



UNISON MENTAL HEALTH WORKBOOK

Relationship Check-Up

Throuples

A workbook for three people who are all partnered with each other

Name

Date

unisonmentalhealth.com · Carlton, Melbourne and online

How to use this workbook

This check-up shows what's working in your throuple, 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.

A relationship works a lot like a garden you look after together, and a throuple is a garden with three people tending it. That's more hands, and more chances for one bed to get missed because everyone assumed someone else was watering it. This workbook is a slow walk around the garden together: noticing what's flowering, what needs attention, and what could use more room to grow.

A throuple is four relationships at once: the three of you together, plus each of the three pairs. Something can be going well in the group while one pair is struggling, and the group can't fix that on its own. So this workbook asks about both.

This workbook is for three people who are all partnered with each other. If one person has two partners who aren't partnered with each other, use the Unison workbook for hinge (V) relationships instead.

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 about an hour on your own. Don't fill it in together or in the same room.
3. Start with "What's going well". Then map your cycles and rate the statements quickly. Your first number is usually the honest one.
4. Answer the open questions in a sentence or two. These are where the specifics live.
5. Don't show anyone your answers until all three of you have 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, which is a large part of why we use it with throuples. 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.

The fight under the fight

Say the three of you are arguing about who gets Saturday night. On the surface it's about a calendar. Underneath, one of you might be asking "do I still matter to you?", another hearing "I'm letting someone down whatever I do", and the third wondering whether they're the one being squeezed out. EFT treats the topic as a clue, not the core issue. Most throuples have the same few fights over and over with different topics swapped in, because the thing underneath never gets answered.

What we're all asking

Attachment theory says we're wired to need a small number of people we can reach when it counts. Having two partners doesn't halve that need. Each relationship has its own version of the question, and Johnson boiled it 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 the answer feels like "yes", a throuple can survive a lot of mess. When it starts to feel like "maybe not" in even one of the pairs, the alarm can spread to the whole group.

The cycle

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

- **Pushing for a response.** Criticising, chasing, raising your voice, asking the same question again, sending the third text. It's a protest: "Notice me. Come back."
- **Pulling back to calm things down.** Going quiet, defending, changing the subject, leaving the room, getting busy. It's protection: "If I don't engage, maybe this won't get worse."

Each move sets off the other. With a couple there's usually one cycle. In a throuple, several can run at once, and they feed each other. When B pulls back from A, A may lean harder on C, and now C feels caught in the middle of something they didn't start. There can also be a cycle at group level, where two people end up on one side of every disagreement and the third keeps having to push to be heard.

Here's the most important idea in this workbook: **the cycle is the weed, not any one of you.** Throuples often go looking for the person who's causing the problem. Usually it's a loop that all three of you are caught in, and naming it takes the blame off whoever is closest to it.

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, sarcasm	Fear of not mattering, loneliness, hurt
Going quiet, shutting down, numbness	Feeling overwhelmed, fear of failing, shame
Keeping score of time and attention	Fear of being the less-wanted one
Checking up, needing reassurance	Fear of being replaced or left out
Over-functioning to keep the peace	Fear that the group falls apart without you

Raw spots

Some reactions are bigger than the moment because they're touching something older: being the left-out sibling, a past relationship where opening up went badly, years of being told your relationship wasn't real. EFT calls these raw spots. In a throuple, knowing where everyone's raw spots are explains a lot about why the same event lands so differently on each of you.

What repair looks like

Repair happens when one of you can say the thing underneath ("When you two made plans without me, I felt like the extra one") and the person it's said to answers that, rather than defending ("You're not the extra one. I didn't think about how it would land, and I want you there."). It feels slower and more exposed than fighting. It's also the thing that actually changes the pattern.

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 each partner brings to your life, how they show love, and what you bring to them.

Answer for each of your two relationships. Use the same column order you'll use for the rest of the workbook: column 1 is you and one partner, column 2 is you and your other partner.

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

And the three of you together:

What does being part of the three of us give me that I wouldn't have otherwise?

What's something from the last month I'd like to thank both of them for?

Map your cycles

You're mapping two relationships here, not one. In a throuple you have a separate relationship with each of your partners, and each relationship can have its own cycle. You might push with one partner and pull back with 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 of the columns before you start.

Fill this in on your own. For each column, think of a recent argument or moment of distance with that partner specifically, not the three of you together.

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 with this partner?

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

Does our third partner get pulled in? How?

RELATIONSHIP 1

RELATIONSHIP 2

And in the group as a whole, when the three of us are together, I'm most often the one who:

- ☐ pushes for a response
- ☐ pulls back to calm things down
- ☐ keeps the peace between the other two
- ☐ gets left out

The check-up

Eleven areas, 62 statements. Every statement is worded so that a higher number means that area is working better. Area 10 asks about each of your two relationships. The other areas are about the three of you.

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, or I've never thought about it
-----------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------	--

A "?" is a real answer. If you can't tell whether something is happening, that's worth talking about too.

1. Reaching for each other

#	STATEMENT	RATING
1.1	When I reach out to either partner, I can usually get through.	
1.2	When I share something painful, my partners respond to how I feel about it.	
1.3	I feel like I matter to both of my partners, not only to one.	
1.4	I can say when I'm hurt or scared.	
1.5	When we get stuck in a familiar fight, one of us can name it.	
1.6	When one of us pulls back, the other two don't just close ranks around each other.	

2. The three of us together

#	STATEMENT	RATING
2.1	We regularly spend time as a three that isn't just running the household.	
2.2	When all three of us are together, I feel included rather than like a guest.	
2.3	Any one of us can raise a problem with the whole group.	
2.4	Group conversations don't end up as two people talking and one person watching.	
2.5	When the three of us disagree, we can get to a decision without someone just giving in.	
2.6	After a group conflict, we reconnect as a group, not just in pairs.	

3. Balance and fairness

#	STATEMENT	RATING
3.1	I don't feel like the "third" added to an existing couple.	
3.2	How time is shared between the pairs feels fair to me, even if it isn't equal.	
3.3	Things like where people sleep, holidays and special dates are talked about openly.	
3.4	No one of us carries most of the work of keeping the three of us connected.	
3.5	If one pair has more history, that isn't used to settle arguments.	
3.6	I can say "this feels lopsided" without being treated as the problem.	

4. Jealousy, insecurity and compersion

#	STATEMENT	RATING
4.1	When I feel jealous, I can say so without it being treated as an attack.	
4.2	When someone tells me they feel jealous, I can stay curious instead of defensive.	
4.3	Seeing my partners enjoy each other is mostly good for me.	
4.4	I know what helps me feel secure when the other two have time alone.	
4.5	My partners know that too, and they do it.	

5. Agreements and decisions

#	STATEMENT	RATING
5.1	Our agreements (about outside partners, safer sex, privacy, time) are clear to all three of us.	
5.2	All three of us had a say in those agreements.	
5.3	We revisit agreements when they stop fitting rather than quietly breaking them.	
5.4	I know what's private to a pair and what gets shared with the group.	
5.5	Big decisions (moving, money, children, opening up further) involve everyone they affect.	

6. Practical load: home, money and time

#	STATEMENT	RATING
6.1	The split of household work feels fair to me, including the remembering and planning.	
6.2	I'm not the default organiser for the three of us unless we've chosen that.	
6.3	We can talk about money without someone shutting down or getting defensive.	
6.4	How we share costs makes sense to all three of us, including anyone who earns less or joined later.	
6.5	The way I split my time between work, friends, family and both partners works for me.	

7. Space and individuality

#	STATEMENT	RATING
7.1	I have time that's mine, and I don't have to justify it to either partner.	
7.2	I can have friendships my partners aren't part of.	
7.3	Needing space doesn't get read as not caring, or as choosing one partner over the other.	
7.4	I still feel like a whole person, not just one third of a unit.	

8. Shared direction

#	STATEMENT	RATING
8.1	We want broadly the same things over the next five years (where we live, kids, work, whether the throuple stays closed or open).	
8.2	Where we differ on the big things, we've talked about it as a three rather than hoped it would sort itself out.	
8.3	I can picture the three of us handling a major setback together.	
8.4	We've talked about what happens if one pair's relationship changes.	

9. The outside world and stress

#	STATEMENT	RATING
9.1	We agree on how out we are, and with whom.	
9.2	No one is hidden or introduced as "a friend" in a way that hurts them.	
9.3	We've talked about the practical gaps the law and the systems leave for three-person households, like leases, next of kin, wills and parenting.	
9.4	Family and friends' reactions don't put pressure on one pair more than the others.	
9.5	When one of us is stressed, the other two notice and offer something useful.	
9.6	We understand how each other's brains work, including any ADHD, autism, anxiety or trauma, and adjust for it.	

10. Each pair

Rate each of your two relationships separately. Use the same column order as your cycle map: column 1 is you and one partner, column 2 is you and your other partner.

#	STATEMENT	RELATIONSHIP 1: ME AND	RELATIONSHIP 2: ME AND
10.1	We have time just for the two of us.	☐	☐
10.2	When I reach for this person, they're there.	☐	☐
10.3	I feel wanted by this person, not just included because of the group.	☐	☐
10.4	We talk directly to each other rather than through the third person.	☐	☐
10.5	We can sort out a conflict between the two of us without pulling the third person in.	☐	☐
10.6	I'm happy with the physical and sexual side of this relationship, whatever that looks like for us.	☐	☐
10.7	When we argue, I know what this person is usually feeling underneath.	☐	☐
10.8	This relationship would still matter to me if the group changed shape.	☐	☐
10.9	This person shows me love in ways that land for me.	☐	☐
10.10	I feel appreciated by this person for what I bring.	☐	☐

11. What we bring each other

#	STATEMENT	RATING
11.1	Being in this throuple makes my life better in ways I could name.	
11.2	I feel appreciated for what I bring to the three of us.	
11.3	We still make each other laugh as a three.	
11.4	I regularly tell my partners what I appreciate about them.	
11.5	I'm proud of what the three of us have built.	

Open questions

Write a sentence or two for each.

- 1** Which of the three pairs do you think gets the least attention? What makes you think so?

- 2** When do you feel most like a full member of the throuple? When do you feel least like one?

- 3** What's one agreement you'd like to revisit?

- 4** Is there something you've told one partner but not the other? What's stopping you from telling them?

- 5** What would help you feel more secure when the other two are together without you?

Reading your results

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

Then put all three sets of ratings side by side and look for four patterns. There's no pass mark. A throuple 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	All three rated it 4 or 5	This is working. Name it out loud, and protect it when life gets busy.
Needs attention	All three rated 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	One or more of you answered "?"	Nobody has looked closely. Find out before you assume it's fine.

Watch for two-against-one. If two of you rate an area high and one rates it low, it's easy for the majority to decide they're right. In a throuple, the lowest score is often the most important one, because it usually belongs to whoever has been carrying the problem quietly.

Gaps are information, not accusations. If you rated 3.2 (time is shared fairly) a 2 and the others rated it a 5, nobody is lying. Start with "What made you pick that number?" rather than "How can you think that?"

Some pairs are worth comparing on purpose:

- 3.1 and 10.3 for the newest member of the throuple. Low on both suggests they feel added rather than chosen.
- 5.1 and 5.2 (agreements are clear, agreements were made by all three). A low 5.2 is often where resentment starts, even when everyone is keeping the agreement.
- Area 10 across all three people. Each pair gets rated twice, once by each person in it. Look for the pair with the lowest combined score: that relationship probably needs the most attention.
- Your cycle maps. Look for one person who is pulled into both of the other pairs' cycles. That person is often the most tired one in the group.

Area summary

Add up your ratings in each area and write the total. Leave out any "?". The gap is the difference between the highest and lowest of the three scores.

AREA	ME	PARTNER	PARTNER	GAP
1. Reaching for each other (out of 30)				
2. The three of us together (out of 30)				
3. Balance and fairness (out of 30)				
4. Jealousy and compersion (out of 25)				
5. Agreements and decisions (out of 25)				
6. Practical load (out of 25)				
7. Space and individuality (out of 20)				
8. Shared direction (out of 20)				
9. Outside world and stress (out of 30)				
11. What we bring each other (out of 25)				

Each pair (Area 10). Each pair is rated twice, once by each person in it. Write in the names, then each person's total for that relationship (out of 50).

PAIR	PERSON 1	PERSON 2	GAP
_____ and _____			
_____ and _____			
_____ and _____			

Start with the area that has the biggest gap. Then look at any area where someone scored less than half. In Area 10, the pair with the lowest scores probably needs the most attention.

Pick two

Before you talk, each of you chooses:

1. **One strength** to name to your partners, with a specific example. For example: "2.6. After the fight about Christmas, we all ended up on the couch together that night. That mattered to me."
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 conversation afterwards, and with three people that conversation needs more structure. If it starts going sideways, stop, and come back to it on another day.

Set it up:

- Pick a time when nobody is tired, hungry, drinking or about to leave for work. Sunday morning beats 10pm on a Tuesday.
- Give it about an hour and agree on the finish time before you start.
- Decide whether to start as a group or in pairs. If one person is likely to feel outnumbered, start with each pair talking separately, then come together.

Run it in this order:

1. Each of you reads out two or three answers from your "What's going well" page, 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. Share your cycle maps. Try to describe the cycles together, as loops you're all caught in.
3. One person shares their pain point or gap, and says what they feel underneath it. The other two ask "What made you pick that number?" and listen.
4. One listener says back what they heard, in their own words, until the speaker says "Yeah, that's it". Then both listeners respond to that feeling before anything else. Hold off on solutions until then.
5. Rotate until everyone has had a turn.
6. Agree on one small, specific change to try for two weeks. "Each pair has one evening a fortnight that's protected" works. "Be more fair" doesn't.
7. Put a date in the calendar to check how it went.

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, anyone can call a break, and everyone takes at least 20 minutes apart, not two together and one alone. 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, and with three people it's easy for the loudest pattern to drown out the others. 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
- one person keeps ending up as the problem, the messenger or the one left out
- one pair is struggling and the group can't seem to help without making it worse
- 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 opening up, closing, or one pair's relationship changing shape
- one of you is quietly wondering whether to stay

If anyone in the throuple is unsafe, the order changes. Don't use this workbook together, don't try group 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 throuples. We see clients in person in Carlton or online. You can [read about throuple therapy](#), [take the match quiz](#) to find a therapist who fits, or [book a free 15-minute call](#) to talk it through first.