

Shrink Rap: Save your marriage: Part 2

In the previous week I talked about Dr. John Gottman's research at the University of Washington in Seattle and how he can predict divorce with 91% accuracy based on six communication indicators. Last week we learned about Harsh Start-up, and the Four Horsemen. This week I will tell you about the indicators of Flooding, Body Language, Failed Repair Attempts, and Bad Memories.

The third sign Dr. Gottman looked for is the feeling of being physically and emotionally overwhelmed, shell-shocked by negativity, defenseless to the point of being “flooded.” When people feel flooded with emotion, they tend to shut down, tune out, and turn away. This makes it impossible to have a productive, solution-focused conversation.

Dr. Gottman's fourth indicator of Body Language is not what we typically think of as facial expression, body posturing, and tone. He actually measured heart rates, breathing rates, and blood pressure. These physiological changes trigger us into the 'fight or flight' response. How physiologically responsive our bodies are to stress influences our ability to stay rational and calm, which is necessary for communicating openly and productively.

A “Failed Repair Attempt” is when an attempt to de-escalate does not work. When one says “let's take a break” or “could we talk more later after we have had time to think” or offers a submission and willingness to change, and the other responds with defensiveness, attacks, pursuing and persisting in the conflict, there is a failed repair attempt.

The last indicator is “Bad Memories.” In marriages headed for divorce, the couple tells their history with an overwhelming amount of negativity, blaming, or if their past is too painful to recall they “just don't remember.” Couples will rewrite their story to create a very negative script with ulterior motives, misinterpretations, allegations, bitterness, and noting all the things that went wrong.

In addition to the 'six indicators' Dr. Gottman states the deeper signals of death to the relationship lies in how the couple feels about their marriage. If they see their problems as severe, they feel talking things over seems useless, they lead parallel lives, and loneliness has set in, then without change, success of the relationship is minimal.

But it is not over until it is over. Dr. Gottman has spent countless hours developing strategies to help these troubled marriages. His book “The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work” expands his research into saving marriages. Next week we will start unpacking those seven principles. Get started today – start looking for the positives in your relationship, allow repair attempts, take down your walls of defensiveness and communicate in only kind and loving ways. Notice the things that go 'right' in your relationship and how you work through things together.

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