

Self-Confronting Questions

For an honest look at how you operate, participate, and dodge in your closest relationship.

Paula Pate, LCMFT | Crucible® Approach

These aren't warm-and-fuzzy journaling prompts. They're built to be a little uncomfortable, on purpose — because discomfort is usually a sign you've hit something real. Most people, when something's wrong in a relationship, can describe in detail what their partner does. This is not that list. Every question here points back at you: how you operate, what you get out of the pattern you complain about, where you go blind to manage anxiety, and how you dodge the choices you'd rather not make.

HOW TO USE THIS

Read each question slowly. Don't rush to answer. Notice which ones you want to skip past quickly — that's often the one worth sitting with longest. You don't need to answer everything today, and you don't need anyone's permission to be honest with yourself about what you find.

SECTION 1

How You're Operating

Your actual patterns in this relationship — not the ones you'd describe to a friend.

1. What's your real pattern when things get tense — do you pursue, withdraw, appease, or attack? Would your partner describe it the same way you just did?
2. What do you do in this relationship that you'd find alarming if you watched someone else do it to their partner?
3. Have you settled into a role — the reasonable one, the patient one, the one who copes — that quietly lets you avoid changing anything?
4. What's become “just how we are” that you've stopped questioning, even though it still costs you something real?
5. If someone watched a week of your actual behavior here, what pattern would they see that you don't say out loud?

SECTION 2

How You're Participating in the Dysfunction

Every stuck pattern gives someone something. What does this one give you?

1. What do you get out of the problem you keep complaining about?
2. Where do you quietly need your partner to stay the same, even while you say you want them to change?
3. What have you trained your partner to expect from you, just by how consistently you show up?
4. When you describe what's wrong between you, how much of that description leaves you out entirely?
5. What's your actual contribution to the dynamic you keep describing as something that happens “to” you?

SECTION 3

Where You Go Blind — Managing Anxiety Together

Couples regulate each other's anxiety constantly. Sometimes that looks like support. Often it's collusion.

1. What do you avoid noticing about yourself, because really seeing it would cost you the comfort of the current arrangement?
2. When your partner gets anxious, do you actually help them face what's causing it — or do you do something to make the feeling go away for both of you?
3. What have the two of you silently agreed not to look at directly, because looking would require one of you to change?
4. Whose anxiety are you currently carrying, as though managing it were your job?
5. What do you already know about your part in this that you've been careful not to say, even to yourself?

SECTION 4

How You Dodge Your Two-Choice Dilemmas

A two-choice dilemma is when you want two things you can't actually have at the same time — and instead of choosing, you stall, so it feels like you haven't given anything up. Dodging it doesn't make the dilemma go away. It just quietly steals your partner's choice along with your own.

1. What decision have you been “still thinking about” for far longer than actual thinking requires?
2. Where are you trying to get two things you're not actually entitled to have both of at once?

3. Have you ever kept a choice deliberately unspoken, so your partner couldn't act on knowing where you really stand?
4. What would you have to give up — comfort, certainty, being seen a certain way — if you actually chose, instead of stalling?
5. Where are you waiting for your partner to decide first, so you don't have to?

What to Do With What You Find

Some of these questions will land harder than others — that unevenness is information, not a flaw in the exercise. You don't have to solve anything you find here on your own. Most of what surfaces in questions like these is exactly the raw material a consultation is built to work with.

Ready to talk through what came up?

If one of these questions is still sitting with you, that's usually a good sign it's worth bringing into a real conversation. I'll help you see the pattern clearly — you decide what to do with it.

paula@paulapate.com | 316-737-7504 | Wichita, KS & Virtual

Crucible® is a trademark developed by David Schnarch, PhD. The concepts of “two-choice dilemmas” and “borrowed functioning” referenced here are drawn from Dr. Schnarch's books, including *Passionate Marriage* and *Intimacy & Desire*. These specific questions are Paula Pate's own, written to help readers apply those concepts to their own lives, and are offered for educational purposes.