

Gottman Repair Checklist

Checklist · 95 items · 10 sections

The Gottman Repair Checklist is a conflict de-escalation tool from Gottman Method Couples Therapy, developed by Drs. John and Julie Gottman based on four decades of research at the Gottman Institute. Print it, post it, and read directly from it during a fight. The phrases are deliberately simple so they bypass your defensive reflexes and signal goodwill.

Open the editable, AI-powered version online:

<https://genechecklist.com/checklist/gottman-repair-checklist>

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

- Both partners must agree, in a calm moment, to use this checklist together. One-sided use does not work
HIGH
- Practice the phrases during peaceful times, not for the first time mid-argument
HIGH
They will feel awkward at first; that is normal.
- Print the checklist and post it somewhere visible (fridge, bedside, shared workspace)
HIGH
- During conflict, either partner may read directly from the list. Reading aloud is not cheating: it is the entire point
HIGH
- The phrases are deliberately simple and slightly stilted; their power is that they bypass defensive reflexes
- If a phrase does not land, try another. The goal is connection, not winning

I FEEL

- I'm getting scared
- Please say that more gently
- Did I do something wrong?
- That hurt my feelings
- That felt like an insult
- I'm feeling sad
- I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?

- I'm feeling unappreciated
- I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?
- Please don't lecture me
- I don't feel like you understand me right now
- Sounds like it's all my fault
- I feel criticized. Can you rephrase that?
- I'm getting worried
- Please don't withdraw

SORRY / I'M WRONG

- My reactions were too extreme. Sorry
- I really blew that one
- Let me try again
- I want to be gentler to you right now, and I don't know how
- Tell me what you hear me saying
- I can see my part in this
- How can I make things better?
- Let's try that over again
- What you are saying is...
- Let me start again in a softer way
- I'm sorry. Please forgive me

GET TO YES

- You're starting to convince me
- I agree with part of what you're saying
- Let's compromise here
- Let's find our common ground
- I never thought of things that way
- This problem is not very serious in the big picture
- I think your point of view makes sense
- Let's agree to include both our views in a solution
- What are your concerns?

I NEED TO CALM DOWN

- Can you make things safer for me?
- I need things to be calmer right now
- I need your support right now
- Just listen to me right now and try to understand
- Tell me you love me
- Can I have a kiss?
- Can I take that back?
- Please be gentler with me
- Please help me calm down
- Please be quiet and listen to me
- This is important to me. Please listen
- I need to finish what I was saying
- I am starting to feel flooded

STOP ACTION

- I might be wrong here
- Please, let's stop for a while
- Let's take a break
- Give me a moment. I'll be back
- I'm feeling flooded
- Please stop
- Let's agree to disagree here
- Let's start all over again
- Hang in there. Don't withdraw
- I want to change the topic
- We are getting off track

I APPRECIATE

- I know this isn't your fault
- My part of this problem is...
- I see your point

- Thank you for...
- That's a good point
- We are both saying...
- I understand
- I love you
- I am thankful for...
- One thing I admire about you is...
- I see what you're talking about
- This is not your problem. It's our problem

SIGNS OF FLOODING

- Recognize diffuse physiological arousal (flooding): heart rate over 100 bpm (80 for athletes/low-resting)
 - HIGH**
- Tight chest, shallow breathing, jaw clenched, shoulders up around the ears
 - HIGH**
- Tunnel vision; your partner starts to look like the enemy
 - HIGH**
- Thoughts like 'I have to win this' or 'I have to get out of here'
 - HIGH**
- Inability to take in new information; rehearsing your next line instead of listening
 - HIGH**
- Going numb, going silent, or wanting to walk out (stonewalling, more common in men)
 - HIGH**

THE 20-MINUTE BREAK PROTOCOL

- When either partner is flooded, call a break using a Stop Action phrase. The break is non-negotiable once requested
 - HIGH**
- Take a minimum of 20 minutes apart (less is not enough for physiology to settle); up to 24 hours if needed
 - HIGH**
- Agree on a specific time to come back. Walking away without a return time reads as abandonment
 - HIGH**
- No rumination during the break. Do not replay the fight in your head
 - HIGH**

- No rehearsing your next argument or building your case against your partner
HIGH
- No 'righteous indignation' thoughts ('I can't believe she said that'; 'He always does this')
HIGH
- Do something genuinely calming: walk, shower, listen to music, deep breathing, light stretching, read something unrelated
HIGH
- Goal: bring heart rate down and prefrontal cortex back online so you can return as a partner, not an adversary
HIGH

FOUR HORSEMEN AND ANTIDOTES

- Criticism (attacking character, not behavior). Antidote: gentle start-up, complain without blame, use 'I feel' statements
HIGH
- Contempt (mockery, sarcasm, eye-rolling, name-calling). The single strongest predictor of divorce. Antidote: build a culture of appreciation and respect
HIGH
- Defensiveness (counter-attacking, playing the victim). Antidote: take responsibility, even for a small piece
HIGH
- Stonewalling (shutting down, withdrawing, going silent). Almost always a sign of flooding. Antidote: physiological self-soothing, then return
HIGH