

The Better Relationship Series

Welcome back to our Better Relationships Series

Last time we introduced the Gottman's Sound Relationship House, which focuses on building strong foundations and levels to help make our relationships happy and healthy. *Building Love Maps*, or really getting to know our partners, forms the foundation of any relationship.

This time we will be talking about the next three levels – Sharing Fondness and Admiration, Turning Towards Instead of Away, and the Positive Perspective. This will give you a peek at a few more attitudes and activities that make relationships work well.



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Sharing Fondness and Admiration

Sharing fondness and admiration for one another in intentional and consistent ways increases the amount of affection and respect in a relationship, and is the antidote to contempt. We may not need to actively do this in the early stages of a relationship, but when the 'newness' wears off, it becomes necessary to keep up habits of sharing our love with our partner.

- Tell your partner *WHY* you admire, respect or love them, and make sure you are specific, otherwise it's not meaningful. For example, there is a big difference between saying "Babe, you're great" versus "I really appreciate all the hard work you did to keep up with the kids today!"
- Try to recall the reasons you found your partner attractive in the first place – those qualities will still be there, you may just have forgotten about them.
- Tell them they are beautiful, attractive or hot and that you are glad they are with you. Don't take it for granted that they know, everyone loves to feel appreciated.
- Telling other people, in your partner's presence, why you admire them can make their heart sing.

You may believe that your partner already knows this stuff, but I guarantee they'll enjoy hearing you say it out loud. Want to know the current level of fondness and admiration that exists in your relationship? Check out this quick assessment here: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/fondness-and-admiration-assessment/>

Turning Towards instead of Away

So, what exactly does this mean, and how do you turn towards instead of away? The key to this is something Dr John Gottman calls 'bids'.

A bid is any attempt from one partner to another for attention, affirmation, affection, or any other positive connection. Partners make multiple 'bids' to each other during the course of a day in order to gain their attention. We use bids to test the water - to see if our partner is receptive to us. If our bids are not noticed or are intentionally ignored, we can start to lose the love.

So what does a bid look like? It can come in the form of

- A touch: a squeeze on the arm, a hand on a thigh.
- A comment: it's nice to see the sun today
- An appreciative look
- A smile

Whatever their bid looks like and whatever you're doing at the time, devote a split second to your relationship's happiness and turn towards them. Give them your attention for a moment and acknowledge the bid. To miss a bid is to turn away. There's nothing worse than feeling rejected by someone we love. When bids are constantly ignored, bidding will eventually stop and you will find yourselves wondering why you feel disconnected. Don't forget it's ok to let your main squeeze in on this secret and ask them to get better at noticing your bids too! Just for fun, next time you are sitting in a café, have a look around and notice the bidding (and ignoring) that goes on between couples.



What 'Bids' can look like

Text

- How do I look?
- Let's put the kids to bed.
- I talked to my sister today.
- Want to cuddle?
- Want to play Cribbage?
- I had a terrible lunch meeting today.

Subtext

- Can I have your attention?
- Can I have your help?
- Will you chat with me?
- Can I have your affection?
- Will you play with me?
- Will you help me destress?

Tips for a Stronger Relationship

- You have just woken up and your partner is lying next to you. Roll over, put your arm around them and tell them how thankful you are that you get to wake up next to them every day.
- You are reading the paper over breakfast and your partner makes a passing comment about a meeting they have at work that day. Follow up on what they said (put down that paper!) and give them your attention for at least a minute.
- Your partner is leaving to go somewhere. Tell them to come see you before they go. When they come to see you, give them a six-second kiss.
- You see that your partner looks stressed. Let them know you've noticed, and ask if they'd like to talk about what they are feeling.
- Compliment your partner about something they did. Compliment your partner about their appearance. Thank them for something they've recently done that you appreciate.
- Your partner is back from their job and is doing some housework. Without saying a word, join in and start helping them.
- Your partner is looking tired, but you are still having fun. You know they have to be up early tomorrow to prepare for a meeting. Recommend that you go home so that they can get some rest.

(Courtesy of The Gottman Institute: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-sound-relationship-house-turn-towards-instead-of-away/>)

The Positive Perspective

It might seem like a no-brainer that relationships work better when we are more positive than negative towards each other. But unfortunately it is human nature to be negative at times, and unless we monitor it, it can be easy to let our relationships slip into unhelpful habits and communications. And this can be more serious than just who puts near empty milk containers back in the fridge or forgetting your partner even exists when Offspring is on. Once you start seeing your partner as an adversary, rather than your best friend, you need to consciously work on improving things.

A fundamental principle of maintaining The Positive Perspective in your relationship is to let your partner influence you. In Dr John Gottman's study of 130 newlywed couples in the US, they found that "even in the first few months of marriage, men who allow their wives to influence them have happier marriages and are less likely to divorce than men who resist

their wives' influence". This obviously works both ways – if one person in the relationship is making all the decisions and doesn't compromise or take into account their partner's needs, the relationship has an over 80% chance of being seriously damaged and destabilised.

If you and your partner are able to sit and talk about the problems you have or how you're feeling about the relationship, then you're off to a great start. However, many couples find this difficult and discussion can immediately lead to finger pointing, blame and other forms of conflict. So, for the Positive Perspective to remain in a relationship we must be able to accept influence from our partner.

In our next issue we will be exploring healthy conflict and the skill of conflict management.