

# Creating Friendship & Love

## What happened to the friendship & love you once experienced in your relationship? Is it possible to have that again?

John Gottman, PhD, psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, and founder of the Seattle Marital and Family Institute, believes there are definite things a couple can do to create and maintain friendship and love in a committed relationship. He developed statistical predictions based on his 25 years of studying couples.

His well-researched findings are helpful in two regards:

He has a 90% success rate in predicting which couples will make it over the long haul and which will not. He found that couples who demonstrate certain observable behaviors have a higher success rate. As a result of the research data, he has developed a method and practice of helping couples re-create the friendship and love that was once present in their relationship.

While Gottman's theory and approach to committed love relationships is somewhat different from Harville Hendrix, PhD, his ideas about strengthening relationships are complementary to *imago* relationship therapy.

Here is some solid advice coming out of Dr. Gottman's research about partners maintaining a good connection:

**Seek help early.** Half of all marriages that end do so in the first seven years.

The average couple lives with unhappiness for far too long.

**Edit yourself.** Gottman studies show that couples who **avoid saying every angry thought** when discussing tough topics are consistently the happiest.

**Be careful how you "start up" a discussion.** Both partners have a crucial role in keeping arguments from getting out of hand. One partner or the other usually escalates conflict from the get-go by making a dramatic, angry or upsetting remark in a confrontational tone. A marriage succeeds to the extent that both partners can **accept influence** from each other. A true partnership only occurs when both partner's take responsibility for keeping conversations safe and respectful.

**Learn to self soothe and to soothe each other as a way of ensuring connection and intimacy.** Successful couples know how to **exit an argument** when they stumble into one unconsciously. Happy couples know how to repair the situation before an argument gets completely out of control. Successful repair attempts include: throwing in some humor; lowering the intensity by knowing when not to proceed; taking a time out; even backing down at times; stroking your partner with a caring

remark; making it clear you see the problem as "our" problem; changing the topic to something completely unrelated for a brief period of time; waiting for a more opportune time to deal with the issue; moving to compromise quickly.

**Focus on the bright side.** In good relationships, couples make five times as many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship than negative ones. For example, "We laugh a lot" as opposed to, "We never have fun."

**Make deposits in your emotional bank account.** It's not how you "fight" or disagree that makes the difference in marital happiness, but rather how the two of you move through time together when you're **not** fighting that determines the mood of your marriage and what your fate will be like.

Gottman calls this the art of "**turning towards the other.**" He has found that if you can get people to practice "**turning toward each other**" in the little ways day in and day out – reading things out loud to each other, finding common ground on a few subjects periodically, acknowledging whatever the other person has to say, which doesn't necessarily mean agreement, being generous with appreciations, etc. If couples can infuse their relationship with more goodwill, kindness, and appreciations, terrible arguments just don't happen or they are infrequent and can be repaired quickly.

Gottman has many ideas that can be helpful to couples in keeping friendship

and love alive, **if practiced regularly.**

Whenever you are in conflict with someone, your partner or anyone else for that matter, there is one factor that can make a difference between damaging your relationship or deepening it. That factor is **attitude.** An attitude of mutual respect and demonstrating that respect by how you discuss any difference is what matters.

**Create friendship In your relationship with conscious awareness, kindness, and practice!!!**



**Carole Kirby, Imsw**

therapy4couples.com ♥ 734.904.4345