

## How to build a secure and healthy marital relationship:

Emotional connection and responsiveness to each other is the key to a secure relationship. Steps for building a secure relationship\*:

1. Begin to understand your patterns of interaction—what happens when you disagree? What is the negative cycle between you?
2. What are the sensitive spots for each of you? Do you recognize your partner's needs and raw spots and support them?
3. De-escalate your conflict and remain open and attentive to your partner and show caring even if you disagree.
4. Develop positive patterns. Negative cycles need to be replaced by positive cycles of support, mutual appreciation, affection and caring.
5. Forgive injuries: Are you both able to forgive past mistakes and build new ways of interacting?
6. Nourishing your physical intimacy and building trust and connection?
7. Deposit positive experiences in the bank of love and affection so that when distress occurs and you want to count on your partner, you have made sufficient investments.

*Cherishing each other and the emotional connection will help it to grow. Supporting each other to be the best and the most that they can be allows the family to flourish to reach its best potential.*

\*Based on research done by Sue Johnson developer of EFT

\*\*Based on research done by John Gottman

## Conflict is inevitable: Repair is critical

We are different people and differences between partners are inevitable. We do not come with owner's manuals and so there will be times in our relationships that we will disagree or make mistakes that lead to conflict .

*Successful relationships are able to repair ruptures that naturally arise. If repair is successful, the relationship will actually deepen over time.*

Learn to resolve conflicts effectively and repair the relationship by\*\*:

1. Being open to making and receiving repair by conversing openly and with mutual respect and caring
2. Soften your approach and start the conversation gently without criticism or contempt
3. Difficult conversations are upsetting and activating. Soothe yourself and your partner by taking frequent breaks, taking deep breaths, using calming techniques, validating the positive aspects of each other, etc.
4. Compromise
5. Accept each other's limitations and recognize strengths

*Strengthening an intimate relationship bond requires a focus on the emotional life of the couple. Sometimes consulting with a professional can be helpful.*

## Emotion Focused Therapy for Couples



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## Building Happiness: Strengthening Intimate Relationships



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## Science supports romantic love

¶ The neurobiology literature suggests that both sexual desire and romantic love stimulate the brain. Both activate the striatum (the brain's pleasure center), yet only romantic love also activates the insula (the part of the brain that organizes and makes sense of our emotions and social connections). Thus, the striatum is responsible for sexual desire and initial attraction, and the insula is responsible for transforming (giving value) to that desire, and turning it (potentially) into love. In other words, love is in our heads and not our hearts!

The "rush" of early love encourages us to become temporarily obsessed and to stay around the other person long enough to form the attachment bonds necessary for sustained love and intimacy.

Lastly, romantic love is based on our ability to value other human being and care about their feelings. Science proves it!

We can build healthy relationships by investing in positive attitudes, behaviors, and emotions.

¶ No relationship is perfect but the good ones can be deeply supportive and last "forever".

¶ Conflict and differences are inevitable in all relationships and repair is needed. Repair can deepen and strengthen a relationship. ¶

*Repair is a skill and can be learned.*

## Developing an effective intimate partnership is key to a successful and happy emotional life.

When we are in healthy relationships we:

- Are happy – have a deep sense of well being and self esteem
- Enjoy optimal physical health
- Feel safe and supported so that we can be creative, innovative, successful, productive and effective in all aspects of our life
- Can be our best self and in touch with our human compassion, capacity to love, generosity and tenderness
- Feel resilient and our capacity to recover from conflicts, repair and maintain good relationships is intact
- Are able to bounce back from untoward events in life that cause loss, trauma, anxiety or distress

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## Attachment and primal panic

*Attachment Theory informs us that we are hardwired to attach to intimate others.*

¶ When the attachment and bonding is disrupted or dysfunctional, we feel devastated.

Research also shows that the presence of the following negative attributes in a relationship predict the collapse of the relationship:

- Defensiveness,
- Stonewalling,
- Criticism,
- Contempt

¶ The level of negative sentiment slowly erodes the positives, so that the relationship becomes too painful to be sustained.

Researchers have argued that distress in the attachment relationship leads to "primal panic" that is experiential rather than "rational," prompting "automatic" and possibly desperate behaviors which can also be maladaptive and hurt the self, our partner and the relationship.

Conflict and distress in our primary intimate relationship with our partner can also cause chronic stress which in turn is linked to:

- Physical health problems such as: hypertension and heart disease, high cholesterol, diabetes and gastrointestinal distress
- Mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, or substance abuse
- Family distress with negative outcomes for our children

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## A successful relationship requires emotional skills:

*A couple shares an emotional bond.*

We don't always have a lot of training in how to recognize and express our emotions effectively and how to empathize with our partners and support them.

*Learning these skills is possible and can enhance our lives.*

