

One of the most effective buffers against the stress of life is the realm of human relationships. Many research studies have indicated that social support – the presence of other people – has the capacity to protect us from the devastating effects of a wide variety of stressors, ranging from major crises to the common cold. Friends, family, romantic partners, teachers, and counselors can all help reduce the overwhelming consequences of anxiety and stress. Today's column will discuss the keys to forming and maintaining a healthy, lasting romantic relationship that can support you through life's rough moments.

In his excellent book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (available for \$10 at Amazon), psychologist John Gottman reveals the secret of happily married couples based on over 3 decades of detailed investigation. Surprisingly, the main difference between couples who divorce and those who stay together is not how often they fight or argue – rather, it is the quality of the everyday friendship between the partners. By working on and strengthening the bond between partners, couples will likely begin to argue differently (though perhaps not less frequently), with their conflict featuring less hostility, less criticism/defensiveness, and decreased withdrawal or running away. **SO HOW CAN YOU STRENGTHEN THE FRIENDSHIP/BOND?**



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## *Effective Relationships*

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Here are 3 tips:

- 1) Enhance your “love maps” – i.e., get to know each other on a deep, intimate level as human beings. What are your partner's favorite foods, music, books, movies, etc.? What is his/her favorite way to spend an evening? What was his/her childhood like? Who are his/her best friends? What was his/her happiest moment in the past 5 years? Proudest accomplishment?
- 2) Nurture your fondness and admiration for each other – i.e., take the time to tell your partner what you appreciate about him/her, what you admire most, why you like him/her as a person.
- 3) Turn toward each other instead of away – i.e., set aside time to connect with your partner every day, such as taking walks or having dinner together and “catching up” on a regular basis. Partners who characteristically turn toward each other are putting money in their “emotional bank account,” building up savings that can serve as a cushion when times get rough, when they are faced with a major life stress or conflict.

These tips apply not only to romantic partners, but to close friends as well. The more you “invest” in a friendship, the more it will be there for you when you need it.