

Exercise: Turning Toward Your Partner's Bids for Connection

We believe Melissa and Ron can improve their marriage by clearly telling each other what they need in terms of acceptance, friendship, affection, and romance.

Imagine, for example, what might have happened on that lonely night they describe on page 229 if either one had made a clear bid for emotional connection. What if either Ron or Melissa had said, "I really want to kiss you right now"? And what if the other had responded, "That's what I really want, too"?

Our research has shown that such exchanges are the stuff that happy marriages are made of. Whether a partner wants sex, affection, conversation, or just some help with the yard work, the story is the same: One partner makes a bid in the form of a comment, a gesture, a question, a touch, or a facial expression. And the other partner "turns toward" that bid with interest, empathy, or support.

While turning toward your partner's bids leads to the growth and development of a loving, caring relationship, "turning away" by ignoring your partner's bids has just the opposite effect. Whether the slight is intentional or simply caused by mindlessness, continually disregarding your partner's bids leads to increased conflict, hurt feelings, and the deterioration of your relationship.

"Turning against" your partner's bids with arguments and hostility also has a negative impact. It can make the bidding partner feel hurt and fearful, so that bidding stops, feelings are suppressed, and the relationship begins to wither.

Below is a list of situations in which partners commonly bid for emotional connection. As you read each item, imagine your partner offering this bid to you. Then imagine ways that you might turn away, turn against, or turn toward the bid. Over the next several weeks, see what happens when you make an effort to habitually turn toward your partner.

Examples:

BID: My partner pours me a cup of coffee as I'm working at the computer.

Turning-away response: Silence. No acknowledgment.

Turning-against response: "Looks like you made it too weak again."

Turning-toward response: "Thanks. That's so thoughtful."

BID: My partner reads aloud a joke that he or she thinks is funny.

Turning-away response: "Have you seen my black shoes?"

Turning-against response: "I can't concentrate when you're reading like that."

Turning-toward response: "That's funny." Or "I don't get it. Tell me why it cracks you up."

BID: My partner tells me some bit of news about a relative.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner mentions something that needs to be done in the yard.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner tells me we're out of laundry detergent.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner admires the neighbor's new car.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner touches me in an affectionate way.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner complains about a chronic health problem.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner says he or she is worried about our child.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner touches me in a way that usually leads to sex.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner tells me he or she is very tired.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner recalls something from childhood that was very hurtful.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____

BID: My partner tells me about an incident at work where he or she felt unfairly treated.

Turning-away response: _____

Turning-against response: _____

Turning-toward response: _____