



The Gottman Institute®

The Gottman Recovery Kit

*Aftermath of a Fight or
Regrettable Incident*



5 steps to learn about and reclaim
good will with your partner

This form is for "processing" past fights, regrettable incidents or past emotional injuries.

"Processing" means that you can talk about the incident without getting back into it again. It needs to be a conversation — as if you were both sitting in the balcony of a theater looking down on the stage where the action had occurred. This requires **calm** and some emotional distance from the incident.

Before you begin

Keep in mind the GOAL is greater understanding — addressing the **process** and **how** the issue was talked about, without getting back into the fight. So, wait until you're both calm.

We assume that **each** of your realities has validity. Perception is everything. Don't focus on "the facts."

Pay attention to the common barriers to communication and their antidotes as you move through the process. The "Four Horsemen" reference on the last page of this booklet can help.

Work through the following five steps together.

The Five Steps

1. ***Feelings:*** Share how you felt. Do not say why you felt that way. Avoid commenting on your partner's feelings.
2. ***Realities:*** Describe your "reality." Take turns. Summarize and validate at least a part of your partner's reality.
3. ***Triggers:*** Share what experiences or memories you've had that might have escalated the interaction, and the stories of why these are triggers for each of you.
4. ***Responsibility:*** Acknowledge your own role in contributing to the fight or regrettable incident.
5. ***Constructive Plans:*** Plan together one way that each of you can make it better next time.

Step One

Feelings

Share how you felt, but not why yet.

(Read **aloud** the items that were true for you during the fight.

Do not comment on your partner's feelings.)

I felt:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. defensive. | 17. I was right and you were wrong. | 32. I was overwhelmed with emotion. |
| 2. not listened to. | 18. both of us were partly right. | 33. not calm. |
| 3. feelings got hurt. | 19. out of control. | 34. stubborn. |
| 4. totally flooded. | 20. frustrated. | 35. powerless. |
| 5. angry. | 21. righteously indignant. | 36. I had no influence. |
| 6. sad. | 22. morally justified. | 37. I wanted to win this one. |
| 7. unloved. | 23. unfairly picked on. | 38. my opinions didn't even matter. |
| 8. misunderstood. | 24. unappreciated. | 39. there was a lot of give and take. |
| 9. criticized. | 25. disliked. | 40. I had no feelings at all. |
| 10. took a complaint personally. | 26. unattractive. | 41. I had no idea what I was feeling. |
| 11. like you didn't even like me. | 27. stupid. | 42. lonely. |
| 12. not cared about. | 28. morally outraged. | 43. alienated. |
| 13. worried. | 29. taken for granted. | 44. ashamed. |
| 14. afraid. | 30. like leaving. | 45. guilty. |
| 15. unsafe. | 31. like staying and talking this through. | |
| 16. tense. | | |

Step Two

Realities

Subjective Reality and Validation

- a) Take turns describing your perceptions, your own reality of what happened during the regrettable incident. Describe yourself and your perception. Don't describe your partner. Avoid attack and blame.
- b) Summarize and then validate your partner's reality by saying something like, "It makes sense to me how you saw this and what your perceptions and needs were. I get it." Use empathy by saying something like, "I can see why this upset you." Validation doesn't mean you agree, but that you can understand even a part of your partner's experience of the incident.
- c) Do both partners feel understood? If yes, move on. If no, ask, "What do I need to know to understand your perspective better?"

Step Three

Triggers

- Share what escalated the interaction for you. What events in the interaction triggered a big reaction in you?
- Share your stories — it will help your partner to understand you. As you think about your early history or childhood, is there a story you remember that relates to what got triggered in you, your “enduring vulnerabilities”? Your partner needs to know you, so that your partner can be more sensitive to you.

(See examples of triggers on next page.)

Examples of triggers:

1. I felt judged. I'm very sensitive to that.
 2. I felt excluded. I'm very sensitive to that.
 3. I felt criticized. I'm very sensitive to that.
 4. I felt flooded.
 5. I felt ashamed.
 6. I felt lonely.
 7. I felt belittled
 8. I felt disrespected.
 9. I felt powerless.
 10. I felt out of control.
 11. Other:
-

Validation

Does any part of your partner's triggers and story make sense to you?

Step Four

Take Responsibility

Under ideal conditions, you might have done better at talking about this issue.

1. *What set me up for the miscommunication*

Share how you set yourself up to get into this conflict.

Read aloud the items that were true for you on this list:

What set me up:

1. I've been very stressed and irritable lately.
2. I've not expressed much appreciation toward you lately.
3. I've taken you for granted.
4. I've been overly sensitive lately.
5. I've been overly critical lately.
6. I've not shared very much of my inner world.
7. I've not been emotionally available.
8. I've been turning away more.
9. I've been getting easily upset.
10. I've been depressed lately.
11. I've had a chip on my shoulder lately. *(continued next page)*

What set me up (cont'd):

12. I've not been very affectionate.
13. I've not made time for good things between us.
14. I've not been a very good listener lately.
15. I've not asked for what I needed.
16. I've been feeling a bit like a martyr.
17. I've needed to be alone.
18. I've not wanted to take care of anybody.
19. I have been very preoccupied.
20. I haven't felt very much confidence in myself.
21. I've been running on empty.

2. Overall, what was your contribution to this regrettable incident or fight?

3. What do you wish to apologize for?

(Read aloud)

I'm sorry that:

1. I over-reacted.
2. I was really grumpy.
3. I was defensive.
4. I was so negative.
5. I attacked you.
6. I didn't listen to you.
7. I wasn't respectful.
8. I was unreasonable.
9. Other:

Step Five

Constructive Plans

Share one thing **your partner** can do to make a discussion of this issue better next time.

(It's important to remain calm as you do this.)

Then, while it's still your turn, share one thing **you** can do to make it better next time.

What do you need to be able to put this behind you and move on? Be as agreeable as possible to the plans suggested by your partner.

Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes

CRITICISM



Use Gentle
Start Up

DEFENSIVENESS



Take
Responsibility

CONTEMPT



Build Culture
of Appreciation

STONEWALLING



Do Physiological
Self-Soothing

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