



PARTNERS

DATE

LOCATION



Build your relationship with the same intention you bring to everything else.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Before You Begin

Set aside a full day. Not a morning. Not a stolen hour between commitments. A full day, dedicated entirely to you, your partner, and the life you are building together. This guide works best when treated as an offsite, not a worksheet.

Choose the Right Setting

A space outside your home works best. A hotel lobby, a borrowed office, a quiet rental cabin. New environments produce new thinking. If you stay home, clear the table, put away the phones, and make the space feel deliberately different from an ordinary Saturday.

Arrange the Day

Book childcare in advance and protect the full day as non-negotiable. Arrive with this guide, two pens, your favorite coffee or tea, and nothing else you need to do today. Notifications off. Not silenced. Off.

Approach With Curiosity

Some questions will feel easy. Others will open conversations you have been quietly deferring. Both are the point. You do not need to agree on everything. The goal is understanding and alignment, not consensus on every topic. You are on the same team.

YOUR RETREAT

Partners _____ Date _____

Location _____

What we are doing to mark this day as special _____

Why This Works

The most successful couples in the world share something that has nothing to do with luck and everything to do with practice. Dr. John Gottman, whose four decades of research at the Relationship Research Institute produced the most rigorous body of knowledge ever assembled on what makes relationships thrive, identified a concept he called "shared meaning." It sits at the highest level of his model of relationship health, and it describes something most couples never deliberately build: a shared inner life of goals, rituals, values, and vision.

Yet most couples never do this deliberately.

They build careers with strategic plans and quarterly reviews. They raise children with schedules, intentions, and enormous effort. They invest their money with care and long-term thinking. And they leave their most important partnership to run on instinct, assuming that love is enough to keep two people genuinely aligned. Research suggests otherwise.

Couples who engage in regular structured conversations about their relationship report significantly higher satisfaction, lower rates of escalating conflict, and stronger resilience when life becomes difficult.

Gottman's research also identified that high-achieving couples face a particular risk: they are accustomed to optimizing everything except the relationship itself. Professional ambition, parenting demands, and the sheer volume of shared logistics can quietly crowd out the conversations that keep two people genuinely known to each other. Not through any failure of love, but through the ordinary tyranny of a full life.

Shared Rituals

- Couples who maintain regular intentional rituals, not just date nights but structured reflective practices, report meaningfully stronger connection and a shared sense of identity as a couple.

Aligned Goals

- Research on relationship maintenance consistently shows that couples who periodically review and align on their individual and shared goals experience less friction around major life decisions and report higher partnership satisfaction.

Known Inner Worlds



Gottman's concept of "Love Maps," the detailed knowledge each partner has of the other's inner life, fears, dreams, and current priorities, is one of the strongest predictors of long-term relationship health. It requires regular, deliberate updating.

The retreat you are about to begin is a direct application of this research. It is not couples therapy, and it is not a crisis intervention. It is a practice of the most intentional couples we know: the ones who treat their relationship as something worth building on purpose, season after season.



Kickoff & Grounding

Before you look at any of the session content, spend ten to fifteen minutes on these three questions. Answer them out loud to each other rather than in writing. This is about presence, not productivity.



1. What do we each hope to get out of today?

Share out loud. Write your own answers here.

2. One word for how you are arriving today.

3. One word you want to feel when it's done.

Partner 1 _____ Partner 2 _____

Partner 1 _____ Partner 2 _____



At the close of the day, you will return to these words.

Did the day deliver the feeling you hoped for? Keep this page.

SESSION 1 | Allow 90 minutes

Your Relationship

PURPOSE

Strengthening your partnership and building a shared vision for the year ahead.

Research by Dr. John Gottman shows that couples who regularly "update" their knowledge of each other's inner lives, current stresses, hopes, and fears report significantly stronger connection and lower rates of conflict escalation.

Work through each question together, taking turns sharing before writing. Resist the urge to rush. Allow ninety minutes and let the conversation go where it needs to go.



1 What were the highlights and challenges of our relationship this past year?

Telling the story of your year together is one of the most powerful things you can do as a couple. Take your time here.

2 What did we learn about each other this year, personally or emotionally?

3 What makes us feel most connected and supported by each other?

Be specific. Vague answers produce vague action. Name the actual moments and behaviors.

4 How can we improve our communication or our approach to conflict this coming year?

5 What shared experiences do we want to create together this year? Think travel, projects, traditions, rituals.

6 How can we intentionally make space for joy, rest, and romance amid our full lives?

7 What personal growth goals does each of us have, and how can we best support each other in them?

Answer for yourself first, then listen fully to your partner before responding.

Your Family

For couples with children, this session asks you to step into your roles as the leaders of your family. The values you model, the culture you build at home, and the individual attention you give each child shape more than you may realize. These are the conversations most parents intend to have and rarely do.

No children and not planning to have any? This section is not for you right now. Feel free to skip ahead to Session 3, Your Professional Lives, on the next section divider.

Expecting or planning to start a family? Work through the adapted questions in this section, which are framed around values, readiness, and the family culture you want to build.

YOUR CHILDREN

First name or nickname (optional) and current age.

Child 1	Name _____	Age _____	One thing on your heart for them right now _____
Child 2	Name _____	Age _____	One thing on your heart for them right now _____
Child 3	Name _____	Age _____	One thing on your heart for them right now _____
Child 4	Name _____	Age _____	One thing on your heart for them right now _____
Child 5	Name _____	Age _____	One thing on your heart for them right now _____



SESSION 2 | Allow 90 minutes
Your Family

PURPOSE

Parenting with intention, building household culture, and deciding what your family stands for.

Think of this not as a parenting review but as a conversation between two people who are building a family culture on purpose. Take turns, listen more than you respond, and notice where you are more aligned than you expected.



1 What were the biggest wins and challenges for our family this past year?

If expecting or planning: What does family mean to each of you right now, and what kind of home do you want to build together?

2 How are our children growing, emotionally, academically, and socially, and how can we best support that in the coming year?

Consider each child individually. What does each one need most from you right now? If expecting or planning: What values and habits do we most want to establish as new parents?

3 What traditions or routines worked well this year? Which should we change or let go?

If expecting or planning: What traditions from our own upbringings do we want to carry forward, and what would we leave behind?

4 How can we better model the values we most want to pass down?

The most powerful thing you can do for your children is let them see what a healthy, intentional partnership looks like. That begins with conversations like this one.

5 How can we divide family and household responsibilities more equitably?

If expecting or planning: How do we want to share the load of early parenting, including the tasks that rarely get discussed in advance?

6 What would make our home life feel calmer, more joyful, or more connected day to day?

7 What family adventures or milestones do we want to prioritize this year?

If expecting or planning: What milestones are on the horizon this year, and how will we navigate them as a team?

Your Professional Lives

PURPOSE

Career, finances, and how your professional worlds intersect with the life you are building together.

Misaligned expectations around work, ambition, and availability are among the most commonly cited sources of relationship friction in dual-career households. Naming them here is not a criticism. It is the first step toward designing something that works for both of you.

This session is designed for couples in any professional situation: both partners employed, one or both running a business, or roles that have recently shifted. Answer each question from your own context. The goal is not a business review but an honest conversation about how your work shapes your life together.



- 1 **What were each of our professional highlights and most important lessons from this past year?**

Answer for yourself, then listen. Resist the urge to compare or problem-solve during your partner's share.

- 2 **How do our professional lives interact, and what dynamics does that create at home?**

For those who are employed: consider work hours, travel, stress load, and career pressures. For those who run a business: consider the blurring of business and home life, shared decisions, and whether one of you is carrying more of the mental load.

- 3 **Where do we each want to be professionally in one year, and how do those visions align?**

- 4 **What is one thing each of us could delegate, drop, or automate to create more balance?**

The goal is not to do more. It is to protect the energy and attention your relationship and family require.

- 5 **Are we spending our professional energy on what matters most, or simply on what is loudest?**

- 6 **What skills, relationships, or opportunities does each of us want to develop this year?**

7 How do our professional goals fit within our family and personal priorities, and where does tension exist?

Name the tension directly. Unspoken friction around work and ambition is one of the most common sources of relationship drift in high-achieving couples.

Integration & Action Planning

You have covered a great deal of ground today. This final session is about moving from conversation to commitment. Work through these questions together, taking your time. Then sign the commitment that closes this guide.

1. What three words describe our shared vision for this year?

Word 1

Word 2

Word 3

2. What are our top three priorities across all areas?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. How will we stay aligned between now and our next retreat?

 Monthly check-ins Mid-year half-day review Weekly ten-minute catch-ups Our own approach: _____

4. What rituals or structures will keep us aligned throughout the year?

5. When will we hold our next retreat?

Date _____

Location idea _____



Today we committed to building our relationship with intention.

We named our priorities. We said the important things out loud.

We agreed to return to this document and to each other with the same care.

Partner 1 _____

Partner 2 _____

Date _____

Date _____

Return to your opening words.

At the start of today, you each named a word for how you were arriving,
and a word you hoped to feel when it was done.

Partner 1: I arrived feeling _____

Partner 2: I arrived feeling _____

I am leaving feeling _____

I am leaving feeling _____

One thing I want you to know before we close today.

Partner 1 _____

Partner 2 _____

Carry this practice forward.

Couples OS, our upcoming app, is designed to support ongoing alignment between retreats: monthly check-ins, shared goal tracking, and a guided retreat experience built from this guide. Join the waitlist at couplesOS.app