

Why **Marriages** Succeed or Fail

... and How You Can Make
Yours **Last**



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Introduction

The following “tests” were taken from John Gottman’s book *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail ... and How You Can Make Yours Last*. This is an extremely practical book with lots of tools to help you in your marriage. These “tests” are followed by summaries and remedies.

If you have questions or would like more information please contact the office at North Park to schedule a meeting. The office can be reached at (281) 821-2258.

Both husband and wife should complete the following fourteen (14) tests independently. Take your time, there is no rush. It is vitally important to be completely honest! It may hurt to be honest, but to get the most benefit it is necessary.

- Pastor Randy Harp

Test 1

Is the conflict avoider style of marriage right for you? (51)

1. I will often hide my feelings to avoid hurting my spouse.	Yes	No
2. When we disagree, I don't believe there is much point in analyzing our feelings and motivations.	Yes	No
3. When we disagree, we often solve the problem by going back to our basic beliefs about the different roles or men and women in marriage.	Yes	No
4. We have a lot of separate friends.	Yes	No
5. It is important to attend a church regularly.	Yes	No
6. Many marital conflicts are solved just through the passing of time.	Yes	No
7. We each do a lot of things on our own.	Yes	No
8. During a marital conflict, there is not much to be gained from figuring out what is happening on a psychological level.	Yes	No
9. Our religious values give us a clear sense of life's purposes.	Yes	No
10. When I'm moody I prefer to be left alone until I get over it.	Yes	No
11. I don't feel very comfortable with strong displays of negative emotions in my marriage.	Yes	No
12. We turn to our basic religious or cultural values for guidance when resolving conflict.	Yes	No
13. I just accept most of the things in my marriage that I can't change.	Yes	No
14. We often agree not to talk about things we disagree about.	Yes	No
15. In our marriage there is a fairly clear line between the husband's and wife's role.	Yes	No
16. We just don't seem to disagree very much.	Yes	No
17. When we have some difference of opinion we often just drop the topic.	Yes	No
18. We hardly ever have much to argue about.	Yes	No
19. A lot of talking about disagreements often makes matters worse.	Yes	No
20. There are some personal areas in my life that I prefer not to discuss with my spouse.	Yes	No
21. There is not much point in trying to persuade my spouse of my viewpoint.	Yes	No
22. There's not much to be gained by getting openly angry with my spouse.	Yes	No
23. Thinking positively solves a lot of marital issues.	Yes	No
24. In marriage it is usually best to stick to the traditional values about men and women.	Yes	No
25. I prefer to work out many of my negative feelings on my own.	Yes	No
26. Going over a lot of negative feelings in a marital discussion usually makes things worse.	Yes	No
27. If you just relax about problems, they have a way of working themselves out.	Yes	No
28. When we talk about our problems we find they just aren't that important in the overall picture of our marriage.	Yes	No
29. Men and women ought to have separate roles in marriage.	Yes	No

Scoring: Total up the number of items you checked "YES." If the number is greater than eight (8), you probably feel comfortable with a conflict-avoider marriage philosophy.

Comfort with an avoider philosophy (checked eight or more YES).

	YES	NO
You	_____	_____
Your Spouse	_____	_____

Test 2

Are you comfortable with a volatile or validator style of marriage? (54)

1. I think it's a good idea for my spouse and me to have a lot of separate friends.	Yes	No
2. I believe in honestly confronting disagreements, whatever the issue.	Yes	No
3. We often do things separately.	Yes	No
4. The feeling of togetherness is very central to our marriage.	Yes	No
5. Marriage partners should be direct and honest no matter what the result.	Yes	No
6. I feel quite comfortable with a strong expression of negative feelings.	Yes	No
7. Sometimes I enjoy a good argument with my spouse.	Yes	No
8. The most important aspect of marriage is companionship.	Yes	No
9. Jealousy is sometimes an issue in our marriage.	Yes	No
10. It is important to be a separate individual in marriage.	Yes	No
11. I think we should argue but only about important things.	Yes	No
12. We often will eat separately.	Yes	No
13. Our marriage is based on being one another's best friend.	Yes	No
14. I enjoy trying to persuade my spouse when we have a disagreement.	Yes	No
15. The religious and other beliefs we share are basic to our marriage.	Yes	No
16. I believe in keeping our marriage very romantic.	Yes	No
17. We often look back at our photo albums together.	Yes	No
18. We cultivate a sense of we-ness in our marriage.	Yes	No
19. We have all things personal and emotional in our marriage.	Yes	No
20. All the spaces in our home are shared spaces.	Yes	No
21. I would never take a separate vacation from my spouse.	Yes	No
22. At times I enjoy expressing anger.	Yes	No
23. I believe it is important to fight even about small matters.	Yes	No
24. I enjoy working out our values through thorough arguments.	Yes	No
25. There is nothing personal that I do not share with my spouse.	Yes	No
26. I am comfortable only with a moderate amount of emotional expression.	Yes	No
27. It is essential to have a strong sense of togetherness in marriage.	Yes	No
28. Keeping a certain amount of distance in a marriage helps the romance.	Yes	No
29. A strong sense of traditional values is good for a marriage.	Yes	No
30. There are few issues in a marriage worth arguing about.	Yes	No

Scoring: In the Validator and Volatile columns below, put a check next to the number of each question you answered “YES” to above. Next, separately add up all the check marks in each column. Divide each sum by 15. This will give you percentage scores for your comfort level with each style. For example, you may wind up with a 53% score on the Volatile scale and 80% score on the Validator scale. This suggests that you are mostly comfortable with a validator philosophy in marriage, although there are elements of the volatile type with which you are also comfortable.

Volatile	Validator	
1	4	
2	8	
3	11	Volatile Total / 15 = Volatile % _____%
5	13	
6	15	Validator Total / 15 = Validator % _____%
7	17	
9	18	
10	19	
12	20	
14	21	
16	25	
22	26	
23	27	
24	29	
28	30	
Total _____	Total _____	

	Volatile		Validator	
	YES	No	YES	NO
You	_____	_____	_____	_____
Your Spouse	_____	_____	_____	_____

Test 3

Is there enough love and respect in your marriage (63)

1. My spouse seeks out my opinion.	Yes	No
2. My spouse cares about my feelings.	Yes	No
3. I don't feel ignored very often.	Yes	No
4. We touch each other a lot.	Yes	No
5. We listen to each other a lot.	Yes	No
6. We respect each other's ideas.	Yes	No
7. We are affectionate toward one another.	Yes	No
8. I feel that my spouse takes good care of me.	Yes	No
9. What I say counts.	Yes	No
10. I am important in our decisions.	Yes	No
11. There's lots of love in our marriage.	Yes	No
12. We are genuinely interested in one another.	Yes	No
13. I just love spending time with my spouse.	Yes	No
14. We are very good friends.	Yes	No
15. Even during rough times, we can be empathic.	Yes	No
16. My spouse is considerate of my viewpoint.	Yes	No
17. My spouse finds me physically attractive.	Yes	No
18. My spouse expresses warmth toward me.	Yes	No
19. I feel included in my spouse's life.	Yes	No
20. My spouse admires me.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you checked "YES" to fewer than seven items, then it is likely you are not feeling adequately loved and respected in your marriage. You need to be far more active and creative in adding affection to your relationship.

Test 4

Are you a critic (77)

Think back to the last argument that you had. Try to recall it with as rich detail as possible. What started the argument? What did each of you say? How did you feel when it was over? Then answer the following questions as if you had just finished the discussion.

In the discussion that just occurred:

1. I thought it was very important to determine who was at fault.	Yes	No
2. I saw it as my job to present all of my complaints.	Yes	No
3. I tried to see patterns and analyze my spouse's personality as part of my complaint.	Yes	No
4. I didn't complain until I felt hurt.	Yes	No
5. I tried to make a general point instead of being specific about one situation or action.	Yes	No
6. I analyzed my spouse's personality in addition to discussing specific actions that bothered me.	Yes	No
7. I let things build up for a long time before I complained.	Yes	No
8. I didn't censor my complaints at all. I really let my spouse have it full force.	Yes	No
9. When I complained my emotions were very intense and powerful.	Yes	No
10. I complained in part to get things off my chest.	Yes	No
11. I did not state my complaints in a neutral manner.	Yes	No
12. I didn't try to be very rational when I stated what I thought was wrong.	Yes	No
13. When I complained I felt explosive inside.	Yes	No
14. When I complained I brought up my spouse's faults.	Yes	No
15. There's no stopping me once I get started.	Yes	No
16. I resented having to bring up these issues in the first place.	Yes	No
17. I regret my tactless choice of words when I complained.	Yes	No
18. Whenever I bring up a problem I know I'm basically right.	Yes	No
19. Whenever I bring up a problem it is my goal to get my partner to see how I'm right.	Yes	No
20. It was my goal to get my spouse to accept some blame for the problem.	Yes	No
21. When I complained I used phrases like "You always" or "You never."	Yes	No

Scoring: If you checked "YES" on more than seven (7) items you are probably a good candidate for being a critic. Remember, criticism by itself is not malevolent – it's easy to shift from complaining to criticizing.

	The Critic	
	YES	NO
You	_____	_____
Your Spouse	_____	_____

Test 5

No Respect (81)

Think back to the last argument again. Answer the following questions accordingly.

1. When we were discussing an issue in our marriage, I couldn't think of too much of anything I admired in my spouse.	Yes	No
2. When I got upset I could see glaring faults in my partner's personality.	Yes	No
3. I just don't respect some of the things my partner does.	Yes	No
4. I tried to point out ways in which my partner was inadequate in a particular situation.	Yes	No
5. I found it hard to have much pride in my spouse's qualities.	Yes	No
6. During the discussion I found myself putting my spouse down.	Yes	No
7. There's not a whole lot to look up to in the way my partner goes about things.	Yes	No
8. My spouse can be pretty arrogant at times.	Yes	No
9. When my spouse got negative I found myself thinking of insulting things to say back.	Yes	No
10. My spouse can be pretty smug at times.	Yes	No
11. My spouse was too stubborn to compromise.	Yes	No
12. When my partner was upset with me I wanted to turn the tables and counterattack.	Yes	No
13. I can't help feeling that there's a lot of stupidity in my spouse's behavior.	Yes	No
14. It's hard for me to see my spouse's point of view when I don't agree.	Yes	No
15. I often have no respect for my spouse when we are discussing an issue.	Yes	No
16. I just get fed up with all the negativity.	Yes	No
17. I felt disgusted by my spouse's attitudes.	Yes	No
18. My spouse can be pretty stupid at times.	Yes	No
19. I disapprove of my spouse's behavior.	Yes	No
20. My spouse can be pretty inept at times.	Yes	No
21. It was hard to respect my spouse when he or she was being that incompetent.	Yes	No
22. When my partner is upset with me I think of all the ways I've been let down in this marriage.	Yes	No
23. My spouse can be very selfish.	Yes	No
24. I often feel a sense of righteous indignation when my spouse is expressing something negative.	Yes	No
25. When I get dumped on I think of ways to get even.	Yes	No
26. When I see a glaring fault in my spouse I can't recall my spouse's positive qualities.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to more than seven (7) items you are probably a good candidate for using contempt.

	Contempt	
	YES	NO
You	_____	_____
Your Spouse	_____	_____

Test 6

How defensive are you (90)

Try to recall your actual behavior, feelings and thoughts just after an argument. It is very important to be honest with yourself.

1. When my spouse complained, I felt unfairly picked on.	Yes	No
2. I felt misunderstood.	Yes	No
3. I don't feel that I get credit for all the positive things I do.	Yes	No
4. What went wrong was actually not that much my responsibility.	Yes	No
5. To avoid blame, I had to explain why and how the problem arose.	Yes	No
6. I felt unfairly attacked when my spouse was being negative.	Yes	No
7. When my spouse complained, I realized that I also had a set of complaints that needed to be heard.	Yes	No
8. My spouse's negativity got too intense, too much, too out of proportion.	Yes	No
9. My spouse was too touch, got feelings hurt too easily.	Yes	No
10. There was some truth to my spouse's complaints, but it was not the whole truth.	Yes	No
11. When my spouse complained, I thought, "I am innocent of these charges."	Yes	No
12. When my spouse complained I felt that I had to "ward off" these attacks.	Yes	No
13. I felt obligated to deny the complaints against me that were inaccurate.	Yes	No
14. When I listened to my spouses complaints I thought of complaints of my own that weren't getting attention.	Yes	No
15. My spouse's views of the problem were too self-centered.	Yes	No
16. I thought, "What you say only bounces right off me."	Yes	No
17. When my spouse complained I tried to think of ways to protect myself.	Yes	No
18. when my spouse complained I thought of a way to reexplain my position.	Yes	No
19. When my spouse complained I thought that if my position were really understood we wouldn't have to have all these issues.	Yes	No
20. It seems that all my spouse can do is find fault with me.	Yes	No
21. Sometimes it feels like my spouse is coming at me with a baseball bat.	Yes	No
22. During a hot argument I keep thinking of ways to retaliate.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you've checked "YES" for seven or more items, then you are probably a good candidate for being defensive.

	Defensive	
	YES	NO
You	_____	_____
Your Spouse	_____	_____

Test 7

Stonewalling (96)

1. When my spouse complained I felt that I just wanted to get away from this garbage.	Yes	No
2. I had to control myself to keep from saying what I really felt.	Yes	No
3. I thought, "It's best to withdraw to avoid a big fight."	Yes	No
4. I withdrew to try to calm down.	Yes	No
5. When we have a big blowup, I just want to leave.	Yes	No
6. At times when my spouse is very negative, I think it is best just not to respond at all.	Yes	No
7. I'd rather withdraw than get my feelings hurt.	Yes	No
8. I think that sometimes withdrawing is the best solution.	Yes	No
9. I wondered why small issues suddenly became big ones.	Yes	No
10. I withdrew when my spouse's emotions seemed out of control.	Yes	No
11. I thought, "I don't have to take this kind of treatment."	Yes	No
12. I didn't want to fan the flames of conflict, so I just sat back and waited.	Yes	No
13. I hate it when things in our discussion stop being rational.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you checked "YES" to four (4) or more items you are probably a good candidate for being a stonewaller.

Test 8

Distress-Maintaining Thoughts (108)

During our last “heated” discussion ...

1. I felt hurt.	Yes	No
2. I felt misunderstood.	Yes	No
3. I thought, “I don’t have to take this.”	Yes	No
4. I felt innocent of blame for this problem.	Yes	No
5. I thought to myself, just get up and leave.	Yes	No
6. I was scared.	Yes	No
7. I was angry.	Yes	No
8. I was worried.	Yes	No
9. I felt disappointed.	Yes	No
10. I wanted my feelings to get some attention here.	Yes	No
11. I felt unjustly accused.	Yes	No
12. I thought, “My spouse has no right to say those things.”	Yes	No
13. I felt let down.	Yes	No
14. I felt sad.	Yes	No
15. I was frustrated.	Yes	No
16. I felt personally attacked.	Yes	No
17. I wanted to strike back.	Yes	No
18. I felt like I was warding off a barrage.	Yes	No
19. I felt like getting even.	Yes	No
20. I wanted to protect myself.	Yes	No
21. I knew I was right.	Yes	No
22. I had a pretty low opinion of my spouse’s personality at the time.	Yes	No

Scoring:

First, tally the number of “YES” responses to statements 1,2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, and 20.

Second, tally the number of “YES” responses to statements 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21, and 22.

First total _____ Second total _____

Test 9

Flooding (114)

1. At times, when my spouse gets angry I feel confused.	Yes	No
2. Our discussions get far too heated.	Yes	No
3. I have a hard time calming down when we discuss disagreements.	Yes	No
4. I'm worried that one of us is going to say something we will regret.	Yes	No
5. My spouse gets far more upset than is necessary.	Yes	No
6. After a fight I want to keep away for a while.	Yes	No
7. There's no need to raise one's voice the way my spouse does in a discussion.	Yes	No
8. It really is overwhelming when an argument gets going.	Yes	No
9. I can't think straight when my spouse gets so negative.	Yes	No
10. I think, "Why can't we talk things out logically."	Yes	No
11. My spouse's negative moods come out of nowhere.	Yes	No
12. When my spouse's temper gets going there is no stopping it.	Yes	No
13. I feel cold and empty after one of our fights.	Yes	No
14. When there is so much negativity I have difficulty focusing my thoughts.	Yes	No
15. Small issues suddenly become big ones for no apparent reason.	Yes	No
16. I can never seem to soothe myself after one of our fights.	Yes	No
17. Sometimes I think that my spouse's moods are just crazy.	Yes	No
18. Things get out of hand quickly in our discussions.	Yes	No
19. My spouse's feelings are very easily hurt.	Yes	No
20. When my spouse gets negative, stopping it is like trying to stop an oncoming truck.	Yes	No
21. All this negativity drags me down.	Yes	No
22. I feel disorganized by all this negative emotion.	Yes	No
23. I can never tell when a blowup is going to happen.	Yes	No
24. When we have a fight, it takes a very long time before I feel at ease again.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to more than eight (8) statements, this is a strong sign that you are prone to feeling flooded during conflict with your spouse.

Test 10

How sever is the problem? (121)

1. My spouse and I have very severe communication problems.	Yes	No
2. I have very little faith that we are going to be able to resolve our problems.	Yes	No
3. The problems we have run very deep.	Yes	No
4. Things have gotten so complex that I'm not sure there is a solution.	Yes	No
5. Each of our problems has caused us a great deal of pain.	Yes	No
6. I doubt whether we can reconcile our differences.	Yes	No
7. It's going to be very hard for us to ever forgive one another for some of the hurt we have suffered.	Yes	No
8. There is a great deal of intensity to our problems.	Yes	No
9. We stand very little chance of ever having really good times together.	Yes	No
10. There is very little respect in this relationship.	Yes	No
11. I am not sure that we love each other.	Yes	No
12. There are "wheels within wheels" to our problems – they are so difficult to solve.	Yes	No
13. I have a sense of despair about our future together.	Yes	No
14. Sometimes I feel bitter about how things have gotten between us.	Yes	No
15. When it comes down to it, I am not sure I have very much hope.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to more than five (5) of these questions, you have a very negative view of your marital difficulties.

Test 11

Can you work things out? (122)

1. Talking things over with my spouse only seems to make them worse.	Yes	No
2. I'd rather just keep things to myself.	Yes	No
3. I am a very private person about my feelings.	Yes	No
4. When I'm in a bad mood I'd much rather just go off by myself.	Yes	No
5. I don't see much point in discussing my troubles with my spouse.	Yes	No
6. Talking about our problems only gets them more muddled.	Yes	No
7. There are some people you just can't talk to and my spouse is one of those.	Yes	No
8. I'd rather try to work out our marital problems alone.	Yes	No
9. Our conversations about our problems never seem to get anywhere.	Yes	No
10. I don't place a lot of faith in delving into my problems with my spouse.	Yes	No
11. I have given up on trying to talk things out.	Yes	No
12. I don't see any potential gain in trying to talk things over with my spouse.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to four (4) or more of these statements, you've given up on working things out with your spouse.

Test 12

Do you lead parallel lives? (124)

1. We don't eat together as much as we used to.	Yes	No
2. Sometimes it seems we are roommates rather than a married couple.	Yes	No
3. We have fewer friends in common than we used to.	Yes	No
4. We seem to do a lot of more things separately.	Yes	No
5. It seems that we have fewer and fewer interests in common.	Yes	No
6. Sometimes we can go for quite a while without ever talking about our lives.	Yes	No
7. Our lives are more parallel than connected.	Yes	No
8. We often don't talk about how our separate days went.	Yes	No
9. We don't spend very much time together anymore.	Yes	No
10. We spend a lot of our free time apart.	Yes	No
11. We don't set aside much time just to talk.	Yes	No
12. I don't think that we know each other very well anymore.	Yes	No
13. We don't have dinner together very much anymore.	Yes	No
14. We rarely go out on dates together.	Yes	No
15. A lot of our good times these days are with people other than each other.	Yes	No
16. We seem to be avoiding each other.	Yes	No
17. We are like two passing ships, going our separate ways.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to five or more of the statements, then you may well be leading parallel lives.

Test 13

How lonely is your marriage? (125)

1. Marriage is a lot lonelier than I thought it would be.	Yes	No
2. We're not as close as I wish we were.	Yes	No
3. I feel an emptiness in this marriage.	Yes	No
4. I often feel bored when we do things together.	Yes	No
5. I feel very restless and sad even when we're together.	Yes	No
6. Lots of times I don't know what to do with myself.	Yes	No
7. At times I feel bored and restless in this marriage.	Yes	No
8. I long for someone I can be close to.	Yes	No
9. I feel so lonely it hurts.	Yes	No
10. Something is missing from my marriage.	Yes	No
11. I wish people would call me more often.	Yes	No
12. I often wish I had someone to be with.	Yes	No
13. I don't feel that I'm an important part of someone's life.	Yes	No
14. I don't feel that I belong to anyone.	Yes	No
15. I often feel emotionally isolated.	Yes	No
16. I feel abandoned in this marriage.	Yes	No
17. There is no one I can turn to.	Yes	No
18. I often feel left out.	Yes	No
19. No one knows me.	Yes	No
20. No one understands me.	Yes	No
21. There is often no one I can talk to.	Yes	No
22. I often feel a great need for companionship.	Yes	No
23. I have become very withdrawn in this marriage.	Yes	No
24. I feel disconnected.	Yes	No

Scoring: If you answered "YES" to eight (8) or more of the questions, you may have reached the end of the Distance and Isolation Cascade. Feeling lonely in marriage make you vulnerable to having an affair, if this hasn't already occurred.

Test 14

Telling your story (132)

Part A

1. I am genuinely fond of my partner.	Yes	No
2. I can easily speak of the good times in our marriage.	Yes	No
3. I can easily remember romantic, special times in our marriage.	Yes	No
4. I am physically attracted to my spouse.	Yes	No
5. My partner has some specific qualities that make me proud.	Yes	No
6. I feel a genuine sense of “we” as opposed to “I” in this marriage.	Yes	No
7. We have the same general beliefs and values.	Yes	No
8. My spouse is my best friend.	Yes	No
9. I get lots of support in my marriage.	Yes	No
10. My home is a place to come to get support and reduce stress.	Yes	No
11. I can easily recall when we first met, the marriage proposal, and our wedding.	Yes	No
12. We divide up household chores in a fair way.	Yes	No
13. We have planned things out and have had a sense of control over our lives together.	Yes	No
14. I am proud of this marriage.	Yes	No
15. There are things I don’t like about my spouse, but I can live with them.	Yes	No
16. Marriage is a struggle, but it’s been worth it.	Yes	No

Total number of items checked “YES” _____

Part B

1. I feel cynical about my marriage.	Yes	No
2. When I think of my own marriage, I can think of lots of sarcastic things to say about the institution of marriage.	Yes	No
3. I have a lot of criticisms of my spouse.	Yes	No
4. Our lives are very separate.	Yes	No
5. Our beliefs and values are very different.	Yes	No
6. I don’t think of this marriage as a “we.”	Yes	No
7. I don’t really have a sense of trust in my spouse.	Yes	No
8. The stresses of my life just get added to at home.	Yes	No
9. I have only vague memories of our first meeting, the marriage proposal, and our wedding.	Yes	No
10. It seems like problems have beset this marriage throughout.	Yes	No
11. It seem like we have had very little control over our lives.	Yes	No
12. I feel disillusioned and disappointed in my marriage.	Yes	No
13. Marriage is not what I thought it would be.	Yes	No
14. My spouse’s faults are basically unacceptable to me.	Yes	No
15. Things are very unequal in this marriage.	Yes	No
16. When you come down to it, my marital struggles have been pretty meaningless.	Yes	No

Total number of items checked “YES” _____

Scoring: Subtract your total score for Part B from your total score for Part A. If your final score is six or above, this suggests that you have a mostly positive view of your marital history. If your score is lower than six, it’s clear your feelings of admiration, fondness, and solidarity with your spouse have dwindled to dangerous levels.

My Marriage

Evaluation

Test 1 Scoring: Total the number of items you circled “YES.” If the number is greater than eight (8), you probably feel comfortable with a conflict-avoider marriage philosophy. If the number is eight (8) or less, you probably feel comfortable with a conflict-engager marriage philosophy.

Test 2 Scoring: Total the number of items you circled “YES” for part A; then for part B. Divide each number by fifteen (15). Part A is for Volatile, Part B is for Validator.

Test 3 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to fewer than seven (7) items, then it is likely you are not feeling adequately loved and respected in your marriage. You need to be far more active and creative in adding affection to your relationship.

Test 4 Scoring: If you circled “YES” on more than seven (7) items you are probably a good candidate for being a critic.

Test 5 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to more than seven (7) items you are probably a good candidate for using contempt.

Test 6 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to seven (7) or more items, then you are probably a good candidate for being defensive.

Test 7 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to four (4) or more items you are probably a good candidate for being a stonewaller.

Test 8 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to four (4) or more items in Part A you probably tend to have an innocent-victim reaction during negative times in your marriage. If you circled “YES” to four (4) or more items in Part B you probably tend to have a righteous-indignation reaction during negative times in your marriage.

Test 9 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to more than eight (8) statements, this is a strong sign that you are prone to feeling flooded during conflict with your spouse.

Test 10 Scoring: If you circled “YES” to more than five (5) of these questions, you have a very negative view of your marital difficulties. Most people who score at this level have unstable marriages that are either *hostile/engaged*, meaning there’s a great deal of negativity but you still interact, or *hostile/detached*, meaning that hostility has reached such huge proportions that you avoid each other as much as possible.

Test 11 Scoring: If you answered “YES” to four (4) or more of these statements, you’ve given up on working things out with your spouse.

Test 12 Scoring: If you answered “YES” to five (5) or more of the statements, then you may well be leading parallel lives.

Test 13 Scoring: If you answered “YES” to eight (8) or more of these questions, you may have reached the end of the Distance and Isolation Cascade. Feeling this lonely in marriage makes you vulnerable to having an affair, if this hasn’t already happened. Research also suggests that it also makes you more likely to become ill.

Test 14 Scoring: Total the number of items circled “YES” for Part A and for Part B. Subtract your total score from Part B from your total score for Part A. If your final score is six (6) or above, this suggests that you have a mostly positive view of your marital history. That is an excellent sign for your relationship’s prospects. If your score is lower than six, it’s clear your feelings of admiration, fondness, and solidarity with your spouse have dwindled to dangerous levels.

Summary Sheet

Summarize the diagnosis of your marriage by checking any of the areas in which there is a problem.

Marital Style (Tests 1 and 2): Do differences exist between you and your spouse in what style of conflict resolution to have – Avoider? Engager? Volatile? Validator?

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Love and Respect (Test 3): Is there enough love in your marriage?

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

The Four Horseman: Do you or your spouse have a problem with any of the four horsemen:

Criticism (Test 4):

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Contempt (Test 5):

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Defensiveness (Test 6):

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Stonewalling (Test 7):

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Distress-maintaining Thoughts (Test 8):

Is the “innocent victim” pattern characteristic of your thoughts?

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Is the “righteous indignation” pattern characteristic of your thoughts?

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

The Distance and Isolation Cascade: Where do you stand on the distance and isolation cascade?

Do you feel flooded? (Test 9)

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Do you think your marital problems are severe? (Test 10)

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Do you think it isn't worth talking things over with your spouse? (Test 11)

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Have you already arranged your lives in parallel? (Test 12)

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Are you lonely in your marriage? (Test 13)

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

Your marital history (Test 14): What do you tell yourself about the history of your marriage? Are you feeling more negative than positive about your marriage?

Husband		Wife	
_____ Yes	_____ No	_____ Yes	_____ No

DIAGNOSES AND THEIR REMEDIES

Marital Style

If there are no major differences between you and your partner over what style of conflict resolution to have, this stability should make your marriage less vulnerable to the four horsemen. But even if you've arrived at a stable style, you may still find that there are specific problem areas which, if you let them go unchecked, could start to destabilize your marriage.

If there are large differences in the kind of marriage you and your spouse prefer, then you are easier prey for the forces that can destabilize a relationship. In many unstable marriages there was never any agreement about what type of marriage to have. For example, a person who would be happy in a volatile marriage may have inadvertently married a conflict avoider, and both of them have tried in vain to accommodate the other's preferences.

Look at your answers to Test 1. If you said that you both were conflict avoiders you don't have a problem with this area of your marriage. If you said that you were both conflict engagers, go on to the diagnosis based on the second part of this test.

Did you answer the first part as follows?

1. You: *Conflict Avoider*; Spouse: *Conflict Engager*. If you feel most comfortable with a conflict avoider style but your spouse is a conflict engager, you probably feel overwhelmed by your spouse's combativeness and feel that your spouse keeps demanding things of you that you cannot provide.
2. You: *Conflict Engager*; Spouse: *Conflict Avoider*. If you feel most comfortable with a conflict engager style but your spouse is a conflict avoider, your spouse probably feels that you always bring conflict into the marriage, that it is your problem, that you are overly emotional and too demanding. You feel frustrated that you can't really talk to your spouse about your feelings. The marriage seems too distant and unemotional to you and you are frustrated that problems don't seem to get resolved.

Now let's look at your answers to the second part. If you said that you were both volatile, or if you said you were both validators, you do not have a problem with this area of the marriage. But did you answer as follows.

1. You: *Validator*; Spouse: *Volatile*. You probably find your spouse overly argumentative and provocative, even belligerent at times. You feel that you hardly get a chance to express your feelings before your spouse is trying to convince you that your very feelings are wrong. You don't feel that your spouse listens to you very well. You also may find your spouse quite controlling and domineering. At times you dislike your spouse's strong need for independence and autonomy and wish that the two of you could function more smoothly as a unit, as a "we."
2. You: *Volatile*; Spouse: *Validator*. You get annoyed by your spouse's emotional detachment and seeming unflappability. Sometimes you'd do anything to get a rise or any response out of your spouse. You feel that your needs for separateness and autonomy are not understood. At times you feel smothered and need psychological space. You want your spouse to see you as a separate individual, not part of a marriage. You wish that your spouse were a more emotional person and also at times wish that your spouse enjoyed a good argument or debate more. Your discussions are a bit too bland for your taste.

Remedy. Even couples who have found agreement on the marital type they want can use some help ensuring that the four horsemen stay far from the door. Remember that it takes some effort to protect even the happiest marriage from starting to slide down the marital rapids. The key is managing your discussions well.

Mismatches in marital style open the way for the four horsemen and other patterns of reactivity that can destabilize a marriage. If there are mismatches between you and your partner on your preferred marital style, you will benefit by focusing on the particular symptoms that signify your marriage is in danger of losing stability. Tackle each of the specific problems that have been diagnosed by the tests, and put your efforts into mastering the remedies and antidotes for these problems.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Do you or your spouse have problems with any of the four horsemen?

Criticism (Test 4).

If you and your spouse came out high on criticism, you have a common problem. If your spouse is high on criticism but you are not, you probably often feel unfairly attacked. If you score high but your spouse does not, you probably feel you need to be critical because it is so hard to bring about change in your spouse. You are frustrated with the continual lack of resolution of issues, and may resent being turned into a nag by your spouse. If you are both high on criticism you have fallen into a pattern that will eventually be destructive to your marriage. When you are criticized you can easily feel that there is something wrong with you, and are likely to feel hurt and unappreciated. And it is hard to respond positively to criticism, since it is an attack on your personality: if you agree, you are joining in the attack your self; if you disagree, you appear defensive. It is very hard to respond constructively to a Criticism.

Remedy. The antidote to being too critical is learning to state your grievances and complaints in a manner that your spouse will not take as a personal attack. You need to learn to make your criticisms more specific, and to state them as complaints.

Contempt (Test 5).

Contempt is directly corrosive of love in marriages. It would be far better if both you and your spouse felt respected and rarely acted contemptuously toward one another. But if that is not the case, how can you respond? If your spouse is contemptuous of you, it can make you feel somewhere between furious and worthless. It is very difficult to live with someone who insults you; contempt is a form of psychological abuse.

Remedy. Whichever spouse is prone to speaking with contempt needs to replace that habit with the expression of genuine validation and admiration. And, beyond that, your marriage needs to be nurtured by the intentional enhancement of the positive-to-negative ration.

Defensiveness (Test 6).

If you said that you are not defensive but your spouse is, you may not have been completely honest with yourself. Defensiveness is almost always a two-way street. Or perhaps you are in an unusual situation, married to a very defensive person, who becomes defensive at the drop of a hat. In either case it will help to take a hard look at the way you state your complaints and express your anger. It could be that your spouse is emotionally flooded by the way you express your negative feelings about the relationship. Or, perhaps, your spouse is reacting to you as if you were someone else in your spouse's past who was a verbal attacker. Defensiveness is often thought of as a form of fear or response to a perceived attack, real or imagined.

Remedy. Calming down is the first order of business. If you are defensive, then you are probably starting (or well on your way to) feeling emotionally flooded by your spouse's expressions of negativity. In this case you need to be able to soothe yourself, find a way to calm down. You also have to take a hard look at any distress-maintaining thoughts you have. And you can attack the problem directly by mastering ways to speak and listen non-defensively.

Stonewalling (Test 7).

When someone is stonewalling you, you are likely to feel judged, or that your spouse is disapproving, detached, cold, smug, or superior. You feel that your spouse doesn't respond to you, doesn't care about your feelings. It is as if your spouse walked out on you, abandoning you, even if physically present.

On the other hand, stonewallers usually think they are being "neutral," not negative. The stonewaller wants to disengage, calm down, and maybe even run away. The stonewaller is overwhelmed by all this negative emotion and wants to withdraw without making things worse. The stonewaller may be trying to calm down and may even be thinking positive thoughts about the spouse, like "I love her even though I'm upset now; I shouldn't take all this too personally. Just calm down." Or the stonewaller may be feeling hurt, wanting to either leave for a time or to get even.

What about marriages where there are two stonewallers? Such couples are on the way toward a hostile-detached marriage, one of the two styles most likely to break up.

Remedy. Like people who are defensive, you need to master ways to calm down, to listen and speak non-defensively, and to change your distress-maintaining thoughts to more helpful ones.

Other Problems

Cycle of Negativity (No test, but important).

Do you have access to normal repair mechanisms? Is the ration of positive to negative at least 5 to 1? The signs of trouble are long cycles of negative response, in which one negative is met with a counter-negative. There seems to be no way out of this trap. All interaction goes awry.

Remedy. The antidotes to this cycle are repair mechanisms. These operate in most strong relationships, even though they are usually said with negative emotional tone. For example, “Stop interrupting me!” is typically said with some irritation. But in satisfying marriages these repair tactics work.

You also need to recalibrate the positive-to-negative ration, so that positives predominate. This requires that you purposely engage in a very rich schedule of positive events and moments.

Distress-Maintaining Thoughts (Test 8).

When distressing thoughts about your spouse and the relationship become cast in stone, it can be very destructive to your marriage. Is the innocent victim or the righteous indignation pattern characteristic of your thoughts? If so, you are setting yourself up to feel emotionally flooded. And what you think, even if it is known only to yourself, has a great deal of impact on how you treat your spouse.

Remedy. You first need to become aware of these thought patterns, catching them as they take you over. Then you need to realize that you don’t have to believe these thoughts – you can change them instead.

The Distance and Isolation Cascade (Tests 9-13).

If you are feeling flooded (Test 9), then you will probably begin to avoid your spouse, perhaps without even realizing you are doing it. If you think your marital problems are severe, then you may have begun losing hope. If you think it isn’t worth talking things over with your spouse, you are moving toward despair about ever being able to resolve the conflict in your marriage, a sign that you are emotionally divorcing your spouse. Have you already arranged your lives in parallel? Often the process of parallel lives is imperceptible, but it is one of the final stages before a breakup. Are you lonely in your marriage? The possibility of easing your pain with someone else increases as you become lonely; extramarital affairs occur for all kinds of reasons, but loneliness is one of the most common.

Remedy. The pivotal pressure that is the keystone to this cascade of distance and isolation is from feeling flooded. If you can learn to calm these feelings of being emotionally overwhelmed by your spouse, it opens the way for other ways to repair your marriage. To relieve the sense of being flooded, you need to calm down; to change distress-maintaining thoughts; and to speak and listen non-defensively.

Negative Marital History (Test 14).

What do you and your spouse tell yourselves about your past together? This is a sign of trouble if either of you are disappointed, find it hard to express fondness or admiration, can’t remember what first attracted you, find little in common, and have trouble valuing the struggles you’ve gone through. If this is true for you or for your spouse, then there is a real danger that one or both of you has gone a final step toward being closed in your marriage. The situation may not be hopeless, but it is serious, even desperate.

Remedy. The antidotes to such a negative view of your marriage are to change your distress-maintaining thoughts and to better handle feelings of being flooded by learning ways to calm down.

His and Hers Misunderstandings (No test, but important).

The unique tendencies of men and women can feed the difficulties in your marriage. Men may be more likely than their wives to be flooded by criticism, while for women flooding does not typically occur until there

is contempt. Once flooded, men usually have more trouble clamming down physiologically than their wives, and stay physiologically aroused longer. Being flooded means they will not process information as well, not listen as well, and turn to escape or attack.

For men, this pattern shows up as a husband who reacts to being flooded by his wife's criticism by avoiding talking about disagreements, or by stonewalling. If this is your pattern, you may try to dismiss or deal with your wife's negative feelings too quickly, perhaps because you think they are dangerous or cloud one's judgment. Or you may avoid the feelings by diving into work or hobbies, or rush to problem solve before understanding the feelings.

For women, the gender discrepancy results in a wife who comes on too strong in airing complaints, or feels frustrated by an unresponsive husband. This can occur if, in general, you expect to understand your feelings about disagreements with people who are close to you, get support, and then to problem solve only once the feelings are understood. But you may not realize that your husband has less experience with this way of dealing with strong negative feelings, and so you may incorrectly interpret his withdrawal and avoidance as a personal rejection.

Remedy. Wives who criticize instead of complaining trigger the flooding in their husbands that lead to stonewalling. If this is happening in your marriage, master the art of complaining without criticism or contempt. Husbands who feel overwhelmed by their wives' complaints will benefit by learning to listen non-defensively, validating their wives, and mastering ways to clam down, the antidote to being flooded.

Advice

Advice for Validating Couples.

This type of partnership has many strengths that you should be sure to build on – especially your great skills at negotiation and compromise. You and your spouse may get angry with one another from time to time, but you don't let bad feelings overtake the relationship. You often describe your spouse as your "best friend," and you emphasize warmth and sharing in your marriage. Therefore, you should practice a fighting style that honors and protects your friendship.

Here are some tips ...

- Pick your battles carefully.
- Acknowledge your spouse's viewpoint before expressing your own.
- Moderate your emotions.
- Trust your spouse.
- Enhance the romance.

Advice for Volatile Couples.

Lack of sizzle is no problem for your marriage. If you're part of a volatile relationship, you feel a strong romantic attachment to your spouse, and you're quite adept at juggling intense emotions like jealousy and anger. Such unions offer a big payoff in terms of romance, laughter, and affection. But unbridled passion can also put you at risk for contempt – or even violence – that could destroy your marriage. That's why volatile couples should learn to "edit" their thoughts, words, and behavior on occasion. The idea is not to retreat from a good, healthy battle but to handle conflict in a way that demonstrates respect for your opponent. Otherwise you may lose the high ratio of positive interaction in your relationship.

Here are some tips ...

- Don't tell your spouse what you can't or won't do.
- Offer sincere and positive appreciation.
- Express interest in your spouse.
- Choose to be polite, regardless of your spouse's actions.
- Be direct and honest.
- Show affection.
- Be careful about teasing.

Advice for Conflict-Avoiding Couples.

One of the greatest strengths of a conflict-avoiding marriage is the ability to endure periodic turbulence based on the certainty that your relationship is built on a rock-solid foundation of common beliefs and values. But, while you may cherish the peaceful nature of your relationship above all else, you could be stifling too much negative emotion and not getting your needs met as individuals. When this happens, you risk becoming hostile and detached from one another. Some psychologists even theorize that conflict-avoiding couples suffer more physical ailments than others as a result of living with unresolved problems. If you turn all negative feelings inward, you're left with chronic, low-lying stress that eats away at your health and the stability of your marriage.

Does this mean conflict-avoiding couples should transform their marriage into a version of "The Lockhorns"? Hardly. Inviting turmoil into a marriage before you've developed good conflict-management skills could even be dangerous. But there are steps you can take to improve your ability to handle the negative feelings that inevitably crop up in any relationship. By so doing, you improve the likelihood that your bond will remain stable.

Here are some tips ...

- Get in touch with your feelings.
- Reaffirm your basic beliefs about your relationship.
- Learn to level with your spouse when necessary.
- Create "Suggestions Boxes".
- Turn to others for support.

Productive Disagreements.

Apart from these tips for handling disagreements that are specific to one of the three stable marriage types, there are some general points that apply to all couples – especially those where spouses tend to feel flooded or act defensive. If this is the case in your marriage, you can be helped with your discussion of hot topics by imposing some intentional structure and through methods that will help deescalate the topics.

Here are some tips ...

- Schedule discussions.
- Structure your fights
 - Phase One: Building the agenda.
 - Phase Two: Persuasion and arguing.
 - Phase Three: Resolution.
- Non-defensive Communication.
 - Solution to denying responsibility – fess up and be accountable.
 - Solution to cross-complaining – only discuss one issue at a time.
 - Solution to whining – don't do it.
 - Solution to rubber man or rubber woman – stop throwing back accusations.
 - Solution to summarizing-self syndrome – quit repeating yourself, repeat your spouse.
- Soothe your spouse: repair mechanisms
 - Stop action. – stop discussing because one has begun flooding.
 - Editing – only respond to constructive portions of the comments and ignore negatives.
 - Gate-keeping – give spouse directions that keep the discussion flowing in right direction.
 - Getting back on beam – keeping the conversation on primary topic.
 - Affection – respond with positive comments.
 - Humor – learn to laugh at yourself.
 - Feeling probes – ask your spouse how they are feeling and then simply listen.

Exercise: Telling Your Story

This exercise is designed to help you and your spouse find the glory in your marital history. Take time to read each question and jot down a few notes. Then, addressing one question at a time, discuss your answers with one another. Most of these questions are open-ended, allowing you to answer with as much detail as you would like.

1. What was your first impression of your spouse? Was there something about this person that made him/her stand out?
2. Think back to the time you were dating. What were some of the highlights? What were some of the tensions? What made the relationship worth pursuing?
3. How did you decide to get married? Were there obvious differences that you knew you'd have to overcome? How did you overcome them?
4. What do you remember about your first year of marriage? Did you have to make certain adjustments to being married? How did you do it?
5. What about your transition to becoming parents? What were the most difficult and most rewarding aspects of this period in your lives?
6. Looking back, what moments stand out as the really good times in your marriage so far?

Looking back, what moments stand out as the really hard times in your marriage so far? Why do you think you stayed together? How did you get through these difficult times?

7. How would you say your marriage today is different from when you first got married?

Definitions

Here is a simple list of definitions for words that may not be familiar to you ...

- *Conflict-Avoider* – conflict minimizers that make light of their differences rather than resolving them.
- *Volatile* – couples that fight on a grand scale and have an even grander time making up.
- *Validator* – in the midst of disagreement they still let their spouse know that they consider his/her emotions
- *The four horseman* – the term the author uses to describe the four major pitfalls in conflict resolution
- *Criticism* – involves attacking someone's personality or character – rather than a specific behavior
- *Contempt* – what separates contempt from criticism is the intention to insult and psychologically abuse; examples include insults and name-calling, hostile humor, mockery and body language.
- *Defensive* – when you always plead “innocent”. Examples include denying responsibility, making excuses, disagreeing with negative mind reading, cross-complaining, rubber man/rubber woman, yes-butting, repeating yourself, whining, and body language.
- *Stonewalling* – when one person removes themselves from the conversation and turns into a stone wall
- *Distress-maintaining Thoughts* – a person's thought life that keeps the negative thoughts going, oftentimes getting bigger and bigger. Examples include “the innocent victim,” and “righteous indignation.”
- *Distance and Isolation Cascade* – The term used by the author to describe the four stages that people seem to go through in withdrawing from a marriage. This generally starts with flooding.
- *Flooded* – when you feel so overwhelmed by your spouse's negativity and your own reactions that you experience “systems overload,” swamped by distress and upset.