



Counselling Psychologist
Sylvia Tan

Loss the Spark in Your Marriage?

Why good marriages go quite - and four small, evidence-based habits that bring the connection back.

A Gottman Method - informed session for couples and the therapist who support them

Wednesday, 19 August 2026

8:30 - 10.00 PM (SG Time)



Zoom



WELCOME

A Little About Tonight's Session



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Child Custody Evaluator

Couples Therapy

Divorce Counselling/Coaching

Individual Psychotherapy



A note before we start

This talk offers general, evidence-informed guidance. It isn't a substitute for individual or couples therapy — we'll talk about how to tell the difference.

Tonight, we'll look at why closeness quietly fades in good marriages — and what actually helps.

What I learnt From Divorcing Couples



The spark didn't go out in due to one single event

It is through multiple times of unmet bids of support, connection and understanding



The lack of time is not the problem

But the lack of effort or lack of recognition of effort



It is not the lack of communication or poor communication

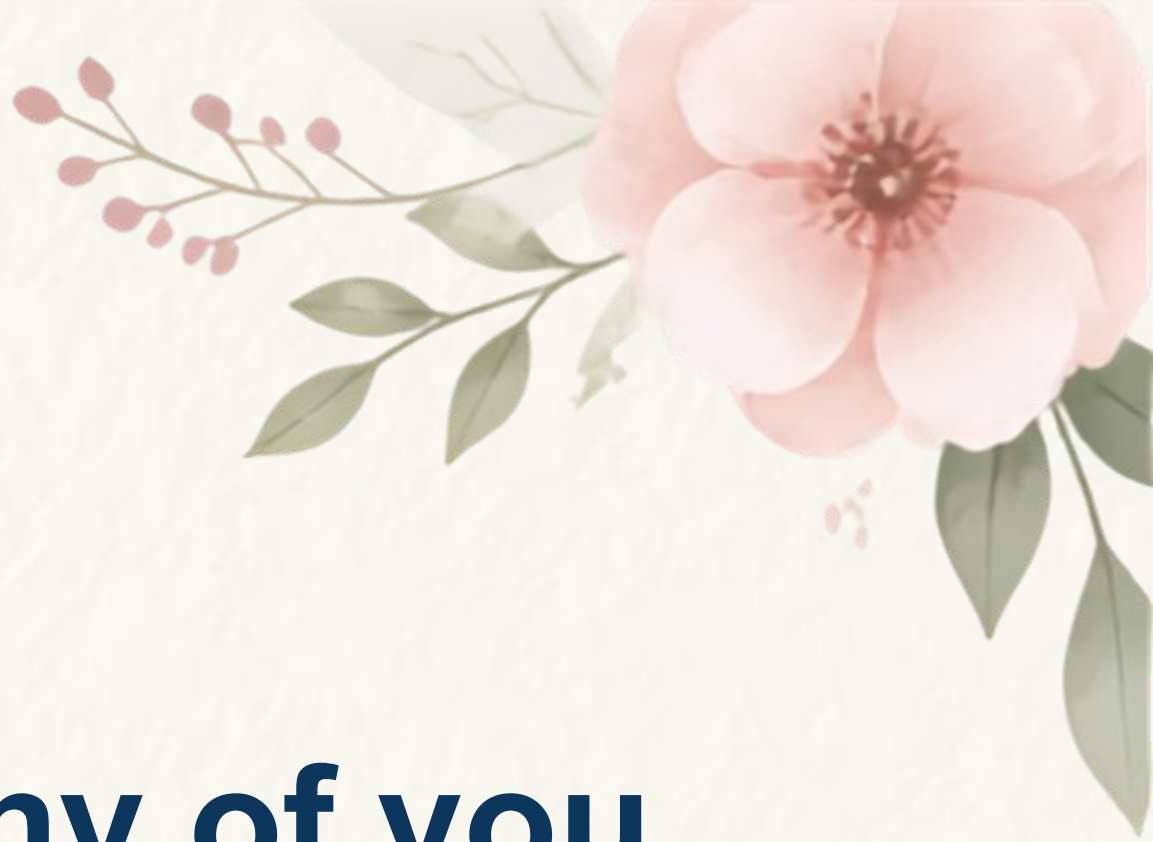
But the lack of emotional safety between each other



Not taking personal responsibility to change and self regulate

The fault always lies with the other, venting on partner, poor emotional regulation





A QUICK GUT-CHECK



Feels like co-managing

- ✗ Conversations are mostly logistics — calendars, bills, kids, chores
- ✗ You know the schedule, not the inner world
- ✗ Physical affection has quietly stopped
- ✗ You'd rather scroll your phone than talk before bed

How many of you feel like this ?





A QUICK GUT-CHECK

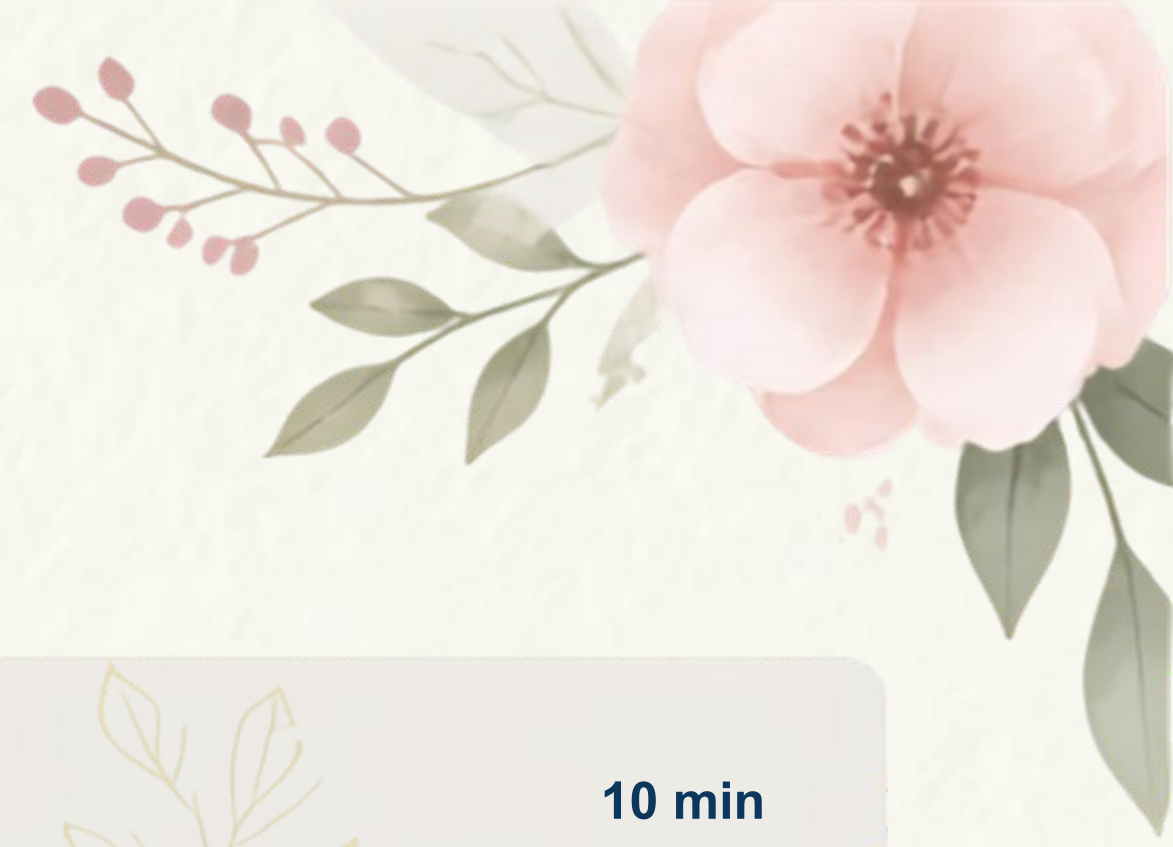


Feels like partnership

- ✓ You still ask each other real questions and update your "love map"
- ✓ Small bids for attention get noticed and answered
- ✓ Brief daily affection is routine, not rare
- ✓ Conflict happens, but repair happens too

**Would you rather
feel like this ?**





What we'll cover in 50 minutes



Why the spark goes silent

How good marriages fade without a single fight — and why yours isn't broken



10 min



Four small daily practices

Evidence-based Gottman Method tools, each under a few minutes a day



18 min



Quiet vs. needs deeper help

A simple way to tell the difference, so you know your honest next step



9 min



For therapists: helping others

How to bring these tools into your work with clients



8 min



PART ONE

Why the Spark Goes Silent

It rarely happens in a single dramatic moment. It happens in a thousand small ones.

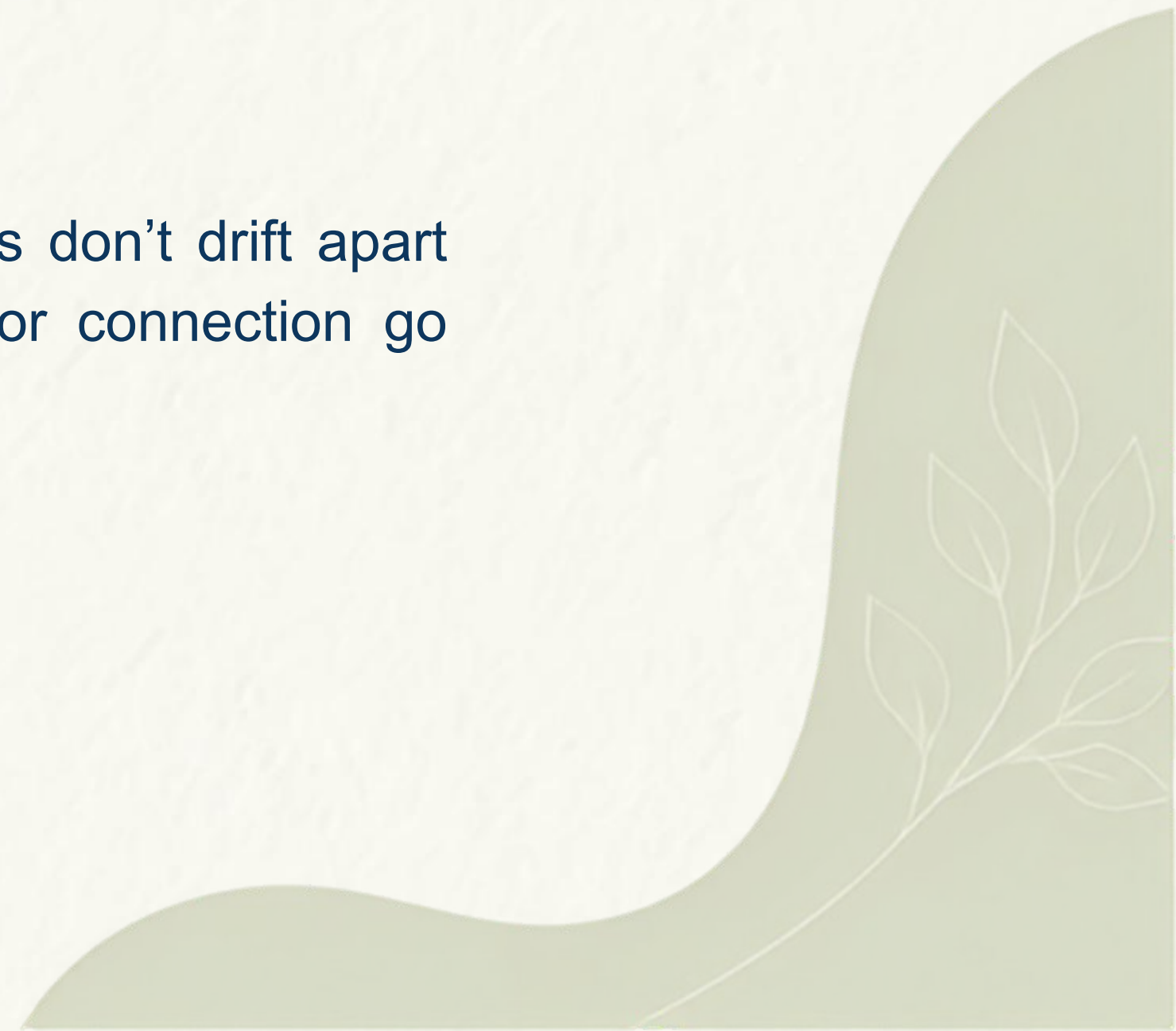




**YOUR MARRIAGE ISN'T
BROKEN**

It's unattended.

Dr. John Gottman's decades of research found that most couples don't drift apart because of one big betrayal — they drift because small bids for connection go unanswered, again and again, until distance feels normal.



THE MECHANISM •
STEP 1 OF 3

Bids go unanswered



A “bid” is any small attempt to connect — a comment, a glance, a question, a sigh after a hard day. Gottman’s Love Lab spent years observing real couples’ everyday interactions, then followed up years later to see who stayed together and who didn’t.

Missing a bid here and there is normal. The pattern only matters when it repeats, week after week, without either partner noticing.

86%

of couples who stayed together turned toward their partner’s bids

33%

of couples who later divorced did the same





Negative sentiment takes over

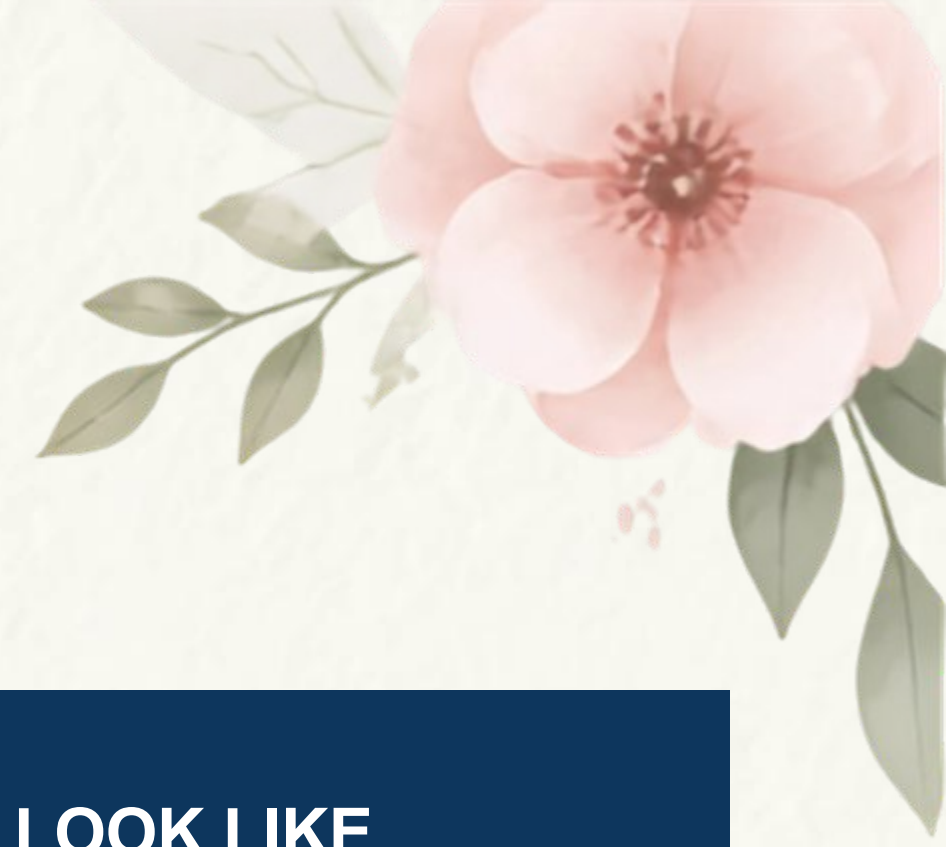


Once bids are repeatedly missed, partners start interpreting neutral — or even kind — behaviour through a negative lens. Gottman calls this negative sentiment override: goodwill runs out quietly, and small annoyances start to feel like proof of something bigger.

This is why the same comment — “you’re late again” — can land as a light remark early on, and as a character attack once sentiment has soured.

HOW IT COMPOUNDS

- 1 A bid gets missed
- 2 The moment goes unprepared
- 3 The next neutral act gets read unkindly
- 4 Goodwill quietly drains



Distance starts to feel normal



Without ever having a single defining fight, a couple can end up living parallel lives — co-managing logistics, but no longer turning toward one another. Because there was no dramatic rupture, the distance can be hard to name, let alone raise.

This is the point most couples I see arrive at: not in crisis, just quietly far apart — and unsure how it happened.

WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE

Conversations that rarely go beyond logistics

Neither partner quite remembers the last real check-in

Evenings spent side by side, not together

NEEDS DEEPER HELP

Gottman's "Four Horsemen" — the strongest predictors of divorce



Criticism



Attacking character ("you always...") rather than raising a specific complaint



Contempt



Mockery, eye-rolling, sarcasm, name-calling — treating your partner as beneath you



Defensiveness



Reflexively deflecting blame instead of hearing the concern



Stonewalling



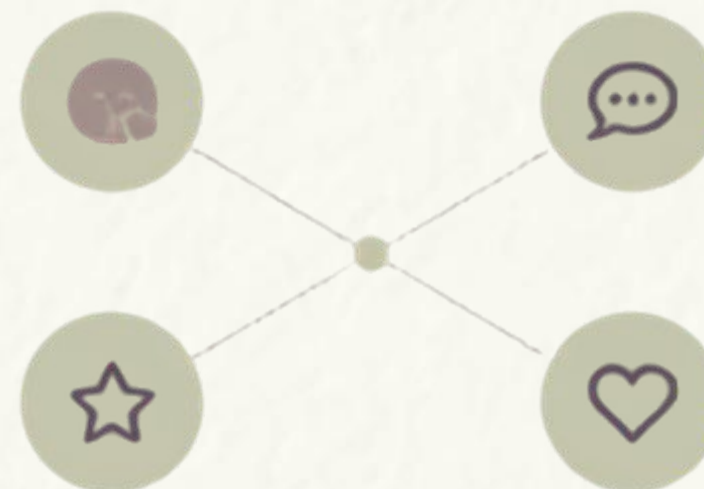
Shutting down and withdrawing instead of engaging, even in small ways

Gottman's research found these patterns predict divorce with striking accuracy — especially contempt, the single strongest predictor of the four.

PART TWO

Four Small Daily Practices

Evidence-based tools from the Gottman Method. Each one takes under a few minutes a day — no grand gestures required.





THE PHILOSOPHY

“Small things often” beats grand gestures

86%

of couples who stayed together turned toward their partner’s small bids for connection — versus just 33% of couples who later divorced.

— *The Gottman Institute, “Love Lab” longitudinal research*

Why these four practices

- ✓ Each takes seconds to a few minutes — realistic on a busy weeknight
- ✓ They target the exact mechanism that erodes connection: missed bids
- ✓ They’re repeatable daily rituals, not one-off events to remember



Coming up: partings & reunions, the stress-reducing conversation, appreciation, and affection.

PRACTICE 1

Partings & Reunions

Turn the moments you already have — leaving and coming home — into connection.

 **Twice a day, 1 minute**

- 1** Before you part for the day, share one thing you know is happening in your partner's day
- 2** End the goodbye with a 6-second kiss (or a full-length hug) — long enough to register
- 3** On reunion, greet each other before logistics take over

WHY IT WORKS

A 6-second kiss is long enough to shift out of autopilot and register as genuine affection, not a peck of habit. Knowing one detail of your partner's day keeps their inner world present in yours, even on the busiest days.



PRACTICE 2

The Stress-Reducing Conversation

A dedicated 20 minutes to be each other's safe harbour from the outside world.

 **Daily, ~20 minutes**

- 1** Set aside time — after work is common — with no phones, no problem-solving agenda
- 2** One partner shares the day's stress; the other listens, reflects, and validates
- 3** Swap roles. The goal is to feel understood, not to fix or advise



WHY IT WORKS

This conversation is explicitly about external stress (work, traffic, family) — not about the relationship itself. Keeping it separate from relationship conflict lets partners practise being each other's ally against the world, which builds trust for harder conversations later.

PRACTICE 3

Rituals of Appreciation

Build a habit of noticing what your partner does right, out loud.

 **Daily, “1–2 minutes**

- 1** Notice one specific thing your partner did or said that you appreciated
- 2** Say it directly and specifically — not just “thanks for everything”
- 3** Keep a running mental (or written) list of your partner’s positive qualities



WHY IT WORKS

Appreciation is the direct antidote to negative sentiment override. Couples who maintain a steady ratio of positive-to-negative interactions build a reserve of goodwill that helps them weather the inevitable rough days.

PRACTICE 4

Everyday Affection

Physical warmth, offered as a daily habit rather than saved for special occasions.

Daily, seconds at a time

- 1 Default to touch in passing — a hand on the shoulder, a hug, holding hands on a walk
- 2 Make touch a hello and goodbye habit, not just a lead-up to intimacy
- 3 Notice and accept your partner's bids for affection rather than brushing past them



WHY IT WORKS

Affectionate touch supports oxytocin release, which is associated with feelings of bonding, safety, and reduced stress. Small, low-pressure touch throughout the day also keeps physical closeness from becoming something that only happens rarely — and therefore feels loaded.

PRACTICE 5

Emotional Regulation

Learning to regulate your emotions, taking control of your anger is love. as your are intentionally choosing not to hurt your spouse

Pause whenever triggered

- 1** Notice whenever your are emotionally triggered eg frustrated, irritated, tired
- 2** Take a deep breath and count backwards from 100
- 3** Instead of reacting, think how to have a different response



WHY IT WORKS

Emotional regulation helps to slow down your reactivity. It prevents you from saying things which you might regret later, or make your spouse feel emotionally unsafe. Without regulating your emotions, you will be perceived as “a source of threat”, and your spouse will not be able to relax around you, and this kills the desire to bond, stay close and be connected.

RECAP

Your one-week challenge



Partings & Reunions

1 detail + a 6-second
kiss



Stress-Reducing Conversation

20 minutes, no
fixing



Appreciation

One specific thing,
said aloud



Affection

Touch as a
daily habit





PART THREE

Quiet vs. Needs Deeper Help

Not every disconnected season is the same. Here's how to tell the difference — honestly.



JUST GONE QUIET

Signs this is a normal, fixable season



You're both stretched thin

New baby, career pressure, aging parents — capacity is temporarily low, not gone



You can still talk when you try

A real conversation is still possible; you've just stopped initiating one



Warmth returns with small effort

A good weekend or a deliberate date night noticeably lifts the mood between you



No contempt, just distance

Disagreements stay respectful — there's no eye-rolling, mockery, or character attacks



This is exactly what the four daily practices are built for.

YOUR HONEST NEXT STEP

A simple way to decide



If it's mostly quiet...

Start the four practices this week. Pick one, do it daily for two weeks, and notice the shift. Small, consistent effort is often enough to turn things around.



Low risk, self-directed, and reversible.

If you see the Horsemen...

Especially contempt, or a pattern that's entrenched and not improving with effort — reach out to a couples therapist. This isn't failure; it's the same instinct as seeing a doctor for a lingering symptom.



A bridge, not a verdict on your marriage.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

**Small, often, and out loud — that's
what keeps a marriage close.**

Pick one practice. Start tonight. And if what you're noticing feels bigger than a quiet season, reaching out for support is a sign of strength, not failure.



Thank you

Questions & discussion



Sylvia Tan

Counselling Psychologist



Sylvia Tan Psychology Consultancy

Reach out for individual, couples, or clinical supervision enquiries.





PART FOUR

For Therapists: Helping Others

How to bring tonight's framework into your work with couples.



APPLYING THIS WITH CLIENTS

Three ways to bring these ideas into session



Assess before you prescribe



Use the Sound Relationship House as a map — ask where a couple's Love Maps, fondness & admiration, and turning-toward habits currently stand before assigning any homework.



Assign the practices as homework



The four rituals translate directly into between-session homework. Start with one, and have couples report back specifically on what happened, not just whether they "did it."



Watch for the Horsemen in-session



How a couple discusses a mild disagreement in the room often reveals more than their self-report. Contempt in particular is worth naming and addressing directly.

TRY THIS IN YOUR NEXT SESSION



A low-lift homework assignment to start with

The Stress-Reducing Conversation Assignment

- 1 Ask the couple to schedule the same 20-minute window each day for one week
- 2 One rule only: no problem-solving, no relationship talk — just listening and validating
- 3 At the next session, debrief what came up rather than whether they were “perfect” at it
- 4 Use their debrief as a live window into how well they turn toward each other’s bids

