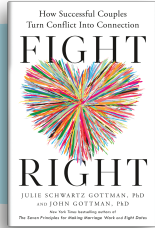


GOTTMAN

Holiday Survival Guide

The holiday season is a time of joy and celebration, but can also bring unique challenges, especially in our interactions with loved ones.



Here are five ways you can survive—and enjoy—the holiday season from the Gottmans' new book,

Fight Right: How Successful Couples Turn Conflict Into Connection.

one.

Stay Mindful of the Four Horsemen

Recognize criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling when they inevitably pop up in arguments with your loved ones. When you spot them, take a deep breath and step back—and apply their antidotes—to prevent these negative behaviors from escalating conflicts.

Horseman	Antidote
① Criticism: Verbally attacking personality or character.	⇒ Softened start-up. Talk about your feelings using “I” statements and express a positive need.
② Contempt: Attacking sense of self with intent to insult or assuming a position of moral superiority.	⇒ Build a Culture of Appreciation. Remind yourself of your partner or loved one’s positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions.
③ Defensiveness: Victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame.	⇒ Take Responsibility. Accept your partner or loved one’s perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.
④ Stonewalling: Withdrawing from an interaction to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance, and separation.	⇒ Physiological Self-Soothing. Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing and distracting.

Example:

① Horsemen are Present:	② Antidotes are Used:
<p>Taylor:</p> <p>"You never help me with the gift shopping or wrapping—why are you so lazy?" [Criticism]</p> <p>Jackson:</p> <p>"You don't include me in the planning! I would help you if you asked, but you don't ask me. I don't think you actually want me to help, or you think I'm useless." [Defensiveness]</p>	<p>Taylor:</p> <p>"I feel overwhelmed with all the shopping and gift-wrapping that needs to get done this season, and I feel like it's all on me to handle. Could we talk about ways to share these responsibilities?" [Softened start-up]</p> <p>Jackson:</p> <p>I know I need to help you with the shopping and gift-wrapping. I'm sorry you feel that it's on you to handle it all. I'll wrap the presents this year, would that help? [Take Responsibility]</p>

two.

Use Softened Start-ups

To soften your start-up means to approach a conversation with how you're feeling about the situation, not your perception of your loved one's flaws or behavior. There's a difference between complaints and criticism. A complaint addresses a specific instance or action and acknowledges how it made you feel.

A GOOD FORMULA TO REMEMBER IS:

①	②	③
"I feel _____,"	"about _____," <i>[the specific behavior, not a pattern of behavior]</i>	"and I need _____." <i>[state the positive need]</i>
"hurt"	"when I'm not invited to events with your friends,"	"to know what your preferred evening schedule looks like and how I can be a part of it."
"abandoned"	"when you don't help me with holiday planning or decorating,"	"to feel like you're interested in the things I care about."
"attacked"	"when we don't take time for just the two of us,"	"to spend some quality time together this week."
"left out"		
etc.		

Example: instead of saying, "You never help with the decorations," try, "I could use some help with the decorations. Can we talk about it?"

three.

Practice Active Listening

Listen attentively to your loved ones without interrupting. Your job is to make them feel safe enough to tell you what's going on.

Not sure what questions to ask to understand your loved one better?

Try some of these:

- What do you believe about this issue?
- Does this relate to your background in some way?
- Is there a story behind this for you?
- Why is this so important to you?
- What are your feelings about this?
- Does this relate to a certain belief or value for you?

Tips:

- ① Don't try to arrive at a solution. You may find one together eventually, or you may not. Sometimes your loved ones just need to express their thoughts and feelings.
- ② Realize the goal is not to solve the problem, but to understand. Listen and ask questions.
- ③ Communicate that you have heard your loved one and understand their point of view. Stating "I understand that ____ makes you feel ____" goes a long way.

Example:

If your loved one gets agitated around the holidays, consider asking them questions to understand better. They could be nervous about gift-giving, dreading a family get-together, remembering negative past experiences, or dealing with something you hadn't even considered.

If your loved one opens up to you, use Tip 3 above to communicate that you've heard them and you understand.

"I understand that your childhood holiday experiences affect your outlook on the holidays today. I want you to know that I'm here for you—whatever you need."

four.

Recognize When You're Flooded

Ever feel overwhelmed during an argument? You may be feeling flooded. Flooding is a sensation of feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed during conflict, making it impossible to have a productive conversation.

So how can you overcome overwhelm?

SELF-SOOTHING IS THE ANSWER:

Step ①

Communicate that you're going to take a short break from the conflict.

Step ②

Practice doing an activity that calms you for at least twenty minutes. This could be something like reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music, as long as you don't focus on the thing that's making you overwhelmed.

Step ③

When you feel calmed, communicate that you are ready to re-join the conversation.

Example:

Aunt Sue won't stop pushing you about when you're having kids. You've hinted at her to drop it, but she's relentless. You're starting to feel overwhelmed, like you can't breathe. You recognize that you're starting to become flooded.

You say, "I need some air," and step out of the dining room for a few minutes to breathe. Perhaps you watch a few funny videos on your phone. When you feel calmer, you re-enter the dining room.

If Aunt Sue still won't give it up, consider using the prompt from the softened start-up section.

five.

Use Repair Attempts

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. Dr. John Gottman refers to repair attempts as "the secret weapon" of emotionally intelligent couples.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE REPAIR ATTEMPTS
VS. NON-EFFECTIVE ACTIONS DURING ARGUMENTS:

Effective Repair Attempts	Not Repair Attempts
<p>① "My reaction was too extreme, I'm sorry."</p> <p>One person is apologizing for their behavior. If the second person listens to this attempt, it can de-escalate conflict.</p>	<p>⇒ "We never solve this problem because you keep saying that over and over. It's so annoying."</p> <p>A better way to phrase this would be "That hurt my feelings. Could you say that in a different way?"</p>
<p>② "I agree with part of what you're saying. Let's compromise here."</p> <p>One person is asking for a compromise. The second person can then meet them halfway to work towards conflict resolution.</p>	<p>⇒ "I'm trying to talk to you but you always criticize me."</p> <p>A better way to phrase this would be "I feel criticized, could you rephrase that?"</p>
<p>③ "I see your point."</p> <p>One person is acknowledging the other person's point of view. This can help the second person feel understood and seen, which aids in conflict management.</p>	<p>⇒ "Why can't you just get over it."</p> <p>This will only escalate conflict. A better way to approach this would be to try and understand your partner or loved one's point of view.</p>
<p>④ "This is important to me. Please listen."</p> <p>One person is asking the other person politely to listen to them. The key here is the second person accepting this repair attempt and really listening to the first person's point of view.</p>	<p>⇒ "I'm leaving."</p> <p>In order to avoid escalating conflict, it would be better to communicate that you need a break from the conversation. Saying "can we take a break?" and agreeing to respect the need for breaks is crucial to effective conflict management.</p>
<p>⑤ Making a goofy face at your partner or loved one to ease the tension in an argument.</p> <p>This is an example of a non-verbal repair attempt. If the other person gives in and smiles a little, they both know they are in this together.</p>	<p>⇒ Eye-rolling and scoffing during an argument when your partner or loved one is speaking.</p> <p>This is actually a non-verbal example of the Four Horseman, contempt.</p>