

2-MINUTE TIP: RELATIONSHIP REPAIRS II

6 TOOLS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP REPAIR TOOLBOX

Like a rescue inhaler for your coupleship

Build a Repair Toolbox

The “Repair Toolbox” – verbal, emotional, and behavioral strategies a couple can use to de-escalate tension, calm down, reconnect emotionally, and repair the relationship after conflict. These tools are especially powerful when used early—before negativity spirals out of control. John Gottman coined the term “bids” to describe small actions or statements meant to gain your partner’s attention, affection, or support. These are repair attempts – words or actions that signal, “Let’s stop fighting and come back together.” Many are also bids for connection, affection, or support.

- 1. Verbal Repair Attempts:** Gently spoken, sincere words – never sarcastic or biting -- to break the momentum of conflict, then re-establish emotional safety. Use a soft start up vs a harsh one. “Can we take a short break and come back to this?” “I’m starting to feel overwhelmed.” “I want to talk about this without hurting each other.” “That came out wrong—I didn’t mean it that way.” “Let me try again..., more calmly.” “We’re on the same team.” “This is important to me—can we talk about it without fighting?”
- 2. Affectionate or Soothing Behaviors:** Holding out your hand to be taken. Making eye contact with warmth, a compassionate facial appearance. Offering a hug or physical closeness after conflict Smiling or making a softening joke like “We’re being ridiculous, huh?”
- 3. Meta-Communication (Talking About the Talk):** Stepping outside the content of the fight and commenting on how the communication is going. “I notice we’re both getting really defensive. Let’s slow down.” “I feel like we’re misunderstanding each other.” “This doesn’t feel productive. Let’s find another way.” “This usually ends in stonewalling, which is bad for us, so let’s stop.”
- 4. Physiological Self-Soothing Break:** According to Gottman’s research, when heart rates go over 100 beats per minute, people become emotionally flooded and lose access to rational problem-solving. Even small physical gestures lower stress hormones and restore connection. Self-soothing strategies include: Taking a 20-minute break – the minimum needed to think clearly again. Avoid rehearsing the fight while apart – let adrenaline settle. Deep breathing. Splashing cold water on your face. Going for a walk. Listening to calming music. Saying to yourself, “It’s okay to pause. I want to do this right.”
- 5. Validating and Accepting Influence:** When one partner makes a point—even during conflict—the other can repair by validating that point (“I hear you. I want to make sure I understand.”) and showing willingness to be influenced (“If I need to do a change something, I want to get it.”) Accepting influence is a predictor of relationship success, especially for men. Accepting influence is NOT capitulation; it means you accept your partner as having a perspective you want to understand. “You’re right, I didn’t think of it that way.” “I understand why that would upset you.” “That makes sense now that you explain it.” “I see what you are saying” [whether you agree or not]. “I see your point – let’s find a middle ground.”
- 6. Re-Connection Rituals:** Repair continues after the conflict ends. Trust increases by working on reconnecting gently once calm – through humor, affection, shared routines, or revisiting the issue when both feel safe. “Can we start fresh?” :That’s a do-over, let’s start from the beginning.” “Thanks for calming down with me.” “Want to get some coffee together?”

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