

The Easiest Way to Improve Your Relationship

Utah Marriage Commission

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Have you ever wondered if there was one thing you could do to improve your marriage? Everyone has their own relationship advice to give. I have heard many people tell me, “Just make sure to communicate” or “Put each other first”. The list goes on and on. While this advice can be helpful, they can feel vague and general, especially for a newly married couple. Today I am giving you one specific piece of advice that will change the trajectory of your relationship for the better. One of the keys that John Gottman suggests is to turn towards your spouse when they make bids for connection. He says that it is one predictor of a healthy, long-term relationship, when we turn towards each other.

What is a bid? It is an action that tries to get your attention and indicates a desire for connection. What does a bid for connection look like? They could be verbal, non-verbal, serious, humorous, or said in a statement or a question.

- Examples of verbal: “You would not believe what happened today!”, “How was your day?”, “Look at that awesome house!”, or “Can you come sit by me?”
- Examples of nonverbal: Sighing, smiling, blowing a kiss, or winking.

The way we respond to our partner’s bids will go a long way, whether for better or for worse. We can either turn towards our partner, turn away from them, or turn against them. I will describe each so you can understand how to respond positively. I will use this scenario to explain each response: your spouse sighs.

- You could turn towards them by asking, “Hey, are you doing okay?” or “What’s on your mind?” You could also put your arm around them, grab their hand, or give them a hug.
- You could turn away from them by not saying or doing anything, and just continuing to look at your phone or work on the task you were working on. This option is simply ignoring them.
- Or lastly, you could turn against them. That is usually shown in criticism and sarcasm, like if you said, “You are always sighing, it’s so annoying.” or “Could you breathe any louder?”

The key to improving your relationship can be as simple as turning towards your partner. It takes effort and being intentional, but you can totally do it. It can build trust and increases emotional connection as well. It really can improve your relationship; it can create more positive experiences you have together which will create a healthier and happier environment for you and your partner to be in.

How do I start?

Start by noticing the various bids your partner makes and be intentional about responding positively by turning towards them. When they show that they are seeking your attention, give it to them. The cool thing is that everyone makes bids, your partner, children, coworkers, and more. People are longing for connection, and a great way to start is by turning towards people in small ways and being observant about when they happen. By turning towards others, especially your partner, you will be showing them that they are worth your attention and interest.

For more:

Watch this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib7Ain2aVR0>

Here are a few links to other articles about bids:

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/want-to-improve-your-relationship-start-paying-more-attention-to-bids/>

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/self-care-friendship-and-dr-gottmans-guide-to-recognizing-bids/>

<https://www.improveyoursocialskills.com/gottman-bids-for-connection>

<https://thelightprogram.pyramidhealthcarepa.com/emotional-bids/#:~:text=Nonverbal%20bids%20may>

%20include%20facial,dismissing%20what%20your
%20partner%20says.