



**Royal Flying
Doctor Service**
QUEENSLAND SECTION

A GUIDE TO MANAGING Healthy relationships

FROM THE FLYING DOCTOR

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP LOOK LIKE?

A healthy relationship involves being practically and emotionally connected with your partner, as well as supporting each other through the good, and the difficult times. Some important aspects that assist in keeping that bond strong, active and healthy are:

- > Communication.
- > Trust, honesty and respect.
- > Understanding and acceptance of differences.
- > Ability to provide emotional support to each other.
- > Shared interests, activities and companionship.
- > Shared goals and hopes for the future.
- > Agreement about how to manage responsibilities, finances or other areas of importance.

Relationship experts, Drs. John and Julie Gottman of the Gottman Institute, outline similar components of what makes a healthy relationship in their model “The Sound Relationship House”. The Gottmans’ believe that all 9 of these components are the building blocks for a healthy foundation.

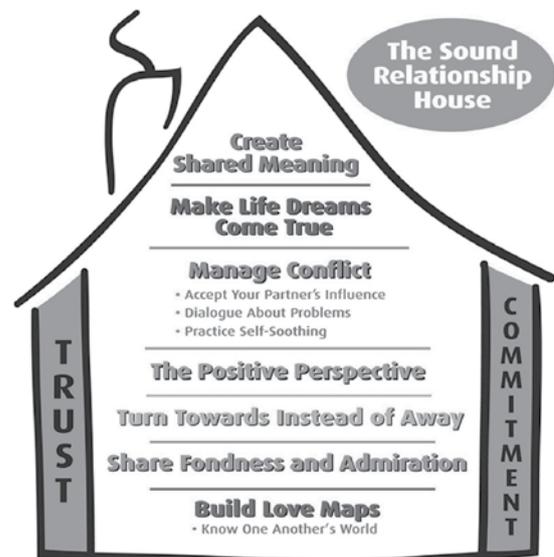


HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT IN RELATIONSHIPS

All relationships face challenges. Relationships can change throughout life depending on situations, demands and pressures. It is important to remember that as individuals we go through many stages of change and transition in life which can have a direct effect on how we feel about ourselves and our relationships. Working on keeping your relationship intact, solid and healthy is therefore important for navigating through life’s challenges together.

Conflict in relationships is unavoidable and can be an effective way of continuing to learn and grow with your partner, hopefully resulting in a healthier stronger relationship. How the conflict is approached and managed is important. Often couples get stuck in old habits or toxic styles of communication resulting in an inability to work through issues together hopefully resulting in a healthier, stronger relationship”.

[A healthy relationship involves being practically and emotionally connected with your partner]

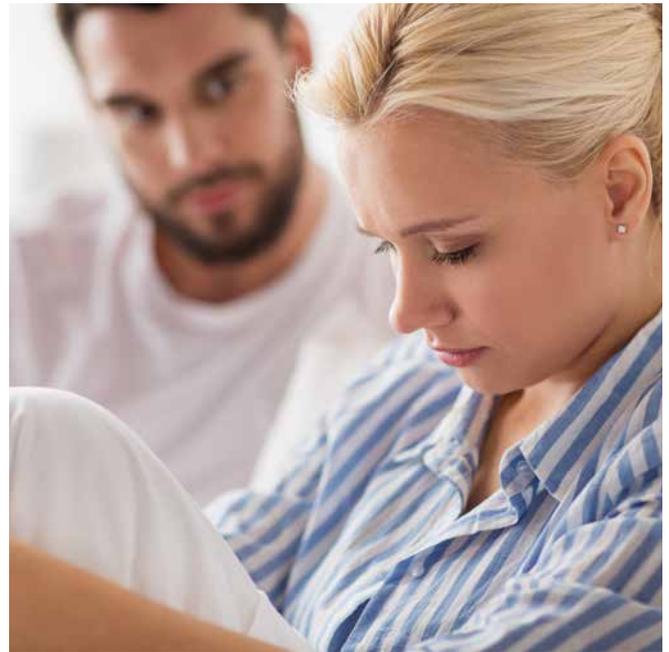


Healthy relationships

The Gottman institute outlines 6 key skills for effectively managing conflict with your partner:

1. **Practice psychological self-soothing:** Find ways during conflict to ease your emotions. Do something that relaxes you. Having an opportunity to step back and collect your thoughts or simply engaging in a distracting task will allow time to calm and reframe the issue differently. Dr Gottman suggests couples take a time out for 20 minutes when conflict arises.
2. **Use a softened start up:** Starting a conversation with criticisms and accusations is likely to result in further conflict. Soften the approach by using facts and an objective stance to describe the issue along with 'I' statements to express how you feel about the situation e.g. "I feel upset when you return home late" rather than "you are always home late..." This approach allows both parties to enter the discussion feeling like they have something to gain rather than feeling blamed.
3. **Repair and de-escalate:** Focus on rephrasing and adapting communication to understand each other better e.g. "I don't feel like I am being understood right now" allows your partner a chance to respond and hopefully de-escalate.
4. **Listen to your partner's underlying feelings:** Becoming a better listener in a relationship allows for a deeper understanding of your partner's needs, fears and hopes. This allows for a more meaningful understanding of who your partner is and better communication overall.
5. **Accept influence:** This means sharing power and taking the other person's feelings and opinions into account. Be open to other perspectives and allow your partner the opportunity to express opinions and ideas that may differ from yours. Being able to recognise that you may not always agree on everything but can still respect the other person's view point is important and allows each individual to feel valued.
6. **Compromise:** Work together to find a compromise that leaves you both feeling valued, respected and supported. Dr Gottman points out that this never feels comfortable and isn't perfect "Everyone gains something, and everyone loses something, but the important thing is feeling understood, honoured and respected."

[Love is saying, "I feel differently" instead of "you are wrong".]



HOW TO IMPROVE THE CONNECTION

- > Spend time together and alone ensuring you not only feel connected to your partner but also to yourself.
- > Plan fun dates and activities together.
- > Talk about your day.
- > Talk about physical intimacy, what is good about it and if there is anything that can be improved.
- > Listen to and support each other.
- > Express your affection, care for your partners and understand how you both show and express this differently. Learn and understand your 'love language' i.e. the way you feel and show love. This may differ between partners so understanding how you both show love differently can help work out expectations and strengthen communication. For more information on the 5 Love Languages (words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, physical touch) go to www.5lovelanguages.com
- > Be present when engaging with your partner – day to day life causes many distractions but having someone's full attention allows for a more meaningful interaction.

Sources: Relationships Australia - www.relationships.org.au | Love languages - www.5lovelanguages.com | The Gottman Institute - www.gottman.com



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To find out more about RFDS Mental Health services visit <https://rfd.co/mentalhealth>