

Core Differences in Ways of Maintaining Emotional Stability

(Legitimately Different Ways of Navigating Life)

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A hallmark of people who are good at getting their partners to treat them well is that they know that when they get upset with their partners, it doesn't necessarily mean that their partners have done something wrong. They realize that there are many different ways of prioritizing things that can work in relationships. People who are less effective in their relationships don't realize this. When their priorities or preferences are different than their partners, more often they believe that theirs are right and their partners are wrong. This is especially true when partners' nervous systems are wired so that the very same conditions that make one partner feel calm and stable make the other partner feel anxious and unstable. It's one thing for your partner's behavior to be annoying. It's another thing for your partner to behave in a way that threatens your sense of stability, but this is inevitable if you and your partner have nervous systems that are calmed by radically different conditions. If your partner's way of maintaining emotional stability threatens your sense of stability, it's almost natural to think that she's doing something wrong. But studies suggest that most of the time when partners get upset with each other, neither partner's priorities or expectations are out of line. Each partner tends to prioritize things in ways that are calming to his or her nervous system. In our investigations in the past decade, we've found five specific differences in nervous system wiring that most often result in partners becoming critical of each other (see summary chart on page 10). Let's go through them one at a time.

Independence-First vs. Togetherness-First

The first difference in nervous system wiring involves the extent that you feel calmed or stabilized more through operating by yourself, or through interaction with other people. If your nervous system is stabilized more through independent activity, you'll need solitary activity, and you might feel anxious if you don't get enough alone time. We'll call your type of nervous system wiring "independence-first." If your nervous system is stabilized more through togetherness, you'll need more interaction with other people, and you might get anxious if you don't have ready access to your partner. We'll call this type of nervous system wiring "togetherness-first."

If you and your partner's nervous systems are wired differently in this area, you're at risk for getting critical of each other, especially when you're both stressed at the same time. When stress goes up, an independence-first type person's first reactions will be... "Just give me some space... I need to think." But the first reaction of a togetherness-first person will be to seek out the comfort of his or her partner. You can see what a setup this is. Each person's way of stabilizing interferes with the other's. It's no wonder that partners become critical of each other. The different needs of those who stabilize through togetherness versus those who stabilize through independence are not simply different preferences, like, "I like chocolate more than vanilla." These people have nervous systems that require different conditions for

maintaining emotional stability, and if these conditions are interfered with, anxiety skyrockets. When stress arises, people who are more wired for independence don't just want some personal space; they need it, and if they don't get it, they may become very anxious. The same is true for people who are more wired for togetherness. When stressed, emotional contact with their partners is an important part of their process of stabilizing. Each person's way of stabilizing interferes with the other's. It's normal to get upset when your way of coping is interfered with, and it's easy to conclude that your interfering partner is doing something wrong. When their partners aren't there for them, people who stabilize more through togetherness can often be heard saying things like, "You live in your own little world." "What's the point in being in a relationship if you're just going to run off by yourself when the going gets tough!" "You don't know how to function like a team!" People who stabilize more through independence can be equally critical of their more togetherness-oriented partners, thinking of them as too dependent or needy, saying things like, "Can you just babysit yourself for a few minutes while I get some things done here?"

Some of the most rigid gridlocks we have seen in our work with couples involve the different ideas that people have about who should be responsible for whose needs. If your nervous system stabilizes most readily through togetherness, you probably like the idea of having a relationship where both you and your partner take on the task of anticipating each other's needs and helping each other shoulder life's demands, whenever possible. You probably offer to help your partner without being asked.

But if you're a person whose nervous system stabilizes most readily through independent activity, you probably prefer that you and your partner each assume responsibility for taking care of your own tasks and burdens. You probably don't like having to guess what your partner wants or needs, and you might have even said on occasion, "Look, if you want something, just ask for it. Please don't expect me to read your mind." If you're in a time crunch, or you're tired, you might be especially annoyed if your partner expects help from you. You want your partner to take care of her own tasks, just like you take care of yours. It's likely that you don't ask for support or help nearly as often as your partner does, and for this reason, you might feel somewhat burdened by her or even resentful. You want a relationship where each of you carries your own weight. You might think that your partner is being too dependent or needy, or even lazy.

But if you're a person who's wired more for togetherness, you'll be offended by the implication that you're overly dependent, or that your expectations are too high. In your way of thinking, mutual dependency is healthy. In fact, to you it might seem barbaric to go through life mostly thinking about yourself. You want a relationship where your partner cares enough about you to volunteer to take your needs into consideration without you having to ask. If your partner stabilizes more through operating independently, it might seem like she is selfish or self-centered, and you might have even found yourself thinking or saying things like, "You never think about anybody but yourself!" or "You live in your own little world!" But if you're a person who is more wired for independence and you have a more togetherness-oriented partner, it will probably seem like she is the one who's selfish, by constantly requiring attention, or wanting you to do things that she could easily do for herself. It might seem like your partner is trying to make *you* responsible for *her* happiness.

Although it may be really difficult for you to believe, people whose nervous systems stabilize more through independence and those whose nervous systems stabilize more through togetherness succeed and fail in relationships at about the same rates. Both of these orientations can work just fine. If two people who are wired more for independence are paired in a relationship, they can function just fine, and so can two people who are more wired for togetherness. Mismatches are difficult, but most relationships are mismatched, at least to a degree, and mismatched relationships thrive under the right conditions. What are these conditions? You each accept the idea that both of your nervous systems have legitimate ways of stabilizing, and you each stretch your own comfort levels a bit so you're able to give and take in a way where each of you gets your needs at least partially met.

Invest-in-the-Future-First vs. Live-For-the-Moment-First

A second way that you and your partner's nervous systems may be wired differently has to do with the degree that you feel calmer and less anxious when you invest in the future, or if you feel less anxious when you set things up to enjoy life along the way. Some people just feel better when they work first, and then play later. Other people feel better when they combine work and play. If you're one of the latter kind of people you tend to reason that there's always more work to do, and if you wait to enjoy life until all the work is done, you might miss some of the best parts of life. You'll probably gravitate toward a career that allows you to mix the things you love to do with your job requirements.

But if you feel calmer when you work first, then play later, you probably don't have the same requirement that work be mixed with enjoyable activities. For you, work is work; it doesn't have to be fun. It's just something that you have to do—like it or not. In fact, you probably find it sort of difficult to relax and enjoy yourself if important tasks are looming overhead. You feel more stable when you stay on top of your responsibilities.

If you and your partner are different in this area, you probably have different ideas about how an ideal relationship should be. If you're an invest-in-the-future-first person, you dream of a relationship where you and your partner both work hard, making sacrifices in the present for the sake of a more secure future, when you guys can relax together. One of your biggest fears is that life will become unstable because important responsibilities go unmet while you're enjoying the present moment. But if you're a person who needs to mix work and play, you probably dream of a relationship where your partner will be less preoccupied and more relaxed, taking life at a leisurely, enjoyable pace, not forever putting off the good parts of life until later. One of your greatest worries is that life will pass you guys by while you're preoccupied with meaningless, monotonous routine.

Obviously, if you and your partner are wired differently in the ways I'm describing here, you'll be set up for some potential frustration. If you're not able to see her way of doing things as being as legitimate as your own, you'll be on a slippery slope toward trouble. If you're beginning to see your partner as someone who's childish, or irresponsible, or incapable of delaying gratification, you may be an invest-in-the-future-first type of person who has lost perspective on the fact that different people have legitimately different standards on the question of how much gratification should be delayed. On the other hand, if you see her as a boring stick-in-the-mud who is neurotically preoccupied with controlling a future that's

impossible to control anyway, you're probably a mix-work-and-play type of person who has gotten out of hand with your attitude.

The fact is, there's no evidence that one of these orientations works better in relationships than the other. If you're an invest-in-the-future-first type of person, you probably find it hard to believe that two live-for-the-moment-first people could survive in a relationship together. But they do... all the time, as do invest-in-the-future-first people who are paired together. Actually, most people have both orientations in them. It's just a matter of how much. Mix-work-and-enjoyment people are also quite interested in investing in the future, just not as much as invest-in-the-future-first people.

Sometimes, partners who are mismatched in this dimension become more extreme in reaction to each other. If they were living alone, they'd be much more balanced. For example, if you're a person who needs to mix work and enjoyment and you have a partner who wants to work first, then enjoy later, your partner might have trouble relaxing and enjoying life along the way partly because it seems that you are always wanting her to live for the moment. And if you're a work-first, enjoy-later type of person and have a mix-work-and-enjoyment type of partner, she might always be pushing for having more fun now because it seems to her like if she doesn't push, you'll never want to relax and just enjoy life.

The fact is, there's an upside and a downside to both of these orientations. People who have a higher requirement for enjoying each moment may have a better time along the way, but run the risk of ending up in less-than-optimal circumstances. People who work hard and postpone enjoying life may build a more secure future, but be less able to enjoy it when it comes, because they tend to always be preoccupied with what comes next. People who succeed in relationships respect the legitimacy of their partners' orientations, and simply ask their partners to try to stretch themselves enough to meet in the middle, as they try to do the same.

Predictability-First vs. Spontaneity-First

Another difference in nervous system wiring that often underlies relationship gridlocks involves the level of predictability or structure you need in order to function best. If your nervous system is calmed by predictability, you do best when you're able to organize your life so that you can know what to expect. You like to have all your ducks in a row. You prepare for life's challenges, leaving little to chance. This level of structure will actually make many other people feel anxious. If you're one of these other people you may have a nervous system that craves novelty and variety. If your nervous system is wired this way, you'll become restless or anxious if things become too routine. You thrive on the unexpected, and you specialize in improvising with life's unpredictable turns. You want your partner to be a co-adventurer with you...a cohort in a wide-open exploration of life. You're probably more of a risk-taker, and you enjoy not knowing what to expect next. You may actually like the feeling of not being in control, and you love it when life surprises you. Monotonous routine can trigger a sense of claustrophobic-type panic in you. But if you're a person who needs more predictability, the more your partner pushes for an unplanned, spontaneous lifestyle, the more anxious you get, because your nervous system gets calmer when you know what to expect.

Many couples become gridlocked when dealing with these differences. If you're a person who feels better with predictability and you have a more spontaneous partner, it might seem to you that your partner is not delightfully spontaneous, but just plain irresponsible! For you, some things seem just basic. You might be heard saying things like, "If you take something out of the closet, you put it back when you're done!" You may not realize that the world is full of happily-coupled people who don't put things back in the closet for days. And they might be loose on other things too, like how closely they stick to a schedule. There are happily-coupled people who are never late, and there are happily-coupled people who are rarely on time. They don't expect others to be on time either. The degree of structure or order a person prefers in his or her life is not one of the factors that are predictive of relationship success or failure.

Of course, people who prefer predictability aren't the only ones who can be critical of their partners. If you prefer spontaneity and you have a more structured partner, you might think she's boring and too scared to loosen up and enjoy life. But the fact is, again, that there are pros and cons with each of these types of nervous system wirings. Most people just feel that the pros of their own temperaments outweigh the cons. The problem comes only when they expect their partners to act accordingly, rather than trying to meet their partners halfway.

Slow-to-Upset vs. Readily-Upset

A fourth difference involves how your nervous system reacts to things you don't like. Some people have internal mechanisms that generate upset feelings quickly and intensely while other people have mechanisms that dampen upset feelings as soon as they happen. If your nervous system is wired to diffuse upset feelings, you probably pride yourself in your ability to let frustrations roll off your back, and in your ability to avoid making a big deal of it when things don't go the way you want. You probably believe that the world would be a better place if everybody were more accepting of the fact that life can't always go according to plan, and if people didn't get so bent out of shape when things didn't go their way. This doesn't necessarily mean that you're always willing to "go with the flow." In fact, you might be a powerful agent of change and feel that the secret to your success is precisely in your ability to remain calm. On the other hand, if you're a person whose nervous system generates upset feelings quickly and intensely, you create change in almost opposite ways. Your emotional intensity may be the primary vehicle for change. Your upset feelings provide internal motivation, and also they motivate others to take notice.

If you're more of a readily-upset type of person, you probably tend to value justice and quality over peace and harmony. If a situation doesn't seem fair to you, or if something seems substandard in some way, you have no problem shaking things up and creating the impetus toward change. You don't mind "rocking the boat," and you're probably comfortable with conflict. For you, anger is a normal and necessary part of life.

But if you're more of a slow-to-upset type of person, you get anxious when anger or tension is in the air. You tend to value having peace and harmony more than being "right." Even if something doesn't seem fair to you, you might give in to keep the peace. You might feel that it's just not worth the hassle of the turmoil that might follow if you assert yourself. You tend to live by the motto, "Don't sweat the small stuff" —a philosophy that actually isn't relevant to readily-upset people, because they can get upset without even breaking a sweat! If

you're more of a readily-upset type of person, getting upset simply isn't that big of a deal to you, and you probably have the ability to maintain an inner calm while appearing outwardly upset. In fact, expressing upset feelings may actually be calming to you.

The dreams and fears of people who are readily-upset and slow-to-upset are different. If you're more of a readily-upset type of person, above all, you want a partner who'll accept influence from you. Your biggest fear is that your partner might want you to stifle your feelings, bite your tongue, never rock the boat and pretend that everything is OK. If you're a slow-to-upset type of person, your dreams and fears are different. You probably dream of a relationship where you and your partner are accepting of each other's differences and don't freak out every time the other person fails to meet your expectations. Your fear is that if you were to become more like your readily-upset partner, life would be a never-ending series of upsets.

If you're a slow-to-upset person and you have a more readily-upset partner, you may become very critical, seeing your partner as being like a child who throws temper tantrums if she doesn't get her own way. You might be heard saying things like, "Do you have to get upset over every little thing I do?" or "You make a mountain out of a molehill!" You might see your partner as a negative, unhappy person for whom "nothing is ever good enough."

If you're a more readily-upset person, you can be equally critical if you have a more slow-to-upset partner. You might accuse her of covering up her true feelings to avoid conflicts. You might think she's afraid of her emotions, and you might have trouble respecting her, because she seems wimpy, and won't stand up and fight.

If you and your partner are wired differently, it might be hard for each of you to conceive that the other's way of handling upsets is as legitimate as your own, but evidence suggests that neither way is better or worse. Two readily-upset people often do fine in their relationships, because they know how to take each other. Being upset isn't that big of a deal for either of them. But two slow-to-upset people can do just fine, too. Mismatches are the most difficult. But as we've discussed before, the nervous systems of most people in long-term relationships are mismatched to a degree, and many of them have great relationships. So if you're mismatched, how do you manage it? Rather than trying to change your partner, try to develop the ability to better tolerate her style, and ask her to do the same.

Problem-Solving-First vs. Understanding-First

Even people whose nervous systems are wired to dampen upset feelings eventually get upset, at least sometimes. So once you're upset, what does it take for you to feel better? Some people feel better mostly by making a plan for how to change things. We'll call these people, problem-solving-first people. Other people feel better by getting somebody else to understand how they feel. We'll call these people "understanding-first" people. If you're a problem-solving-first type of person, you don't see much value in dwelling on negative feelings, regardless of whether the feelings are your own or your partner's. You probably see a lot of wisdom in the phrase, "There's no sense in crying over spilled milk." If you can't do something about the upsetting conditions, you often feel better by making a plan that you can later put into action. Once you've done all you can about an upsetting situation, you probably try to detach from negative feelings by focusing on other things. You probably don't spend much

time looking for sympathy or validation when you feel bad. Instead, you look for more concrete forms of action on the part of your partner.

If you're an understanding-first type of person, you may be almost opposite in this way. You know that your uncomfortable feelings can be soothed by your partner in ways that won't cost her a thing... she doesn't have to solve any problems; she doesn't have to change any life circumstances... all you need is a little understanding. You know you can feel better almost instantly if your partner can just give a little understanding and support, and it's hard to imagine what could possibly be so hard for her to give it sometimes. It's not that you aren't interested in changing the conditions that make you feel upset. For you, it's a matter of timing. Understanding and validation come first; formulating a plan of action comes second.

Problem-solving-first people and understanding-first people can become very critical of each other, because their ways handling upset feelings are in direct conflict. If you're a problem-solving-first person, it may seem like your partner just wants to complain and complain, but never do anything to make things better. It might even seem like your partner *wants* to be upset, and loves wallowing in misery! This is not likely true. Understanding-first people often resist their partners' efforts to solve the problem and move on because, at the moment, they're looking for understanding, not solutions. It's all about timing. Usually, they can easily shift to problem-solving mode once they feel understood.

If you're a problem-solving-first person, you probably think that mutual understanding is nice, but not necessary in order to function well as a unit. The way you look at it, people could spend years trying to understand each other and still be no closer to working solutions to life's problems. But if you're an understanding-first person, you probably feel that the one of the most important things about having an intimate relationship is the feeling that comes from being really understood. You might think that problem-solving is fine for business partners, but intimate partners should be invested in each other enough to keep engaged in discussion to the point where they really feel understood.

Exactly what kinds of understanding are understanding-first people trying to get? If you're a problem-solving-first person and your partner is an understanding-first person, it might at least sometimes feel to you that the only kind of understanding that will satisfy your partner is the understanding that she is completely right and the person that she is upset with (which may be you) is completely wrong! It may seem to you that if you don't agree with her, there's no way she will feel understood. It'll seem like the only way you can satisfy her is if you basically lie and say you think her feelings are 100% justified and inevitable, in the sense that any and every person on earth would feel the way that your partner does if they were in her shoes. If you can't honestly say this, you might just throw up your hands and give up, concluding that your partner is impossible. In other words, you might not offer any understanding or validation. Listen closely here. If your partner is an understanding-first person, what she needs is just for you to find her feelings at least partly understandable. There's a big difference between seeing your partner's viewpoint as valid but still liking your own logic better, and seeing no merit in her viewpoint. Your partner needs you to see her feelings and interpretations as valid—like she's not crazy for having them, and that other people very well might feel the same way if they were in her shoes. That doesn't mean that *everybody* would feel the same way; it just means that her feelings are potentially valid. The mistake of many problem-solving-first people is that they tend to go sort of black and white.

Because they're good problem solvers, they have confidence in their solutions, and they sometimes forget that there are usually many potentially valid solutions to most situations. They may not only disagree with their partners' feelings or opinions, but they might also cross the line and conclude that their partners' feelings or interpretations are misguided. Actually, it's not even the conclusion that your partner's interpretations are misguided that'll get you into trouble so much... it's the level of certainty you have about your conclusion, and your lack of an open mind about the possibility that you could be wrong and that your partner could be right about her take on things.

You might be worried that if you give an inch of understanding, your partner will want to take a mile. You don't want to feed into what seems like your partner's tendency to dwell on negative feelings. If your partner seems to get stuck on negative feelings, you may not realize that it's likely that this happens, at least in part, because you're not very good at giving even a little bit of emotional support. Things often change dramatically when understanding-first people experience a few moments of full-blown, no-holding-back support and understanding from their partners. Many problem-solving-first people are amazed to see how willing their understanding-first partners are to shift into problem solving after a few minutes of serious support and understanding.

But let's flip it around for a minute. If you're an understanding-first person, and your partner is a problem-solving-first type, you would do well to explicitly clarify for her that you're not looking for her to just agree with whatever you feel. You're just looking for her to see your feelings as at least partly valid, or understandable. Unless you make this clear, you'll have a hard time getting any understanding from her. But there's something more important you need to realize. You need to understand that there's nothing wrong with your partner's desire to detach from negative feelings. To you, it'll seem like she's sweeping things under the rug, or putting on rose-colored glasses and pretending everything is OK. But not everybody needs to discuss their feelings as much as you do. If you take the attitude that there's something wrong with your partner for wanting to move on and figure out what to do, she will have a much harder time giving you some understanding or validation.

Problem-solving-first and understanding-first people are wired so differently that it's really hard for them to conceive that there may be legitimacy in the other's way of operating, but people who succeed in their relationships are intelligent enough to keep open minds. Rather than judging their partners, they each stretch their comfort zones a bit and try and meet in the middle.

Concluding Comments on Core Differences

The differences I've been describing aren't the only ones that can be difficult for couples to navigate. They're only some of the most common ones. Another common difference involves how quickly people make decisions. Some people feel best when they make decisions fairly quickly, not spending a lot of time deliberating. Other people feel better when they take their time and consider all of the possible options very thoroughly. There are pros and cons with each style. Quick-decision people often cover more ground. They make decisions and then throw themselves into courses of action, and can be halfway to accomplishing goals in the period of time it takes slower-decision-

making people to just make up their minds. But, if the decision made is flawed, this person could be wasting time running down the wrong road. A more thoughtful decision-maker might actually save time by taking more time making a well-thought-out decision. The point is that neither style of decision-making works better or worse in relationships. People gravitate toward styles of decision-making that somehow make them feel better, and minimize anxiety.

Differences in nervous system wiring are so difficult to work with because each partner's way of maintaining emotional stability interferes with the other's way. It isn't just inconvenient that your partner has a different coping style. Her natural way of navigating life messes with yours! It's no wonder that you might feel that her behavior is wrong. It's normal for you to view her behavior from within your own framework. But if you're smart, you'll learn to keep perspective. Usually, when you feel that your partner's way of prioritizing or going about doing things is wrong, it really isn't. It's just different.

This doesn't mean that you should just back off and let your partner do whatever she wants. Of course, she has just as much right to ask you to stretch yourself as you do to ask her. No, you should ask her to try to expand her comfort zone—not because she's doing things wrong. Rather, because she's in a relationship with you, and your expectations are just as important and legitimate as hers. This isn't easy, because each of you has to literally expand your ability to tolerate stress. If you're a predictability-first person, it's stressful to endure clutter or disorganization, and if you're a spontaneity-first person, it's stressful to have to live life in a more structured way. And there's no reason why either of you should have to change, other than that you're in a relationship with someone who's wired differently. On the other hand, it wouldn't hurt either of you to become more flexible. In fact, this is usually what happens in successful relationships. People become more balanced and flexible in their coping styles over time.

Summary of Core Differences

<p>1</p> <p>Independence vs. Togetherness</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Independence-First</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Often prefer to engage in activities and tasks independently ➤ Each partner mostly assumes responsibility for meeting their own needs and completing their own tasks. ➤ Rather than assuming responsibility for anticipating each other's needs, each partner expects the other to speak up when they need something. <p><i>Dream:</i> Not having to worry about inadvertently hurting someone by one's inattentiveness. Not being responsible for someone else's happiness.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I'll spend my whole life meeting my partner's needs, and I'll be neglected.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You want me to read your mind! You expect too much! You want me to do things for you that you're perfectly capable of doing for yourself! You're too needy!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Togetherness-First</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Often prefer to engage in activities and tasks together ➤ Each partner counts on help from the other in completing tasks or shouldering burdens. ➤ Each partner anticipates the needs of the other, and attempts to meet them without having to be asked. <p><i>Dream:</i> That my partner would take my feelings into consideration without my demanding it. A feeling of companionship. Never having to be alone.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I'll feel like I'm in this world alone. There will be nobody looking out for me but myself. I've got no backup. I'm on my own.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You live in your own little world! You're self-centered (or selfish)! Any moron would have realized that I needed help. I shouldn't have to ask!</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Present vs. Future Orientation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Invest-in-the-Future-First</p> <p>Delay gratification. Work first, then play.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To share a secure future together.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> If we goof around along the way, we may invest inadequately in our future happiness.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're lazy! You're irresponsible! You're like a child who has to have everything right now!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Live-for-the-Moment-First</p> <p>Invest in the future, but not at the expense of enjoying the present.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To have a life where you enjoy each moment.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> Life will be a continual chore. What's the point, if you don't enjoy it along the way? There will always be more work... enjoyment will fade.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're anal, neurotic, anxious, etc.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Degree of Structure</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Predictability-First</p> <p>Seek security, predictability and order first, and then feel safe to experiment within the safe parameters.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To have a safety net so that life feels more stable, less anxiety-provoking.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> If you don't plan it, it might not happen. Life will be out of control.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're reckless!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Spontaneity-First</p> <p>Seek adventure, creativity, open-endedness first; the rest will fall into place. Be more structured only if a more spontaneous approach fails.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To avoid boredom. Life as an adventure!</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> Slowly dying of boredom. Life will be dull and meaningless.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're boring! You're a coward!</p>
<p>4</p> <p>First Reaction to Things You Don't Like</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Slow-to-Upset</p> <p>Getting upset doesn't help anything. Don't make a big deal of things. It's not the end of the world if everything doesn't go the way you wanted it to.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To have a partner who doesn't freak out when I fail to meet his/her expectations.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> That life will become a never-ending series of things to be upset about.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You are never satisfied! You're a negative person. You're not happy unless you have something to be upset about!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Readily-Upset</p> <p>It's normal to feel upset when something seems wrong, deficient or less than it should be. If nobody gets upset, nothing ever changes.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To have a partner who understands that there's nothing wrong with getting upset if something bothers you.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> That I'll go through life stifling my feelings. I'll feel like a Stepford wife.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're a fake. Underneath it all, you get just as upset as I do. You're just afraid of a little conflict! You're a wimp!</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Resolving Upset Feelings</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Problem-Solving-First</p> <p>Feel better by doing something about the upsetting situation. Solve the problem or make a plan and you'll feel better.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> To have a partner who lets bygones be bygones—who has a positive attitude toward life.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> I don't want to "fuel the fire" by giving her negative feelings too much attention.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You're a hopelessly negative person, a whiner, a victim. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and get over it. Either do something about it or get over it!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Understanding-First</p> <p>Feel better by feeling understood.</p> <p><i>Dream:</i> For someone to understand what its like to be me. To avoid loneliness.</p> <p><i>Fear of Accepting Influence:</i> If you let go of upset feelings before feeling understood, you will never feel understood. You'll just fix things on the surface.</p> <p><i>Critical Stance:</i> You couldn't care less about how I feel! You just want to pretend the whole thing never happened!</p>