

What are Secure Functioning Relationships and PACT?

As a PACT Couple Therapist~ I help couples reach their unique relationship goals and create a “secure functioning” relationship. I have found that the secure functioning paradigm is the foundation for long-lasting, fulfilling relationships.

Below is PACT's founder Stan Tatkin's, PhD description of a “secure functioning” relationship:

“Our relationship is grounded in true mutuality- whatever we do is good for me and you. We are tethered to one another. We depend on each other. We tell each other everything. We’re the first to know. **We watch each other’s back.** We protect each other from other people and ourselves. We're good **caregivers** of each other. We have each other's "owner's manual". We know exactly what our partner is doing and why. We know what hurts our partner or knocks them to their knees, and what we can do to pick them up. We know what to say to make our partner feel absolutely loved and secure. We get each other in and out of distress very quickly. We only use attraction, not fear or threat, to get what we want. **We do whatever it takes to help our partner feel safe, secure, and loved.**” - Tatkin

Isn't this a codependent relationship?! Tatkin explains the difference, "Codependent partners live through or for each other, while ignoring their own needs and wants, thus leading to resentment and other emotional distress". Secure functioning relationships, on the other hand, are based in true mutuality, which allows both partners' needs and wants to be honored.

How is this different from an avoidant relationship? Avoidant style relationships are less overtly condemned in our culture, but inadvertently cause their partners to feel lonely, emotionally deprived, and even betrayed through their emotionally and physically distancing behaviors. Avoidant relationships are not emotionally attuned and responsive like “secure functioning” relationships.

While you you weren't able to choose your adult attachment or relationship style because it is primarily a product of your childhood, **you can still create a secure attachment with your partner and build a secure functioning relationship!** Using the PACT model and my steps of 1.) reconnect, 2.) rebuild, 3.) rediscover, and 4.) reauthor, you can create a long-term fulfilling relationship that has the potential of being even *more* wonderful than you thought possible.

What is PACT?

PACT stands for a Psychobiological Approach to Couple Therapy®. PACT was developed out of cutting-edge research in three areas:

1. **Neuroscience-** Parts of our brain are wired for war (“primitives”) in order to survive and other parts are wired for connection and love (“ambassadors”). I help couples increase their awareness of their partner's and their own triggers and things that make them feel safe and secure so they can adjust their non-verbal (body language and facial expressions) and verbal communication skills to have more productive and enjoyable conversations. Couples also practice shifting their focus from being heard to “attunement”- being able to “read” their partner and listening *with their heart*. This motivates their partner to be more interested in understanding them! Through practice and coaching in session, couples leave with effective tools in being able to talk about ANYTHING.
2. **Arousal (Nervous System) Regulation-** Couples also greatly benefit from becoming “expert soothers” of one another. This is a “superpower” partners can learn from one another, which elicits feelings of deep caring, safety, and security. I support partners in identifying and expressing how they would like their partner to skillfully respond to

different emotions they experience. When partners can adeptly soothe each other's distress, they feel more confident in their ability to talk about anything, resolve conflicts, and feel more loved.

3. Attachment Theory-

The goal of PACT sessions is to help couples develop a secure functioning relationship. In a nutshell, this means that both partners agree to do *whatever* it takes to help one another feel safe, secure, and loved. These feelings naturally occur in children when they consistently experience their parents skillfully emotionally responding to their distress. These children learn that depending on someone is natural and safe, in addition to learning how to emotionally respond to others' feelings. Secure attachments with parents generalize to secure attachments with adult partners, which allow for healthy emotional and physical intimacy.

On the other hand, when children experience non-existent, inconsistent or inappropriate emotional responses from their parents when they are in distress, these children develop an insecure attachment style, which creates anxiety or avoidance/emotional numbing of their emotional or attachment needs. These children develop insecure attachment styles as adults, which causes them anxiety when wishing to express the need for comfort when distressed, lacking awareness of any emotional needs, or lacking any self-soothing skills and solely turning to their partner for comfort. Conversely, adults with insecure attachments may lack attunement and consistent emotional responsiveness skills with their partner when s/he is distressed. Fortunately, even adults with insecure styles can develop a secure functioning relationship if committed to following the principles.

What does a PACT session look like?

- **Experiential and goes deep-** Instead of sitting on a couch looking to the therapist for help, I will support and coach you and your partner sitting in rolling chairs facing each other because helping couples *in real time* will strengthen your communication skills much more effectively than us just talking about it or me demonstrating it. PACT's experiential exercises will also *get you out of your chairs*, are playful and fun, and also tap into your deeper or truer emotions and beliefs by incorporating non-verbal exercises that tend to “show the truth”. Clarity about what partners really want and need and change happens much faster when couples participate in experiential exercises.
- **Heart-centered-** Grounded in attachment theory, Lana fosters empathy and understanding of partner's behavior that is rooted in their childhood and with previous significant others, and partners are also coached to practice healthier relationship skills to create a secure functioning relationship.
- **Mindfulness & awareness fostered-** Partners are coached to slow down their interactions and increase their awareness of themselves and their partners (facial expressions, body language, & internal experience- emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations) to increase attunement, understanding of one's self and partner, and become an expert on what amplifies your partner's joy and soothes his/her distress.
- **Feedback in real time-** Sessions are filmed with your permission so you can learn in the most effective ways possible by watching excerpts of your sessions during video playback



If you are interested in creating an amazing intimate relationship,
Contact Lana Isaacson, LCSW, CAC III, PACT Level I, 720.432.5262 or lanaisaacson@gmail.com.