

Mantra of Hope Counselling — July 2026

This issue brings together Imago Relationship Therapy and photography-based art therapy to support South Asian immigrant couples navigating distance, silence, and cultural change. Inside: five integrated therapy modules, follow-up guidance, a practical communication tool (DESC), and a short primer on adopting a growth mindset in relationship work.

Editor's Note

Imago Therapy's structured dialogue and empathy tools pair naturally with photography as art therapy — a way to externalize feelings, practise shared seeing, and reconnect through creative collaboration. This newsletter summarizes a modular program therapists can use and couples can try at home.

Quick Links — This Issue

- Integrated therapy modules (pages 3–6): Safety, Emotional Mapping, Collaborative Creation, Archive Work, Beauty Reclamation.
- Follow-up plan and homework strategies (page 7).
- DESC communication model with example and script (page 8).
- Growth mindset vs. goal orientation: practical activities and micro-practices (page 9).

Integrated Therapy Modules — Overview

Each module pairs an Imago therapeutic tool with a photography-based exercise. Modules are designed to be brief, experiential, and culturally humble.

Module	Imago Tool	Photography Exercise	Therapeutic Goal
1. Safety Building	Dialogue structure introduction (mirroring, validation, empathy)	"What I See That You Don't Know I See" — 5 simple images from home	Reduce defensiveness; build curiosity and shared attention
2. Emotional Mapping	Validation and mirroring; introduce shared vocabulary	Zone System emotional mapping — each partner places an image in a zone	Create a non-threatening shared emotional vocabulary
3. Collaborative Creation	Behaviour Change Request (BCR)	The Collaborative Photograph — make one photo together	Practice negotiation, attunement, and small behaviour change
4. Archive Work	Link present triggers to childhood impressions	Bring and reflect on past shared photos (wedding, festivals)	Recover warmth, reclaim cultural memory, surface grief gently
5. Beauty Reclamation	Empathy and conscious relationship vision	"One with Beauty" visual love letter — five images each	Rebuild gratitude, daily noticing, and ongoing appreciation

Module-by-Module Quick Guides

Module 1 — Safety Building

Session focus: set ground rules, introduce the Imago Dialogue, and complete the first photographic brief. Step-by-step: 1) Teach 3-part Imago Dialogue; 2) Assign: each partner takes 5 photos around the home of small comforts and one image that shows how they feel; 3) Use the dialogue to mirror responses

to the photos. Therapist tips: normalize reluctance, frame photography as neutral observation, keep early sessions short and predictable.

Module 2 — Emotional Mapping (Zone System)

Session focus: introduce the photographic Zone System metaphor and map current emotional experience visually. Exercise: partners choose or make images representing their current marital zone, label them together, and discuss what a one-zone shift would look like behaviorally. Therapist tips: use grayscale cards or prints, avoid pushing for full vulnerability (no Zone X demand).

Module 3 — Collaborative Creation

Session focus: create a single photograph together to practice negotiation and shared authorship. Exercise: plan subject, frame, roles; make the image; debrief process using Imago Dialogue (what each noticed, moments of difficulty, how decisions were made). Therapist tips: celebrate small successful negotiations; treat disagreements during the shoot as material for exploration, not failure.

Module 4 — Archive Work

Session focus: reconnect with the couple's visual past to surface memory and affect safely. Exercise: bring 3–5 personal or shared photographs; each partner uses Imago Dialogue to describe what they remember and miss. Therapist tips: prepare for grief responses; schedule follow-up check-ins after intense archive sessions.

Module 5 — Beauty Reclamation

Session focus: sustain reconnection by cultivating ongoing noticing practices. Exercise: "One with Beauty" visual love letter — five images each of ordinary beauty in the relationship; share with the partner and name the felt response. Therapist tips: convert the images into a shared album or rotating wall display to keep the practice alive.

Follow-up: Structure, Homework, and Re-assessment

A clear follow-up plan increases homework adherence and helps track progress without pathologizing reluctance.

1. Session cadence: Weeks 1–4 weekly sessions to build skills; Weeks 5–12 biweekly to consolidate; monthly check-ins thereafter as needed.
2. Homework design: keep tasks activity-focused and time-limited (20–30 minutes). Provide technical coaching for photography assignments to reduce friction.
3. Check-ins: brief mid-week asynchronous check-ins (text or voice) to troubleshoot homework and reinforce small wins.
4. Re-assessment points: at 6 and 12 weeks use the Zone System images and a short relational satisfaction measure to track movement.
5. Relapse planning: identify early warning signs (return to Zone I–II patterns) and schedule a booster session with a short photographic brief to re-open dialogue.

DESC Communication Model — A Practical Script

DESC is a structured, non-blaming way to raise relationship concerns. Use it in-session first, then as a homework script.

- D — Describe: State observable facts without interpretation.
- E — Emote: Share your feeling using "I" language (briefly).

- S — Specify: Request a concrete behaviour change (positive and actionable).
- C — Consequences: State a calm result or benefit if the request is met (or a natural consequence if not).

Example tailored to the dinner-and-phone issue:

****Describe:** *******"When we sit down for dinner, I notice you often look at your phone right away and the table goes quiet."

****Emote:** *******"I feel lonely and unseen during those evenings."

****Specify:** *******"Could you put your phone in another room or turn it face down for the first 30 minutes of dinner three nights this week?"

****Consequences/Benefit:** *******"If we do this, I think our conversations will come back more easily and we'll both feel more connected. If it's hard, we can try just one night and check in tomorrow."

Therapist coaching tip: practice DESC once in-session with Imago Dialogue mirroring, then assign it as a low-stakes homework script.

Growth Mindset vs. Goal Orientation — A Brief Guide

Being growth-oriented emphasizes ongoing practices without a fixed finish line; being goal-oriented emphasizes specific, time-limited outcomes. Both have value; for relationship repair, a growth orientation supports sustainable change.

Feature	Growth-Oriented	Goal-Oriented
Focus	Ongoing practices, curiosity, learning	Specific measurable objectives, deadlines
Example in relationships	Daily noticing, monthly photo walks, continuous gratitude	Attend 8 therapy sessions, reduce arguments by X% in 3 months
Emotional tone	Flexible, forgiving of setbacks	Motivating but can feel pressurized
Best use	Long-term relational resilience and attunement	Short-term crisis management and measurable skills work

Why growth orientation helps couples: it reduces shame around imperfect progress, encourages small daily rituals that compound over time, and keeps attention on process rather than a single outcome.

Growth-Oriented Practices (No Finish Line) — Examples to Start This Week

- Daily noticing (2 minutes): each partner names one small thing they noticed and appreciated about the other that day.
- Weekly micro-project: a 20–30 minute photo-walk together noticing light, textures, or ordinary domestic beauty.
- Monthly shared album: add one photo each that represents a moment of connection and spend 10 minutes reviewing them together.
- Ongoing curiosity journal: one sentence per day about what surprised you about your partner (keeps momentum without pressure).

Micro-practice for this issue (phone-at-dinner): try a 14-night growth experiment — start with three phone-free dinners, then scale as comfort increases; log brief reflections (one sentence) after each dinner.

Practical Resources and Tips

- Camera basics for beginners: use phone camera in portrait mode, hold steady, notice light direction.
- Printing tips: small 4x6 prints or a shared digital album reduce logistical friction for homework sharing.
- Safety note: archive work can trigger grief — plan immediate follow-up and grounding practices (breathing exercise, 5-minute walk).
- Cultural humility: invite family photographs and rituals into the work when comfortable; avoid imposing Western-only metaphors without explanation.

Follow-up & Contact

If you are working with a therapist: agree a follow-up schedule this week and identify a 6-week re-assessment. If you are reading as a couple: try Module 1 and the DESC script this week; if either partner feels overwhelmed, pause and seek a trained therapist for support.

Mantra of Hope Counselling — contact us for workshops, clinician consultation on integrating photography into couple therapy, and group photo-therapy walk events.

Credits: This newsletter integrates Imago Relationship Therapy principles (Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt), photography-based art therapy practices inspired by Ansel Adams and Paul Strand, and clinical research on South Asian Canadian couples (2016). Content is intended for educational purposes and should be adapted by qualified clinicians.