



NOTES FOR COUPLES IN DIFFICULTIES

(From John Gottman's *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*) 1997

The success of a long term relationship is to a large extent dependent on the couple's capacity to resolve the inevitable conflicts that will occur.

There are three basic couple-types when it comes to dealing with disputes:

- compromising and validating; calm working through of difficulties;
- agreeing to disagree, rarely confronting each other;
- passionate disputes and passionate making up.

As a rule, a couple who are going to stay together need **5** times as much positive as negative experiences, in order for the conflict style that they have adopted to work.

The key destructive elements in any relationship are:

Criticism
Contempt
Withdrawal
Defensiveness

It is vital to learn how to settle a disagreement without escalating the conflict. The key nourishments (**love & respect**) are shown by:

Showing an interest
Being affectionate
Showing you care
Being appreciative
Showing concern
Being empathic
Being accepting
Joking around
Sharing your joys

Change criticisms ("*you never clean the bathroom*") to an assertive complaint ("*I am upset because the basin isn't clean*") ie, use an I-statement, and don't blame or globalise.

Change contempt ("*How can I ever trust you?*") which is intended to insult, into an assertive complaint plus admiration ("*I am annoyed because I have been waiting for half an hour, though I know you were working late because you are responsible at your job*")



Change withdrawal, which can happen during conversation as well as by physically removing oneself, to demonstrating that you are listening and that you can see things from the other's point of view (*"I know you are angry with me about this, and I can see that from your perspective you think I don't care about the mess"*)

Change defensiveness (*"It's your fault anyway – if you hadn't been late to start with none of this would have happened"*) to calming yourself down, and seeking or giving accurate information (*"It is true that I was late and this has annoyed you. However, I am angry that you forgot to cancel your meeting tonight when we had decided to go out for a meal together. Would you like to rebook it?"*)

Where possible, seek to change a negative to a positive. Instead of saying *"We never go out anywhere: you are always working"*, try *"I really miss evenings out with you: it is so much fun going out together. Shall I arrange something?"*

'Communicate with love and understanding during the bad times – and then keep working at it together even after your (relationship) improves.' Gottman