

The Bearing

Anchor, Tide, Breakwater, Squall — four ways of being in a relationship, and what happens when they meet.

This is not a compatibility test.



How to read this

The Sounding is a self-report scale we wrote, not a validated clinical measure.

They are honest, careful, and useful for one thing: showing two people where their instincts differ, in language they can act on. They diagnose nothing and promise nothing about the future.

Everything in this guide comes from one questionnaire, the Sounding: forty-eight statements, answered separately by each partner, scored on six dimensions. Two of those dimensions set your **core** — Anchor, Tide, Breakwater or Squall. Your strongest remaining signal sets your **modifier**. Twenty archetypes; ten ways two cores can meet.

You will not find a score for your relationship here. Where friction appears, it is described — named, located, and paired with the work that addresses it — never rated. Difference is information, not deficiency, and no pairing in this guide is better than another. They are different shapes of the same work.

Read your archetype first, then your partner's, then your pairing. The portraits here are deliberately short — a name, a line, an edge, and what stress does to it. The full portraits arrive with Your Survey at the end of the forty-eight, and they include the parts nobody enjoys reading. Those are the useful parts.

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The legal fact, since it is why many couples pick this up:

there is no such thing as common law marriage in England and Wales. A 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey found 46% of the England and Wales population wrongly assume cohabitants living together form one; in households with children, 55%.

NatCen Social Research, 22 January 2019; cited by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *The rights of cohabiting partners*, HC 92, 2022, paragraph 16.

Friction bands run **very low · low · moderate · high · very high** and are always labelled *descriptive, not predictive*, here and in the product.

The Sounding

48

statements each

6

dimensions

20

archetypes

10

pairings

12

minutes

Each of you answers alone — neither sees the other's answers, so nobody performs. Every statement is scored from *not like me at all* to *exactly like me*, answered for your ordinary self, not your best self.

Two dimensions do the structural work. **Attachment anxiety** — how much your security depends on reassurance — and **attachment avoidance** — how much you protect autonomy with distance — place you in one of four quadrants: your core. The strongest of the other four becomes your modifier; when none dominates, it is **Even**.

 **Anchor**

low anxiety · low avoidance

Holds position. Stable, resolved. Distance doesn't alarm; closeness doesn't crowd.

 **Tide**

high anxiety · low avoidance

Reaches. Distance registers early, and loudly.

 **Breakwater**

low anxiety · high avoidance

Holds a line. Closeness reads as pressure before it reads as warmth.

 **Squall**

high anxiety · high avoidance

Pulled two ways. Wants closeness and defends against it.

Axes: **anxiety** — how loudly distance registers · **avoidance** — how instinctively you protect room.

THE FIVE MODIFIERS — COLOUR-KEYED TO THE DIMENSION THAT TRIGGERS THEM

 **Open**

triggered by high secure expression — the pattern, plus the words for it

 **Even**

no dominant secondary signal — the core pattern, undecorated

 **Fierce**

triggered by high conflict heat — the pattern runs hot in disagreement

 **Bound**

triggered by high emotional dependency — the relationship carries the day-to-day weight

 **Watchful**

triggered by high vigilance — attention goes to monitoring rather than assuming good faith

The six dimensions

Positions, not categories — the notation is a marker on a scale for exactly that reason. Each dimension keeps its colour throughout this guide and inside the product's charts.

Attachment Anxiety Anxiety

Sits with ambiguity → Needs to know where they stand

How much your sense of security depends on reassurance, closeness, and knowing where you stand.

Reads high — You feel relationship threat early and strongly. Distance registers as danger before you have evidence of it.

Reads low — You tolerate ambiguity and time apart without your sense of the relationship wobbling.

Neither end means loving more. High is an early alarm; low is a late one — both can miss things.

Secure Expression Expression

Builds up unspoken → Says it in time

How readily you name what you feel, ask directly, and stay comfortable in closeness.

Reads high — You can say what's going on inside you and stay present while the other person responds.

Reads low — Feelings tend to stay unspoken until they've built up, which makes them harder to land well.

Neither end means feeling less. High says it as it happens; low feels it and files it.

Emotional Dependency Dependency

Own base holds → Mood tracks the relationship

How much your day-to-day steadiness rests on the relationship rather than on a base of your own.

Reads high — Time alone is hard, and your mood tracks closely with the state of the relationship.

Reads low — You have a self that holds steady whether or not the relationship is in a good week.

Neither end means loving better. High builds the week around 'us'; low keeps a base of one's own.

Attachment Avoidance Avoidance

Moves towards → Handles it alone

How much you protect autonomy by keeping emotional distance, especially when closeness intensifies.

Reads high — Closeness can feel like pressure. Your instinct under stress is to handle it alone and create room.

Reads low — You lean towards others when things are hard rather than away from them.

Neither end means caring less. High protects the self first; low reaches first — both are strategies.

Conflict Heat Conflict

De-escalates → Contests to win

How much conflict turns adversarial — score-keeping, insisting, resentment, wanting the other to concede first.

Reads high — Disagreements can become contests. Repair tends to wait for the other person to move first.

Reads low — You de-escalate rather than dig in, and you let things go once they're addressed.

Neither end means being right. High fights to be understood; low settles fast — sometimes too fast.

Vigilance Vigilance

Good faith by default → Tracks and re-checks

How much attention goes to monitoring, suspecting, and checking rather than assuming good faith.

Reads high — You notice threat cues constantly, and trust has to be re-earned more often than most.

Reads low — You extend the benefit of the doubt and don't spend energy tracking your partner.

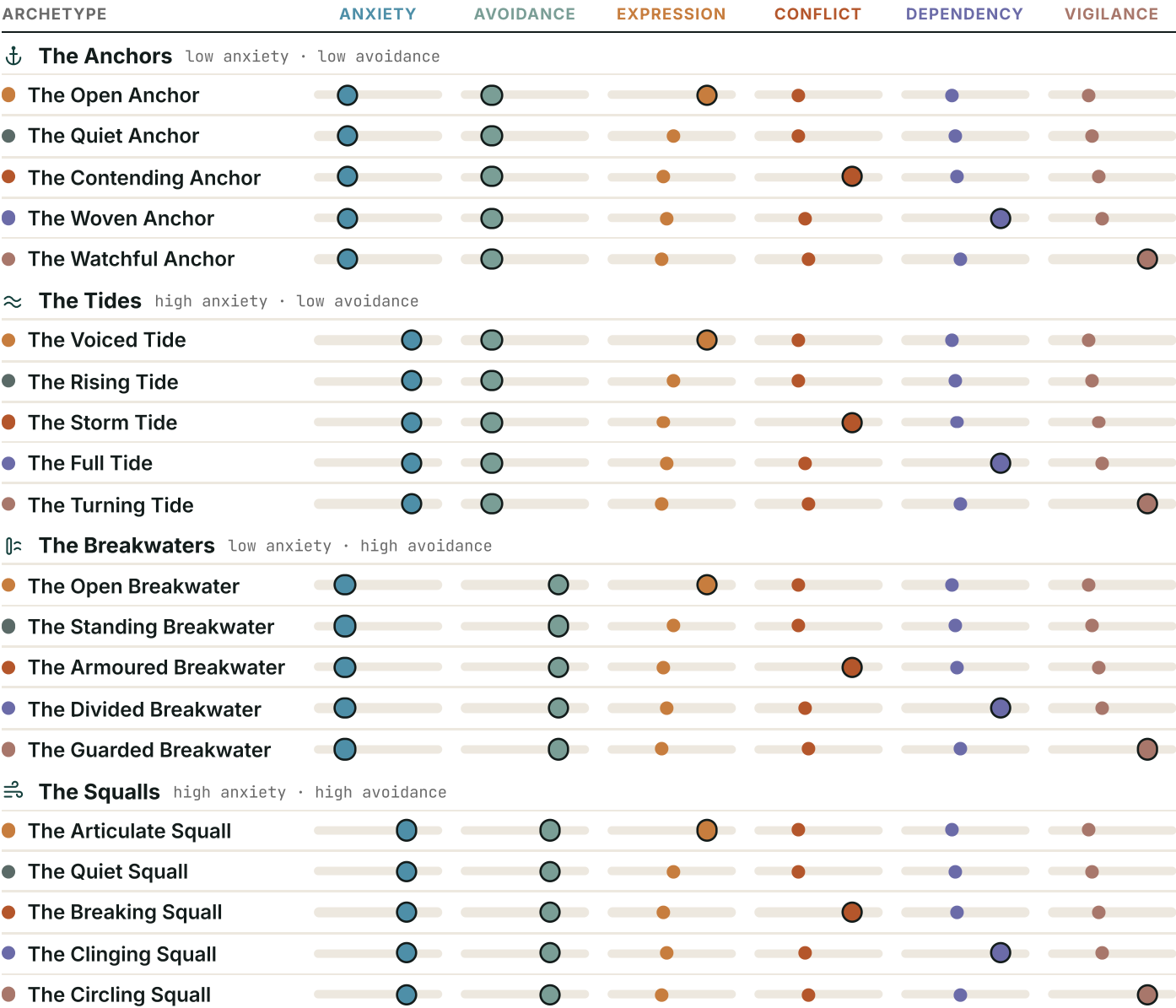
Neither end means naivety or paranoia. High watches; low assumes — both are bets about people.

KEY — HOW THE SIX BECOME TWENTY

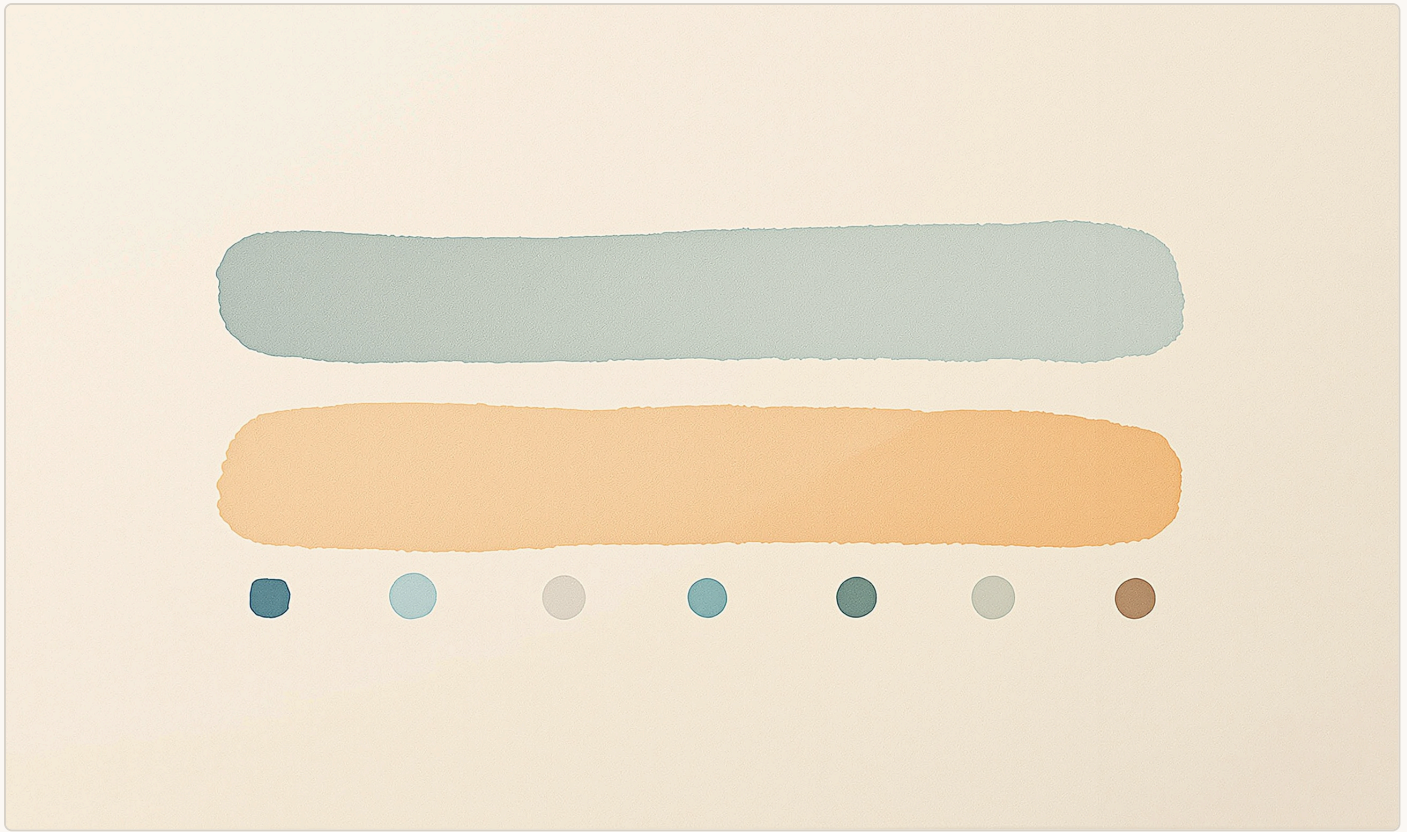
Anxiety × **Avoidance** set the core. The strongest of **Expression** (→ Open), **Conflict** (→ Fierce), **Dependency** (→ Bound) and **Vigilance** (→ Watchful) sets the modifier — or **Even**, when none dominates. Four cores × five modifiers = the twenty archetypes overleaf. The "neither end means" lines come from the Sounding itself, and appear beside every chart inside the product.

The twenty configurations

Every archetype as its typical position on all six dimensions — the Sounding's own view of it, low to the left, high to the right. **Ringed markers** are the positions that make the archetype: the two core dimensions and the modifier's trigger. Even archetypes ring two, because their third signal is precisely that none dominates.



Positions are the engine's typical configuration for each archetype, drawn to the same scale as Your Survey; your own marks will sit near them, not on them. The coloured dot before each name is the modifier. Descriptive, not predictive.



PART TWO

The twenty archetypes

A name, a line, an edge, and what stress does to it — deliberately incomplete. Four pages, one core each, five archetypes to a page.

KEY — HOW TO READ AN ENTRY

Name — core + modifier. ● **Chip** — the modifier, in its dimension's colour. *Italic line* — the archetype's tagline, quoted from the engine. Body line — one sentence from the full portrait. **Under stress** — the move the pattern makes when squeezed.

THE FOUR CORES

⚓ Anchor	≈ Tide
⚓ Breakwater	⇄ Squall

The marks: a form and its relationship to a line. Anchor holds position; Tide reaches; Breakwater holds a line; Squall is pulled two ways.



The Anchors

low anxiety · low avoidance · Holds position — stable, resolved.

01-05 of 20

Six markers: the archetype's typical configuration on the Sounding, low to high. The ringed, bold ones are the positions that make it — the two core dimensions and the modifier's trigger. Even archetypes ring two; their third signal is that none dominates.

Low anxiety, low avoidance. Anchors are the people other people steady themselves against: they seek little reassurance and take little distance, so what you see on a good day is roughly what you get on a bad one. The cost is that an Anchor can mistake steadiness for having nothing to say — and a partner can mistake it for not caring. The modifier tells you which way that quiet leans.

The Open Anchor

Open

Steady, and says so out loud.

When something bothers you, you tend to say it early, plainly, and without needing the other person to be wrong for you to be right.

Under stress — Under real strain you get quieter and more practical rather than more reactive — which can look like you're unaffected when you're not.



The Quiet Anchor

Even

Reliable ground, no theatre.

The gap between what you feel and what you say out loud is your main working edge.

Under stress — You go internal and get on with it. The risk is that your partner finds out about the strain long after it started.



The Contending Anchor

Fierce

Secure in the relationship, hot in the argument.

Your certainty that the relationship is safe doesn't mean they feel that way mid-argument.

Under stress — You get sharper, faster, more insistent. You want to resolve it now, and 'later' feels like avoidance.



The Woven Anchor

Bound

Secure, and deeply invested in togetherness.

If the relationship contracted, you'd notice you'd let some of your own scaffolding go.

Under stress — You move towards the relationship — more time together, more contact, more reassurance-seeking than your usual baseline.



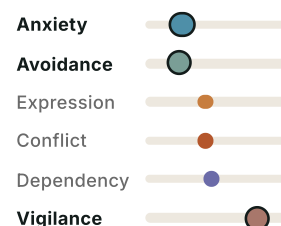
The Watchful Anchor

Watchful

Secure by disposition, alert by history.

Occasionally you're building a case from evidence that has an innocent explanation you haven't asked about.

Under stress — You gather information. You get quieter and more observant while you work out what's going on.



Six markers: the archetype's typical configuration on the Sounding, low to high. The ringed, bold ones are the positions that make it — the two core dimensions and the modifier's trigger. Even archetypes ring two; their third signal is that none dominates.

High anxiety, low avoidance. Tides move towards: they want contact, confirmation and the conversation now rather than later, and they are usually the first to notice when something has shifted. The cost is that reaching can read as pressure, and a Tide can spend its energy monitoring a relationship instead of living in it. The modifier tells you what the reaching is made of.

The Voiced Tide

Open

Feels it strongly, and can say it clearly.

Rather than testing, hinting, or withdrawing to see if you're followed, you tend to say 'I'm feeling far from you and it's scaring me.'

Under stress — You reach out — more messages, more questions, more need for contact and confirmation.



The Rising Tide

Even

Closeness matters, and the wanting shows.

The wanting can arrive as mood or pressure rather than as a clear request.

Under stress — You ruminate, then reach out — often in a way that lands as complaint rather than as a need.



The Storm Tide

Fierce

Wants closeness, fights to get it.

Underneath a sharp remark is almost always a plea: are we all right, am I still important here?

Under stress — You escalate: sharper words, higher stakes, a demand for engagement right now.



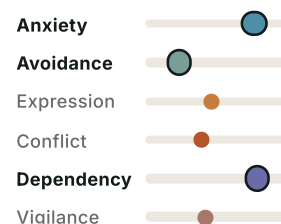
The Full Tide

Bound

The relationship is the centre of gravity.

A self that has been folded into a couple has very little left to steady itself with when the couple wobbles.

Under stress — You move closer still, and separation becomes very hard to tolerate.



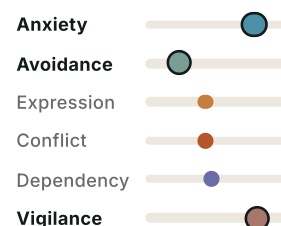
The Turning Tide

Watchful

Wants closeness, scans for its withdrawal.

Sometimes you're picking up something real, and sometimes you're pattern-matching to a history that has nothing to do with this person.

Under stress — You gather evidence and seek confirmation, often repeatedly.





The Breakwaters

low anxiety · high avoidance · Holds a line — room first.

11–15 of 20

Six markers: the archetype's typical configuration on the Sounding, low to high. The ringed, bold ones are the positions that make it — the two core dimensions and the modifier's trigger. Even archetypes ring two; their third signal is that none dominates.

Low anxiety, high avoidance. Breakwaters hold a line: they need room before they need reassurance, they process alone first, and they are at their best when the boundary has something real behind it. The cost is that room can look like absence from the other side of it, and a Breakwater can leave a partner guessing. The modifier tells you what the line protects.

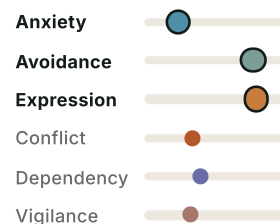
The Open Breakwater

Open

Independent, but not closed.

You may not volunteer your interior often, but when asked directly, you answer honestly rather than deflecting.

Under stress — You get more self-contained and more practical. You solve rather than share.



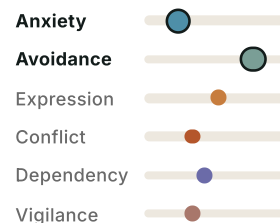
The Standing Breakwater

Even

Self-contained by default.

Partners often experience you as steady and slightly unreachable, and both readings are accurate.

Under stress — You withdraw — more work, more solo time, less contact. You experience this as coping; your partner experiences it as leaving.



The Armoured Breakwater

Fierce

Distant when calm, sharp when pressed.

The distance itself is manageable in a relationship; the sharpness that protects it is what does real damage.

Under stress — You get cold, then cutting. The message is: back off.



The Divided Breakwater

Bound

Needs more than the distance suggests.

You don't ask for much, so you don't get much, and then the unmet need surfaces as irritation, withdrawal, or a sudden disproportionate reaction to a small thing.

Under stress — You withdraw and wait to be pursued, then feel the absence of pursuit as evidence.



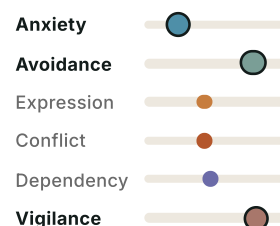
The Guarded Breakwater

Watchful

Keeps distance, and keeps watch.

You may be running a long, private assessment that your partner doesn't know they're in, and can therefore never actually pass.

Under stress — You close further and watch harder.





The Squalls

high anxiety · high avoidance · Pulled two ways at once.

16-20 of 20

Six markers: the archetype's typical configuration on the Sounding, low to high. The ringed, bold ones are the positions that make it — the two core dimensions and the modifier's trigger. Even archetypes ring two; their third signal is that none dominates.

High anxiety, high avoidance. Squalls are the only core with internal tension: they want closeness and flinch from it, often in the same hour, and can feel the pull both ways as a kind of weather. The cost is that the weather changes without notice — for themselves as much as anyone. Squalls also do something the other cores rarely manage: they know exactly what both sides of the argument feel like. The modifier tells you which pull tends to win.

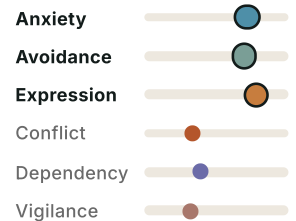
The Articulate Squall

Open

Pulled both ways — and able to say so.

'I want you closer and I need to get away from you and I know that doesn't make sense.' Naming it is enormous.

Under stress — You oscillate faster: reaching out, then needing away, then reaching out again.



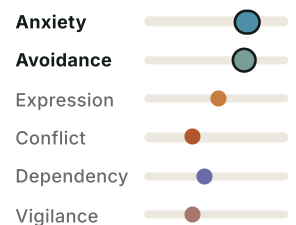
The Quiet Squall

Even

Wants in, needs out, says neither.

It's two real needs firing at once, and the switching is how you manage the collision.

Under stress — You go dark, sometimes abruptly, sometimes for a while.



The Breaking Squall

Fierce

High need, high defence, high heat.

It can feel like passion. It's usually exhausting, and it's the pattern most likely to produce genuine damage for both people.

Under stress — Rapid escalation — pursuit and attack, or sudden total withdrawal, sometimes both within a day.



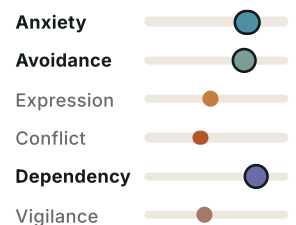
The Clinging Squall

Bound

Can't be close, can't be apart.

Your partner is likely to feel they can't get it right, because from inside the pattern, they can't.

Under stress — Distress with no available relief; you may escalate in several directions at once.



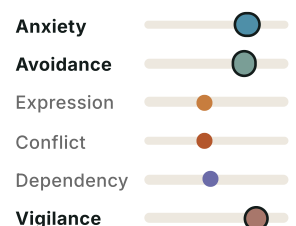
The Circling Squall

Watchful

Braced for the betrayal you expect.

You stay close enough to monitor and far enough to survive.

Under stress — Intense monitoring alternating with withdrawal.





PART THREE

When they meet — the ten pairings

Cores meet in ten combinations, and every pairing gets the same weight on the pages that follow: what it feels like, where the friction tends to sit, and the work that addresses it. Modifiers tune each of these — a Fierce Tide meets a Breakwater more loudly than a Quiet one — but the structural pattern belongs to the cores. None of it says what will happen; it says what is there.

KEY — THE FRICTION BAND SCALE · DESCRIPTIVE, NOT PREDICTIVE

very low

low

moderate

high

very high

Band colour is temperature in the brand's one signal hue — never a verdict, never red/green. The band names a pattern's heat; the text beside it always says so in words.

THE TEN, BY BAND

Low friction — Two Anchors · Anchor & Breakwater · Two Breakwaters — calm, and at risk of quiet erosion

Moderate — Anchor & Tide · Two Tides (moderate-to-high) — heat that needs tending

High friction — Anchor & Squall · Tide & Breakwater · Tide & Squall · Breakwater & Squall

Very high — Two Squalls — please read page 16 carefully

⚓ ⚓ Two Anchors low friction descriptive, not predictive

Low turbulence, high risk of drift.

Neither of you destabilises easily, which makes this a genuinely calm pairing. Conflict rarely spirals, repair is straightforward, and time apart doesn't generate crises. The characteristic failure mode isn't explosion — it's erosion. Two people who don't need much reassurance can go a long time without asking each other anything real, and wake up as extremely amicable housemates.

STRENGTHS

- Conflict rarely escalates beyond what either of you can handle
- Both of you can tolerate time apart without alarm
- Reassurance is credible from both sides because neither of you is performing
- The relationship can survive external stress well

FRICTIONS

- Complacency — nothing forces the deeper conversations
- Unspoken small grievances that neither of you considers worth raising
- Mistaking absence of conflict for presence of intimacy

THE WORK

- Schedule the conversations that won't happen spontaneously
- Actively raise the small stuff rather than letting it settle
- Watch for parallel lives that never quite intersect

⚓ ≈ Anchor & Tide moderate friction descriptive, not predictive

One of the most workable mixed pairings.

The Anchor's steadiness gives the Tide something reliable to calibrate against, and the Tide's expressiveness pulls the Anchor into more depth than they'd generate alone. This works well — often very well — as long as the Anchor doesn't tire of being the reassurance source, and the Tide doesn't route all their regulation through the Anchor.

STRENGTHS

- The Anchor's consistency directly soothes the Tide's core fear
- The Tide brings emotional aliveness and initiates depth
- The Anchor rarely withdraws, which is the Tide's worst trigger
- Repair usually works because neither party stonewalls

FRICTIONS

- The Anchor can become the relationship's entire regulation system
- The Tide's needs can be read as excessive rather than as information
- The Anchor's calm can read as indifference during the Tide's distress

THE WORK

- The Anchor: offer reassurance before it's requested — it's much cheaper that way
- The Tide: build regulation practices that don't route through your partner
- Both: check whether the Anchor is carrying more emotional labour than acknowledged



Anchor & Breakwater

low friction

descriptive, not predictive

Comfortable, quiet, and easy to under-invest in.

Neither of you demands much, which makes for a remarkably low-conflict relationship. The Anchor doesn't chase, so the Breakwater doesn't feel pressed; the Breakwater's distance doesn't alarm the Anchor. The risk is straightforward: two people who are both fine on their own can gradually become two people who are on their own.

STRENGTHS

- Very low conflict
- The Breakwater's need for space is respected without drama
- Neither party pursues or panics
- Both are self-sufficient and low-maintenance

FRICTIONS

- Intimacy can thin out with nothing to interrupt the drift
- Neither of you is likely to initiate the difficult conversation
- The Breakwater's inner life may stay invisible indefinitely

THE WORK

- Build in structure for connection, since neither of you will force it
- The Anchor: ask direct questions — you'll usually get real answers
- The Breakwater: volunteer something occasionally, unprompted



Anchor & Squall

high friction

descriptive, not predictive

The steadiest available partner for the hardest pattern.

The Anchor is, honestly, the best-case partner for a Squall — steady enough not to be destabilised by the oscillation, secure enough not to take the withdrawal personally, present enough to be there when the Squall comes back. 'Best case' is not the same as 'easy': the Anchor will absorb a great deal, and needs to be honest with themselves about the cost.

STRENGTHS

- The Anchor's consistency is exactly what the Squall's pattern needs
- The Anchor doesn't escalate during withdrawal or pursue during retreat
- The Squall's depth of feeling is genuinely met rather than pathologised

FRICTIONS

- The Anchor carries disproportionate emotional load
- The oscillation is confusing and wearing even for a secure partner
- The Anchor may normalise more instability than is good for them

THE WORK

- Professional support for the Squall — the Anchor cannot substitute for it
- The Anchor: audit honestly what this costs you, and say so
- Agree an explicit signal for 'I need space and I'm coming back'

≈ ≈ Two Tides moderate-to-high friction descriptive, not predictive

Intense, mutual, and easily flooded.

You understand each other's need for closeness immediately, and neither of you will ever withdraw as a weapon. But when both people need reassurance at once, there's nobody holding the floor. Small ruptures amplify because you're each reading the other's anxiety as evidence of danger, and the feedback loop can escalate fast.

STRENGTHS

- Deep mutual understanding of the need for closeness
- Neither party stonewalls
- High emotional intimacy and expressiveness
- Both willing to work on the relationship

FRICTIONS

- Anxiety amplifies between you rather than being absorbed
- No stable ground during a mutual spiral
- Reassurance is hardest to give exactly when it's most needed
- Risk of an intense, insular relationship with a thin outside world

THE WORK

- Agree a de-escalation protocol before you need it — a pause word you both honour
- Each of you needs regulation that doesn't route through the other
- Protect outside friendships deliberately; this pairing tends to close in

≈ ≈ Tide & Breakwater high friction descriptive, not predictive

The pursue-withdraw pairing — the most common, and the most self-reinforcing.

The classic: the Tide's pursuit triggers the Breakwater's withdrawal, and the withdrawal triggers more pursuit — each of you doing the thing that most reliably produces the behaviour you least want from the other. Left alone the cycle deepens; named and worked deliberately, it changes shape; it doesn't resolve by itself.

STRENGTHS

- Genuine complementarity — emotional life meets steadiness
- Each has real capacity the other lacks
- Strong mutual attraction is common

FRICTIONS

- The cycle is self-reinforcing and escalates over time
- The Tide feels chronically unmet; the Breakwater chronically pressured
- Each reads the other's coping as rejection

THE WORK

- Both: learn the cycle by name and call it when it starts
- The Breakwater: signal before withdrawing and say when you'll return — the single highest-value change
- The Tide: state the need directly rather than escalating
- Couples counselling — this pattern responds well to it

≈ ≈ Tide & Squall high friction descriptive, not predictive

High need on both sides, with unstable ground.

Both of you need a great deal of reassurance, and one of you also periodically needs to disappear. The Tide's pursuit meets the Squall's approach-avoidance: intense closeness followed by inexplicable retreat — probably the single most activating sequence for anxious attachment. A demanding pairing that generally needs outside support to do well.

STRENGTHS

- Deep mutual capacity for intensity and connection
- Both take the relationship seriously
- The Tide's persistence means they won't abandon the Squall

FRICTIONS

- The Squall's withdrawal is maximally destabilising for the Tide
- Neither partner provides stable ground
- Cycles can escalate quickly with nothing to interrupt them
- High risk of an exhausting dynamic that both mistake for passion

THE WORK

- Professional support is strongly indicated for this pairing
- Build external stability — routine, friendships, individual support
- Agree explicit protocols for space, return, and repair
- Both: assess honestly whether the intensity is serving you or consuming you

0~ 0~ Two Breakwaters low friction descriptive, not predictive

Peaceful, respectful, and at real risk of quiet disappearance.

You give each other exactly the space you both want, and neither of you experiences the other's distance as a problem. It's genuinely comfortable. It's also the pairing most likely to end not in conflict but in a slow, mutual, barely-noticed fade — because nothing in this pairing generates the pressure that produces intimacy.

STRENGTHS

- Deep mutual respect for autonomy
- Very low conflict
- Neither party pressures the other
- Both are genuinely self-sufficient

FRICTIONS

- Nothing forces depth; intimacy can thin indefinitely
- Neither will raise the difficult topic
- Emotional distance can become total without a rupture to mark it
- You may not notice you've disconnected until it's substantial

THE WORK

- Deliberate structure is essential — regular check-ins that happen whether or not you feel like it
- Practise volunteering interior information without being asked
- Set a review cadence and actually keep it

0^ ⇌ Breakwater & Squall high friction descriptive, not predictive

Two people withdrawing, one of whom also panics.

When the Squall reaches, the Breakwater pulls back; when the Squall withdraws, the Breakwater is relieved rather than concerned. The anxious phase gets no reassurance and the avoidant phase gets no pursuit — the pattern receives nothing that would settle it, in either direction. Meanwhile the Breakwater experiences the oscillation as pressure arriving without warning.

STRENGTHS

- The Breakwater doesn't escalate during the Squall's difficult phases
- Both value autonomy, so the Squall's need for space is genuinely respected
- Low risk of pursuing dynamics

FRICTIONS

- The Squall's need for reassurance goes structurally unmet
- The Breakwater finds the oscillation confusing and pressuring
- Neither provides stability during the other's harder phases
- Distance can compound until there is very little left

THE WORK

- The Breakwater: some reassurance during the Squall's anxious phase, even if it feels unnatural
- The Squall: professional support, and clear signalling about phases
- Both: agree explicit reconnection rituals, since neither instinct will produce them

⇌ ⇌ Two Squalls very high friction descriptive, not predictive

The most volatile pairing in the set. Please read this one carefully.

Both of you want closeness intensely and both of you defend against it hard. The cycles can synchronise — producing extraordinary intensity — or oppose, producing chaos. Feeling runs high, and feeling is easy to mistake for compatibility. It is the pairing most likely to be genuinely damaging without outside help, and most likely to be described afterwards as the most passionate relationship either of you had.

STRENGTHS

- Profound mutual recognition — you each understand the other's contradiction from the inside
- Enormous depth of feeling
- Neither of you finds the other's pattern alien

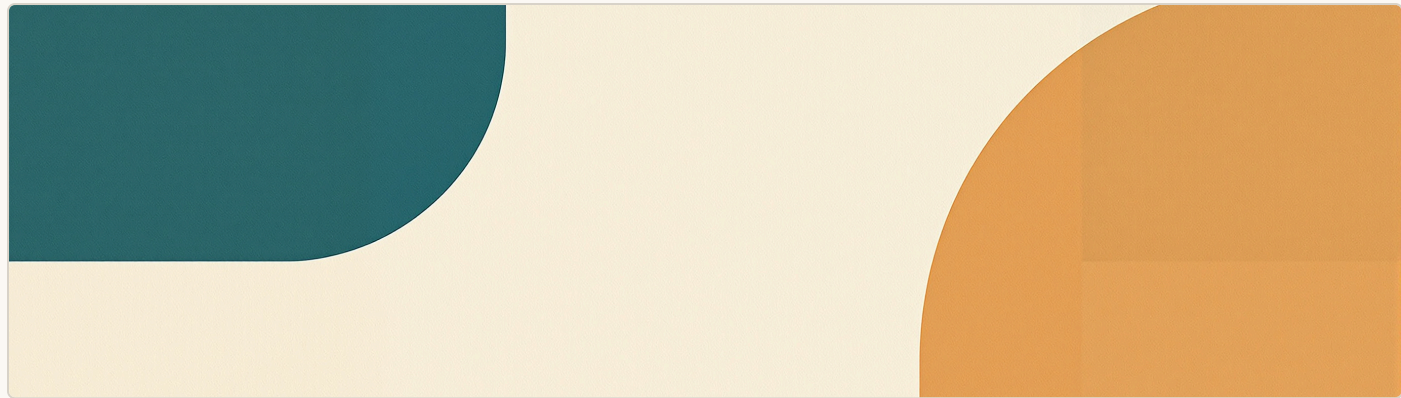
FRICTIONS

- No stable ground anywhere in the system
- Cycles can escalate without limit
- Intensity is readily mistaken for love
- A destabilising dynamic that is hard to leave

THE WORK

- Professional support is strongly recommended — individually and together
- Build external stability deliberately: routine, friendships, outside support
- Agree firm conflict limits while calm, and honour them
- Be honest about whether this nourishes or consumes you

If conflict ever becomes frightening, controlling, or physical, that is a safety matter, not a compatibility matter. The helpline numbers on page 19 are free to everyone, always.



PART FOUR

From friction to terms

Naming a pattern is the start, not the work. Inside Terms of Us, your two surveys recommend clauses — plain-language agreements matched to your actual scores, written while you're calm so they exist when you aren't. Three of the fifteen, quoted in full:

The Pause Signal

We agree a word either of us may use to pause an argument. When it is used, both of us stop within one minute, without a final word. We will return to the subject within twenty-four hours — the pause is not a way to end a conversation permanently, and neither of us will use it to avoid a topic indefinitely.

Space With a Return

Either of us may ask for time alone without justifying the request. Whoever asks will say roughly how long they need and will make contact when they return. We agree that what we are avoiding is withdrawal without a marker, not the withdrawal itself.

Proactive Reassurance

We agree that reassurance offered before it is requested costs less than repair afterwards. Each of us will proactively say where we are and when we will be back when apart for an extended period, and neither of us will treat the other's need for reassurance as a failing. Where one of us asks whether we are all right, the other will answer directly rather than treating the question as an accusation.

“I will try to be more present” scores 27. “I will put my phone in the drawer from 7 to 9 every weeknight” scores 85. Only one of those can be honoured or broken. — Vow Curator

Take Your Survey — free · termsofus.com

48 statements, about twelve minutes, no card. Your full archetype at the end, yours to keep — and Get help now stays free whether or not you ever sign up.



What this is

Every couple is already operating under an agreement. Who handles money. Who apologises first. What counts as an emergency. What happens when one of you needs to leave the room.

Nobody wrote it down. Nobody agreed it. You each assumed a different version, and the difference stays invisible until the night it doesn't.

Terms of Us is where two people write down what they have actually agreed — before the law, or an argument, decides it for them.

HOW IT WORKS



1

The Sounding

Forty-eight statements, about twelve minutes. You each answer separately, so neither of you edits in response to the other.



2

Your Survey

One of the twenty archetypes in this guide, in full. Yours to keep, including the parts nobody enjoys reading.



3

The Structural Report

Where your two surveys meet, where they don't, and where you differ in ways that will keep coming up.



4

Your Terms

Written in plain language, with clauses matched to your actual scores rather than a template. You sign them. Every change afterwards is logged, word by word.



5

Maintenance

Ten seconds a day. An agreement nobody returns to is a keepsake.

Each of you answers forty-eight statements, separately. Each of you gets a full portrait. Together you get a report describing where you differ — described, not forecast. From there you write your terms, sign them, and return to them ten seconds a day.

No compatibility score. No odds. No verdict. No consumer product can honestly give you one.

Help is never behind a payment.

N° 1 You are holding this one

The Bearing

Where each of you is starting from — four cores, twenty archetypes, ten pairings, and what happens when two of them meet.

Free to read, keep and share · termsofus.com/field-guide

N° 2

The Atlas

What is here — thirty-two modules in five suites, what each does, and what it draws on.

Free to read, keep and share · termsofus.com/atlas

N° 3

The Routes

Which way through, for your moment — fifteen routes, eleven schedules, and the year after the signing.

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Where this comes from

Everything in this guide is quoted from the product itself — the dimension definitions, the archetype names and taglines, the three clauses in the library's wording, the under-stress lines, the pairing descriptions, the friction bands, the clauses. The one-line portraits are single sentences taken from the full ones; the "neither end means" lines, the keys and the sidenotes are ours. The Sounding is a self-report scale we wrote, not a validated clinical measure. Friction bands describe; they do not predict. Nothing ranks one pairing above another. No claim rests on a number we cannot source — the common-law-marriage figure is NatCen's, 2019. The four cores are Anchor, Tide, Breakwater and Squall on every surface. The four artworks are generated brand geometry — no people, no faces — each registered with model, date and licence.

NatCen Social Research, "Almost half of us mistakenly believe that common law marriage exists", 22 January 2019 (British Social Attitudes 2019); cited in House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *The rights of cohabiting partners*, HC 92 (2022–23), paragraph 16. 46% of the England and Wales population; 55% in households with children; 47% in 2005.

If anything here is frightening rather than frustrating — if there is fear, control or force in your relationship — this is not the document you need.

999

if anyone is in immediate danger

0808 2000 247

National Domestic Abuse Helpline, free, 24 hours

116 123

Samaritans, any reason, any hour

Text SHOUT to 85258

silent support by text

Checked at source on 28 August 2026.

The four numbers above are the ones available today. Terms of Us will also route to a wider directory of specialist organisations — not a feature of the product but the floor under it, and never behind a payment.