



TURN TOWARDS EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF AWAY

By John Gottman

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LET'S EDUCATE

We continue The Sound Relationship House Series today with the third level of Dr. Gottman's model: **Turn Towards Instead of Away**. The strongest relationships (and homes) are built from the ground up. According to Dr. Gottman's 40+ years of research, one of the greatest predictors of your relationship's success is your ability to turn towards each other, constantly developing your bond by making an effort every day to reach out to your partner and accept their bids for emotional connection. We have found that the majority of fights in relationships are the result of turning away from and against these bids. Turning away and against are related to both **suppressed negativity** (sadness, whining, stonewalling) and being in **the attack-defend mode** (anger, criticism, contempt, defensiveness, belligerence). Playful bids and enthusiastic efforts to turn towards each other result in heightened levels of positivity during conflict discussions. They also help you to build up your emotional bank account, maintain a strong and healthy bond, and bring the fire back into your romance.

When Dr. Gottman asked couples what they thought made their relationships feel more romantic, he heard the following examples: candle-lit dinners, soft music, lovely drives in the country, picnics, and moonlit walks. According to his research on relationships, **none of these things alone** will make your love life better if you are not first connected emotionally.

Turn towards what? Bids for connection

A bid is any attempt from one partner to another for attention, affirmation, affection, or any other positive connection. Bids show up in simple ways, a smile or wink, and more complex ways, like a request for advice or help. In general, women make more bids than men, but in the healthiest relationships, both partners are comfortable making all kinds of bids.

Bids can get tricky, Gottman said, "admittedly I sometimes miss more bids than I don't." Indeed many men struggle in this regard, so it's important to pay attention. Bids usually have a secondary layer — the true meaning behind the words. Call it the difference between text and subtext. A few examples to get your brain going:

DR. JOHN GOTTMAN'S LIST OF MINOR BIDS FOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

01. **Pay attention to what I say.**
"How do I look?" "Did you see that squirrel?!"
02. **Respond to simple requests.**
*"Could you take Pooh for a walk?"
"While you're up, can you grab the salsa?"*
03. **Help or work with me.**
"Let's help Grandma outside."
04. **Show interest or active excitement in my accomplishments.**
"Do you like my drawing?" "How were the cookies?"
05. **Answer my questions or requests for information.**
"Phoebe's on the way, can you give her our address?"
06. **Chat with me.**
"Let me tell you what happened when he came back..."
07. **Share the events of your day with me.**
"What've you been up to?"
08. **Respond to my joke.**
"Did you hear the one about...?"
09. **Help me de-stress.**
"I've been cooking all day, I'm so tired."
10. **Help me problem solve.**
"Greta wants to go on a walk but my foot hurts."
11. **Be affectionate.**
"Come cuddle with me while I read."
12. **Play with me.**
"Let's get the chess board!"
13. **Join me in an adventure.**
"Do you want to explore the woods tomorrow?"
14. **Join me in learning something.**
"Let's go to that ice-skating class!"

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It is important that you learn to recognize bids and that you commit to making them to one another. Make the word **"bids"** part of your conversation and perhaps name your bids toward one another. It's okay to say, **"I'm making a bid for attention now"** as you get to know each other in this early phase of your relationship. Once you start to get intentional about your bids, you can concentrate on "turning towards."

To "miss" a bid is to "turn away." Turning away can be devastating. It's even more devastating than "turning against" or rejecting the bid. Rejecting a bid at least provides the opportunity for continued

engagement and repair. Missing the bid results in diminished bids, or worse, making bids for attention, enjoyment, and affection somewhere else.

How to turn towards? Pay attention to your partner

Turning towards starts with paying attention. Your work on bids will come in handy here. Simply recognizing that a bid has been made opens the door to response. If you've really been paying attention, you'll respond to both the text and the subtext. As bids get more complicated, so will the nature of turning toward. For now, start simple. Take an inventory of the bids and turning in your relationship and share your responses with one another.

- What do I know about how I make bids?
- Could or should I get better at making bids? How?
- How good am I at recognizing the difference between text and subtext?
- What keeps me from making bids?
- What is my impulse for turning?
- Do I turn away or against more often than I turn towards?
- When it comes to turning towards, am I closer to 33% or 86%?
- What does it feel like when my partner doesn't turn towards me?
- How can I get better at turning towards?

WATCH VIDEO

Here we will provide some easy but very effective ways in which you can make a deep and lasting emotional connection with your loved one and show them your commitment and attention throughout the day:

- You have just woken up and your partner is lying next to you. Roll over, put your arm around them, and tell them how thankful you are that you get to wake up next to them every day.
- You are reading the paper over breakfast and your partner makes a passing comment about a meeting they have at work that day. Follow up on what they said (put down that paper!) and give them your attention for a minute.
- You are walking together and you see that your partner looks cold. Stop into the nearest coffee shop and get them a warm beverage!
- Your partner is leaving to go somewhere. Tell them to come see you before they go. When they come to see you, give them a six-second kiss.
- You see that your partner looks stressed. Let them know you've noticed, and ask them if they'd like to talk about what they are feeling.
- Your partner sends you a text message about something, anything. Send them one back that lets them know how irresistible they are to you.
- Compliment your partner about something they did. Compliment your partner about their appearance. Thank them for something they've recently done that you appreciate.

- Your partner is back from their errand and is doing some housework. Without saying a word, join in and start helping them.
- Your partner tells you that they are getting hungry. You tell them that you are too, and that you are going to take them out for dinner.
- Your partner and you are talking after dinner, and they say how much they miss going out and dancing like you used to back in the day. Agree and recommend that you go out right now and dance.
- Your partner is looking tired, but you are still having fun. You know that they have to be up early tomorrow to prepare for a meeting. Recommend that you go home so that they can get some rest.
- You are in the bedroom and things are getting hot. Light some candles, and tell them that you want to re-discover their body for an hour.

WEEKEND HOMEWORK

If one of you is feeling rejected by the other lately, or overwhelmed by your partner's need for closeness, you should both take some time this weekend to review the exercise below and then share your answers. There is no answer key for these questions – they are merely a point of departure for discussions with your partner. The bottom line of this approach is that there isn't one reality when a couple misses each other in little ways. There are two equally legitimate perspectives. Remember: couples often ignore each other's emotional needs out of mindlessness, not malice. Once you understand and acknowledge this, you'll find that reconnecting just comes naturally.

During this week I felt...

1. Defensive.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

2. Hurt.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

3. Unappreciated.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

4. Unattractive.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

5. Sad.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

6. Lonely.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

7. Criticized.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

8. Worried.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

9. Misunderstood.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

10. Like leaving.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

What triggered these feelings?

1. I felt excluded.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

2. I felt that my partner was not attracted to me.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

3. I was not important to my partner.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

4. I felt no affection toward my partner.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

5. I definitely felt rejected.

A Great Deal Definitely A Little Not at all

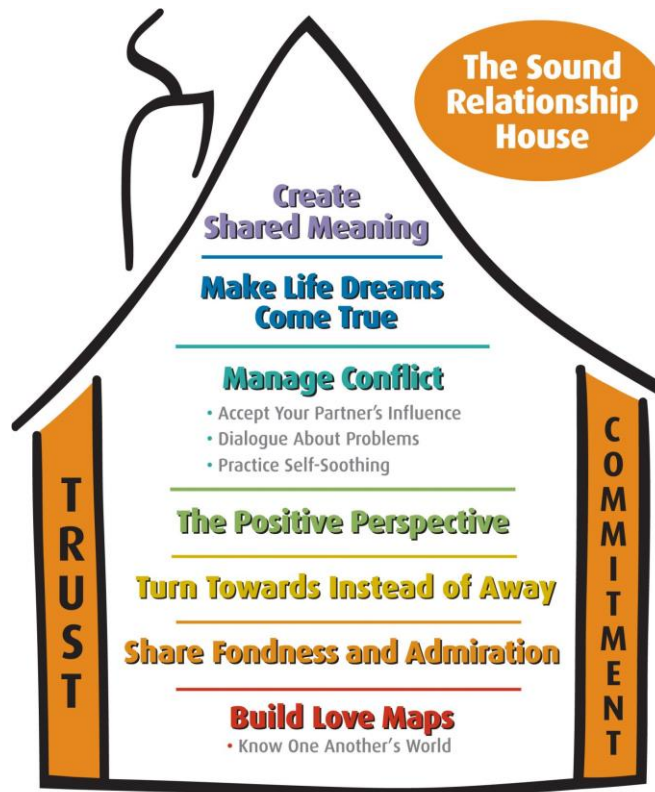
Now that you know what triggered this episode, it's time to see whether your emotional reaction is rooted in your past. Were there any connections there between earlier traumas or behavior and the current situation? Use the following list to facilitate this search for links between the past and present.

These recent feelings about my relationship come from:

- The way I was treated in my family growing up
- A previous relationship
- Past injuries, hard times, or traumas I've suffered
- My basic fears and insecurities
- Things and events I have not yet resolved or put aside
- Unrealized hopes I have
- Ways other people treated me in the past
- Things I have always thought about myself
- Old “nightmares” or “catastrophes” I have worried about

After you've discussed each other's answers above, you will come to see that many of your differences are not really matter of “fact.” We are all complicated creatures whose actions and reactions are governed by a wide array of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories.

As you work through this exercise, you'll become more adept at turning toward each other regularly. When you honor and respect each other, you're able to appreciate each other's point of view, even if you don't agree with it.



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