Learning to Connect Emotionally in Relationships the John Gottman Way

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The Relationship Cure
Dr. John Gottman

BY THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING MARRIAGE WORK

JOHN M. GOTTMAN, PH.D.
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The Relationship Cure

A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships
Background Information

- Author of more than 190 academic publications and author or coauthor of 40 books.

- Dr. Gottman is highly regarded in the areas of marital stability, divorce prediction and parenting.

- Co-founder of the Gottman Institute, where he studies marital relationships.
Dr. Gottman’s Background Cont’d

- Executive Director of The Relationship Research Institute, a non-profit research institute. Website: [http://www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com)

- Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Washington

- Founder of “The Love Lab” where most of his research was conducted on couples’ interactions
Books by Dr. Gottman

- The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work
- Why Marriages Succeed or Fail
- Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child
- 10 Lessons to Transform Your Marriage
- What Makes Love Last
- And Baby Makes Three
5 Steps for Strengthening Emotional Connections

- Examine your bids for connection
- Discover your brain’s emotional command systems
- Examine your emotional heritage
- Sharpen your emotional communication skills
- Find shared meaning
STEP 1
Examine your bids for connection
What is “Bidding”? 

- Can be easy to see and interpret
- Difficult to understand
- Verbal or nonverbal
- Physical or intellectual
- Sexual or nonsexual
- High or low-energy
- Funny or serious
- The content could involve thoughts, feelings, observations, opinions or invitations
Examples of Nonverbal Bidding

- Affectionate touching
- Facial expressions
- Playful touching
- Affiliating gestures
- Vocalizing
How we respond to bids: (1 of 3 ways)

- **Turning Toward** –
  ◦ React in a positive way to a person’s bids for emotional connection

- **Turning Against**
  ◦ A person behaves in a hateful or argumentative manner; This type of bid usually involves sarcasm and ridicule

- **Turning Away**
  ◦ Ignoring another person’s bid for emotional connection, or acting preoccupied
Two coworkers are talking, and one makes a funny comment and the other laughs.

A wife discusses her desire to take a vacation, and her husband agrees and says they should start working on a plan.
A wife asks her husband to turn off the TV so they can talk about their happenings that day, and he sighed and said, “What is there to talk about?”
Example Scenario of Turning Away

- A friend might say something to this effect, “Look at that sports car, I would love to sport a ride like that!”

- The other friend would not even bother to look up or respond to the remark, or he might respond with something completely unrelated, like, “What time is it?”
1. Being mindless instead of being mindful
2. Starting on a sour note
3. Using harmful words instead of helpful complaints
4. Flooding
5. Practicing a crabby habit of mind
6. Avoiding needed conversations
Bid Buster #1 – Being mindless instead of mindful

- Being mindful is noticing other individual’s bids and responding to them
- Being mindful is being in the moment with someone, being present in the relationship
- Become a collector of emotional moments
- Set goals in your relationships
- Consciously look for opportunities to connect with others
Bid Buster #2: Starting on a sour note

- Start your bids on a softer note
- Begin with something positive
- Express appreciation and gratitude
- Start with “I” instead of “You”
- Don’t stockpile complaints
  - Try to address issues one at a time, or as they happen
- Revisit the episode later with that person
Bid Buster #3: Using harmful words instead of helpful complaints

- Issue complaints when necessary, but not criticism
  - Complaints address a specific problem, criticism is more judgmental and personal

- How to appropriately issue a complaint;
  - State your needs; do not attack or blame the other person
  - Describe your complaint as your perception, not as an absolute truth
  - Focus on a specific behavior you would like to see changed, not on global judgments
Bid Buster #4: Flooding

What is flooding?

- When interacting with a person with whom you already have a strained relationship, additional conflict discussions may trigger intense emotions.
- The person becomes so stressed they become physically and emotionally overwhelmed.
What are some constructive ways to handle flooding

- Take a time-out from the conversation for at least 20 minutes and self-soothe (Take a walk, meditate, progressive muscle relaxation, read, etc.)
- Do not think about the conflict during the 20 minute relaxation time
- After 20 minutes have expired, either get back to the conflict situation or schedule another time to discuss
- Exercise: Give the other person just one word to help them better understand your needs in the conflict situation
Bid Buster #5 – Practicing a crabby habit of mind

- Look around and find things and people in your environment that you appreciate instead of having a critical attitude
- Search for reasons to say “Thank You”
- Make praise and thanksgiving a habit
  - Keep a daily Journal of Thanksgiving, and attempt to write down several things, people or talents that you are thankful for each day
Many times arguments occur and resentments build due to a lack of communication.

If you are surrounded by conflict in a relationship, take a look at issues that are not being discussed.
3 Ways We Respond in Conflict Situations

- Attack & defend
- Avoid or deny
- Self-disclose and connect

***Derived from well-known psychologist Dan Wile***
Exercise: Creating a Relationship Map

- An activity for spouses, parents, or friends to complete to better understand each other, which will facilitate emotional connection.
  - Answer the questionnaire as you think the other person would respond and circle any answers you don’t know the answer to.
  - Go over the Love Map with the other person to gain the correct answers and share with each other.
Exercise: Choose 5 questions and respond to your neighbor

1. Favorite Meal
2. Special Hobbies or Interests
3. Favorite holiday
4. Ideal birthday present
5. Ideal vacation destination
6. Favorite TV shows
7. Favorite kind of animal
8. Favorite way to get over being sad
9. Personal improvements you would like to make
10. Best vacation you have ever had

***An excerpt from *The Relationship Cure* by John M. Gottman, PH.D.
STEP 2
Discover your brain’s emotional command systems
The Emotional Command System

- Definition: Nerve-based circuits that coordinate electrochemical signals in the brain
  - Researchers have found 7 separate systems that are responsible for transmitting messages from 1 nerve cell to the next until all of the cells throughout the body are activated to carry out the desired service.
  - Panksepp (a scientist) first identified these command systems. He contends there are probably more.
The 7 Emotional Command Systems

- The Commander-in-chief
  - Dominance, control and power
- The Explorer
  - Searching, learning and satisfying curiosity
- The Sensualist
  - Sexual gratification and reproduction
- The Energy Czar
  - Regulates need for energy, rest and relaxation
- The Jester
  - Play, recreation and diversion
- The Sentry
  - Survival—Relates to worry, fear, vigilance
- The Nest-Builder
  - Affiliation, bonding and attachment
Importance of Understanding Emotional Command Systems

1. Become more educated on your emotional needs
2. Increase your ability to make bids for connection and how to handle others’ bids for connection
3. Better understand loved ones and friends
STEP 3
Examine your emotional heritage
Families deal with emotions in 4 different ways:

1. Coaching
   - Family members help each other cope and solve problems

2. Dismissing
   - Feelings are hidden and not acknowledged, so guidance rarely provided

3. Laissez-faire
   - Expressing emotions is accepted, but they frequently wait for feelings of anger, sadness or fear to pass.

4. Disapproving
   - Feelings should be kept hidden, and they are critical toward family members who express emotions.
STEP 4
Sharpen your emotional communication skills
Elements of Emotional Communication

- Facial Expressions
- Movement & Gestures
- Touch
- Tone of Voice
- Descriptive Words
- Metaphors
The Art of Listening

- Focus on being interested, not interesting
- Ask questions
- Ask questions about a person’s goals and dreams for the future
- Look for similarities
Occasionally paraphrase what the person says
Maintain appropriate eye contact
Let go of directing the outcome of a conversation
Limit television time
Focus your attention completely on that person
Respond with nods or sounds (minimal encouragers) during the course of the conversation
STEP 5

Find shared meaning
Discover Shared Meaning

- Shared meaning are things you and another person have in common.
- This can be achieved when two individuals support each other’s dreams even when there is no gain for the other person.
- We can achieve shared meaning by:
  - Communicating about our dreams and desires with another individual
  - Participating in rituals

Butterfly Kisses
Rituals are predictable, because they are repeated over and over again.

Rituals differ from routines in that they have a symbolic meaning
- Example: Routine: Brushing your teeth every night
- Example: Ritual: Kissing your spouse goodbye before leaving for work

Rituals ensure structure so that emotional connections happen on a regular basis
Benefits of Rituals

- Symbolize cultural identity and values shared with our family, friends, or community

- Ensures that time is set aside for emotional connection

- Helps us to understand our feelings and process major life transitions

- Helps us to remain connected even though we may have differences with others
Examples of Rituals

- Celebrating special days (Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays)
- Date night with your partner
- Taking vacations
- Bedtime
- Dinnertime
- Attending sporting events
- Doing charity work
- Handling Finances
Pictures of Rituals
MORE REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS
Connecting (Turning Toward) Coworkers

- Activities we can do to build relationships with our coworkers
  - Say hello and goodbye each day
  - Return borrowed items
  - Make your coworker feel special on his or her birthday
  - Remember things that are of personal importance to your coworker (pets, children, partner, travels)
  - Laugh with your coworker
  - Give your coworker encouragement when they are having a difficult time, or when they have had a success
  - Be creative!!!
Improving Your Relationship with Coworkers

- Lunch
- Coffee
- Potluck lunch
- Form some type of interest group/club at work (book club, running club)
- Volunteer for a community service organization
- Plan parties/celebrations for fellow coworkers
- Commute to work together
Thank you for taking the time to listen & explore with us the subject of developing stronger emotional connections!

For copies of the PowerPoint, please email ecowger@latech.edu