

Gottmann, John M. and Joan DeClaire. *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships.* New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001.

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Preface. This book discusses the basic principles that regulate how human relationships work and how conflict can be regulated. Emotional awareness guides us in finding meaning in our lives.

Chapter 1: How We Connect Emotionally.

1. *Bid by Bid: How to Build Better Relationships One Step at a Time.* People need to share emotional information to feel connected with one another. The "bid" is the fundamental unit of emotional communication. A bid may be a inquiry, movement, gaze, touch, or anything that communicates the actor's desire to build a positive connection with you. A response to a bid is a positive or negative act that invites further bidding or declines further bidding.
2. *Turning Points: The Choices We Make in Responding to Bids.* Relationships build bid by bid. Positive responses to bids lead to further and more intense and frequent bidding and responding. People almost never re-bid when a bid is rejected. There are three responses to a bid:
 - Turning Toward. This bid response invites further bidding.
 - Turning Against. This bid response expresses hostility, and is usually followed by repression of emotions. This hostility destroys a relationship.
 - Turning Away. This bid response ignores the bid. This ignoring also destroys a relationship.
3. *Unrequited Turning.* Rejected or ignored bidders generally never try to connect with a person in the same way again.
4. *Disconnected: The Consequences of Living Without Emotional Bonds.* People satisfy three needs by bidding to relate to someone: 1) to feel included, 2) to feel in control of one's life, and/or 3) to be liked.
 - When Parents Fail to Connect. Emotional bonds with one's child set a pattern for their future relationships. Infant cries are bids, and the response sets expectations concerning what to expect from people. Children raised in conflict-ridden homes have chronically elevated stress hormones.
 - When Couples Fail to Connect. Even if one has failed to make emotional connections well, the skill can be learned at any age. Unhappily married people get sick thirty-five percent more often than happily married couples, and live an average of four years less.
 - Trouble Connecting with Friends and Siblings. Good friends extend life, reduce stress, increase infection resistance. Some studies indicate that longevity is more related to friendship than genetics.
 - Trouble Connecting on the Job. Workplace harmony makes worker lives better. But ignoring worker emotions may be profitable. The downside of such neglect is the fractured workplace.
 - The Good News about Connecting. Emotional connection is a skill to be learned, practiced, and mastered. Even hobbled relationships can be improved if both parties persevere, give attention, and correct mistakes.

Chapter 2: STEP ONE: Look at Your Bids for Connection. Bids are not exciting talk; they deal most frequently with the mundane.

1. *How Bids Work.* People bid because they want to be connected to another person. The closer the relationship, the more frequent and intense the bidding. The ladder of bidding

- looks like this: small talk, humor, friendly gossip, affection, support, problem solving, and heartfelt subjects like future goals, worries, values, meaning.
2. *What Do Bids Look Like?* Bids come in bewildering variety. They may be verbal or non-verbal. Many bids are ambiguous.
 3. *What Causes Fuzzy Bidding?* Fear of emotional risk and poor communication leads to fuzzy bidding. A fuzzy bid is often a trial balloon. People turn toward, away, or against the bids for connection from others.
 4. *Choosing to Turn Toward Bids for Connection.* Responses to bids may be nearly passive, low-energy, attentive, or high-energy. Turning toward a bid leads to healthy relationships, and one must turn toward the other in all sorts of circumstances. Low conflict families build better environments for children. Playfulness is good for relationships. To build a deep relationship, turn toward that person as often as possible.
 5. *Choosing to Turn Away From Bids for Connection.* Turned away responses may be preoccupied, disregarding, or interrupting. The usual reason for turning away from a bid is mindlessness. When intentional, the turner may be seeking more autonomy. When a partner turns away, the rejected bidder crumples and rarely rebids. “Habitually turning away can eventually destroy relationships.” Preoccupied wives are frequently more dissatisfied with their marriages than are preoccupied husbands. There are gender differences in bidding and responding.
 6. *Choosing to Turn Against Bids for Connection.* Turning against a bid may be contemptuous, belligerent, contradictory, domineering, critical, or defensive. Creating an emotion log of your emotional experiences may help you become more aware of your style in bidding and responding to bids. Use a blank book.
 7. *Difference between Men and Women.* Husbands in happy marriages turn toward their wives more frequently than husbands in unhappy marriages. Unhappily married wives turn toward their spouses with the same frequency as happily married wives. When turned against, husbands become hostile or repressed. Wives only become repressed. **BIDDING ANALYSIS WORKSHEETS. LOVE MAP EXERCISE.**
 8. *Better Bids Ahead.* Once you become aware of your style, there are patterns to avoid that otherwise might obstruct closer bonds with others. You can improve your relationships.

Chapter 3: Six Bid Busters and How to Avoid Them.

1. *Being Mindless Rather Than Mindful.* Generally, people are not deeply aware of other's emotional needs. Learning to share the feelings of others creates a shared journey of discovery. Set a goal to learn the other's feelings. Collect moments of emotional poignancy. See life as a string of these collected pearls.
2. *Starting on a Sour Note.* The “harsh startup” is a bid that begins with a negative, blaming, or critical introduction. Start bids softly.
3. *Using Harmful Criticism Instead of Helpful Complaints.* Complaints concern a specific problem, and addresses behavior. Criticism judges, addressing character. Criticism hurts people's feelings, increases tension, defensiveness, resentment, and leads the other to shut you out.
4. *Flooding.* Emotional stress can become so intense that one grows emotionally and physically incapable of responding. Thinking is muddy. Men flood more easily than women. If flooding happens, take a break from the conversation and soothe yourself for at least twenty minutes. **RELAXATION, FLOODING, AND EMOTIONAL LITERACY EXERCISES.**
5. *Practicing a Crabby Habit of Mind.* Crabby people grow fixated on making situations perfect and pointing out the faults of others. Their tendency is to turn against bids. If you are such a person, redirect your attention to things in your world that please you, that make you want to offer praise. Children of crabby parents learn to turn away from those parents. **THANKSGIVING EXERCISE.**
6. *Avoiding Conversations You Need to Have.* Most often, damage to relationship derives not from what was said, but from what was avoided. If there is conflict on the horizon, only three choices lie open: a) attack and defend, b) avoid or deny, and c) self-disclose and connect. Tell the person about how you feel now. Do not try to resolve events of the

past. This is not always possible. Both parties must choose self-disclosure and connection.

7. *Looking Ahead.* Our lives can become an ascending chain of improved emotional insight and improving relationships.

Chapter 4: STEP TWO: Discover Your Brain's Emotional Command System.

1. *Panksepp Research.* Jaak Panksepp is a neuroanatomist who studies the human emotional brain systems. Panksepp argues that at least seven deep emotional brain structures govern large portions of human behavior, and these structures are ancient and aim to protect us. They constitute genetic learning. People differ in the comfort they experience when different systems are stimulated. Some people prefer one system over another, though all employ all systems. Knowing your own proclivities is important self-awareness, and also important for how you relate to others who do not share your preferences and inclinations. Being overstimulated or understimulated in emotional control systems can make a person uncomfortable in a circumstance, and if the unwanted stimulation (or lack of it) becomes chronic, it can alter your personality.
2. *The Seven Systems and How They Affect Us.*
 - Commander-In-Chief. This system coordinates dominance, control, and power urges.
 - Explorer. This system coordinates searching, learning, and curiosity.
 - Sensualist. This system coordinates sexual and reproduction urges.
 - Energy Czar. This system coordinates rest and food requirements.
 - Jester. This system coordinates play, recreation, and diversion.
 - Sentry. This system coordinates worry, fear, vigilance, and defense of self.
 - Nest-Builder. This system coordinates affiliation, bonding, and attachment.
3. *Command Systems Often Act Together.* More than one system frequently coordinates in meeting a specific need of an individual.
4. *What Determines How You Use Your Command Systems?* Your individual emotional orientation with regard to emotional command systems is influenced by: a) genetic heritage, b) gender (men more likely to prefer the command, jester, and sentry systems; women more likely to prefer the nest-builder system), c) life experiences generally, and 4) lone experiences of great intensity. Emotional command systems are malleable over time, and a natural part of human survival.
5. *Evaluate Your Emotional Command Systems.* You should become aware of your own emotional command system needs and preferences, so you can care for your own emotional needs, improve your ability to bid and respond, and help you understand others. EMOTIONAL COMMAND SYSTEMS EXERCISES.
6. *Putting Knowledge To Work.* When we make decisions that conform to and cooperate with our emotional command system needs, our sense of well-being grows and life improves.
7. *Accepting Ourselves and Others.* Your brain differs from others' brains. Knowing this makes compassion easier. This mental framework helps people know how to compromise with others.
8. *Expect Mismatches and Work with Them.* You will experience people with whom your emotional command preferences collide. You can celebrate the differences or complain about them.
9. *Bidding Across Emotional Command Systems.* Gottmann offers a long section of exchanges between persons with differing emotional control system preferences.
10. *Still More Connections.* Emotional command style is not all the difference between people. Their experiences also complicate matters.

Chapter 5: STEP THREE: Examine Your Emotional Heritage. One person frequently responds and feels differently about experiences than does another. A person's emotional history impacts their ability to connect emotionally with others.

1. *What Our Experience Tells Us.* Past experience influences future emotional experience, which can affect your ability to connect with others. Brain pathways are plastic to an extent. Events can influence them. **EMOTIONAL HISTORY EXERCISE.**
2. *Your Family's Philosophy of Emotion Matters, Too.* Each of us (and our families) has a philosophy of emotion. We take on beliefs and expectations concerning how our emotions should be. Families generally fall into one of four approaches to handling emotions: a) coaching, b) dismissing, c) laissez-faire, or d) disapproving. "Coaching" families accept expression of emotion and help one another cope. "Dismissing" families discourage expression of negative feelings. Feelings are ignored or minimized. Little help with emotions or instruction about emotions occurs. "Laissez-faire" families allow emotional expression, but do little to help one another cope. "Disapproving" families also hide negative feelings, but express active hostility to their expression. **FAMILY PHILOSOPHY OF EMOTION EXERCISE.**
3. *The Emotion-Coaching Philosophy.* Emotion coaching families turn toward one another during a member's feelings of sadness, anger, or fear. They empathize and help. They set limits on expression of negative emotion. Emotions have value, even negative emotions. They teach self-soothing to one another.
4. *The Emotion-Dismissing Philosophy.* Emotion dismissing families discourage expression of negative feelings. They ignore or disregard emotional expression. They often fear emotions will overwhelm the family and lead to catastrophic results. Some members may avoid emotions because they feel too responsible for fixing the underlying problems. Dismissing emotions causes lost opportunities for connection, and deeply injures children. Opportunities for teaching children to care for themselves when upset, and how to problem-solve, are also lost.
5. *The Emotion-Disapproving Philosophy.* Emotion-disapproving families often see emotional expression as an unfair strategy to manipulate toward an outcome. Emotional expression is countered with threats. Such families have not learned to tolerate negative emotions and see them as bids for connection. We can accept people's emotions, empathize, all without adopting the sufferer's position.
6. *The Laissez-Faire Philosophy.* Laissez-faire families view emotions as letting off steam. When the emotional outburst is over, it is over. There is no more work to be done. Often, parents with this philosophy came from abusive or chaotic homes, and have sworn off that approach. But they do not know what to do. So, such parents eventually feel helpless. **EMOTIONAL PHILOSOPHY EXERCISE.**
7. *Which Philosophy Works Best?* Emotion-coaching families prosper. Their lives are more successful and fulfilling. The other approaches do not.
8. *Emotional Intelligence Versus Detachment and Denial.* Emotions are diverse; people are healthiest when they express, identify, and cope with emotional breadth. The pain of negative emotions is real, and many fear it. But failure to welcome your own emotions, even the negative ones, leads to inability to understand yourself and consequent inability to understand others. You will connect less often. Bonding becomes difficult.
9. *Understanding Enduring Vulnerabilities.* An "enduring vulnerability" is a life event so powerful that it is not possible to move past its effects. Such events may, for example, be deaths, abuse, rape, seeing violent acts, being victimized, marital problems, job loss, hazing, illness, depression and suicidal ideation, substance abuse, or war. Enduring vulnerabilities may hinder attempts to form new relationships, because they affect our behaviors and erode self-trust. **ENDURING VULNERABILITIES EXERCISE.**
10. *What Awareness Offers.* People able to speak of their enduring vulnerabilities with others help their relationships get over the hurdle the vulnerability presents. The others need to listen carefully when the vulnerable person tells their difficult story from which the enduring vulnerability derives.
11. *Back to the Future.* Learning about your emotional history helps you differentiate yesterday's problems from today's opportunities.

Chapter 6: STEP FOUR: Sharpen Your Emotional Communication Skills. We can learn emotional communication skills throughout life, though childhood is the primary classroom. You

can become a person who detects unspoken difficulty and views it as a bid for connection, turning toward it with compassion. Many cues are unspoken: expressions, posture and gestures, tone. Others are verbal: word descriptions and metaphors. Building these skills makes heart-to-heart exchanges more likely.

1. *Pardon Me, But Your Feelings Are Leaking.* Many people avoid expressing negative emotions because they fear them, or don't want to burden others, or because they lack vocabulary to say what is happening, or cherish privacy. But people's true emotions leak through to others, even when they actively seek to hide them. And people believe the non-verbal cues one gives over the words one says.
2. *Understanding the Face.* Thirty-three muscle groups in the face are dedicated to communicating emotion via changes in the shape of forehead, brows, eyelids, cheeks, nose, lips and chin. Basic facial motions are universal, always expressing a given emotion. These movements are genetic and not culturally determined. The seven basic emotions are: sadness, anger, fear, happiness, surprise, contempt, and disgust. These expressions may be mixed with one another. To read another's emotions facially, a) learn their face's neutral state, b) keep in mind that more than one emotional state may coincide and be expressed, c) avoid interpreting physical features of a face as emotional expression, and d) watch carefully because many of the facial expressions are fleeting. People frequently mis-report their own emotions. The careful observer can listen past the error and detect authentic emotion. **FACIAL EXPRESSION EXERCISE**.
3. *Reading Movements and Gestures.* The face tells what a person is feeling; bodily actions tell you how strongly they feel it. Factors to consider are a) universal gestures (fidgeting = non-interest; relaxed forward leaning = respect and attention; copying posture of other = affiliation; arm or leg crossing = opposition), b) distance from another, and c) eye level (equal level means openness). **MOVEMENT-GESTURE EXERCISE**.
4. *The Language of Touch.* Touching is important for our wellbeing (consider the research on depressed mothers massaging their babies), but is subject to misinterpretation. Touching may express attachment, power, sexual interest, or other sentiments. The appropriateness of forms of touching is culturally determined, and may evoke strong responses. **TOUCH EXERCISE**.
5. *What the Voice Reveals.* Voices communicate emotions by changes in pitch, rate, and volume. Fear and tension cause halting or broken speech. **VOICE EXERCISE**.
6. *Putting Feelings Into Words.* Some people can talk easily of their emotions; others lack understanding and words to express emotion. Identifying and conversing about one's emotions gives a sense of control over them, helps one connect with others, and opens the door to input from others. **IDENTIFYING FEELINGS EXERCISE** and **EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY LIST (192)**
7. *Metaphorically Speaking.* The metaphors by which people speak of their emotions may reveal their experiences and histories. One may shift feelings by changing metaphors. You might adopt the metaphorical language of a person with whom you want to connect. **METAPHOR EXERCISE**.
8. Above All, Just *Listen*. To connect with others:
 - Focus on being interested in others, not interesting to them.
 - Start by asking open-ended, but reasonably specific questions.
 - Ask questions about people's goals and visions of the future.
 - Look for and express your commonalities with others.
 - Tune in with all your attention to what the other is saying. Do not plan what you will say next while the other is speaking.
 - Respond with an occasional brief nod or sound.
 - From time to time, paraphrase what the speaker says.
 - Maintain the right amount of eye contact. More when listening, less when speaking. Lack of eye contact indicates disinterest, nervousness, lack of confidence.

- Let go of your own agenda. Listening requires patience and a willingness to forgo action for the present. Engage in open receptive listening. Reach for a place where you can honestly say, “I understand.”
- Turn off the television. TV reduces people’s ability to connect, especially for children. Limit TV watching. Watch something together, then discuss it afterwards. EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION GAME.

Chapter 7: STEP FIVE: Find Shared Meaning. Shared meaning supports emotional connections. Supporting another’s dreams is very good for relationships.

1. *People in Conflict as Idealists.* Irresolvable conflict is usual and normal. 69% of marital conflicts never go away. Most conflicts grow from different meanings attached to common circumstances. Uncovering the dream takes the edge off conflict.
2. *Become a Dream Detector.* Find out the meaning a person’s position holds for him or her. Such conversations reveal meaning, not positions, and expose what really matters to a person.
3. *Sometimes Dreams are Hidden.* The dream-conflict connection is not always obvious.
4. *Listening to Dreams.* Look for the other’s dream when in conflict.
5. *Trust the Process and Offer Support.* Zero-sum conflicts eradicate the possibility of connection between people. We must honor the dreams of others. We can do that by asking questions, offering empathy, offering validation, and participating in the other’s dream at an appropriate level. DREAMS EXERCISE. ENDING GRIDLOCK EXERCISE.
6. *Explore the Rituals You Share and Create New Ones.* Shared rituals create structures within which bids for emotional connection occur on a regular basis. Rituals symbolize meaning and values we share. Rituals combat the excuse of lack of time to connection emotionally. Rituals help people normalize relationship after or during conflicts.
7. *Consider Emotional Command Systems.* Different rituals may appeal to different parts of our emotional makeup.
8. *Re-create and Update Rituals in Healing Ways.* Examine your rituals and adjust or delete or create them to be meaningful to you now. RITUALS EXERCISE.

Chapter 8: Apply What You’ve Learned. Building better connections to others does not prevent conflict, but it helps relationships better weather conflicts that do occur. This section applies the five steps to various sorts of relationships.

1. *Building Better Emotional Connections in Marriage.* Improve your bids. Turn toward bids; avoid turning away from bids. Gottmann moves through the five steps with helpful specific suggestions for resolution of difficulties.
2. *Building Better Emotional Connections Between Parent and Child.* Gottmann moves through the five steps with helpful specific suggestions for resolution of difficulties.
3. *Building Better Emotional Connections in Friendship.* Gottmann moves through the five steps with helpful specific suggestions for resolution of difficulties.
4. *Building Better Emotional Connections in Adult Sibling Relationships.* Gottmann moves through the five steps with helpful specific suggestions for resolution of difficulties.
5. *Building Better Emotional Connections in Coworker Relationships.* Gottmann moves through the five steps with helpful specific suggestions for resolution of difficulties.

Chapter 9: In Conclusion. Make bids toward the others you want in your life in simple and positive ways. Learn to recognize and respond to the bids of others. Be patient, observant, and optimistic. Deep bonding will follow.