The Couple and Family Maps are based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems, which is a very popular and well-researched model of couple and family health.

The Circumplex Model consists of two dimensions: (1) closeness (ranging from disconnected to overly connected) and (2) flexibility (ranging from inflexible to overly flexible). These dimensions create a matrix with four quadrants: Balanced, Mid-Range, Somewhat Flexible, and Unbalanced. Each quadrant represents a different level of closeness and flexibility, with the Balanced quadrant having moderate levels of both, the Mid-Range quadrant having one high and one moderate level, and the Unbalanced quadrant having one high and one low level.

### Closeness Indicators
- **Disconnected**: Little closeness
- **Somewhat Connected**: Moderate closeness
- **Connected**: High closeness
- **Very Connected**: Overly high closeness
- **Overly Connected**: Too much closeness

### Flexibility Indicators
- **Inflexible**: Too little change
- **SOMewhat Flexible**: Can change when necessary
- **Flexible**: Changing leadership
- **Very Flexible**: Dramatic role shifts
- **Overly Flexible**: Too much change

### CHANGE
- **Leadership**: Lack of leadership
- **Role Sharing**: Interdependent
- **Discipline**: Democratic discipline

### LOYALTY
- **Lack of Loyalty**: Authoritarian leadership
- **High Loyalty**: Interdependent
- **Togetherness**: Low dependency

### INDEPENDENCE
- **High Independence**: Strict discipline
- **Interdependence**: High dependency
- **Dependency**: Soviet discipline

The Couple and Family Maps are used to assess the current state of a couple or family and to identify areas for improvement. By understanding the quadrant in which a couple or family falls, a therapist can develop a treatment plan that addresses specific challenges and aims to move towards a Balanced state.
COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS

Five levels of Closeness and five levels of Flexibility for couples in their relationship and in their family of origin:

- **Closeness** – the feeling of togetherness and emotional connection with each other. Measured by I vs. We, loyalty, and independence.
- **Flexibility** – the ability to make changes in roles and leadership when necessary. Measured by openness to change, leadership, role sharing, and discipline.

HEALTHY BALANCE

Balancing Closeness and Flexibility is the key to couple and family health. Couples who are in the nine central squares are considered balanced.

- For Closeness, couples/families need to balance *separateness* (I) vs. *togetherness* (We).
- For Flexibility, couples/families need to balance *stability* vs. *change*.

The two Unbalanced levels of Closeness are “Disconnected” and “Overly Connected”:

- **Disconnected** – too much separateness, lack of loyalty, high independence
- **Overly Connected** – too much togetherness, loyalty is demanded, high dependency

The two Unbalanced levels of Flexibility are “Inflexible” and “Overly Flexible”:

- **Inflexible** – too little change, authoritarian leadership, overly strict discipline
- **Overly Flexible** – too much change, lack of effective leadership, dramatic role shifting, erratic discipline

COUPLE AND FAMILY MAPS ARE DYNAMIC

The Maps capture a snapshot of the couple and family at one point in time. Relationships change over time, and so does their movement on the Couple and Family Maps:

- It is normal for couples and families to change on the Map across the family life cycle.
- Stressful and/or traumatic events will cause movement on the Map.
- Couples often become more unbalanced for short periods of time to adapt to stress.
- After dealing with stress, couples often move back toward their previous position on the Map, though rarely to exactly the same position.

COUPLE EXERCISE

MAPPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP
Couple Closeness is defined as the emotional closeness one feels toward their partner. On this dimension, relationships can range from disconnected to overly connected.

- **Daniel** describes this relationship as **Connected**. These individuals experience a healthy balance of "We" and "I", or closeness and separateness, which reflects an interdependent relationship. Most healthy marriages not only foster connection, but also leave room for each partner to continue to grow and develop as individuals.
- **Maria** describes this relationship as **Very Connected**. Very connected couples often have a good balance of closeness and separateness, which reflects an interdependent relationship. Healthy marriages foster connection, but also leave room for each partner to pursue individual interests and activities.

Couple Flexibility is defined as the ability to adjust to changes in roles and leadership in response to life’s demands. On this dimension, relationships can range from **inflexible** to **overly flexible**.

- **Daniel** feels the relationship is **Somewhat Flexible**, with more stability and less openness to change. The partners may sometimes resist changes in leadership or roles and may need to remember that healthy relationships often require the ability to be flexible while meeting the demands of busy lives.
- **Maria** feels the relationship is **Very Flexible**, with a good balance between stability and change. They may often share decision making and are able to adjust to ongoing issues. Most couples function well with this level of flexibility.

**Couple Discussion:** Review the Closeness and Flexibility results. It can be helpful to discuss what is positive about the current levels of closeness and flexibility. It can also be helpful to discuss any desired changes (increases or decreases) in closeness and flexibility.

**PREPARE/ENRICH Exercises:** Mapping Your Relationship, Closeness Exercises, Flexibility Exercises
Family Map

**Family Closeness** is defined as the emotional closeness one felt growing up in their family of origin. On this dimension, family relationships can range from disconnected to overly connected.

- **Daniel** grew up in a family that was Somewhat Connected. These individuals experienced some family closeness, with plenty of freedom to be an individual and pursue outside relationships.
- **Maria** grew up in an Overly Connected family. These individuals often describe feeling a high level of closeness in their family of origin, with closeness and loyalty being the priorities. At times they may have experienced too much connection and wished for more freedom from their family.

**Family Flexibility** is defined as a family’s ability to adjust to changes in roles, leadership and discipline. On this dimension, family relationships can range from inflexible to overly flexible.

- **Daniel** experienced a family of origin that felt Inflexible. These families are not very open to change. Family members are often too rigid and resist changes in leadership, roles, and routines. These families also have trouble adjusting to stress and finding new ways to deal with issues.
- **Maria** experienced a family of origin that felt Somewhat Flexible. These families maintain a high level of structure and organization. Leadership, decision-making, and roles are clearly defined with little flexibility. They can have some difficulty adjusting to stress and finding new ways to deal with challenges.

**Couple Discussion:** Review family of origin closeness and flexibility results. Discuss family closeness and flexibility with actual examples such as observing a holiday, celebrating a birthday, or handling discipline. What does each person want to bring from their family into the current relationship? What does each person want to leave behind?

**PREPARE/ENRICH Exercises:** Mapping Your Relationship, Closeness Exercises, Flexibility Exercises
MAPPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In your report, there is a **Couple Map**, which indicates how you each described your relationship, and a **Family Map** which indicates how you each described your family of origin. These Maps are designed to help you better understand and discuss your couple relationship and families. The fact that families are so diverse can add to the challenge of merging individuals from two families into a couple relationship.

**Closeness**

*Closeness refers to how emotionally connected you feel to your partner and family.* How do you balance separateness and togetherness? Indicators of Closeness are I vs. We, loyalty, and independence vs. dependence. There are five levels of Closeness. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of Closeness are most healthy for couples and families, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

**Flexibility**

*Flexibility refers to how open couples and families are to change.* How do you balance stability and change? Indicators of Flexibility are leadership, relationship roles, discipline and rules. As with Closeness, there are five levels of Flexibility. **Balanced levels** (3 central levels) of Flexibility are the most happy and healthy, while the two **Unbalanced levels** (2 extreme ends) are more problematic.

**COUPLE DISCUSSION**

- Compare how you each described your couple relationship.
- Compare your family of origin with your partner’s family on Closeness and Flexibility. Use the examples below for your discussion:
  - Family gatherings during a holiday
  - Celebrating a birthday or anniversary
  - Dinner time / Meal time
  - Handling discipline and parenting responsibilities
  - Closeness and Flexibility in your parents marriage
  - Caring for a sick family member
  - Adjusting to a stressful change (e.g. a move, job transition).
- How similar or different were your families in terms of Closeness and Flexibility?
- How might the similarities or differences impact your current relationship?
- What from your family of origin would you like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- What from your family would you not like to repeat in your couple relationship?
- How satisfied are you with the current level of Closeness and Flexibility in your couple relationship?
- Consider ways you might increase or decrease Closeness and Flexibility (see next section for ideas).