

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by Gottman

Key idea 1

Principle One: Functioning couples have a richly detailed love map.

If you have a husband or wife, you'll likely be wise to plenty of special, private or sensitive information about them. But did you know this information is actually stored in our minds in a love map?

The more developed your love map, [the stronger your love](#).

It's important to be aware of your love map because it contains your own and your partner's aspirations and life philosophies. But it can change. Having a baby can radically alter a woman's life purpose or direction, and thus change her love map. This is not unusual; becoming a parent changes your values and identity. Maggie's love map had changed to fit her new priorities, and Ken had to realign his own love map accordingly.

Key idea 2

Principle Two: If a couple has a fondness and admiration system, their marriage is salvageable.

If your marriage is on the rocks how do you know if it's salvageable? The key is to assess your feelings when you both think of the past you've shared together. To see if a couple still have what is known as a fondness and admiration system - where both partners share a sense of respect and appreciation toward one another - ask them how they see their history.

If some positive feelings remain within the marriage, partners will speak emphatically about how they first met, their first date, and so on. If a marriage is really struggling, however, recalling beautiful moments with your partner will feel like trying to get blood from a stone.

The way you see your shared past is key: 96 percent of couples who see their marriage history in a positive light are likely to enjoy a happy future. If you have no fondness or admiration system and don't believe that your partner deserves your honor and respect, it makes having a successful marriage impossible.

So how can you assess your fondness and admiration system? One way is to answer true or false to these statements:

1. When we're apart, I think of my partner positively.
2. I can easily list three things I admire in my partner.
3. My partner is happy to see me when I come into a room.

If the answers are true, your fondness and admiration system is pretty solid!

Key idea 3

Principle Three: During brief and seemingly trivial chitchats, couples turn toward one another.

No matter how dull they seem, the important moments in a marriage are the daily conversations you have with your spouse. In marriage, spouses frequently make “bids” for their partner’s attention, affection, humor and support. When you take a brief pause in your work day to give some attention to your partner and his or her worries, you turn toward each other, meaning you reinforce your marriage and maintain romance.

For example, when your wife confides in you one morning that she had a horrifying nightmare and you reply with, “I have to get to the office, but tell me about it now and we can discuss it tonight,” instead of brushing her off with “I don’t have time today,” you enrich your marriage with romance. Romance endures when you signal that your spouse is valued during the monotony of daily life.

Many couples can improve stability and romance simply by realizing that they should avoid taking their everyday interactions for granted. You can turn toward your partner any time, so the next time you’re chatting with them, focus on enjoying it rather than seeing it as mindless nattering.

Key idea 4

Principle Four: Partners should let each other influence their decisions by taking each others' opinions and feelings into account.

If a husband yells "You're not listening!" the wife often replies with "Sorry, now I'm listening," in order to prevent an argument. But if a wife starts with "You're not listening to me!" the husband likely either ignores her, gets defensive ("Yes, I am!"), becomes critical ("I don't listen because you never make sense.") or displays contempt ("This is a waste of my time."). All these reactions escalate a minor conflict and demonstrate that the husband couldn't care less about what his wife thinks

It's useful to note that most long-term, stable marriages are those in which the husband treats his wife with respect. A long term, 130-couple study by the author showed that marriages in which husbands allow their wives to influence them are happier and less likely to end in divorce than those with husbands who don't let their wives influence them. There's an 81% chance his marriage will fall apart when a man refuses to share any power with his partner.

Key idea 5

Principle Five: There are two kinds of marital conflicts - solvable and perpetual problems.

It's no secret that conflicts happen in every marriage. But even if they happen frequently, you can still clear them up easily and save yourself some stress.

Solvable problems in a marriage are minor problems that can result in excessive tension and pain. Just because the problem is solvable doesn't mean it actually gets resolved. This is because couples often haven't learned how to deal with them. Sometimes all it takes is for each spouse to begin a discussion more calmly and monitor themselves as it goes on, keeping alert for alarm bells such as emotional flooding - i.e., when we become overwhelmed by feelings. To monitor yourself, take notice of gestures, facial expressions and vocal pitch - don't scream at your wife when you see she's already in tears!

Take the case of Rachel, who thinks her husband Jason drives too fast. He claims speeding is necessary because she takes forever to get ready for work. Rachel argues that it takes her so long because he takes ages in the shower every morning. If they just took a broader view here, they'd see this clash is solvable: waking up a mere ten minutes earlier each day could solve it.

Unlike solvable problems, which can be short-lived, most marital problems are perpetual, meaning they keep occurring over and over again. 69 percent of couples have a conflict that they have been rowing about for many years. Even though there often is no real solution, they must keep recognizing the problem and talking about it in order to deal with it.

Some perpetual problems can signify more serious issues, but there are ways around them. For example, Tony wants to have his children raised Catholic, yet his wife Jessica is Jewish and wants their children to follow her faith. How do they cope with this perpetual conflict? They have a sense of humor about it, and don't let their religious preferences spoil their love for one another.

Key idea 6

Principle Six: When you feel gridlocked because of a problem that can't be solved, you have to learn to cope with it.

Now you know what kinds of conflicts can weasel their way into your marriage, but what do you do if you think they're unsolvable and you feel trapped? In these cases, you need to get out of gridlock, which is that feeling of being caged by the same problems that come up over and over again. The aim of this is not to eradicate the problem, but to convert it into a dialogue.

Even if the issue seems unsolvable, you should keep working at it and try to target what is actually feeding the conflict. By having a dialogue, Laura freed herself from gridlock immediately.

Experiencing gridlock is a sign that you have hopes for your marriage that aren't respected by your partner. These hopes can be anything from reaching a certain salary at work, to having a spiritual awakening. Your partner must learn how to deal with your desires and respect that they are a part of you.

John and Amy, for example, quarrel about where to eat on Sunday evenings. Whereas John wants Amy to cook and eat at home, like his mother did when he was a child, Amy prefers to go to a restaurant to feel special. In this case, the conflict is symbolic of what makes each of them feel loved. To settle their dispute, they need to respect each other's wishes and take turns.

Key idea 7

Principle Seven: You don't have to agree on what is meaningful about your lives together.

You don't have to be two peas in a pod to have a stable marriage, but the more shared meaning you can find, the deeper and more fulfilling your relationship will be. Your marriage will further deepen when both of you agree on the roles you play in the relationship.

All of us have a specific idea of who we want to be and which role we want to play in a marriage. To have this work in the long term requires communication and agreement. For instance, Ian and Hilary held the view that the husband should be the protector and provider, while the wife should fulfill the nurturer role. In contrast, Chloe and Evan desired an egalitarian marriage, where they could support each other emotionally and financially.

Whichever way each couple wants to be, the most important thing is that the couples agree on their roles, and enjoy happy and long-lasting marriages, as the couples above did.

Key idea 8

There are various signs which indicate divorce is likely.

Ever had a sneaking suspicion that your friend's marriage was doomed? Could you pin down why you got this feeling? Well, there are many factors that can indicate that a marriage is heading for the rocks.

Four of the largest indicators, which the author labels "the four horsemen of the apocalypse," are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

Let's start with criticism, usually the first of the four horsemen to appear in a marriage. In every relationship, there will be complaints about mistakes, missed chores or forgotten anniversaries. But a warning sign of a troubled marriage is when these complaints turn into criticism. Whereas a complaint focuses on a specific failure, for example, "You forgot to take the trash out again!", criticism highlights a fault in your partner's character, such as "The trash was left again - you're so lazy!"

Mild criticism is common in a marriage, but if left unchecked, it can lead to the next, more dangerous, horseman: contempt.

Contempt is snarling or mocking behavior designed to undermine your partner and make them feel small and useless. Contempt is toxic because it leads to further conflict. After all, if your partner constantly tells you that you're useless, you'll feel compelled to become belligerent and aggressive in return.

And this is when defensiveness, the third horseman, usually enters the stage. Faced with a contemptuous partner, you respond by getting defensive and arguing that your behavior isn't as bad as they say it is. For example, if your partner sneers at your spending habits, your response will probably be something like "I don't spend that much! I know lots of people who spend much more than I do." Of course, being defensive won't soothe any problems, it will only lead to more contempt and defensiveness.

Now we turn to the final horseman, stonewalling. When someone has experienced enough contempt and criticism from his partner, he'll disengage from conversation. Rather than

becoming defensive, he'll respond to an attack with an "Uh-uh," or "Sure," or by avoiding face-to-face interaction.

Witnessing the approach of each horseman is a sign that a marriage is in jeopardy. So keep an eye out for them.

Final summary

The key message in this book:

A long-lasting marriage is possible! All it takes is becoming conscious of how you think about and react to your partner and your behavior toward them not just in daily life, but also in conflicts. By practicing some straightforward healthy behaviors, you can enjoy a harmonious partnership with your spouse.

Respect your stress response. A stressed mind massively impairs your ability to solve a problem, so take a break for a few minutes until your body has noticeably calmed down before attempting to resolve a conflict with your partner.