

Tools for Marriage

Gottman's Toolbox

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work

John Gottman, a psychologist at the University of Washington, has spent two decades trying to develop the tools to keep your marriage working. His research says the quality of spousal friendship is the most important factor in marital satisfaction.



Happy marriages are based upon deep friendship, mutual respect and enjoyment of each other's company. Those couples know each other, their likes and dislikes, personality quirks, hopes and dreams. They share an abiding regard for each other and express their fondness in big and little ways every day.

Friendship doesn't prevent arguments, but gives couples a secret weapon to prevent quarrels from getting out of hand. Friendship renewed keeps the marriage partners from becoming adversaries

Gottman's seven principles are tools to guide you in coping with conflict and in building a foundation to strengthen the friendship at the heart of your marriage.

Principle 1: Enhance Your Love Maps

A love map stores all the relevant information about your spouse's life. Happy couples remember the major events in each other's history and keep updating facts and feelings. She orders his salad with dressing



on the side, the way he likes it. He tapes her favorite program when she's late at work.

Knowledge is power. To draw a love map requires you to know your spouse well. Time talking intimately was how you dated and got to know each other. It still works!

Principle 2: Nurture Your Fondness and Admiration

Marriages need fondness and admiration in order to be rewarding and long-lasting romances. Even if your marriage is in trouble, you probably still feel your spouse is worthy of honor and respect.

Obviously, people who are happily married like each other. If they didn't, then they wouldn't be happily married. Friendship is fragile, though.

If you focus on each other's flaws, then you will feel corrosive contempt or disgust, especially when you have a difference of opinion

Fan the flames of friendship through the attitude of gratitude. Express your appreciation often.

Principle 3: Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away

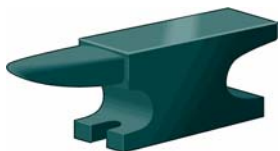
Romance is kept alive by telling your spouse that he or she is valued during the grind of everyday life.



Hollywood does not depict leaving a short voice mail as often as a passionate kiss but both are ways of turning toward your spouse instead of turning away.

Couples make deposits in their spouse's emotional love bank account by spending time together. Candlelight dinners and by-

the-sea vacations are great. Staying in touch in little ways every day is even better.



Principle 4: Let Your Partner Influence You

Sharing power can be difficult as each spouse must accede to the other's wishes at times. More husbands have trouble letting their wives influence them than vice versa.

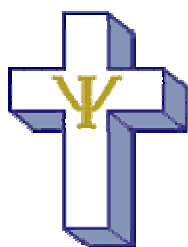
If the wives say, "You're not listening to me," then men ignore her (stonewalling), act defensively ("Yes, I am!"), be critical ("You never make any sense.") or be contemptuous ("Why waste my time?"). These escalate the conflict.

Emotionally intelligent husbands learn more about relationships from their wives. The man learns to yield in order to win. He scores major points by putting the toilet seat down.

Ask your wife to gently point out when you are unwittingly being domineering, defensive or disrespectful of her.



As husbands share power and decision making with their wives, they cope better in conflict.



Principle 5: Solve Your Solvable Problems

The five steps to resolving conflict in a marriage are basically having good manners:



1. Soften you startup.
2. Learn to make and receive repair attempts.
3. Soothe yourself and each other.
4. Compromise.
5. Be tolerant of each other's faults.

Principle 6: Overcome Gridlock

Gridlock leaves couples feeling hopeless about perpetual issues that never get resolved. You can learn to live with the problem, like a bad back or allergies.

The goal is to move to dialogue. Happy couples help each other realize their dreams. Partners incorporate each other's goals in their concept of what the marriage is about.

Become a dream detective to find your spouse's hopes and dreams.

Principle 7: Create Shared Meaning

A deep sense of shared meaning helps you create an inner life together – a culture rich with rituals and symbols, an appreciation for your roles and goals and an understanding of your family.



Each couple has customs (Sunday dinner out) and rituals (a champagne toast after the birth of each child) and myths, those stories told and embellished that explain their sense of what their marriage is like, what it means to pull together in their family.