

# Building Healthy Relationships

---

TIFFANY BROWN, PH.D., LMFT

DAY HANCOCK-MURPHY, M.S. CANDIDATE

AISHA NAKRANI, M.S. CANDIDATE

*COUPLES AND FAMILY THERAPY*



Evidence-Based Keys to  
Relationships

Tips & Tricks

Questions



# What Does *Healthy* Mean?

---

Who decides what is *healthy*?

How are we influenced?

What happens if who we like, love, admire, want to be intimate with is “different” than the messages from the dominant culture?



# Defining Relationships





# Conflict is Normal

---

When we have relationships with people, it is inevitable that we will experience conflict, and that is ok!

Conflict can often feel like a time when we are **failing** or something that we should avoid, but conflict happens most when we begin to grow closer to others.

In fact, conflict and navigating conflict well means that you are moving towards closeness with others.



Relational  
Functioning -

*What goes  
“wrong” in  
relationships?*

---

A word cloud of various terms including Intimacy, Sex, Substances, Parenting, Loss, Discrimination, Infidelity, Arguing, Illness, Addiction, Politics, Grief, and Decisions.

Intimacy  
Sex  
Substances  
Parenting  
Loss  
Discrimination  
Infidelity  
Illness  
Arguing  
Addiction  
Politics  
Grief  
Decisions

# How Do Problems Develop?

---

People struggle to communicate their needs, emotions

Interactional patterns get *stuck*

Positive affect is diminished

Problem solving skills are decreased because of emotional activation  
(hard to problem solve when we are **mad!**)



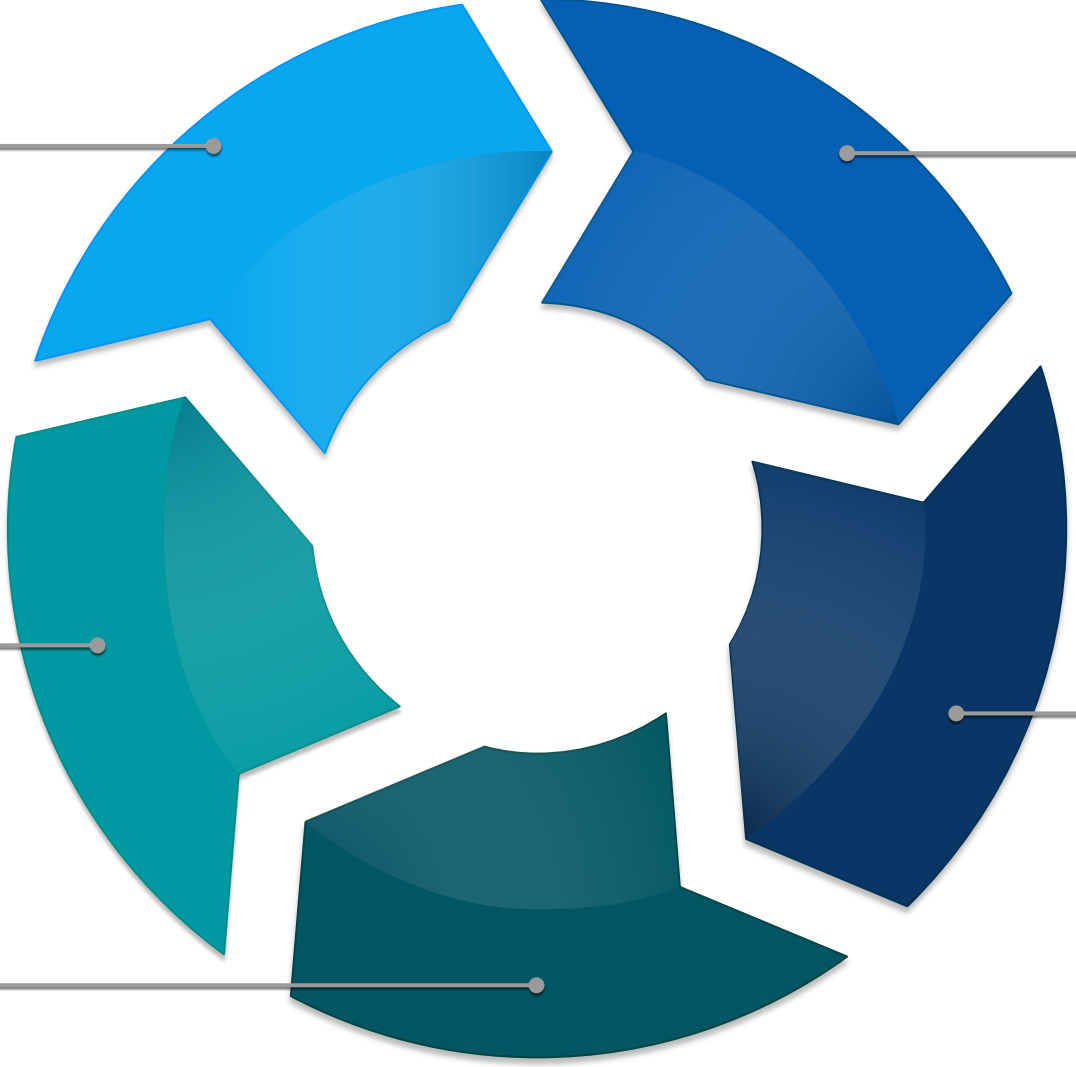
Communication  
Norms

Relationship  
History

Affect &  
Emotions

Individual/Family  
Culture

Behaviors



# "Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

---

Based on **attachment** theory - considers **insecurity** to be the main driver of conflict in relationships.

Focuses on *emotional connection* and *responsiveness*.

The fix that is needed is **relational** – not individual.

# "Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

---

Conflict →

Emotionally unavailable →

Panic emotions: anger, sadness, hurt, fear →

The internal alarm goes off (amygdala) →

Strategies to deal with losing connection →



# "Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

---

Underneath all the stress and complaints, the bottom-line questions are:

- Can I count on you?
- Are you there for me?
- Do I matter to you?
- Do you need me, rely on me?



## "Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

---

Stay in the present

Focus on emotion, connection

Be responsive

Recognize your impact

Increase bonding

MORE THAN 1 MILLION COPIES SOLD

# Hold Me *Tight*

SEVEN CONVERSATIONS  
for a LIFETIME of LOVE

.....  
Dr. Sue Johnson

Developer of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy,  
the most successful approach to building loving relationships

# THE Hold Me *Tight*

WORKBOOK

A COUPLE'S GUIDE  
FOR A LIFETIME OF LOVE

.....  
Dr. Sue Johnson

Author of the million-copy bestseller *Hold Me Tight*



# The Gottman Institute – Drs. Julie & John Gottman

---

Observational data

*Apartment Lab*

- Divorce Prediction
- Sound Relationship House
- 4 Horseman

Most relationship problems (69%) never get resolved -- but are “perpetual” problems based on personality differences between partners.

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN

**CRITICISM**

Verbally attacking personality or character.

**CONTEMPT**

Attacking sense of self with an intention to insult or psychologically abuse.

**DEFENSIVENESS**

Seeing yourself as the victim in efforts to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame.

**STONEWALLING**

Withdrawing as a way to avoid conflict in efforts to convey disapproval, distance, and separation.

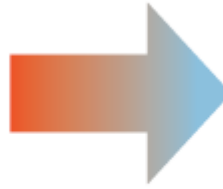
## Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes

**CRITICISM**



Teach Gentle  
Start Up

**DEFENSIVENESS**



Take  
Responsibility

**CONTEMPT**



Build Culture  
of Appreciation

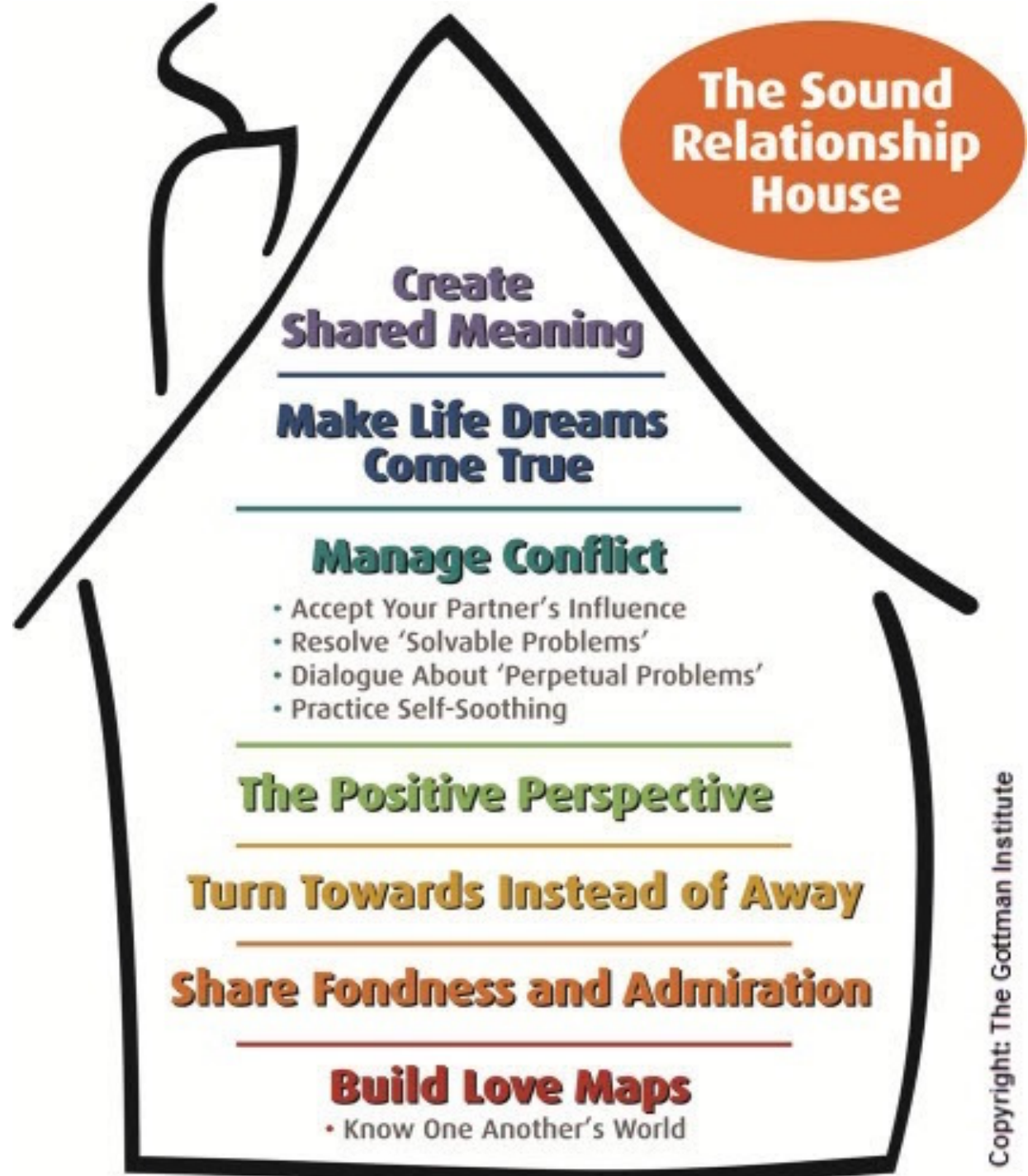
**STONEWALLING**

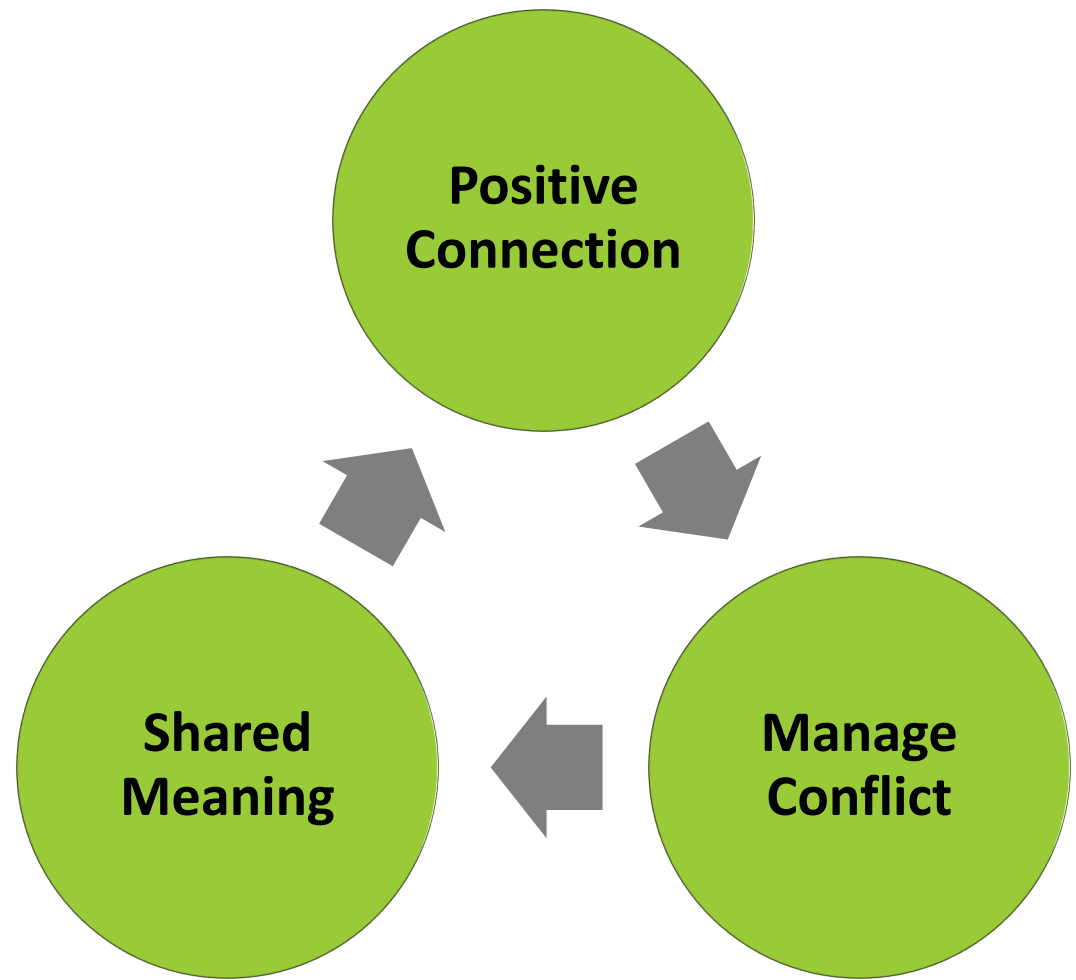
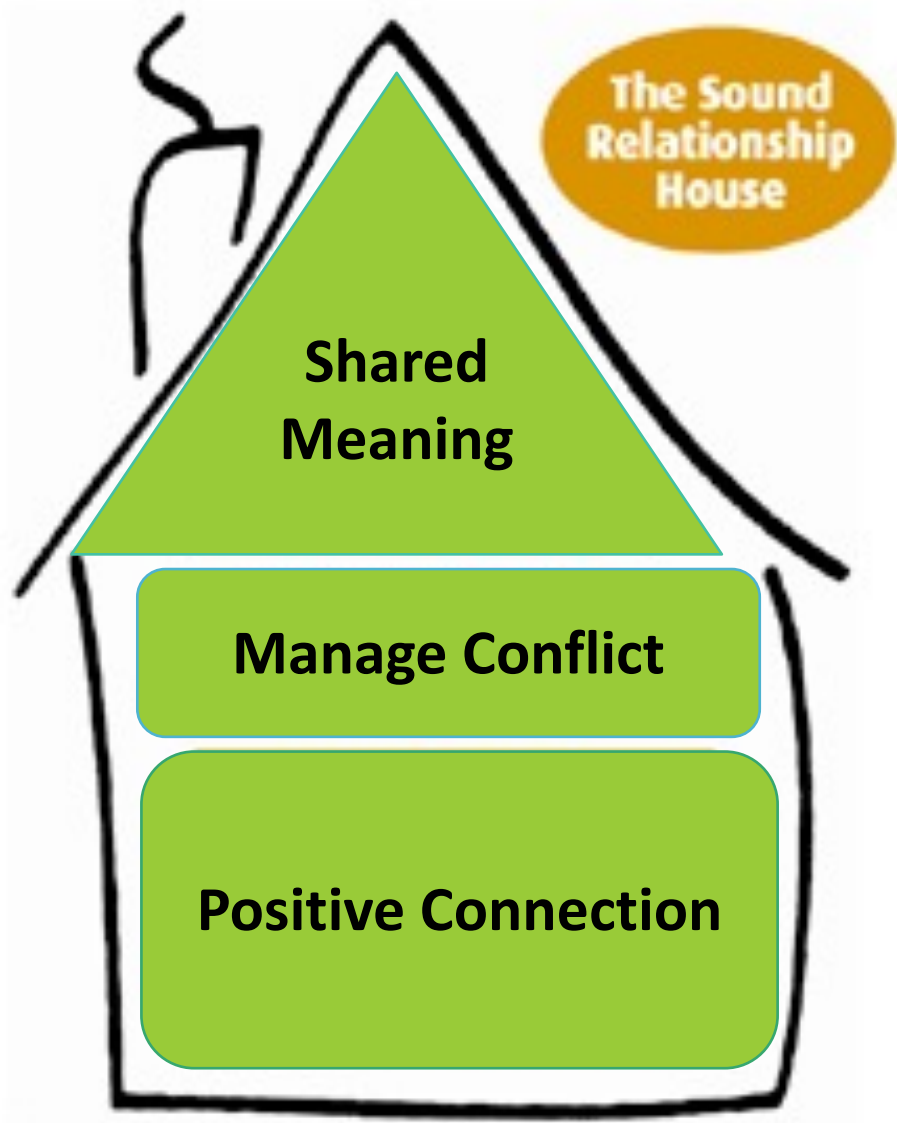


Do Physiological  
Self-Soothing



# The Sound Relationship House

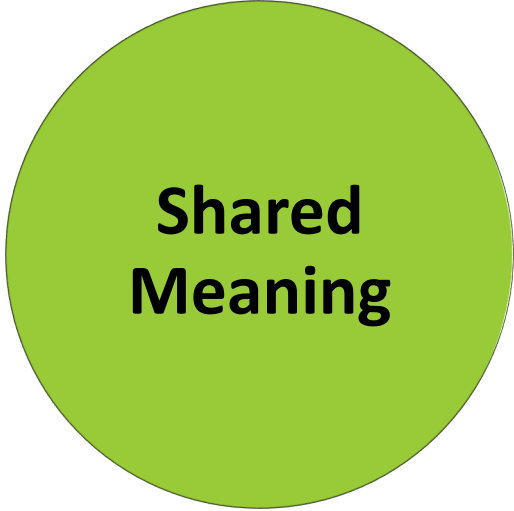




“Emotional Bank Account”



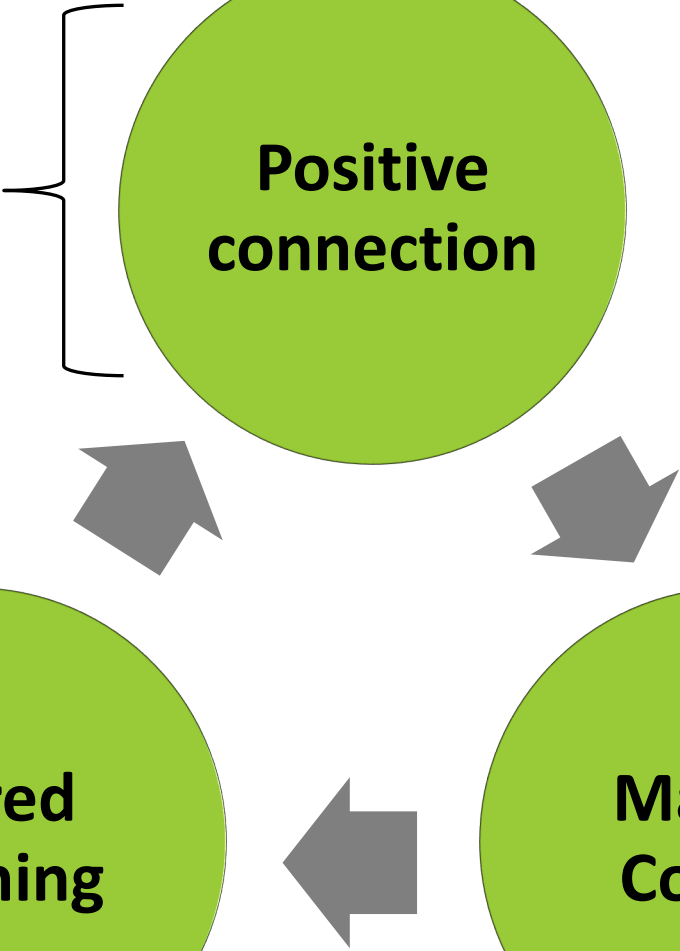
If you feel like your person(s) is/are your friend...



... you will live life together in a way that helps you feel that things are *good*...



... you will give them the benefit of the doubt when you disagree...





# WHAT ARE “DEPOSITS” AND “WITHDRAWALS” TO THE ACCOUNT?

All relationships have a kind of imaginary “emotional bank account.”

When you do something to **make another person feel good** about the relationship, you make a **deposit** in their emotional bank account.

When there is **conflict**, the relationship feels less positive. At least one person, and sometimes both people, feels a little less connected to the other. Then we would say that you made a **withdrawal** from the emotional bank account.

As long as the overall total, or “balance,” of your account is positive over time, you will probably feel close, or connected, to the other people.

# Emotional Bank Account - Deposit

---



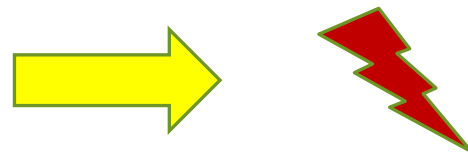
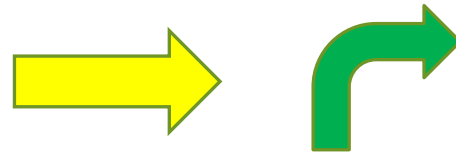
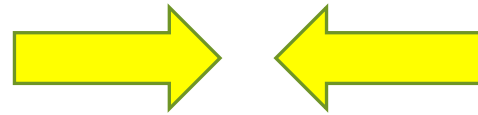
*"I want to feel connected to you."*



1. Turning Toward
2. Turning Away
3. Turning Against



Adds to the *emotional bank account.*



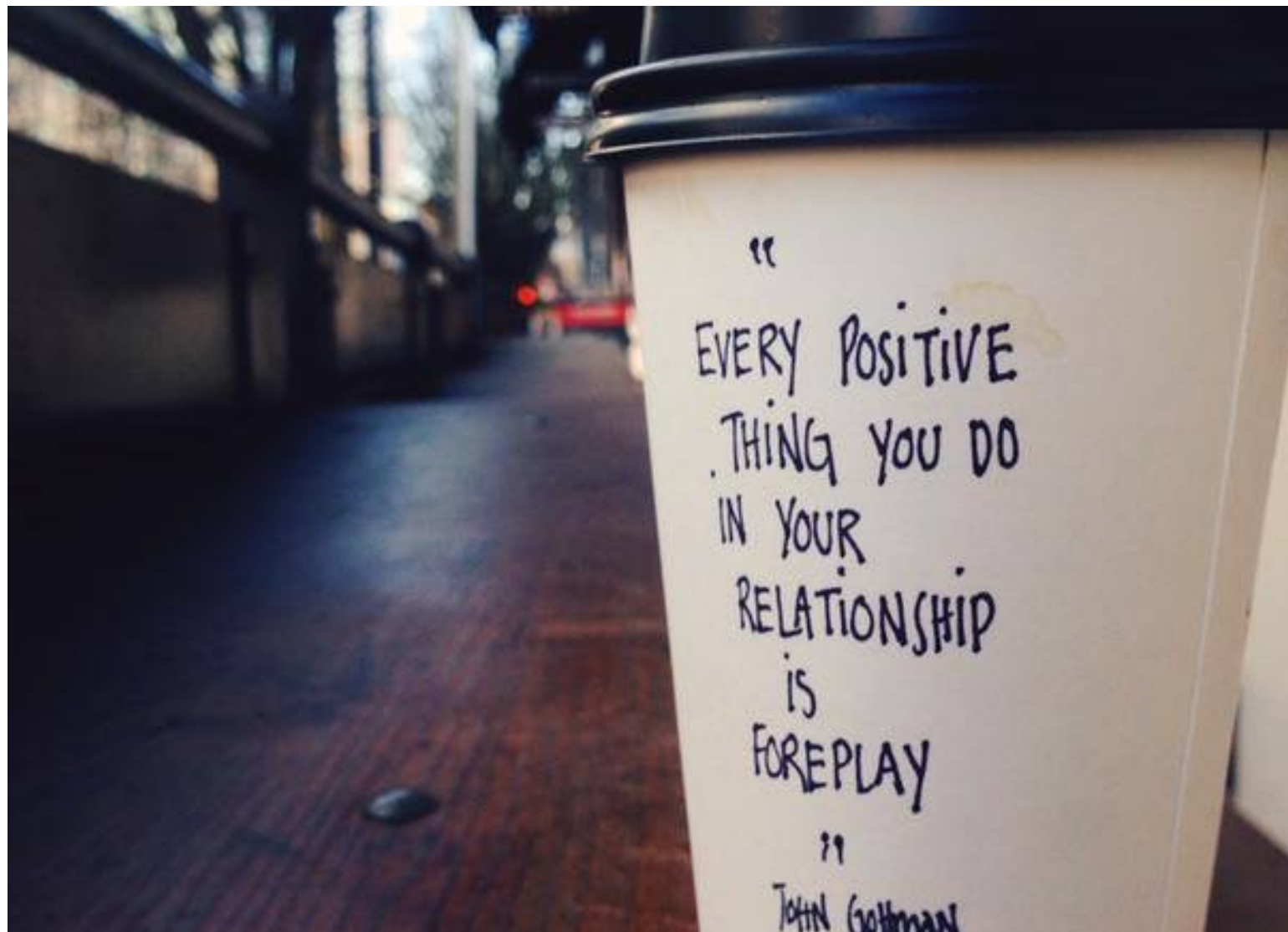
# In a Nutshell, what works?

---

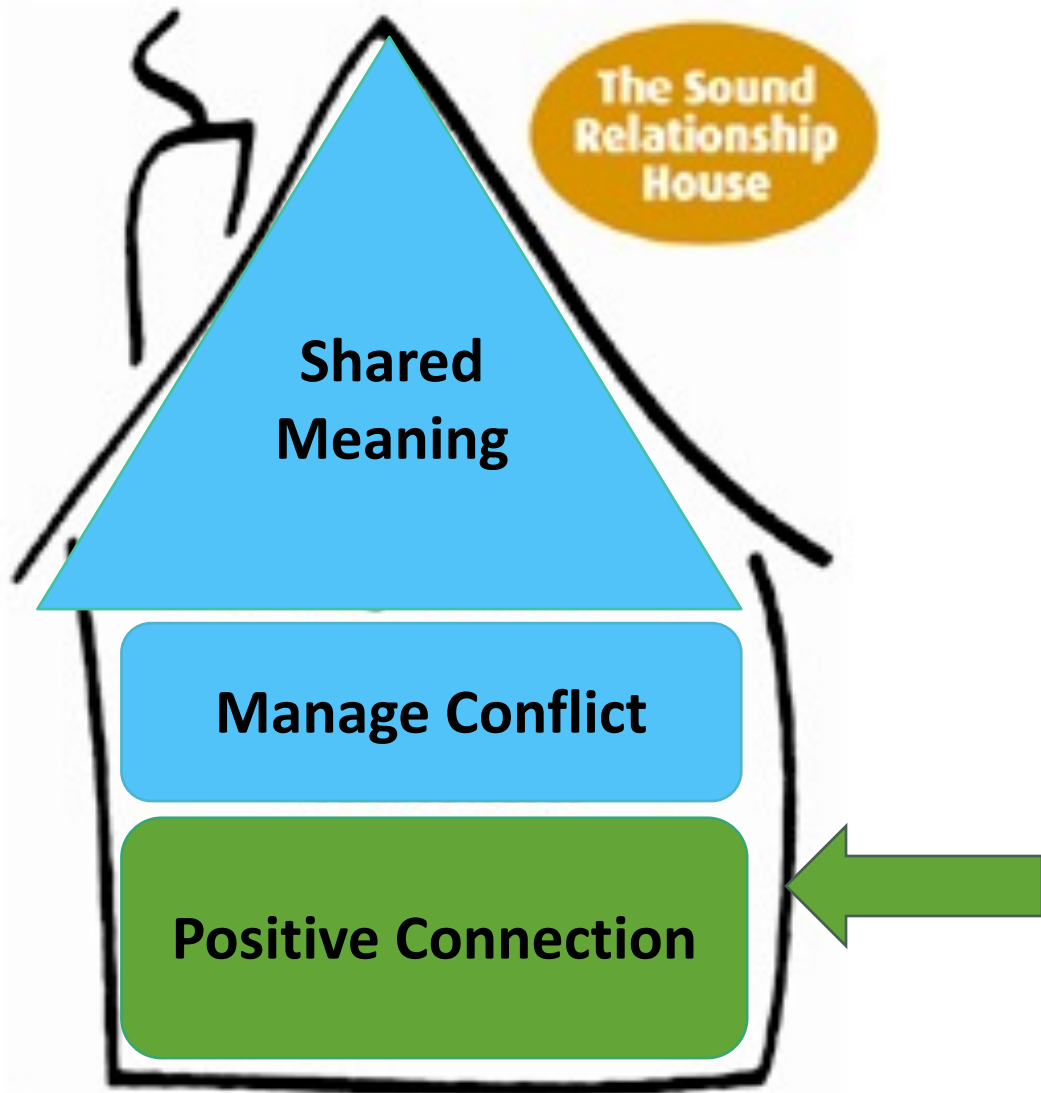
Intervention studies that have produced lasting results have changed three things in relationships:

1. Increased positive feelings *outside* the conflict situation (e.g., when things are going well)
2. Reduced negative feelings during conflict
3. Increased positive affect during conflict

TIP!







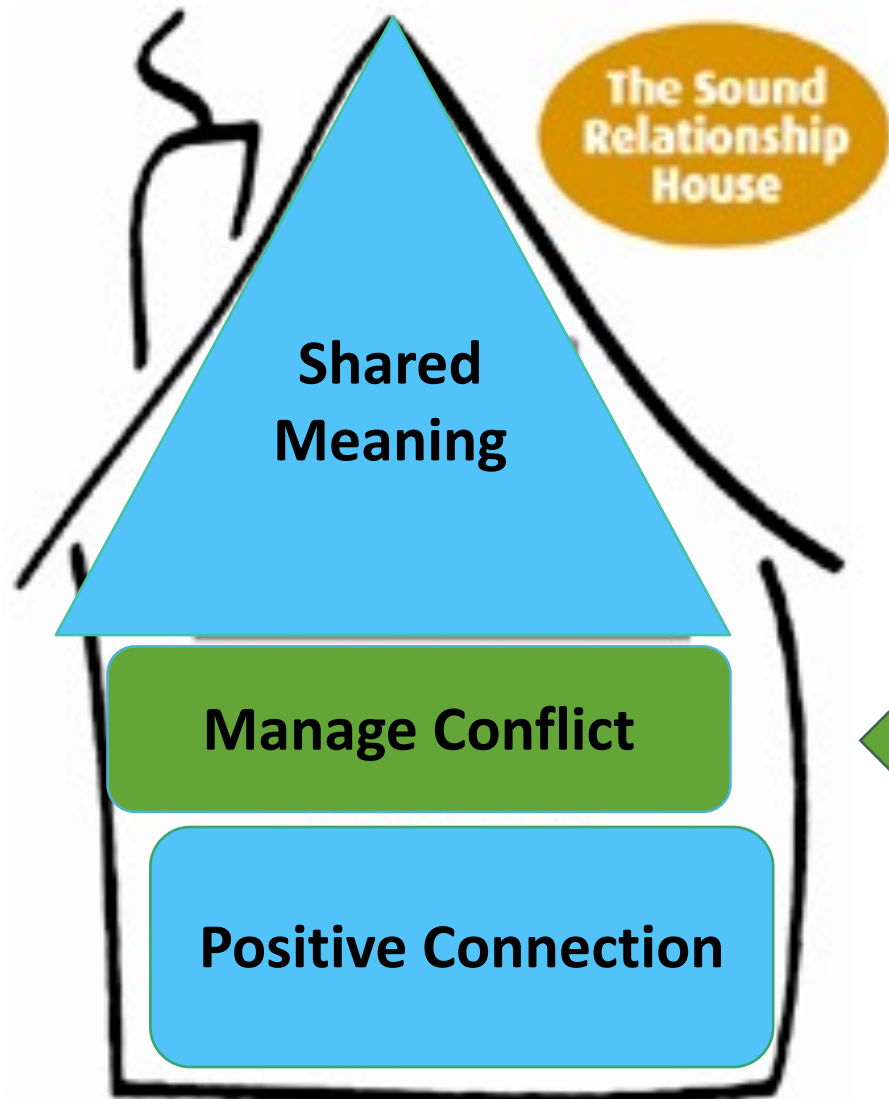
## ***TRY THIS!***

- Date nights // Fun!
- Simple “getting to know you” conversations
- Love mapping (dreams, stories)
- High fives

# No, Really, All-The-High-Fives!

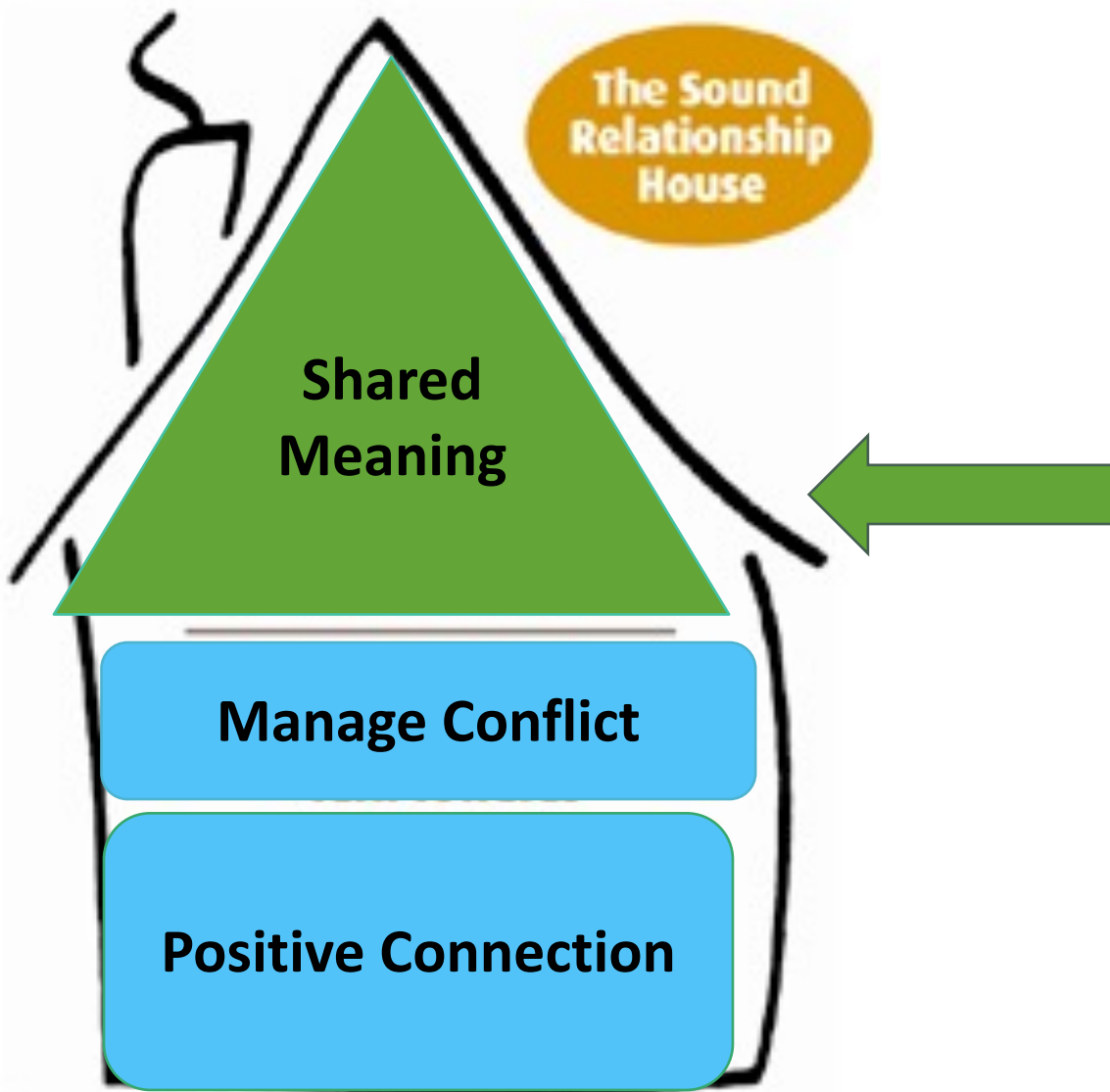
---





## ***TRY THIS!***

- **Complain w/o blame**
- **Listen w/o interrupting**
- **Validate one another**
- **Repair strategies**



## ***TRY THIS!***

- Share life goals
- Find ways to support one another's dreams
- Identify shared values

To make a relationship last/work/have meaning, relationships must focus on friendship, learn to manage/repair conflict, and create ways to support each other's hopes and dreams.



# Center for Healthy Relationships

*Located at the HEDCO Clinic, 17<sup>th</sup> & Alder, Sliding Scale Fees*



## CHR - A Year At a Glance

**~ 3,500 sessions per year**

**~800 sessions per academic term**

**7.5% no show rate**



Collaborative; Team Oriented

# Relationship Check-Ins

---

Offers participants a designated time to **celebrate** the joys of their relationship and recognize its strengths.

It also provides a venue to **explore issues** away from the heat of a crisis or troubled time.

Free & open to the public

For couples, polycules, friends, roommates, families, or any kind of relationship.

Request a Relationship Check-in session; 541-346-0923



# Questions

[HTTPS://HEDCOCLINIC.UOREGON.EDU/](https://hedcoclinic.uoregon.edu/)