

Foundations

Spring

Building and Mending a Marriage

We live in a world of opposing forces. We want to limit our food intake and also cook delicious meals made with calorie rich ingredients. We want to save money for retirement and also buy a house here and now. We want to have our children grow and be better able to take care of themselves, but when they do we mourn the loss of our “babies.”

Individual Needs vs Couple Needs

In the same vein, we know that we need to have a secure and healthy sense of self, yet we also need to modify some of our own individual rights in order to be a couple. Just like athletes need to develop their own skills and also learn to play together as a team, we need to be healthy, autonomous people who can freely give up that autonomy for the good of a marriage.

Reconciling Differences

No two people are completely compatible 100% of the time. That’s why it is so important to spend some time developing the skills of conflict resolution. We will have disagreements and if we want to be able to successfully resolve them, then we need some tools. Luckily, relationship experts have spent a lot of time and energy on creating tools to help us get along. This edition of *Foundations* will feature some of that wisdom in the hopes that one piece of advice or



another may sound like something useful for you.

Building That Toolbox

Of course, we are not building that set of resources from scratch. We already have ways to solve conflicts. We learned them in the home we were raised in. We learned others when we went out to play in the neighborhood or the schoolyard. We picked up more in our jobs. And some of them might actually be helpful – but often the skills we come to our relationship with are not the ones that are most helpful in this very close relationship that we are planning to have endure for a lifetime...

His and Hers Toolboxes

...because in all likelihood your partner has come with a different set of tools. Boys and girls, growing up, are often expected to resolve conflicts in different ways, ways that are often not exactly complementary. Then we get married and spend the rest of our lives figuring out how to mesh two systems and by golly, most of us DO figure it out!

A Job Worth Doing

So collect your tools. Just think of yourselves as Erin and Ben Napier, or Chip and Joanna Gaines, only you’re not building houses. You’re out to build a masterpiece, a lifelong, healthy happy marriage.

Love and Anger

Many people have spent years trying to control their angry feelings, when these feelings are not even completely under the control of the conscious mind. Anger is a primitive response to something we perceive as a danger. We are not responsible for getting angry. We are responsible for what we do with our anger after it is aroused.

Responses to Anger

1. *We can act on it*, or vent it by hitting or threatening or yelling or accusing. These painful ways to express anger don't produce good results. If we come at our spouse with one of these responses, they have only two choices. They can fight back or run away, neither of which is particularly helpful in solving the problems that aroused the anger in the first place.

Hide It

2. *We can suppress our anger*. In this way we don't face up to our differences. We decide not to respond to the thing that made us angry. We may decide that it's not worth the time or energy it's going to take to unravel it. We'll just let it go. The trouble with this approach is that the next time a similar irritation occurs, we're likely to be twice as angry. Now we see it as a pattern, and when we point it out we're likely to say, "You always..." or "You never..." Often suppressed anger may lead to other bodily responses, such as headaches or indigestion.

Work it Through

3. *We can process the anger*. After we've cooled down, we can sit down and decide what we could have done differently to prevent the irritation, or what could be done in the future to prevent that situation from disrupting us again. We look at all the possible ways of solving the situation and decide what we can both live with.

Take a Break

4. *We can step away and calm down*. Something researchers tell us is that we can't feel love and anger at the same time. When we're feeling love we can't be angry and when we're angry we can't be loving. That is why it is important to resolve differences after the feelings of anger have subsided. When we are relaxed and there is a chance for love to assert itself again, we can come to a conclusion that is in the best interests of us both.



What do you Think?

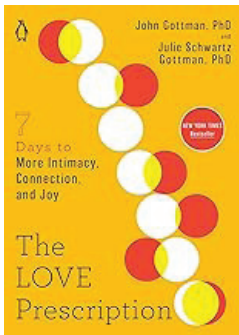
What's your first reaction when you get angry? What do you think your spouse's reaction is? Can you think of a time when you were able to resolve an issue that made you angry and you felt good about the way the two of you handled it? Do you need to apologize for something you said the last time you lost your temper?

A graphic with a dark background. It features three horizontal arrows pointing to the right. The top arrow is green and contains the text "marriage is a journey". The middle arrow is blue and contains the text "prepare like it's the trip of your dreams". The bottom arrow is a darker blue and contains the text "six online Zoom sessions can be your roadmap". To the right of the arrows is a pair of gold wedding rings. At the bottom of the graphic, the text "Sign up at snkpublishers.us/marriage-preparation" is displayed.

Meet the Researchers

The internet is full of advice – some good and based on valid studies, and others not so much. Here is a guide to some of the people we believe have valuable information to share.

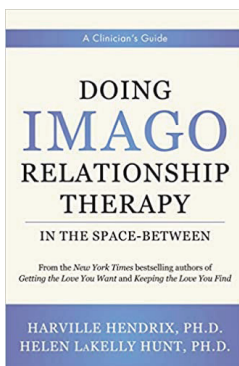
Gottman Tips



Have you heard of John Gottman? He is probably the best known researcher of marriage and relationships in this country. Here are a couple of his tips:

Things to avoid – what he calls the four horsemen of the apocalypse – are contempt, criticism, stonewalling, and defensiveness. Avoiding these four pitfalls really increases your chances of coming to a resolution of your conflict. John and Julie Gottman's recent book, "The Love Prescription" provides helpful exercises to build negotiation skills.

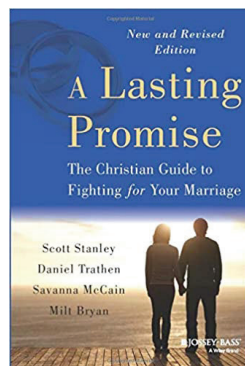
Harville and Helen Hendrix



This couple is best known for a kind of therapy called imago therapy. Their basic advice to married couples is to "be" the right partner. Rather than

finding the right partner try to be the right partner by listening carefully so you are sure you are hearing what your partner is trying to say, taking turns so one doesn't dominate the conversation, and see conflict as a chance to grow in your relationship.

Scott Stanley

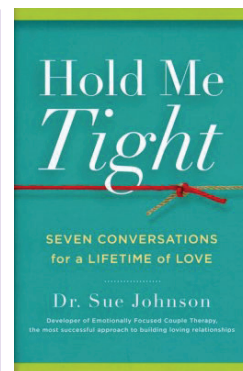


Scott Stanley and Howard Markman developed a tool called PREP, which is a program that teaches marital skills. They found through their research that

learning skills to handle conflict was one way couples could change the direction of the marriage. Whereas you can't change outside factors, like whether your parents got divorced, you can change the way you talk, the way you share disagreements. Stanley's techniques are also presented in a Christian format in his book, *A Lasting Promise*.

Sue Johnson

This therapist, who works in Canada, has developed a kind of therapy

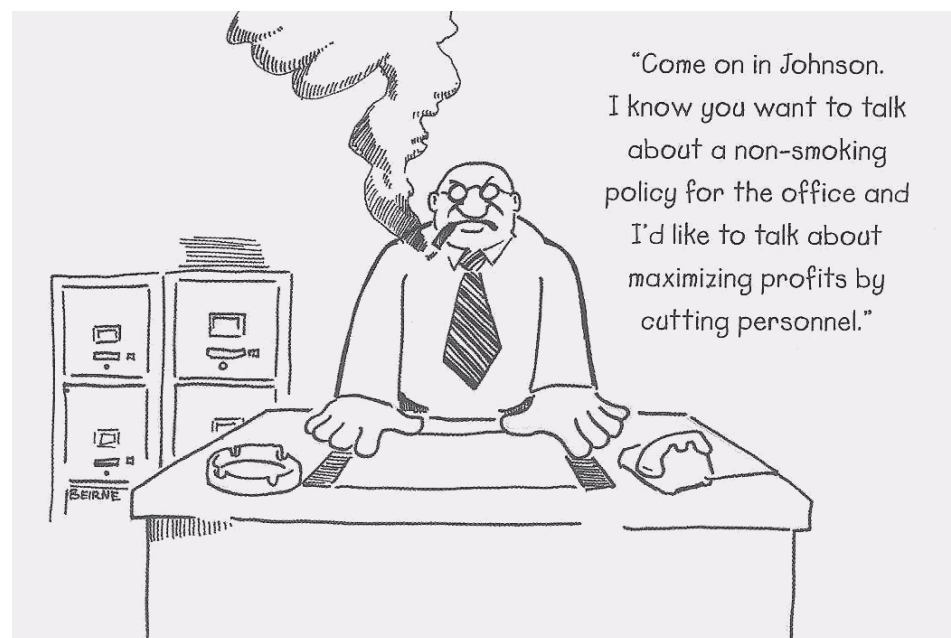


called EFT, or emotionally focused therapy. This is what she has to say about her own work. "I research how relationships can be repaired, how the bonds of love work, and how

people change in psychotherapy." She believes that attachment is the basic way humans are meant to connect. Her book, *Hold Me Tight*, gives both information and exercises you can do.

What do you think?

Where do you get advice about marriage? Do you look at articles or books on marriage or talk to friends? What is the best self help book you have read? If you wanted to change something about how you resolve conflict in your marriage how would you go about it?



Looking for the Love Reason

Conflicts often begin with a complaint.

"I hate it when you come home late."

"Why don't you ever spend time with me?"

"You spent money on that?"

The program known as Relationship Enhancement, has a suggestion for presenting our complaints in a different way – a way that may help our spouse listen and understand instead of feeling attacked and defensive. Their suggestion is to look for the love reason behind the complaint. The creators of that approach to healthy relationships believe that behind a complaint is often a concern that arises out of love.

In the first instance, a spouse may have been concerned for their partner's safety. They may have been imagining a traffic accident, or a mugging, or some other situation that put the other person's safety at risk. The way they expressed their fear, however, was in the form of an attack. Even though most of us carry cell phones these days, there are the times when your cell phone dies, or you're out of range. Instead, bringing it up as an expression of concern rather than anger defuses the complaint.

The second complaint is likely a bid for more couple time, and a remembrance of how good it felt when the two of them dated. Bringing it up in that context, hearkening back to the walks they took, the times they played board games, the projects they did together taps into the love reason



behind the complaint.

In the third instance, the spouse might want financial security for the marriage, and worries that spending money on non-essentials will make it harder to have a nest egg.

The next time you are tempted to raise a complaint to your spouse, try to think about a possible love reason for the complaint. The interesting thing is that it not only is likely to keep your spouse from reacting badly, but you may find that it softens your attitude toward them too. You are tapping into the love reason behind your current grievance, motivating you to enter into a conversation rather than a debate.

Love Tank

Dr. Gary Chapman is most famous for his theory about the Five Love Languages, and truly, that information has helped countless couples communicate better. But another aspect of his work is the concept of the love tank.

Dr. Chapman talks about our need to feel loved, and he likens it to a 'love tank' inside of us that needs to be kept filled. When our feelings of being loved are not present, then our ability to BE loving is diminished. His experience with hundreds, if not thousands of couples, is that there is such a yearning to feel love that it

supersedes pretty much everything else in a relationship.

Dr. Chapman claims, "I am convinced that keeping the emotional love tank full is as important to a marriage as maintaining the proper oil level is to an automobile, Running your marriage on an empty 'love tank' may cost you even more than trying to drive your car without oil."

So what should we do about this? Recognize when you feel like your love tank is low, and ask your partner for some sign of love. For us, it's a hug. We ask each other for a hug if we know we are running low on positive energy.

Exercise

I know/understand:

My parents fought a lot.

We fight more than we like.

We argue about the same thing over and over.

Fighting doesn't mean our marriage is in trouble.

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I believe:

We have gotten better at resolving conflict.

We are able to compromise to solve some differences.

It is not good to argue in front of our children.

We have a tough time apologizing after we fight.

Physical and verbal abuse is always wrong.

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I will:

Never use divorce as a threat when we fight.

Ask for help if we can't resolve our differences.

Take time out to cool down if I'm feeling very angry during arguments.

Try to avoid the "silent treatment" when we argue.

Agree	Disagree	Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Each go through the questions and put down your answer privately. After you read each other's answers check off the ones you don't agree on and set some time aside to discuss them.

No Museum Keeping

This suggestion comes from Marriage Encounter, a marriage retreat movement that was very popular in the 70's and 80's. The idea is very simple but not necessarily very easy. If you get into a conflict and one of you apologizes and the other one accepts the apology then the slate is wiped clean.

The apology has to be sincere. It doesn't count if you just casually say "Sorry," and move on. The forgiveness also has to be truly sincere, and thoughtful. There are certainly times when it takes some reflection and maybe even discussion for a partner to be able to say, "I forgive you."

We have found this an invaluable tool in our own marriage, especially because one of us has a better memory than the other. It has been a great equalizer. The one with the good memory does not get to hold past faults over the head over the other. Old grievances are not museum pieces that are kept on display forever.



Using Prayer to Solve Conflicts

Many of us who plant our feet in a faith tradition do use prayer for times of distress. When someone we love is sick or when we face a job loss, we often ask God's help, or one of the saints, or Mary's. How many prayers does St. Anthony receive a day as people try to find lost articles?

Knotty Problems

A devotion to Mary that has only become popular recently is one of Mary, Untier of Knots. This is a very appropriate devotion for those of us who are married, because it started when a young nobleman asked a priest to help him sort out a conflict between him and his wife. They were headed toward a divorce, but the man met to pray with the priest several times.

Smoothing out Troubles

The last time, he brought with him a ribbon that had been used at his wedding to tie the couple together. As the story goes, the priest lifted it up to a painting of Mary and the ribbon became untied. The couple reconciled, and a painting was commissioned that represented Mary, taking a knotted ribbon from one angel and presenting a straightened ribbon to another. (You can read more about the story [here](#)).

Pray Your Way to Resolution

A reflection on the ways prayer helps us during conflict appeared in [Mediate](#). In the article, the author talks about the different ways to use prayer to help in conflictual situations. He says we can pray to let go of our anger, or we can pray to see God's will in going forward. Also, we can pray for the person we're in conflict with.

When that person is our spouse, it sounds like a winning strategy. We might want to pray that our partner continues to listen to us so we can come to a common solution. Maybe we want to pray that they forgive us. We could just



We might want to pray that our partner continues to listen to us so we can come to a common solution.

want to pray that they find peace in their heart. Whatever our prayer is, it will not only help them, but it will help us let go of our anger too. "As we ask God to help the person we are at odds with, God is connecting us with them in the spirit realm, which He plans to follow up with by connecting us together in the natural realm (by causing us to be at peace with each other, to build or rebuild relationships)," writes Lester Adams, the author of the mediation article.

With Mary Untier of Knots in our corner and prayer in our arsenal, we are equipped to handle conflicts and maybe even resolve them to the satisfaction of both.

Foundations

A NEWSLETTER FOR MARRIED COUPLES

A publication of S&K Publishers. Contact us by email at: foundationseditor@gmail.com

Copyright 2024 by Foundations. All rights reserved. Written permission must be obtained from Foundations for reprinting and duplicating.