

The 5:1 Ratio

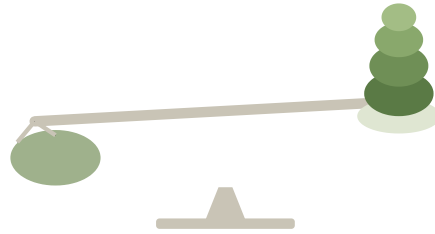
THE BALANCE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

Through decades of observing couples, psychologist John Gottman found that stable, satisfying relationships tend to maintain roughly five positive interactions for every negative one during conflict — not by avoiding disagreement, but by consistently repairing and reconnecting around it.

1

NEGATIVE INTERACTION

Moments of criticism, defensiveness, contempt or disconnection.



5

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

Moments of warmth, humour, interest, affection or repair.

More positive moments create a stronger, more resilient relationship.

Negative Interactions

These can erode trust and connection, especially when frequent or unresolved.

Criticism

Sarcasm

Defensiveness

Dismissiveness

Interrupting

Eye-rolling

Contempt

Withdrawing

Positive Interactions

These build connection, goodwill and emotional safety.

A genuine compliment

Shared laughter

A kind touch

Showing interest

Active listening

A repair attempt

Appreciation

Small acts of kindness

The Ratio Shifts With Context

DURING CONFLICT

5 : 1

Gottman's original research found that stable couples maintained roughly five positive interactions for every negative one, specifically during disagreements.

IN EVERYDAY LIFE

20 : 1

Outside of conflict, satisfied couples show a much higher ratio of positivity — a reserve of goodwill that can help relationships weather more difficult moments.

Building the Ratio



SMALL, FREQUENT DEPOSITS

The positives don't need to be grand gestures — a warm greeting, a thank you, or noticing something your partner did well all count.



REPAIR DURING CONFLICT

A well-timed apology, a moment of humour, or simply softening your tone can help shift the balance back toward positive.

*You don't need to avoid conflict.
You need enough warmth around it to hold the relationship steady.*

SOURCES

Gottman, J. M. & Levenson, R. W. (2000). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. · Gottman Institute (2015). *The Science of a Lasting Relationship*.

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