



The Gottman Guide to Friendship

You Can't Have Love Without Friendship

Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Julie Gottman's research has shown that friendship is the foundation of long-term romantic connection. Couples who maintain a strong friendship enjoy more trust, emotional intimacy, and resilience during conflict. In fact, a deep friendship is one of the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction over time.

What Does Friendship Look Like in a Romantic Relationship?

- **Knowing each other well** - hopes, fears, likes, dislikes, favorites, dreams
- **Showing interest** in each other's inner world and thoughts
- **Turning towards** each other in small everyday moments
- **Enjoying one another's company**
- **Being playful** and laughing together
- **Building trust** through everyday care and attention

Ways to Strengthen Your Friendship

With busy schedules and long to-do lists, it can be challenging to carve out time for each other.

HERE ARE SIX PROVEN WAYS YOU CAN STRENGTHEN YOUR FRIENDSHIP IN THE MIDST OF EVERYDAY LIFE:

Update your love maps	Love maps are your mental roadmap of your partner's inner world. You should be updating them regularly. Ask questions like, <i>"What's been stressing you out at work?"</i> or <i>"What are you looking forward to?"</i> to continuously update your love maps. Knowing the little things about your partner's life creates a strong foundation for friendship and intimacy.
Turn towards each other	One of the greatest predictors of your relationship's success is your ability to turn towards each other. Your partner makes small bids for connection every day. It could be a sigh, a question, a statement, or a glance. Turning toward those bids (even with a simple nod or <i>"tell me more"</i>) builds emotional trust.
Create everyday rituals of connection	A ritual is a structured event or routine that you each enjoy and depend on and both reflects and reinforces your sense of togetherness. Rituals of connection are an important tool for successful relationships and a way of regularly turning towards each other. They can be as simple as having your morning coffee together, a weekly walk in the park, or watching your favorite show every Tuesday evening.

Share fondness and admiration	Don't wait for a special occasion to say something kind. Vocalize the characteristics that you appreciate and love about your partner, big or small, to grow affection and respect in your relationship. This includes statements like, <i>"I'm proud of your accomplishments,"</i> or <i>"I appreciate that you are thoughtful."</i>
Accept each other's influence	Accepting influence means accepting, understanding, and allowing your partner's perspective, feelings, and needs into your decision-making process as a couple. It builds respect and trust in your relationship, which in turn strengthens your friendship. Work on accepting influence by listening with curiosity, staying open and seeking to understand, and looking for ways to say yes, even if that yes is a simple acknowledgment of your partner's point of view.
Infuse fun into your life	When was the last time you did something spontaneous with your partner? Go on an adventure, belly laugh together, tell jokes, do a playful activity, get a little adventurous in the bedroom, try a new fun hobby, or have a conversation about a lighthearted topic. Couples who play together, stay together.

Is It Too Late? What to Do if You're Feeling Disconnected

Feeling distance in your relationship happens, even in strong relationships. Don't panic or pull away further, but instead try to turn towards each other.

IF YOU'RE FEELING DISCONNECTED, HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOU CAN BEGIN RECONNECTING:

Start small	Rebuild with brief, positive interactions. Compliment each other, turn towards something your partner said, pay attention, ask them their opinion. It's not complicated, you just need to start.
Be curious	Ask how your partner is doing and really listen. Ask them what they think about a current issue. Listen to the things they say and bring them up later so they know you really care.
Schedule connection	Even if it's awkward at first, scheduling your time for connection can ensure that you both make space to focus on each other.
Soften your start-ups	If something is bothering you, start the conversation with an "I" statement rather than immediately placing blame. Example: <i>"I feel sad you didn't acknowledge me when you got home, can we talk about it?"</i>

Repair, repair, repair	Dr. John Gottman refers to repair attempts as <i>“the secret weapon”</i> of emotionally intelligent couples. A repair attempt is any statement or action—verbal, physical, or otherwise—meant to diffuse negativity and keep a conflict from escalating out of control (like <i>“Sorry, I didn’t mean to raise my voice,” “Let’s take a beat,”</i> or <i>“Can I start over?”</i>). Repair when you’re fighting, repair when you hurt each other’s feelings, and repair when you think you might not even need to repair! It will help your connection.
Have stress-reducing conversations	This conversation is the one that typically starts out with, <i>“How was your day?”</i> Take 20 minutes to talk about external stressors (work, parenting, etc.) and just listen to each other without problem solving.
Get physical	If your physical connection has stalled, kickstart it again with small, intentional moments of intimacy. Hold hands on a walk, rub your partner’s back after a long day, engage in a six-second kiss (proven by science to lead to deeper connection!), or give each other a hug when you’re reuniting after work. Being intentional with physical moments can make those physical moments more frequent and lead to a better intimate connection over time.
Start weekly check-ins	A weekly meeting with your partner serves as a dedicated space to discuss things you want to change or focus on in your relationship. Dr. Gottman’s research revealed that spending just one hour per week discussing areas of concern within the relationship can transform the way partners manage conflict. Weekly check-ins can help you and your partner address issues instead of bottling them up. Getting things out in the open can help remove obstacles in the way of connection.