



Outline of the Retreat

Both days of the retreat will include lectures, science-based information, role plays by us, discussion, and exercises that you will do only with your partner. When hearing information, we will be seated together in a comfortable living area. When it comes time to do exercises, you may move to separate seating areas or to the garden which overlooks the sea. You will not be pressured to disclose anything publicly.

Here is what you will learn during the two days of our retreat together:

Day One: Deepening Friendship and Intimacy

Day Two: Constructive Conflict Management and Creating Shared Meaning

Day One: Deepening Friendship and Intimacy

On this day, we will help you work on the skills necessary for building friendship and intimacy in your relationship. First, we will review the research on what makes relationships work and what predicts relationship meltdown. Questions like these will be answered:

- What makes relationships change, for better or for worse?
- What are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in relationships, and what can you do if they are attacking your relationship?
- What are the specific strengths a relationship needs to last?
- Why is self-soothing so important?
- How do partners who have been distant from one another rebuild their friendship?

- How do couples cool down their heated conflicts?
- How do couples share values and life purpose with one another?

Next, we will explain our scientifically-based "Sound Relationship House" theory. This is our guide for building strong relationships. The "House" has seven levels:

- The foundation of the house is **Love Maps**. It involves knowing one another's internal world and updating this knowledge often.
- The second level is **The Fondness & Admiration System**. It includes not just feeling but also expressing fondness and admiration.
- The third level is **Turning Toward Versus Turning Away or Turning Against**. It contains the everyday, small moments that, when added up, can make or break a relationship.
- The fourth level is **The Positive or Negative Perspective**. It focuses on whether or not we give our partner the benefit of the doubt during an interaction.
- The fifth level is **The Regulation of Conflict**. Sixty-nine percent of relationship conflicts never get resolved. People either adapt to these PERPETUAL conflicts with dialogue, or the conflicts get gridlocked. Only 31% of relationship issues are resolved over time. We introduce you to the following:
 - The skills for effective problem solving. These are Softened Startup, Repair and De-escalation, Accepting Influence, and Compromise.
 - An important component of effective problem solving: physiological soothing (Self and Partner) and dealing with Flooding.
 - The "dreams-within-conflict" method for calmly discussing perpetual problems.
- The sixth level is **Making Dreams and Aspirations Come True**. The skills at this level reverse relationship alienation and deepen emotional intimacy and mutual understanding.
- The seventh level is **Building a Shared Meaning System**. Everyone is a philosopher trying to make some sense out of this brief journey through life. At this level, couples share with one another what makes their life journeys meaningful.

After this introduction to the research, we begin our work with strengthening the first four levels of the Sound Relationship House.

- **Love Maps** – The masters of relationship have developed a map of the inner, psychological world of their partners that includes their partner's history, concerns, preferences, and his or her current struggles and hopes. We will help you to create a Love Map of your partner's inner world.
- **The Fondness and Admiration System** - The antidote for contempt In healthy relationships, couples frequently express respect, gratitude, and affection for one another. You will have the opportunity to voice what you are proud of and admire about your partner. You will also learn how to create a Culture of Appreciation to replace the Culture of Criticism in your relationship and how to build a positive habit of mind in which you can catch your partner doing things

right.

- **Turning Toward versus Turning Away and the Emotional Bank Account** - Relationships are enhanced by earning "points" with your partner during everyday moments, and by moving from "Me-ness" to "We-ness." We don't have to be mindless about these moments. By understanding their importance and being mindful, we can decide whether to turn toward, away or against the bids for attention that our partners make. We call this "turning" process building an "emotional bank account." We will teach you how to increase your account assets by turning towards your partner's bids for attention while not losing yourself, using the following:
 - **Rituals of Connection**
Rituals of connection are ways for couples to connect with one another that they can depend on, that are part of their routine. You will develop a way to change how you move through time together, so that your relationship can become more meaningful and connected.
 - **The Stress-Reducing Conversation**
This is key in maintaining change after the retreat. The stress-reducing conversation is for handling stresses OUTSIDE the relationship. It is guided by the motto: Understanding first, then advice. We will teach you how to be your partner's ally in reducing stress, rather than his or her enemy.
- After we work on these three levels of the Sound Relationship House, we will focus on **Intimacy**, as the research shows that these levels, while building friendship, also form the basis for **Romance, Passion and Good Sex**. We will help you to improve the quality of your affection, romance, passion, and sex life using our "Salsa Card Deck."

The Positive or Negative Perspective - Our theory states that couples are in one of two states, positive or negative "sentiment override", or perspective. It is impossible to manipulate these states directly. We cannot tell our partners to not be so sensitive or to become more thick-skinned, or to reduce their expectations of us. The secret to creating the positive perspective is to become better friends.

Day Two: Constructive Conflict Management and Creating Shared Meaning

An introduction to effective problem solving and management of conflict

First we prove that relationship conflict and regrettable incidents are inevitable in all relationships. We demonstrate this by processing a fight that we have recently had ourselves, using the Aftermath of a Fight or Regrettable Incident Questionnaire, a tool that you will be taking home.

We explain the research findings on how the masters of relationship use a gentle approach to conflict, and specifically, what skills they practice.

Identifying an issue to work on

We help you to decide on a problem to discuss. You will use this issue later in the day to practice the skills we will give you for gentle and constructive conflict management.

The Skills for Constructive Conflict Management:

Skill #1: “Softened Startup”

How to bring up a problem gently without criticism or disrespect. We will practice this skill in a group exercise that involves converting harsh statements into gentle ones, based on imaginary situations.

Skill #2: Repair and De-escalate

When a conflict discussion gets off-track, it’s difficult to think of what to say to make it better. We introduce you to the Repair Checklist, a series of statements that you can use to get your communication on the right track again.

Applying Skills #1 and #2 to Your Own Identified Problem

We will help you to privately begin a discussion of the problem you chose to work on earlier. Your initial goal will be UNDERSTANDING, NOT PERSUASION. You won’t work towards agreement at this point, but instead, you’ll focus on hearing one another clearly in a safe atmosphere created by using Softened Startup and the Repair Checklist.

Skill #3: Practice Physiological Self-Soothing

Diffuse physiological arousal can disrupt conflict discussions and destroy trust. We explain the physiology of diffuse physiological arousal and flooding, and why it is so important to take breaks when they occur. We also describe what to do during a break and give a guided relaxation exercise to teach how to self-soothe.

Skill #4: Compassionately Understand Your Partner's Point of View

We describe the nature of gridlocked conflict. Basically, people feel rejected by their partners during gridlock. They vilify one another. The problem is that neither partner is really listening to the DREAMS WITHIN EACH PARTNER'S POSITION on the issue. We will demonstrate the "dreams within conflict" method of transforming gridlocked conflict into healthy and meaningful dialogue. There is a dream within each person's position, a wish, or a hope. This dream has a history or a story to it that helps it to make sense. We will guide you to discuss your issue with your partner using this method to more deeply understand each other's points of view. Eighty-five percent of our workshop participants make major breakthroughs on their gridlocked conflicts by using this method.

Skill #5: Accept Influence & Compromise

We talk about the importance of accepting influence and honoring a woman's dreams. And we discuss how men's dreams also need to be honored. Then we return to the issue you have been working on, and we give you a method to create a compromise in which you can each honor each other's position on the issue without sacrificing the core of your own.

Build Shared Meaning

The retreat concludes by discussing and working on the "shared meaning system" with your partner. You will be guided to share your sense of meaning and purpose, shared goals, and life mission and purpose with one another.