

## THE NO-EXIT DECISION

With the completion of the preceding exercises, you have a vision of the relationship you want with your partner. Before you go forward, you must both make a decision: You must decide to recommit to your partner and to your relationship, and you must make a new commitment to a process that will change your relationship. This decision is called the "No-Exit Decision."

Essentially, making a no-exit decision means that you decide to commit to the goal of creating a positive, working relationship with your partner and to participate in the processes and procedures of achieving your goals.

Each of you will need all your energy to devote to the work of creating the relationship of your vision.

Even if you are not sure that you want to stay in this relationship, you are encouraged to make this decision. As we have seen, the problems you have in this relationship reflect the unresolved problems you have in yourself. You will tend to repeat these problems in any future relationship until and unless you resolve them in yourself.

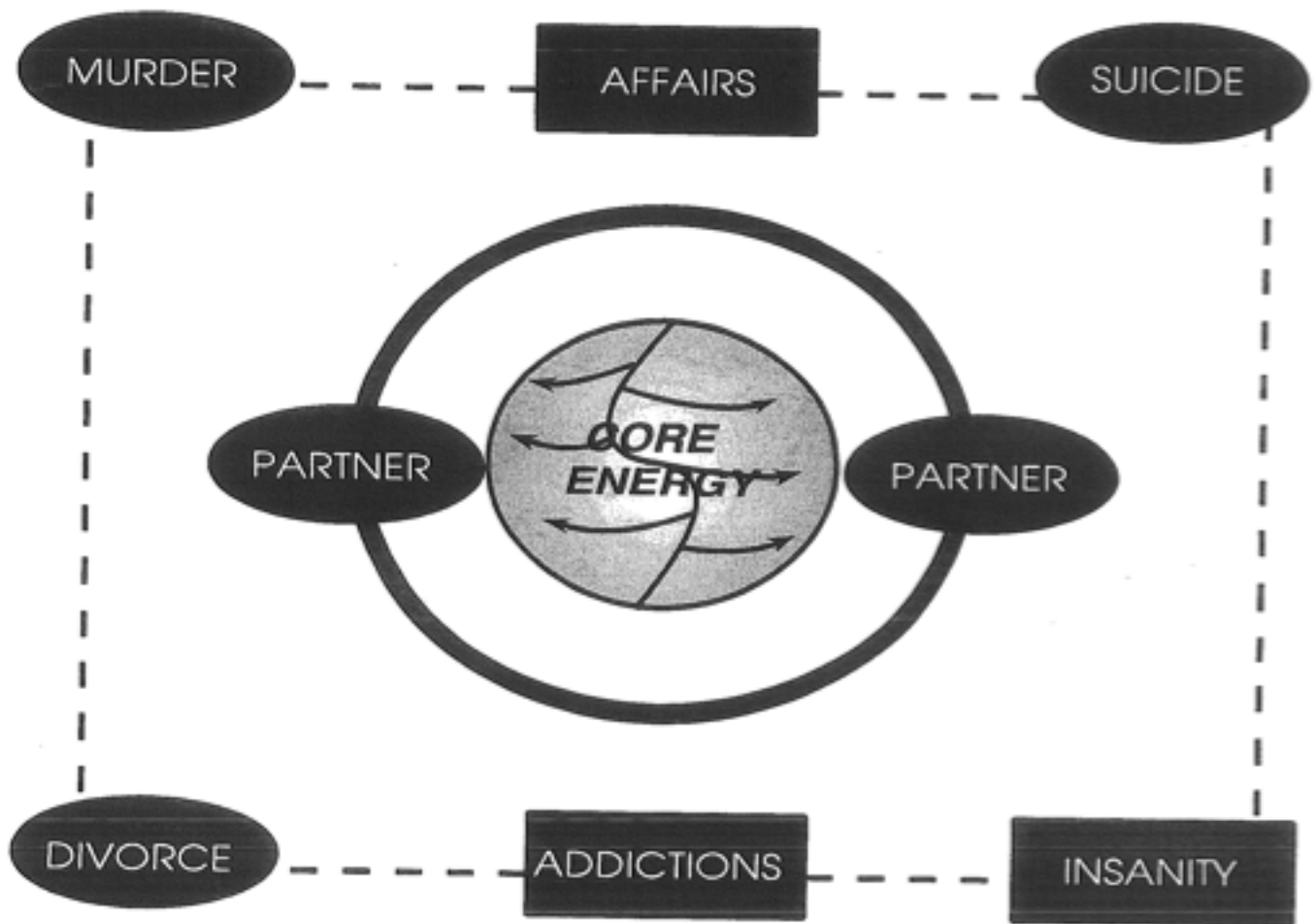






## THE INVISIBLE DIVORCE

1. The diagram below represents your relationship boundaries. The open spaces in the lines represent possible "exits", i.e., ways you prevent intimacy by using energy to create conflict or to avoid involvement.
2. The three exits in the ellipses, if used, will terminate the relationship. The exits in the rectangles will greatly damage your relationship. Are any of these open for you? Circle which one(s).



3. List on the dotted rectangle any other exits you use such as watching TV, sports, children, etc. that take energy and time away from your partner.
4. The three terminal exits--divorce, suicide, murder--will end your relationship. Put an X on the exits you will close today.









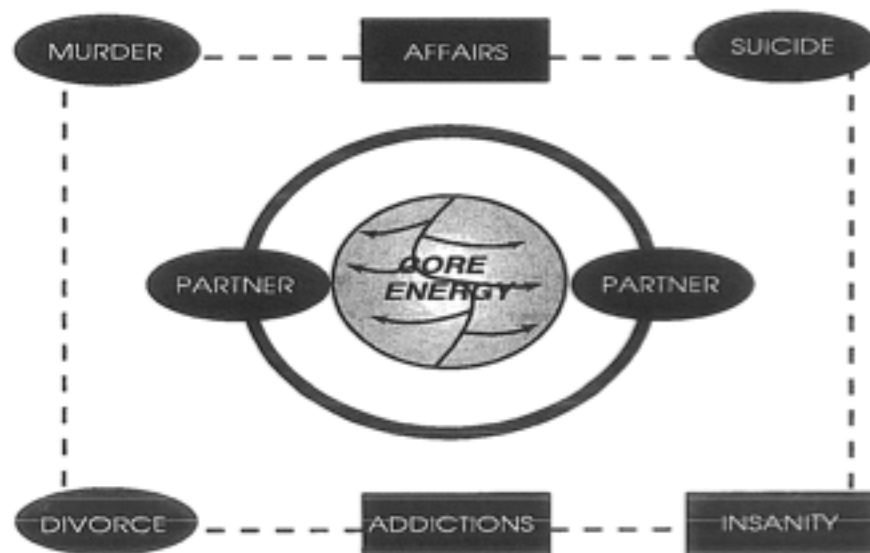
## The Invisible Divorce (Continued)

5. The three catastrophic exits--affairs, addictions, insanity--will greatly damage your relationship. If any of these exits are open, they must be closed immediately to prevent serious damage to your relationship. Put an **X** over the exits you will close immediately.
6. The remaining exits fall into two categories: intentional and functional. An intentional exit is a feeling expressed as a behavior with the clear motivation to avoid involvement with your partner, thus diminishing intimacy and growth. In other words, you experience the activity as more pleasurable than being with your partner.

A functional exit is a behavior that you enjoy, but your involvement in the activity clearly takes energy and time away from the relationship. The effect, although not the motivation, is decreased involvement with your partner, thus diminishing intimacy.

Indicate with a **circle** the exits that are intentional. **Underline** the functional exits.

7. On the diagram below, list the behaviors that you perceive your partner uses as exits. **Circle** the ones you think are intentional and **underline** the ones you think are functional.



Using the *Couples' Dialogue*, share your two charts with each other. Revise any judgments you have made about the ones that are intentional or functional until you have an agreement.

Now add any exits from your partner's list to your chart on page 16. Remember to **underline** the functional and **circle** the intentional exits.







## The Invisible Divorce (Continued)

8. Next, rank all the intentional exits according to "difficulty of closing them," making the most difficult number 1. Then rank all the functional exits according to difficulty of closing them.
9. On page 19 you will find a chart with the terminal and catastrophic exits listed. Add to this list, in the appropriate sections, your intentional and functional exits in the order that you ranked them.
10. **REMEMBER:** An exit is a behavior that expresses a feeling you have about being with your partner. It is called "acting out." For example: you may watch TV to avoid making love because you are angry or because you fear it will be a painful experience. Or, you may use over-working to avoid your fear that your partner will be critical of you or ask you to do things around the house you dislike. Or you may have considered or attempted suicide because your partner ignores you and it is a desperate attempt to get his/her attention.
11. Using the *Couples' Dialogue*, share with your partner the feelings which each behavior expresses.

Start with the terminal and catastrophic exits. Share your feelings in the dialogue process, ask for a behavior change and close these exits immediately.

Now go to the intentional exits. Starting with the easiest, share your feelings in the dialogue process and close these exits as soon as possible. Then go on to the next hardest and so on. Since each intentional exit is usually a legitimate or necessary activity, you will have to modify, but not eliminate it, to redirect excess energy into the relationship.

Now go to the functional exits. Do the same process, starting with the easiest. Although these exits are not motivated to avoid involvement, they diminish involvement and intimacy. You will have to modify, but not eliminate them, to increase involvement and intimacy.

12. **REMEMBER THE GRADUATED CHANGE PROCESS:** You cannot close all your exits at once. Start with the easiest and make a plan by which you will gradually close them until all the energy and time that is necessary for intimacy and growth is committed to it.

**NOTE:** The graduated change process does not apply to the terminal and catastrophic exits. They must be closed immediately. As long as they are open, your relationship is hemorrhaging and should be treated as a crisis.

1







## CLOSING THE EXITS

**Example:** I agree to keep you safe - No murder.  
 I agree to stay in the relationship - No divorce.  
 I agree to limit my TV viewing and spend an hour with you each evening.

| Exit I Will Close | Date I Will Close It |              |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Murder            |                      | TERMINAL     |
| Suicide           |                      |              |
| Divorce           |                      |              |
| Affairs           |                      | CATASTROPHIC |
| Insanity          |                      |              |
| Addictions        |                      |              |
|                   |                      | INTENTIONAL  |
|                   |                      |              |
|                   |                      |              |
|                   |                      |              |
|                   |                      |              |
|                   |                      | FUNCTIONAL   |
|                   |                      |              |
|                   |                      |              |
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