

Licensed clinical psychologist Don Crowe, PhD, operates a private practice in Orinda, California. He has more than 35 years of experience providing psychotherapy to individuals, couples, and families. In his couples therapy, Don Crowe, PhD, uses the Gottmann method, a set of research-based interventions and exercises for couples established by psychologists John and Julie Gottmann.

According to Drs. John and Julie Gottmann, there are seven components to building a sound relationship and making it work:

1. Build a love map. Get to know your partner's inner world and history. Find out what his or her key hopes, fears, dreams, and worries are.
2. Express affection and admiration. Rather than burdening the relationship with negative emotions like contempt, show appreciation and respect for your partner.
3. Identify and express your needs to each other. Be assertive about what you need but use it as a way of communicating and bonding with your partner. Turn towards one another for everyday needs to build a stronger relationship.
4. Manage conflict wisely. Relationship conflict is natural and can have positive effects. Don't ignore or push it away. Recognize that you and your partner may have different ways of dealing with conflict and that there are important differences between handling solvable issues and perpetual problems.
5. Be honest about dreams and make them come true. Both you and your partner should feel comfortable sharing hopes, values, and aspirations and about supporting each other's visions and dreams.
6. Build an atmosphere of trust. You and your partner should work not only for your own benefit or interest but also for that of the other. It is crucial to know you can rely on your partner's support.
7. Take your commitment seriously. If you are in a long-term relationship with someone, recognize that this is a vital part of your life journey and that it is your responsibility to nurture it and make it work, for better or for worse. If it does get worse, you must both be prepared to work on improving it rather than cultivating resentment.