

Small Things Often

HOW TO BUILD A POSITIVE,
LASTING RELATIONSHIP

*Partings, Reunions, Admiration
& Appreciation, Date Night
& Love Maps, Affection,
Aftermath of a Fight*

The Gottman Institute

Small Things Often

You might be surprised to know that it doesn't take a major overhaul to improve your relationship and maintain momentum for a lasting connection. Changing your relationship even slightly can have a dramatic, positive effect over time. Our motto is "Small Things Often." Partners who do the following small, thoughtful things often and repair conflict when it arises, will create a path toward a more intimate, trusting, and satisfying relationship.

PARTINGS AND THE 6 SECOND KISS

2 minutes x 5 days

Prior to parting in the morning, spend two minutes chatting with your partner to discover at least one interesting thing that will happen in their day. Remember to say goodbye in a way that increases your closeness. A great way to do that is with a six second kiss (faithfully known as “The 6 Second Kiss”).



ADMIRATION & APPRECIATION

5 minutes x 7 days

Maintaining a loving relationship requires action and expression. It's not enough to have kind, appreciative thoughts about your partner; it's really important to say them out loud and let them know. Frequent expressions of affection and appreciation toward your partner help build a loving base. Here are some ways to do that:

- Share something you like about your partner's personality and an actual incident that illustrates this characteristic.

Example: "I love that you are so (playful, caring, gentle, kind, powerful, sweet, understanding), especially this afternoon when you spent time with the neighbor's kid."

- Catch your partner doing something "right" and say thanks for it.
- Send an e-mail, call or text during that day to let your partner know you're thinking about him or her.
- Stick a love note in your partner's car or purse.

AFFECTION

5 minutes x 7 days

Kiss, hold, and touch each other. Learn what kinds of touch your partner likes. Play is good. Make sure to kiss or touch one another at partings, reunion and before going to bed. Practice a lingering kiss or affectionate gesture when possible.



REUNIONS

20 minutes x 5 days

Build in a Stress-Reducing Conversation

Greet your partner with a kiss or another affectionate gesture when you return at the end of the day. Build in time for a Stress-Reducing Conversation. You may need to schedule your Stress-Reducing Conversation for a later time.

How you manage stress turns out to be very critical. Research shows that those who buffer their relationships from external stresses are able to maintain positive changes over time.



STEP 1

Find a quiet, distraction-free space in your home to sit across from one another and take turns sharing about the stressors in your day.

STEP 2

Take turns as Speaker and Listener.

Speaker: Talk about your stress in detail for 10 minutes. The topics must be about situations outside the relationship. This is not the time to discuss how worried you are about your fizzling sex life, your partner's lack of organization, or to complain about your partner.

Listener: Provide support to your partner. This is not the time to try and solve your partner's problem. Clearly understanding the issues and feelings must precede any advice.

Giving support means:

- Show genuine interest, maintain eye contact, and ask questions.
- Be an ally for your partner. Show empathy.
- Communicate understanding: "Wow! That would bother me, too."

- Show solidarity: “This is our problem and we will face it together.”
- Don’t side with the “enemy” even if you agree with them. You can still empathize with your partner’s reaction to a bothersome person or situation. Focus on what your partner is feeling, not whether they are “correct” about the situation.
- Provide affection and comfort: “Let me hold you. I’m here for you, baby.”

Show that you empathize and care:

- “Tell me more about that.”
- “Wow! No kidding!”
- “That’s so sad.”
- “That would have worried me, too.”
- “I’d be annoyed, too.”

Don’t: Stonewall, ignore your partner, fail to respond, get defensive or criticize.

STEP 3 ASK QUESTIONS

The Listener should ask the Speaker if they feel heard and understood. (Example: “Anything else? I want to make sure I get it.”) If the speaker says, “Yes,” then you can ask if they want help problem solving.

If the Speaker does not feel understood, then ask more questions.

- What’s most upsetting to you about this?
- What’s the worst thing that could happen?
- Is there anything I can do to support you in this?
- What do you need right now?
- What don’t you like about this?

STEP 4

Switch roles as the Speaker and the Listener. Repeat steps 2 & 3. Make a commitment to have a Stress-Reducing Conversation five days a week for 20 minutes each day.

DATE NIGHT & LOVE MAPS

2 hours x week

Make a weekly commitment to have a special date night, just the two of you, for a minimum of two hours. A weekly date can be a relaxing, low stress way to update your Love Maps and “turn toward” each other. Think of open ended questions to ask your partner:

- What would be your idea of a great getaway?
- How do you envision spending your retirement?
- If you could change anything about the world, what would it be?



AFTERMATH OF A FIGHT

30 minutes x week

We all have arguments and times when we say the wrong thing, do the wrong thing, and end up hurting one another. One of the most important tools for maintaining a lasting relationship is to know how to process a fight (without getting back into it) in order to make the discussion better next time, and in a way that doesn't hurt each other.

Process any hurt feelings or misunderstandings between you using the "Aftermath of a Fight" booklet. Discussing emotional injuries can help you reclaim goodwill toward your partner.

Note: To "process" means to talk about an incident without getting upset about it again. There is no absolute "reality" in a disagreement. Rather, there are differing "subjective realities." Your job is to talk about what happened as if you were watching a play or movie and the action was happening to the characters on the stage or screen.

**We promise that if you practice these Small Things
Often each week, you'll see how quickly positive
feelings can grow to create the kind of satisfying,
close relationship you both want.**

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OTHER GOTTMAN RELATIONSHIP GUIDES:

How to Be a Great Listener

Aftermath of a Fight

Fondness & Admiration

Avoid the Four Horsemen

Relaxation

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