Bids for Connection Worksheet

Part 1. Bids and the three ways to respond

Item	Entry
Our names	
Counselor or therapist	
Week of	

A bid is any way one of us reaches out to the other for attention, interest, affection, humor or support. It can be a question, a comment, a joke, a look or a touch. Each bid gets one of three responses.

Response	What it looks like	An example
Turning toward	Noticing the bid and responding to it with interest or attention.	"Guess who I ran into at the store." "Who? Was it someone from your old job?"
Turning away	Missing or ignoring the bid, often without meaning to, because attention is somewhere else.	"Guess who I ran into at the store." No answer. My partner keeps reading.
Turning against	Answering the bid in a hostile or argumentative way.	"Guess who I ran into at the store." "Can't you see I'm busy?"

When and where we usually reach for each other

Include: the times of day we are together or in touch, and the ways each of us tends to make bids.

What each of us would like more of

Include: the kinds of connection each of us would like more often.

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Part 2. My bids: first partner

I write down bids I made this week, what I wanted and how my partner responded: turned toward, turned away or turned against. In session, we write what turning toward could look like.

My name	

	Bid 1
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

	Bid 2
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

	Bid 3
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

How connected I felt to my partner this week

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not connected at all										*Very connected*

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Part 3. My bids: second partner

I write down bids I made this week, what I wanted and how my partner responded: turned toward, turned away or turned against. In session, we write what turning toward could look like.

My name	

	Bid 1
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

	Bid 2
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

	Bid 3
My bid and how I made it	
What I wanted	
How my partner responded	
What turning toward could look like	

How connected I felt to my partner this week

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not connected at all										*Very connected*

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Part 4. Turning toward each other

We fill in this page together.

Partner	A bid from my partner that I turned toward this week *Include: the bid and what I said or did.*
First partner	
Second partner	

Partner	A bid from my partner that I missed, and what I could do next time *Include: the bid, what got in the way and one way I could turn toward it next time.*
First partner	
Second partner	

Daily moments we will make time for

Include: one or two regular times to check in with each other, such as a meal or a talk after work.

What we want to talk about in our next session

Include: bids that went well, bids that were hard and questions for our counselor or therapist.

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Clinician guide: using the bids for connection worksheet

- **When it fits.** Use the worksheet when partners describe distance, loneliness or few everyday moments of connection. Gottman (1999) places turning toward, with love maps and fondness and admiration, in the couple's friendship, which shapes how partners handle conflict and whether their repair attempts succeed.
- **Screen each partner first.** Gottman (1999) interviews each partner on their own to assess violence and any ongoing affair, and he lists ongoing physical abuse and an ongoing extramarital affair as his criteria for when couples therapy is contraindicated. Use the worksheet with couples who have neither, and follow your setting's protocols when a partner discloses abuse.
- **Explain the three responses.** Gottman and DeClaire (2001/2002) describe three ways to respond to a bid: turning toward it, turning away from it and turning against it. Gottman (1999) writes that most failed bids are mindless responses, in which the partner did not see the bid or was caught up in something else.
- **Review missed bids without blame.** Ask each partner how they felt and what they saw, and help each one validate part of the other's account. Then ask about the need behind the bid and how it could be expressed more clearly (Gottman, 1999).
- **Agree on one change.** Close each review with one change for the coming week, such as a daily time to talk, and fill in Part 4 together. Gottman (1999) sets the goal of helping couples notice failed bids and repair them on their own.

Adapted from the descriptions of bids and the three ways to respond in Gottman and DeClaire (2001/2002) and of turning toward and failed bids in Gottman (1999) and Gottman and Silver (1999). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Aisha and Ben (a fictional couple)

Aisha, 31, a graphic designer who works from home, and Ben, 34, an electrician who starts work early, are a fictional couple who have lived together for five years. They came to couples therapy because they rarely talk except about chores and errands, and Aisha feels lonely in the evenings. After an assessment that included an individual interview with each partner and found no violence, their counselor, L.P., a licensed professional counselor, introduced the worksheet at their third session on November 3, 2026, and they brought it back to their fourth session on November 10, 2026. Aisha, Ben, their counselor and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. Bids and the three ways to respond

Item	Entry
Our names	Aisha and Ben
Counselor or therapist	L.P., licensed professional counselor
Week of	November 3, 2026

When and where we usually reach for each other

Mornings are rushed because Ben leaves at 6. We text during the day, and most of our time together is dinner and the evening.

What each of us would like more of

Aisha: real conversations at dinner. Ben: being asked about my day and doing small projects together.

Part 2. My bids: first partner

My name	Aisha

	Bid 1
My bid and how I made it	At dinner I showed Ben my logo sketch that a client loved.
What I wanted	For him to look at it and be proud of me.
How my partner responded	Turned away. He kept watching the game on his phone.
What turning toward could look like	Put his phone down, look at the sketch and ask about it.

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	Bid 2
My bid and how I made it	I texted him a photo of a dog that looks like our old dog.
What I wanted	A small laugh together in the middle of the day.
How my partner responded	Turned toward. He wrote back right away: “That’s her twin!”
What turning toward could look like	Just what he did.

	Bid 3
My bid and how I made it	I asked if he wanted to walk to the farmers market Saturday.
What I wanted	Time together outside the house.
How my partner responded	Turned against. “You know I’m wiped out on Saturdays. Why are you always making plans?”
What turning toward could look like	Say he’s tired and suggest Sunday afternoon instead.

How connected I felt to my partner this week

0	1	2	3	**4**	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not connected at all										*Very connected*

Part 3. My bids: second partner

My name	Ben

	Bid 1
My bid and how I made it	When I got home I sighed and said work was brutal today.
What I wanted	For her to ask what happened.
How my partner responded	Turned away. She kept folding laundry and asked if I had picked up milk.
What turning toward could look like	Stop folding for a minute and ask about my day.

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	Bid 2
My bid and how I made it	I put my hand on her shoulder while she was cooking.
What I wanted	To feel close to her.
How my partner responded	Turned toward. She leaned back against me and smiled.
What turning toward could look like	Just what she did.

	Bid 3
My bid and how I made it	I asked her to help me pick a paint color for the bathroom.
What I wanted	To decide something together.
How my partner responded	Turned away. “Whatever you like,” without looking up.
What turning toward could look like	Come look at the colors with me for a few minutes.

How connected I felt to my partner this week

0	1	2	3	4	**5**	6	7	8	9	10
Not connected at all										*Very connected*

Part 4. Turning toward each other

Partner	A bid from my partner that I turned toward this week
First partner	Aisha: when Ben put his hand on my shoulder, I leaned back and stayed there for a minute.
Second partner	Ben: when Aisha sent the dog photo, I wrote back right away.

Partner	A bid from my partner that I missed, and what I could do next time
First partner	Aisha: Ben’s sigh when he got home. I was folding laundry and thinking about groceries. Next time I’ll stop and ask what happened.
Second partner	Ben: Aisha’s logo sketch at dinner. I was half watching the game. Next time I’ll put my phone face down at dinner and look.

Daily moments we will make time for

Phones in the basket by the door during dinner. Ten minutes on the couch after Ben’s shower to talk about our days.

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What we want to talk about in our next session

What happened with the farmers market question, and how to plan weekends so that both of us get some rest and some time together.

L.P. asked Ben about the farmers market question. He said Saturday is the only morning he can sleep in and the question felt like one more task, and Aisha said she had wanted time with him away from the house. L.P. helped each of them say what they had needed in that moment, and Ben tried turning toward the same bid in the session: “I want to go with you. Can we go Sunday afternoon?” They agreed to keep phones in the basket at dinner and to log their bids for another week.

References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Gottman, J. M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy*. W. W. Norton. ISBN 978-0-393-70282-8.

Books for couples

Gottman, J. M., & DeClaire, J. (2002). *The relationship cure: A 5 step guide to strengthening your marriage, family, and friendships*. Harmony Books. ISBN 978-0-609-80953-2. (Original work published 2001)

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (1999). *The seven principles for making marriage work*. Crown. ISBN 978-0-609-60104-4.

Research

Driver, J. L., & Gottman, J. M. (2004). Daily marital interactions and positive affect during marital conflict among newlywed couples. *Family Process, 43*(3), 301–314.

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