
Intimacy: A Task for Two

Idaho Society of Individual Psychology

February 28 – March 1

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Objectives:



- (1) discuss eight principles of Adlerian psychology pertaining to couples
- (2) discuss seven principles of John Gottman's research on couple relationships
- (3) identify childhood perceptions of couple relationships
- (4) identify demonstration of respect and affection in relationships
- (5) identify opportunities for positive connection in relationships
- (6) identify positive character traits in others
- (7) identify methods to encourage others and self
- (8) identify problem solving strategies for couples
- (9) design a couple mission statement
- (10) design theory and researched-based strategies to empower couples



Introductions

Session 1:

Where have we been?

"Equality is only possible if both partners have this attitude. It should be the effort of each to ease and enrich the life of the other." — Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler

- Born in Vienna, Austria in 1870
- Died May 28, 1937 In Aberdeen, United Kingdom
- History of health problems (rickets and pneumonia and being run over by two vehicles) and death of brother that compelled him to become a physician
- Named his theory Individual Psychology based on his thought that humans are indivisible
- Advocated for equality in relationships stating that true partnership is based on mutual admiration and cooperation



Alfred Adler Timeline



Birth

Born in Vienna, Austria

1870



Graduation

Graduated from the University of Vienna with a medical degree.

1895



Joined

Joined Sigmund Freud's discussion group.

1902



Separated

Founded the Society for Free Psychoanalytic Research, later known as the Society for Individual Psychology

1911



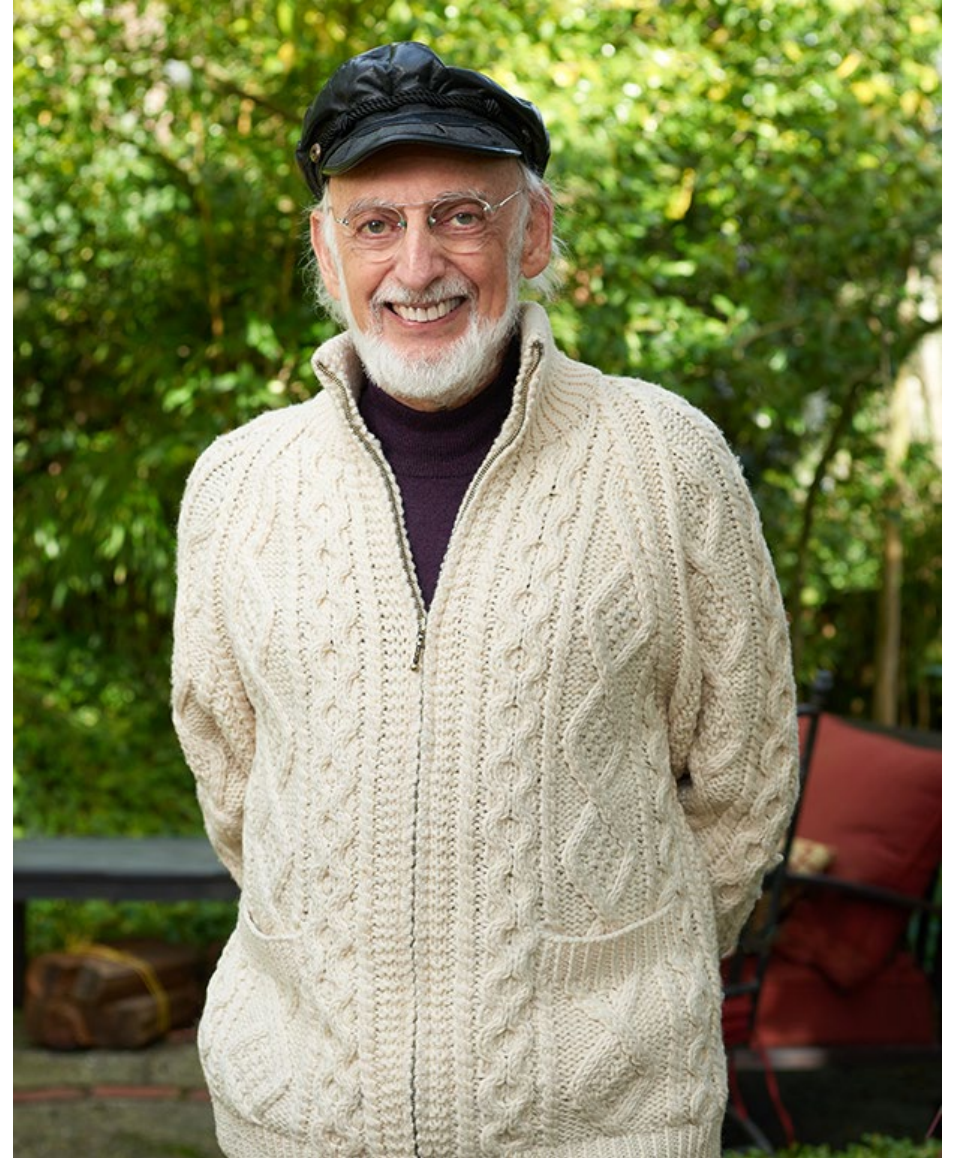
Death

Passed away in Aberdeen, Scotland.

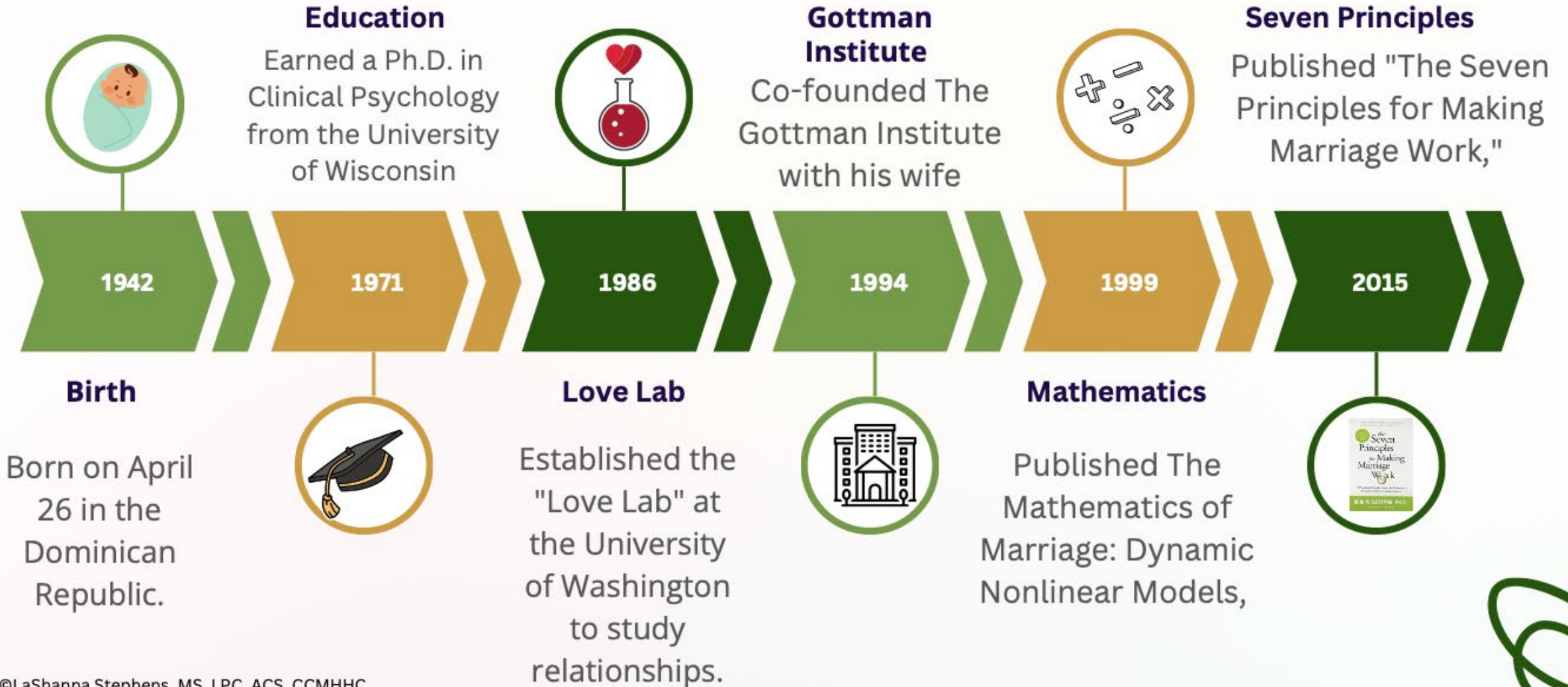
1937

John Mordecai Gottman

- ▶ Born April 26, 1942, in Dominican Republic
- ▶ Professor Emeritus at The University of Washington
- ▶ 35 years of research backs the Gottman Method Couples Therapy with over 677 couples
- ▶ Can predict divorce with 94% accuracy
- ▶ Married three times
- ▶ Believes that all marital conflict falls into two categories: they can be resolved, or they are perpetual



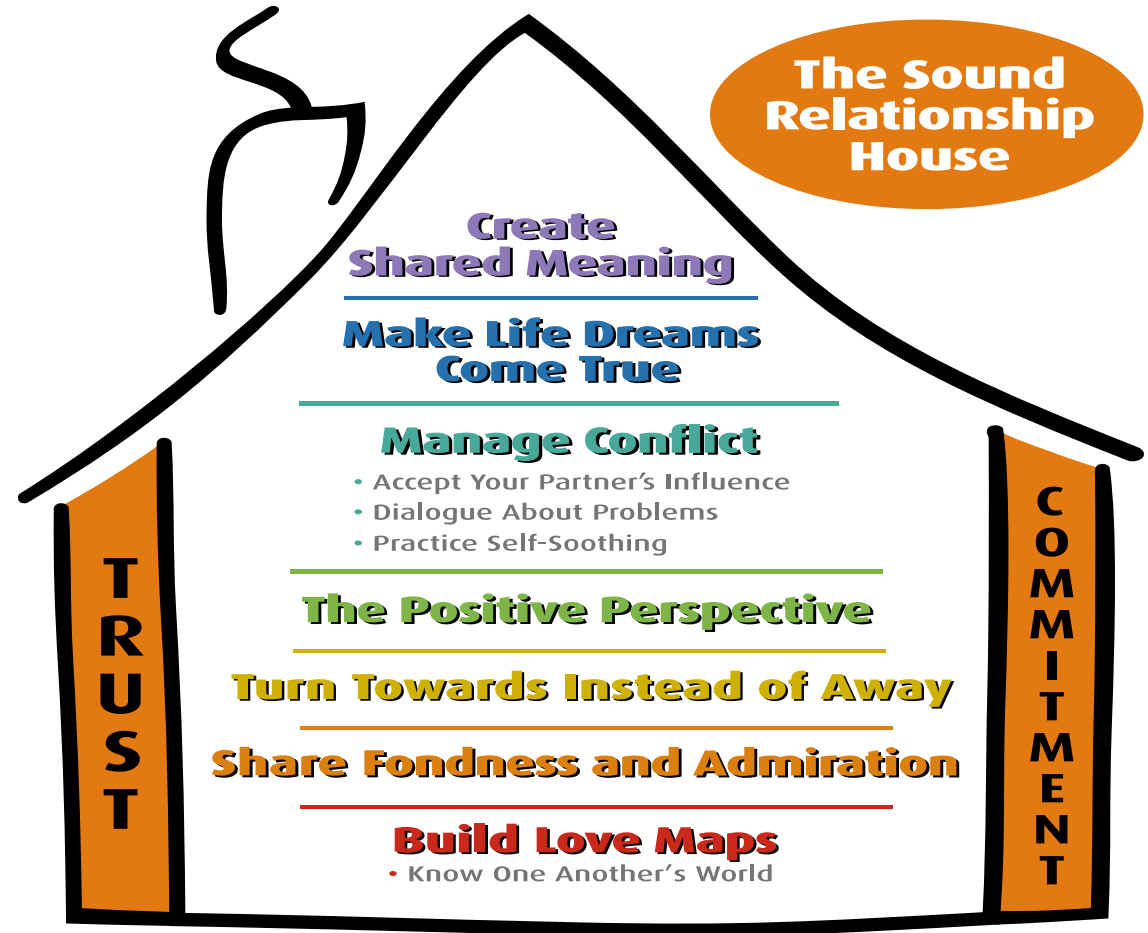
John Gottman Timeline





**Met the
Gottmans....**

Sound Relationship House



Theories compared....

ADLER AND GOTTMAN COMPARED

Category	Adlerian Therapy 	Similarities 	Gottman Approach 
Core Philosophy	Focuses on belonging, significance, and mistaken beliefs.	Both prioritize strengthening emotional intimacy	Emphasizes emotional connection and relational research
View of Relationship	A partnership based on equality, respect, and shared goals.	Relationships thrive on mutual respect and support.	A friendship-based relationship with repair strategies.
Assessment	Lifestyle assessment, family constellation, and early memories.	Both assess patterns of behavior and relationship dynamics.	Love Maps, Four Horsemen framework, and emotional attunement.
Conflict Approach	Views conflict as stemming from unmet social needs or mistaken beliefs.	Both aim to reduce destructive conflict patterns.	Addresses conflict through repair attempts and soft start-ups.
Focus on Growth	Encourages personal growth and cooperative solutions.	Both promote deeper understanding and shared purpose.	Helps couples build shared meaning and resolve issues.
Interventions	Insight-focused techniques (e.g., encouragement, role-play).	Both use structured interventions to improve dynamics.	Skills-focused exercises (e.g., Love Maps, repair attempts).
Cultural Emphasis	Values community and social interest within the relationship.	Both see relationships as part of a broader social system.	Encourages building shared meaning and rituals.



Build Love Maps – Knowing Your Partner Deeply

Love Maps



What is a Love Map?

A *Love Map* is **your knowledge of your partner's inner world**—their dreams, fears, joys, and daily experiences.

According to John Gottman, couples who build detailed love maps have **stronger emotional connections and more resilient relationships**.

💡 *How well do you know your partner's inner world?*

How to Build a Stronger Love Map

♥ Ask Thoughtful Questions

- *What's something exciting happening in your life right now?*
- *What is stressing you the most lately?*
- *What's a dream you have for the future?*

🧠 Remember the Details

- Your partner's favorite foods, hobbies, people they admire, and their daily routines.

🤝 Check In Regularly

- People change over time—keep updating your Love Map by staying curious and engaged.

🎯 Make Time for Deeper Conversations

- Set aside time for **undistracted** connection—date nights, walks, or simply talking before bed.

Session 2:

What are my Partner's Strengths?

“In addition to physical suitability and attraction, primarily the following points are to be considered, as indicators of a sufficient degree of social interest: the partner must have proven that he can maintain friendships; he must be interested in his work; he must show more interest in his partner than in himself. “

-Alfred Adler

The 5 Life Tasks: Building a Strong Foundation for Relationships

According to Adlerian psychology, every person must navigate **five key life tasks** to achieve fulfillment. These tasks shape how we engage with ourselves, others, and the world around us. A strong relationship supports growth in each area.



The 5 Life Tasks:

Work (Occupation & Purpose)

How does your partner find meaning in their work or daily responsibilities?

Support their **goals and ambitions** by showing interest in their passion

Love & Intimacy (Close Relationships)

How do you nurture connection and intimacy?

Express admiration, build trust, and prioritize **quality time** together.

Friendship (Social Connectedness)

Does your partner have strong friendships?

Encourage healthy social interactions and maintain **independent connections**.

Self-Significance (Spirituality & Personal Meaning)

What gives your partner a sense of **purpose or inner peace**?

Support their beliefs, practices, or personal reflection time

Contribution to Society (Community Engagement)

How does your partner contribute beyond the relationship?

Volunteer work, mentoring, or acts of kindness strengthen **shared values**.

Encouragement Starters



“I like...”

“I appreciate...”

“I think...”

“I enjoyed...”

“I value...”

“I respect...”

I noticed...”

I like how...”

Thank you for...”

I admire...”

Next time...”

Your Contributions...”

Share Fondness and Admiration



The key to strengthening the relationships.

Fondness and admiration are crucial for lasting relationships. When couples express appreciation and respect, they build a stronger emotional foundation and protect their relationship from negativity.

Why It Matters:


Helps **counteract negativity** by focusing on what's going well.


Strengthens **emotional intimacy** and connection.

Increases **relationship satisfaction** and overall resilience.


How to Build Fondness & Admiration:

 **Express Appreciation Daily** – Compliment your partner on something specific.

 **Say Thank You** – Acknowledge your partner's efforts, big or small.

 **Recall Positive Moments** – Reminisce about happy memories together.

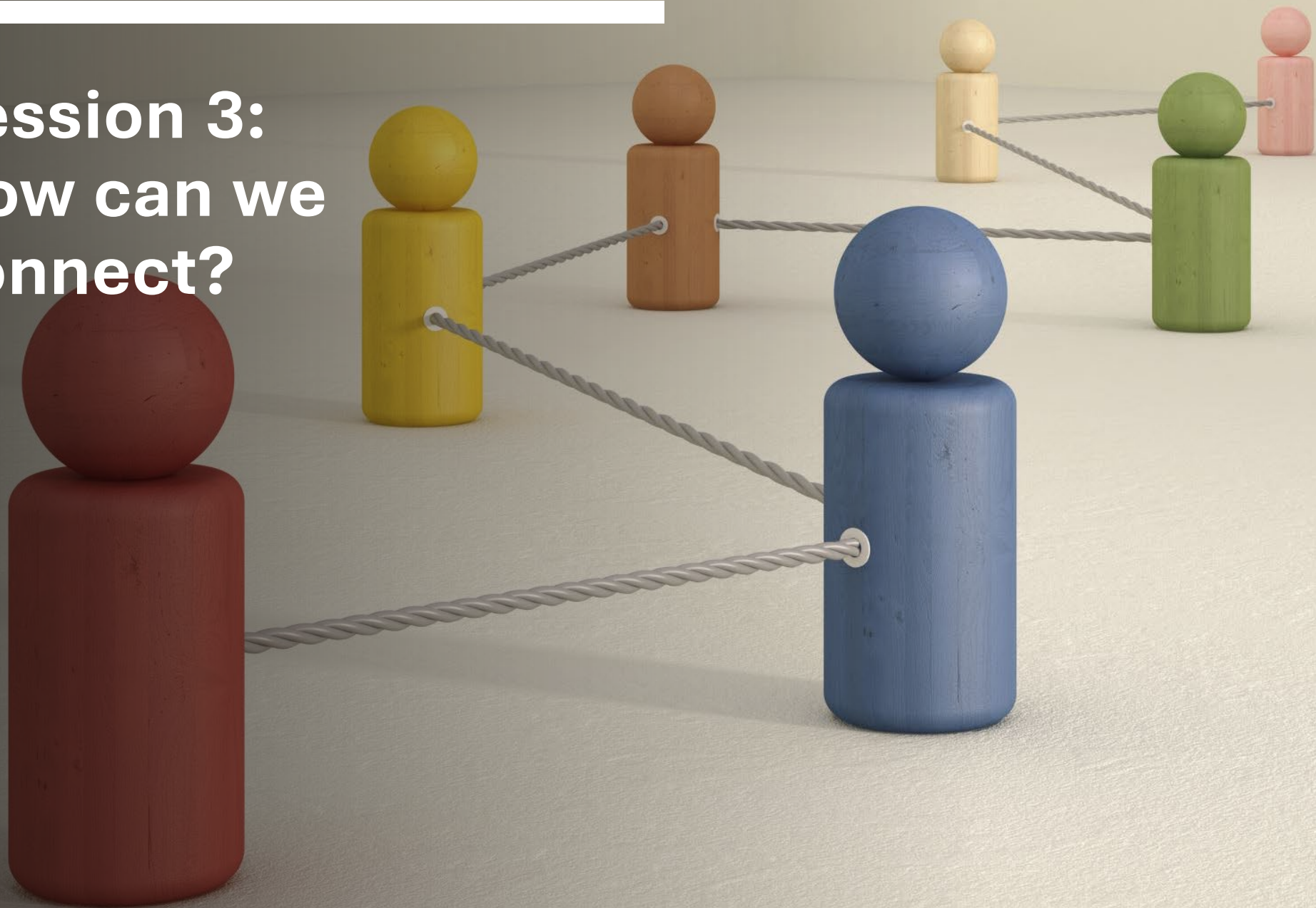
 **Love Notes or Messages** – Send a kind text or leave a note expressing admiration.

 **Speak Well About Your Partner** – Share positive things about them with others.

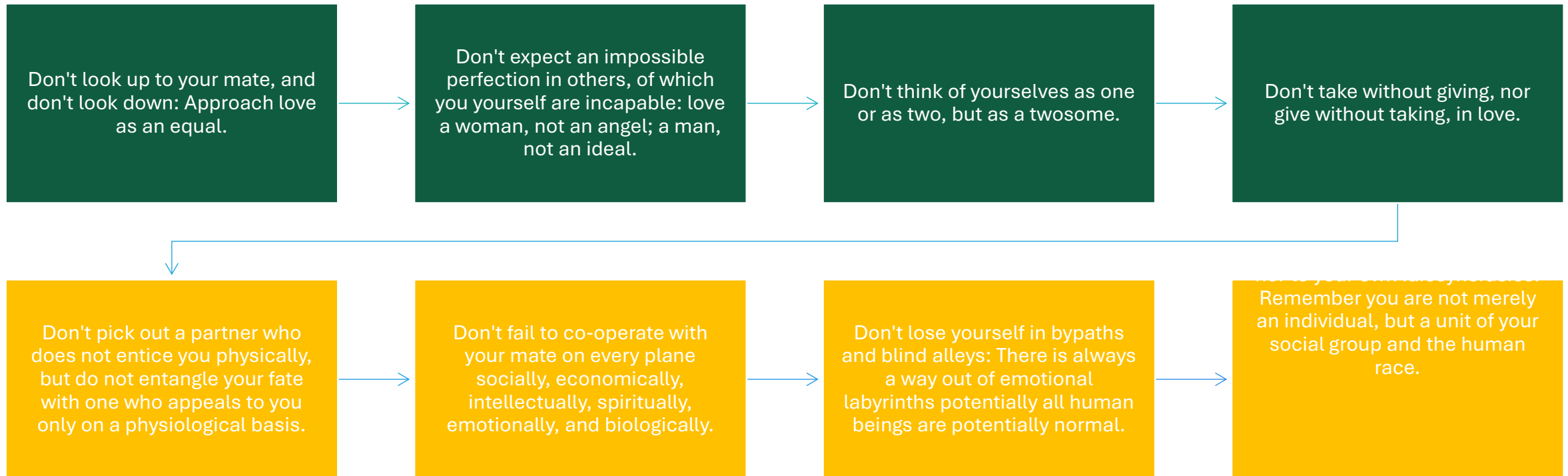
Try This:

Before bed, share one thing you appreciate about your partner from the day. This simple habit can rewire your relationship for more positivity and connection.

Session 3: How can we connect?



How to Achieve the Dyad



Turn Toward Instead of Away

The Small Moments That Build Strong Relationships

Every relationship is made up of **small daily interactions**, and how partners respond to these moments determines their connection. According to John Gottman, **turning toward** your partner means recognizing and engaging with their bids for attention, affection, and support.



What Does "Turning Toward" Mean?



IT'S ABOUT RESPONDING POSITIVELY TO YOUR PARTNER'S ATTEMPTS TO CONNECT. THESE **BIDS FOR CONNECTION** CAN BE VERBAL OR NON-VERBAL AND INCLUDE:



A SMILE OR EYE CONTACT



A QUESTION ABOUT THEIR DAY
A SIGH THAT SIGNALS THEY NEED SUPPORT
A REQUEST FOR HELP OR AFFECTION

Turning Toward Matters:

Couples who consistently turn toward each other **stay together longer** and feel more connected.

It **builds trust and emotional security**, making both partners feel valued.

Strengthens **friendship**, the foundation of romantic relationships.

How to Turn Toward Your Partner:

❤️ **Be Present** – Put down your phone and actively listen.

👂 **Acknowledge Their Words** – Even a simple “That makes sense” or “Tell me more” helps.

🤝 **Engage in Small Acts of Connection** – A touch, a smile, or a kind word can make a big difference.

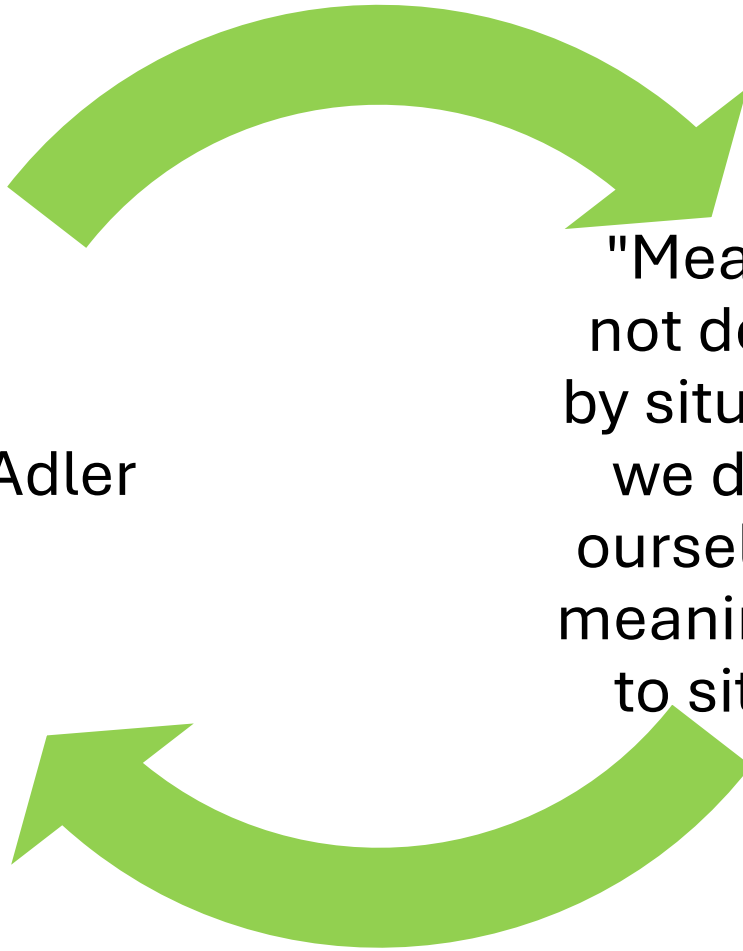
😞 **Avoid Turning Away or Against** – Dismissing or responding negatively to bids weakens the bond over time.

💡 **Try This:**

For one day, **consciously notice and respond** to your partner’s bids for connection. Even a small change can lead to a **big improvement in emotional intimacy!**

Session 4: How can we move forward?

- Alfred Adler



"Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations."



Social Interest Traits

HELPING – Offering support to your partner

SHARING – Being generous in words and actions

PARTICIPATING – Engaging in mutual activities

RESPECTING – Valuing your partner's individuality

COOPERATING – Working toward shared goals

COMPROMISING – Finding middle ground

EMPATHIZING – Understanding each other's emotions

ENCOURAGING – Uplifting your partner

REFORMING – Growing together for the common good

Accept Influence



Accepting Influence Matters....

John Gottman's research shows that **happier couples** accept each other's influence instead of resisting or dismissing it. In strong relationships, partners respect each other's perspectives and work **collaboratively** rather than competing for control.

What It Means to Accept Influence:

Being **open** to your partner's thoughts, feelings, and requests.

Valuing your partner's **input in decisions** rather than insisting on your own way.

Seeing your partner as an **equal teammate**, not an opponent.

Listening instead of defending when your partner shares their needs.

How to Accept Influence in Your Relationship

❤️ **Listen & Validate** – Show that you hear and respect your partner's opinions.

🗨️ **Use Softened Start-Ups** – Express concerns in a way that invites discussion, not conflict.

🤝 **Compromise Willingly** – Find solutions that work for both partners rather than demanding control.

💡 **Be Curious, Not Combative** – Ask questions and seek to understand, not just to argue.

Meaning- Making in Love and Connection

"Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations"

- Alfred Adler

Session 5:

How can we

solve

problems?

Courage means cooperating rather than competing. True success comes from solving challenges together.

-Alfred Adler

Gottman's
FOUR HORSEMEN & THEIR
ANTIDOTES



Criticism

Verbally attacking personality or character.



Gentle Start Up

Use "I" statements and express a positive need instead of blaming.



Contempt

Speaking with disrespect, sarcasm, or name-calling.



Build Appreciation

Focus on your partner's positive qualities. Express gratitude regularly.



Defensiveness

Shifting blame or making excuses instead of addressing concerns.



Take Responsibility

Own your role in conflicts and acknowledge your partner's perspective.



Stonewalling

Shutting down, withdrawing, or ignoring to avoid conflict.



Self-Soothe

Take a short break, practice self-soothing, and return to the conversation calmly.

Solve Solvable Problems – Strengthening Your Relationship Through Conflict Resolution

Not All Problems Are the Same



John Gottman's research shows that **69% of relationship conflicts are perpetual**, meaning they stem from personality differences or core values. However, **31% of conflicts are solvable** – and how couples handle these makes all the difference.



Solvable problems usually revolve around **daily life issues** like household chores, schedules, and minor disagreements. The key is **effective communication and compromise**.

Solving Solvable Problems – An Adlerian Perspective

Adlerian Psychology & Conflict Resolution

From an **Adlerian perspective**, conflicts are **opportunities for growth** rather than battles to be won. Adler emphasized that strong relationships are built on **mutual respect, cooperation, and social interest**—the ability to consider the needs of both partners rather than focusing solely on individual desires.

💡 **The Goal:** Not to "win" the argument, but to work **together** toward a solution that strengthens the relationship.

Why Do Couples Struggle with Solvable Problems? (Adlerian View)

- ◆ **Lack of Cooperation** – When partners approach problems as competitors rather than teammates, minor issues become bigger than they need to be.
- ◆ **Feelings of Inferiority or Superiority** – If one partner feels unheard or "less than," they may resist solutions to regain a sense of control.
- ◆ **Low Social Interest** – When partners prioritize **individual needs** over the relationship, solutions become harder to find.
- ◆ **Unconscious Early Life Patterns** – Adler believed past experiences shape our conflict styles. A person who grew up feeling dismissed may **struggle with compromise**, while someone raised in a controlling home may **resist influence** from their partner.

How to Solve Problems Using Adlerian Principles

1 Approach Conflict as Equals 🍷

- Power struggles create distance; mutual respect builds solutions.
- Ask: *"How can we find a solution that respects both of our needs?"*

2 Encourage, Don't Criticize 💡

- Adler believed that **encouragement leads to positive change**.
- Instead of *"You never help around the house!"* → Try *"I really appreciate when you help with dishes—it makes me feel supported."*

3 Look for Common Goals 🎯

- Adler emphasized **shared meaning**.
- Instead of focusing on differences, find **where your goals align**.
- Example: If one partner wants more free time and the other values structure, a **flexible routine** could meet both needs.

4 Take Responsibility Instead of Blaming 🗣️

- Adlerian therapy encourages **self-reflection over finger-pointing**.
- Ask: *"How am I contributing to this problem?"* rather than *"How is my partner making this worse?"*

5 Strengthen Social Interest 🌍

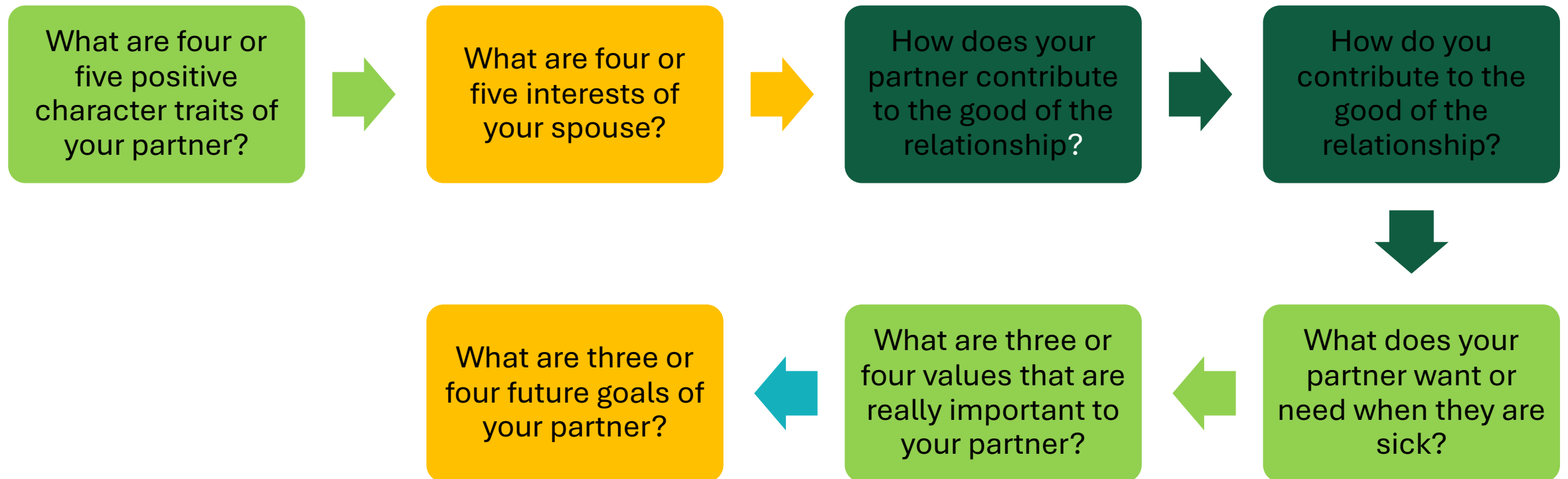
- View the relationship as a **unit**, not two competing individuals.
- Ask: *"How does this solution support both of us?"* rather than *"How do I get my way?"*

Session 6: How can we understand each other and our differences?

Equality is only possible if both partners have this attitude. It should be the effort of each to ease and enrich the life of the other. In this way each will be safe; each will feel that he is worthwhile and that he is needed. The fundamental guarantee of marriage, the meaning of marital happiness, is the feeling that you are worthwhile, that you cannot be replaced, that your partner needs you, that you are acting well, and that you are a fellow man and a true friend.

-Alfred Adler

Questions to Aid in Understanding Partner



Overcome Gridlock – Moving Forward in Stuck Conflicts



What is Gridlock?

Gridlock happens when couples face **ongoing, unresolved conflicts** that resurface repeatedly. These disagreements often involve **core values, dreams, or unmet needs**—making them feel impossible to resolve.

💡 *Gridlock isn't about small, solvable issues. It's about deep-rooted differences that require understanding, not just solutions.*

Signs Your Couple is Stuck in Gridlock



- ⊘ The same argument happens over and over with no progress.
- ⊘ Conversations feel **tense, frustrating, or hopeless.**
- ⊘ Both partners feel **misunderstood or unheard.**
- ⊘ The issue creates **resentment, withdrawal, or emotional distance.**

Steps to Overcome Gridlock

1 Identify the Core Issue 💡

- What **deeper values, fears, or unmet needs** are behind the conflict?
- Example: A partner resisting moving to a new city may **fear losing their community** rather than just hating change.

2 Express Dreams & Values 💬

- Discuss **why this issue matters** to each of you.
- Example: *"I always dreamed of living near my family because connection is really important to me."*

3 Listen Without Defensiveness 🗣️

- Focus on **understanding**, not winning the argument.
- Ask: *"Can you tell me more about why this is important to you?"*

4 Find Small Ways to Compromise 🤝

- Even if the core conflict remains, **find middle ground**.
- Example: If moving isn't an option now, maybe frequent visits to family can help meet both partners' needs.

5 Create a Plan for Ongoing Conversations 🔄

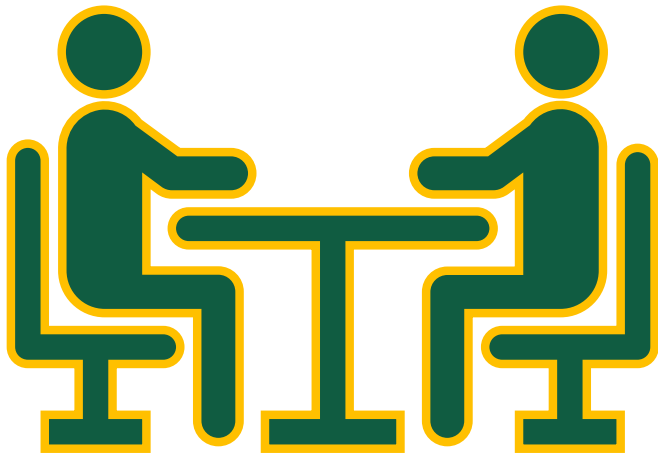
- Gridlocked issues don't disappear overnight—**schedule regular check-ins** to revisit and adapt solutions.

Overcoming Gridlock – An Adlerian Perspective

Adlerian Psychology & Relationship Gridlock

From an **Adlerian perspective**, **gridlock** represents a deeper struggle for belonging, significance, and mutual respect in a relationship. When partners experience repeated unresolved conflicts, it often means their **individual life goals, values, or social interests are clashing**. Rather than trying to “win” an argument, **Adlerian psychology encourages cooperation, empathy, and encouragement** to move past the stuck points.

How Gridlock Happens (Adlerian View)



- ◆ **Differences in Life Tasks** – Partners may have conflicting priorities in work, love, friendship, spirituality, or community involvement.
- ◆ **Struggles for Superiority** – One or both partners may feel the need to be “right” rather than work toward mutual understanding.
- ◆ **Lack of Social Interest** – When partners focus only on **personal needs** rather than the relationship as a whole, conflicts become harder to resolve.
- ◆ **Unmet Early Childhood Needs** – Adler believed our early experiences shape our worldviews. If a partner feels unheard in childhood, they may **overreact** to feeling dismissed in their relationship.

How to Overcome Gridlock Using Adlerian Principles

1 Shift from Competition to Cooperation 🤝

- View the relationship as a **team**, not a battle.
- Ask: *“How can we solve this in a way that works for both of us?”*

2 Encourage Instead of Criticize 💡

- Adler believed **encouragement fosters change**.
- Focus on **what your partner is doing well** instead of what they’re doing wrong.

3 Identify the Hidden Goal 🎯

- What does this conflict **really** mean to each partner?
- Ask: *“What deeper value or fear is behind this issue for you?”*

4 Strengthen Social Interest 🌍

- Instead of “What do I need?” ask: *“What does our relationship need to thrive?”*
- Find ways to support **each other’s growth**, not just your own.

5 Reframe the Conflict as a Shared Challenge 🔄

- Instead of “Me vs. You,” think **“Us vs. the Problem.”**
- Work toward understanding**, even if the issue doesn’t disappear overnight.

Session 7: Where are we going?

“Courage, an optimistic attitude, common sense, and the feeling of being at home upon the crust of the earth, will enable (us) to face advantages and disadvantages with equal firmness. “


-Alfred Adler

Create Shared Meaning – The Heart of a Lasting Relationship

What is Shared Meaning?



John Gottman's research shows that **happy couples don't just resolve conflicts—they build a life together with shared values, dreams, and traditions.** When partners create shared meaning, they develop a deeper connection that sustains them through challenges.



 Shared meaning is about more than just daily routines—it's about creating a relationship with purpose.

Shared Meaning Matters because...

- ✓ Strengthens emotional connection and resilience.
- ✓ Helps couples navigate change by staying grounded in common values.
- ✓ Creates a sense of partnership beyond practical responsibilities.

How to Build Shared Meaning in Your Relationship

1 Identify Core Values Together 🏆

- What values guide your relationship? (e.g., family, adventure, growth, stability)

2 Create Shared Rituals & Traditions 🎉

- Daily routines (e.g., morning coffee together, evening walks).
- Weekly or yearly traditions (e.g., date nights, holiday rituals).

3 Support Each Other's Dreams 🚀

- Encourage each other's personal growth and life goals.

4 Have Meaningful Conversations 💬

- Talk about **big-picture** topics:
 - *“What kind of legacy do we want to leave?”*
 - *“How do we want to grow together over the next 10 years?”*

5 Develop Shared Goals 🎯

- Financial, family, lifestyle, or personal development goals.

Where Are We Going? – An Adlerian Perspective

Adlerian Psychology & Relationship Growth

From an **Adlerian perspective**, relationships are not just about solving problems or maintaining harmony—they are about **growth, shared purpose, and striving together toward a meaningful future**. Adler believed that **humans are goal-oriented beings**, and in relationships, partners thrive when they work toward a **shared vision** while supporting each other's individual aspirations.

💡 *Healthy relationships are not stagnant; they evolve as partners grow together.*

Key Adlerian Themes for Relationship Growth

1 A Relationship is a Shared Life Task 🤝

• Adler viewed relationships as a **team effort**—partners must **cooperate** to build a fulfilling life together.

2 Encouragement Fuels Growth 💡

• Adler believed that **encouragement, not criticism, is the foundation of growth.**

3 Social Interest Strengthens Bonds 🌍

• Healthy couples extend their love beyond themselves—contributing to their **family, community, and the world.**

4 Life Tasks Must Be Balanced ⚖️

• Adler taught that humans have **five life tasks**: work, love, friendship, self-significance, and contribution to society.

5 Strive for a Future with Meaning 🎯

• More than just planning for the next vacation or home project, partners must **dream together.**

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Questions

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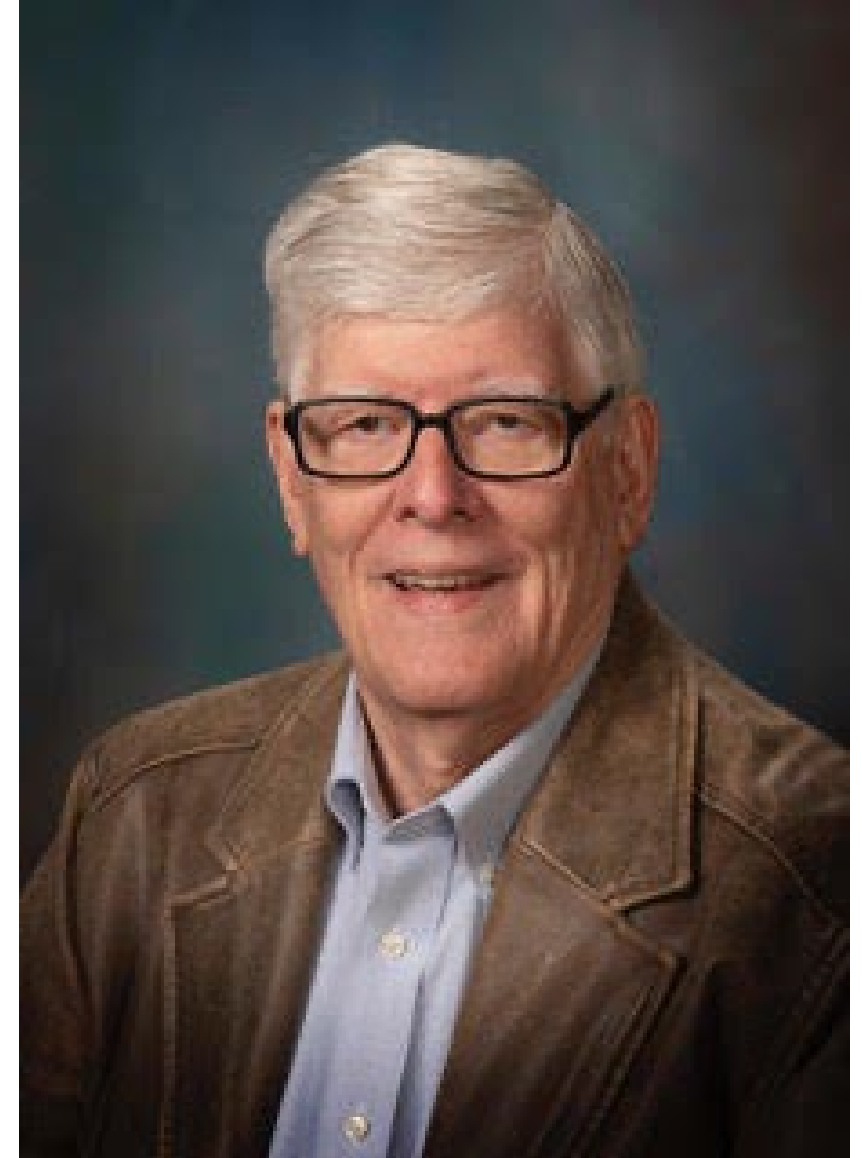
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