

## A Lunch and Learn Companion Fact Sheet

The Gottman Method of Couples Therapy is based on years of research and is designed to improve communication between couples.

### Common Relationship Problems

There are many reasons for success or failure in romantic relationships. However, psychologists have identified communication as one of the main causes for successes or break downs in relationships. Psychologist Preston Ni sums up four communication mistakes he says may ruin relationships:

- ▶ “You” language, such as “You need to; you should; you have to”
- ▶ Universal statements, such as “You always put the toilet paper on backward; you never clean up after yourself”
- ▶ Being hard on the person, not the issue, such as “You are so stupid; you’re such a slob”
- ▶ Invalidating feelings, such as “You’re over-reacting; I have zero interest in that”

*Scholarly thought on love goes back to ancient Greece, but only hit its stride in the mid-1900s.*

Ineffective communication can cause conflict and defensiveness between partners. “Common reactions to ineffective communication include the three ‘F’s: people are more likely to either fight an ineffective communicator; take flight from an ineffective communicator; or freeze emotionally.”<sup>1</sup>

Research, though, shows that these problems can be repaired.

### History of Research on Love

While philosophy about love can be traced back at least as far as Plato, critical love research began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Four major ideas influenced the next two centuries of research in this area:

- ▶ Charles Darwin proposed that reproductive success was the basis for evolution. Subsequent researchers have developed theories on mate preference, mating strategies, and attachment styles.
- ▶ Sigmund Freud developed the first psychological principles about relationships, including early childhood experiences, subconscious motives, defenses and boundaries, and sexuality as a force. While some of Freud’s conclusions have been abandoned, his work opened the door for the next century of research on love and relationships.
- ▶ The next big moment was Margaret Mead’s anthropological research. She researched variations of love and sexuality in many cultures, leading following researchers to consider the role of socialization and culture in relationships.
- ▶ In the 1970s, the woman’s movement was in full swing, contributing to “a cultural climate that made the study of what had been traditionally thought of as ‘women’s concerns’ not only acceptable, but in fact necessary for the science of human behavior.”<sup>2</sup>

## Research by Dr. John Gottman

Gottman and his colleagues took up the thread of love research in the 1970s and 1980s, beginning by trying to find out if there were patterns in unhappy relationships. While conventional wisdom in psychology held that couples shouldn't be studied—it was hard enough to find patterns in behaviour in individuals—Gottman's research showed that couples behaved reliably over time.

Using a mathematical analysis they developed, they discovered “consistent sequences that differentiated happily married from unhappily married couples.” About 80% stability in conflict discussions was observed, even when these discussions were held three years apart. Furthermore, about 69% of conflict in relationships are never resolved; based on personality differences between partners, these problems can be perpetual.

## The Sound Relationship House Theory

Dr. Gottman began working with his wife, Dr. Julie Schwartz-Gottman, in 1994 to develop the Sound Relationship House (SRH) theory. In one study, they used interventions based on Gottman's research on one of two conflicts in a relationship, then had the partners take a 20-minute break to read magazines. They found that giving the break allowed the partners' heart rates to return to normal and allowed the couple to re-access their senses of humour and affection for each other.

## *The Sound Relationship House Theory has nine components for healthy relationships.*

The SRH describes nine components of healthy relationships:

- ▶ Building love maps
- ▶ Sharing fondness and admiration
- ▶ Turning towards (as opposed to turning away from each other)

- ▶ The positive perspective (seeing your partner as a friend, not an adversary)
- ▶ Managing conflict
- ▶ Making life dreams come true
- ▶ Creating shared meaning
- ▶ Trust
- ▶ Commitment<sup>3</sup>

## The Gottman Method Couples Therapy

A therapy session based on the Gottman method has each partner of the couple complete an assessment about their relationship. The therapist takes this information, assesses the couple together, and initiates an action plan including therapeutic interventions.

Three published studies have shown the efficacy of the Gottman method.<sup>3</sup>

## Try This at Home

You can apply some of the principles from the Gottman method in your own relationship without going to a therapy session. You can try love exercises to improve your bond, rekindle affection, and give each other time to relax about conflicts.

Try these interventions!

### *Extended Cuddling*

The chemicals your brain releases during cuddling or sex can help you sleep faster and better. Plan a 20 to 30 minute cuddling session at least a few times a week.

### *The Seven Breath Forehead Connection*

Lie on your sides or sit upright. Face each other directly and touch foreheads; tilt your chins down a bit so your noses don't touch. Breathe seven deep, slow breaths together.

### *Uninterrupted Listening*

Set a timer and let your partner talk. It can be about conflict or happy times, what's been on their mind, or how they feel about a book or TV show. While your partner talks, you listen. When the timer rings, switch roles.<sup>4</sup>

## Sources

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