

# Stage Climbing for Couples

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Partner's Name \_\_\_\_\_

This questionnaire is designed to help you gain insight and direction into your relationship by using the *Stage Climbing* system. To gain the maximum impact, please follow it in order.

**What is an issue in your relationship that you would like to work on?**

Please write down your issue and keep it in mind as you follow it through the *Stage Climbing* process:

Use additional paper, if necessary.

**With respect to the relationship issue I've identified above, this questionnaire expresses *my* view of how:**

I operate in this relationship    My partner operates    We function as a couple

**STEP 1:** Indicate which of the following statements apply, regarding the specific **view that you** checked above; that describe **what you believe about yourself** in this relationship, what you believe regarding **how your partner operates** OR **how you function together** as a couple. Please check all that apply:

**Part I**

- I must be taken care of by my partner*
- My partner must satisfy me and fulfill my needs*
- My partner owes me fulfillment*
- He/she must always be accessible to me*
- Even if I wanted to help myself, I don't know where to begin or what to do.*
- I am only interested in doing whatever feels easiest, safest, and most comfortable in my relationship*
- I am incapable of making the relationship work*
- I don't deserve love*
- I am excessively needy*
- I am stuck or trapped in this relationship with no choices of my own or way out*
- I could never make it on my own*
- No matter what my partner does for me, it's not enough*
- Sex is necessary to keep my partner happy and the relationship intact*
- My partner should always want to have sex with me when I want it*
- I feel inadequate when my partner doesn't satisfy me sexually*

**Part II**

- I must always enjoy myself, have my way and do whatever I want, regardless of the effect I (or my actions) may have on my partner*
- I'll stay as long as my needs and desires are being met*
- I want to get as much as possible for myself without having to give much back*
- I don't want to change or take responsibility for my actions*
- I have no responsibility for the problems in this relationship*
- My partner is expendable; if he/she is unhappy in this relationship, he/she can leave*

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- My partner is merely a resource for sex, money, power and/ or \_\_\_\_\_*
- My partner gets what he/she deserves in this relationship*
- I can and will manipulate my partner if it means I will get what I want or need*
- I have the right to be angry when my partner doesn't fulfill me sexually*
- As long as my needs are satisfied, one sex partner is as good as another*

### **Part III**

- My partner must do things my way/ or I must obey my partner*
- I must follow "the rules" carefully to avoid conflict*
- Disagreement or conflict with my partner is a sign of a bad marriage/ relationship*
- For things such as settling our differences, child rearing, sex, finances, religion, family involvement, fidelity, the roles for me and my partner or any other conflict; there is only one right or wrong way to do things and no shades of gray*
- \_\_\_\_\_ *is the way my partner and/or our marriage/relationship should be*
- The status quo is always preferable to major change*
- If I defy tradition or challenge long standing attitudes or beliefs, something terrible will happen*
- Sex comes with a set of rules, in that it can only be done a certain way and any variation is unacceptable, shameful and/or perverted*
- A partner who goes outside of the marriage for sex regardless of the reason is no good and/or has forfeited his/her right to have a point of view (in this or perhaps even any other issue)*

### **Part IV**

- Disapproval of any kind from my partner is intolerable and is a reason for me to reject myself and/ or become consumed with anger*
- I need more (or constant) personal validation from my partner*
- Disagreement or conflict means that my partner doesn't love me*
- I must feel loved and have my partner's approval at all times or our relationship is in jeopardy*
- I should/must please my partner in order to be loved*
- Jealousy is not an insecurity, but a sign that you love your partner*
- In a marriage or love relationship, there is nothing as important as being loved*
- I can only accept myself to the degree that my partner accepts me*
- Sex makes me anxious as it heightens my self-consciousness about my body and/or performance*
- When my partner is not in the mood for sex, I feel rejected, unloved and/or unlovable*
- Sex is one way I feel loved and needed by my partner*

## **STEP 2: Learn Some of the Stage Climbing Terms:**

### **What is Stage Climbing?**

*Stage Climbing* is a simple system for helping you to recognize and resolve the issues that stand between where you are in your relationship *now* and exactly where you *want* your relationship to be. The *Stage Climbing* process involves learning and applying specific strategies to reach your goals in the *shortest time possible*. Although this questionnaire is specifically designed to zero in on the attitudes and beliefs that underlie your relationship issues, the *Stage Climbing* system can be applied to many other aspects of your life as well.

### **What are the Stages?**

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Stages simply pinpoint the level of maturity that characterizes *specific areas* of your relationship. **Think of your stages as benchmarks or plateaus. They can explain practically any aspect of why you and/or your partner think or act as you do in your relationship.** There are seven possible stages defined below. They are numbered from one to seven.

## **What is a Default Stage?**

This is the stage that defines how your relationship *typically or automatically*—but *not* always—functions with respect to the issue(s) you are working on.

## **What are Hooks?**

Any part of you or your relationship that is *uncharacteristically* in a stage higher or lower than what your default stage would indicate. Some hooks can be highly beneficial, while others can be extremely counterproductive. Thus, hooks could propel you forward or hold you back in your relationship. **Think of your hooks as things you *sometimes* do, feel or believe that are anomalies or exceptions to how you normally operate** via your default stage. *The boxes you checked above can be thought of as hooks to the various stages that you will read about below.*

**STEP 3:** Read on to connect the statements you checked in **Step 1** above to the corresponding stage(s) that you believe characterize how you (and/or your partner) may be operating with respect to this relationship issue. Each of the four parts in **Step 1** (Parts I, II, III and IV) corresponds to the stage with the same number. Each affirmation (or alternative attitude) you can choose to adopt below is categorized by the stage it typifies. Check all of the boxes that apply:

**Stage One-** Stage One hooks in your relationship occur when one or both of you are seen as overly needy and/or dependent on the other. At Stage One, emotional or financial security might provide the foundation for your relationship. One or both of you may be preoccupied with “needing to be needed.” When conflict arises, one partner may “surrender” and allow the other to resolve it on his or her own.

**To move past your Stage One hooks** (as identified by the statements you checked in **Part I** above), **consider adopting these affirmations** (check all that apply):

- I am ultimately responsible to care for my own needs*
  - I am tired of feeling like a victim and helplessly depending on my partner*
  - I am worthy of being loved*
  - I am not stuck or trapped; I am in this relationship by choice*
  - If necessary, I can end this relationship and/or live on my own*
  - I can choose my attitudes about sex and no longer need to jump to painful conclusions about sex that may not be accurate*
  - My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*
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**Stage Two-** Stage Two hooks often-prompt one or both of you to act out with little or no regard for the consequences to the other partner or the relationship. In extreme cases, this might even include major deception or abuse. There is often a tendency for one partner to dominate or control the other.

**To move past your Stage Two hooks** (as identified by the statements you checked in **Part II** above), **consider adopting these affirmations** (check all that apply):

- Nobody has everything they want*
  - I no longer need to exploit or control my partner*
  - I value my partner and our relationship even if I don't always get certain things I want/need*
  - I take responsibility for the role I play in our issue(s)*
  - I no longer take every conflict personally*
  - I want to do whatever it takes to make this relationship thrive for the long-term*
  - Our sex life can improve if we both commit to working on it*
  - My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*
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**Stage Three-** Stage Three hooks generally indicate that the foundation and climate for your relationship are grounded in dictums that are usually based on long-standing rules and traditions (sometimes even societal stereotypes or clichés) that were not necessarily chosen mindfully by you and your partner. Disagreements often focus on who's most or least compliant with whatever rules form the basis of your relationship (e.g., how you came together as a couple, who works, who stays home, finances, family involvement, religion, the nature of your sex life, fidelity, forgiveness, etc.). Conflicts are usually settled by the spoken or unspoken "book of rules" you attempt to live by as a couple.

**To move past your Stage Three hooks** (as identified by the statements you checked in **Part III** above), **consider adopting these affirmations:**

- I am ready to examine and challenge the unquestioned rules in this relationship that no longer work*
  - I can tolerate conflict, shades of gray and ambiguity when it arises*
  - To make our relationship thrive, it's important to forgive and let go of hurt and anger*
  - Leaving my comfort zone may be scary at first, but it's usually worth it, since discomfort with new things is only temporary*
  - We can disagree---even on important issues--- without hurting the quality of our relationship*
  - I/we can be flexible and have the choice to make whatever decision I/we feel is best*
  - No matter what the issue may be, each of us have reasons for believing, feeling and behaving as we do/did; and much of resolving conflict is about understanding each other's point of view*
  - My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*
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**Stage Four-** At Stage Four, partners look to their relationship and each other as a *source* of love, validation, and approval. Stage Four issues may arise when by virtue of your hooks, you are more focused on *being* loved and validated by the other, than *giving* love. For example, it's a Stage Four hook when the reason for pleasing your partner is to get back for yourself at least as much as is given. Also jealousy is usually a Stage Four hook. At Stage Four, one or both of you may need to consistently be reassured of your partner's love and commitment. Sex often serves as a means of reassurance as well.

**To move past your Stage Four hooks** (as identified by the statements you checked in **Part IV** above), **consider adopting these affirmations:**

- It's not necessary to have my partner's approval on everything*
  - My partner and I can disagree without effecting our feelings for each other*
  - We can work through a difficult issue together without questioning the relationship itself*
  - I am committed to letting go of jealous feelings and other insecurities about our relationship*
  - I no longer choose to read unnecessarily hurtful messages into our sex life together*
  - I accept my body and sexual abilities and can make whatever improvements I chose to work on without putting myself down*
  - I give myself unconditional acceptance regardless of whether or not my partner does*
  - My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*
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## STEP 4: Choose Your Target Stage

### What is a Target Stage?

This is the stage from which you would most *like* your relationship to operate. **Think of it as your goal.** Your target stage in your relationship is the *zone* where your relationship would operate **at its highest potential.**

**Stage Five-** Each of you fulfills most or all of your important relationship *roles*; e.g., sex partner, financial partner, travel partner, tennis partner, companion, friend, co-parent, someone with whom to share and be

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intimate, etc. The relationship is not necessarily governed by passion or a strong emotional attachment between you that transcends these roles as much as by the comfort and function that your relationship roles provide. At Stage Five, sex is often seen as a part of the relationship; and as a form of “play” that you both enjoy. You may generally agree on frequency, preferences regarding how to do it and the way it’s initiated. For some couples, Stage Five is the target stage they are comfortable with; while other couples strive for deeper feelings of fulfillment than Stage Five—the most neutral or dispassionate stage—delivers. As the intense passion associated with the early phases of a relationship decreases over time, Stage Five is probably the most *typical* stage for marriages and long-term love relationships in our society.

## For your relationship to operate at Stage Five, consider adopting these affirmations:

- We are comfortable in our lives together*
- We enjoy each other’s company and have much in common*
- Being ‘in love’ is something that happens in the beginning of a relationship (or when you’re young or more idealistic) and is often not practical (realistic or even necessary) later on*
- I love him/her but I’m not in love and I accept that*
- In addition to procreation; sex is a healthy, normal and nice way to have good sensations. It is an important part of any marriage or love relationship*
- If my partner isn’t in the mood, at a given time, that’s normal as long as it doesn’t happen too often—(and in reality I may not always be 100 % eager myself)*
- My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*

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**Stage Six-** At Stage Six; you transcend the roles (that define you at the lower stages) and look to each other as people *to love and support* (as opposed to the Stage Four situation where love, sex, support and validation are typically *expected* and where the focus is not on the love *you give* to your partner, but the love you receive). Thus, there is genuine caring, intimacy and respect that’s never predicated merely on what you get *back*, your agreement on issues or the security provided by the relationship. When you tell your partner “I love you,” it’s heartfelt and you mean just that. Sex is generally a great source of mutual pleasure and passion that’s directly and personally connected to your partner and the love you feel for him or her. *This is the first of two stages that generally define a marriage or love relationship at it’s best.*

## For your relationship to operate at Stage Six, consider adopting these affirmations:

- This is the person that I want to be with for the rest of my life (or the foreseeable future)*
- When I am with him/her, I generally feel good about myself*
- When one of us doesn’t desire sex and the other one does, other forms of expression and pleasuring can often be substituted (however, we do not make each other wrong when one of us is unavailable in this area)*
- Sex with my partner is often an ecstatically pleasurable experience! However, we don’t treat this as a given or an expectation.*
- My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes I need to hardwire \_\_\_\_\_*

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**Stage Seven-** Stage Seven, the highest stage, contains all the ingredients of Stage Six. In addition, you and your partner are a team who selflessly work together in a common mission outside of yourselves (e.g., your children, your community, etc.) where you give without regard to what comes back. At Stage Seven, you can easily put your partner first without disdain or expecting a *quid pro quo*. You are beyond *seeking* self-gratification, though it is generally and effortlessly there. Conflict is handled by considering all perspectives and making a decision that comes closest to best serving the highest good of all concerned. Sex deepens your loving connection, often in a spiritual way.

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For your relationship to operate at Stage Seven, consider adopting these affirmations:

- My pleasure comes from providing gratification to my partner*
- We can strongly disagree without either of us being wrong*
- Our relationship is grounded in genuine respect and support*
- We are a team that supports each other's missions and seek the highest good for both of both of us*
- I can be happy for my partner even though his/her good fortune does not necessarily benefit me*
- Sex is a way to deepen the loving connection perhaps even in a spiritual way between my partner and me, who love and care deeply for each other*
- My unique version of the affirmation(s) and new attitudes to hardwire*

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## STEP 5: Identify Your Default and Target Stages

<p>The <b>default stage</b> I now recognize for <i>this aspect</i> of my/our relationship is:</p> <p>Stage 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 ____ 6 ____ 7 ____</p> <p>The <b>target stage</b> I <i>choose</i> for <i>this aspect</i> of my/our relationship (consider this your goal) is:</p> <p>Stage 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 ____ 6 ____ 7 ____</p>
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## STEP 6: Make your Target Stage Your Default Stage

Beliefs and attitudes that define how you operate in any part of your life are hardwired by *taking the action necessary to live by them*. **This is how lasting change is achieved.**

What I/we/he /she need(s) to do in order for this aspect of our relationship to function as a couple in the zone of the target stage we've chosen and thus **make our target stage our default stage** and to internalize the affirmations listed and identified above (use additional paper, if necessary):

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For more information on Stage Climbing as it applies to relationships or any other area of your life, please visit [StageClimbing.com](http://StageClimbing.com).