

# Begin Again:

## REPAIR ATTEMPTS DURING ARGUMENTS

*"Your future together can be bright even if your disagreements tend to be very negative. The secret is learning the right kind of damage control. You may discover that your partner is more conciliatory during arguments than you realized—once you know what to listen for!"*

—DR. JOHN GOTTMAN

### What is a repair attempt?

A repair attempt is any statement or action—verbal, physical, or otherwise—meant to diffuse negativity and keep a conflict from escalating out of control. Dr. John Gottman refers to repair attempts as “the secret weapon” of emotionally intelligent couples.

### Why are repair attempts important?

Research shows that the success or failure of a couple’s repair attempts is one of the primary factors in whether a relationship is likely to flourish or flounder.

Couples who make repair attempts are willing to admit responsibility for their part in the conflict, and can then begin the process of healing their bond. They realize their relationship is more important than the problem.

### What does a repair attempt look like?

#### I FEEL...

- “I am getting scared”
- “Please say that more gently”
- “That felt like an insult”
- “I don’t feel like you are understanding me right now”

#### I NEED TO CALM DOWN...

- “I just need this to be calmer right now”
- “Can I take that back?”
- “I need your support right now”
- “Can we take a break?”

#### SORRY...

- “Let me try again”
- “I’m sorry”
- “I really messed up, I can see my part in this”
- “I want to say this more gently but I don’t know how”

#### I APPRECIATE...

- “I know that this isn’t your fault”
- “Thank you for...”
- “I understand”
- “I love you”

## How do repair attempts work?

### VERBAL REPAIR EXAMPLE:

**Taylor:**

*Calls to Devon from the car warming up in the driveway,*

“Devon, we need to go! We’re going to be late.”

**Devon:**

“We have plenty of time. I need to finish getting ready.”

**Taylor:**

*Detects a tone of frustration in Devon’s voice, but calls back,*

“If you had put your phone away and quit texting we would’ve been out of here 10 minutes ago.”

**Devon:**

“Our friends needed to know what our plans are for this weekend. Just cool off! We won’t miss anything.”

*Devon stomps out of the bathroom, grabs their bag off the kitchen counter and gives Taylor a stern look.*

“I’m ready!”

**Taylor:**

*Realizes they’re on the verge of a fight.*

“I’m sorry. I need a do-over. Can we begin again?”

**Devon:**

“Yeah,”

*Devon sighs and gives Taylor a small smile,*

“let’s get on the road and chat about it.”

### NON-VERBAL REPAIR EXAMPLE:

**Erin:**

“I’m not sure what time I’ll be home for dinner tonight.”

**Sam:**

“Well, the kids get hungry and they don’t want to start dinner without you so they get irritable and I have to put up with them.”

**Erin:**

“Why don’t you feed them a snack?”

**Sam:**

*Gives Erin a look that essentially communicates, “What do you think I am? A moron? Of course I would give them a snack.”*

**Erin:**

*Realizes she needs to make a repair, so she smiles a goofy grin.*

**Sam:**

*Starts laughing.*

That silly grin changed the way they were going into the negative downwards spiral.

