



THE GUY'S AIRBAG

A RELATIONSHIP PRE-CRASH COURSE

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Hello, and welcome to “The Guy’s Airbag: A Relationship Pre-Crash Course,” an ebook brought to you by Jason Fierstein. Jason is a licensed professional counselor in Phoenix, Arizona, and works with men and couples just like you to create healthier and happier relationships. He is known locally as “the man that men will talk to.”

What if you had an airbag for your relationship? What if when things went really wrong, you had solid skills and tools designed to help you prevent a relationship crash? Would you believe it if I told you some of the secrets were inside this ebook?

I picked this title because I want to help you prevent a fatal crash in your relationship. I see victims of wrecks all the time. Too often, men and couples stumble into counseling after a crash, are damaged and angry, and never had the skills and tools to know how to prevent their fatal crash. The relationship is dead, and the post-mortem reveals very little because the pain and suffering often obscures the truth of why the relationship died.

Or, many other times, the relationship suffers a slow death over time. Slowly, the relationship begins to change, and then over time, things get to the point that there can’t be resolution because it’s too late. It slips into a place where things have gotten worse, and you can’t put your finger on exactly when, or how, things took a turn for the worse with your wife or girlfriend.

Maybe your relationship is on life support, or maybe an affair has damaged your relationship to the point of irreconcilable differences. These days, everything seems to be held together by a string, and it didn’t used to be this way. Life was way different when you were both honeymooning. You were happier; she was happier; and you were worrying less and working way less hard than you are now.

In addition, I see a lot of guys start new relationships with the same faulty thinking that got them into trouble the first time. They are re-creating the cycle and keep picking the same partner over and over again. Or, they’ll keep going back to a bad relationship. Their heart says yes, and their head says no. Maybe you know somebody like this. Maybe this is you.

Whichever way it ends, the relationship damage has happened, and both parties are stunned. They’re walking away from the scene not knowing what hit them. They’re confused and scared. It’s hard to look back on a car wreck and immediately know whose fault it was or who’s to blame for the accident. It’s the same in a relationship. Too often I see relationships that have crashed and burned, and it’s too late to repair the damage. A lot of the time, the counseling work begins there, after the fact, but I propose something different for you.

My goal in creating this ebook for men is to prevent you and your relationship from getting to the point of no return. I designed this ebook as a personal “airbag” to prevent you from the damages that your relationship on a crash course is bound to suffer.

This ebook will give you very practical skills, tips, and ideas to not only help patch up your relationship, but to prevent it from getting to the point of a life-threatening crash. It’s all about prevention - if you take the steps to stave off a wreck, just like defensive driving on the road, you lessen your marriage’s mortality rate. You both love each other and want to make it work, so this ebook aims to help keep you together and to keep you happy.

A lot of people ask me why I do this work at all. Men and women alike tell me at parties and social gatherings “Well, men just don’t ask for help. They hold it all in. Counseling men seems like a good idea, but does it work? Do guys really ask for help?”

The answer is definitely a “yes” to both questions. Men need help in their lives the same way women do, but it’s true; guys have a harder time asking for help. Coming into counseling is sometimes even more difficult. A root canal sounds more attractive to some men whom I talk with. Opening up, expressing emotions and feelings, learning how to communicate - it’s just too much work and too hard, they say. A lot of men want the quick fix and want it at the eleventh hour, when chances are much slimmer that their relationship will survive until the midnight hour.

This ebook is divided into four separate sections, each addressing different elements of success for men in relationships with their partners and with themselves.

The first section is called “The Real Hurdles Guys Have in Relationships”. I also included “The Hulk Complex” as a part of this section too, because we need to talk about the anger guys suppress, so this is key. Together, we’ll take a look at what the most common issues that guys deal with in intimate relationships are. We’ll come up with what works and what doesn’t work to help fix those issues that you’re struggling with. We’ll get you tuned up and back on the road.

“Cracking the She-Code” is the second part. Here, I’ll present real testimonials from women I’ve talked to about their experiences with men in relationships, so that you can take those new ideas and develop them for your own. The age-old secrets of what women want in a relationship are right here for you, as to leave you less confused in your own. Now you have no excuse. You’ll get to hear the straight story, right from the source.

Next, we’ll discuss the very basics of communicating well and effectively with your partner in the third section called “The Nuts and Bolts of Great Communication”. Here, I’ll talk about the most

critical things about effective communication, which, in my opinion, is the number-one relationship factor that will make your relationship sink or swim. So, get a manila pad and take notes. You'll then have the critical skills to turn around the way that you listen and communicate with your wife or girlfriend.

And finally, in the section called "The Wall", we'll take a sneak peek into a universal phenomenon that many guys deal with in their relationship - which is emotional distancing. Too often, guys who avoid or withdraw from their women make things worse. I want to coach you to not go down that road, or to bring you back if you have. So many men I talk with or work with in counseling report hiding behind this invisible wall. Most of the time, they are oblivious to this phenomenon, or it's just plain invisible to them. The invisibility factor is much worse and creates way more problems in a relationship. I want to show you that this wall is the culprit for a lot of unneeded suffering and distance, and can be successfully worked on to bring you closer to your woman.

This is an interactive ebook. It will challenge you to apply these skills to your life and to your relationship. Through the use of exercises, risk-taking challenges, open-ended questions, and writing, you'll have the opportunity to not just read this ebook, but to engage with it directly if you so choose. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

My goal with this ebook is to have you get into the spirit of relationship change right now. Not later, but right now. Try to envision your relationship from a vantage point high above it, so you can gain perspective on it. This will allow you to see more non-judgmentally and compassionately. Sometimes, when we're directly in our lives, it's hard to see the forest for the trees.

I want you to get in the habit of seeing the forest for the trees and seeing your relationship as ever-changing and dynamic. Your relationship is like your life; it can be whatever you want it to be. Although we can't control other people, especially not our significant others, we can control the way we think, feel, act, and thus create our lives. Our lives, like our relationships, are malleable and mirror images of the way our minds work.

We create what we believe about our lives, so if you have negative messages and "old tapes" playing in your mind, chances are that you end up creating those. But, as those negative messages needed to be uploaded into your mind, so, too can they be wiped and replaced with new software, new and more positive ideas about your relationship or your life.

If you want a great relationship, you can have it. Bottom line. Does it take work? Yes. Will it test you? Absolutely. Will you feel like giving up and wiping your hands sometimes? Perhaps. But, rela-

tionships are a real vehicle for growth, and, although you might not know it, they can challenge you and provide you with the biggest learning curve of your life if you let them. You can grow personally, psychologically, and spiritually from relationship work. I'll bet you're telling yourself, "Man, I didn't know what I was getting into." But, are you up for the challenge? I hope to provide some ideas to help you take on that challenge with this ebook.

I want to begin by prepping you for your relationship course today by asking you, what is the one biggest goal you'd like to achieve when it comes to creating a better relationship with your wife or girlfriend? Or, if you're currently single, what is the one biggest goal you have for your future relationship? Think about this for a minute. I want to get you primed for the work we're about to start.

Try to sit in a comfortable spot and think about these questions, write them down, or do whatever you need to help yourself work towards the answers here.

I want you to use this time to really hone in on and identify the things that need work in your relationship. A lot of the time, guys know that there is a problem and don't have the slightest clue about where to begin. They don't know what the problems are to begin with, let alone what to start working on.

I invite you to use this time before the ebook really begins to stay with the questions I am about to ask you. One of my coaches uses the S.W.O.T. analysis in her work to identify different business or relationship factors to promote success and growth. S.W.O.T. simply stands for:

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

So, at this preparation stage of the ebook, use these factors to gauge your relationship's standing now. Again, write them down, keep them to yourself, or share them with your girlfriend or wife, and really start a dialogue.

Here are some example questions to get you going: What are the strengths of our relationship now? What is working well currently?

For weaknesses, you can brainstorm for weaknesses, such as types of conflicts you both have, jealousy, insecurity, any fears. This relationship factor will require a little more insight and honesty.

Next, identify what the opportunities for growth are. How can you create change? I know you must want to create relationship change or else you wouldn't have downloaded this ebook. What opportunities do you see right in front of you? Are there activities that you can start to do together? What do you both like to do as a couple? Maybe you haven't been spending a lot of time together and want to start to - there are plenty of opportunities to do that. Also, are there opportunities to get counseling, do couples workshops, opportunities to talk together? I'm sure there are, and excuses don't count for opportunities. We make excuses to obscure the freedom we have in creating opportunities.

Lastly, what are the threats that face the both of you? What are the contributing factors to the problems in your relationship? These might be other difficult factors to identify because they might not be as apparent as ideas from the other factors. Are there threats from the outside or from the inside? I'll bet that if you sit with this one, you'll see that many of the threats come from within, if not all of them. Do the best you can and write as many threats as you can think of.

We begin with the first section of *The Guy's Airbag*, called "The Real Hurdles Guys Have in Relationships." We'll take a look at the most common types of problems that actual men report having in their intimate relationships, and put our heads together to come up with real solutions for the problems of unexpressed anger and communication that cripple an otherwise good relationship.

I've also included a subsection called "The Hulk Complex" to deal with the role of anger in men's lives. Needless to say, anger ends up creating way more destruction to a relationship than you would believe, whether it's expressed or not.

Of the men that I have surveyed over the years, general problems with their relationship or marriage have stood above any other issue that guys struggle with as a whole. Guys want to fix their marriages, have better self-esteem (in or out of the relationship), stop fighting with their mate, not feel depressed, and improve their communication. They want to feel important to their women, feel connected (although we won't say it like that), enjoy security and trust, and have an active sex life. Men want to feel in control of their relationship in the same way they want to feel in control of other parts of their life - work, play, sports, and the like.

The ways we go about it are different, but I'm not always convinced of that when I hear that men and women are from totally different planets. We have a lot of basic needs that are the same, and, yes, men and women go about getting those needs met in different ways,

The control factor is important because guys are not good at feeling out of control and helpless.

We're fixers and doers, and when it comes to relationships, it's really hard for most men to admit helplessness and feeling out of control. We'll just avoid those feelings, do other activities to forget about them, or generally not check in with those feelings when they come up. Guys tell me that they want to get a handle on their relationship and that they want to improve it, control it, take it back, or generally aren't in the place where they feel secure in it.

That's why women accuse us of always wanting to "fix" the problem instead of listen to them. We are "creatures that fix things," and if a relationship is needing repair, our DNA kicks in and we go to work on fixing that which is broken. To feel helpless and out of control are two experiences that men do not have a very easy time having, let alone admitting, even in counseling.

A second major hurdle men deal with in relationships is problem, or non-existent, communication. It is probably the biggest and most obtrusive problem for most guys in their relationship. I could do a whole other ebook on just this topic alone. And if I could pick a second runner-up problem, it would be about expressing anger in a healthy way. And what do you know? Both are related to each other! We could kill two birds with one stone and talk about both. So here we go.

Bad communication is probably the single biggest general problem that men get into in their relationships. Period. The failure to speak clearly, from our heart, and in the present moment when it happens creates an enormous amount of problems for men. We end up making assumptions, playing guessing games, shut off our listening capacity, and yell and scream, or duck and avoid conflict situations and make them worse. We do all sorts of trouble behavior in our intimate relationships, but why?

Our romantic relationships are often mirrors of the early relationships we model when we first learn how to have a relationship. We take on these patterns from our parents growing up. A lot of the ways we act in our intimate relationships today can be traced back to early experiences learning how to function in relationships. The way we communicate with our mate is no different; we often communicate with them the way that we saw our parents communicating with each other. We attract mates because we are unfinished with some of the early relationship conflict from the past. So, next time you ask yourself why you've attracted the same women, whether that's a date, girlfriend, or wife, consider that you might be onto something. Take a look at who you're attracting and why. Other than physique, sexual attraction, and the superficial traits, dig a little deeper to find the answers you seek.

We're now going to take a break to do an exercise. I want to ask you some questions to get you thinking about the family you grew up in, and consider how current relationship problems are re-creations of past family relationships.

How did you learn to communicate in your family relationships growing up?

Did you hear a lot of fighting in your household? How did you deal with conflict as a young child?

Did you have a parent who yelled and screamed or slammed things?

Did you grow up angry or afraid of either parent? Do you still hold those same feelings now around your current mate?

Did the other parent, maybe your father, withdraw from conflict and avoid it?

What role did you play in your family - a scapegoat for others' problems, the conflict resolver, the bad child?

Spend a minute and think back to those early experiences growing up. Picture yourself as a young boy and imagine how, when growing up, you experienced any conflict that you saw, or didn't see. Sometimes fighting that should have happened never did, and resentments got stuffed and grew over time. For some, their parents never fought, and both withheld anger and conflict because they "didn't want to fight in front of the kids." Maybe this was an excuse because, in their minds, neither could face the potential damage of a fight.

Often, a child will model one of these behaviors from one parent or the other and will attract a mate who does the opposite behavior. We often attract this opposite behavior into our lives because we are attracted to resolving the conflict that we started when we were young. This is a complex idea, and I don't want to get into too much psychobabble, but the conflicts that we create in our current relationships are often unresolved conflict that date back to the beginning of your life, usually with a parent.

Most men choose not to get angry because they are either really afraid of their anger and/or are afraid that if they "unleash" their anger on their mate that she will react wildly and either blow up herself or end up rejecting him because she can't deal with his rage. There's a lot here to unpack, so let's go slowly.

We're at the subsection now called "The Hulk Complex". I've included it as a section within a section because it is definitely one of the biggest hurdles for guys in relationships. There are two types of ways that guys generally express their anger. Most men either stuff their anger inside themselves or stow it away. Or, on the other end of the spectrum, they explode in a Hulk-like warpath when they hit the boiling point. Okay, so maybe they don't throw cars into buildings, but you get the idea. Or, sometimes it's acting out anger in both ways. I know a lot of men who stuff their anger inside for a while and then explode like a pressure cooker when they are triggered by their women in just the right way.

Guys often say that they "are not that guy." They'll say, "That's not me. I'm not an angry person."

Let me first say that there is a huge difference between identifying ourselves as being angry and actually being angry itself. It's one thing to identify ourselves as "angry people," which is an identity thing, and another thing to actually have the experience of being angry. When we reject ourselves as not an "angry guy," we take on two identities: First, we create an identity of "angry guy." Then we reject it. We replace it with a positive identity, and then we want that good, acceptable identity.

So, now, we've not only stuffed our anger, we've stuffed an identity or a story about the anger, and we further distance ourselves from that. The more stuffing that we do, the more distant we become from our anger. When we do this over and over, we end up suppressing who we are. It's like stuffing the core of our feelings and compromising who we are. Men need to understand that expression of anger in a healthy way is good for them and good for their relationship.

What I know is that men are afraid of their own anger most of the time. Some guys who are overly nice tend to stuff their anger inside. They're afraid that if they let their anger out, the people that they love will reject them. They end up creating this whole mask about being "the nice guy," and what it does is compromise their needs and pushes them aside to please other people and meet their needs. It's a game because "nice guys" want to be lap dogs for other people. They want to be validated, loved, praised - and end up swallowing their soul. The very thought of expressing their anger is mortifying because if that happened, terrible things would happen. In their minds, jobs would be lost, women would abandon them, they would be terrible wrecks. But, the truth is quite different. These guys just don't know it.

On the other end of the anger spectrum, guys who rage out and show more outwardly anger tend to alienate everyone they know. These are the kinds of guys whom people don't want to be around. They are the kinds of guys that the "nice guy" is afraid of becoming, and yet is probably attracted to as well. "Raging bulls" also can tend to stuff their anger inside, out of fear of the damage that they'll inflict on those around them.

I now want to talk more in depth about this idea of being afraid of one's anger because I think it's crucial to understand it as a root to other problems in a guy's relationship.

One's fear of anger is just as preventative for growth as is anger itself. They are two different things but are related so closely that it's hard to see the subtle difference. A lot of men don't realize that they are both afraid of their anger - for the damaging effects that they think they will create when it's unleashed - and are dealing with anger itself. For men, a lot of times being afraid of their anger and the effects of playing out their anger make their mental health worse off. How guys often deal with this is that they avoid or suppress their anger and their fear of it and end up creating depression, anxiety, and

a host of other problems that didn't need to be there.

Many men I speak to are afraid of the damaging effects of their anger on other people. They are simply afraid of unleashing what they think will be destructive anger onto their mates, partners, co-workers, or family, so they muzzle it. Their minds make up all of these scenarios, based on past experiences, of what will happen when their anger comes out. Men are known to stuff their anger, suppress it, mute it, or fail to communicate it. This creates a host of problems. The anger is in there, building up over time like a pressure cooker, and needs a release valve to depressurize it. It'll either need to explode, or it will fade away and keep building up. The cycles of anger explosion and repression or avoidance keep happening over and over, and keep getting triggered by the same kinds of people who upset us.

So, without a good valve, the anger gets mutated. It comes out as sideswipes, quips, sarcasm, or criticism. It is worn on the sleeve and becomes part of one's overall personality. It becomes "who we are" and how others see us, especially our wives and girlfriends. We forget or simply don't have a clue about how to deal with it effectively for fear that we'll do it ineffectively and be rejected by others for our raging behavior.

We get afraid of our own anger, but the reality is that anger is a normal and natural force that needs expression just like the other feelings that we experience, such as sadness, pain, happiness, etc. But, somehow along the way, either by cultural forces or gender expectations or both, we as men learned to stuff that natural force that is anger. We hid it and stopped its organic and expressive flow.

So, learning to express our anger in a healthy way is a must to finding better mental health and more open and happier relationships. Learning to simply say, "I'm angry about this," or "I'm angry at you," are acceptable and non-violent ways to express yourself. It's difficult to do because we're usually fixated on the person who caused us to be angry and subsequently spend all of our time and psychic energy damning them and their actions that caused us to be angry. Taking responsibility for our own anger is a must, and we must learn to get better in touch with our own anger, so that it does not drive us into the ground and run our lives.

To get to the physical root of the your anger, I want you to pay very, very close attention to the anger as a pure feeling in your body when it arises, as it surely will, the next time you have an argument with someone close. Most, if not all of the time, what happens is that we aren't aware of that experience in our heart, or our chest or stomach. The angry energy is right there, in your body, but it takes a clearer awareness that that is happening. We usually fight out of our heads, which makes sense, and end up neglecting the other sources of angry energy. So, the next time you find yourself in a conflict

or a fight with your woman, as impossible as it might be, I want you to sit with that angry energy on your body for just thirty seconds. You're also defusing the conflict in a major way, which is a great byproduct of just sitting with yourself and your physical experience in your body.

Before we end this important section of the ebook, we have one exercise. I want you to stop and think about the status of your relationship. Ideally, I want you to sit down with yourself first and make a list of the most important or critical issues that you are dealing with in your relationship. This is really an exercise in honesty with yourself. I assume you are motivated to make changes or else you wouldn't have picked up this CD. You can share these with your partner later, if you choose to.

Maybe you're a poor listener. Maybe you need help communicating in a way that doesn't start a fight. Maybe you deal with anger and feel scared of it or don't know what to do with it. Write that down.

I want you to take some time and name each issue by name, and write them all down. You'll be creating three columns side by side, so create these on paper or on your computer.

In one column, I want you to write down the issues that present the most difficulty for you in one list and rank them by priority. Put the most pressing issues at the top, and then the less critical issues lower down the list. You'll be really contemplating this one. Maybe you haven't really sat down to consider this exercise in your life before, so it's new and your mind can't come with anything. It's okay. Take some time right now, jot a couple ideas, and leave it and come back. This is an open project that is ongoing. This does not need to be completed by the end of this CD. This exercise is fluid just like you are and changes with you. You'll add to the columns as you go along over time.

In a second column adjacent to the first, I want you to make a second column called "What Would It Look Like If This Problem Was Solved?" and answer each of the corresponding issues that you listed in the first column.

In the third column, I want you to call this "What's Getting in My Way?" This will be the trickiest of the three columns. I want you to consider the roadblocks that prevent the successes you wish for in column two, like in the S.W.O.T. exercise before. What types of problems, either caused by you, by your partner, or by your particular situation, prevent you from having the ideal relationship you want? And what will you need to overcome those obstacles?

Now, we're going into the next section called "Cracking the She-Code". There are some critical things that are important to know about what women think about their relationships and what they want you to know specifically. In researching material for this ebook, I spent a lot of time talking

with all kinds of women, some who are professional counselors and psychologists, and some who are not, about their own personal experiences with men in relationships. I asked them several interview questions, and we'll explore those all in this section.

I want to concentrate on one critical question first. One question I had for these women was this: What do you see as the three biggest problems men have in intimate relationships?

For this question, "What do you see as the three biggest problems men have in intimate relationships?" the answers were really quite interesting. Women said that men want to fix everything instead of just validating their feelings. These same women said that men hold in their feelings and then react quickly to events or problems because their emotions start to control them. They said that men are afraid to show their partner the vulnerable side of them because they fear their partner will think they're weak and cannot take care of her. A number of women I spoke with also named communication, honesty, trust, allowing themselves to be vulnerable, and too much analytic thinking as problems.

Think about these for a minute. Scan back to the beginning of this question if you need some more time to think about the answers that these women are giving you. This is like verbal gold for you, and I want you to reflect on these responses. Plug in your thoughts here and see if what these women are saying matches the problems you have written earlier.

What would your woman say if asked? What are the problems that she is having with you in your relationship? And the \$20,000 question: How well could you listen to her if you had to and really take in what she is saying about the problems that she is having with you?

So, what about the top three problems that women have? What are women saying about themselves in their relationships?

In surveying these women about their own relationship perceptions, they stated that that they sometimes force their partners into communicating instead of easing into it.

One interviewee said that women search for the "mythical mate". What does this mean? It means that women look for something or someone that does not exist - a man who can fulfill a myth or a fantasy relationship. Women are looking for somebody that you are not, or could be. They see the ideal you, not the you that they have. The downside to this is that women tend to get into relationships to "fix" their guy, which ends up going bust most of the time because guys have a hard time changing when they are being mummied by their women. Men react the same way to women who want to change

them as they did to their mommies growing up. Instead of shouting, “No,” guys will just not comply and force their women to keep working hard to change them. A lot of relationships are based on this dynamic, which doesn’t really work.

Another thing I found was that women stated that if their partner does not do something on their own without being told, then she thinks he does not love her because she had to tell him her need (mind reading). In fact, men are much more likely to need direct communication without any bandwidth in which to “mind read” or to guess what is going on with their partner. Guys simply “can’t take a hint” a lot of the time and end up failing the hidden and silent expectations of their women. Then, they get mad at their men because their guys just “don’t get it” but fail to look inside and see just how clearly they are communicating themselves and their needs to their men. They are reacting to their own assumptions and expectations of their men, which creates a cycle of frustration and anger.

Women also answered that they do not understand why men sometimes bury themselves in work to help manage their stress, and it is not because he wants to get away from her. Women stated that, for men, being open was quite scary and that they are afraid they may scare their girl away. Some said that men have a problem creating an equal partnership and sometimes feel misunderstood. Also, women said that nagging or repeating things to their guys created a situation in which they were not heard anymore. Other responses included being too emotional and impulsive.

When women were asked this question: “What does an ideal relationship look like to you, from a female perspective?” women had some things to say about their men and relationships. Many women agreed that, most importantly, they wanted to be able to communicate without having their guy try to fix the problem. They wanted men to validate their feelings instead of bringing their own solutions to the problem. I want to say something about this one because I know that women are onto something. I asked these women, hoping that they would answer in this way. I wanted you to hear it straight from them.

If there is one thing that seems pretty universal with the guys I work with, it’s their inability to just simply listen. It’s one of the most difficult things for either sex to do when in an intimate relationship. I know. But, too often, guys try to apply a solution to the problem. It’s evolutionary, what we do. We try to use our caveman minds to figure out how to generate fire, or get a stone wheel to run. But with relationships, it’s the opposite approach that will work best. I’m giving you some pointers about how to listen better and fix less. Here we go:

You’ve gotta listen. Just sit back and listen to what your partner is saying and try to get a sense of how she might be feeling underneath.

Watch your defensiveness. When you start to get defensive, you're taking it personally. If she's upset or emotional, the first response men have is to think that it's about them. Not only can this be prematurely self-centered, it just may be dead wrong.

You gotta just listen, man. Sit back again and just listen.

Repeat back to hear what you hear her saying. Summarize. This is called reflective listening, and it'll show her that you're listening, Reflect back or summarize the points you hear her saying.

Don't propose solutions. She doesn't want them from you, no matter how good or proven your solutions are. This is not the office, and you're not getting paid for your smart brain. If she asks for your solutions or your fix, then share it with her. But get into the habit of waiting for her to ask you for help.

Ask her if you could offer her your solution. If she says no, they don't give it to her. But inviting her into your solution, instead of pushing onto her, is different and gives her some freedom to choose. And lastly, you gotta listen. Did I mention that previously? I don't think so, so I'll say it once more: listen. If you can pull one thing from this course, and one thing only, I would wish that you take this one idea in and use it.

I work with one couple in counseling where the husband constantly creates these scenarios in which his wife is rejecting him when she gets angry. He's not listening to what's really going on with her because he is too busy thinking about why she is rejecting him when she's angry. The reality, after checking it out with her and asking her what's really going on, is that she has anger about other things that aren't related to him. He's creating ideas in his head and then reacting to them. He often leaves conflicts or arguments feeling quite upset because he does this and doesn't really even understand what's happening with his wife because he never sat still to listen to what is actually going on with her in the first place. He assumed she was always mad at him and was making arguments much worse. He started to listen better, and fighting became less in intensity and less in consistency.

Doing things outdoors together. Laughing together. Being equal partners - even if it's just dishes and cooking, laughing - a lot, being with your best friend. Equal trust, respect, and equality. Both are better for being in a relationship; both have strengths the other does and does not have...I think this is for both. Interdependence...connection without codependency, independence without distance

What do you think a guy (yours perhaps?) might say his ideal relationship looks like? Spending time

together and not telling him the same thing over and over again concerning things that need to be done, and admitting to being wrong at times.

What do women want more of in their relationships? Communicating without fixing. How about men? Being made to feel important and indispensable. Women want more hand holding, sweet gestures, time together, commitment, (which includes monogamy!), honesty, directness, fun :)

We now begin the third section of the ebook, called “Finding the Words”, and I want to ask you a very blunt question. How good of a communicator do you consider yourself? Or, a more complete question may ask, “How would other people, such as your current or previous partners, rate you as a communicator?” Be honest, guys. Growth never comes without a little honesty.

“Finding the Words” is an idea I had from all the times that I have seen guys freeze up, say nothing, and look bewildered in couples counseling. It’s that “deer-in-the-headlights” experience. You know the one I am talking about, where the woman is yelling or crying at the man, and the poor guy doesn’t have a clue as to what to do. He doesn’t know that his woman desperately wants him to open up and share his feelings. He has no idea what she wants, or how to do it if he figured it out. He’s trying to find the words and comes up short. Instead, he’ll end up retreating to one of several safe places, whether he needs to flee the scene and leave a potential conflict, or start yelling, or just stand there and not say anything.

So, I want to give you the tools to communicate to get what you want and to give her what she wants. What she wants is for you to communicate your needs and feelings in a way that is not harmful to yourself or to her.

Communication, along with emotional intimacy, are the two hardest things for a guy to do. Actually, they are kind of related. Effective communication in a relationship is being intimate. You are baring your soul in a way that is not being defensive. Most of the time, guys are busy defending or avoiding, which makes it difficult to really communicate the emotions, feelings, and needs that are going on within them. Communication, or lack thereof, has led to countless crashes of otherwise decent relationships. I have seen the smartest, brightest couples fail the communication test miserably. They get into blaming, shaming, criticizing, and failing to take responsibility for their role in relationship conflict.

This is one of the toughest things you’ll learn in this ebook, so have faith, tenacity, and keep on going, even if you think you’re not doing it right. Effective communication is like riding a bike with training wheels. It’s a skill like any other skill that requires practice. It will increase your self-aware-

ness, confidence, and your ability to take responsibility.

Needs and feelings. Just three words. Needs and feelings. What do you think of when I say those words? They sound so simple when I say them, but for most guys, they are the most elusive concepts in the whole world. Speaking from needs and from feelings will get you out of disastrous conflict most every time. They are the airbags of your communication, bar none.

I want you to consider the first of these three words - needs - the next time you get angry, something goes wrong in your life, or when you have a blowout with your partner. I want to ask this question of you: What is it that you are needing from this person? What is it that this person is failing to give to you right now, in this moment? We get angry with others when they fail to meet our needs. This is tricky because it's not like you always need something tangible from your woman. Maybe you need one or more of the following: attention, love, food, security, affection, sex, to be heard or listened to. It's possible that you need alone time, or time to yourself. Or, maybe you need more time with her. In the midst of a fight or conflict, it's really, really hard to stop, take a breath, and get in touch with what need is not being met. Do you know why? Because we succumb to our defenses. When we get defensive, retreat from conflict, explode in anger, withdraw, criticize, or blame, we are turning to our defenses. And why don't these things work? Let me tell you.

These defenses create a snowball effect. Think of a tiny snowball bouncing down the side of a mountain, accumulating more and more snow and more and more speed. Soon, the small snowball is a titan and is careening down the side of the mountain towards the villagers. For argument's sake, think of the way you do conflict as that snowball and your relationship as the village that the snowball is on course to squash. The snowball didn't start out as mammoth as it is once it's at the end of its journey down the side of the mountain. And neither was your fight with your woman. When you defend yourself or do any of the other things I just mentioned, it creates more of the same of itself. Conflict creates more conflict. When people feel threatened, their protective shell comes up and starts to defend their fragile ego from more attack. Different people have different defenses and thus attack differently. So, you may find yourself in different types of conflict with different people.

Speaking needs is the first critical part to healthy and effective communication. Speaking feelings is the second and harder one for men to deal with. Women are usually more emotionally attuned than men are. Call it evolutionary wiring, or call it what you will. The activities that we find ourselves doing as men generally don't revolve around feelings. We don't talk about our feelings to others. We hide them and hold them in. We stuff them so tight inside, and don't let others - not even those closest to us - see them most of the time. We don't cry. We don't have too many emotional outlets unless there is alcohol involved. And then we might loosen our lips and defenses and cozy up to our feelings

in a way that regular life doesn't permit us to.

Is this crazy? Our culture expects men to be complete partners. Historically, it seemed easier for men. Our roles were more clearly defined. In the Stone Age, we might have been expected to create fire or chop up some brontosaurus cutlets. In the 1950s, we were the breadwinners, and we worked to support our families. We had no business with feelings. What are feelings? Aren't those things better left to the female domain?

But now, in the 21st century of self-help, Oprah, two-income households, and mutual parenting, the role of men has changed. There is much more expectation of men to be more whole partners. No longer are we limited to the breadwinner role. Much more is expected of us as relationship partners, and men are now expected to be much more forthright about their feelings to their women. So, when did all of this happen? Culture has had a lot to do with changing the conversation over the last several decades. Men are expected to do much more, and being comfortable and expressive with their emotions is now a priority. We mostly see the absence of emotions as symptoms in our culture, through jokes, bad sitcom plots, and general "men vs. women" thinking.

I think guys are very emotional beings and are capable of having the kind of emotionally based relationships that women want them to have. I think that men not only are capable of having them, but I think that they want them. The problem is that most guys don't know where to begin. They want to be emotionally aware but don't have the tools to know how to do so. They didn't learn it from their fathers, who were just as unaware or inept at communicating their feelings. So, how is a guy to learn how to be emotionally aware and intelligent? Someone who is aware of their feelings and can communicate them in a way that builds instead of destroys a relationship?

But, a lot of guys mention that they find themselves having the same kind of conflict with different women. Notice this pattern in your own life? It's not a coincidence. We create the same types of conflict over and over again, until we can wise up and start to change that which is in us that is hurt, wounded, fearful, or pain-ridden, as to extinguish the energy that drives that perpetual conflict. Does that make sense?

We are actually attracted in some ways to having certain types of conflict in our lives. Maybe we had an overbearing mother or had a certain type of way of interacting with a female figure in our early life. Well, guess what. We attract that unfinished conflict back into our lives through our intimate relationship. A lot of counseling has to do with bringing back those early conflicts and working them out so that they don't hold dominion over our current lives. We re-create conflicts in our lives to try to work them through and finish them. Everybody does this, so (a) you're not crazy, (b) you're as cra-

zy as every last one of us, (c) the key to a successful relationship ultimately lies in turning these early forces around and using them for the better.

Our relationship pre-crash course moves on to the last section, entitled “The Wall”. This section is a little more philosophical. In it, I want to talk with you about a common occurrence I see with men. Many I talk to report feeling like they have a wall in front of them. It’s a feeling of distance between themselves and their loved ones, especially their wife or girlfriend. I hear so many men talk about this wall that I felt it was really important to address on this CD.

I call it “The Wall” because it continues to remind me of the Pink Floyd song of the same name. On their famous album, Pink Floyd - I later learned - is both the band and the name of the protagonist of the album. It’s a story about a guy who chooses to build an emotional wall around himself to prevent himself from falling victim to the physical and emotional problems that could destroy him. Each new brick in the wall is filled in with every new incident of pain that he experiences. Each brick reinforces and shuts Pink out from the rest of the world. Pink ends up walling himself into insanity, but the point is, that he shuts the pains of the world out by constructing this wall around him because that’s the temporary fix.

Most men know how to avoid the painful situations that they experience by constructing “The Wall”. In early childhood, as boys, we learn how to do this from early environments or from parents who taught us to do the same thing. We model this kind of avoidance behavior and grow up into adult men still doing these childhood behaviors. But they don’t work in the long run.

Constantly avoiding problematic situations in a relationship will lead to foundational problems or the end of a relationship. It’s not the situations that we avoid or wall up against. It’s the emotions that come as a result. We avoid our emotions because we avoided similar situations in the past growing up as young boys in our families. We never learned to do any differently. And, in turn, avoidance leads to a host of other problems, whether that’s rifts in a relationship, money problems, stress, physical problems, alcohol or drug abuse, infidelity, or general disease within one’s own skin.

In what ways do you avoid situations, people, or your life?

The energy that it takes to uphold this avoidance stays stuffed inside oneself. Feelings stay trapped, and just because someone avoids them doesn’t mean they go away. It’s like sweeping the dirt under the carpet. The dirt is still there, but denial might say otherwise. We use denial as a way to cope with the reality that is different from our desire for it to be to our liking. So, the feelings are still there, and they don’t go away as much as we would like them to. They don’t go away until we deal with the

root cause of the negative feelings themselves.

I want to take a minute to talk with you and ask you about how “The Wall” plays out in your life and in your relationships. Are you the type of guy who can confront feelings and situations head on? Or are you more prone to avoiding your feelings and situations that come up that are too hard to deal with? What would former or current partners say about you concerning any avoidance behaviors that they might have seen you do?

Think about one problem area in your life, something that has been chronically plaguing you for some time now. Maybe it’s something that you have wanted to say to your mother or father but have been afraid to for all these years. Maybe it’s something that you have hidden from your own self and locked away in the basement of your mind and heart for some time now. Identify one area of your life that you avoid and stay with it for a minute now.

Okay, got it? Now think about how you have traditionally handled that conflict in the past. I want you to ask yourself, “Is the current outcome satisfactory to me? Do I need a different outcome from this conflict, and if so, what have I missed by avoiding engaging in it?”

I want to give you some more examples of common areas of avoidance, to give you a better sense of what I mean:

a conflict that you don’t want to have with your girlfriend or wife because you’re scared of her response to you telling someone close to you how you really feel, for fear of being rejected.

money situations in which you have avoided taking action, such as paying bills or taxes

job or career concerns, such as not looking for a new job or staying put at your old one and complaining about it all the time something that stresses you, either physically or emotionally, that you have avoided. It could be a problematic co-worker or boss, or it could be a friend who can’t stop employing you as their counselor.

Avoiding taking action for fear of actually succeeding at it (yes, you heard me right on that one).

Rejection and fear of rejection are very real concerns and fuel for the avoidance game.

I want you to ask yourself: “Because I avoid such and such in my life, am I really afraid that something bad might happen if I actually proceed and do it?”

I invite you to keep a separate journal, with a section called “What I Avoid.” I want you to write

down those things that you tend to avoid in your life and how you avoid them. I want to help you create more awareness about the things that you do avoid. You know, most of the time, we're not even aware of the things that we avoid because we don't look it in the eye. We just push against it, turn our heads, and carry on like we're not pushing this thing back and holding it at a distance in our lives.

The thing about avoidance may not be what you think. The things we tend to avoid have a special way of creeping back into our lives. It seems to be a law of relationships, like Newton's Third Law, which says: "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." If you avoid, that which you avoid will come back to you, but sometimes with more than an equal and opposite reaction.

The Guy's Airbag ebook has offered you the most common issues that I see men struggling with in their marriages and relationships. Congratulations on completing this ebook, and thank you for downloading it, and hopefully, it left you thinking about the type of relationship you have and the type you may want to evolve into. If you've benefitted, drop me a line through my website - www.phoenixmenscounseling.com - and let me know. If you want additional support with your marriage or relationship, you can also contact me directly through my site or book an online appointment there as well.

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