



## Love Maps

Summary of Figuring out Families Podcast with  
marriage counsellor Derek Boylen

Love Maps are what we create inside of our minds which are very important, particularly in how we navigate love relationships. That doesn't necessarily just mean couples, but (in) any loving relationship. So, between parents and their children or between siblings.

What the research has found is that by having these detailed Love Maps, this helps us to navigate family life and navigate family relationships with the people that we care about ... and to do it in a way that's safe, effective and healthy.

So, what's the process? I guess on one level these things develop naturally. Through Love Maps we develop an understanding of what it's like to be inside the minds of the people we care about. As we begin a relationship with someone, we start to get an impression about what they're like and what they don't like. We base it on their on their body language and how they respond to us when we relate to them in different ways.

And as those Love Maps get better, we get better at expressing our needs in a way that the other person can hear and understand. It also helps us to meet the other person's expectations in a way that doesn't erode trust.

These Love Maps help us to protect trust in the relationship and help us to express our needs in a way that other people can hear. When we're emotionally intimate, we reveal our deepest emotions to someone that we care about and we risk ridicule. We risk rejection but in the interest of building greater trust and understanding, Love Maps can really help.

So, John Gottman who coined the concept of Love Maps produces an app on smartphones. It's called the Guttman card deck. And it's free. One of the options includes different questions for couples to discuss; like what was the best present you've ever received and who were your closest friends growing up?

I often give couples I counsel that kind of homework. I'll give them a list of topics to discuss. Was there ever a time where everyone forgot your birthday? And what was that like and how did you cope? Couples need to be curious about different aspects about their partner's life in order to grow their Love Map. There's always something new to learn about the people that we're in relationships with because they are constantly growing and changing.

If we keep the communication open and we keep talking about the things and the experiences that we're having, it helps us to converge in our values and helps us to grow closer to one another and develop a common understanding about what's really important for us.

But I think one of the other things that's helpful for Love Maps ... when we recognise that our partner has a 'value' to be curious about and where that value comes from. For example, I noticed that you value your family. How did you come to value 'family' so much? Or I see that working hard and a good work ethic are important to you. How so?

Having common values helps, and being curious about one another's values definitely helps with forming Love Maps. Maintenance is important. If you have a home, it needs to be maintained. If you have a car it needs to be maintained. If you have a career it needs to be maintained. Relationships are no different.



### Strategies

Check in with your partner from time to time. (Ask questions such as) How are we going as a couple? How are we travelling? What do we need to learn about one another? That's something couples should do very regularly, but many don't.

I'll give you a tip that a couple shared with me not so long ago. I asked a couple who'd been married for 30 years what's the secret to a happy marriage? The wife made one suggestion. I thought it was gold. She said in about the fifth year of their marriage they started having weekly interviews on a Sunday evening; once the kids had gone to bed. There are two questions ... and it's the same two questions week after week.

The first question: when did you feel most loved by me this week? And what's one thing I could do this week to love you more? She said, for example, I've got a meeting and I'm really stressed about it. Just be patient with me Thursday morning. I thought they were profoundly beautiful questions.

I think it's important to also develop strong Love Maps with your children. By the time a child reaches 14, 15, 16, years of age, as a parent, I really want to know what are the things that bring my child life? What are the things that bring them happiness and fulfillment? What are the things that they're thinking about? You need to start that conversation way back when they're two ... and they're three ... and they're four and five years old. I

think in understanding our children's Love Maps, it's important to set a foundation as early as possible.

Love Maps for families are also important. One of the things Karen (wife) and I do is we try at least every three weeks to schedule at least one thing as a whole family that serves no other purpose than to bring us joy. We're might order pizza and sit on the floor and watch a movie together as a family or go out for a picnic at a park. And don't underestimate how important holidays are for families because taking a break from the daily grind is fulfilling.

Almost all families discover new levels of intimacy which always brings with it a sense of connection, a sense of belonging and a sense of safety, which is important for healthy families.



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## Figuring out Families Podcast

Derek Boylen, an experienced marriage and relationship counsellor and a lecturer in relationships at the University of Notre Dame. We have put together this most valuable podcast series which we are calling the Focus Sessions.

The series focusses on many aspects of family relationships and can help in strengthening your family. We hope you'll find the series beneficial and get some insights on issues you may face in your family.

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