

DAY TWO

MANAGE CONFLICT OVERVIEW

● ● ● 8:30–8:45 a.m. Presentation

Today we're going to talk about conflict. All of us have conflicts in our relationships. Sometimes they're just simple disagreements. Other times they're awful battles. Our goal today is to help you learn six skills that can help you to manage your conflicts and transform them into opportunities between you, for greater understanding, compromise, and compassion.

The American View and the Italian View of Conflict and the negative emotions

We Americans think that conflict in any relationship is a sign that the relationship is doomed. We Americans avoid conflict like the plague. We also have a very avoidant view toward the so-called "negative emotions," which include anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and contempt. A lot of our negative view toward both conflict and the negative emotions can be traced to Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*. The idea he popularized was that emotion was a choice, and if you could have any emotion you wanted, like wearing a jacket, why would anyone CHOOSE to wear a sad jacket, or an angry jacket?

It is very American to view conflict as a symptom of a bad relationship. It's not. Conflict is inevitable in all relationships. Many other nations feel differently than we do about conflict, especially Israelis and Italians. We invite you today, as we focus on conflict and the so-called negative emotions, to adopt a more Italian view toward conflict. We wish to make conflict constructive, but not eliminate it. In fact, it can help us to better understand our partner.

Our research has shown that conflict is inevitable in all relationships, and it is inevitable simply because there are two minds instead of one, and the probability that these two minds will be in sync is very low. That's true even of identical twins, and we have studied them in our lab. Even though they are genetically identical, they still have conflict.

Here is a mathematical proof that conflict and regrettable incidents in which we hurt our partner's feelings are inevitable in all relationships. Estimate the proportion of time you are together with your partner that you are emotionally available, ready to listen with an open heart without getting defensive. I think you will agree that 50% of the time is a generous estimate in a good relationship. That's like the probability of getting a heads from tossing an unbiased coin, 50%, or 0.5. Now ask, what in general would be the probability that BOTH people in a relationship are both emotionally available, ready to listen with open hearts without getting defensive? Assuming independence, that's like tossing two coins and getting two heads, and the probability is $0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$, or just 25% of the time. Therefore 75% of the time either only one person will be emotionally available or neither person will be, all ripe and fertile ground for miscommunication and regrettable incidents. If we used a less generous estimate of emotional availability like 30%, the probability that both people will be emotionally available, ready to listen with an open heart without getting defensive is just 9%, so that 91% of the time would be ripe and fertile ground for miscommunication and regrettable incidents.

So instead of expecting communication to be par for the course in relationships, we should expect miscommunication and regrettable incidents to occur with some regularity, and therefore we need a way of dealing with these inevitable moments when we hurt our partner or our partner hurts us.

The other part of an Italian view toward conflict – namely it just happens – is a different attitude toward the negative emotions. There are more words for negative emotions than for positive emotions in every language on the planet. Why? Because negative emotions stop us and make us think, why did that happen, what was that all about? Positive emotions like humor and joy just accelerate whatever we are doing, no elaborate thinking required.

Instead of viewing negative emotions as unwelcome it is important to recognize that behind every negative emotion there is a longing, and within that longing there is a positive need, and simply empathetically understanding that positive need is a recipe for success with the person who has that negative emotion. Every negative emotion gives us important information, like a GPS in life. Negative emotions are therefore an opportunity to connect and to understand our partner better.

Conflict is also an opportunity to learn how to love our partner better over time. We *need* conflict to grow in a relationship. These moments of being out of sync are the opportunities for connection in any relationship. Our motto is:

The goal in conflict is understanding our partner

Relationships that we see in our clinical consulting offices are always relationships that have left both people in pain, often for many years. Instead, we need to adopt an additional motto:

*“When you are in pain, baby, the world stops and I listen.
We figure out what to do to understand your pain and help ease it.”*

That is the first skill in dealing with conflict that we are going to work on today, the skill of being able to LISTEN and process a regrettable incident or fight that happened in the past. By “process” we mean being able to talk about it without getting back into it. So that means we need some calm and emotional distance from the incident to be able to “process” it. We can do that because, as William Faulkner wrote, “the past is never dead. In fact, it isn’t even past.” These regrettable incidents live on in our bodies. They are like a stone in our shoe in the relationship, and we want to stop walking with that stone in our shoe by processing the regrettable incident.

How do we do that? The answer is in an old Jewish joke about a rabbi who was a master of couples’ therapy and this was the first day when a young apprentice rabbi was studying with the old master.

There was a couple in the old rabbi’s waiting room, Mr. and Mrs. Goldstein. The rabbi asked them for permission for the apprentice to sit in, and they said fine. Then the rabbi called in Mrs. Goldstein. He said to her, “What seems to be the problem?” She complained bitterly about her husband, and after 20 minutes the rabbi stopped her and said, “Mrs. Goldstein, I have listened to you now for 20 minutes, and I think you are completely right. It is unbelievable what you have to put up with that man, and yet you keep giving and giving to your family, and to the sisterhood in our synagogue. I have tremendous admiration for you.” Mrs. Goldstein said, “Oh rabbi, thank you so much for listening to me. I feel so much better.” And she left.

Then the rabbi called in Mr. Goldstein. He said to him, “What seems to be the problem?” He complained bitterly about his wife, and after 20 minutes the rabbi stopped him and said, “Mr. Goldstein I have listened to your wife for 20 minutes and now to you for 20 minutes, and I think you are completely right. It is unbelievable what you have to put up with that woman, and yet you keep giving and giving to your family, and to the brotherhood in our synagogue. I have tremendous admiration for you.” Mr. Goldstein said, “Oh rabbi, thank you so much for listening to me. I feel so much better.” And he left.

The assistant rabbi then turned to the master rabbi. He said, "I don't understand what you do here." "Why not?" asked the master. The assistant said, "Well, you said Mrs. Goldstein was completely right." "Yes," answered the master. "And then you said that Mr. Goldstein was completely right." "Yes," answered the master. "Well they can't BOTH be completely right!"

"You're absolutely right," answered the master.

That's the attitude we want you to adopt, that in any regrettable incident or fight there are always two points of view, both valid and right from within each perception. Perception is everything. There is no "God camera" that reveals the absolute truth.

Conflict Resolution in Relationships

When thinking about conflict in relationship, it is important to ascertain if a problem is Solvable or Perpetual. **Remember that 69% of relationship conflict is about perpetual problems.** All couples have them – they are grounded in the fundamental differences that any two people would face. Perpetual issues keep coming back. They never seem to really get solved. Here's why: Perpetual problems are either (1) fundamental differences in your personalities that repeatedly create conflict, or (2) fundamental differences in your life style needs. Needs are basic to your own identity, to who you are as a person. We want you to have the kind of relationship that does not leave one another in pain. Instead we want you to have the kind of relationship where when one person is upset, the other is communicating, "When you are in pain, the world stops until we figure out what you need."

- Perpetual Problems will keep resurfacing in a relationship in perpetuity.
- Perpetual Problems can become gridlocked.

The Difference Between a Solvable Problem, a Perpetual Problem, and a Gridlocked Perpetual Problem

1. **Solvable Problems** can be about housecleaning, disciplining children, sex, in-laws, etc., the exact same topics that could be perpetual problems for a different couple. A solvable problem within a relationship is about something situational. The conflict really is simply about that topic, without a deeper meaning behind the position. A solution can be found and maintained.
2. **Perpetual Problems** are problems that center on either fundamental differences in your two personalities, or fundamental differences in your life style needs. All couples have perpetual problems. The issues can seemingly be about the exact same topics as what for another couple might be solvable; but unlike a solvable problem, these are the problems that a couple will return to over and over and over again.
3. **Gridlocked Perpetual Problems** are perpetual problems that have been mishandled and have essentially calcified into something quite uncomfortable. When a couple tries to discuss a gridlocked issue, it can feel like they are "spinning their wheels" and getting nowhere. The nature of gridlock is that hidden agendas underlie the issue.

**A component of relationship gridlock
is that usually both people feel criticized,
rejected and unaccepted by their partner.**

How will you know if your Perpetual Problem is now a Gridlocked Perpetual Problem?

- In gridlocked conflicts, people feel basically rejected by their partner.
- They have the same conversation over and over and over again, spinning their wheels on the discussion. They make no headway.
- People become entrenched in their positions.
- These conversations go nowhere, leading to frustration and hurt.
- There is little humor, amusement, or affection when they talk about the problem.
- The gridlock gets worse over time, and leads people to vilify one another.
- Over time this vilification leads people to become more entrenched in their positions: more polarized, more extreme, and uncompromising.

Eventually, this all leads to emotional disengagement.

The Great Relational Paradox

*It is a fact that people can only change
if they feel that they are basically liked and
accepted for who they are.*

John Gottman discovered in his study of long-term happy relationships that when people stay married for a long time, they become mellow about one another's faults. They become more accepting of one another, and they communicate this acceptance. When people feel criticized, disliked, and unappreciated they are unable to change. Instead, they feel like they have to dig in and protect their personality and sense of self from the attack and onslaught they are experiencing. If you feel judged, misunderstood, or rejected by your partner, you will not be able to solve very many important problems in your relationship.

How can we communicate to our partner that we love and accept him or her, "warts and all," while still communicating that some changes are also necessary? Many of the middle-aged and older couples Bob Levenson, Laura Carstensen, and John Gottman studied in the San Francisco Bay area were masters at this. They had been married for a very long time (an average of twenty years for the middle-aged couples and forty years for older couples). Over time they had learned to view their partner's shortcomings and oddities as more amusing than painful and frustrating. It was simply part of the whole package of their partner's character and personality.

**Basic to all effective
problem solving
is communicating
fundamental acceptance
instead of rejection of your
partner's personality**

*We recommend that you accept
what you cannot change.
Accept one another.*

Acceptance is critical in dealing with perpetual issues. In the study of older relationships that is exactly what they are able to communicate:

*I love you. I accept you as you are. I don't want you to change.
But for God sake will you change?*

Fritz Heider conceptualized the **Fundamental Attribution Error**, which essentially says: "I'm OK – you're the one who is defective. If we could only 'fix' you, then our relationship would be just fine." People are more forgiving of their own mistakes than the mistakes of others.

Caveat: The Limits of Acceptance.

In relationships some things are unacceptable. It is everyone's individual right to decide what these unacceptable things are that are injurious to one's own dignity or to one's children. No one should have to accept abuse. No one has to accept violence. No one deserves to be hit. No one has to accept betrayals of the relationship contract.

MANAGE CONFLICT

AFTERMATH OF A FIGHT OR REGRETTABLE INCIDENT

● ● ● 8:45–9:25 a.m.

Presentation, Role-Play, and Process Exercise

Just like all of you, we have fights, too, where we say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, and end up hurting one another. One of the most important tools for any relationship to have is to know how to process a fight in order to make the discussion better next time. The key is to talk about what happened during the fight without getting back into it again. In this way, you can also figure out how to discuss the problem better next time, in a way that doesn't hurt each other.

We are going to demonstrate for you how to process a fight using a fight of our own and the "Aftermath of a Fight" exercise that follows. You'll see what we each have to put up with! (Not really....) And how to make your processing of a fight improve.

Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident

This exercise is for "processing" past fights, regrettable incidents or past emotional injuries.

"Processing" means that you can talk about the incident without getting back into it again. It needs to be a conversation – as if you were both sitting in the balcony of a theater looking down on the stage where the action had occurred. This requires *calm* and some emotional distance from the incident.

Before you begin

Keep in mind the GOAL is greater understanding — addressing the process and *how* the issue was talked about, without getting back into the fight. So, wait until you're both calm.

We assume that *each* of your realities has validity. Perception is everything. Don't focus on "the facts."

Pay attention to the common barriers to communication and their antidotes as you move through the process. Keeping the "Four Horsemen" diagram handy can help.

Step One *Feelings: Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way.* **Avoid commenting on your partner's feelings.**

I felt...

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. defensive | 19. out of control | 38. my opinions didn't even matter |
| 2. not listened to | 20. frustrated | 39. there was a lot of give and take |
| 3. feelings got hurt | 21. righteously indignant | 40. I had no feelings at all |
| 4. totally flooded | 22. morally justified | 41. I had no idea what I was feeling |
| 5. angry | 23. unfairly picked on | 42. lonely |
| 6. sad | 24. unappreciated | 43. alienated |
| 7. unloved | 25. disliked | 44. ashamed |
| 8. misunderstood | 26. unattractive | 45. guilty |
| 9. criticized | 27. stupid | 46. culpable |
| 10. took a complaint personally | 28. morally outraged | 47. abandoned |
| 11. like you didn't even like me | 29. taken for granted | 48. disloyal |
| 12. not cared about | 30. like leaving | 49. exhausted |
| 13. worried | 31. like staying and talking this through | 50. foolish |
| 14. afraid | 32. I was overwhelmed with emotion | 51. overwhelmed |
| 15. unsafe | 33. not calm | 52. remorseful |
| 16. tense | 34. stubborn | 53. shocked |
| 17. I was right and you were wrong | 35. powerless | 54. tired |
| 18. both of us were partly right | 36. I had no influence | |
| | 37. I wanted to win this one | |

Step Two *Realities:* Describe your “reality.” Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner’s reality.

Subjective Reality and Validation

- a. Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don’t describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame. Talk about what you might have needed from your partner. Describe your perceptions like a reporter, giving an objective blow-by-blow description. Say “I heard you saying,” rather than “You said.”
- b. Summarize and then validate your partner’s reality by saying something like, “It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it.” Use empathy by saying something like, “I can see why this upset you.” Validation doesn’t mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner’s experience of the incident.
- c. Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, “What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?” After summarizing and validating, ask your partner, “Did I get it?” and “Is there anything else?”

Step Three *Triggers:* Share what experiences or memories you’ve had that might have escalated the inter-action, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.

- As you rewind the video tape of your memory, stop at a point where you had a similar set of feelings triggered in the past. Now tell the story of that past moment to your partner, so your partner can understand why that is a trigger for you.
- Share your stories – it will help your partner to understand you. As you think about your early history or childhood, is there a story you remember that relates to what got triggered in you, your “enduring vulnerabilities”? Your partner needs to know you, so that your partner can be more sensitive to you.

Examples of triggers

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. I felt judged. <i>I’m very sensitive to that.</i> | 7. I felt belittled |
| 2. I felt excluded. <i>I’m very sensitive to that.</i> | 8. I felt disrespected. |
| 3. I felt criticized. <i>I’m very sensitive to that.</i> | 9. I felt powerless. |
| 4. I felt flooded. | 10. I felt out of control. |
| 5. I felt ashamed. | 11. Other: |
| 6. I felt lonely. | |

Validation

Does any part of your partner's triggers and story make sense to you?

Step Four *Responsibility: Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.*

Under ideal conditions, you might have done better at talking about this issue.

1. *What set me up for the miscommunication*

Share how you set yourself up to get into this conflict.

Read aloud the items that were true for you on the following list:

What set me up:

1. I've been very stressed and irritable lately.
2. I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately.
3. I've taken you for granted.
4. I've been overly sensitive lately.
5. I've been overly critical lately.
6. I've not shared very much of my inner world.
7. I've not been emotionally available.
8. I've been turning away more.
9. I've been getting easily upset.
10. I've been depressed lately.
11. I've had a chip on my shoulder lately.
12. I've not been very affectionate.
13. I've not made time for good things between us.
14. I've not been a very good listener lately.
15. I've not asked for what I needed.
16. I've been feeling a bit like a martyr.
17. I've needed to be alone.
18. I've not wanted to take care of anybody.
19. I have been very preoccupied.
20. I haven't felt very much confidence in myself.
21. I've been running on empty.

2. Specifically what do you regret, and specifically, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?

3. What do you wish to apologize for?

(Read aloud) I'm sorry that:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. I over-reacted. | 5. I attacked you. |
| 2. I was really grumpy. | 6. I didn't listen to you. |
| 3. I was defensive. | 7. I wasn't respectful. |
| 4. I was so negative. | 8. I was unreasonable. |
| | 9. Other: |

**4. If you accept your partner's apology, say so.
If not, say what you still need.**

Step Five Constructive Plans: Plan together one way that each of you can make it better next time.

Share one thing your partner can do to make a discussion of this issue better next time.

(It's important to remain calm as you do this.)

Then, while it's still your turn, share one thing you can do to make it better next time.

What do you need to be able to put this behind you and move on? Be as agreeable as possible to the plans suggested by your partner.

Write your plan to make it better:

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #1: PRACTICE PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING

• • • 9:25–10:20 a.m. Presentation, Exercises 8A, and Exercise 8B

⇒ Practice Physiological Self-Soothing

- Use Gentle Start-up
- Repair and De-Escalate
- Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
- Accept Influence
- Compromise

John Gottman discovered in his research that the physiology of partners during conflict discussions predicts what will happen to their relationships. In ailing relationships there is often heightened physiological arousal for both men and women. This creates a feeling of unmanageable stress, of being overwhelmed, which can suppress the immune system. People in chronic heightened physiological arousal are less resistant to infectious illnesses and are more likely to break up, compared to couples who practice self-soothing. When we look at physiology we can also predict what will happen to a relationship.

Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA)

Your body has a *general alarm mechanism* that was inherited through evolution from our hominid ancestors. This mechanism is used to mobilize your body so that it can effectively cope with emergencies that might injure you. It is called *Diffuse Physiological Arousal*, *DPA* for short.

The way DPA works is that in situations that are perceived as “dangerous” or “threatening” (this perception can be very rapid and require very little complex or cortical thought), a series of changes occur very quickly in your body to prepare you for an emergency.

- The action of the vagus nerve is inhibited, which releases the parasympathetic brake on the heart. Then the heart speeds up.
- When the heart speeds up to beyond 100 bpm—the “intrinsic” pacemaker rhythm of the heart—the body starts secreting adrenaline. The heart increases its contractility as well as its rate and blood flow to the body.
- Blood flow to the gut and kidneys is shut down. The peripheral arteries constrict and blood is drawn in from the periphery to the trunk to minimize the potential damage to internal organs from hemorrhage.
- The kidneys activate the renin-angiotensin system, which increases blood pressure and attempts to conserve fluid volume, again in the event of hemorrhage.

- The pituitary-adrenal axis is activated and the adrenal cortex secretes cortisol.
- The body begins getting fuels into the blood stream from the liver – by glycogen converting to glucose.
- Blood flow to the brain is maintained, but mostly to the parts of the brain that help with responses to emergencies.
- Fight or flight patterns of behavior get activated as the cortex of the brain perceives danger. Attention becomes very focused with tunnel-vision and tunnel-hearing.

Why is This Important?

These physiological changes known as DPA make it much harder to problem solve. We only hear and see signals of danger; nothing else. Then we're likely to attack or be defensive verbally. Empathy and creative thinking fly out the window, along with our positive communication skills.

There Is a Critical Sex Difference

Although this conclusion is still controversial in academic circles, the scientific evidence we have suggests to us that after an unpleasant relationship conflict, men more than women— particularly in ailing relationships—are much more likely to have thoughts that maintain their distress that keep them vigilant to continued danger. We have discovered that these distress-maintaining thoughts are of two types: Righteous Indignation or Innocent Victimhood. **Thoughts like these maintain distress.** On the other hand, women are more likely to think relationship enhancing thoughts to calm themselves down. It is no wonder that between the ages of twenty and fifty men are twice as likely as women to die from cardiovascular disease. Prolonged stress increases this risk. (Dolf Zillman's research)

In addition, in the face of perceived danger, men are generally more likely than women to stay vigilant. There is good evidence from the writing of anthropologist Richard Leakey that this is part of our evolutionary heritage. Males hunted cooperatively in large groups over large spaces. We were, in part, selected as a species by evolution for the ability of the male to maintain vigilance and to work together efficiently in teams. Women, on the other hand, historically needed to work together in small groups and small spaces, gathering food, grooming one another, and caring for small children.

For females who nurse their young, milk letdown is essential for survival. The let-down response begins with the brain releasing oxytocin, which can only occur if the female is relaxed. This means that humans evolved from female ancestors who had a greater capacity for self-soothing (via the brain oxytocin-based response) Males, on the other hand, had to be able to respond quickly and aggressively and stay vigilant to potential danger which meant they had to learn to suppress emotion in the service of this continued vigilance. Where does that leave us? With more vigilant males and self-soothing, calmer females.

A simple but brilliant experiment conducted by Bob Levenson and his student Loren McCarter was presented at a meeting of the Society for Psychophysiological Research several years ago. Levenson and McCarter suggested that it might be the case that any stimulus that suddenly arouses this male response to danger and vigilance will produce a greater adrenergic response to stress in men than in women. They studied responses to acoustic startle, in this case, a sudden and unexpected loud sound (like a gunshot) going off. Their first hypothesis was that men would have a larger cardiovascular response to the startle. Their second hypothesis was that men would show more anger, contempt, and disgust in response to the startle, and their third hypothesis was that it would take men longer to recover from the cardiovascular arousal than women. Essentially all of these hypotheses were supported. Interestingly, they found no gender differences for anger. Both men and women responded with anger to the loud noise. But men, much more so than women, also responded with contempt, one of the Four Horsemen. Women also calmed down from the anger more rapidly than men—evolution at work!

Why is this experiment so relevant? Because it corroborates with the same gender difference discovered in John Gottman's research: why men and women respond so differently in relationship conflict situations.

**For this reason,
the male's ability to self-soothe is critical
for relationships to be able to survive.**

Women and Trauma

While, generally speaking, in the face of a perceived threat, men are more likely than women to stay vigilant, there is an important exception to this. The exception is when women have a history of being abused in some way. When they've been sexually, physically, or mentally abused, women, too, become very, very flooded, and they too have difficulty calming down. But it may look quite different. Men may stonewall and turn away or get very angry and upset when flooded. A woman with a history of abuse—when flooded—may freeze, like a deer caught in headlights. You may have seen this: it can seem like your partner is not there. She/he may just sit and stare at you, but blankly, as if she's looking right through you. This, too, is a sign of flooding.

The Pursuer-Distancer Pattern

The Pursuer-Distancer Pattern is a pattern that begins when one partner, usually the woman, brings up an issue, trying to have a conversation to resolve a problem that is creating emotional distance. The other partner (usually the husband) doesn't want to talk about it and may think there really isn't a problem. The listener may also be negatively impacted by the way in which the issue is raised. The listener either wants to run away from this conversation or winds up escalating the conflict and rejecting all influence from the speaker. The conversation gets progressively worse and leads one or both people to become what we call "flooded," in other words, in "DPA."

When we flood or move into DPA, it feels like our partner's complaints come out of nowhere; the negativity is very upsetting and disorganizing. It seems like our partner's needs constitute an infinite list of impossible, impractical, and unreasonable demands that we can't possibly meet. We would do anything in the world to get it all to stop and go away. If you feel this way, you are probably in Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA) or Flooded.

**Flooding leads people
to reject incoming
information. Being
soothed leads to the
ability to take in
information.**

Flooding Begins the**Distance and Isolation Cascade**

Negative Emotions/Flooding →

Dismissed by partner →

Four Horsemen →

Emotional Disengagement & Loneliness →

Parallel Lives →

Dissolution

When one is flooded, he or she cannot listen. Healthy processes of conflict resolution go right out the window (e.g., processing information, creative problem-solving, affection, and humor) and are replaced by Fight or Flight.

Why is Physiology Crucial?

Just as there is an optimal heart rate for aerobic exercise, there is also an optimal level of heart rate for relationship interaction, and it should be well below 100 bpm. Over 100 bpm the body secretes adrenaline and may move into fight or flight. Therefore, couples need to learn how to restore calm in themselves and in one another in order to reduce stress. In this way, the relationship becomes a port in a storm instead of the source of *flooding*.

**The antidote for flooding and the
Distance and Isolation Cascade is soothing.
The couple needs to learn how to
self-soothe and to soothe one another.**

Ideally, physiological soothing should be associated with the presence and voice of your partner. This reverses the need to escape that results in flooding. To accomplish this, we recommend that during non-conflict times you consider taking turns using the relaxation instructions to soothe one another.

● ● ● 9:45–10:00 a.m. **Break**

MANAGE CONFLICT**SKILL #1: PRACTICE PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING**

- ● ● 10:05–10:20 a.m. **Exercise 8A: Developing a Break Ritual for Flooding and**
Exercise 8B: Guided Relaxation

The Nature of a Good Break

When one member of a couple is flooded, a *withdrawal ritual* is needed to disengage and get space from one another. That means that partners should briefly separate in order to calm down. **Before separating, partners should agree to a time to get back together** in order to continue their discussion. For a break to be effective:

- **It must be at least twenty minutes long.** Why? Because the major sympathetic neurotransmitter norepinephrine doesn't have an enzyme to degrade it so it has to be diffused through blood. This takes twenty minutes or more in the cardiovascular system.
- **It cannot involve thinking “distress maintaining” thoughts** such as, “I don't have to take this,” or “I'm going to get even.”
- **It must involve a truly relaxing activity**, such as listening to calming music, or taking a walk around the block.

► EXERCISE 8A

Developing a Break Ritual for Flooding (5 minutes)

Instructions: Agree upon a neutral HAND SIGNAL to use when one or both of you get FLOODED.

► EXERCISE 8B

Guided Relaxation (10 minutes)

There are five secrets to soothing yourself.

1. The first secret is to get control of your breathing. When you are flooded you will find yourself either holding your breath or breathing shallowly. Sit or lie down comfortably. Alter your breathing by taking deep, regular, even breaths. Take your time inhaling and exhaling.
2. The second secret is to find areas of muscle tension in your body. First tense each group of muscles and then relax them. Start with your legs, then move up to your back, arms, shoulders, neck, and face, especially your jaw and forehead.
3. The third secret is to let the tension flow out of each muscle group and feel its heaviness.
4. The fourth secret is to let the tension flow out of each muscle group and feel its warmth.
5. The fifth secret is to meditate, focusing your attention on one calming vision or idea. Try envisioning a very comforting place, like a forest or a beach. Imagine this place as vividly as you can as you calmly breathe.

Remember to:

- Breathe deeply and evenly, from the tummy.
- Tense specific muscle groups, hold the tension, then relax.
- Feel the natural heaviness in your relaxed muscles.
- Feel the warmth in your relaxed muscles.
- Imagine a soothing visual image.

How to Self-Soothe

You will now be led in a brief guided relaxation and imagery exercise. These instructions are also written out for you on the following pages. You can refer to them to self-soothe or read them to one another while the listener follows them and relaxes.

Relaxation Exercise

Instructions: You can either use this exercise to self-soothe by reading the text below to yourself, or read to one another while the listener follows along and relaxes. Have the person who will be relaxing get comfortable. If you are doing this together, you can touch each other during this exercise if you'd like, or have your partner's head in your lap. The position is up to you. Take about 15 minutes per person to do this exercise.

Keep your voice relaxed and even, speaking in a soothing monotone. Be sensitive to facial expressions that may indicate your partner's discomfort, and respond to these cues, trying to make your partner as comfortable as possible. Over time make these instructions more personal. Speak SLOWLY and EVENLY.

“Okay, find a position that is comfortable for you. Sit back or lie down and try to get comfortable. Concentrate on my voice and try to do everything I say.

The first thing you need to do is to focus on your breathing, put your hand on your belly and as you take a nice deep breath in, push your hand out with your belly. As if your belly was a balloon filling up with air. Then as your exhale, push your hand back down against your belly and feel your belly deflating. Take another nice deep breath in, inhale and push your hand out. Then, as you exhale push your hand back down against your belly. Every time you take a nice deep breath in, just feel your hand pushing out as your stomach expands, and then as you exhale you are just gently pushing against your stomach as the breath leaves your body.

Continue to breathe this way. Take another nice deep breath in and exhale, another and exhale, and then a last nice deep breath in and exhale. Now, as you continue to breathe normally, you should be sitting either on a sofa or in a chair. Lift your left leg up straight in front of you, pull your toe up towards your knee, and tense all the muscles in your left leg. Feel them tense, including your quadriceps and your calf muscles and now release your leg and drop your leg back down. Take another nice deep breath in. That's it, good.

Now, do the same with your right leg. Raise your right leg straight ahead of you. Pull your toe up towards your knee flexing your foot, and tighten all the muscles in your right leg. Feel really, really tight in your calves and quadriceps, hold it and then release your leg back down. Relaxing both legs and taking another nice deep breath in.

Next, move to your lower back. Arch your lower back by pushing your belly out towards the opposite wall and pulling your shoulders back. Creating a nice arch in your back and feel the tension in that lower back—feel it tighten. And now, release back down and allow your back to just rest against the back of your chair or sofa. And just relax; let that chair really support you.

The next step is raise both arms straight ahead of you and tense all the muscles in your arms by first clenching your fists really tightly, both fists. Then, stretch your fingers out towards the opposite wall, reaching for that opposite wall with all your strength. Good. Now, drop your arms back down to your lap. Take another nice deep breath in. Good.

Now, raise your shoulders up shrugging your shoulders way up way towards your ears. Higher, higher, this is where you are holding lots and lots of pressure and burdens. Feel those shoulders lifting even higher and now drop your shoulders and circle them first one direction, and then circle them in the opposite direction. And just feel the relaxation in your shoulders as you take another nice deep breath in.

Now move to the lower jaw. Clench your teeth tightly together, very tight, that's it—that's where we all hold lots of frustration. And now release, circling your lower jaw first one direction, and then the other direction. Good. Now, relax your jaw and simply drop your head to the side so that you are moving your right ear towards your right shoulder—giving your neck some stretch. That's good, and now straighten your head up and drop the left ear towards the left shoulder. Stretching the other side of your neck now. That's it. And now, returning your head to a straight position up and just relaxing your head now. Taking a nice deep breath in.

And finally, close your eyes tightly shut, squeeze them tightly shut—as if you are shutting out the world and saying “no”—tight, tight. Very good. And now, simply relax your eyes, keeping your eyes lightly closed. Take another nice deep breath in, and imagine yourself under a warm waterfall. The water is pouring down over your head and body and rinsing away any remaining stress, any remaining tension in every little nook and cranny of your body. The water is flowing down, carrying all the remaining tension in your body down towards the earth, down over your head, down over your shoulders, down over your arms and the trunk of your body, down through your legs, down through your feet and down into the earth. Leaving you feeling very warm, and relaxed and comfortable. Another nice deep breath in. That's it.

Now imagine yourself going to a place where you feel completely at peace. It might be a place outside, or perhaps one that's inside. It's a place where you can be completely safe, where it's beautiful, where it's quiet, where it really feels like a sanctuary—where you can feel completely at peace. Notice the colors in this place, the shapes, look around you—see what's in this place around you. Listen for any sounds that might be there in this place—are there any sounds? Feel the air on your skin, does it feel warm or does it feel cool? What feels best to you? Allow yourself to savor every bit of this experience—is there a fragrance with this place? Enjoy every aspect of this place. This is your sanctuary; this is your special place where you can always take yourself. Going deep inside, following your breath and letting yourself be completely relaxed and comfortable and at peace. Just enjoy now. And when you are ready, you can come back to the place where you are now, sitting. Slowly, when you feel ready, open your eyes, look around you and return to the here and now.

MANAGE CONFLICT

PROCESS A PAST REGRETTABLE INCIDENT

● ● ● 10:20–10:55 a.m.

Instructions and Exercise 9

Now it is your turn to process a past regrettable incident. This exercise is *not* meant to open up an issue that you are conflicted about now. We will be giving you tools later today to help you discuss a current issue. Instead, we want you to talk about an *interaction* you have had in the past that didn't go as well as you would have liked.

In this exercise you will be describing your *experience* of the fight. Do not blame or get critical. You can say, "When you said, '____' I felt like ____." What is important is that you *listen* to your partner's reality and that you *validate* it. Afterward, describe what set you up, in other words, what you were experiencing before the fight. Try not to go back into the fight. Instead, try to focus on your *experience* during the fight and what you can do to make it better next time.

► EXERCISE 9

Process a Past Regrettable Incident (30 minutes)

Each of you think of a past regrettable incident that you want to process and repair now. While remaining in your seats, take three minutes to agree on which incident you will discuss.

Then, please refer to pages 34-35 in this book or refer to the booklet in your kit and follow the instructions for the "Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident" exercise to process your incident. Keep in mind, the purpose of this exercise is to talk about *how* the regrettable incident was handled by both of you, rather than the issue itself.

Stay calm and avoid getting back into the fight.

The best way to accomplish staying calm is to take turns answering one step or question at a time, alternating between you. For example, each of you will take turns listing all the feelings you had. Remember, it is *crucial* that you do not re-engage in the fight. You can avoid doing this by stopping the discussion if you accidentally shift into any of the Four Horsemen (Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt, Stonewalling), then taking a few moments to calm down. Only after you are calm, continue with your discussion.

There is no joy in the victory of winning a fight.

● ● ● 11:00–11:10 a.m.

Process Exercise

MANAGE CONFLICT SIX SKILLS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

● ● ● 11:10–11:25 a.m. **Presentation**

In Dr. Gottman's research, the Masters of Relationships demonstrated a gentler approach to conflict than did the Disasters of Relationship. There are two perspectives (subjective realities) and they are both right. It is also productive to talk about one another's feelings and needs. Don't dismiss feelings as a waste of time.

There are six skills that help in every kind of conflict discussion. Regardless of whether your problem is solvable or perpetual, if you use these skills, your discussion is bound to go better. These skills are what the 'Masters of Relationships' use.

Skill #1. Practice Physiological Self-soothing

When partners practice self-soothing, diffuse physiological arousal is minimized. Conflict discussions are less escalated, gentler, and therefore safer. This helps the relationship to become a port in the storm, and not the storm itself.

Skill #2. Use Gentle Start-up

Gottman's research revealed that the way a conflict discussion starts determines a lot of what happens for the entire discussion. The predictive role of gentle or harsh start-up is played by women. They bring up the issues 80% of the time. When there is irritability and non-responsiveness in the friendship, harsh start-up is the result. But when there's emotional connection, it's easier to do gentle start-up. Try to avoid harsh start-up and practice gentle start-up.

Skill #3. Repair and De-escalate

By repair we mean a verbal or nonverbal gesture of staying on a healthy track in a discussion. It can be a communication about one's feelings, about needing or wanting to calm down, or about appreciation. It can be moving toward one's partner's position, stopping action, apologizing or accepting responsibility. It's a communication that essentially states to your partner, "You, and what you think and feel, are important to me. We'll get through this."

Skill #4. Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams

Beneath each of your positions on the issue are deeply held feelings and dreams. Take turns asking each other questions to bring these up, and just listen to your partner's answers. Avoid persuasion and problem solving.

Skill #5. Accept Influence

Accepting influence simply means expressing agreement with at least part of what your partner is asking for and showing a willingness to move toward compromise. A central part of accepting influence is uncovering and understanding the *meaning* of your partner's position in the conflict. Research has shown that people who don't accept influence wind up creating bad will and being powerless in relationships.

Skill #6. Compromise

The Compromise step involves developing a common way of thinking: creating a third solution out of two positions. For this to work you must use the Aikido principle: **Yield To Win.**

Six Skills for Conflict Management

- Skill #1. Practice Physiological Self-soothing**
- Skill #2. Use Gentle Start-up**
- Skill #3. Repair and De-escalate**
- Skill #4. Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams**
- Skill #5. Accept Influence**
- Skill #6. Compromise**

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #2: USE GENTLE START-UP

• • • 11:25–11:40 a.m. **Presentation and Group Exercise**

- Practice Physiological Self-Soothing
- ⇒ Use Gentle Start-up
- Repair and De-Escalate
- Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
- Accept Influence
- Compromise

We all use these skills. Gentle Start-up is basically the way we treat guests—respectfully and courteously. When you break it up, Gentle Start-up has five components.

Rules For Gentle Start-up

1. **Make statements that start with “I” instead of “You” to avoid blame.** Complaining is okay, but criticizing is not. Criticizing is a statement—often generalized, using words such as “always” and “never” —which attacks another person's character. Psychologist Thomas Gordon noted that when statements start with the word, “You” instead of the word, “I,” they are usually more likely to be critical and to make your partner defensive. Instead of saying, “You're so thoughtless....” it works best to start your complaint with a statement of how you feel, like, “I feel upset.....” Don't cheat and form an ‘I’ statement that is actually a ‘You’ statement like, “I think you're mean.”
2. **Describe what is happening, don't evaluate or judge.** Instead of accusing or blaming, just describe what you see happening objectively and non-judgmentally. For example, instead of saying, “You never help clean up,” say “The kitchen is messy.”
3. **Talk clearly about WHAT YOU NEED IN POSITIVE TERMS.** What you wish for or hope for, and/or what you want more of (versus what you don't want). If you could wave a magic wand and get what you want, what would things be like? Instead of asking your partner to guess what you need, or to read your mind, express it explicitly. For example, instead of saying, “I'm doing all the clean-up,” say “I'd appreciate it if you would clean your stuff off the kitchen table.”
4. **Be polite.** Make requests politely, adding such phrases as “please” and “I would appreciate it if...”
5. **Give appreciations.** Noticing what our partners are doing right is always the best way to go. If your partner has, at some time, been better in this situation, then ask for what you need and couch it within an appreciation of what your partner did right in the past and how much you miss that now.

Be Specific! And Don't Store Things Up!

While being specific is a better idea than global criticism, storing things up is not a good idea. The “What's Wrong With Jim” list is a humorous example.

What's Wrong with Jim

1. Jim doesn't listen.
2. Jim doesn't show his feelings.
3. Jim is not a good father.
4. Jim doesn't help around the house.
5. Jim doesn't recycle.
6. Jim is not conscious of the need to renew resources on earth.
7. Jim is at times quite lousy in bed.
8. Jim runs away when the feelings get hot.
9. Jim isn't a good planner.
10. Jim doesn't pay bills on time.
11. Jim neglects his friends.
12. Jim doesn't call his mother very often.
13. Jim flirts with other women at parties.
14. Jim rushes me when I'm trying to get ready.
15. Jim leaves his dirty clothes all around.
16. Jim breaks dishes when he has to wash dishes. I think he does this on purpose.
17. Jim drinks to excess.
18. Jim yells at other drivers and it scares the kids.
19. Jim is a couch potato.
20. Jim goes grocery shopping and forgets the list so he doesn't get the essentials like toilet paper.
21. Jim often forgets to flush.
22. Jim doesn't ask me about my day, he just talks about his day.
23. Jim doesn't share his innermost feelings with me.
24. Jim gets rowdy at parties.
25. Jim doesn't clean up after a party.
26. Jim is too lenient with the kids.
27. Jim is sometimes too strict with the kids.
28. When Jim paints he leaves spots undone.
29. Jim's attitude toward women is sexist.
30. Jim forgets to feed the cat.
31. When Jim does feed the cat he doesn't wash the fork off but leaves it to get crusty and yucky in the sink so I have to clean the disgusting fork.
32. There's rarely any foreplay before sex.
33. Jim can't spell antisestablishmentarianism.

Summary:

Gentle Start-up Rules

- **I Feel...**
State what you feel with an “I” statement. For example, “I feel upset...”
- **About What...**
Describe the situation neutrally, with facts. Describe “It” and not your partner.
- **I Need...**
Tell your partner what you need in order to make things better.
- **Be Polite**
- **Give Appreciations**

Examples of Gentle Start-up

1. **TOPIC: Affection.**

You want your partner to express more affection toward you.

Harsh Start-up: You never touch me.

Gentle alternative: I loved it when you kissed me in the kitchen the other day. You're such a great kisser. I would love it if we could do that more often.

2. **TOPIC: Your partner's car has a new dent in it.**

You are worried that your partner is not being a careful enough driver and you are concerned over your partner's safety.

Harsh Start-up: I saw that new dent. Were you ever going to tell me about it? When are you going to stop being so reckless?

Gentle alternative: I saw that new dent. What happened? Honey, I am getting worried about your driving. I want you to be safe. Can we talk about this?

3. **TOPIC: Your partner has not been paying much attention to you.**

Harsh Start-up: You are so emotionally unavailable to me!

Gentle alternative: I have been missing you lately and I'm getting a little lonely.

When complaining, think about what you need. Instead of criticizing, think of how your partner can shine for you. Catch your partner doing something right. Then thank your partner for it.

► **GROUP EXERCISE**

Use Gentle Start-up

Instructions: Below you will see a situation described and an example of a harsh start-up. Supply a gentle alternative. This is not a test, but rather an opportunity to learn how to apply this skill. Sample answers are given below, but try not to peek.

1. **TOPIC: In-laws.**

Your mother in-law is coming to visit this evening. You are upset with how she has criticized you in the past. You want your partner to back you up when you tell your mother in-law that it hurts your feelings when she does this.

Harsh Start-up. Your mother is a wart on the back of humanity.

Your gentle alternative:

2. **TOPIC: Housework.**

You wish that your partner would cook dinner tomorrow night or take you out to dinner.

Harsh Start-up. You never take me anywhere and I am sick of doing all the cooking.

Your gentle alternative:

3. **TOPIC: Parties.**

You sometimes get shy in social situations. You think that your partner ignores you when you go to parties and prefers to spend time with other people instead of you. Tonight, there is a party and you want your partner to spend time with you.

Harsh Start-up. I just know that tonight you're going to just dump me off in some corner while you shamelessly flirt all night long.

Your gentle alternative:

4. **TOPIC: Sex.**

You are upset that you and your partner have not made love in some time. You are feeling unsure that your partner finds you attractive. You wish that the two of you could make love tonight.

Harsh Start-up. You are so cold to me! All you care about is yourself.

Your gentle alternative:

5. **TOPIC: You want your partner to ask for a raise.**

Harsh Start-up. You are too wimpy to get a raise for your own family.

Your gentle alternative:

Sample Gentle Start-up Answers

1. You know I really care about your Mom, but I'm worried that she will be critical of me tonight about how I am with the kids. It upset me so much the last time she was here. I would so appreciate it if you could find a way to support me.
2. I am very tired of cooking and would love a break. It'd be so nice if you took us all out.
3. I can tell that I'm going to feel shy tonight. I don't want to cramp your style—you are so much more comfortable at these parties than I am. But it would help me so much if you would spend time with me. I don't know why, but when you do, it makes it easier for me to talk to other people.
4. I've been thinking about you all day and about how incredibly gorgeous you are. Is there any chance we could have a long, luxurious and romantic evening together?
5. Maybe I'm nuts, but I think you deserve so much more than they are paying you at work. I'd love it if you would get a raise soon. Could we talk about this and maybe come up with a plan?

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #3: REPAIR AND DE-ESCALATE

• • • 11:40–11:50 a.m. Presentation and Role Play

- Practice Physiological Self-Soothing
- Use Gentle Start-up
- ⇒ **Repair and De-Escalate**
- Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
- Accept Influence
- Compromise

Research by T.B. Brazelton and the modification of his hypothesis by Ed Tronick showed that 70% of mother-child interactions are mis-coordinated. What matters are **repair attempts**. This appears to be equally important in relationship interaction when resolving conflict.

All couples naturally make many attempts to repair their interaction when it goes negative. In happier relationships, this **repair** work is done before the interaction becomes negative as a way of keeping things on track emotionally. Gottman's research discovered that men in marriages that wound up stable and very happy were *de-escalating* low-level negativity. This means that their response to their wives' being hurt, angry, disappointed, or just generally upset with them was to be neutral (not stonewalling) for at least five seconds. The major effect of this de-escalation was that the husband's heart rate dropped significantly. Its calming effect on the husband predicted good things for the relationship. Taking responsibility for a part of the problem is a powerful repair.

In relationship interaction, making repair attempts is a great skill. One aspect of repair is *learning how to put on the brakes* when you and your partner are in a negative cycle. (The "Stop Action" statements on your Repair Checklist). The first thing instructors teach you when you learn to ski is the snowplow. You have to learn how to slow down and how to stop. Because we are formalizing a natural process, even one that may not be working, this may feel somewhat artificial and phony. For now, we want to introduce this artificial method for putting the *brakes on* when an interaction goes negative.

Take a look at the Gottman Repair Checklist. These are brief statements of repair that are hard to think of when people are upset during a conflict discussion. One of John's favorites is, "What are your concerns?" when your partner is angry with you.

No Fault Discussions

Alternative Principles

- **Don't find fault.**
It is not productive to find out whose fault anything is. Don't do it.
- **If it's about the past, use the Aftermath of a Fight exercise to process your regrettable incident.**
- **Try to forgive, as opposed to airing past resentments.**
If possible, there needs to be genuine forgiveness on old issues.
Otherwise, anger may turn into bitterness, and bitterness has the quality of inconsolability.

How this can be accomplished? The answer is for at least one person (preferably both) to accept some responsibility for the problem. When you start talking about issues in the upcoming exercises, try to think of yourselves at a new starting point: this is where you are today and you'll go from here, trying hard to drop past resentments and hurts.

You might also want to consider these lines from Shakespeare. Mercy blesses those who receive it, as well as those who give it.

The Quality of Mercy

From *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare.
Portia says this in Act IV, the courtroom scene.

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His scepter shows the force of temporal power.
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice.

● ● ● 11:50–1:10 p.m. **Lunch**

✓ Gottman Repair Checklist

I Feel

1. I'm getting scared.
2. Please say that more gently.
3. Did I do something wrong?
4. That hurt my feelings.
5. That felt like an insult.
6. I'm feeling sad.
7. I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?
8. I'm feeling unappreciated.
9. I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?
10. Please don't lecture me.
11. I don't feel like you understand me right now.
12. Sounds like it's all my fault.
13. I feel criticized. Can you rephrase that?
14. I'm getting worried.
15. Please don't withdraw.

Sorry

1. My reactions were too extreme. Sorry.
2. I really blew that one.
3. Let me try again.
4. I want to be gentler to you right now and I don't know how.
5. Tell me what you hear me saying.
6. I can see my part in all this.
7. How can I make things better?
8. Let's try that one over again.
9. What you are saying is...
10. Let me start again in a softer way.
11. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

Get to Yes

1. You're starting to convince me.
2. I agree with part of what you're saying.
3. Let's compromise here.
4. Let's find our common ground.
5. I never thought of things that way.
6. This problem is not very serious in the big picture.
7. I think your point of view makes sense.
8. Let's agree to include both our views in a solution.
9. What are your concerns?

I Need to Calm Down

1. Can you make things safer for me?
2. I need things to be calmer right now.
3. I need your support right now.
4. Just listen to me right now and try to understand.
5. Tell me you love me.
6. Can I have a kiss?
7. Can I take that back?
8. Please be gentler with me.
9. Please help me calm down.
10. Please be quiet and listen to me.
11. This is important to me. Please listen.
12. I need to finish what I was saying.
13. I am starting to feel flooded.
14. Can we take a break?
15. Can we talk about something else for a while?

Stop Action!

1. I might be wrong here.
2. Please let's stop for a while.
3. Let's take a break.
4. Give me a moment. I'll be back.
5. I'm feeling flooded.
6. Please stop.
7. Let's agree to disagree here.
8. Let's start all over again.
9. Hang in there. Don't withdraw.
10. I want to change the topic.
11. We are getting off track.

I Appreciate

1. I know this isn't your fault.
2. My part of this problem is...
3. I see your point.
4. Thank you for...
5. That's a good point.
6. We are both saying...
7. I understand.
8. I love you.
9. I am thankful for...
10. One thing I admire about you is...
11. I see what you're talking about.
12. This is not your problem, it's OUR problem.

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #4: LISTEN TO YOUR PARTNER'S UNDERLYING FEELINGS AND DREAMS

● ● ● 1:15–3:00 p.m.

Presentation, Exercise 10, Exercise 11, and Exercise 12

- Practice Physiological Self-Soothing
- Use Gentle Start-up
- Repair and De-Escalate
- ⇒ Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
- Accept Influence
- Compromise

Gridlock

Sometimes it happens that the problem a couple thought was solvable turns out to be a Gridlocked, Perpetual Problem. The result is you will *try* to reach a compromise, *try* to understand one another's positions emotionally, *try* to accept influence, *try* to use the tools of gentle start-up and the repair checklist—and it feels like you're banging your head against a stone wall.

**If this happened to you,
you have indeed hit Gridlock
on your Perpetual Problem.**

Research has shown that couples wait an average of six years (from the time that they first realize that there is a serious problem with their relationship) before they get any kind of professional help (Buongiorno, 1995). Compare this to the average four weeks a woman waits upon discovering a lump in her breast before going to a doctor. By the time six years (or more!) have passed, the original problems have undergone major changes, usually for the worse. But even so, these gridlocked processes can be reversed.

Changing Gridlock to Dialogue on Perpetual Problems

REMEMBER

Conflict in relationships falls into two categories—Solvable and Perpetual Problems

It is perfectly normal to have Perpetual and Solvable problems—all relationships do. Gridlocked Problems are those Perpetual Problems that a couple has struggled with unsuccessfully, often leading to increased Flooding and the Four Horsemen.

The BIG, HEAVY problems in your relationship that keep causing you a lot of pain and hurt are very likely to be GRIDLOCKED PERPETUAL PROBLEMS. When we are gridlocked on a problem, we basically feel betrayed, disrespected, hurt, frustrated and like we never get anywhere with this problem. The danger of gridlocked perpetual problems is that they can propel a couple down the Cascade of Loneliness and Distance, where they avoid talking, end up leading parallel lives, and are emotionally estranged.

How will you know if your Perpetual Problem is Gridlocked?

- In gridlocked conflicts, people feel basically rejected by their partner.
- They will have the same conversation over and over and over again, spinning their wheels on the discussion, making no headway.
- People become entrenched in their positions.
- These conversations go nowhere, leading to frustration and hurt.
- There is little humor, amusement, or affection when they talk about the problem.
- The gridlock gets worse over time, and leads people to vilify one another.
- Over time this vilification leads people to become more entrenched in their positions: more polarized, more extreme, and uncompromising.
- Eventually, this all leads to emotional disengagement.

Gridlocked conflict is like two fists clenched and placed against one another. Unclench fists, open hands, and the dreams (like doves) can emerge.

What happens when people get stuck in gridlock and compromise becomes impossible?

There are five stages:

1. Dreams in opposition
2. Entrenchment of positions
3. Fears of accepting influence
4. Vilification (Four Horsemen)
5. Emotional disengagement

When these five steps occur, the relationship is in danger of becoming the kind of place where dreams are crushed. People become alienated from one another. A very destructive process is created in which each person becomes *entrenched* in opposition to the other. Then each person begins seeing the other as a bad guy, leading to *vilification* of one another. Fears rule the day and friends turn into enemies. Mental divorce occurs long before actual divorce.

What has to happen to change this situation?

When people get stuck on a position they are taking, it typically means there is a hidden meaning beneath their positions, a deeply *symbolic meaning*. There may be a *dream* hidden in their position. By *dream* we don't mean the dreams we have at night when we are asleep. We mean a person's hopes, aspirations and personal wishes. We mean dreams that have personal meaning and history, dreams that need to surface if the gridlock on the problem is ever to loosen. Gridlock is the result of **dreams in opposition**, and fears that we have about accepting influence on the problem at hand.

When people get stuck in gridlock, they usually are not talking about that problem, but instead about some core part of Self, some aspect of what the problem **MEANS** to them. So, for example, a discussion on money that is gridlocked is probably **not** about money. Instead, it could be about the experience of power, or competence, or security. Or perhaps it is about independence and freedom. Each person's position has a very deep meaning for that person inside. People cannot yield easily, unless they feel understood and honored.

First, the relationship has to become safe enough so that each partner's dreams or values or histories (which have often gone 'underground,' hidden within each person's entrenched positions) can come forth, be heard and accepted as valid.

Talk about what the problem means to each of you.

Forget about trying to compromise or solve the problem at this point. Instead, focus on truly understanding, at a very deep level, who you both are, regarding each of your points of view on this problem. As good listeners, we need to explore what our partner's dream is really about; why it carries so much meaning for them; why it is so core to their sense of self.

► EXERCISE 10

Choose a Perpetual Gridlocked Problem to Work On (10 minutes)

In this next exercise, we'd like you to choose a perpetual or gridlocked problem you're having in your relationship to work on for today. With this problem, you'll have a chance to practice six skills that John Gottman found in his research to help couples manage their conflicts well. The list that follows details problems couples typically have in their relationships. These problems are typically perpetual ones that come up over and over again. We will be teaching you a method to convert gridlock into dialogue. Remember, a gridlocked perpetual problem is one in which discussion often produces hurt feelings, anger and great tension without any resolution.

Instructions: Individually read over the list on the following page and put a check mark next to one perpetual or gridlocked problem you'd like to discuss with your partner today. Then share with your partner which problem you selected and choose, of the two problems (if they're different), which one you will work on today. Make sure you and your partner both agree on which problem you're choosing, as we will be returning to it for the rest of the workshop. The primary goal here is to give you material to work with as you learn new skills to make conflict management easier for your relationship.

Perpetual Gridlocked Problems List

1. *Differences in neatness and organization.* One person is neat and organized and the other is sloppy and disorganized.
2. *Differences in wanting time together versus time apart and alone.* One person wants more time alone than the other, who wants more time together.
3. *Differences in optimal sexual frequency.* One person wants more sex than the other.
4. *Differences in preferred lovemaking style.* There are differences in what each person wants from love-making. For example, one sees intimacy as a pre-condition to making love, while the other sees love-making as a path to intimacy.
5. *Differences in handling finances.* One person is much more financially conservative and perhaps a worrier, while the other wants to spend money more freely and has a philosophy of living more for the moment.
6. *Differences with respect to kin.* One person wants more independence from kin, while the other wants more closeness.
7. *Differences in how to approach household chores.* For example, one person wants equal division of labor, while the other does not.
8. *Differences in how to raise and discipline children.* One person is more involved with the children than the other.
9. *Differences in how to raise and discipline children.* One person is stricter with the children than another.
10. *Differences in how to raise and discipline children.* One person wants more gentleness and understanding with the children than the other.
11. *Differences in punctuality.* One person is habitually late and to the other it is important to be on time.
12. *Differences in preferred activity level.* One person prefers active physical recreation while the other is more passive and sedentary.
13. *Differences in being people-oriented.* One person is more extroverted and gregarious than the other.
14. *Differences in preferred influence.* One person prefers to be more dominant in decision-making than the other.
15. *Differences in ambition and the importance of work.* One person is far more ambitious and oriented to work and success than the other.
16. *Differences in attitudes about work.* One person may want to return to work, while the other person wants them to remain home with the children. Or one person feels their partner should work harder, longer hours or make more money.
17. *Differences with respect to religion.* One person values religious observances or principles more than the other.
18. *Differences with respect to drugs and alcohol.* One person is far more tolerant of drugs and alcohol than the other.
19. *Differences in independence.* One person feels a greater need to be independent than the other.
20. *Differences in excitement.* One person feels a greater need to have life be exciting or adventurous than the other.
21. *Others (you supply them here):*

► EXERCISE 11

Use Gentle Start-up On Your Perpetual Gridlocked Issue (10 minutes)

Write out your starting position on the issue you have chosen to discuss, using the following format of gentle start-up. Then read what you have written to your partner.

1. **I Feel (name your emotion here).** Example: “I feel upset....”
(Do not describe your partner’s personality)

2. **About What.**
Describe the facts of the situation neutrally. Be careful not to describe any characteristics of your partner or to blame your partner. Example: “...about how we are currently dividing up household cleaning.”

3. **I Need.**
State clearly and concretely one thing you do need. Avoid saying what you don’t need.
Example: “I need us to each spend an hour a week cleaning the house.”

► EXERCISE 12

Dreams-Within-Conflict (30 minutes)

Instructions: In the next exercise, we would like you to again discuss the perpetual gridlocked problem you just chose to work on. The purpose of this exercise is to help you dialogue about the problem without feeling it unravel in front of you. You are postponing persuasion until later.

Do not, under any circumstances, try to solve it.

One person will be the Speaker and the other the Listener for 15 minutes: then you'll change roles.

Speaker's Job

Your task as the speaker is to honestly talk about your feelings and beliefs about your position on this problem. Explore what this position means to you, what the dream might be behind your position, tell the story of the source of this dream or this belief: where it comes from and what it symbolizes. You must be clear and honest. What do you *really* want here? Why is it important to you? Try to make your partner understand. Do not blame or attack. Avoid "you-statements."

*Don't argue for or try to persuade your partner of your point of view;
just explain how you see things. Tell your partner all of your thoughts
and feelings that you have about your position on this problem.*

Try to be like a reporter. For example, try saying, "I heard you say" instead of "You said." You may want to look over the list on the following page for a sample of dreams that people sometimes have (or have lost) that could underlie the position you have taken on this problem.

Listener's Job

Your job as the listener is to make your partner feel SAFE enough to tell you what's behind their position on the problem: their belief, dream or story. Toward this end, you will LISTEN, the way a friend would listen. Ask questions that draw out your partner and his or her point of view. You can contribute to this climate if you suspend judgment and not act like a judge but like someone who wants to hear your partner's story, and the dream behind the story. Just hear it; don't judge it.

Don't try to solve the problem. It is much too soon for that. You first need to end the opposition of dreams and become one another's friend instead of one another's foe. Try to understand the meaning of your partner's dream. Be interested.

*It is important to realize that the goal is not to solve these problems.
The goal is to move from gridlock to dialogue,
and to understand, in depth, your partner's position.*

**Do not argue for your point of view!
Just listen and ask questions.**

SAMPLE QUESTIONS for the Dream Catcher (the Listener):

- ① Do you have any core beliefs, ethics or values that are part of your position on this issue?
- ② Is there a story behind this for you, or does this relate to your background or childhood history in some way?
- ③ Tell me why this is so important to you.
- ④ What feelings do you have about this issue?
- ⑤ What would be your ideal dream here?
- ⑥ Is there a deeper purpose or goal in this for you?
7. What do you wish for?
8. What do you need?
9. Is there a fear or disaster scenario in not having this dream honored?

SAMPLE DREAMS for the Dream Speaker:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. A sense of freedom | 20. Exploring an old part of myself I have lost |
| 2. The experience of peace | 21. Getting over a personal hang up |
| 3. Unity with nature | 22. Having a sense of order |
| 4. Exploring who I am | 23. Being able to be productive |
| 5. Adventure | 24. A place and a time to just "be" |
| 6. A spiritual journey | 25. Being able to truly relax |
| 7. Justice | 26. Reflecting on my life |
| 8. Honor | 27. Getting my priorities in order |
| 9. Unity with my past | 28. Finishing something important |
| 10. Healing | 29. Exploring the physical side of myself |
| 11. Knowing my family | 30. Being able to compete and win |
| 12. Becoming all I can be | 31. Travel |
| 13. Having a sense of power | 32. Quietness |
| 14. Dealing with my aging | 33. Atonement |
| 15. Exploring a creative side of myself | 34. Building something important |
| 16. Becoming more powerful | 35. Ending a chapter of my life |
| 17. Getting over past hurts | 36. Saying goodbye to something |
| 18. Becoming more competent | 37. Love |
| 19. Asking God for forgiveness | |

REMEMBER to ask for help if you need it.

The bottom line about dreams is this: You don't want to have the kind of relationship in which you win and are influential in the relationship but wind up crushing your partner's dream. You want the kind of relationship in which each of you support one another's dreams. If your dreams connect, so much the better.

● ● ● **2:50–3:00 p.m.** **Process Exercise**

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #5: ACCEPT INFLUENCE, HONOR ONE ANOTHER

• • • 3:00–3:15 p.m.

Presentation

- Practice Physiological Self-Soothing
- Use Gentle Start-up
- Repair and De-Escalate
- Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
- ⇒ Accept Influence
- Compromise

Here are some basic facts about divorce: We are living in the midst of a worldwide revolution in women's rights, one that is millennia overdue. Ninety-one percent (91%) of men now see their babies born. In 1960, that percentage was zero. Then, in 1960, John Quinn handcuffed himself to his birth laboring wife. He was 24 years old, a student at Humboldt State University. After the baby was born, the cops arrested him. How has seeing babies being born affected us men? There's a new level of respect men have developed for women. This process is attempting to right the enormous imbalance that has existed in human culture for so long. It is far more important than the fall of the Soviet Union, and it is affecting the family throughout the world. Some places are going slower than others, and some are regressive, but the process is inevitable. As women become economically and psychologically empowered, they will no longer stand for bad relationships. Men throughout the world are losing their exclusive role as breadwinners. As a result, men are floundering and undergoing enormous polarizations. Forces are pushing some men toward authoritarian and misogynistic positions, claiming that to be "real men" they should challenge women, "take back" their authority (and responsibility). Some prominent writers, such as Robert Bly, have said things such as, "Don't let a woman's moods run the house," in effect urging men to ignore women's emotions.

In some circles it is believed that to be a man means to be unemotional. This is misguided. What is necessary is for men to realize that the world of emotions is part of being human, and that men have styles in families that are important and different from those of women. As Ron Levant has emphasized, we do not need men to be driven away from their women and their children, but drawn closer to them.

In his research John Gottman has shown that the men who have the emotional intelligence to accept influence from women are way ahead of the game in the world of relationship and parenting, and their kids are way ahead of the game not only in emotional and social development but also in terms of cognitive development. Fathers are enormously important, both because of their great potential for doing good and also because of their great potential for doing harm.

The idea of men accepting influence is that the sharing of power needs to be a two-way street; it needs to be balanced, and there needs to be give-and-take on both sides.

This has nothing to do with religious beliefs. You can believe that the Bible or the Koran or other sacred texts say that the man is the head of the family, but what matters here is *respect*. Sharing influence is all about respecting both points of view on problems. We are not telling you what to believe religiously about the role of men and women. We are just telling you that according to Gottman's research: **relationships fare much better when a man accepts influence from his female partner.**

Men also need to ask themselves whether they want to win this battle, but lose the war. This means that the process of deciding things is all important and that both people need to feel respected and consulted in this process.

The Developmental View

Developmental psychologists have observed that most little girls accept influence in their play from both boys and girls, but most boys almost never accept influence from girls. Psychologist Eleanor Maccoby suggests that this pattern is responsible for the worldwide Gender Segregation effect in childhood. What this means is in every culture, at around age five to seven, boys and girls have nothing to do with one another until puberty. Even though about 35% of best friendships in preschool are boy-girl friendships, the percentage drops to zero percent by age seven.

As boys grow up and mature, they are socialized entirely differently from girls with respect to emotion. In run and chase games young boys deal with emotion quickly and efficiently, with the goal of keeping the ball in play. They quickly dispense with emotion by changing the rules, or by offering a quick word of comfort. But girls on the other hand often prefer to play in small groups and regardless of the game they are playing (like hopscotch), the relationships with one another are far more important than playing the game. If someone's feelings get hurt, girls will stop the game, discuss their feelings and soothe one another. So in adolescence, when boys and girls turn toward one another again with the normal emotional ups and downs of relationships at a time when relationships are also potentially sexual – it is the girl who is likely to be more expert about navigating through emotional waters. Thus the guy who can accept influence is a pretty smart guy.

John Gottman has studied the play of hundreds of children. He noted that he never observed two boys pretending that they were grooms at a wedding, whereas girls dress up as brides all the time. No self-respecting preschool would be without bridal dress-up clothes, yet there aren't little tuxedos for little pretend grooms. Little girls are fascinated with play about domestic themes. They like to pretend they have a baby to feed, nurture, and show off to their friends.

Gottman studied the best friendship of two four-year-old children, Eric and Naomi. Naomi wanted to play 'this is our baby and we are showing it off to our friends.' Eric played along with this theme for about ten minutes and then he said, "Hey, Naomi, this baby is dead! We have got to get it to the hospital right away!" And so they "drove" to the hospital. Naomi said, "Eric, slow down! You drive too fast." Then the two of them became surgeons and operated on the baby and saved its life. Eric had wanted Naomi to be a nurse but she objected that girls can be surgeons too, and he relented. After saving the baby's life, they continued showing the baby off to their friends.

**The guys who can accept influence
are way ahead of the game.**

Example for Accepting Influence

What not to do

The idea in this bad relationship advice is to reject any attempt your partner makes to request something of you, no matter how reasonable this request is.

Partner 1: Do you have to work late on Thursday night? My mother is coming this weekend and I really could use your help getting things ready.

Partner 2: What do you want from me? To always bow down to you? My plans are set and that's that!

What to do

Partner 1: Do you have to work late on Thursday night? My mother is coming this weekend and I really could use your help getting things ready.

Partner 2: Well, OK. But I do need to get this report done. Would it work out for me to work on the report Sunday afternoon after your Mom leaves?

Move With The Opponent, But Stay Balanced—The Aikido Principle

Gottman's research revealed that one does not win an argument by countering everything your partner says. If you are a brick wall, things will only escalate. In fact, what you have to do to win is to get your partner to start saying *yes*, and the only way to do that is to *yield* to those parts of your partner's point of view and argument that seem reasonable to you. What happens then—when you start yielding—is that the problem starts to become something that *both of you* are working on together.

The Emotionally Intelligent Husband or Partner

When you drive through the streets of any modern city today, you encounter outrageous obstacles, cars and trucks and barricades that block your normal and rightful passage. You can take two approaches toward these daily outrages. One is to stop, become righteously indignant, and insist that the offending obstacle move, and the other is to drive around the obstacles, even if this means driving in an unorthodox fashion. The first approach will eventually earn you a heart attack and the second approach will get you home.

John Gottman's data suggests that a new kind of male partner and father is emerging, one who is adapting to the changing events around him; for instance, the loss of meaningful work in a workplace, or the rapidly growing independence and psychological and economic power of women.

He is like the next step in social evolution. He is the emotionally intelligent male. He makes a map of his partner's world, and of his children's worlds as well. He nourishes his admiration and fondness for his partner and children, and he communicates this to them in his daily actions toward them. He honors them. He has reset his priorities so that he turns toward those he cares about instead of turning away from them. When he is busy and his daughter comes to him and says, "Daddy?" he often turns away from his work and says, "Hi sweetheart. What is it?" because he wants her to remember him as having had time for her. He is emotionally connected to his wife and to his children. When they are troubled, they feel comfortable turning toward him. When they are joyous, they look forward to sharing their good news with him. This gives him the solid emotional base that makes it possible for him to create and work effectively.

The emotionally intelligent partner and father will lead a rich and meaningful life. People who matter will care about him when he lives, and they will mourn him when he dies.

The other kind of husband and father is a very sad story. He is experiencing a great loss of male entitlement. He refuses to drive around the obstacles and demands that things change for him. He is responding to the changes around him with righteous indignation. He may respond by becoming more authoritarian or by withdrawing into a lonely shell, protecting what little he has left. He does not give others much honor and respect because he is engaged in a search for the honor and respect from others that he thinks is his due. He simply expects honor and respect from others and he will not adapt. He will not accept influence because he fears any further loss of himself. And because he will not accept influence, he does not have much influence. The consequence is that no one will care much about him when he lives, nor mourn him when he dies.

**The new emotionally intelligent husband
or partner and father try to accept influence
so that he can be influential. It is as simple as that.
He has discovered that he must yield to win.
Accepting Influence is part of COMPROMISE.**

Honoring a Woman's Dreams

Both men's and women's dreams need to be honored in a relationship. John Gottman claims that marital relationships are helped, not hurt, by honoring the dreams of both men and women. However, women have been raised with a much lower sense of entitlement about having and developing their own dreams unless those dreams are about relationships. Gottman has noted that both men and women have trouble permitting women to have life dreams that are not related to families, to being good wives, good mothers or good daughters. Women are all too willing to give up their dreams for the sake of their relationships. No one wants a close relationship with a woman who is defeated, beaten, and depressed. Every lover wants a woman who is a partner and a true teammate; someone who is alive and who loves her life, who feels loved, honored, and respected. This is *not* to suggest that a man's dreams are not to be honored. But in our history, unfortunately, it has typically been the woman's dreams that have not been taken seriously, by both genders. All that is now changing.

Let's look at this from a historical perspective. Tikva Frymer-Kensky wrote a book called "In the Wake of The Goddess." Long before the birth of Judaism or Christianity, our Assyrian and Sumerian roots (ancient Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria) led to the Judeo-Christian view of God. She analyzed a period of 700 years of Sumerian and Akkadian culture; the religions of these people changed a great deal. In the beginning there were both Gods and Goddesses and the roles these gods and goddesses played reflected the actual roles that men and women played.

A great deal is known about this culture, in part, because of King Ashurbanipal, who made it part of his life's work to build a library of cuneiform tablets. Schliemann, an amateur archeologist in the late 19th century, dug his pick axe into a mound one day, and found the door to Ashurbanipal's library, finding the library essentially intact.

Some of women's historical contributions:

- It is very clear that women were the originators of record-keeping in families as part of their domestic role. As such, they invented writing (originally cuneiform writing on clay tablets).
- Women not only originated writing, but also the development of knowledge, including all sorts of technologies, like cooking, baking, technologies for making beer and wine, writing poetry, making music, magic, singing and other religious rituals, the making of cloth, and the healing arts and science.
- Women invented medicine.
- Women started the first schools and universities.
- Women invented science.
- Women invented song and poetry. One of the greatest writers of this time, the Shakespeare of the Sumerian times was a female poet, Enheduanna, daughter of King Sargon (2350 BCE). She was quoted for hundreds of years. A lot of her poetry still survives today.

The female society, which in all human and non-human primate societies is generally more extensive and cohesive than for males, passed this knowledge down and it grew over the centuries. Males tended to play roles that involved mostly farming. The actual power and knowledge of females in our parent cultures must have been enormous.

So we owe an enormous debt to women who created so many fine things at the very start of our culture.

The 700 years of Sumerian and Akkadian history is a story of the end of a partnership of Gods and Goddesses, which led—in those civilizations—to the domination of the male Gods over the female Goddesses. This was followed by a diminishing of women's status and the rise of warfare, leading to the eventual demise of these ancient cultures. Women had originally been enormously powerful in our civilization, and the subsequent male domination of women was extracted at tremendous cost. This cost included de-valuing areas of life related to family and domesticity, like the life of individual infants. The feminine in nature, spirituality, and personal relationships became de-valued.

We are living through a renewed dialectic with this ancient struggle. The outcome of the dialectic is unknown at this point, but John Gottman believes that the future of our species will depend on it.

Peggy Sanday, in a brilliant book, entitled, "Female Power and Male Dominance," studied 186 human hunter-gatherer cultures. She found no female-dominant hunter-gatherer cultures. There were only male dominant cultures and cultures where power was shared between men and women. First, in all but nine cultures there was very clear gender role specialization in the jobs that men and women held. This means that in almost all cultures there were men's jobs and women's jobs, and these were very separate. But, here's an interesting result: Gender role specialization did not necessarily imply male dominance. This only happened about half the time.

Sanday also studied cultures that had moved from male dominance to more equality, and vice-versa. She found that when cultures moved in either direction these five factors accompanied the change.

- In male dominant cultures food was quite scarce and daily life was hard. There was often a lot of danger.
- The culture hunted large game, almost always a male activity. Large game was always more valued than other food sources.
- In more equalitarian cultures, food was more plentiful, the environmental conditions were not as harsh, and food was obtained primarily by gathering and hunting small game (something both men and women did).
- In more equalitarian cultures, men participated in the care and the raising of infants. Not *children*, mind you, but infants. This is critical.
- There was strong female representation in the symbols of the sacred in the culture, especially the culture's creation myths.

John Gottman believes we are living through a similar cultural transformation today. Here is the evidence:

- In our culture food is generally plentiful, and the environmental conditions are not very harsh.
- In most places there is little direct danger from predators. There are professional police systems.
- Our culture does not hunt large game, it gathers food in grocery stores, and both men and women are allowed to do this.
- Today more men participate and are interested in participating in the care and the raising of infants. The participation of men in Lamaze classes, diapering, feeding, and classes in how to play with babies is increasing world-wide (especially in Sweden).
- College men today are much more interested in being better fathers and in taking family life courses and courses on relationships.
- There is an increasingly strong female representation in the symbols of the sacred in the culture, especially our culture's creation myths. The Women's Movement has assisted in this transformation. This is not happening in the fundamentalist portions of today's religions but it is happening outside of that. The *New York Times* Sunday Magazine had a section on female icons in the USA. *Life* Magazine recently ran a cover issue on the Virgin Mary. Ideas about Mary have changed for many Catholics. She now plays an active role in the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel asks her if she will take upon herself the role of being the mother of Christ. Many Catholics pray directly to the Virgin Mary and ask for compassion and forgiveness. National Conservative and Reform Judaism movements have rewritten prayer books to emphasize the female in the sacred. The matriarchs are now valued in prayer books, not just the Patriarchs, and the female spirit of God, which Jews call the Sheckina, is now emphasized.

We are living in the midst of a world-wide revolution in women's rights. This process is attempting to right the enormous imbalance that has existed in human culture for so long and it is affecting the family throughout the world. Some places are going slower than others, and some are regressive, but the process is inevitable. As women become economically and psychologically empowered, it is very important for both men and women to realize that women's life dreams deserve to be honored, if only for the psychological health of relationships with women.

Unfortunately, we have found that women are all too willing to give up their dreams for the sake of relationships. Also, society promotes the idea that a woman's dreams, if they are not about being a daughter, a mother, a sister, or a wife, are frivolous and unimportant. Women feel bad for having these dreams. But what they have to learn is that honoring their own dreams will also help their relationships.

**Accepting influence
is all about
honor and respect.**

Now we are going to work on compromise on your problem area and help you try to make some headway.

● ● ● 3:15–3:30 p.m.

Break

MANAGE CONFLICT

SKILL #6: COMPROMISE

• • • 3:35–4:25 p.m.

Presentation and Exercise 13

- Practice Physiological Self-Soothing
 - Use Gentle Start-up
 - Repair and De-Escalate
 - Listen to Your Partner's Underlying Feelings and Dreams
 - Accept Influence
- ⇒ **Compromise**

No one can tell you how to arrange things in your own relationship so that you each feel that your dreams on this problem are being honored. You have to do this work on your own, and in your own way. But remember, the goal is not to fix this problem. In a Perpetual Problem the goal is DIALOGUE instead of GRIDLOCK.

In this next exercise working with your Perpetual Gridlocked Problem, you will continue to work toward moving from gridlock to dialogue. In this exercise, we are introducing the concept of Compromise into the dialogue. It is important to remember that this problem will probably never go away completely in your relationship. Instead, the idea is to work to more deeply understand one another's point of view, feelings, beliefs and dreams behind the issue, and to search for some small area within the Perpetual Problem where you might be able to reach a temporary compromise.

The Art of Compromise

To make compromise work, we have to feel safe. To do that, we need to first decide what we *can't* compromise on. We identify our CORE needs in our problem area, the parts that we are inflexible on. By identifying this in the beginning, we won't inadvertently accept compromise that gives away something essential to us.

For this to work it helps to adopt the Aikido principle: Yield to Win. In the Japanese martial art Aikido the idea is that direct opposition, two forces opposed, is a big mistake. We must yield to win. The truth for relationships is this:

REMEMBER
You can only
be influential
if you accept
influence

► EXERCISE 13

Compromise (30 minutes)

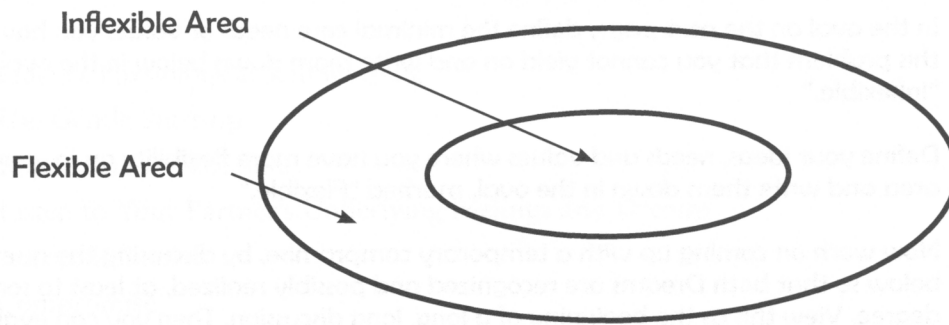
Instructions: Discuss your problem using the following three steps:

- Step 1:** In the oval on the next page, define the minimal core needs or values you have about this problem that you cannot yield on and write them down below in the oval, marked "Inflexible."
- Step 2:** Define your ideas, needs and values where you have more flexibility on in your problem area and write them down in the oval, marked "Flexible."
- Step 3:** Now work on coming up with a temporary compromise, by discussing the questions below so that both Dreams are recognized and possibly realized, at least to some degree. View this as the beginning of a long, long discussion. Then you can evaluate your compromise after a time and see where you are on the problem later.

REMEMBER

**Compromise never feels perfect.
Everyone gains something and
everyone loses something in a
compromise. The important thing is
feeling understood, respected and
honored in your dream.**

COMPROMISE OVALS



NOTES:

My Inflexible Area or Core Need on this problem is:

My More Flexible Areas on this problem are:

Getting to “Yes”: The Art of Compromise

Yield To Win: *Compromise With Me Like I Am Someone You Love*

You can view a compromise as a temporary experiment you can revisit after some period of time.

Discuss these questions with your partner:

- What feelings do we have in common?
- What core goals or dreams do we have in common?
- How might these goals be accomplished?
- Help me understand your flexible areas.
- What flexible areas do we have in common?
- How can I help to meet your core needs?
- What temporary compromise can we reach on this problem?

Our compromise that honors both our dreams is:

● ● ● 4:20–4:25 p.m.

Process Exercise

MAKE LIFE DREAMS COME TRUE

● ● ● 4:25–4:30 p.m. **Presentation**

We've been talking about accepting influence from each other and working towards compromise. These skills help us with conflict management. But they also form the building blocks for making our life dreams come true. Conflict discussions can offer you the opportunity for understanding each other and for uncloaking your own values and dreams. When you really listen to one another and explore underlying dreams within your positions on a problem you get to see who your partner really is—what their dreams are deep inside. You have an opportunity—you can choose to help your partner's dreams come true by finding a way to honor their dreams. This doesn't mean giving up your own dreams. But hopefully, through the skills of accepting influence and compromise, you can keep working on ways to honor you and your partner and make both of your dreams, in some way, come true.

CREATE SHARED MEANING

• • • 4:30–4:50 p.m.

Presentation and Exercise 14

Consider the story of Alfred Nobel and the creation of the Nobel Prizes. In 1888, Alfred's brother, Ludvig, died while visiting Cannes and a French newspaper erroneously published Alfred's obituary. It condemned him for his invention of dynamite and is said to have brought about his decision to leave a better legacy after his death. The obituary stated "Le marchand de la mort est mort" ("The merchant of death is dead") and went on to say, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." Alfred was disappointed with what he read and concerned with how he would be remembered.

► EXERCISE 14

Mission and Legacy (15 minutes)

On the blank paper in the back of the manual, spend some time individually answering the following questions. It's OK to just write an outline or jot down notes.

In your lifetime:

- What are you trying to accomplish?
- What is your dream?
- What is your life mission?
- How do you want to be remembered when you're gone?

After completing your writing, share your answers with your partner and discuss:

What changes might you make in your relationship to accomplish your dreams/life's mission?

SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE OVERVIEW

STATE OF THE UNION MEETING AND THE MAGIC FIVE AND A HALF HOURS A WEEK

• • • 4:50–5:00 p.m. **Presentation and Summary**

Sound Relationship House Levels: Overview

State of the Union Meeting

The purpose of the State of the Union Meeting is to commit one hour a week to talk about the relationship. Pick a time that will be sacred for both of you.

Our time each week (fill in your time): _____

Use the following format for your State of the Union Meeting:

1. Start with what is going right in the relationship.
2. Give one another five appreciations each.
3. Select an issue to talk about, or process a regrettable incident using the conflict blueprint: (1) Gentle start-up — “I feel,” in what situation, and “I need.” (2) Accept influence. (3) Repair and de-escalate. (4) Soothe self and one another. (5) Compromise — two ovals.

The Magic Five and a Half Hours a Week: Other Suggestions We Have

Partings

Don't part in the morning without knowing one interesting thing that will happen in your partner's day. The six-second kiss. 2 minutes a day for 5 working days. Total 10 minutes.

Reunions

The six-second kiss. The stress-reducing conversation. Each take 10 minutes to talk about your day. Partner does active listening. This is the proper place for it. Give support. Rule: Understanding must precede advice. 20 minutes a day for 5 days. Total 1 hour 40 minutes.

Admiration & Appreciation

Find some way every day to genuinely communicate affection and appreciation toward your partner. 5 minutes a day for 7 days. Total 35 minutes.

Affection

Kiss, hold, grab, touch each other. Play is good. Make sure to kiss each other before going to sleep and follow the admonition in Ephesians, “Do not let the sun set on your wrath.” The six-second kiss. 5 minutes/day for 7 days. Total 35 minutes.

Love Maps

Update your love maps. Turn toward one another. *Have a marital date.* Think of great questions to ask your partner (e.g., “How are you thinking of changing the bedroom these days?” or “What would be your idea of a great getaway?” or “How are you thinking about your work these days?”). These dates can sometimes be about resolving a marital issue. Total 2 hours

Aftermath of a Fight

For the first few months after the workshop, consider practicing an Aftermath of a Fight once a week. We encourage you use it with smaller disagreements so that you can get the hang of the six steps encompassed in the process. Remember that the Masters of Marriage rarely use all six steps at the same time. John Gottman created this process for the purpose of learning all six steps. Do this process twenty times and you'll find yourself incorporating different aspects of it spontaneously while discussing an area of disagreement (e.g., listening and validating your partner's subjective reality, or catching if one of you is flooded or taking responsibility for some piece of the issue.) Total 30 minutes

Our Motto is:
Small Things Often

*It's the small positive things done often
 that make the difference.*

REMEMBER

The goal of the workshop was to
start you on the beginning of a journey.

We are trying to change your path.

Even making just a small and gentle change
 on the trajectory of your relationship can have
 a dramatic, positive effect over time.

• • • 4:55–5:00 p.m.

Day Two Evaluation

SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF MAJOR POINTS

We want to congratulate you and thank you for honoring your relationship by investing your time and energy in enhancing it. We know that these brief exercises did not give you adequate time to solve all the problems and issues in your relationship; however, research shows that it's the healthy process of *how* you relate that makes relationships succeed, not how many problems you solve.

Research has also shown that if one does not continue to put energy into a relationship, it deteriorates. In truth, you have to put energy into a relationship to just keep it where it is. For it to improve, you have to put even more energy into it.

This information is based on over thirty years of scientific research. By studying the masters and the disasters of relationships—across various life spans and over many years—these ideas have evolved.

What Predicts Divorce or Continued Relationship Misery?

I. **Positive to Negative Ratios**

The couples who are happy in their relationships have a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative *during conflict discussions*; and a 20:1 positive to negative ratio when just hanging out.

Conclusion: Relationships have to be a very rich climate of positivity to feel good: lots of kindness, attention, interest in one another, affection, humor, good sex, and so on.

II. **The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and Their Antidotes**

Criticism:

Complaining as if there is something defective in your partner's personality.

Antidote: Use Gentle Start-up. Complain, don't criticize.

Defensiveness:

Self protective responses, warding off an attack.

Two types—Righteous indignation or innocent victimhood.

Antidote: Accept responsibility, even for a small part of the problem.

Contempt:

Speaking from a superior plane, a holier-than-thou position.

Basic Rule: No contempt! It is sulfuric acid for love and for the immune system.

Antidote: Create a culture of appreciation in the relationship and use a gentle start-up. Change mind set to scanning for things to appreciate instead of things to criticize. Don't be involved in your partner's mistakes. Catch your partner doing something right. Give praise.

Stonewalling:

Listener withdrawal from interaction, emotional disengagement.

Antidote: Self soothe, take breaks.

What the Masters of Relationship Are Doing to Keep Their Relationships Strong

1. One central concept in all of this: REPAIR

- Communication is like baseball. 70% of it is miscommunication.
- Need to be able to “process” it later—to have a recovery conversation.
- Processing it means being able to talk about it without getting back into negativity, and finding a way to make the next conversation on that topic better (**Aftermath of a Fight**).

What makes repair work?

Answer: The Positive Perspective, which means when the couple does a cost/benefit analysis of their relationship, the benefits win out. Then they're in a positive perspective. If you don't have a chip on your shoulder, you won't take it personally if your partner is irritable or says something crabby. When a couple is in the negative perspective, one will perceive even things said very sweetly as being negative.

You cannot get somebody to be in the positive perspective if they're in the negative perspective. People are in the negative perspective for good reason. It's because there's something wrong with the friendship in the marriage. They don't feel like their partner is their ally. They don't feel their partner is really on their side; they don't feel respected or understood. They don't feel that their partner is really interested in them. There's not much affection going on. They feel rejected; there's not much romance or passion or good sex in the relationship.

2. **A gentler approach to conflict.** The masters of marriage approached conflict in a much gentler way than the disasters did. (**Gentle Start-up**)
3. **Responding differently to Perpetual, Gridlocked and Solvable conflicts.** 69% of all relationship conflict in a relationship is Perpetual, due to personality or lifestyle differences between people. If you were with someone else you wouldn't have those issues; you would have another set of Perpetual Problems. Solvable Problems occur 31% of the time.

People are either in **dialogue** about Perpetual Problems or in **Gridlock**. When a process of dialogue is used, it doesn't mean the problem is solved; instead people don't feel rejected by their partner. In contrast, in Gridlock they do feel rejected. The main issue in conflict is how to move people from Gridlock to dialogue on Perpetual Problems.

The Sound Relationship House Theory

The positive perspective is related to the first three levels being strong. The three levels are:

I. **Build Love Maps**

A love map is a road map of your partner's inner psychological world. This is the most basic level in building friendship. It's about feeling known in the relationship, feeling like your partner is interested in knowing you and your partner feeling that you are interested in knowing her or him. This level is strengthened by asking open-ended questions that you want to know the answer to. When people ask questions, it's an invitation.

II. **Share Fondness and Admiration**

This is about affection and respect in the relationship. Create a habit of mind that scans your world for things to admire, appreciate and be proud of in your partner. Your fondness, respect and admiration needs to be expressed verbally or nonverbally, not remain hidden. Catch your partner doing something right. Say, "Thanks for doing that. I notice you did this and I really appreciate it."

III. **Turn Towards Versus Turning Away or Turning Against**

When people are just kind of hanging out, they actually are stating their needs to one another either nonverbally or verbally all the time. They're making bids for emotional connection. This is a fundamental unit of connection, of emotional connection. These tiny moments of emotional connection really form a bank account, an Emotional Bank Account that either gets larger or depleted over time.

Manage External Stress with Stress-Reducing Conversations

Men and emotion: Get rid of the negative emotion and keep the ball in play. Solve problems so that the negative emotions will go away. Give advice, problem solve.

Women and emotion: Explore all the feelings and understand one another. Make sure understanding is central.

Rule: Understanding Must Precede Advice

Speaker's job: to talk about that stress as openly and as honestly as possible.

Listener's job: The listener needs to: Show genuine interest by asking questions, questions like "What makes that so upsetting for you?" or "Tell me more about it, when did that start happening?" Show genuine interest and communicate. So they might be something like "Wow, this is really amazing stuff. You know, tell me more about it." Or "That really is so sad." Or "Gosh, I could see how that would really make you angry" or "Hmm, boy that sounds pretty scary." The listener is expressing the feeling they hear the speaker saying.

If you don't know what the feeling is, ask. "So how does that make you feel?" Solidarity comes up by saying something like "This is our problem—I'm behind you on this—and we'll face it together."

AFTER UNDERSTANDING can come problem solving and advice. This honors both the male and the female style.

Don't side with the enemy, even if you somewhat agree with the enemy. The stress-reducing conversation isn't the place to raise issues.

Fundamental law of bids and Turning Towards

You don't need to have high standards. Turning toward works--it leads to more turning toward. So start small. It will build over time.

Fundamental process

Increasing awareness and mindfulness about how your partner makes bids. See the longing behind a bid that may sound a bit negative or unclear.

IV. The Positive Perspective

The strength of the first three levels of the SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE affects the way people interact when they disagree. They actually have a lot more access to their patience, their humor, their affection, when discussing an area of disagreement, all the positive things that make it possible to live together in a much more constructive and creative way. This is about earning and building up points. The first three levels of the Sound Relationship House are fundamental for being able to have access to positive emotions during times of disagreement.

Romance, Passion and Great Sex

The other thing that Gottman discovered—but wasn't expecting—was that these three levels of the Sound Relationship House are the basis for romance, passion and good sex.

V. Manage Conflict

Process a Fight or Misunderstanding

Remember that in any miscommunication or fight:

- There are two subjective realities, both are right.
- Instead of trying to persuade your partner of your reality, it's your job to find out your partner's subjective reality.

Use the **Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident** as your guide to process it and make it better next time.

Use the Six Skills for Managing Conflict:

1. Practice Physiological Self-Soothing.

- When partners practice self-soothing, diffuse physiological arousal (DPA) is minimized.
- Conflict discussions are less escalated, gentler, and therefore safer.
- Physiological self-soothing helps the relationship become a port in the storm, and not the storm itself.

2. Use Gentle Start-up.

Use the rules for gentle start-up:

- Take the blame out of the complaining
- Start sentences with “I” instead of “You”. “I feel upset. I feel anxious. I feel angry. I feel frustrated.”
- Describe what is happening without evaluation or judgment. Use neutral statements.
- Talk clearly and positively about what you need (versus what you don’t need).
- Be polite.
- Give appreciations.
- Don’t store things up. You want to bring up complaints, but when you do, bring them up just a little bit at a time.

3. Use No-Fault Arguing. Repair and De-escalate.

- Don’t waste time trying to lay blame.
- Drop past resentments.
- Practice forgiveness. The quality of mercy is not strained.

Use the Repair Checklist if there are any negative feelings that emerge.

4. Listen to Your Partner’s Underlying Feelings and Dreams.

- Each of you presents your subjective reality on the issue.
- Try to listen to your partner’s viewpoints and see the logic of his or her perception.
- Don’t try to solve the problem yet.
- Just make sure you’re on the same page, with some emotional understanding and acceptance.

5. Accept Influence.

- You cannot be powerful in a relationship unless you are capable of being influenced
- Yield to win.

6. Compromise.

- Identify the core areas you can not yield on.
- Identify areas of greater flexibility. Where, when, and how things will be done. What is your common ground? What are our guiding feelings, common values and goals?
- Arrive at a compromise solution. It is a temporary experiment.

The Differences between Gridlocked, Perpetual, and Solvable Problems

Solvable Problems can be about the exact same topics that could be perpetual problems for a different couple. A solvable problem within a relationship is about something situational. The conflict really is simply about that topic, without a deeper meaning behind the position. A solution can be found and maintained.

Perpetual Problems are problems that center on either fundamental differences in your two personalities, or fundamental differences in your life style needs. All couples have perpetual problems. The issues can seemingly be about the exact same topics as what for another couple might be solvable; but unlike a solvable problem, these are the problems that a couple will return to over and over and over again.

Gridlocked Perpetual Problems are perpetual problems that have been mishandled and have essentially calcified into something quite uncomfortable. When a couple is Gridlocked over an issue, whenever they try to discuss it, it feels like they are ‘spinning their wheels’, getting nowhere. They’ll have the same conversation over and over and over again, making little if any headway on it. There is no possibility of compromise. Over time people become more and more entrenched in their positions, more polarized and more extreme. Conversations on this issue lead to frustration and hurt. There’s very little shared humor or amusement or affection or giving appreciation when you talk about this problem. People start vilifying one another. In Gridlocked conflicts, people feel basically rejected by their partner. They feel like their partner doesn’t even like them when they are talking about that issue. The nature of gridlock is that underlying hidden agendas have developed.

A component of relational Gridlock is that usually both people feel criticized, rejected and unaccepted by their partner.

When you think it’s a Solvable Problem but it’s not—it’s Gridlocked.

Compromise seems impossible. Emotions run high. People get flooded. There seems to be no progress. What to do? *Go to Dreams Within Conflict.*

Dealing with Gridlocked Perpetual Problems

Move From Gridlock to Dialogue: Dreams Within Conflict.

CAN’T COMPROMISE?

You May Have A Gridlocked Perpetual Problem.

Principles of Perpetual Problems:

- Within every complaint there is a longing.
- Within every person's position there is a recipe.
- In gridlocked conflict within each person's position there is a hidden LIFE. DREAM that has deep symbolic and philosophical meaning to that person.
- That meaning is very core to the self.
- It has a story behind it.
- It usually has a history to it.

Release the Dreams and Make the Relationship Safe

Take turns being the Speaker (Dream Thrower) and the Listener (Dream Catcher).
(Use the Dreams Within Conflict Process.)

Flooding & Taking Breaks

Flooding is what often escalates quarrels.

**Flooding is the first step of the
Distance and Isolation Cascade.**

Negative Emotions/Flooding →

Dismissed by partner →

Four Horsemen →

Emotional Disengagement & Loneliness →

Parallel Lives →

Dissolution

Learn to know when you are flooded.

Ask for a time out, a break.

Being Flooded

It's a state of mind. You feel like you'd rather be anywhere on the planet than in this room talking to this person. You feel overwhelmed and disorganized by the negativity. You hate the way your body feels.

Physiology

Only sometimes does physiological arousal accompany Flooding. The state of mind is the most important cue. If your heart rate is above 100 beats a minute, or if you are an athlete make that 80 beats a minute, you are probably in Diffuse Physiological Arousal (DPA), which sometimes accompanies Flooding. Above those heart rates your body has started secreting adrenaline, and lots of systems are firing. You will get a Tunnel Vision, so that you can not process information very well, you can't be a creative problem solver, you will want to withdraw or become more aggressive, to shut down the negativity.

Solutions

- Take a break. Make it an okay ritual in your relationship. Use the hand signal you agreed upon in the workshop. Always let your partner take a break if asked for.
- It must last at least 20 minutes.
- Do something relaxing, like taking a walk or a bath.
- Do not rehearse thoughts that maintain distress. These are thoughts of righteous indignation or innocent victim hood.
- Do something that soothes you.

VI. Make Life Dreams Come True

- Accepting Influence and working towards Compromise are the building blocks for making your life dreams come true.
- Conflict discussions can offer the opportunity for understanding each other and uncloaking your own values and dreams.
- Keep working on ways to honor you and your partner and make both of your dreams, in some way, come true.

VII. Create Shared Meaning

- Write the mission and legacy statement for your own life. You can do this over and over again. After completing your writing, share your answers with your partner and discuss.
- What are you trying to accomplish? What is your dream? What legacy would you like to leave this world with?

VIII. Trust

Trust is the state that occurs when a person knows that his or her partner acts and thinks to maximize that person's interests, and maximize that person's benefits, not just the partner's own interests and benefits. In other words, this means, "my partner has my back and is there for me."

IX. Commitment

Commitment means believing (and acting on the belief) that this relationship with this person is completely one's lifelong journey, for better or for worse (meaning that if it gets worse we will both work to improve it). It implies cherishing one's partner's positive qualities and nurturing gratitude about what one has with this person by comparing one's partner favorably with real or imagined others, rather than trashing one's partner by magnifying one's partner's negative qualities, and nurturing resentment by comparing one's partner unfavorably with real or imagined others.

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