

Intervention: Repair Checklist

Purpose: For couple to discuss and resolve one issue in their relationship. Don't pick a gridlocked issue.

Information: All couples naturally make many attempts to repair their interaction when it goes negative. In happier relationships, this repair work is done before the interaction becomes negative as a way of keeping things on track emotionally. Our research discovered that men in relationships that wound up stable and very happy were *de-escalating* low-level negativity. This means that their response to their wives' being hurt, angry, disappointed, or just generally upset with them was to be neutral (not stonewalling) for at least five seconds. The major effect of this de-escalation was that the husband's heart rate dropped significantly. Its calming effect on the husband predicted good things for the relationship.

In couples interactions, making repair attempts is a great skill. One aspect of repair is *learning how to put on the brakes* when you and your partner are in a negative cycle (the stop-action statements on your repair checklist). The first thing instructors teach you when you learn to ski is the snowplow. You have to learn how to slow down and how to stop. Because we are formalizing a natural process, even one that may not be working, this may feel somewhat artificial and phony. For now, we want to introduce this artificial method for putting the brakes on when an interaction goes negative.

Instructions: Use *The Gottman Repair Checklist*. The couple takes five minutes to become familiar with the checklist. Then they use the checklist in their discussion. They are to announce to their partner that this is a repair attempt before making it. They can refer to the repair attempt by number, as in, "I'm making a repair attempt. It's the one under 'I FEEL, #6.'" They continue the discussion for an additional 15 minutes. The job of the receiver of a repair attempt is to try to *accept the repair attempt*. This means that the receiver needs to find that part of the repair attempt that he or she can agree with right now.

The process also involves accepting influence. They are to try to view the interruption of the conversation (from the *Repair Checklist*) by the partner as an attempt to make things better, and they are to try to accept the repair attempt. The checklist can then go on the couple's refrigerator or someplace else that's in the home. They are to retrieve it and use it whenever it is needed.

Below is a useful checklist to help you review your work with this intervention as well as to help you improve your skills in the Gottman Method.

- a. Stop the couple and explain the concept of offering and accepting repairs and why it is useful. You may briefly describe research distinguishing between the masters and disasters of relationships using repairs if it flows from the context of the discussion.

- b. Provide the Repair Checklist and explain its use.
- c. Help the couple to find a repair that works for them.
- d. Re-direct the couple to resume their discussion using the repair checklist.



Gottman Repair Checklist

I Feel

1. I'm getting scared.
2. Please say that more gently.
3. Did I do something wrong?
4. That hurt my feelings.
5. That felt like an insult.
6. I'm feeling sad.
7. I feel blamed. Can you rephrase that?
8. I'm feeling unappreciated.
9. I feel defensive. Can you rephrase that?
10. Please don't lecture me.
11. I don't feel like you understand me right now.
12. Sounds like it's all my fault.
13. I feel criticized. Can you rephrase that?
14. I'm getting worried.
15. Please don't withdraw.

Sorry

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

Get to Yes

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

I Need to Calm Down

1. Can you make things safer for me?
2. I need things to be calmer right now.
3. I need your support right now.
4. Just listen to me right now and try to understand.
5. Tell me you love me.
6. Can I have a kiss?
7. Can I take that back?
8. Please be gentler with me.
9. Please help me calm down.
10. Please be quiet and listen to me.
11. This is important to me. Please listen.
12. I need to finish what I was saying.
13. I am starting to feel flooded.
14. Can we take a break?
15. Can we talk about something else for a while?

Stop Action!

1. I might be wrong here.
2. Please let's stop for a while.
3. Let's take a break.
4. Give me a moment. I'll be back.
5. I'm feeling flooded.
6. Please stop.
7. Let's agree to disagree here.
8. Let's start all over again.
9. Hang in there. Don't withdraw.
10. I want to change the topic.
11. We are getting off track.

I Appreciate

1. I know this isn't your fault.
2. My part of this problem is...
3. I see your point.
4. Thank you for...
5. That's a good point.
6. We are both saying...
7. I understand.
8. I love you.
9. I am thankful for...
10. One thing I admire about you is...
11. I see what you're talking about.
12. This is not your problem, it's OUR problem.