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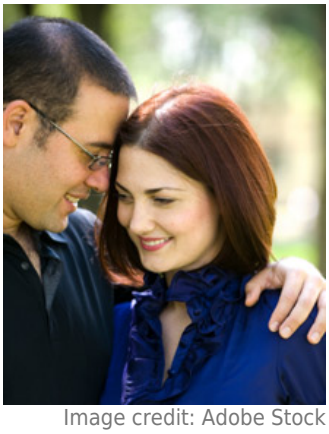
# Relationships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**Summary:** Although its common sense that having strong, healthy relationships is good for mental health, it can be a challenge to keep our relationships working well. What should a couple do to keep their relationships strong? Fortunately, studies of couples provide useful tips on what a couple should (or shouldn't) do in order to keep their relationships strong...

## Introduction

In our lives, we have many relationships, and all of these make a difference to our mental health. When our relationships go well, it helps our mental health. When we have problems with our relationships, it can cause stress and problems for our mental health.

Perhaps the most important relationship in our lives is our romantic relationship, i.e. the one that we have with our spouse, partner, husband, wife, boyfriend or girlfriend...

The following advice about our primary romantic relationship comes from the Gottman Institute, which is dedicated to the study of marital relationships -- what makes them, what breaks them, and what can be done to help them.

## What To Do For a Strong Relationship

If you are having troubles with your primary relationship, here are some top suggestions for how to keep your marriage strong (and even if you are not 'married', the following advice should still be helpful):

- **Get Help Soon.** Half of all marriages end in the first 7 years. On average, most couples wait 6 years before seeking help for marital problems. This means the average couple lives with unhappiness for far too long. Don't wait that long. Seek out help early! The sooner the better!

- **Starts Talks Softly.** How you start a conversation sets the tone for the entire conversation. Starting with a critical, contemptuous or confrontational tone will get you off on the wrong foot and likely escalate towards a conflict. By bringing up problems and issues gently and without blame, you will increase the chances that you may have a constructive conversation. Start soft.

- **Bite Your Tongue, Avoid Criticism.** Stop and edit yourself. Avoid saying each and every critical thought when you are discussing sensitive topics with your partner. Couples who avoid being overly critical are generally happier.

- **Have Low Tolerance For Bad Behaviour.** Do not accept inappropriate and/or unacceptable behaviour. Keep your standards high and do not compromise. Successful couples do not tolerate hurtful behaviours. Address these hurtful and/or inappropriate behaviours early and do not repeat them. Couples who have low tolerance for bad behaviours tend to be happier.

- **Guys, You Got To Do Something Different!** Research shows that relationships in which the man is able to accept influence by his partner tend to succeed. Woman tend to naturally accept influence from men and so are likely already doing this in their relationship. So, men have to become more able to be flexible and engage in a partnership, one in which there is an equal measure of influence from both partners.

- **Manage Your Arguments, Don't Let Them Manage You.** Learning how to manage the energy during conversations and arguments is vital. Successful couples know how to keep control of the argument by continuously making efforts to manage the energy created around the conversation. These efforts may include; using humour, letting your partner know that you working on common ground, offering gestures of caring, love and appreciation for your partner and their efforts, etc. Also, successful couples take lots of time-outs when the conversation gets too heated, returning to the topic once each person has cooled down**.**

- **Invest In Being Positive Rather Than Negative.** Research shows that people in happy marriages make 5 times more positive statements than negative ones during problem discussions. A healthy climate of positivity maintains and stregthens the degree of goodwill, creating a strong buffer and cushion for the relationship. Make regular and frequent deposits into this emotional bank account.

## For More Information

- The Registry of Marriage and Family Therapy in Canada is associated with the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), and provides a register of certified marriage and family therapists in Canada.
  Web: www.marriageandfamily.ca

- The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, provides  resources for practitioners and consumers of *marriage* and *family therapy*. The site also offers a search engine for finding a qualified therapist in your area.
  Web: www.aamft.org

- The Gottman Institute, is an internationally respected research centre in the area of marriage and family relationships.
  Web: www.gottman.com

## References

Wikipedia Article on Relationships and Dr. John Gottman