

# Preventing Roommate Syndrome:

Balancing love and everyday life

Genesis Games, LMHC

The Gottman Institute





# What is roommate syndrome?

What couples are at a  
higher risk?



**The Sound  
Relationship  
House**

**Create  
Shared Meaning**

**Make Life Dreams  
Come True**

**Manage Conflict**

- Accept Your Partner's Influence
- Dialogue About Problems
- Practice Self-Soothing

**The Positive Perspective**

**Turn Towards Instead of Away**

**Share Fondness and Admiration**

**Build Love Maps**

- Know One Another's World

**T  
R  
U  
S  
T**

**C  
O  
M  
M  
I  
T  
M  
E  
N  
T**



# Roommate Problems

The Gottman Institute

# Roommate Problems

- The types of issues you might encounter living with a roommate:
  - Household chores
  - Paying bills
  - The use of common areas
- These problems don't provide an opportunity for growth because they are logistical in nature
- They are a distraction from relational issues
- Often caused by a desire for control



# Impact of Roommate Problems in the Relationship

- Tension & disconnection
- Distraction from more important issues
- Lack of vulnerability
- Sense of not being adequate or “good enough”
- Parent-child dynamic develops over time
- Decrease fondness and admiration
- Lack of support and resentment due to mental load and/or lack of appreciation



**Is it worth it?**

# Resolving Roommate Problems

- Practice self-soothing techniques:
  - Deep breathing
  - Mindfulness break
- Team approach
- Accountability & curiosity
- Accepting influence
- Focus on:
  - The issue & your experience with it
  - Not on your partner's character flaws, etc
- Provide potential solutions & compromise
- Co-create a dynamic that works





# Relational Problems

The Gottman Institute

A photograph of a man and a woman in a close embrace. The woman, on the left, has her eyes closed and a pensive expression, with her hands resting on her face. The man, on the right, has a beard and is looking at her with a concerned expression, his hands resting on her shoulders. The background is softly blurred, showing a wooden door and a grey wall.

**69% of problems couples  
face are not resolvable**

“Almost all of us have at least one additional exquisite sensitivity - a raw spot in our emotional skin - that is tender to touch, easily rubbed, and deeply painful. When this raw spot gets abraded, it can bleed all over our relationship. We lose our emotional balance.”

Sue Johnson

# Relational Problems

- These are problems that have to do with our core values and identity, and/or deep emotional wounds
- Conversations can feel redundant & they escalate quickly
- These issues don't have a simple one time and done solution
- They require repeated conversations and attempts at compromising
- You learn to live with these issues



# Common Relational Problems

- Building trust
- Togetherness vs independence
- Relational pace
- Boundaries with extended family
- Sexual preferences, desire, & ability
- Parenting styles
- How much money we make & how we spend it
- Religious or cultural differences
- Navigating a mental or physical health diagnosis



## **Roommates don't talk about hard stuff.**

If you don't want to feel like roommates, you need to stop avoiding relational problems.

# Impact of Relational Problems on the Relationship

- Emotional distance
- Rejection
- Resentment
- Sense of inadequacy or not being “good enough”

None of this is sexy; therefore, eroding “the spark.”

A field of yellow flowers, possibly rapeseed, with a teal overlay. The text "Navigating Relational Problems" is centered in white.

# Navigating Relational Problems



“Mutual understanding: this is the healthiest and most productive goal of all conflict. That may surprise you. The goal of conflict is not to win or convince the other person that you’re right or even to be the same. In creating compromise we have to understand each other’s core needs on the issue we’re discussing, as well as each other’s areas of flexibility. However, the goal is not to become identical, it’s to understand each other.”

John Gottman, *Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*

# Antidote to Relational Problems

## EMOTIONAL SAFETY:

Freedom to share thoughts, feelings, and ideas without fear of being judged or ridiculed.

## LOVE MAPS:

Knowing the past, present, and future of the other.

Feeling known, understood, and embraced.

“Distressed partners may use different words but they are always asking the same basic questions, ‘Are you there for me? Do I matter to you? Will you come when I need you, when I call?’ Love is the best survival mechanism there is, and to feel suddenly emotionally cut off from a partner, disconnected, is terrifying.”

Sue Johnson

# Tips for Addressing Relational Problems

- Self-Soothing techniques
- Accepting Influence
- Flexibility & curiosity
- Slim down your list of non-negotiables

# Dreams Within Conflict - DIY


- Partners will take turns being the speaker and the listener
- The speaker identifies the dream within the conflict.
  - Justice
  - Exploring my physical body
  - Adventure
  - Becoming all I can be
  - Togetherness as a family

# Dreams Within Conflict - DIY

- Speaker is not persuading, just telling the story of their dream
- Listener is listening to understand with curiosity:
  - Not looking for solutions
  - Not defending themselves
  - Suspending judgment

# Dreams Within Conflict - DIY

- Listener is asking questions:
  - The story behind the dream?
  - Why is this dream so important for you?
  - Is there a fear or disaster scenario in not having this dream honored?
  - How do you feel about it?
  - How is your dream being threatened

A photograph of a man and a woman in silhouette, looking out over a landscape at sunset. The man is in the foreground, and the woman is behind him, both looking towards the right. The background shows a range of mountains under a sky transitioning from blue to orange and yellow. The text is overlaid in the center-right of the image.

**The goal is to have a  
deep understanding of  
each other's dreams  
and how the conflict at  
hand threatens these.**



A romantic scene featuring a man and a woman in silhouette, embracing and looking out over a vast landscape at sunset. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon, where the sun has set. In the background, there are layers of dark, silhouetted mountains. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

**Only after,  
will you attempt to  
compromise.**

A romantic couple is shown in silhouette, embracing and looking out over a vast landscape at sunset. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a warm orange and yellow near the horizon. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under the twilight sky. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

**Compromise  
must honor both  
dreams.**