



A COUPLES RITUAL

FONDNESS & ADMIRATION

THE ANTIDOTE TO CONTEMPT

Gottman's second principle. Noticing what you admire in your partner, and saying it out loud in a way they can take in, is what helps them feel seen and loved. It also builds the reserve of respect that carries a relationship through its harder stretches.

WHY IT MATTERS

THE IDEA

- Fondness and admiration are the affection and respect that sit underneath a lasting relationship.
- They are the direct antidote to contempt, the single strongest predictor of divorce in Gottman's research.
- It isn't about grand gestures; it's a daily habit of noticing your partner's good qualities more than their faults, and saying so out loud.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD APPRECIATION

A GOOD COMPLIMENT

- Be specific. "You're thoughtful" is nice, but "you texted to check on me before my meeting" is the thing your partner actually feels.
- Point to who they are underneath the act: "that's the kind of steady I count on." Speaking to the person, not just the chore, is what helps someone feel seen.
- Say the effect it had on you: "it made me feel looked after." That's what tells your partner they matter to you.
- Go small and often over big and rare. A daily noticing does more for a relationship than an occasional grand speech.

WORDS FOR WHO THEY ARE

Appreciate who your partner is, not only what they do for you. Pick a couple of these, tell them the word, and one moment this week you saw it.

Warm

Funny

Steady

Creative

Generous

Sharp

Patient

Brave

Thoughtful

Playful

Loyal

Calm

Kind

Curious

Honest

Strong

Gentle

Dependable



SAY IT LIKE THIS

Specific beats general every time. A few examples to make your own.

- “I appreciate how patient you were with the kids during the bedtime routine.”
- “Thank you for handling the insurance call I’d been dreading. It took a weight off me.”
- “You let me sleep in and started the coffee. I woke up feeling cared for.”
- “The way you checked on your mom this week showed a steadiness that’s one of the things I love about you.”
- “You made me laugh in the middle of a hard day, right when I needed it.”
- “I saw how you calmed things down at dinner. You’re good at that, and I don’t say it enough.”
- “You stayed calm when I was losing it. I don’t tell you enough how much that steadies me.”
- “Thanks for remembering how I take my coffee. It’s small, but it makes me feel known.”

SEE THEM THROUGH OTHERS’ EYES

When fondness runs low, these help you find what you appreciate again.

REFILL THE WELL

- Picture how a good friend of theirs would describe them, and borrow that admiration for the day.
- Think back to what first drew you to them, then look for where it still shows up now.
- Notice what they do that you’d miss immediately if it stopped. Gratitude often hides in the ordinary.
- Keep a running note in your phone of small things you appreciate, so you’re never starting from a blank page.

WHEN IT FEELS FORCED

DO IT anyway

- If it feels awkward at first, that’s normal. A new habit feels stiff before it feels natural.
- You don’t have to feel a rush of warmth to say it. Notice the true thing, say it, and the feeling often follows.
- Skip the flattery. If you don’t mean it, your partner will hear it. Aim for true and small over big and hollow.

Fondness is a practice, not a feeling you wait for. The couples who keep it spend a few minutes a day looking for what they admire and saying it out loud. Over time that rebuilds the respect a relationship depends on. Adapted from Gottman’s second principle, Nurture Your Fondness and Admiration (*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*). My Mental Climb is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or certified by The Gottman Institute.

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