

# the Gottman Seven Principles Program

This weekend couple's retreat at Sanctum Retreat will unpack and explore Dr. John Gottman's *Seven Principles that Make Marriage Work*. According to Gottman, couples strengthen the friendship that is at the heart of any marriage by enhancing their love maps, nurturing their fondness and admiration, turning toward each other instead of away, letting their spouse influence them, solving their solvable problems, overcoming gridlock, and creating shared meaning.

## 1. Enhancing love maps

A "love map" is that part of our brain where we store the relevant information about our partner's life, including their worries, hopes, and goals in life, as well as their history and the facts and feelings of their world. According to Gottman, happily married couples use their love maps to express not only their understanding of each other, but their fondness and admiration as well.

## 2. Nurturing fondness and admiration

Nurturing fondness and admiration involves meditating a bit on our partner and what makes us cherish our beloved. Exercises include thinking about incidents that illustrate characteristics one appreciates in one's partner, talking about the happy events of the past, and nurturing fondness and admiration.

## 3. Turning toward each other

Turning toward each other means connecting with one's spouse, being there for each other during the minor events in each other's lives, and responding favorably to our partner's bids for attention, affection, humor and support.

## 4. Accepting influence

Accepting influence means sharing power, making one's spouse a partner in one's decision-making by taking their opinions and feelings into account.

## 5. Solving solvable problems

Gottman's model for conflict resolution involves softening the startup (i.e. leading off of the discussion without criticism or contempt, making a straightforward comment about a concern and expressing one's need in a positive fashion). It also includes learning to make and receive repair attempts (statements or actions that prevent negativity from escalating out of control, as well as efforts the couple makes to de-escalate tension during *touchy* discussions); soothing oneself and one's partner, compromising, and being tolerant of each other's faults.

## 6. Overcoming gridlock

According to Gottman, gridlock occurs when a conflict makes one feel rejected by one's partner. Both continue to talk about the issue but make no headway. Each becomes entrenched in their positions and is unwilling to budge; when they discuss the subject, they end up feeling more frustrated and hurt. Their conversations about the problem become devoid of humor, amusement, or affection, and the partners become evermore inflexible over time, leading them to vilify each other during these conversations. Vilification makes one all the more rooted in one's position. Polarized and more extreme in distinct viewpoints, both become less willing to compromise. Eventually, they disengage from each other emotionally. Gottman argues that no matter how entrenched in gridlock a couple is, all that they need in order to get out of it is motivation and a willingness to explore the hidden issues that are really causing the gridlock.

## 7. Creating shared meaning

Gottman describes shared meaning as a spiritual dimension to marriage that has to do with creating an inner life together — a culture rich with symbols and rituals, and an appreciation for the partner's roles and the goals that link them and lead them to understand what it means to be a part of the family they have become. According to Gottman, when a marriage has a shared sense of meaning, conflict is much less intense and perpetual problems are less likely to lead to gridlock.