

Why Marriages Succeed or Fail..and How You Can Make Yours Last
by John Gottman, Ph.D. Summarized and adapted by Jim O'Neill, Ed.d.

"A lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship."

"There are three different styles of problem solving in to which healthy marriages tend to settle. In a **validating marriage** couples compromise often and calmly work out their problems to mutual satisfaction as they arise. In a **conflict-avoiding marriage** couples agree to disagree, rarely confronting their differences head-on. In a **volatile marriage** conflicts erupt often, resulting in passionate disputes...research suggests that all three styles are equally stable and bode equally well for the marriage's future." **BUT** these styles or adaptations work **ONLY if YOU HAVE AT LEAST FIVE TIMES AS MANY POSITIVE AS NEGATIVE MOMENTS TOGETHER**. Also couples must negotiate **WHAT STYLE** they will adopt, some couples (opposites attract) have trouble negotiating a style or creating a viable mixed style.

HOMEWORK: Talk about what styles your parents had, what style you desire and what style you would compromise on.

Observe your comments to your spouse to discover your ratio of positive to negative comments. If it is less than five to one, begin immediately to improve the ratio.

HOW TO INCREASE THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THE MARRIAGE EQUATION?

Show interest, be affectionate, show you care, be appreciative, show your concern, be empathic, be accepting, joke around, share your joy. Provide the basic marital nutrients: LOVE AND RESPECT

WARNING SIGNS OF MARITAL MELTDOWN

Couples who have failed to find a viable marital style and have not developed a five to one ratio of positive to negative interactions fall into two destructive styles: HOSTILE/ENGAGED OR HOSTILE/DETACHED. They manifest **FOUR DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS**: in order of least to most dangerous they are: CRITICISM, CONTEMPT, DEFENSIVENESS, and STONEWALLING. **SO BEWARE OF THESE ENEMIES OF YOUR MARRIAGE.**

COMPLAIN, YES; CRITICIZE, NO! Expressing anger and disagreement-airing a complaint-though rarely pleasant, makes the marriage stronger in the long run than suppressing the complaint. But criticism involves **ATTACKING SOMEONE'S PERSONALITY OR CHARACTER-RATHER THAN A SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR-USUALLY WITH BLAME**. To tell the difference: "a criticism entails blaming, making a personal attack or an accusation, while a complaint is a negative comment about something you wish were otherwise. Complaints usually begin with I, e.g. I feel disappointed.., while criticism often begins with YOU, e.g. You never..

WHEN CRITICISM BECOMES CONTEMPT "What separates contempt from criticism is the **intention to insult and psychologically abuse** your partner...When contempt begins to overwhelm your relationship you tend to forget entirely your partner's positive qualities, at least while you're feeling upset.. This immediate decay of admiration is an important reason why contempt ought to be banned from marital interactions. Examples of contempt include: **Insults and Name-calling, hostile humor, Mockery, Body Language** (sneering, rolling your eyes, curling your upper lip) Contempt is the **OPPOSITE** of respect and admiration.

You **STOP CONTEMPT** when you decide not to retaliate or play one up and instead choose to present particular complaints along with a healthy dose of respect, validation and admiration.

WHAT FOLLOWS CONTEMPT IS DEFENSIVENESS In the face of contempt or when bombarded with insults it is natural to **DEFEND YOURSELF** from attack, to claim innocence, to play the "victim". The signs of defensiveness are: **denying responsibility, making excuses, negative assumptions or mind reading, escalation of accusations, defending yourself by blaming the other, yes-butting, repeating yourself while ignoring the other, whining, and body language** (e.g. folding your arms)

"Of course, the major problem with defensiveness is that **IT OBSTRUCTS COMMUNICATION**. Rather than understanding each other's perspective you spend your discussions defending yourselves. Nothing gets resolved, so the conflict continues to escalate."