

# Why do you get upset?

What is fuelling your feelings of disappointment, hurt, anger or resentment? Your spouse comes home – late again – why does this bother you? Maybe your spouse has had an affair, what truly hurts you about the affair? You see, what we've discovered through the years is that couples do not fight because of in-laws, finances, communication, or children. Couples fight because of something far more significant.

**The reason we get upset and then get into ugly arguments with our mate is because of fear.**

This is not the kind of fear that prevents you from turning off the lights in a room or walking down an empty street. But relational fears like rejection, disconnection, being controlled, failure, invalidation, worthlessness, or unhappiness.

This exercise will finally help you realize why you get upset, and this will give you power over your most heated arguments! Once you can identify why you get upset then you can start changing the way you respond when your “buttons” get pushed (*buttons like feeling devalued, unappreciated, worthless, etc.*).

What you don't know will destroy your marriage!

Your groaning leads to blaming, which leads to wandering, which leads to looking in the wrong places. The importance of this session is the power of identifying why the marriage is stressed out. Couples are not miserable because of finances, kids, or in-laws. The reason couples become miserable is because of **hot buttons**.

Everyone has hot buttons like: Disconnection, Control, Failure, Invalidation, Rejection . . .

There are about 25 major hot buttons and we give you a list on the following page. You will want to use this list with your partner to help identify what his/her hot buttons are.

**You will never get rid of your hot buttons, but you can respond to them differently.**

Now is the part where you will each identify your major hot buttons. This is not a complicated process and really involves simply learning how to ask the question, “So why does that bother you so much?” The more you ask that question the more you will encourage an individual to dig down deep to a hot button. Here is an example of what we are talking about:

Marriage coach: What is the most recent conflict you two have had?

Husband: Oh, that's an easy one. We just got in a huge fight over how much time I work.

Marriage coach (to the wife): What bothers you about your husband's work hours?

Wife: I don't like how much he works; he spends more time at work than he does at home.

Marriage coach (to the wife): Okay, but what bothers you about your husband spending more time at work than at home?

Wife: The kids really miss him a lot.

Marriage coach (to the wife): What bothers you about the kids missing him so much?

Wife: It's like they are not important enough for him to spend any time with, and me to.

Marriage coach (to the wife): Okay, it sounds like what you're telling me is that when your husband spends more time at work than at home, that makes you feel unwanted or unimportant?

Wife: Yes, that is exactly what I feel.

At this point you will finally get down to your hot buttons.

To help you identify your hot buttons read the list of hot buttons. It is not unusual to get stuck when trying to drill down to a hot button. Whenever you get stuck, all you need to do is point to the list of the most common hot buttons, then read the list and pick 1-3 potential hot buttons that fit the argument.

### THE HOT BUTTON DANCE LIST

1. In using this list, **each person circle about three of the hot buttons** listed below that are the most important feelings associated with the conflict.

Rejection

Humiliation

Judgment

Feeling Unimportant

Disconnection

Abandonment

Loneliness

Feeling Ignored

Failure

Neglect

Powerlessness

Condemnation

Being misunderstood

Feeling Unwanted

Being scorned

Danger

Being invalidated

Feeling Disliked

Feeling defective

Mistrust

Inferiority

Feeling Devalued

Worthlessness

Unhappiness

2. Now that you have identified your major hot buttons, **write the hot buttons on the following graph:** "Your Hot Button Dance Exercise" - on page 4. The point of this graph is

to show you, your hot button dance. This is why your marriage is so unsatisfied, the cycle of dysfunction that keeps messing things up for your marriage!

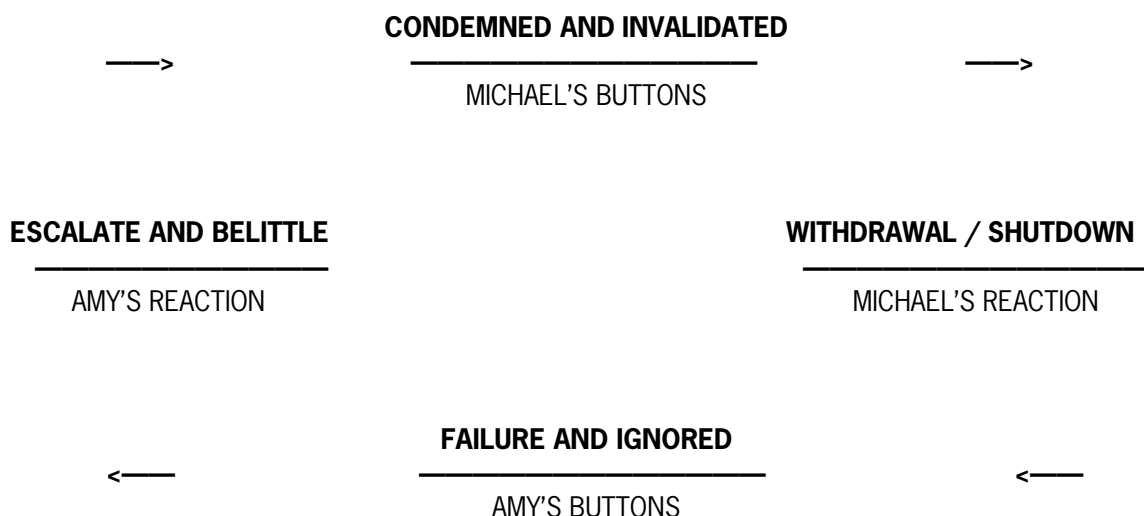
- Once that is completed, ask your partner (it does not matter who asks first) how he/she reacts when one of those buttons gets pushed. You might get a response like, “Well, when I feel unimportant, I guess I tend to gripe and complain.” At this point, **summarize what you heard by filling it in the appropriate reaction space.** In this example you would write “gripe and complain” in the woman’s or the man’s reaction space.

The power in filling out this graph is that you get to see why your arguments spiral out of control. **The important thing to remember is that couples can not change their hot buttons. What they can change, however, is their reaction to a hot button getting pushed.** That is the focus, to help change the way you react to your buttons getting pushed.

To help you further understand the graph, I have included an example of a couple’s hot button dance. Their hot button dance is describing a frequent fight they used to get in to when first married. Michael had an inability to bring home ATM receipts when he travelled for business. This did not help his wife, Amy balance the check book because she never knew how much money he had taken out during a trip. This caused a massive amount of conflict for the couple and it was frustrating to both. Hopefully this context will help you understand better your hot button dance.

**Notice how each person’s reactions actually end up pushing the other person’s hot buttons!** This is so important to point out. You need to understand that your dysfunctional reactions only make things worse in your marriage. Instead of using your old reaction style, you need to adopt the new skills you are learning - like validation, listening, forgiving, and creating a safe relationship.

## MICHAEL AND AMY’S HOT BUTTON DANCE



# YOUR HOT BUTTON DANCE EXERCISE

Write short summary of your conflict here:

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**HIS** BUTTONS



**HER** REACTION



**HIS** REACTION



**HER** BUTTONS

**Unproductive Responses** (The 4 Risk Factors of Divorce from Drs. Howard Markman and Scott Stanley).

**1. Escalate**

**2. Avoid**

**3. Dishonor**

**4. Negative Beliefs**