

## The Couple's Cheat Sheet: Build, Bond & Bloom

**Healthy relationships take intention, not perfection.** Whether you're navigating stress, parenting, or just feeling disconnected lately — you're not alone. These small shifts, backed by relationship research and clinical practice, can help couples reconnect, communicate better, and feel more like a team again.

### 1. Start with Curiosity, Not Criticism

When things feel tense, we tend to assume or accuse. Instead, try asking:

*"Can you help me understand how you're feeling?"*

*"What was going on for you when that happened?"*

**Why it works:** Curiosity invites safety. It helps your partner feel heard, not attacked — which is essential for healthy repair and deeper understanding (Gottman, 1999).

### 2. Use "I" Statements, Especially in Conflict

Instead of:

 "You never listen!"

Try:

 "I feel unheard when I talk and don't get a response."

**Why it works:** This reduces blame and keeps things from escalating. It puts the focus on your experience rather than your partner's flaws.

### 3. Make Time for "Micro-Connection"

Busy schedules can push connection to the bottom of the list. Try:

- A 5-minute check-in at the end of the day
- A quick text during the workday
- A shared cup of tea without screens



**Why it works:** Research shows small, consistent moments of connection help couples feel emotionally bonded over time.

#### 4. Know Your Stress Styles

We all deal with stress differently. Some people withdraw, others vent or fix. When stress hits, ask each other:

*"How can I support you right now?"*

*"Do you need space, or someone to talk to?"*

**Why it works:** Understanding and honouring each other's stress responses reduces miscommunication and resentment.

#### 5. Turn Toward, Not Away

Your partner might say something simple like, *"Look at this funny video,"* and it's easy to dismiss. But responding positively to these "bids for connection" is powerful.

**Why it works:** Couples who regularly turn toward each other's bids for attention are more likely to stay connected and satisfied (Gottman Institute).

#### 6. Repair Attempts Matter More Than Being Right

Arguments are normal. What matters most is **how you repair**. That might sound like:

- *"I'm sorry for snapping — I was feeling overwhelmed."*
- *"Can we try that conversation again when we're both calmer?"*

**Why it works:** Repair builds trust and strengthens the relationship, even after conflict.

#### Want to Talk It Through?

If you and your partner are feeling stuck, overwhelmed, or just want to grow together — couples counselling can help. There's no shame in seeking support. It's a sign you care. Capaz is here to help so reach out and work with our Relationship specialist – Mick Lea. Stop merely surviving and start Thriving.