

FIVE CHECK-IN FORMATS FOR COUPLES HEALING FROM SEXUAL BETRAYAL

In the aftermath of sexual betrayal, even the most basic communication between a couple may become strained and fraught with challenges. The goal of introducing structured, regular check-ins is to provide a contained context wherein a couple may mutually share emotions, needs, thoughts, and recovery-related updates in a predictable and emotionally safe manner.

When used with sincere intent to cultivate healing, regular check-ins can foster:

- Accountability
- Connection
- Trust
- Safety

The following document is intended to provide ideas and guidance for couples who wish to incorporate check-ins into an existing recovery plan. Each check-in format is designed for alternating and mutual sharing between a couple, meaning both partners participate in the check-in format so that the communication is balanced and sustainable over time.

To be clear, check-ins are not a substitute for therapeutic support, but they can complement and enrich therapeutic work. Please consult with your respective therapists, coaches, and/or Twelve-Step sponsors if you need help implementing a check-in practice or modifying one of the formats to suit your individual needs.



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Five Check-In Formats for Couples Healing from Sexual Betrayal

1

FANOS

FANOS is a widely used check-in format in the fields of sexual addiction and betrayal trauma treatment. It is used for building emotional intimacy and accountability.

Feelings: State the predominant feeling(s) you are experiencing that moment, day, or week. Remember that a feeling does not need to be explained, justified, defended, or accompanied by lengthy discussion to be effectively communicated. Avoid confusing thoughts for feelings or using this part of the check-in to indirectly communicate something to your partner. State your own feelings simply and clearly. (See the emotions list on page 9.)

Effective: *"Today I feel sad." "I feel angry." "This week I felt hopeful." "I feel overwhelmed."*

Ineffective: *"I feel you are slipping in your recovery work because you skipped your Twelve-Step meetings this week." "I feel like I have too much work to do this week." "I feel like you don't love me anymore." (These statements communicate thoughts or opinions instead of emotions and can come across as manipulative or as passive-aggressive.)*

Affirmation: Offer your partner an affirmation or say thank you for something he or she did. Be sure to affirm worth and not appearance.

Needs: Ask for something you need, remembering that sometimes your needs cannot be fulfilled by your partner. Your request may be met with a "no," or the need could be fulfilled through your own efforts.

Own: Take responsibility for something you did. Offer a sincere apology when appropriate.

Sobriety: The addict will check -in about his/her sobriety status. If sexual sobriety is no longer the primary issue, he or she may choose to be accountable for a new problematic behavior during the check-in if the betrayed partner agrees to this. The betrayed partners may use this part of the check-in to share how they are doing in terms of avoiding any behavior that invites them to act contrary to their healing goals.

2

The Vowel Check (A.E.I.O.U.Y.)

The Vowel Check (A.E.I.O.U.Y.) is another common check-in format used in self-improvement and recovery circles.

Abstinence/Sobriety: Have I abstained from addictive/problematic behaviors since our last check-in?

Exercise: How have I taken care of my physical body since our last check-in?

I-Care: What have I done for myself since our last check-in?

Other-Care: What have I done for others since our last check-in?

Unexpressed emotion or need: What is an emotion or need I have not yet expressed since our last check-in?

Yay for the day: What is something positive I want to celebrate or acknowledge since our last check-in?

3

Checking In Using Preset Questions


Some couples prefer to center their check-in format around preset questions that directly target a specific communication or relational need. In this format, it is recommended that both parties 1) agree to the questions, 2) agree to the number of questions used in the check-in (no more than three are generally recommended), 3) mutually share answers to the same question(s), and 4) agree in advance as to how and when the list of check-in questions can be changed going forward (e.g., during the last check-in of each month, new questions are selected for the next month; or the questions are changed once a quarter with input from the couple's therapist).


The following list provides *samples* of the kinds of questions commonly used in this type of check-in. Couples are encouraged to create or to select questions that will best meet their needs and goals.

Sample Questions for Check-Ins:

1. What recovery-related book(s) are you currently reading, and what are you learning?
2. What are the specific recovery tools you have implemented since our last check-in?
3. What progress have you made in preparing for the Full Therapeutic Disclosure?
4. What has triggered you since our last check-in, and what skills did you use to get grounded?



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5. How have you handled extended family dynamics since our last check-in?
 6. Share a new insight about yourself that you have learned since our last check-in.
 7. What are you currently learning and applying from your Twelve-Step work?
 8. What progress have you made on preparing for our upcoming move since our last check-in?
 9. What are you currently focused on in your individual and/or group therapy?
 10. What expenses have you incurred since our last check-in?
 11. What have you done to promote healthy relationships with our children since our last check-in?
 12. Describe one impact of the betrayal/acting out on your life and our relationship.
 13. What is the strongest emotion you have felt this week, and how did you regulate it?
 14. At present, what is the most challenging part of this healing process for you?
 15. What recent growth do you notice in yourself?
 16. What recent growth do you notice in your partner?
 17. What do you most need from your partner this week?
 18. What could your partner do or say this week that would make the biggest difference for you?
 19. What help or support do you most need this week?
 20. What do you believe has been most misunderstood about you during this healing process?
 21. What is the current status of your physical health and well-being?
 22. What progress have you made on safety plans for solo/family travel since our last check-in?
 23. What has addiction cost me/us?
 24. What has brought you joy since our last check-in?
 25. How is our in-home separation working or not working at present?
 26. Which therapeutic assignments or tasks are you currently working on and why?
 27. Which emotions have been most present for me since our last check-in?
 28. Which spiritual practices have I utilized since our last check-in?
 29. How connected do I feel to my Higher Power/God since our last check-in?
 30. What steps did I take to remain present and mindful since our last check-in?
 31. What do you most need from me as we approach the anniversary of the betrayal discovery?



"Check-ins provide structure for difficult conversations and build healthy connection over time."

— Dr. Jill Manning

4

Checking-In Using Randomly Pulled Preset Questions

Some couples prefer a more spontaneous approach to check-ins while also leveraging the structure and containment a set check-in format provides. Using randomly pulled preset questions is one way to achieve this. This format works especially well for couples in the latter stages of recovery or after solid sobriety and safety have been established.

To use this format, a couple agrees upon a list of questions (e.g., 10–20) that are written out and placed in an envelope or jar. At the beginning of the check-in, they randomly pull one to three questions from the envelope or jar, and then each person answers.

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High–Low

This is a simple and well-known communication exercise that is not exclusive to sexual betrayal recovery work. It is useful when an abbreviated format is needed or when a couple wants to foster more open communication with their children (e.g., at mealtime). Please note that this check-in format does not directly ask for information about sobriety, so it is typically used in between more developed check-ins such as FANOS or the Vowel Check.

HIGH of the day: What was the best part of the day?

LOW of the day: What was the hardest part of the day?

Suggestion: Decide in advance if you want the listeners to ask questions or offer validation about the Highs and Lows that each person shares, or if this will be a listening exercise only with no discussion following each share.

General Considerations for all Check-Ins Formats:

- A. Frequency:** Mutually decide upon the frequency of check-ins that best suits your needs and your stage of healing work. A minimum of once a week is generally recommended, but some couples find daily check-ins stabilizing in the early stages of recovery work.

How often will you hold check-ins?

- ☐ Daily
☐ _____ Times Per Week
☐ Weekly
☐ Other _____

- B. Day & Time:** A set day and time will help promote consistency and predictability for the check-in process.

Which day of the week and at what time of the day will you hold the check-ins?

Day of the week: _____

Time of day: _____

- C. Time Limit:** Setting a time limit for check-ins helps keep the communication contained and on point. If you are new to a check-in process, perhaps begin with a shorter time limit, say 10—12 minutes (which would give each person 5—6 minutes to share their answers). As couples build safety and healthy connection, longer check-ins (e.g., 30 minutes) may be useful as more topics begin to feel safe to discuss openly and deeper work is underway.

How long will the entire check-in process be, and how will this time limit be monitored (e.g., a nearby clock, an alarm on a watch)?

Time Limit: _____ minutes

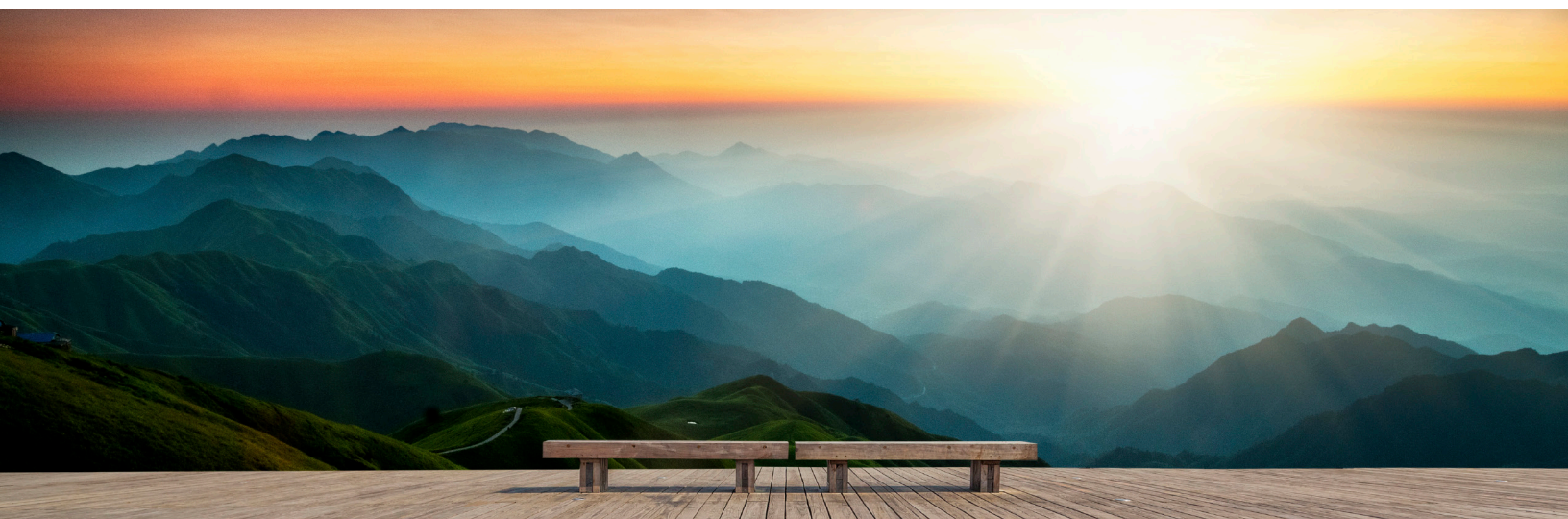
Monitored using: _____

D. Location: If possible, select a neutral location for the check-ins that is free of distractions and that supports high-quality listening. Bedrooms are typically discouraged as a check-in location, but they may also be the only private space a couple has to check in.

Which location in your home or property makes the most sense for hosting regular check-ins?

E. Distractions: What are the potential distractions that could disrupt a check-in? What steps can you take in advance to eliminate or to reduce distractions? For example, can devices be turned off, a door closed or locked, a pet put in a crate, or children put to bed before beginning the check-in?

Which distractions are most likely to occur in your situation, and what can you do to avoid these?





F. Missed Check-Ins: If one or both partners are ill or are traveling, how will missed check-ins be handled? Will you skip, conduct by phone, or reschedule them? Deciding this in advance protects the consistency of the check-in process and demonstrates commitment to healing, which builds trust.

How will missed check-ins be handled?

G. Format: After reviewing the check-in formats outlined in the following document, select one that will best meet your needs at this time.

Which check-in format will you use?

- ☐ FANOS
- ☐ The Vowel Check
- ☐ Using Preset Questions
- ☐ Using Randomly Pulled Preset Questions
- ☐ High—Low
- ☐ Mixture (e.g., High—Low daily and The Vowel Check weekly)
- ☐ Other: _____

Emotions List

The Eight Basic Emotions

Emotion	Associated Emotions	Associated Gifts of this Emotion
Anger	Resentment Irritation Frustration	Assertiveness Strength Energy
Fear	Apprehension Feeling Overwhelmed Feeling Threatened	Preservation Wisdom Protection
Pain	Hurt Pity Sadness Loneliness	Healing Growth Awareness
Joy	Happiness Elation Hope	Abundance Happiness Gratitude
Passion	Enthusiasm Desire Zest	Appetite Energy Excitement
Love	Affection Tenderness Compassion Warmth	Connection Life Spirituality
Shame	Embarrassment Humility	Humility Containment Humanity
Guilt	Regret Contrition Remorse	Values Amends Containment

Note: This entire table is adapted from the work of Pia Mellody.

