Glimmers

The small moments of safety that build a life together

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What a Glimmer Is

A glimmer is a small moment that tells your body you are safe. A warm look. A hand on your back. The sound of someone you love laughing in the next room. It is the opposite of a trigger. A trigger is a cue that pulls the body toward danger and sets off protection. A glimmer is a cue that nudges the body toward ease and connection. Your body registers it before your thinking brain has formed an opinion.

A glimmer is a micro moment that signals safety. A small cue that moves the nervous system toward connection, ease, and presence.

Why Glimmers Matter

We are wired to notice threat. That wiring kept our ancestors alive and it still runs quietly in the background of every relationship. Dr. Stephen Porges, who developed polyvagal theory, called this constant scanning neuroception. Your body is always reading the room for cues of safety or danger, below the level of awareness. The trouble is that a body trained toward threat walks right past glimmers. It is not looking for them. It is too busy watching for what might go wrong.

This is not positive thinking. The hard things are still real. Glimmers matter because they build something. When you start noticing what is going right, even in small flickers, you begin to collect evidence that connection is possible and that safety lives here. John Gottman spent decades watching couples in his research lab, and he found that the relationships that lasted kept a steady rhythm of about **five positive moments for every one negative moment**. Barbara Fredrickson calls small positive moments like these the raw material that slowly widens what we can see and reach for, a process she named broaden

and build. Each glimmer registers before you decide whether to trust it, and over time those small registrations add up.

Gottman called this the emotional bank account. I call it **emotional wealth**, because what you are building is not a ledger. It is a reserve. The kind that carries you when a season gets hard and there is nothing dramatic to point to, just two people who have been choosing each other in small ways long enough that the body already knows the other one is safe.

What It Looks Like in Real Life

A woman I worked with had been married a long time. She told me she could not name a single moment in months when she felt chosen. Her husband was not cruel. He had not checked out. He called her every day and he carried a real share of life at home. But her body had stopped registering any of it. We did not start by adding grand gestures. We started with noticing. Within a week she came back with a list. The way he warmed her car on cold mornings. The way he said her name when he walked in the door. None of it was new. What was new was that her body had finally started letting it land.

The Work

Glimmers are already happening around you. The practice is learning to catch them, let them land, and offer them back. Try this over the next week.

1 **Notice**
Once a day, pause and catch one small moment that told your body you were okay. A shared laugh. A quiet cup of coffee. The warmth of a hand. You are not manufacturing anything. You are noticing what was already there.

2 **Let it land**
When you catch a glimmer, stay with it a breath or two longer than usual. Drop your shoulders. Let your body actually feel it. A glimmer only builds emotional wealth if the body registers it, so give it a moment to sink in before you move on.

3 **Name it out loud**

Tell your partner when something they did landed as a glimmer for you. That felt good when you reached for my hand in the car. Naming it does two things at once. It shows them what safety feels like to you, and it makes the moment more likely to happen again.

4 **Offer one on purpose**

Once a day, do one small thing you know signals safety to your partner. A text in the middle of the day. A hand on the back as you pass in the kitchen. Small and steady beats big and rare. The body learns to trust the pattern, not the grand gesture.

Anchor questions for the week

- What told my body I was safe today?
- What small thing can I offer that would land as safety for my partner?

Common Stuck Points

- **I cannot find any glimmers.** This is normal at the start, especially if your body has been bracing for a long time. Start smaller than you think. The warmth of a mug. Sunlight on the floor. A glimmer does not have to involve your partner to begin retraining what your body notices.
- **It feels fake or forced.** Noticing what is going right can feel strange when you are used to scanning for what is wrong. You are not pretending the hard things away. You are widening what your body is allowed to take in. The strangeness usually fades as the practice becomes familiar.
- **My partner did something kind but I could not feel it.** When the body has been braced for a long time, real care can bounce right off. That is not a character flaw and it is not proof the care was not real. It means your body needs more evidence before it lowers its guard. Keep noticing. The evidence accumulates.

- **We only count the big things.** Grand gestures are lovely and they are not what holds a relationship together. It is the ordinary, repeated, small moments that teach the body the other person is safe. Do not overlook the quiet ones.

Something to Carry

You do not have to fix everything to begin. You only have to start noticing what is already going right. Every glimmer you catch is a small deposit into a reserve you are building together. Your body is keeping track, even when your mind forgets. Keep collecting them. That is the whole work.

Reflection

Three glimmers I noticed this week.

One glimmer I want to offer my partner.

Resources

These are the sources behind the ideas in this guide, offered for anyone who wants to read further.

Dana, D. (2021). *Anchored: How to befriend your nervous system using polyvagal theory*. Sounds True.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218-226.

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. Crown.

Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. W. W. Norton.