

UNISON MENTAL HEALTH WORKBOOK

Relationship Check-Up

Hinge (V) relationships

A workbook for one person with two partners, and for those two partners

Name

Date

How to use this workbook

This check-up shows what's working in your V, how you show up for each other, and where things are wearing thin. Each of you fills it in alone, then you compare. The gaps between your answers are usually more useful than the answers themselves.

In a V, one person (the hinge) has two partners who are each other's metamours: they share a partner but aren't partnered with each other. If all three of you are partnered with each other, use the Unison workbook for throuples instead.

A relationship works a lot like a garden you look after together. A V is closer to two gardens that share a gardener and a fence. The hinge tends both, each partner tends their own, and what happens along the fence line (time, information, feelings) affects everyone. This workbook is a slow walk around both gardens, with sections for each seat.

Who fills in what:

SEAT	SECTIONS
The hinge	Map your cycles (both columns), Area 1 (both columns), Areas 2 and 4, hinge open questions
Each partner	Map your cycle (first column), Area 1 (first column), Areas 3 and 4, partner open questions

How to do it:

1. Read "What's going on underneath" first. It gives the three of you a shared language for the rest.
2. Set aside 45–60 minutes on your own. Don't fill it in together or in the same room.
3. Start with "What's going well". Then map your cycle and rate the statements quickly. Your first number is usually the honest one.
4. Answer the open questions for your seat in a sentence or two. These are where the specifics live.
5. Don't show anyone your answers until everyone has finished.
6. Use "Reading your results" to find what's working and what needs attention, then pick one of each to talk about.

When not to do this together. If you're afraid of how a partner will react to your honest answers, don't share them. The same goes if there's been violence or threats, or if someone monitors your phone, controls your money or stops you from seeing people. A workbook isn't the right tool for that, and sharing your answers could make things less safe. Talk to 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732, any time, or speak to a therapist on your own first.

This workbook isn't a diagnosis or a substitute for therapy. It's a structured way to notice patterns and start a better conversation.

What's going on underneath

At Unison, we incorporate Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) into our relationship work. EFT was developed by psychologist Susan Johnson from attachment theory. It doesn't assume a particular relationship structure, so it works for a V as well as it does for a couple. You don't need to know any theory to use this workbook, but a few of its ideas make the rest of it much more useful. For more on the hinge seat itself, see our article [The challenges of being a hinge in a polyamorous dynamic](#).

The fight under the fight

Say one partner is upset that the hinge moved their date night for the other relationship. On the surface it's about a calendar. Underneath, that partner might be asking "do I still matter to you?", while the hinge is hearing "you're failing one of us whatever you do." Meanwhile the metamour, who wasn't even in the room, may be wondering whether they're being blamed. EFT treats the topic as a clue, not the core issue.

What we're all asking

Attachment theory says we're wired to need a small number of people we can reach when it counts. In a V, each partner is asking that question of the same person, and the hinge is answering it twice. Johnson boiled the question down to three parts:

	THE QUESTION UNDERNEATH	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE DAY TO DAY
Accessible	Can I reach you?	You pick up, look up from your phone, make time when it matters.
Responsive	Will you respond to what I'm feeling?	You answer the feeling, not just the facts.
Engaged	Do I matter to you? Will you stay close?	You're interested, present, and you come back after distance.

When a partner's answer feels like "yes", they can usually handle the hinge having another relationship. When it starts to feel like "maybe not", the other relationship stops looking like part of the arrangement and starts looking like the reason.

The cycle

When the alarm goes off, most people do one of two things.

- **Pushing for a response.** Criticising, chasing, asking for more reassurance, sending the third text. It's a protest: "Notice me. Come back."
- **Pulling back to calm things down.** Going quiet, defending, explaining, getting busy. It's protection: "If I don't engage, maybe this won't get worse."

Each move sets off the other. In a V, the hinge can be caught in two cycles at once, and they often look different. A hinge might pull back from one partner who pushes, then push for closeness with the other partner who keeps their distance. The two cycles can also feed each other. When one partner pushes harder for reassurance, the hinge may pull back from them and turn towards the easier relationship, which confirms the first partner's fear.

Metamours can end up in a cycle with each other too, even if they rarely speak. It usually runs through the hinge: complaints, comparisons and worries travel along the fence line instead of being said directly.

Here's the most important idea in this workbook: **the cycle is the weed, not any one of you.** In a V, it's tempting to make the metamour the problem, or for the hinge to decide they're the problem. Usually it's a loop that all three of you are caught in.

On top and underneath

What you show in the cycle is usually the reaction on top. The softer feeling underneath is the one that would actually get through, and it's the hardest to say.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE ON TOP	WHAT'S OFTEN UNDERNEATH
Anger, criticism, keeping score of time	Fear of not mattering, of coming second
Going quiet, over-explaining, defending (often the hinge)	Feeling pulled in two, fear of failing someone, guilt
Asking for details about the other relationship	Fear of being replaced or compared
Avoiding the metamour, or criticising them	Fear of being less loved, feeling powerless
Saying "I'm fine with it"	Fear that having needs will cost the relationship

Raw spots

Some reactions are bigger than the moment because they're touching something older: being the child who had to keep two parents happy, a past partner who left for someone else, years of being the easy-going one. EFT calls these raw spots. Hinges often carry a raw spot about letting people down. Partners often carry one about not being chosen.

What repair looks like

Repair happens when one of you can say the thing underneath ("When the plan moved, I felt like I was the one who always gives way") and the person it's said to answers that, rather than defending ("You're not second to me. I should have talked to you before I moved it."). For the hinge, repair often means saying their own underneath feeling too: "I feel like I'm failing both of you, and I don't know how to fix it."

What's going well

Start here. When you're looking for problems, it's easy to walk straight past what's working. This page is about what your partners bring to your life, how they show love, and what you bring to them.

Hinge: answer for each of your two relationships, column 1 for one partner and column 2 for the other, in the same order you'll use for the rest of the workbook. **Partners:** use column 1 only, for your relationship with the hinge.

Be specific. "You make my coffee before my early shifts" says far more than "you're thoughtful". You'll read some of these out to each other later.

RELATIONSHIP 1: ME AND _____

RELATIONSHIP 2: ME AND _____

How does this partner show me love? (A text when I'm nervous, remembering how I like my tea, making room for me.)

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What does this partner do, often in small ways, that makes my life better?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

When did I last feel really looked after by this partner? What did they do?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What does this partner bring out in me?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

How do I show love to this partner? Would they recognise it as love?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

For the hinge:

What does each partner do that makes being the hinge easier?

For each partner:

What does the hinge do that helps me feel secure in the V?

Is there anything my metamour brings that I'm glad about, for me or for our partner? (Leave it blank if not.)

Map your cycles

Hinge: you're mapping two relationships here, not one. Each relationship can have its own cycle, and you might push in one and pull back in the other. Column 1 is your relationship with one partner, column 2 is your relationship with your other partner. Write their names at the top. **Partners:** fill in column 1 only, about your relationship with the hinge.

Fill this in on your own. For each column, think of a recent argument or moment of distance in that relationship specifically.

RELATIONSHIP 1: ME AND _____

RELATIONSHIP 2: ME AND _____

In this relationship, do I mostly push for a response or pull back?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What usually sets it off?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What do I do or say on the outside?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What do I feel underneath?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

What do I most need from this partner then?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

When I do my part, what does this partner usually do?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

How does the other relationship come into it?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

The check-up

Four areas, 42 statements. Every statement is worded so that a higher number means that area is working better.

How to rate. For each statement, write the number that's closest to true for you right now. Not how it was at the start, and not how you'd like it to be.

1

Not true for us

2

Rarely true

3

Sometimes true

4

Mostly true

5

Very true for us

?

I don't know
(that's worth
talking about too)

1. Each relationship

Hinge: rate each of your two relationships separately, in the same column order as your cycle map.

Partners: use column 1 only, for your relationship with the hinge.

#	STATEMENT	RELATIONSHIP 1: ME AND	RELATIONSHIP 2: ME AND
1.1	When I reach out to this person, I can get through, even when they're busy or stressed.		
1.2	When I share something painful, they respond to how I feel about it.		
1.3	I feel like I matter to this person.		
1.4	I can tell this person when I'm hurt or scared.		
1.5	When we get stuck in our usual fight, one of us can name it.		
1.6	Most days we have some contact that isn't about logistics.		
1.7	We still do things together just because we enjoy them.		
1.8	I can raise something that bothers me without rehearsing it for days first.		
1.9	After an argument, one of us usually makes a move to reconnect within a day.		
1.10	When this person says they'll do something, it gets done.		

#	STATEMENT	RELATIONSHIP 1: ME AND	RELATIONSHIP 2: ME AND
1.11	I'm happy with the physical and sexual side of this relationship, whatever that looks like for us.	☐	☐
1.12	Needing space doesn't get read as not caring.	☐	☐
1.13	We want broadly the same things from this relationship over the next few years.	☐	☐
1.14	This relationship feels like it has its own life, not just what's left over from the other one.	☐	☐
1.15	This person makes my life better in ways I could name.	☐	☐
1.16	This person shows me love in ways that land for me.	☐	☐
1.17	I feel appreciated by this person for what I bring.	☐	☐

2. For the hinge

#	STATEMENT	RATING
2.1	I can split my time between my partners without feeling guilty about whoever misses out.	☐
2.2	I'm not the only one keeping track of the shared calendar.	☐
2.3	I don't end up passing messages, moods or complaints between my partners.	☐
2.4	When one partner is upset about the other, I can listen without having to take a side.	☐
2.5	I tell each partner what they need to know about the other relationship, and I don't oversell or undersell it.	☐
2.6	Neither partner asks me to keep things from the other that I'm not comfortable keeping.	☐
2.7	I can tell each partner what I need without worrying it'll be weighed against the other relationship.	☐
2.8	I notice when I'm pushing in one relationship and pulling back in the other.	☐
2.9	I still have time that's just for me.	☐
2.10	When there's tension between my partners, I don't try to fix it all by myself.	☐

3. For each partner

#	STATEMENT	RATING
3.1	I know enough about my metamour and their relationship with our partner to feel settled.	
3.2	I'm not told more than I want to know about the other relationship.	
3.3	How our partner's time is shared feels fair to me, even if it isn't equal.	
3.4	Plans with me don't get moved for the other relationship without a conversation.	
3.5	My relationship with my metamour (close, friendly, distant or none) is what I want it to be.	
3.6	When I have a problem with my metamour, I raise it with them directly rather than through our partner.	
3.7	When I feel jealous or left out, I have ways of looking after myself beyond going to our partner.	
3.8	I can say what I feel underneath jealousy (fear, hurt, loneliness) rather than only the complaint.	
3.9	I know where I stand: what this relationship is, and what it isn't.	

4. For all three

#	STATEMENT	RATING
4.1	The agreements that affect all of us (safer sex, privacy, overnights, special dates) are clear to all three of us.	
4.2	Everyone affected by an agreement has had a say in it.	
4.3	Any of us can ask to change an agreement without being treated as difficult.	
4.4	I know what happens if someone wants to bring in a new partner.	
4.5	Holidays, birthdays and events where we're all invited are planned openly.	
4.6	The way this V is set up is working for me right now.	

Open questions

For the hinge

- 1** When do you feel most stretched between your two partners? Name a specific week or situation.

- 2** What's something you keep to yourself to avoid upsetting one of your partners?

- 3** Do you push in one relationship and pull back in the other? What sets that off?

- 4** What would make being the hinge feel lighter?

For each partner

- 1** What do you need to know about the other relationship to feel secure? What would you rather not know?

- 2** When did you last feel like you came second? What happened, and what did you feel underneath?

- 3** What would you want your relationship with your metamour to look like a year from now?

Reading your results

Start with your "What's going well" pages. In each relationship, read them to each other before you look at a single number.

Then put everyone's ratings side by side and look for four patterns. There's no pass mark. A V with several 2s can be in good shape if everyone knows where the 2s are and you're working on them.

PATTERN	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS
Working well	Everyone who rated it gave it 4 or 5	This is working. Name it out loud, and protect it when life gets busy.
Needs attention	Everyone who rated it gave it 1 or 2	You already agree something's wrong. That often makes it the easiest place to start.
A gap	Two people's ratings are 2 or more points apart	You're having different experiences of the same relationship. This is usually the most useful thing in the whole workbook.
Not yet explored	Someone answered "?"	Nobody has looked closely. Find out before you assume it's fine.

Compare each relationship on its own first. In Area 1, put the hinge's column for a partner next to that partner's own ratings. Then do the same for the other relationship. Only compare the two relationships with each other afterwards, and gently: different isn't the same as worse.

Gaps are information, not accusations. If a partner rated 3.3 (time is shared fairly) a 2, and the hinge rated 2.1 (splitting time without guilt) a 4, nobody is lying. The hinge may have made peace with an arrangement the partner never agreed to. Start with "What made you pick that number?" rather than "How can you think that?"

Some pairs are worth comparing on purpose:

- 2.3 against 3.6. A low 2.3 from the hinge and a low 3.6 from a partner usually means the hinge has quietly become the messenger.
- 2.5 against 3.1 and 3.2. If the hinge thinks they're sharing the right amount and a partner disagrees, agree together on what gets shared, rather than leaving the hinge to guess.
- 1.14 across both relationships. If one partner feels their relationship only gets what's left over, that's often the cycle talking, but it's worth checking the calendar too.
- The hinge's two cycle maps. If they push in one relationship and pull back in the other, both partners may be reacting to something that started in the other relationship.

Area summary

Add up your ratings in each area and write the total. Leave out any "?". The gap is the difference between the scores in that row.

Each relationship (Area 1, out of 85). The hinge's score for that relationship goes next to that partner's own score.

RELATIONSHIP	HINGE	PARTNER	GAP
Hinge and _____			
Hinge and _____			

The rest of the V. Area 2 is for the hinge only, and Area 3 for the two partners only.

AREA	HINGE	PARTNER	PARTNER	GAP
2. For the hinge (out of 50)				
3. For each partner (out of 45)				
4. For all three (out of 30)				

Start with the area that has the biggest gap. Then look at any area where someone scored less than half.

Pick two

Before you talk, each of you chooses:

1. **One strength** to name, with a specific example. For example: "1.9. After we argued about the holiday, you rang me the next morning. That mattered."
2. **One pain point or gap** to talk about first. Just one. Choose something that matters but won't blow up the whole evening.

Having the conversation

The workbook does its job in the conversations afterwards. In a V, most of those happen in pairs: the hinge with each partner. Some agreements need all three of you. If any conversation starts going sideways, stop, and come back to it on another day.

Set it up:

- Start with two separate conversations, the hinge with each partner, covering Area 1 and that partner's answers in Area 3.
- Only bring all three of you together for Area 4 (shared agreements), and only if everyone wants to. Metamours don't have to be close for this to work.
- Pick a time when nobody is tired, hungry, drinking or about to leave for work, and agree on the finish time before you start.

Run each conversation in this order:

1. Each of you reads out two or three answers from your "What's going well" page for this relationship, then names your strength from "Pick two". Don't skip this. The hard conversation goes better when you've just heard, in detail, how you show up for each other.
2. Swap cycle maps for your relationship. Try to describe the cycle together, as something you're both caught in.
3. One of you shares a pain point or gap, and says what you feel underneath it. The other's only job is to ask "What made you pick that number?" and listen.
4. The listener says back what they heard, in their own words, until the speaker says "Yeah, that's it". Then they respond to that feeling before anything else. Hold off on solutions until then.
5. Swap.
6. Agree on one small, specific change to try for two weeks. "Plans with you don't move without a phone call first" works. "Make more time for me" doesn't.
7. Put a date in the calendar to check how it went.

A note for the hinge: you'll have two of these conversations, and it's easy to walk into the second one carrying the first. Leave time in between, and don't report one conversation to the other partner unless you've agreed to.

Redo the whole check-up every three to six months and compare it with this round. A score moving from 2 to 3 is worth noticing.

If it turns into a fight, take at least 20 minutes apart. A nervous system that's flooded can't take in new information, however good the information is. Come back to it within a day. Coming back is the repair.

When to get support

Some patterns are hard to shift from inside them, especially when one person is holding two relationships together. It's worth talking to a relationship therapist if:

- the same pain point comes up every time and nothing changes, or every attempt to talk about it turns into a fight
- the hinge feels like they're failing both partners, or is burning out from carrying both relationships
- complaints about the metamour keep travelling through the hinge
- there's a gap of 3 or more points somewhere important, and you can't talk about it without someone shutting down
- trust has been broken and you keep getting stuck trying to repair it
- you're deciding about structure, such as changing agreements, adding a partner, or one relationship ending or changing shape
- one of you is quietly wondering whether to stay

The hinge can come to therapy alone, with one partner, or with both. Any of those can be the right starting point.

If anyone in the V is unsafe, the order changes. Don't use this workbook together, don't try relationship therapy first, and contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732. If you're in immediate danger, call 000.

We incorporate Emotion-Focused Therapy into our relationship therapy, including with polyamorous relationships. We see clients in person in Carlton or online. You can [read about polyamory and ENM therapy](#), [take the match quiz](#) to find a therapist who fits, or [book a free 15-minute call](#) to talk it through first.