

ATTUNEMENT:

A = Awareness

T = Turning Toward

T = Tolerance

U= Understanding

N = Non-Defensive Responding

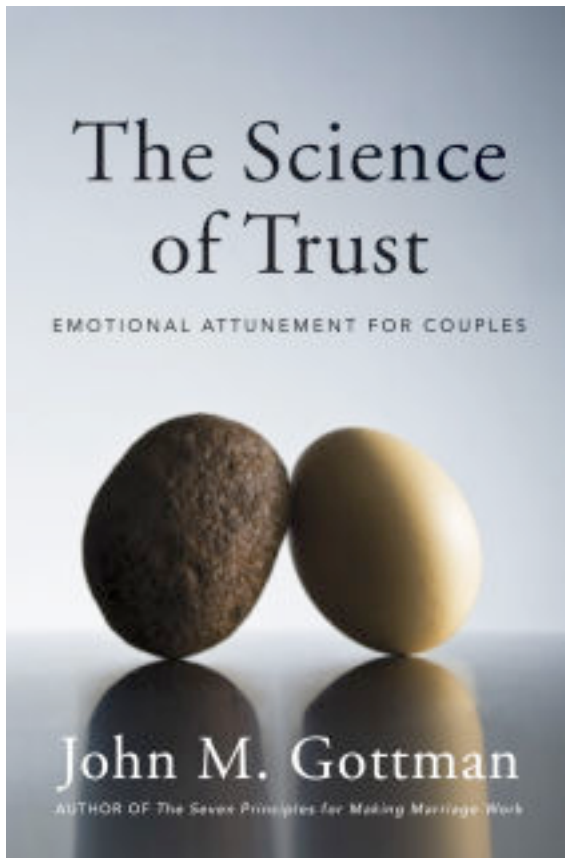
E = Empathy

The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples

Good Relationships are Skillfully Gentle

- To “Skillfully Attune” learn & become Skillfully Able to hold and process or somehow “Metabolize” and “Repair” emotions like Anger & Sadness
- Awareness of “Zeigarnic Effect” = Unresolved Conflict Ultimately Floods
- A Negative or Positive “Absorbing State” is established through learning.
- Absorbing state is Eased: only when conflict is repaired – finished – resolved
- Successful & Skillful “Repair Efforts” help resolve historical conflict
- Awareness of negative attributions & negative sentiment override.
- Skillful management of absorbing state conflict & emotional flooding
- Graceful mutual “oral history” -- story of “us” and shared life meaning.

- Attunement is correlated with negative affect (emotion) not becoming an absorbing state – resulting in “negative sentiment over-ride
- Be Aware: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
- High Attunement = is correlated with Lower Flooding & Absorbing State
- Attunement builds trust.



The Sound Relationship House Theory

Characteristics of long-term, stable relationships are described in the three components. In the SRH theory: the Friendship System, the Conflict System, and the Meaning System. The first three levels of the SRH describe the friendship system.

1. ***Love maps***: The most basic level of friendship, a love map refers to feeling known by your partner. It is the road map you create in your mind of your partner's inner world of thoughts, feelings, hopes, aspirations, dreams, values, and goals. The fundamental processes are asking open-ended questions and remembering the answers.

2. ***Fondness and Admiration***: This level describes partners' ability to notice and express what they appreciate about each other. Building a culture of respect, partners catch their partner doing something right and convey appreciation, respect, and affection verbally and nonverbally. The fundamental processes are a positive habit of mind that ignores the partner's mistakes and instead notices what the partner is doing positively for the relationship, and expresses appreciation, fondness, affection, and respect.

3. Turning toward: When couples are just kind of hanging out, they actually are often letting their needs be known to one another either nonverbally or verbally. They're making *bids* for emotional connection. When partners turn toward bids, it is like putting money in the emotional bank account that gets built over time. Conversely, if bids are ignored (turning away) or attacked in response to the bid (turning against), it is like taking money out of the emotional bank account. There is a hierarchy of bidding, from getting one's partner's attention to getting empathy and emotional support. Of the newlyweds who were divorced six years after the wedding, 33% turned toward bids, while the ones still together after six years turned toward bids 86% of the time.

4. Sentiment override: If the first three levels of the friendship system are working well, then couples will be in positive-sentiment override. Conversely, when the friendship is ailing, couples will be in negative-sentiment override.

<http://www.routledgejournalofmarriageandfamilytherapy.com/case-studies-in-couples-therapy-9780415879439>

Negative-sentiment override: The negative sentiments we have about the relationship and our partner override anything positive our partner might do to repair. We are hypervigilant for put-downs; we tend not to notice positive events. We tend to distort and see even neutral (and sometimes even positive) things as negative. We are overly sensitive.

Positive-sentiment override: The positive sentiments we have about the relationship and our partner override negative things our partner might do. We don't take negativity personally, but merely as evidence that our partner is stressed. We tend to notice negative events but not take them very seriously. We tend to accurately see the positive things our partner is doing and minimize the negative, perhaps even distorting toward the positive, and seeing even negative interactions and gestures as neutral.

5. Manage conflict: Relationship conflict is natural, and it has functional, positive aspects. The masters of relationships are gentle toward one another; they start conflict discussions without blame (including preemptive repair); they accept influence; they self-soothe; they repair and deescalate, using positive affect during conflict to deescalate physiological arousal (especially humor and affection); and they are able to offer compromise. The longitudinal research indicates that only 31% of couples' problems are solved over time. Surprisingly, it turns out that 69% of couples' problems were perpetual (they don't get solved over time), relating to lasting differences in personality,

preferences in lifestyle, and differences in needs. The masters of relationships create a dialogue with these perpetual issues, while the disasters are in gridlock about these perpetual issues. This latter finding reveals the existential nature of most conflicts and has led to the “dreams within conflict” intervention.

6. *Make life dreams come true:* A crucial aspect of any relationship is to create an atmosphere that encourages each person to talk honestly about his or her dreams, values, convictions, and aspirations, and to feel that the relationship supports those life dreams.

7. *Create shared meaning:* A relationship is about building a life together, a life that has a sense of shared purpose and meaning. Couples do that in many ways, including creating formal and informal rituals of connection, creating shared goals and life missions, supporting one another’s basic roles in life, and agreeing on the meaning of values and symbols. So here we return once again to build love maps, but at a deeper level.