

# How to Live Happily Together



"If you want to be happy for the rest of your life," then don't do what the songs recommend, do what research has proven works. John Gottman, PhD. at UW, has studied married couples for decades. Here are some of his ideas:

- Accept influence instead of responding negatively to each other; share power
- Put the brakes on anger as it accelerates between you; de-escalate negativity
- Use positive interactions: agreement, approval, laughter, assent, smiles
- Instead of withdrawing from angry spouses, soothe them gently, lovingly
- Husbands: validate your wife's feelings  
(*I understand that or that makes sense.*)
- Wives: use humor to decrease your husband's stress when you complain
- Both: show you're listening with brief vocalizations, head nods and facial movements that convey to the speaker that you are tracking what they say

Be fair with each other – remember the *Golden Rule*. Be a choice maker – you choose what you say and how you act.

You can make things worse, better or about the same. Choose.

If you can't resolve the issue, step back and look at it from your spouse's perspective. Rate it from 1 *inconsequential* to 10 *vital*.

Negotiate trades. Which is more important: A, B or C?

Find the third alternative so it's not *Win-Lose*.

Take turns. Well, it worked in kindergarten!

Decide to be Christ-like, laying down your life for each other.

During conflict resolution, happily married couples use skills:

1. When he does something she doesn't like, she softens her approach to him to gently ask him to make a change.
2. When she raises this complaint, he de-escalates her low intensity negativity by validating, soothing and empathizing.
3. She offers humor to break the tension in an argument; this is one type of *repair* effort to mend the relationship during conflict.
4. He accepts influence from her, trusting she means him no harm, sharing decision making and power with her as an equal.
5. As they talk, both use five times more positive comments than negative, ten times more compliments than criticisms.
6. As they listen, both show positive affect (pleasant, friendly, kind, smiling, patting, stroking, nodding, tilting the head nicely).
7. While resolving the conflict, both intentionally de-escalate negativity by calming, lowering volume, saying positive things.
8. Because males respond physiologically with *fight-or-flight*, both partners physiologically soothe the husband during conflict.
9. Both see with X-ray vision beyond hostility to the old wounds behind any hostility, then reframe the perceived attack.
10. Each spouse reframes *harder* emotions (anger, hostility) as the *softer* emotions (fear, sadness), then provides caring support.
11. Couples need other patterns of emotional engagement and responsiveness than conflict resolution, like inductive Bible study.
12. Happy marriage partners express affection for each other all the time, even during a disagreement.
13. Couples acknowledge their partner's point of view (*I'm sorry I hurt your feelings*) in order to keep quarrels from getting too hot.