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## Date Two of Gottman Eight Dates

John and Julie Gottman, psychologists and founders of the Gottman Love Lab, have been studying how to win at love for over forty years. After observing thousands of couples, they know the areas in a couple's life that cause the most struggle. Through these eight dates, they lead you through the essential conversations that will give you the best chance at a fulfilling and connected relationship.

### The Date: Addressing Conflict

#### Conversation Topic

- How do we manage conflict?
- How are we the same and how are we different?
- How do we accommodate and accept the differences between us?

#### Preparation

Review the topics and your answers from the issues exercise. Reflect on what you read in this chapter and any ideas it sparked about how you've managed conflict and how you would like to manage conflict in the future.

#### Location

The partner that didn't plan the first date will plan this one. For this date, it's best to go to a place where you can speak privately. Find a location that is peaceful to both of you, or a place where you have had a great time together in the past.

#### Suggestions

A picnic in a favorite park, beach, or even your own backyard. If you have this conversation over a meal at a restaurant, make sure you have plenty of privacy. An afternoon date may be preferable to an evening date, so that no one is too tired or low on energy.

At-home date: You may also choose to have this date while on a walk together around the neighborhood. Even if you get stuck in your conversation, you're still moving. And even if you disagree, you're still headed in the same direction together. Hold hands while walking and while talking about something that is or was difficult between you. See how it feels to hold on to each other while discussing how you manage conflict.

#### Bring

You should bring the differences you chose in the "We All Have Issues" exercise, and be prepared to read or openly listen to your partner's answers and discuss.

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## Troubleshooting

- Don't make your partner the bad guy. There is no winner in a healthy conflict; there is only understanding and resolution or acceptance.
- Communicate a fundamental acceptance of your partner's personality, regardless of how you're different.
- Don't avoid conflict. Avoiding conflict breeds emotional distance.
- Don't criticize or judge your partner, or believe that their viewpoint is wrong and yours is right. Both of your perspectives are valid.
- When regrettable incidents happen, use the four steps (see: "The Four Skills to Intimate Conversation" worksheet) to process and repair your fight.
- Love your partner for who they are, as they are.
- Recognize when a problem is solvable and when it's not. Not all conflict can, or needs to, be resolved.

## Open-Ended Questions for Your Date Conversation

Discuss each item you chose from the "We All Have Issues" exercise. Some of the couples that went on this date chose to explore every issue. Take turns as both speaker and listener. When it's your turn to listen, ask each other the following three questions for any topics you both see as a source of conflict or difference between you.

1. What is the story of how this issue is important to you?
2. Is there a story behind this issue related to your own personal history or your family growing up?
3. Is there a deeper purpose or goal for you in your position on this issue?

## Other Open-Ended Questions about Conflict

1. How was conflict handled in your family growing up?
2. How do you feel about anger? How was it expressed in your family growing up?
3. How can I best support you when you're feeling angry?
4. How do you like to make up after a disagreement?
5. What do you now understand about your partner that you didn't before this exercise?

## Affirming Our Future Together

Take turns reading this affirmation out loud to each other. Maintain eye contact while reciting.

*"I commit to accepting you completely and embracing our differences. When we have conflict, I'll seek to understand your feelings and point of view about the issue, and will manage our conflict*

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*as skillfully as possible. When regrettable incidents do happen, I'll seek to repair the damage through the process we have discussed."*

Adapted from: Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love. By: John Gottman, Julie Schwartz Gottman, Doug Abrams, and Rachel Carlton Abrams.