



LOVE notes

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Get Connected!

Turn Toward Your Partner to Create Intimacy

Adapted from John Gottman, Ph.D.

Each and every day we make many verbal and non-verbal attempts to connect with the people in our families. Psychologist and family researcher John Gottman, Ph.D. calls these attempts “relational bids.” Relational bids and the way listeners respond to them are important to the overall health of a relationship.

What Type of Listener are You?

Gottman’s research shows three different patterns that listeners use to respond to another’s bid for connection.

Turn Against

People who turn against a bid might be called “in your face” or argumentative. They may use sarcasm, put downs or make fun of a person to make their point. A person on the receiving end of a turning-against response will probably pull away from the conversation and even the relationship. No one wants to be made fun of or snapped at—especially by someone they love. In Gottman’s research, when there were lots of turning-against responses, couples didn’t feel close to each other and it sometimes led to divorce.

Turn Away

In this way of relating, the listener ignores the bid. While not listening or having your mind on other things aren’t exactly unfriendly responses, they aren’t good for a relationship. In fact, Gottman’s research found that turning-away from a partner’s bid on a regular basis could damage a relationship.

Speakers who often turn away run the risk of their partners becoming aggressive or self protective — especially when discussing an area of continuing disagreement. Gottman found that constant turning-away led to early divorce among many couples.

Turn Toward

To “turn toward” one another means to react in a responsive, interested and loving way to a bid for emotional connection. The result of consistently turning toward your partner is that you develop stable, long-lasting relationships rich in good feelings for one another. Of the three response choices, turning toward was the most positive. It tells the speaker:

- I hear you.
- I am interested in you.
- I understand you (or would like to).
- I’m on your side.
- I’d like to help you (whether I can or not).
- I accept you (even if I don’t accept all your behavior).

If you want to build a deeper emotional connection, turn toward that person as often as you can.

What do Bids Look Like?

If we could send an invitation every time we wanted to connect with our spouse, we’d probably have a better chance of being understood.

Details would be written to make sure there is no misunderstanding. But we are more complicated than that. Our bids for connection take many forms—some easy to understand and others that are not so easy. Bids can be verbal or non-verbal. They can be physical or intellectual, sexual or non-sexual, low or high energy, funny or dead serious.

Successful Relationships are 20 Times More Positive

Gottman and his associates discovered that successful relationships had a 20:1 ratio of positive bids and turning toward their partner for every one negative bid or turning against or away.

try this...

How you should respond to a bid:

- Comment or change your behavior in response to a bid.
- Offer a supportive gesture like a smile, wink, or nod of the head.
- Ask a question.
- Share an opinion, thought or feeling.
- Use humor. Laugh at jokes.
- Make a supportive statement.
- Reply with an action—give a kiss; rub shoulders, etc.
- Make eye contact.
- Be positive in your response.

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