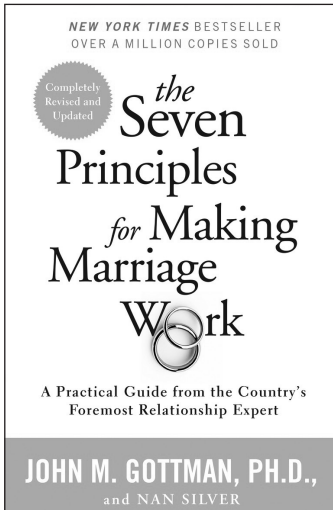


SECTION 1 | *About the Program*

1





THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING MARRIAGE WORK

by John M. Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver

John Gottman revolutionized the study of marriage by using rigorous scientific procedures to observe the habits of married couples in unprecedented detail over many years.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work book summarizes this research and guides couples on the path toward a harmonious and long-lasting relationship.

Packed with practical questionnaires and exercises, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* is the definitive guide for anyone who wants their relationship to attain its highest potential. It aids couples in deepening the friendship foundation of their relationship, managing conflict successfully, honoring each other's dreams, and creating shared meaning.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work has been used around the world by thousands of couples to strengthen their relationship. It has been translated into over 20 languages and is used in a wide variety of settings.

INTRODUCTION

The Gottman Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work Couples Program and Leader Training was developed using the book, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, by John M. Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver, for use in a class format or weekend retreat setting. Since the *Seven Principles* was published, The Gottman Institute has received many requests by churches, synagogues, mosques, and other community organizations for assistance in using the book in a class format. The intent of this program is to equip individuals or couples to successfully lead a class by offering tips and tools on everything from behind the scenes logistical considerations to detailed instruction on how to present material from the book in a class setting and to use exercises in the book effectively.

The relationship skills contained in the book are applicable to couples who are engaged or contemplating marriage, all the way through couples who have been together for a lifetime but desire to deepen and enhance their relationship. Classes may be offered for couples of all ages or may target specific populations such as newlyweds, couples with preschoolers, parents of teenagers, or empty-nesters.

Couples often wait an average of six years from the time they identify problems in their relationship until they seek help (Notarius & Buongiorno, 1992). By then problems deepen,

opposing positions become more entrenched, feelings become deeply hurt, and the task of recovery is much greater. In addition, only 37 percent of couples who divorced sought any type of counseling or therapy (Johnson *et al.*, 2002).

The hope is that providing The Seven Principles Couples Program based on the latest research about what makes marriages succeed, and what happens when relationships deteriorate and fail, will encourage couples to get help, and get it much sooner, in order to avoid the pitfalls of delaying or avoiding seeking assistance.

The aim is to provide couples with practical tools to enhance and improve their relationships while understanding the research-based foundation from which the tools and skills are derived. This program does not provide psychotherapy nor is it intended to take the place of marital therapy, but it does provide practical skills in a psycho-educational format that can help couples strengthen their relationships.

The Gottman Institute has offered a two day weekend workshop for couples since 1996 called The Art and Science of Love. It was developed by Drs. John and Julie Gottman to assist couples based on Dr. John Gottman's research and Dr. Julie Gottman's many years of clinical experience. The material in the *Seven Principles* book was drawn from this workshop and the content of the class based on the book is similar. A study (Babcock, Gottman, Ryan & Gottman, 2013) has shown that this workshop improved couples' friendship and the quality of sex, romance, and passion in their relationship and helped couples have less destructive and more constructive conflict discussions. Reading the *Seven Principles* book without attending the workshop served as the control group for this study, and those couples who just read the book without participating in the workshop also experienced significant relationship improvement, with about half the gains of those who attended the workshop. While there was no control group who didn't receive an intervention, for ethical reasons, the finding that couples who read the book alone and experienced relationship enhancement is in contrast to the general tendency in couples research for no intervention control groups to experience relationship deterioration (Wesley & Waring, 1996; Baucom, Hahlweg & Kuschel, 2003). This research suggests that using the *Seven Principles* book in a class setting will benefit couples.

The Art and Science of Love Couples Workshop continues to be offered by Drs. John and Julie Gottman in Seattle and by Certified Gottman Workshop Leaders throughout the United States and Canada. While the material in the *Seven Principles* book is similar, there are some significant differences.

The Art and Science of Love Couples Workshop includes additional material not contained in the *Seven Principles* book. The Couples Workshop goes into more depth and is staffed with Certified Gottman Therapists who are available to assist couples when they are doing their private exercises. This allows couples to go deeper in addressing their issues and provides support when they run into obstacles. These resources are not available in classes using this Leader Guide. For more information on The Art and Science of Love Couples Workshop, see the resources section at the end of this guide.

The Seven Principles Couples Program is taught by working through the book, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, from beginning to end on a schedule that fits the desired time frame for offering the class. A **modular approach** is used that allows for the material to be presented in a wide range of time frames, including classes covering one or two chapters a week spread out over several weeks, meeting on weekends for a few hours to all day, and a weekend couples retreat.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING MARRIAGE WORK COUPLES GUIDE

Participants in the *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* Couples Program will each have a Couples Guide. The purpose of this Guide is twofold: to encourage reflection and integrate knowledge from material in the *Seven Principles* book, and to provide space to complete the exercises contained in the class.

Many of the exercises from the *Seven Principles* book are contained in this Couples Guide. The “Bonus Exercises” are in addition to those included in the class and are provided for couples who wish to do exercises beyond those covered in the class and are also for couples who do not participate in the class who independently read through the *Seven Principles* book and do the exercises on their own.

This Couples Guide is not meant to stand alone because the exercises come from a much broader context of information contained in the *Seven Principles* book. Instead, the Couples Guide is meant to accompany the *Seven Principles* book so that participants gain a full understanding of Dr. Gottman’s research and benefit from his guidance for improving their relationship. The *Seven Principles* book contains much more information and many additional valuable exercises.

CLASS GOALS

To Strengthen Relationships

The main goal of The Seven Principles Couples Program and Leader Training is to help couples strengthen their relationships in a variety of ways including deepening their love maps, fostering fondness and admiration, facilitating turning toward each other, accepting influence, solving solvable problems, overcoming gridlock, creating shared meaning, and maintaining gains.

To Foster Community Support for Relationships and Normalize Experiences

In some settings, a secondary goal may be to facilitate a community supportive of relationships and break down the feeling of isolation that many couples feel when working on their relationships. This would be especially true if the program is offered in a small group setting.

such as a church, synagogue, mosque, or community context where participants normally have the opportunity to remain in contact after the end of the program. This is an optional goal, depending on the context in which the program is offered. While this might be an appropriate goal in some settings, it would clearly be inappropriate in others.

If this is a goal, facilitating couples meeting and getting to know each other can be built into the program. Ways of facilitating this will be presented. In any case, creating a safe and validating environment during the class is essential. Sharing the experience with other couples can provide support by normalizing experiences and fostering a “we’re not in this alone” attitude that can provide encouragement.

In other settings, maintaining confidentiality is very important, thus facilitating couples meeting each other would be inappropriate. This may be true when participants come together only for the purpose of learning the skills from the book. For instance, if the program is offered on a weekend, the maintenance of anonymity is more likely. If the program is offered weekly over a period of time, couples naturally become acquainted by talking before, during, and after the class. The size of the class also dictates the level of disclosure and contact that couples experience.

WHO THE CLASS IS FOR

Appropriate Couples

The Seven Principles Couples Program is appropriate for couples contemplating engagement, for pre-marital couples, for couples living together, and for couples who have been together or married for decades. Classes can be offered targeting specific demographics or they can combine couples with widely varied relational and age histories. The author has taught classes comprised of both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups of couples. Each work well. Homogeneous groups have the advantage of participants sharing similar stage-of-life experiences and relatedness. Diverse groups have the advantage of working through the material with couples in different phases and lifestyles, which normalizes the ongoing process of working on relationships and dealing with perpetual problems.

Inappropriate Couples

Psycho-educational classes are not appropriate for all couples, including those with severe relationship distress, significant emotional or physical abuse, serious emotional or mental health problems, relationships where one or both partners are actively addicted to drugs or alcohol, and relationships with serious compulsive behavior with gambling, sexual acting out, and other disruptive behaviors. Class announcements should state that the class is not appropriate when couples are experiencing these issues. Should the presence of these situations be discovered during the class, a referral should be made for individual or couples psychotherapy.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM FOR COUPLES

There are many benefits of offering The Seven Principles Couples Program. These include:

1. It provides structure, motivation, and accountability to continue working through the book. With busy schedules, it is easy to let reading the book and working through exercises slide, while a class format encourages more active involvement and ongoing participation by following a schedule.
2. It can be encouraging to work on one's relationship in the context of other couples that are doing the same thing.
3. It may be less threatening than seeking couples therapy and fits into an enrichment model that couples may be familiar with. While The Seven Principles Couples Program is not a substitute for therapy, it can soften the entry into working on their relationship and getting help without the stigma that some still have toward seeking therapy. It can also become a bridge into therapy for those couples that desire more personal assistance than the class can provide. Reading the book and working through the exercises can provide a strong foundation for pursuing therapy from the Gottman perspective, as the basic concepts and methods are already familiar to the couple and have been tried and tested, which may enhance and expedite a therapeutic process later.
4. Signing up for a class on marriage and relationships also eliminates some of the uncertainty and hesitation some couples have about working on their relationship on their own, or about seeking therapy because there are often no clearly defined goals, expectations, structure, or duration. In contrast, a class format does have clearly articulated goals, expectations, and time frame.
5. A class format encourages both partners to work on their relationship rather than one partner alone reading the book without the other partner's participation.
6. The Seven Principles Couples Program provides a great opportunity for pre-marital couples to learn skills that can enrich their relationship through a lifetime together.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CLASS

1. *Will we have to share our personal problems and issues with the class?*
No. The class does not include sharing problems or issues publicly. Couples Exercises are done privately.
2. *Must both partners attend or can I come alone?*
Since the class involves couples doing exercises together, both partners must participate. If the class is offered over a period of time and one partner must miss a particular class meeting, then the other partner is encouraged to attend the lecture portion of the class. He or she may use the Couples Exercise time to do part of the exercises and then do the full exercise with their partner later. They may also use exercise time to read the *Seven Principles* book.
3. *My partner isn't a reader. Can we still come to the class if he/she won't read the book?*
Yes, still come to the class. While the book provides very valuable information, the class lectures will summarize the content of the book. Each person will need a Couples Guide, however, to do the Couples Exercises efficiently.
4. *Should we do the exercises in the book at home or save them for class?*
The class will involve doing some of the exercises from the book so doing them first at home would duplicate some of them. In some cases, the directions for doing the exercises in class have been revised and updated from those presented in the *Seven Principles* book. The Leaders also role-play how to – and how not to – do some of the exercises in order to help participants get the most out of each exercise. There are some exercises in the book that the class will not have time to do, and couples are encouraged to do them at home after that chapter has been covered in class.

LEADER QUALIFICATIONS AND ROLES

Leader Qualifications

The Leader role requires effectively balancing several roles with flexibility and sensitivity. Communicating the content of the book clearly needs to be balanced with providing emotional support for couples while they engage in exercises. Awareness of one's own emotions and internal processes is essential to understand and support the work couples are doing. Personal transparency with sensitivity models openness for participants. Experience teaching and leading groups is essential.

The Leader must have a thorough grasp of the *Seven Principles* in order to understand the interrelationship of each principle to the others. Additional reading of other books and viewing video programs about the Gottman Method would be very helpful. See the resource list in Section 8. In addition, Leaders should work through the exercises themselves in order to understand what the experience is like for couples.

Leader Roles Include:

- Creating an atmosphere of emotional safety and support so that individuals feel free to open up to each other.
- Providing encouragement and instilling a sense of hope.
- Summarizing the content of the chapter including providing meaningful illustrations.
- Articulating a clear rationale for the exercises.
- Demonstrating how not to do the exercises and how to do them productively.
- Responding to questions about the material and exercises.
- Assisting couples who may have questions or experience difficulty while doing the exercises.
- Referring couples needing more help for therapy.
- Assisting during exercises.

Leader Roles Do Not Include:

- Providing therapy.
- Giving advice about the relationship.
- Facilitating couples sharing their personal issues in front of the class. This is not designed to be a support or therapy group.
- Sharing his or her personal positive and negative relationship experiences outside of the principles provided in the book.
- Confronting participants with their issues, problems, sins, or displays of the Four Horsemen or other negative behaviors.
- Attempting to predict which couples might divorce.

Providing Support and Encouragement

The spirit of presenting the class is to create a supportive environment with emotional safety as participants work through the material. Providing encouragement helps couples to continue to work on their relationship when they are pressed for time or face difficulties in their relationship.

There are several ways in which Leaders can provide encouragement including the way the material is presented (see Section 4 on Effective Presentation Skills). Another way to offer support is by regularly sending out email messages throughout the duration of the class (for ongoing classes offered in a context where this is appropriate). Email content may include a review of key points from the last class, reminders about Bonus Exercises and reading assignments, and a preview of the next class' content. It also helps couples that were absent keep up-to-date without singling them out.

Assisting During Couples Exercises

When couples are doing their private exercises, the Leader needs to unobtrusively observe them in order to respond to questions. Typical questions are for clarification about how to do the exercise and can be briefly answered. Other times, couples may want counseling assistance. This is not appropriate for the class. The Leader's job is to briefly answer questions and direct the couple to continue working on the exercise.

Sometimes while doing exercises from the early chapters on the friendship foundation of marriage, couples may want to talk about problem areas in their relationship. A helpful response is to empathize with their desire to work on their problems and state that later chapters specifically address ways of dealing with conflict constructively and they will be led through a process to help them work on their problem areas later. Then refocus them on the current exercise.

If someone is obviously flooded as they attempt to do an exercise, instruct them to take a mini-break and help calm them before they attempt the exercise again. Honor the fact that they have been willing to make themselves vulnerable and normalize their situation in an empathetic way. Once they are calmer, direct them to resume the exercise.



In summary, the goal of assisting couples during exercises is to get them back on track to do the specifically assigned exercise. Listen briefly and validate their feelings but resist getting into a discussion about their problems. Focus on bringing them back to the exercise.



See additional information in Section 4, "Handling Difficult Situations During Exercises and Making Referrals for Couples Therapy."