

2026 Presidents Institute

A Deeper Purpose



January 4-7, 2026 ■ Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek ■ Orlando, FL



The Council of Independent Colleges

Keeping Presidential Partnerships Strong: A Science of Happy Marriage

Presented by

Carol Bruess, PhD

Scholar-in-Residence, Relationships & Dialogue

College of St. Benedict & St. John's University, Minnesota



The Council of
Independent Colleges

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2026 Presidents Institute • **Spouses and Partners Program**

Panelists

Connie and Chris Holoman, Centenary College of Louisiana

Mike Householder and Sue Rivera, Macalester College, Minnesota

Kathleen Haring and John Wittenbraker, Muhlenberg College,
Pennsylvania



9.5 years of presidency work, 34 years married, two (grown) kiddos, one 100lb pup



micro-dynamics

LITTLE things that make
BIG differences in **MARRIAGE**



“What you *practice*
becomes *stronger*”

DRS. JOHN & JULIE GOTTMAN

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

GOTTMAN RELATIONSHIP INSTITUTE

Dr. John Gottman

Dr. Julie Schwartz Gottman

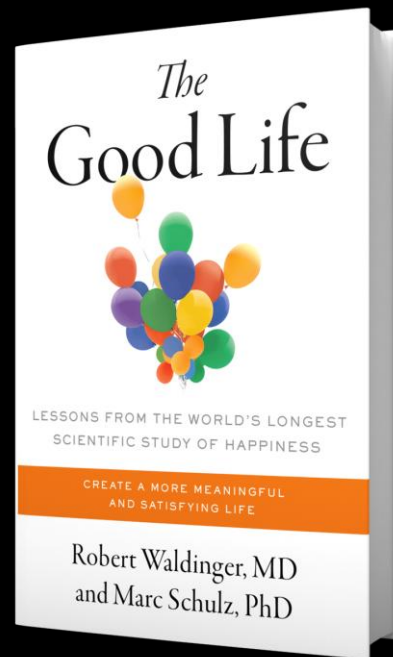


FACT

Marriage is great news
... and *incredibly good* for your health.

TED

75-year Harvard Study, Dr. Robert Waldinger



What Makes a Good Life? Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness

TED
SHORTS



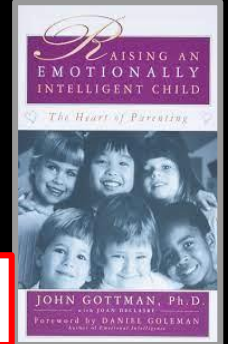
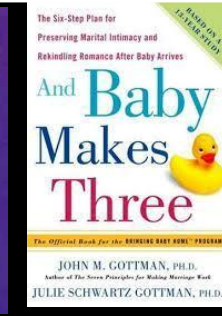
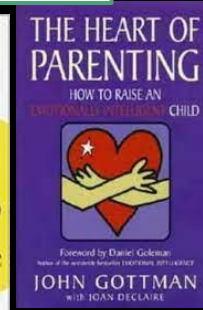
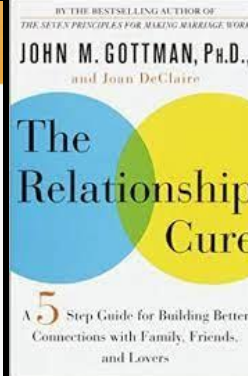
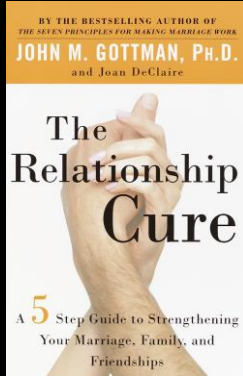
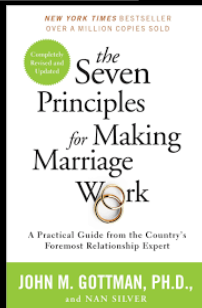
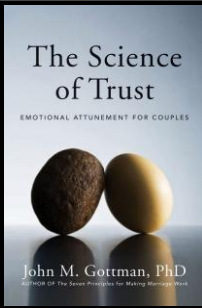
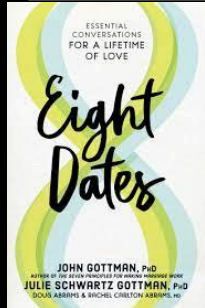
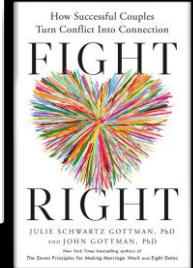
FACT

MICRO-CHANGES MATTER



How we talk to each other predicts the fate of our marriages

DRS. JOHN & JULIE GOTTMAN
GOTTMAN RELATIONSHIP INSTITUTE



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
OVER A MILLION COPIES SOLD

Completely
Revised and
Updated

the Seven Principles *for* Making Marriage Work

A Practical Guide from the Country's
Foremost Relationship Expert

JOHN M. GOTTMAN, PH.D.,
and NAN SILVER

4 HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

90+%

CRITICISM

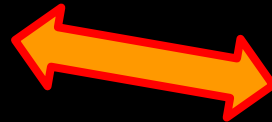
CONTEMPT



DEFENSIVENESS

STONEWALLING

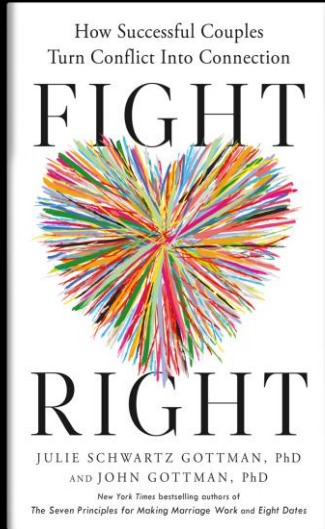
FIRST 3 MINUTES!



**5th horseman
BELLIGERENCE**

HARSH START vs. SOFT START

FIRST 3 MINUTES?



HARSH START

VS.

SOFT START

“What you *practice*
becomes *stronger*”

FONDNESS & ADMIRATION

ACKNOWLEDGE

AFFIRM

ADMIRE

APPRECIATE

Marriage **MASTERS** vs. Marriage **DISASTERS**?

THE RATIOS

5 : 1

20 : 1



The DOG BISCUIT THEORY of marriage

THE BID

“I want to feel *connected* to you.”



THREE RESPONSE OPTIONS

TURN TOWARD

TURN AWAY

TURN AGAINST

86% 😊😊

33% 😞😞

82%

50%

ODDS OF RE-BIDDING?

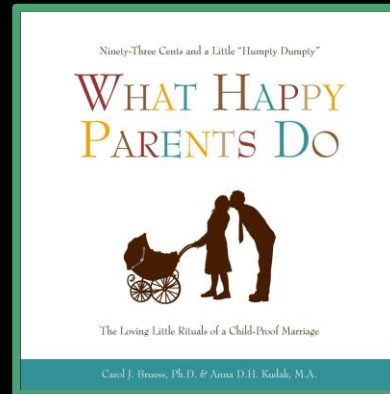
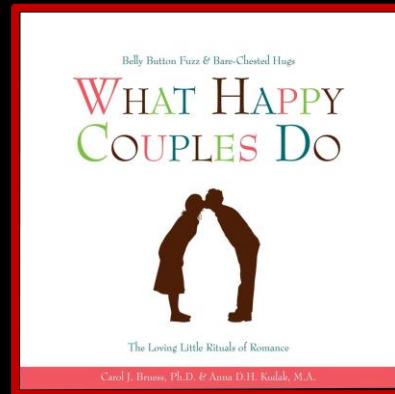


ALMOST ZERO



RITUALS of CONNECTION

Paying homage to what we *value*, what is *sacred*



Daily Check-ins

Celebrating Small Moments

Weekly Date Nights

Daily Rituals

Expressing Appreciation

Partings and Reunions

When my wife comes to bed late, I lay out her pajamas on her side of the bed.

Tim Kelly, Okinawa, Japan

My husband of almost 33 years buys me books he thinks I'll like. Whenever he gives them to me, he says, "I got you flowers."

Kris Dinnison, Spokane, Wash.

I have half a banana for breakfast, and my husband always carves a heart on the cut end.

Jill Black, Kalispell, Mont.



I am a teacher in a public school. My husband is retired. Every morning at 6:50, he takes my work and lunch bags out to the car. Then he warms up the car and pulls it out of the garage for me.


Lori Bricks, Princeton, N.J.

Married 52 years. We always kiss when we're alone in elevators.

Marilyn Schwarzkopf, Jefferson, Iowa

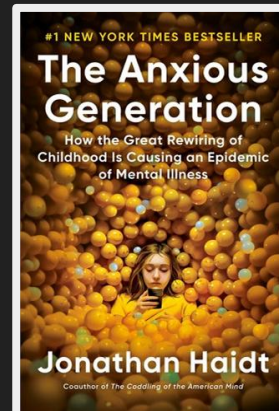
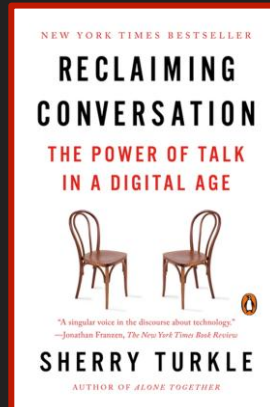
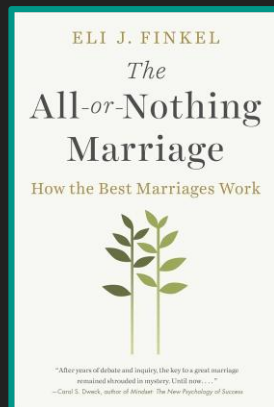
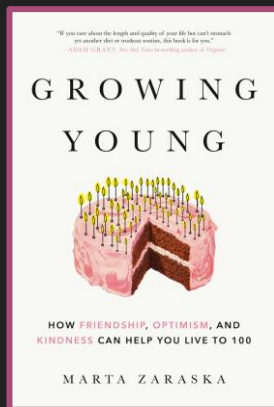
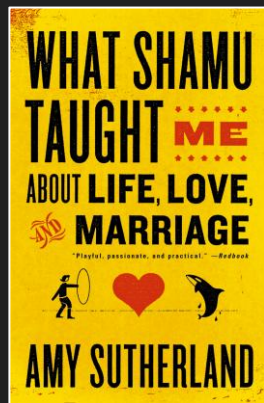
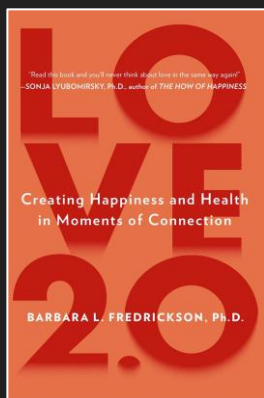
100 Small Acts Of Love

By Melonyce McAfee and Catherine Pearson
Illustrations by Laura Edelbacher
Feb. 13, 2024

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When we see an empty beach on Lake Michigan, we throw on our fanciest attire and go for a quick walk. (#NotActually)



Discussion with Panelists

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Thank you for attending this session!



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