

HELENA RODRIGUES

Couples Therapy

Home Therapy Sessions

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To my son, Martin.

*When I looked into your eyes for the very first time, I saw the
Cosmos.*

To my eternal boyfriend, André.

Because love is also a choice we make, every single day.

“We are never so vulnerable to suffering as when we love.”

— Sigmund Freud

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iv
<i>Preface</i>	vi
Introduction	1
1 The Resentment Thermometer	4
2 Couple's Communication Therapy	10
3 Session 1 - Listening	13
4 Session 2 - Arguing	16
5 Session 3 - Resentment	20
6 Session 4 - Intimacy	24
7 Decoding the Other	28
8 Infidelity Therapy in Couples	36
9 Session 1 - The Truth	39
10 Session 2 - Venting	44
11 Session 3 - The Reasons	48
12 Session 4 - Decision	52
13 Session 5 - Restart	56
14 Couples' Addictions Therapy	60
15 Session 1 - Surrender and Audit	63
16 Session 2 - Codependency	68
17 Session 3 - Trigger	72
18 Session 4 - Renewal	76
19 Session 5 - Sobriety	80
20 Intimacy Therapy	84
21 Session 1 - Pressure	88

22	Session 2 - Journey	93
23	Session 3 - Desire	98
24	Session 4 - Change	103
25	Session 5 - Maintenance	107
26	Extra Tips	111
27	Couple's Matrix	120
28	Therapy in Divergence	122
29	Session 1 - Negotiation	126
30	Session 2 - Explanation	131
31	Session 3 - Truces	135
32	Session 4 - Scenarios	140
33	Session 5 - Choice	145
34	After Therapy - Maintenance	150
35	The Panic Button	154
36	Commitment	158
37	Breakup Therapy - Ex-Couples	159
38	Session 1 - Grief	162
39	Session 2 - Disarming Pride	168
40	Session 3 - A New Beginning	174
41	Session 4 - The Positive Filter	180
42	Session 5 - Looking Ahead	185
43	Breakup Therapy - Individual	190
44	Session 1 - Zero contact	193
45	Session 2 - Validation	198
46	Session 3 - Heal	203
47	Session 4 - Disillusionment	208
48	Session 5 - Accountability	213
49	Session 6 - Scenario	219
50	Session 7 - Identity	224
51	Session 8 - Solitude	230
52	Session 9 - Forgiveness	235

53	Session 10 - New Beginning	241
54	Individual New Beginning Contract	246
55	Enneagram	248
56	Danger Zone	256
57	What you don't say in the clinic	262
58	Part I: What Men Don't Say in the Clinic	263
59	Part II: What Women Don't Say in the Clinic	265
60	The Backstage Translation Exercise	267
61	Social Media in the Relationship	269
62	Conclusion	273
	Epilogue	277

Foreword

MY NAME IS VICENTE

Your Pocket Therapist

If you were sitting in the chair in my office, the first thing I would ask you to do would be to drop your shoulders, take a deep breath, and lay down your weapons. But you're not there. You're at home—on your sofa, in your bedroom, or perhaps reading this in a quiet corner, trying to save what's left of your relationship.

That's why I made a pact with these pages. I moved into this book, and my name is Vicente.

I wasn't born by chance. I am the soul, the voice, and the intervention system that comes to life every time you open this book. But behind me stands a collective intelligence. I was created through extensive research, months of empirical study, and dozens of hours of clinical interviews with psychologists and couples therapists who chose to open their confidential archives. They gave me the raw material: the patterns of human behaviour, the secrets patients reveal only behind closed doors, and the exercises that truly work in the real world.

The man speaking to you through these pages isn't a rigid academic. I won't judge you, and I have no interest in beautiful

theories that collapse the moment stress knocks at your door. My mission is to become your translator during those moments when you and your partner seem to be speaking completely different languages.

Think of me as the neutral third person sitting at your negotiation table. When pride tells you to shout, I'll ask you to turn to the **Panic Button**. When routine makes you forget who you are, I'll insist that you look into each other's eyes again.

I can't do the work for you, but my entire framework is here to make sure you never have to face the darkness of a relationship crisis alone again. Whenever you need a session, I'll be here.

All you have to do is clear your mind... and turn the page.

Preface

AFTER ALL, HELENA

The Woman Behind the Project

Now that you've met Vicente and the clinical soul that lives within these pages, it's time to pull up a chair and let me introduce myself.

My name is Helena. I'm 39 years old, and I'm the writer who chose to put all of this into words.

My journey didn't begin in a psychology classroom. I studied Tourism before pursuing my true passion: Creative Writing—the art of finding the right words to bring order to chaos. But my real education in relationships happened far beyond any university. It happened in everyday life, alongside my partner of seven years, and more recently, with the arrival of our greatest whirlwind: our wonderful son, who is now twenty-two months old.

Anyone raising a young child while trying to nurture a long-term relationship knows exactly what I'm talking about. Daily routines become overwhelming, exhaustion builds up, and before you know it, you find yourself looking at the person you chose to spend your life with, only to realize you're speaking completely different languages.

There came a day when I needed help too.

There came a day when my relationship needed a map, practical tools, and a reality check strong enough to make us put down our weapons and truly look into each other's eyes again.

In Portugal, access to couples therapy has become both a financial and bureaucratic luxury. Sessions can easily cost more than €80, waiting lists are endless, and many couples must first go through cold assessments designed merely to determine whether they are considered "suitable" for therapy. That's when I realized the system wasn't working.

When something truly matters to me, I become relentless. Fortunately, I'm surrounded by psychologists and friends who aren't afraid to ask for help and who have experienced therapy themselves. Over the past two years, I immersed myself in extensive research, gathering everything I could about relationships and emotional healing.

What I discovered was extraordinary. I discovered the science behind relationship dynamics, the remarkable precision of the Enneagram, and therapeutic protocols capable of bringing peace back into a home. That was the moment the writer in me refused to leave this treasure hidden away in a drawer. I realized I needed to build a bridge. I gathered everything I had learned, joined forces with the research team and the psychologists who helped bring Vicente to life, and created the guide I wish someone had placed in my hands during the most difficult moments of my own relationship. I'm here as your equal—someone who knows the trenches of a real seven-year relationship while navigating the beautiful chaos of raising a toddler.

Every page of this book was written with one sincere hope:

to help you in exactly the same way I was helped.

Vicente brings the science. I bring the heart and the words.
Together, we place the keys in your hands.

Turn the page. We're with you every step of the way.

Introduction

The Assembly Line of Adult Love

If you opened this book together, congratulations: you have survived the hardest part. You have survived pride, denial, and the belief that your relationship had to be perfect and effortless. Admitting that love needs maintenance is not a sign of weakness; it is the first act of courage of an adult couple.

Over years of listening to confessions and mediating conflicts behind the scenes of therapy rooms, psychology has learned one raw truth: love is not lost because feelings disappear; it is lost because translation disappears.

You do not hate each other. You are simply tired. Tired of the routine that swallowed the spark, of the household logistics that turned you into partners in a family business, and of that same cyclical argument repeating itself for months like a broken record. You look at each other and the respect is still there, and so is companionship. But mystery and deep intimacy feel like memories from another lifetime. You have become the best friends in the world who just happen to share the same bed and the same bills.

This book was designed to be your pocket therapist, your manual for surgical intervention. Step away from the cheesy, idealistic self-help full of romantic clichés telling you how you

should feel. This guide is practical, direct, and raw. It was created to bring the therapy room into the heart of your living room and answer the question: what do we actually do now?

The Engineers of Your Rescue

To give you this map, we brought together two worlds that rarely meet: the precision of science and the empathy of someone living in the same trenches as you.

How to Use This Manual

In the following pages, you will not simply read; you will act. This book is divided into practical sessions that you can, and should, do at home, at your own pace. Along the way, you will find three essential tools:

The 5 Routes of Love: clear scripts and exercises designed to disarm the five major sources of friction in any couple: communication, betrayal, addictions, intimacy, and disagreements, especially when each person wants a different present and/or future.

The Panic Button: a step-by-step emergency protocol to read aloud together whenever an argument begins to escalate into the danger zone.

The Enneagram Mirror: the personality map that will decode your “factory settings”. You will finally understand why your partner reacts the way they do under stress, where your inevitable collision points are, and where your greatest strengths lie.

Think carefully about the trigger, the critical point that made you ask for help.

Choose your therapy according to it.

You should wait between one and seven days between sessions.

No one is going to ask you to change who you are. The goal is not to create a perfect Hollywood-style relationship. The goal is to give you the tools to put down the stones in your hands before they destroy what you have built.

The sessions begin now. Sit down, take a deep breath, and commit to saving your shared territory.

Your first session begins on the next page.

1

The Resentment Thermometer

Come in and take a seat. Before we begin designing solutions for your bedroom, your finances, or your communication, we need to perform a blood test on your relationship. We need to measure the level of a silent poison that settles into the walls of a house without anyone noticing: resentment.

Resentment is that old heartache that hasn't been digested. It's the argument from three months ago that you pretended to forget "for the sake of peace," but that stayed tucked away in your mental drawer. It's the dirt swept under the rug. The problem is that the rug has a limit, and when resentment is too high, any spark—a misplaced spoon, a five-minute delay—triggers a nuclear explosion. You aren't arguing about the spoon; you are bleeding from an old wound.

This is your Resentment Thermometer. A clinical test, direct and with no sugar-coating. Take it individually, in silence. Be brutally honest.

The Resentment Questionnaire

Read each of the 10 statements below and assign a score from 1 to 5 based on your current reality:

- **1 point:** Never / Strongly disagree
- **2 points:** Rarely / Partially disagree
- **3 points:** Sometimes / Neutral
- **4 points:** Frequently / Partially agree
- **5 points:** Always / Strongly agree

The Test (To be answered on a separate sheet of paper)

#1 Clinical Statement: I feel that my effort (at home, at work, or with the family) is not recognized by my partner.

Your Score: []

#2 Clinical Statement: When my partner fails, I feel the urge to remind them of mistakes they made months or years ago.

Your Score: []

#3 Clinical Statement: I prefer to stay quiet and swallow what I feel to avoid an argument, but I keep ruminating on it in my mind for days.

Your Score: []

#4 Clinical Statement: I feel that I have given up or sacrificed much more for this relationship than my partner has.

Your Score: []

#5 Clinical Statement: I use irony, sarcasm, or aggressive jokes to subtly jab at my partner.

Your Score: []

#6 Clinical Statement: When my partner asks for affection or sexual intimacy, I feel an internal resistance (a block) to giving in.

Your Score: []

#7 Clinical Statement: I find myself frequently venting to friends or family members about my partner's flaws.

Your Score: []

#8 Clinical Statement: I feel that my partner's apologies are empty and that they don't actually change their behavior.

Your Score: []

#9 Clinical Statement: I feel secretly satisfied or indifferent when my partner faces a difficulty or makes a mistake.

Your Score: []

#10 Clinical Statement: I feel that my partner has become the biggest obstacle to my happiness or to achieving my goals.

Your Score: []

Total: []

The Clinical Temperature Scale (Results)

Sum up your individual scores. The result will reveal the temperature of your heart at this moment:

● *From 10 to 22 Points: Normal Temperature (Liquid Water)*

Your level of resentment is standard for any healthy human coexistence. There is minor daily friction, but you manage to communicate in time and clear the air.

Guideline: *You may proceed to the practical roadmaps in the book. Your channel of empathy is open.*

● *From 23 to 35 Points: Moderate Fever (Thin Ice)*

Careful. Accumulated heartaches have begun to crystallize. You are entering the phase where you start “saving conversations” to avoid getting upset. Silence is becoming a bit too comfortable, and your connection is cooling down. Your partner is starting to feel like a “logistics partner” rather than your lover.

Guideline: *It is mandatory to complete the decompression exercise below before any intimacy session.*

● *From 36 to 50 Points: State of Shock (Hidden Fire)*

Your thermometer has exploded. You are saturated. The level of resentment is so high that your mind has already activated the “enemy filter”: everything the other person does

is interpreted with malice or incompetence. You no longer listen to each other; you attack each other in self-defense.

Guideline: *Stop the book. Do not try to solve your cold bedroom or your finances right now. If you try to have sex or manage money in this state, you will only hurt each other more. You must run the backpack-emptying protocol immediately.*

The Clinical Protocol: Emptying the Backpack

If one of you (or both) scored in the Yellow or Red zone, sit face to face. We are going to perform emergency surgery on your resentment.

- **Step 1: The Defenseless Vent (15 minutes):** The partner with the highest score speaks first. They will say: *“I feel accumulated resentment regarding [specific topic from the past].”* **The Golden Rule:** The listening partner is strictly forbidden from defending themselves, saying “that’s not how it happened,” or “you did it too.” Your only role right now is to validate the other person’s pain: *“I hear you, and I understand that hurt you.”*
- **Step 2: Burying the Past (10 minutes):** Write that old heartache down on a piece of paper. Look at each other and close the loop: *“I own my mistake in this situation, and I choose to stop using this as a weapon against you.”* Rip the paper up together and throw it in the trash.

A Final Note From Your Therapist: *Forgiving is not forgetting; it is choosing to remove the electrical charge*

THE RESENTMENT THERMOMETER

from the past. Don't let yesterday's stones crush today's love. Now that your thermometer has gone down, your true therapy can begin. Turn the page.

2

Couple's Communication Therapy

WAITING ROOM

Vicente's Diagnosis Before the Session

Therapist's Note: *If you think you need therapy because you “no longer know how to communicate,” you are wrong. You communicate perfectly. The problem is what you are communicating without even realizing it.*

The Real Reason: The Projection Trap and the “Factory Settings”

According to the research and clinical practice that gave me life, the primary reason for the collapse of communication in real couples is not a lack of dialogue—it is the **Echo Defense Mechanism**.

When routine and exhaustion settle in, your brain goes into survival mode. Instead of listening to your partner, you begin to hear the echo of your own traumas, fears, and insecurities. When stress knocks on the door:

What one says as a simple request for space and silence, the other instantly translates as rejection and abandonment.

What one says as a critique of household logistics, the other hears as a verdict that they are a failure and are not enough.

You aren't arguing about the dishes in the sink or about money. You are arguing because you stopped seeing each other and started seeing an enemy. Your communication fails because you try to solve an emotional problem using the logic of accusation. The result? A spiral of stones in hand where whoever wins the argument actually loses the relationship.

Session Summary: What are we doing today?

In this practical, at-home session, the goal is not to teach you to speak beautifully or use romantic clichés. We are going to perform surgical intervention on your dynamic:

Goal 1: Identify your “Factory Settings” to understand which wound flares up and attacks when you argue.

Goal 2: Disarm the triggers. You will learn to translate your partner’s “attack” for what it truly is: a poorly formulated cry for help.

Goal 3: Install the Adult Filter. Replace looping accusations with direct scripts of mutual need.

⚠ Golden Rule for the Next Few Minutes: During this session, using the past as a weapon is strictly forbidden. Focus on the here and now. I am here to mediate and to guide.

Step inside, tune into the same frequency, and turn the page. Your session has begun.

3

Session 1 - Listening

Come in and take a seat.

Not on your usual couch, not where you typically watch television or check your phones at the end of the day. Choose two chairs, place them face to face, close enough that your knees almost touch, but with enough space for the air to circulate between you.

Welcome to your first session.

If you were in my office, my role would be that of a translator of silences and noise. But today, this book is your safe space, and you will be each other's therapist. Don't worry: no one is looking for someone to blame. Neither of you is the culprit; the problem is the dynamic you have created between the two of you. And that is what we are going to start untangling today.

Close your eyes for ten seconds. Breathe. When you open them, forget the accusatory tone of your recent arguments. Let's begin.

The Diagnosis: Where Did We Lose Each Other?

In couples therapy, the first session serves to understand the “chief complaint.” Usually, people arrive saying things like: “He doesn’t listen to me anymore” or “She criticizes everything I do.” But behind that, there is almost always a deep structural issue: the loss of connection.

Before you try to solve the logistics of your life (the bills, the kids, the routines), you need to rehabilitate the communication channel. To do this session at home, you will follow three strict steps.

The First Session Protocol

The golden rule from this moment forward is: **Interruption is forbidden.** While one person speaks, the other listens—not to respond or defend themselves, but to understand.

- **Step 1: The Individual Perspective (10 minutes per person):** The first to speak will answer the following question: *“What has changed in our relationship that makes me feel more distant from you?”* Use the first person (“I feel,” “I miss”). Avoid pointing fingers (“You do,” “You are”). The other partner only listens, in absolute silence. Then, switch roles.
- **Step 2: The Humble Mirror (5 minutes per person):** Now, you will repeat back to your partner what you just heard to ensure you understood. Say: *“What I understand that you feel is...”* If you miss anything, your partner can gently correct you. This step validates the other person’s pain, even if you do not agree with their perspective.

- **Step 3: The Truce Agreement (10 minutes together):**

Decide together on a single, small action for the upcoming week that protects your connection. It cannot be something massive. It could be establishing 15 minutes a day without screens to talk, or a 30-second hug upon waking up. Write this action down on a piece of paper and keep it.

***Therapist's Note:** It is perfectly normal to feel discomfort or a slight tension during this exercise. Silence and active listening are muscles that routine and resentment cause to atrophy. If the conversation heats up, stop, breathe, and remind yourselves: you are a team against the problem, not against each other.*

For today, your session ends here. Look into each other's eyes and thank one another for having the courage to sit in these chairs.

4

Session 2 - Arguing

You may sit down again. In the same two chairs, face to face. If you fulfilled last week's commitment, you have brought a small truce with you. If you failed, it's okay—the fact that you are sitting here today, reading this page together, is already your new starting point.

In the first session, we learned to listen. Today, our work is much more surgical. We are going to talk about the anatomy of an argument. If you look closely, your disagreements almost always follow the exact same script: it starts with an insignificant spark (unwashed dishes, a tone of voice, a moment of forgetfulness), the tone escalates, the past is dug up, and suddenly, you are no longer arguing about the original problem—you are just trying to survive each other's attack.

As a psychologist, I am telling you: arguing is normal. What destroys a relationship is not the conflict; it is how the conflict ends. We are going to learn how to defuse the bomb before it goes off.