

INTRODUCTION

Intimate relationships offer us our deepest security, strongest friendship, most important teamwork, and best support for our dreams. But these relationships can also be frustrating. Almost every intimate relationship has good times and bad. Very few people are happy all the time in their long-term relationship. This is because relationships have “love cycles” and “fear cycles.” In love cycles we feel wonderful; in fear cycles we feel awful.

Most relationships begin in a love cycle. You each feel good and made your partner feel good. It’s lovely to feel happy and content, safe and secure. But over time most relationships also develop a fear cycle. That’s the opposite of being in a love cycle—you each feel bad and make your partner feel bad. You wind up feeling unhappy and discontent, unsafe and insecure. In our love cycles we feel wonderful; in our fear cycles we feel awful.

There’s a simple way to tell which cycle you’re in now: you know by the way you feel. When your relationship feels good, you’re in a love cycle. When your relationship feels bad, you’re in a fear cycle. Or, perhaps, like many couples, you go back and forth between these two cycles.

In our work with thousands of couples we’ve discovered that all the love cycles of their relationships can be described in four words, and every fear cycle has another four words that can be used to explain what happens. This book, *Love Cycles, Fear Cycles*, will help you discover what these words are for the cycles of your relationship. The four words of your fear cycle will show you what’s gone wrong, and the four words of your love cycle will show you how to make things right.

Your words are unique; they're not the same as everybody else's, because they fit your unique relationship. In your love cycle there is one word for each person's best feeling, and one word for each person's best behavior. In your fear cycle there is one word for each person's worst feeling, and one word for each person's worst behavior.

If you're in your fear cycle more than you'd like to be, this book is for you. A healthy relationship has a lot less fear and a lot more love.

Changing fear cycles to love cycles is the most important part of relationship therapy. Different therapists have different names for this, but they all address the same key task. Our Four Words method is the simplest, most straightforward and easy-to-use method we know. We developed it in the year 2000 and have taught this method to thousands of couples and hundreds of other therapists.

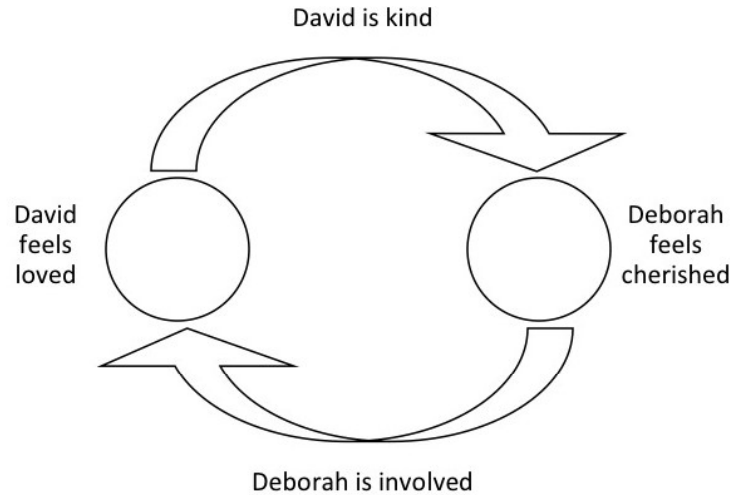
UNDERSTANDING LOVE CYCLES

There are four nice words in a love cycle and four not-so-nice words in a fear cycle. It will be interesting to discover your unique words.

I'll use our relationship as an example. When we met, Deborah was very talkative and outgoing. She explained her interest in ballroom dancing, and demonstrated with me right then. I thought, "Wow. Here's a woman who's really wants to be involved with me." I invited Deborah over for dinner and made my best dinner. I was very thoughtful, attentive and kind. She thought, "Here's a man who could cherish me."

Deborah was involved with me; I felt loved. I was kind; Deborah felt cherished. Feeling cherished made Deborah even more involved. Feeling loved made me even kinder. The four words in our love cycle were—and still are—kind, cherished, involved, and loved.

The diagram of our love cycle on the next page shows how these lead to one another:



Kindness leads to feeling cherished. Feeling cherished leads to being involved. Involvement leads to feeling loved. Feeling loved leads to kindness. The cycle goes round and round. It can start at any of these four places.

Deborah and I didn't know these words at the time, we just enjoyed being in love. It all seemed natural and effortless. The words in your Love Cycle will probably be different from ours, but they will also be caring actions and warm feelings.

DEFINING FEAR CYCLES

Unfortunately, relationships also have fear cycles. These happen when we feel scared, hurt, or angry. When you're in a fear cycle both of you feel bad, and react in ways that make the other person feel bad.

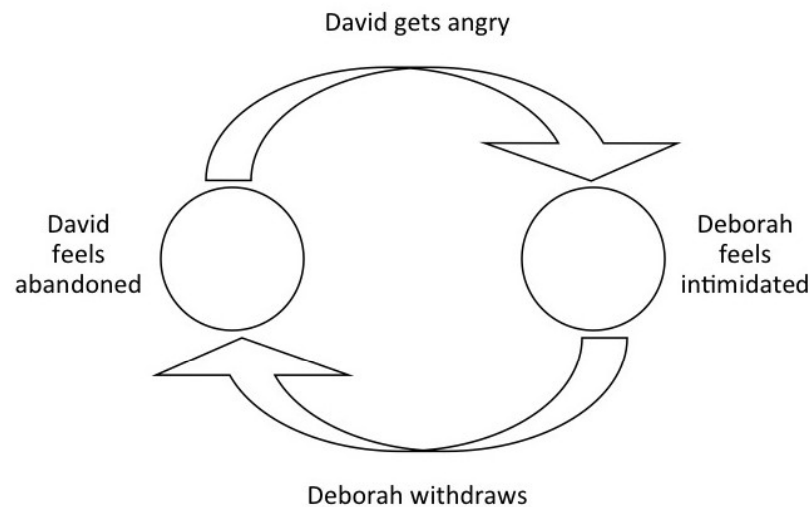
I remember talking to Deborah about our fear cycle very early in our relationship. I told Deborah what I thought could go wrong. As a therapist this seemed like a sensible thing to do—talk about a problem to prevent it. But to Deborah it felt much too soon to be talking about things like this. She thought, "Why is this guy anticipating the

worst?" It was our first example of David's "let's-deal-with-this-right-now" and Deborah's "let's-deal-with-this-later."

I explained that if I got angry, that might make her fearful. Then she might withdraw, which could make me feel abandoned. That could lead to me getting angrier, and to her feeling more fear and withdrawing even more.

I figured this out from what I knew about me and what I'd learned about Deborah. I knew my greatest fear was abandonment, and my worst reaction to abandonment was getting angry. I knew other people didn't like my anger; so I guessed Deborah wouldn't either. Deborah had told me that as a little girl she been around some people who, when angry, had threatened to harm her. She had learned to withdraw as her first line of defense.

Although I'm not a physically violent person, I can raise my voice, and, in those days, I used to get loud when I was angry. So I saw how our cycle could develop:



It turned out I was right. That was our fear cycle then, and it's still our fear cycle.

Your relationship also has a fear cycle. Your four words may differ from ours, but some kind of fight and flight, and some kind of hurt and loneliness, are part of all fear cycles.

CHANGING YOUR FEAR CYCLE TO A LOVE CYCLE

In this book, we'll help you identify the four words that best describe what happens in your fear cycle and your love cycle. The four words of your fear cycle reveal what's been going wrong. Each shows you something you'll want to change. Transforming your fear cycle back to your love cycle is the way to a wonderful, lasting relationship. It lets you live your dreams rather than your nightmares.