grow Wild

a premium online experience for couples

FIRST things FIRST

As you begin your journey to grow wild together, here are a few things to remember about growth:

- Growth may be painful and a little uncomfortable. You may not be able to see it happening in the moment.

- Marriage growth requires discipline, dedication, and diligence. Most importantly, it requires a PLAN.

Marriage Growth Assessment

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss each statement and take a look at where your marriage is at the moment. Take some time to talk about why you're choosing each number.
2. Make sure you're both on the same page (or as close as you can be) before choosing an answer.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree", assess the following statements together:

1. We have a deep, positive connection that allows us to think the best of each other no matter what our marriage goes through.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5

2. Our relationship has encountered storms and challenges, and we have a stronger relationship because of what we've experienced together.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5

3. We have a clear vision for our marriage and the legacy we want to leave for future generations.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5

4. We were on the same page and had very similar responses while completing this marriage assessment.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5

In order to grow wild in your marriage, you have to keep two things in mind:

- Your marriage belongs to you; you do not belong to your marriage.
- The life of your marriage is really up to you as individuals.

Individual Growth Assessment

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Spend the next few minutes in your own thoughts and mind. Take a look at where you are at the moment, and be as open and honest as possible in your responses.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree", assess the following statements on your own:

1. When I make a decision, I first consider how it will affect my spouse and our relationship.

2. I feel I am doing all I can to protect my marriage.

3. I put my marriage first, above work, friends, and leisure time.

4. I am very aware of my spouse and what they're going through or experiencing on a regular basis.

5. I am confident that my marriage is setting a good example for future generations of our family and others we may influence.

6. I am confident in my ability to communicate well with my spouse, both in sharing and listening.

7. It's easy for my spouse to approach me and talk about pretty much anything.

8. I feel equipped and capable to be a dependable, loving spouse and have the healthy, thriving marriage I desire.

Your Growth Plan

SPOUSE 1 **Name:** _____

According to my individual assessment, the tool(s) I need to focus on the most in this season of my marriage is/are:

Draw symbol here _____ *Draw symbol here* _____ *Draw symbol here* _____

SPOUSE 2 **Name:** _____

According to my individual assessment, the tool(s) I need to focus on the most in this season of my marriage is/are:

Draw symbol here _____ *Draw symbol here* _____ *Draw symbol here* _____

What marriage tools do these symbols represent?

EXPECTATIONS

MINDFULNESS

COMMUNICATION

Before building out the rest of your growth plan, share your individual results with each other. Use these questions to get the conversation going:

1. Where did your assessments overlap?
2. Do you feel differently about how your partner scored themselves in certain areas? Why or why not?

Tool #1: Psychological Flexibility

Note: This tool wasn't part of your individual assessment. Why? Researchers conducted an analysis of over 174 marriage studies in 2020 and found psychological flexibility is the key tool for a thriving, happy, growing wild marriage. It's a "newer tool," and it's something we all need to work on and be aware of more.

WHAT TO KNOW

"Psychological flexibility is a set of skills that individuals engage when presented with difficult or challenging thoughts, feelings, emotions or experiences."

6 SKILLS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY:

1. **Acceptance.** Be open to all experiences, good or bad, no matter how challenging or difficult. Give your difficult thoughts breathing room. By accepting negative thoughts, you take their power away.

2. **Contact with the present moment.** Be mindful of the present moments of day-to-day life. Focus on the now instead of the past or the future. Take your awareness off of autopilot and engage with your senses and emotions.

3. **Cognitive defusion.** Be able gently experience thoughts and emotions without being overwhelmed or easily stressed out. Stop yourself from "fusing" with your thoughts. In other words... your thoughts are just thoughts. They are not who/what you are. Don't let your thoughts define you.

4. **Self as context.** Your mind is divided into two elements: the thinking self and the observing self. The thinking self is where you plan, judge and problem solve. The observing self is the part of your brain that is aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions at any given moment. *Using self as context means you are able to use both elements of your mind at the same time and view your relationship as a whole, ultimately realizing it's not about you.*

5. **Contact with values.** Be rooted and grounded in a deeper set of values. Your values describe how you want to act in the world.

   Questions to help clarify values:
   - What do you want to be remembered for at your funeral?
   - What would you like your obituary to say?
   - Deep down, what really matters to you in the big picture?
   - If you already had a billion in the bank, how would you spend your time?

   Values are like a compass that points to your true north, giving you direction and providing guidance for daily action.

6. **Committed action.** Be resilient to overcome challenges in your relationship. Don't be quick to lose sight of the big picture. Embody your values with integrity and live them out daily.

WHAT TO DO

Get out of your comfort zone. Humans naturally want to stick with what's familiar. To grow, you need to face resistance.

Example: If your spouse likes to rock climb, go with them. If they like to watch documentaries, watch one with them. If they like to go to trivia night, attend with them. You may not climb the wall, enjoy the movie or get questions correct, but you'll show your spouse you care about them and that you're willing to get out of your comfort zone and be flexible to spend time with them.

Tool #2: Mindfulness

WHAT TO KNOW

"Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us."

A Harvard University Study revealed *we spend 47% of our waking hours thinking about something other than what we're actually doing.*

To live mindfully is to live in the present moment. It's to observe and label thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

Mindfulness can help you enjoy the here and now with your spouse. It has two key components: awareness and acceptance.

- Awareness is focusing on your inner experiences and processes.
- Acceptance is the ability to observe and accept those streams of thought rather than judge or avoid them.

WHAT TO DO

Mindful walking, together or on your own. Slow your pace down from what's normal. Engage your senses as you walk. Smell the air. Listen to the sounds around you. What do you see that you may not have noticed before? Feel the ground beneath your feet. Take in everything around you and think about what you see, hear, smell and feel.

Tool #3: Expectations

WHAT TO KNOW

Expectations are the way we believe the world should work, and specifically how our marriage should work. They can be unrealistic, unspoken or realistic.

You control what your expectations are. They can be realistic or unrealistic; spoken or unspoken.

Expectations that leave you comparing what did happen to what you hoped would happen lead to feelings of disappointment.

Unrealistic expectations are often unspoken, while realistic expectations are open, communicated and agreed upon by both spouses.

WHAT TO DO

When you find yourself being disappointed or growing resentment toward your spouse, ask yourself these questions,

"Why do I feel this way?" "Is my desired outcome different from the actual outcome?" "Is my spouse aware of my desired outcome?"

It's scary to think about changing your own expectations, especially when many of them come from our past experiences, such as our childhood. But, the only way to truly grow wild in your marriage is to be willing to work through all of your expectations and be open to letting them change and grow together.

Tool #3: Communication

WHAT TO KNOW

Communication has the power to create deep meaningful conversations in your marriage as well as heated arguments that can lead to years of resentment.*

**With great power comes great responsibility.*

Your body language carries SO MUCH WEIGHT in the way you communicate. It can completely change the meaning of what you're trying to say. Be aware of your body. Good communication takes practice and self-awareness from both spouses.

Stanford University researchers have studied a new contagion theory called "social contagion theory." It suggests that if one person is trying to improve themselves or better the relationship in a marriage (or any tight/closely knit relationship), it is highly likely the other person will follow suit. *In other words...*

It's so easy to criticize your spouse's bad or missing communication skills. It's much more difficult to pinpoint and work on your own communication efforts. BUT, in order to truly grow wild, you MUST focus on yourself and the progress you're making. Be an example for each other.

WHAT TO DO

Write down your criticisms. Set a rule that prevents both of you from sharing criticisms verbally. Keep a journal of the criticisms you'd like to say to your spouse. Then share them with each other at a scheduled time.

So What's Next?

FERTILIZER = ACCOUNTABILITY

Hold each other accountable.

WE HOPE YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE WILL GROW WILD WITH YOUR GROWTH PLAN!

Don't Forget!

You can get more "What To Do" and "What To Say" in our bonus video and handout!

GET THE BONUS CONTENT

STAY UP TO DATE WITH FIRST THINGS FIRST THROUGH OUR WEBSITE AND BY FOLLOWING US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

FIRSTTHINGS.ORG