



LOVE notes

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Five Could be your Lucky Number!

Maybe you've seen the signs in your grocery store in the produce department that say: Thrive on Five! Nutritionists tell us that we need at least five fruits and/or veggies a day to be healthy. Guess what—the “thrive on five” motto also applies to marriages. Psychologist and family researcher John Gottman, Ph.D. studies relationships, especially marriage. He wants to know what helps couples create healthy, successful marriages that last.

The Magic Number is Five

Dr. Gottman has come up with what he calls “the magic five hours” where couples focus on small, but important actions that when done consistently, will improve and strengthen their relationship. At the end of the week, the total of these actions is right around five hours—that's less than an hour a day to spend on your relationship.

1. Partings—When you leave home for the day make sure you know at least one thing happening in your spouse's day. Kiss for at least 5 seconds. Estimated time: 2 minutes per day; 10 minutes per week (based on 5 work days).

2. Reunions— Kiss for at least 5 seconds. Take 10 minutes each after you return home, to reconnect and talk about your day. Take turns listening. Dr. Gottman suggests that support and understanding must

Sources:

Gottman, J.M. (1999). *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc.

come before giving advice. Estimated time: 20 minutes per day; 1 hour, 40 minutes per week (based on 5 work days).

3. Admiration and Appreciation—Find a way every day to genuinely communicate admiration and appreciation to your spouse. Estimated time: 5 minutes per day; 35 minutes per week (7 days).

4. Affection—Kiss, hold, touch each other. Be playful in your affection. Make sure to kiss each other before you go to sleep. Estimated time: 5 minutes per day; 35 minutes per week (7 days).

5. Spend time together—Take at least two hours every week for a date. Use the time to talk, update each other about important issues, play and enjoy being together.

Estimated time: 2 hours per week.

Five to One Ratio

In his research with thousands of couples, Dr. Gottman discovered another important five. In strong, healthy marriages, there is a ratio of at least five positives for every negative. In other words, there is a healthy imbalance: many more positives than negatives happening in a good marriage. These positives accumulate like deposits to a savings account, building up a balance,

so that when something comes up that isn't so positive, it doesn't break the bank.

Some couples make it a game to regularly deposit five or more good things in their relationship bank. A positive can be as simple as a thank you, or more complex like listening when the other person is upset about work. What's important is that both are tuned in to what the other views as positives.

Get Your Own Magic Going

Try this experiment to increase positive feelings:

- Schedule time to talk with your spouse about Gottman's “Magic Five Hours” and commit to try it for one month. Pay attention to those transition times when you leave the house and return; voice your appreciation for each other; increase your affection - usually a favorite!; and schedule a weekly date night. Enjoy all the good feelings you generate. Set aside time at the end of the month to talk about how it went. Tell your spouse the things you liked and gently describe the things you didn't like. Make the changes you discuss and then try the experiment again.

- Keep building positives. In healthy marriages, couples have habits of daily positive interactions.

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