated to other family members (children)? Is this process of reallocation done by both partners together or is managing the distribution a task completed by one partner?

// Consider expectations – As a couple, what are your expectations for household tasks? As an individual, do you hold your partner to a certain standard when it comes to completing household tasks? What happens when expectations and standards are not met?

// How do roles change when your lifestyle changes (children, job change, new home, retirement, etc.)? Have you discussed how future lifestyle changes might affect the roles you and your partner currently have?

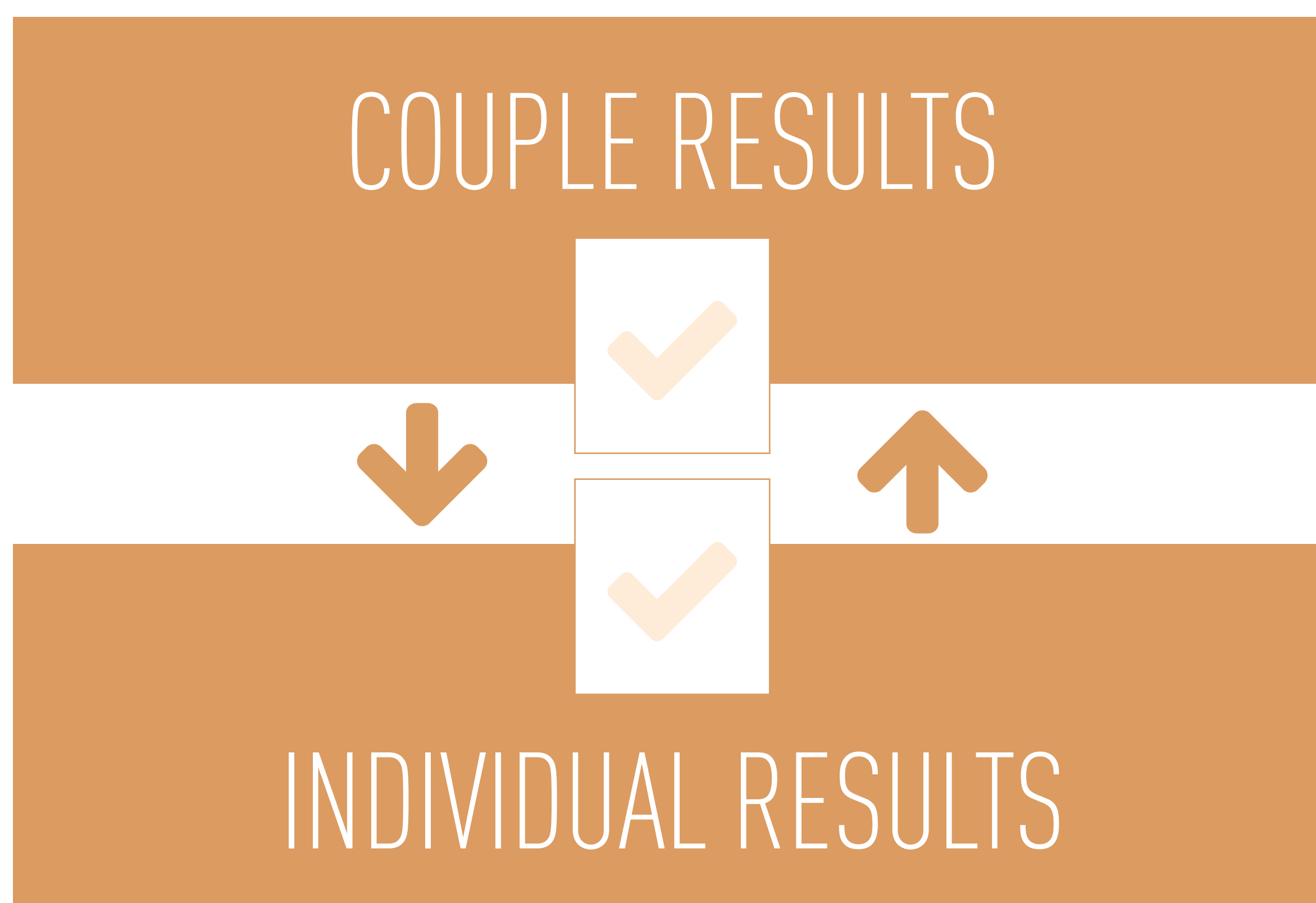
// How is leadership distributed within your relationship? What are effective ways to make decisions regarding your household? Is this a shared responsibility?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Relationship Roles* (engaged couples) or *Roles & Responsibilities* (married couples) section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about roles in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Roles within your relationship may or may not already be distributed in a balanced manner, either way, there may be room for improvement through evaluation and increased awareness; this improvement will help strengthen your relationship.

APPLICATION

Take awareness to a new level; spend a week switching roles with your partner. Changing up who does what within the household will give you a new perspective and appreciation for your partner's contributions.

NEXT STEPS

Establish a monthly meeting to evaluate household task distribution and reassign roles as needed. Consider causes of change: interest level, schedule, seasonal tasks, etc.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Expectations** or **Free Time** next.

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality describes the multifaceted connection between an individual and their spiritual beliefs and practices.

This term is open for you and your partner to interpret. Every person has a spiritual journey, which most likely began with influence from their **family of origin**. This means each couple has two spiritual journeys that relate to each other. Your spiritual journey might be closely aligned with your partner or it might be farther apart.

When spirituality is an area of agreement in your relationship, it can deepen the love you have for your partner and it will support your growth as a couple.

Be cautious, though, as spirituality is ever-changing and there may be times when you and your partner are at different points in your understanding and expression of your spiritual journeys.

Sharing beliefs with each other and discussing your preferences for practicing and expressing spirituality will strengthen this area of your relationship.

It isn't about trying to make your partner meet you where you are on your spiritual journey. It is about learning to support one another and integrate spirituality into your relationship to increase your sense of intimacy and satisfaction.

Family of origin refers to the group of family members with whom you grew up which often includes parents and siblings.

DISCUSSION

// Consider your family of origin – How was spirituality discussed in your family when you were a child? How did your family of origin help you form the beliefs you hold today?

// Look at your spiritual journey – How has your spirituality changed over time? Have you made significant life changes based on spiritual guidance? How has your understanding of spirituality changed? During your relationship, how have you shifted your spiritual beliefs?

// How does spirituality strengthen your relationship? What activities do you and your partner do both together and separately that make your spiritual bond greater? Pray together? Go to church together? Pray for each other? Set daily intentions for your relationship? How does your spirituality allow you to be more connected to your partner?

// How does your relationship honor your spirituality? What values and beliefs from your spirituality do you carry into your relationship? What spiritual practices or expressions influence your relationship? How does spirituality guide your relationship in times of struggle?

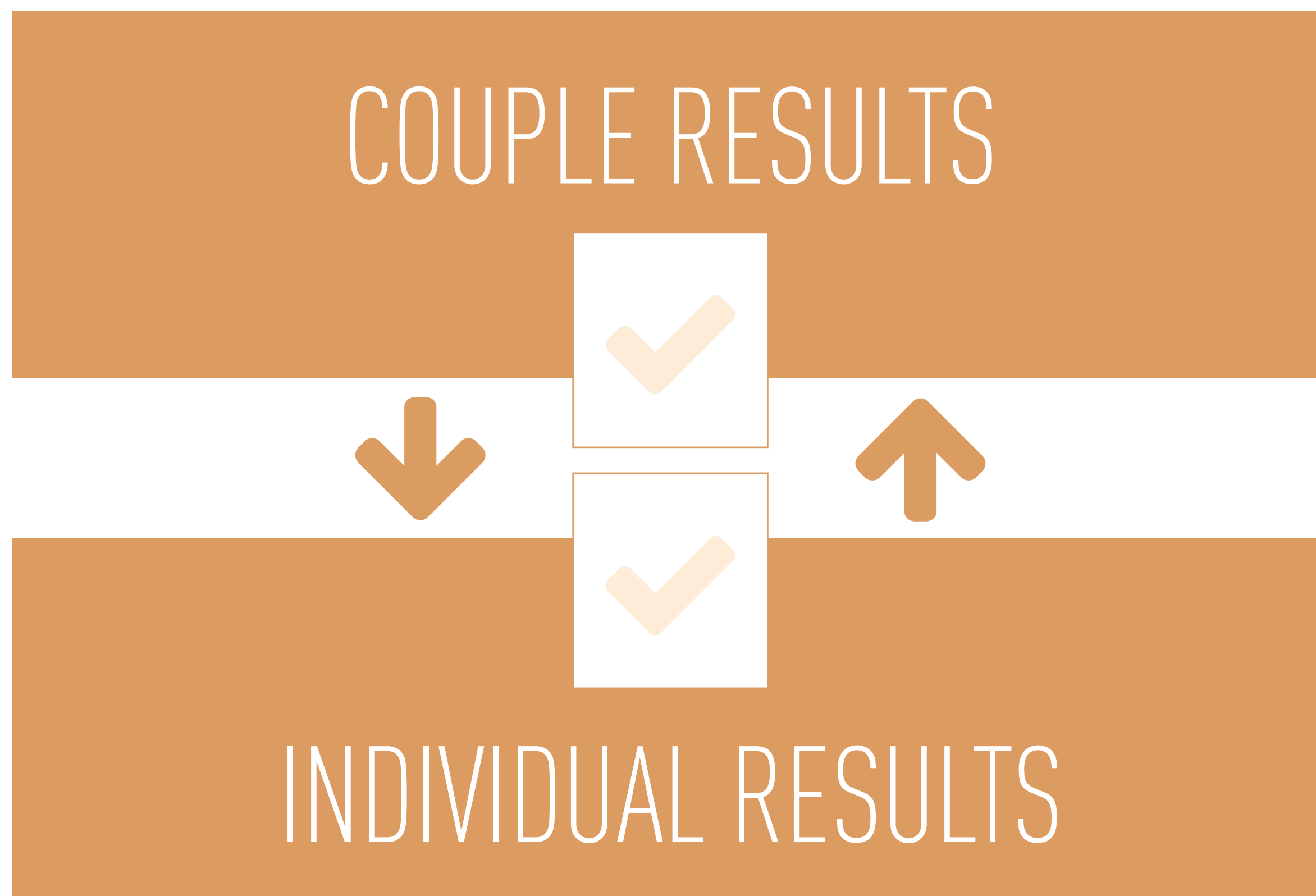
// Is spirituality the foundation of your relationship? If yes, discuss how spirituality supports other topic areas in your relationship. If no, discuss what you consider to be the foundation. How does this align with your shared values and beliefs?

CHECK IN WITH CHECKUP

Check in with your Couple Checkup results

by reviewing the *Spiritual Beliefs* section of your report.

Are you surprised by the suggested discussion items?



Does this accurately reflect how you feel about spirituality in your relationship?

TAKEAWAY

Even though spirituality is a personal journey, your relationship can be strengthened when you celebrate shared perspectives and respect differences.

APPLICATION

Shared values and beliefs may strengthen your relationship, while shared expression of values and beliefs makes your bond even deeper. Establish a new ritual with your partner that honors the relationship between your spiritual journeys.

NEXT STEPS

Be curious about your partner's spiritual journey. Select a time where you and your partner can regularly discuss, practice, and express your spirituality together. Consider joining other couples in a small group in your faith community or even start one on your own.

SECTION SUGGESTION

Consider exploring **Commitment** or **Family & Friends** next.