

Basic Relational Concepts

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<http://marriagebuilders.com>*

If you apply the Basic Relational Concepts, you will do what most couples want to do, but have failed to do -- fall in love and stay in love. And that's what ultimately saves marriage -- restoring the feeling of love.

Of course, it takes more than the feeling of love to build a successful marriage. It takes your willingness and ability to care for and protect each other. But that feeling of incredible attraction is the best litmus test of your success in giving each other the care and protection that you need.

When you are in love, your emotions help you meet each other's emotional needs. They provide instincts that you may not have even known you have -- instincts to be affectionate, sexual, conversational, recreational, honest and admiring. These all seem to come naturally when you are in love. But when you fall out of love, everything that will help your marriage seems unnatural. Your instincts turn against marital recovery, and toward separation.

Basic Concept #1: The Love Bank

In my struggle to learn how to save marriages, I eventually discovered that the best way to do it was to teach couples how to fall in love with each other -- and stay in love. So I created a concept that I called the Love Bank to help couples understand how people fall in and out of love. This concept, perhaps more than any other that I created, helped couples realize that almost everything they did affected their love for each other either positively or negatively. And that awareness set most of them on a course of action that preserved their love and saved their marriages.

Within each of us is a Love Bank that keeps track of the way each person treats us. Everyone we know has an account and the things they do either deposit or withdraw love units from their accounts. It's your emotions' way of encouraging you to be with those who make you happy. When you associate someone with good feelings, deposits are made into that person's account in your Love Bank. And when the Love Bank reaches a certain level of deposits (the romantic love threshold), the feeling of love is triggered. As long as your Love Bank balance remains above that threshold, you will experience the feeling of love. But when it falls below that threshold, you will lose that feeling. You will like anyone with a balance above zero, but you will only be in love with someone whose balance is above the love threshold.

However, your emotions do not simply encourage you to be with those who make you happy -- they also discourage you from being with those who make you unhappy. Whenever you associate someone with bad feelings, withdrawals are made in your Love Bank. And if you withdraw more than you deposit, your Love Bank balance can fall below zero. When that happens the Love Bank turns into the Hate Bank. You will dislike those with moderate negative balances, but if the balance falls below the hate threshold, you will hate the person.

Try living with a spouse you hate! Your emotions are doing everything they can to get you out of there -- and divorce is one of the most logical ways to escape.

Couples usually ask for my advice when they are just about ready to throw in the towel. Their Love Banks have been losing love units so long that they are now deeply in the red. And their negative Love Bank accounts make them feel uncomfortable just being in the same room with each other. They cannot imagine surviving marriage for another year, let alone ever being in love again.

But that's my job -- to help them fall in love with each other again. I encourage them to stop making Love Bank withdrawals, and start making Love Bank deposits. I created all of the remaining Basic Concepts to help couples achieve those objectives.

Basic Concept #2: Instincts and Habits

Instincts are behavioral patterns that we are born with, and habits are patterns that we learn. Both of them tend to be repeated again and again almost effortlessly. They are important in our discussion of what it takes to be in love because it's our behavior that makes deposits and withdrawals from Love Banks, and our instincts and habits make up most of our behavior.

Instincts and habits can make Love Bank deposits, so it is imperative to know how to create those habits because once they are learned, deposits are made repeatedly and almost effortlessly.

Unfortunately, many of our instincts and habits, such as angry outbursts, contribute to Love Bank withdrawals. Since they are repeated so often, they play a very important role in the annihilation of Love Bank accounts. If we are to stop Love Bank withdrawals, we must somehow stop destructive instincts and habits in their tracks. Instincts are harder to stop than habits, but they can both be avoided.

As we discuss the remaining concepts, keep in mind the value of a good habit, and the harm of a bad habit, because their effect on Love Bank balances are multiplied by repetition.

Basic Concept #3: The Most Important Emotional Needs

What's the fastest way to deposit love units into each other's Love Banks? I interviewed literally hundreds of couples trying to find the answer to this question when I was first learning how to save marriages. Eventually their answer became clear to me -- you must meet each other's most important emotional needs.

You and your spouse fell in love with each other because you made each other very happy, and you made each other happy because you met some of each other's important emotional needs. The only way you and your spouse will stay in love is to keep meeting those needs. Even when the feeling of love begins to fade, or when it's gone entirely, it's not necessarily gone for good. It can be recovered whenever you both go back to making large Love Bank deposits.

First, be sure you know what each other's most important emotional needs are (complete the Emotional Needs Questionnaire). Then, learn to meet the needs that are rated the highest in a way that is fulfilling to your spouse, and enjoyable for you, too.

It's likely that you and your spouse do not prioritize your needs in the same order of importance. A highly important need for you may not be as important to your spouse. So you may find yourself trying

to meet needs that seem unimportant to you. But your spouse depends on you to meet those needs, and it's the most effective and efficient way for you make large Love Bank deposits.

Basic Concept #4: The Policy of Undivided Attention

Unless you and your spouse schedule time each week for undivided attention, it will be impossible to meet each other's most important emotional needs. So to help you and your spouse clear space in your schedule for each other, I have written the **Policy of Undivided Attention**:

**Give your spouse your undivided attention
a minimum of fifteen hours each week,
using the time to meet the emotional needs
of affection, conversation, recreational
companionship and sexual fulfillment**

This policy will help you avoid one of the most common mistakes in marriage -- neglecting each other.

But it goes beyond helping guarantee that you will meet each other's emotional needs. It also unlocks the door to the use of all the other basic concepts. Without time for undivided attention you will not be able to avoid Love Busters and you will not be able to negotiate effectively. Time for undivided attention is the necessary ingredient for everything that's important in marriage.

And yet, as soon as most couples marry, and especially when children arrive, couples usually replace their time together with activities of lesser importance. You probably did the same thing. You tried to meet each other's needs with time "left over," but sadly, there wasn't much time left over. Your lack of private time together may have become a great cause of unhappiness, and yet you felt incapable of preventing it. You may have also found yourself bottling up your honest expression of feelings because there was just no appropriate time to talk.

Make your time to be alone with each other your highest priority -- that way it will never be replaced by activities of lesser value. Your career, your time with your children, maintenance of your home, and a host of other demands will all compete for your time together. But if you follow the Policy of Undivided Attention, you will not let anything steal from those precious and crucial hours together.

It is essential for you to (a) spend time away from children and friends whenever you give each other your undivided attention (you need privacy); (b) use the time to meet the emotional needs of affection, conversation, recreational companionship, and sexual fulfillment when you are together (when met, these make the largest Love Bank deposit of all!); and (c) schedule at least fifteen hours together each week (that's how long it usually takes to meet the four needs). When you were dating, you gave each other this kind of attention and you fell in love. When people have affairs, they also give each other this kind of attention to keep their love for each other alive. Why should courtship and affairs be the only times love is created? Why can't it happen in marriage as well? It can, if you set aside time every week to give each other undivided attention.

Basic Concept #5: Love Busters

When you meet each other's most important emotional needs, you become each other's source of greatest happiness. But if you are not careful, you can also become each other's source of greatest unhappiness.

It's pointless to deposit love units if you withdraw them right away. So in addition to meeting important emotional needs, you must be sure to protect your spouse, and the Love Bank, from withdrawals. And paying attention to how your everyday behavior can make each other unhappy does that.

You and your spouse were born to be demanding, disrespectful, angry, annoying, independent and dishonest. These are normal human traits that I call Love Busters because they destroy the feeling of love spouses have for each other. But if you promise to avoid being the cause of your spouse's unhappiness, you will do whatever it takes to overcome these destructive tendencies for your spouse's protection. By eliminating Love Busters, you will not only be protecting your spouse, but you will also be preserving your spouse's love for you.

Basic Concept #6: The Giver and Taker

Have you ever thought that your spouse is possessed? One moment he or she is loving and thoughtful, and the next you are faced with selfishness and thoughtlessness. Trust me, it's not a demon you're up against, it's the two sides of our personalities. I call them the Giver and the Taker.

All of us want to make a difference in the lives of other. We want others to be happy, and we want to contribute to their happiness. When we feel that way, our Giver is influencing us. The Giver's rule is **do whatever you can to make others happy and avoid anything that makes others unhappy, even if it makes you unhappy**. It encourages us to use that rule in our relationships with other people.

But we also want the best for ourselves. We want to be happy, too. When we feel that way, our Taker is influencing us. The Taker's rule is **do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes others unhappy**. If that rule ever makes sense to you, it's because your Taker is in control.

These two primitive aspects of our personality are usually balanced in our dealings with others. But in marriage they tend to take turns being in charge. And that leads to most of the problems that couples encounter. If we take the advice of our Giver, we are willing to suffer to make our spouse happy, and if we take the advice of our Taker, we are willing to let our spouse suffer to make us happy. In either case the advice we are given is short sighted because someone always gets hurt.

Basic Concept #7: The Three States of Mind in Marriage

The Giver and Taker create moods that I call states of mind. These states of mind have a tremendous influence on the way a husband and wife try to resolve conflicts. But in each of the three states of mind, negotiation is almost impossible. That's what makes negotiation, in general, so tough in marriage.

When we are in love and happy, we are usually in the **State of Intimacy**. That state of mind is controlled by the Giver, which encourages us to follow the Giver's rule: do whatever you can to make your spouse happy and avoid anything that makes your spouse unhappy, even if it makes you unhappy. That rule can

lead to habits that may be good for our spouse, but can be disastrous for us because we are not negotiating with our own interests in mind.

Sadly, flawed agreements made in the state of Intimacy can lead to our own unhappiness, and that in turn wakes the slumbering Taker. As long as we are happy, our Taker has nothing to do, but when we start feeling unhappy, our Taker rises to our rescue and triggers the **State of Conflict**. With the Taker now in charge, we are encouraged to follow the rule: do whatever you can to make yourself happy, and avoid anything that makes yourself unhappy, even if it makes others unhappy. The Taker also encourages us to be demanding, disrespectful and angry in an effort to force our spouse to make us happy. Fighting is the Taker's favorite "negotiating" strategy.

When fighting doesn't work, and we are still unhappy, the Taker encourages us to take a new course of action that triggers the **State of Withdrawal**. Instead of trying to force our spouse to make us happy, our Taker wants us to give up on our spouse entirely. We don't want our spouse to do anything for us, and we certainly don't want to do anything for our spouse. In this state of mind we are emotionally divorced.