

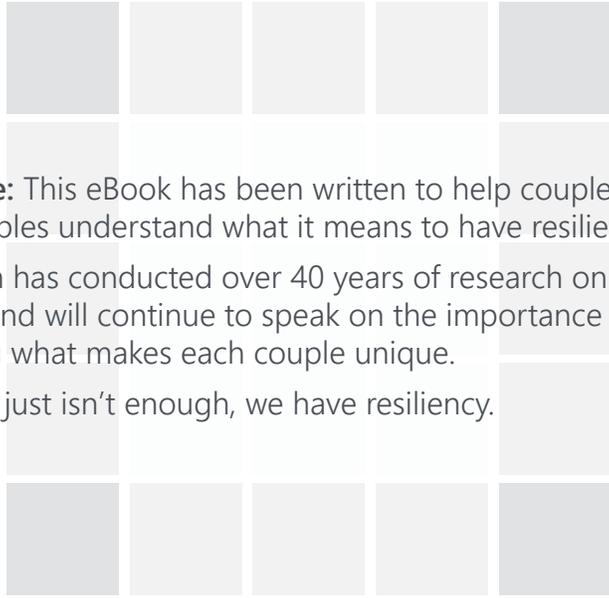
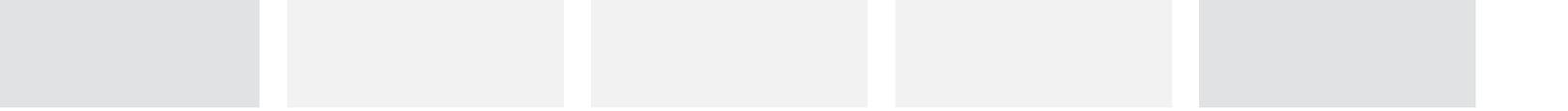
Resiliency in Relationships:

**Bouncing**

**B A C K T O**

**Balanced**





**Author's Note:** This eBook has been written to help couples and those who work with couples understand what it means to have resiliency in relationships.

Prepare/Enrich has conducted over 40 years of research on resiliency in relationships and will continue to speak on the importance of knowing and understanding what makes each couple unique.

For when love just isn't enough, we have resiliency.

#### Research referenced in this eBook:

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# Part One:

# What is resiliency?

## And why do we need it?

Resiliency is such a buzzword in our society today. It's used in article titles to draw people in, blog posts, viral videos. It's used in advertisements that pull on our heart strings. But what does resiliency even mean, and why should we care about it?

Think of a rubber band. It has a standard resting shape; it just hangs out as a rubbery circle. When stress is applied to the rubber band – say it's wrapped around a stack of mail – it stretches and changes shape. What's amazing about rubber bands, though, is that they are elastic. The second you remove the band from the mail, it'll bounce back into its shape.

**That's resiliency.**

## Relationships need that same elasticity.

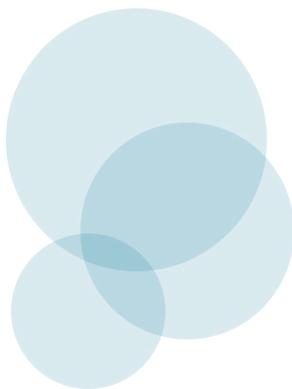
You and your partner have a normal, resting shape. You fall into regular patterns, have your usual rituals, and feel pretty comfortable in those typical situations. However, when stress is added into that equation, it'll throw your relationship out of whack.

Say your partner lost his or her job, your regular patterns and usual rituals are now new and hard and *stressful*. You don't wake up at your usual times, chores are done out of sync, emotions are running high. Maybe the two of you deal with stress differently, which adds another layer of complication into the mix.

What's important in this situation though, is to recognize that your relationship can and will go back to "normal." Healthy relationships can be put through troubling times because resilient couples can bounce back from these events and become balanced again.

The fact of the matter is that sometimes the stressful situations that push us into an imbalance are self-imposed, like having a child or moving to a new city. But then there are things that also happen to us that we have to learn to cope with, like the loss of a family member, or suffering serious health issues. Stress can come from both outside and inside our relationship. Unfortunately, you can't avoid stressful situations.

## That's why resiliency is important.



# Part Two:

# Ingredients of resiliency

Resiliency is an aspect of systems theory. Our world is made up of many levels of “systems” or layers. Starting at the individual, you can move out to the next layer which is the person’s family. Then comes their school, church, or community. Then the government, policies, and society. All of these are wrapped up in a final layer of culture. Think of it like a cream-filled donut. If the individual is the cream, the surrounding layers of the donut are the systems that affect the individual. The way in which the donut is baked will determine the texture of the dough, which will affect the consistency of the creamy center.

Similarly, a person’s ability to bounce back after tough times depends on their surrounding systems. Did the individual grow up in a nurturing family? What has their school or church taught them about overcoming hardship? How does society portray a healthy relationship? We learn from what we see and experience around us.

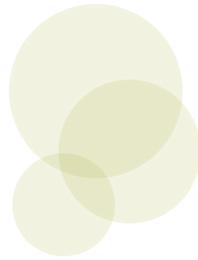
## Let's define some important terms.

### **Cohesion (or connectedness)**

is the emotional bonding of family members or partners. It's how close a couple is to one another.

### **Flexibility (or adaptability)**

is the ability to adapt roles, leadership, and rules within the relationship. It's how easily a couple adapts to disruptions of their "normal."



If you grow up in a family that has healthy levels of cohesion and flexibility, you are more likely to act out that balanced sense of security in your couple relationship.

When partners are able to find a healthy balance of "we" versus "me" and can shift smoothly through the changes in their relationship, they have high levels of resilience.

## Connectedness and adaptability are vital to understanding the resiliency in a relationship.

This is because in times of stress, couples need to be flexible and able to adapt to their situations. They also need to be aware of their cohesion and maintain a good balance of their “me” time and “we” time.

When a taxing event happens, couples might go from a healthy balance of connectedness and adaptability to overly connected and inflexible. They may find that they are spending large amounts of time together, and one or both partners might become co-dependent and lose their sense of individual self.

If this is the method they are using to cope with the situation, they may find it difficult to adjust to other events that come up. For example, if a partner has a work trip coming up, he or she might be hesitant and distressed by the thought of being apart. But if they are a balanced couple, they will exercise their resilience and adapt to the situation, bouncing back to a place of balance during and after the trip.

## Studies show that this idea of resiliency has been around for thousands of years through hundreds of cultures.

This means that we, as people, inherently understand its importance. And when we aren't shown from a young age how to handle stressful events, extreme behaviors can be passed along to our children.

For example, let's imagine a couple –

### Meet Chris and Claudia.

Chris and Claudia have been married for five years and have been a relatively balanced couple over the course of that time. They have regular date nights, go on vacation once a year, have friendships outside of their marriage, and share leadership in their household.



But recently, Chris became very sick.

Claudia has taken on a caretaker role and become consumed with doctors' appointments, driving Chris to and from his chemotherapy sessions, and taking care of Chris and the rest of the household. With all this added attention on her husband, she has stopped going to her volunteer commitments, missed several game nights with her friends, and now rarely sees her parents.

Claudia learned from growing up in a very connected family that the way to handle stress is to draw in closer to your family; this reaction seems natural and logical to her. But through this extreme cohesion, she is beginning to lose a sense of herself.

If Claudia has a strong sense of resiliency, she will recognize her tendency to become overly connected to Chris in times of stress. She may draw closer to him temporarily, but she'll eventually be able to bounce back to a balanced level and avoid losing her sense of self.

Although it is natural to replicate what is learned in one's family of origin, it does not mean you are stuck acting out only what you learned growing up or that you can't grow and strengthen your resiliency muscle.

**That's where we can help.**

## Part Three:

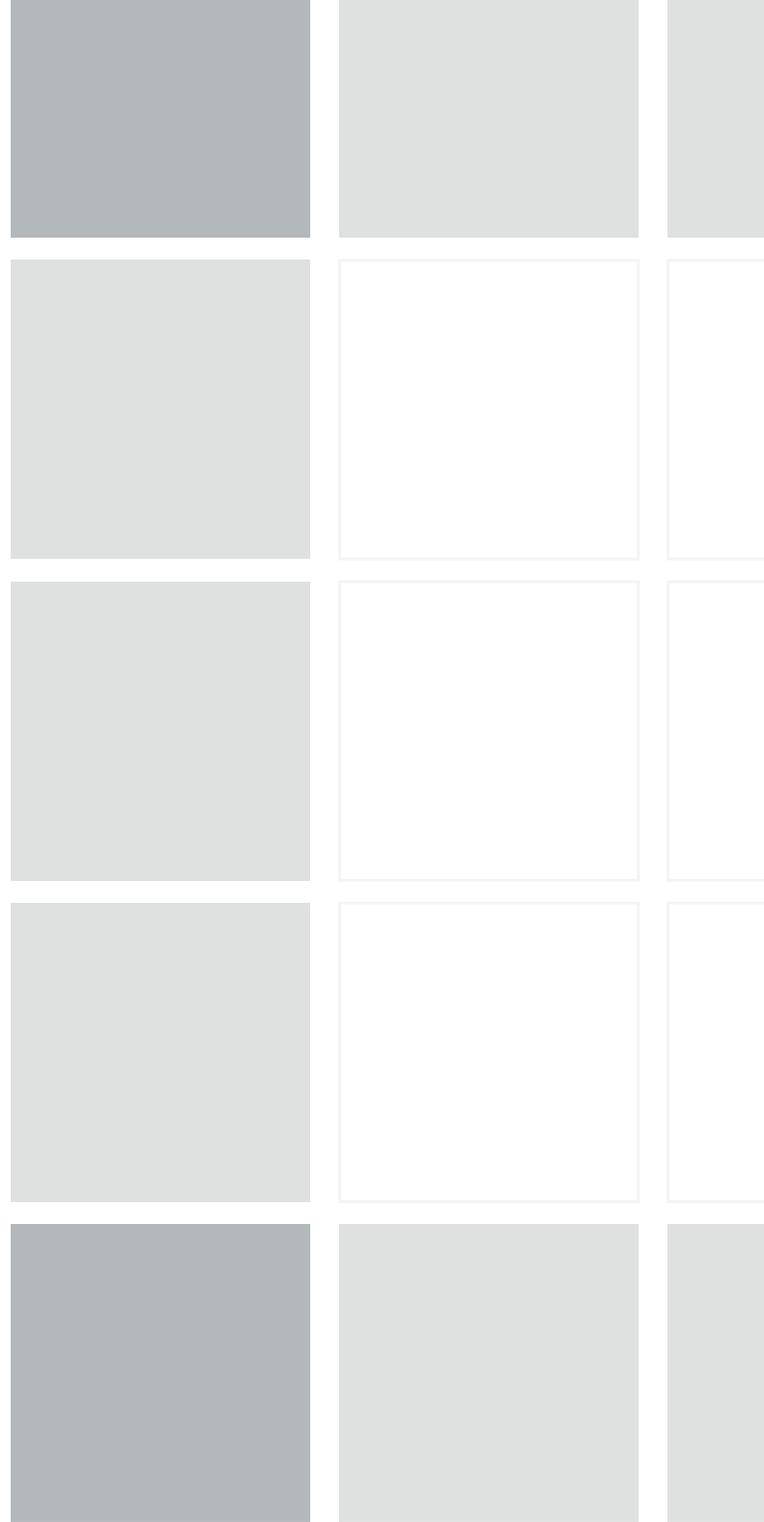
# The Power of the Circumplex Model

Forty years ago, Dr. David Olson, founder of Prepare/Enrich, wrote an article for the Journal of Marriage and Family Therapy on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems. Sounds complex, but it's not as complicated as it seems.

The Circumplex Model was originally created as tool therapists could use to plot a couple's relationship in a visual graph. This gave them a graphic representation to walk their couples through to show how they can grow and move throughout the model.

Since its debut, the marriage and family community has utilized the model outside of the therapist's office. Counselors, pastors, marriage mentors, and even couples can use the model to better understand not only their couple relationship but also how what they learned in their families growing up affects their couple relationship.

So,  
what  
exactly  
**is**  
the  
Circumplex  
Model?



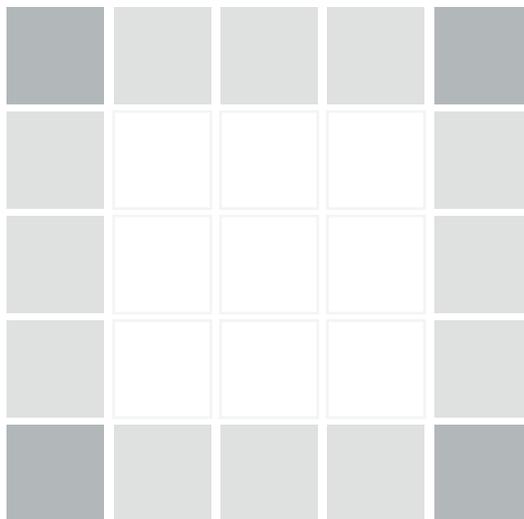
## The Circumplex Model is a graph, or “map” that consists of a 5 x 5 grid, where the X (horizontal) axis is cohesion and the Y (vertical) axis is flexibility.

The four corner boxes are darkened on the grid, the remaining outer edges are lightly shaded, and the middle nine boxes are white.

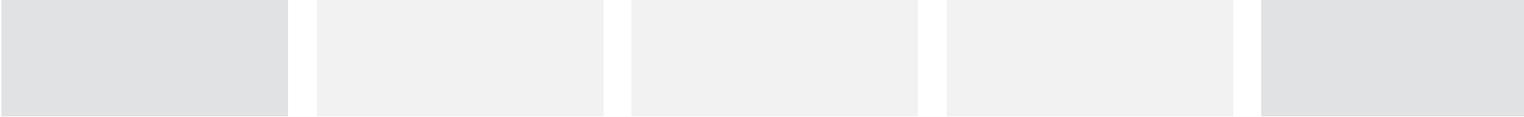
A couple answers several questions about their sense of connectedness and adaptability within their relationship; their scores indicate where they are plotted on the grid.

If a couple falls somewhere within the white boxes, their relationship is considered “balanced,” while falling within the colored boxes indicate somewhat balanced or unbalanced levels of cohesion and flexibility.

It’s important to call out that the model is **dynamic**, meaning that **couples can and will move throughout the boxes** as events and changes occur throughout their life.



Wherever the couple lands on the grid is indicative of cohesion and adaptability levels during that specific season/moment of life.



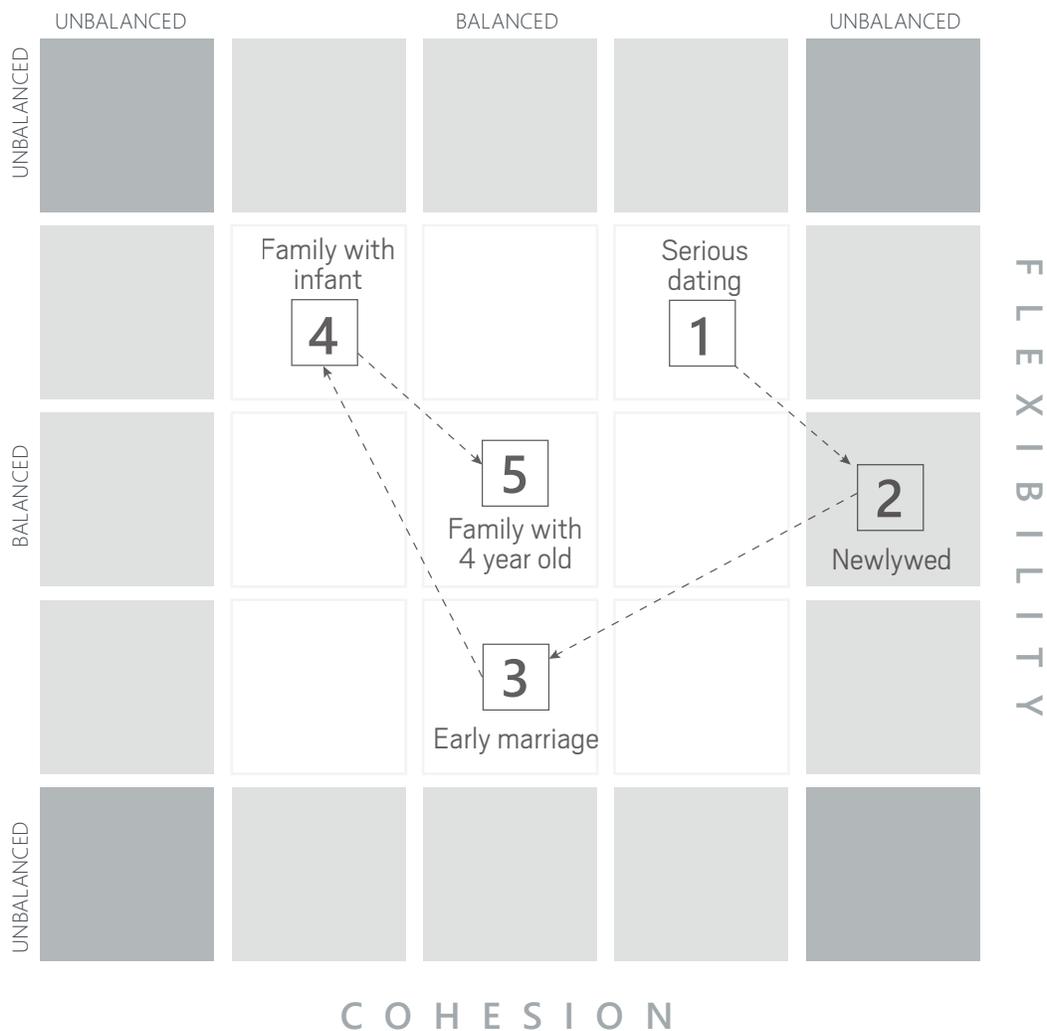
Let's  
**take a look**  
at an **example.**



## Meet Daniel and Maria.

The figure on the next page is an example of the changes they experienced in a period of 7-8 years – from dating to marriage. to having their first child and up to when the child is 4 years old.

- 1** During their dating period, Daniel and Maria, have a very flexible/very connected relationship. They feel very close and have a very flexible style in terms of leadership and decision making. On the path to marriage, they become increasingly close and are trying out different ways of operating as a couple in terms of flexibility.
- 2** During the first year of marriage, the newlyweds would best be described as flexible/overly connected. Daniel and Maria are generally flexible because they were still getting more organized in terms of their roles and leadership. Being in love and enjoying spending maximum time together, they are still in the “honeymoon” phase and are emotionally enmeshed.
- 3** By the end of their second year of marriage, the so-called “honeymoon” effect has worn off, and the couple has become somewhat flexible/connected. Their extreme excitement with each other has faded a bit, and their togetherness has become more balanced, with each of them giving more attention to their lives as individuals. They’ve developed more routines in their roles and lifestyle and have become somewhat flexible.
- 4** During the third year of the marriage the couple has a baby. The infant dramatically changes the couple relationship as they become a very flexible/somewhat connected family. Change is high at this time, and the couple is forced to adapt to the new challenges of parenting. It’s very difficult for the couple to keep on a fixed routine, shifting them to a very flexible family. The infant takes a great deal of the mother’s time and energy and the couple finds it difficult to spend time to stay as connected as a couple, becoming only somewhat connected.



**5** By the time the child is four years old, life has stabilized for this family. They are now functioning as a flexible/connected family and are experiencing very few changes. Both their closeness and flexibility have dropped one level and life is now more manageable for both of them.

The Circumplex Model has been studied for forty years and has made great strides in the marriage and family field. It can be used with all types of couples and family systems, encompassing variables such as race, ethnicity, marital status, living arrangement, family structure (single parent, step-families), sexual orientation, stage of family life cycle (parenting to empty nest), social class, and educational levels.

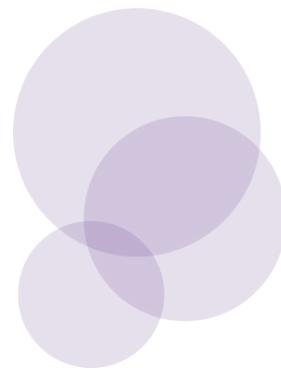
# Part Four:

# Resiliency in your life

So how can you identify and apply resiliency and the Circumplex Model in your own relationship or the relationships you serve every day?

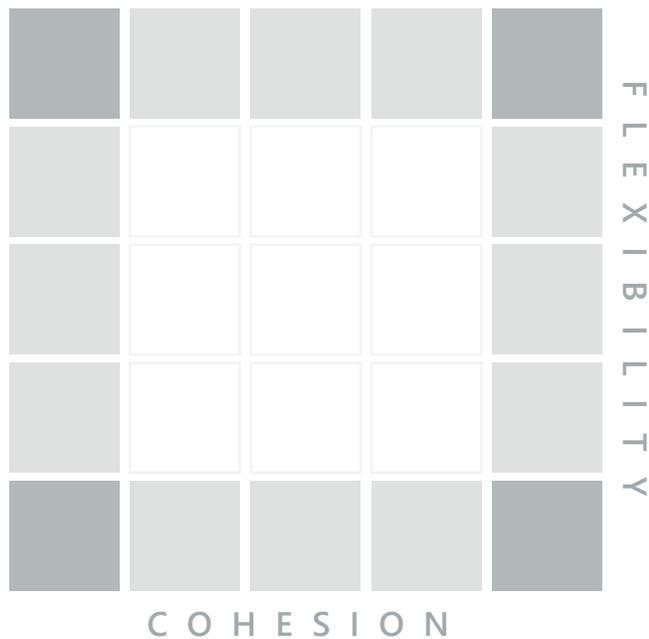
**It's easy. But it can take some practice.**

Try plotting your relationship on the map right now.



**To do so, think of your level of agreement with these cohesion statements:**

- My partner and I ask each other for help
- We spend a well-adjusted amount of time together and apart
- We talk about important decisions
- We rarely do activities together



**And these flexibility statements:**

- We share leadership in our relationship
- We don't budge on our schedules
- My partner and I can adjust when need be
- It's easy for us to complete projects together

Where do you land? Are you feeling balanced or that you sway one way or the other?

Don't worry if this isn't currently a strength area for your relationship, if you aren't satisfied with your level of resiliency right now, or if you feel that consulting a professional would be helpful.

You can take the Prepare/Enrich assessment with a local facilitator, who will show you the right work for your unique relationship. Our assessment automatically plots your relationship on the grid, and we provide free exercises to strengthen your resiliency muscle.

**Read on for some practical tips you can try to help achieve the balanced levels of cohesion and flexibility that promote resiliency.**

## If you are feeling **disconnected**:

- Start having a weekly date night
- Take a class together
- Compliment your partner

## If you are feeling **overly connected**:

- Take time to nurture your friendships
- Volunteer on your own
- Prioritize a self-care day by yourself

## If you are **feeling inflexible**:

- Put your phones away for the date night
- Switch roles with your partner for a week
- Do something spontaneous

## If you are feeling **overly flexible**:

- Create a new ritual together
- Make a list of tasks that need to get done together
- Set a notification in your phone for important reminders in your relationship

## Considerations if you work **with couples**:

- How can I implement the Circumplex Model into my practice?
- What does resiliency mean to my relationship? Could that cause a bias when working with couples who view “balanced” differently than my relationship?
- What else do I need to do to understand the Circumplex Model ?

## Questions to **ask couples**:

- How do you balance separateness and togetherness?
- How do you balance stability and change?
- How satisfied are you with your current level of closeness and flexibility in your relationship?

In many relationships,  
**love is the easy part.**

**But resiliency  
takes effort –**

to learn  
and understand  
and exercise.

Especially if you haven't been taught to flex it in times of difficulty.



**We wish you luck  
on your resiliency  
journey!**