

The 7-Day Connection Challenge

Seven days. One small action a day, about ten minutes each. No meeting to schedule, nothing to buy, and no version of this that requires your partner to be as interested as you are.

A week is not long enough to fix a relationship. It is long enough to find out whether the two of you can still move at all, and which small thing actually fits you. That is what this is for.

Written by D.J. Westbrooks. Not a licensed counselor. A 50-something who has been married 28+ years and has spent years reading what actual relationship researchers and therapists have published (Gottman, Johnson, Nagoski, Tatkin, Hendrix, Perel). Every action in here is built from their work, not from a clinical degree.

How to use this. One page per day. Read the action, say the line if it helps, and use the lines at the bottom for whatever comes up. Nothing to fill in perfectly and nobody checking.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- About ten minutes a day, and no uninterrupted hour you have to find.
- Nothing to buy, print, or download beyond this file.
- No agreement from your partner in advance. Several of these work whether or not they are playing along.
- A little willingness to be the one who goes first.

THE WEEK

At a glance

Day	What you do	About
1	Ask something you have never asked	10 min
2	Name one specific thing they did	10 min
3	The five minute download	10 min
4	Say the thing you almost did not say	10 min
5	One repair attempt, on purpose	10 min
6	Ask for something small, out loud	10 min
7	Read the week back	10 min

Any order works. If a day does not land, skip it and come back. The only day that matters more than the others is day 7, because that is the one where you decide what to keep.

BEFORE YOU START

Two things worth deciding now, because they are the two most common ways this week quietly falls apart.

1. Who goes first. If you are reading this, that is probably you. Fine. Going first is not the same as carrying it. Half of these days only ask one of you to do something, and the doing is what counts.

2. What happens if it goes badly. Pick an exit line in advance, something like we can stop here and pick this up tomorrow. Knowing how to pause a hard conversation is what makes it safe to start one.

THE DAY WE ARE STARTING

Write the date here, so it exists somewhere other than in your head.

Ask something you have never asked

SAY IT LIKE THIS

NOTES

Name one specific thing they did

SAY IT LIKE THIS

questionconnection.com/7-day-relationship-challenge

The five minute download

Each of you gets five minutes to talk about what was hard today. The other one listens and fixes nothing. No advice, no suggestions, no well you should have.

SAY IT LIKE THIS

Do you want ideas, or do you want me to just listen?

This is Gottman's stress reducing conversation, and the rule that makes it work is the boring one: you are not being asked to solve the problem. You are being asked to be on their side while they have it. Most people skip this because it feels like doing nothing. The person talking can tell the difference between a partner who is with them and a partner who is waiting for their turn to improve the situation.

If you feel the advice building up in your throat, ask the question above instead of offering it. That single question has rescued more of these conversations than any technique.

NOTES

Say the thing you almost did not say

SAY IT LIKE THIS

NOTES

One repair attempt, on purpose

I was trying to say we are okay.

Gottman found that the couples who last are not the ones who never rupture. They are the ones whose repair attempts get received. A repair attempt is often so small it is invisible from outside: a tone shift, a touch, a small kindness at the right moment. Doing one when nothing is wrong is practice. You are rehearsing the gesture so it is available to you on the day you actually need it.

If it lands flat, do not escalate. Say what you meant. Naming the attempt is not cheating, and it stops a small awkward moment from turning into a misread one.

NOTES

Ask for something small, out loud

Make one specific, small, doable request. This week, not someday. Small enough that a no will not hurt.

Can you take the dog tomorrow morning so I can sleep in?

Gottman describes the everyday reaches for attention, affection, and support as bids for connection, and found that stable couples turn toward those bids far more often than couples who struggle. A bid has to be small enough to say yes to easily. Can you take the dog tomorrow is a bid. I need more from you is a complaint wearing a request's clothes, and it gets answered like one.

If you get a no, that is a data point, not a verdict. Ask for the thing you actually wanted instead of retreating and deciding you should not have asked.

Read the week back

SAY IT LIKE THIS

NOTES

KEEPING TRACK

The week, honestly

Not a scorecard. Just a record of what happened and how it landed, so day 7 has something real to look at instead of a feeling.

Day	Did it?	How it landed
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

THE ONE THING WE ARE KEEPING

One action, named out loud, that becomes part of an ordinary week from here on. Not a resolution. A habit the two of you actually agreed to.

ONE MORE THING

Where this stops

What this is not

This is not therapy, and it is not a fix for a relationship in real trouble. It will not help with abuse, with an active addiction, with a partner who is unsafe, or with a crisis. A worksheet cannot do that work and pretending otherwise would be dishonest.

If any of that is where you are, please talk to a licensed professional. That is not a disclaimer tacked onto the end. It is the most useful sentence on this page.

If you need someone right now

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call, text, or chat 988 in the US. Free, confidential, and answered 24 hours a day, every day.

National Domestic Violence Hotline. Call 800.799.SAFE (7233). If you are worried your internet use is being monitored, that site explains how to browse more safely.

If you want to keep going

The weekly check in is the next step once the week is over. It is one scheduled conversation a week, about 45 minutes, and it is the difference between a good week and a habit. There is a free guide for it at questionconnection.com/articles/weekly-couples-check-in-meeting.

There are also hundreds of free question sets at questionconnection.com if you want more of the day 1 kind of conversation.

Where the research comes from

Every action in here traces back to published research on couples, not to advice collected secondhand. The two sources behind most of it:

John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. Love maps, bids for connection, repair attempts, and the ratio of positive to negative interactions all come from this research.

Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight*. The A.R.E. framework (Accessible, Responsive, Engaged), and the question underneath all of it: are you there for me.