

# Emotionally Intelligent Husbands are Key to a Lasting Marriage

Kyle Benson // October 7, 2016

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/emotionally-intelligent-husbands-key-lasting-marriage/>

In a [long-term study](#) of 130 newlywed couples, Dr. John Gottman discovered that men who allow their wives to influence them have happier marriages and are less likely to divorce.

This critical skill is not limited to heterosexual couples. It's essential in same-sex relationships as well, but the research shows that gay and lesbian couples are notably better at it than straight couples. See [The 12 Year Study](#) for more on this.

I want you to meet Lauren and Steven.\* While Steven believes an equal partnership is the key to a happy and lasting marriage, his actions speak differently.

Steven: "The guys and I are going fishing this weekend. We are leaving later tonight."

Lauren: "But my girlfriends are staying with us on Friday, and I need help cleaning the house tonight. We talked about this. How could you forget? Can you leave tomorrow morning?"

Steven: "How did you forget I have my guys trip? I can't change our departure schedule. We are leaving in a few hours."

Lauren's anger boils. She calls him a "selfish asshole" and storms out of the kitchen.

Feeling overwhelmed, Steven pours himself a glass of whiskey and turns on the football game.

When Lauren walks back into the room to talk, he [stonewalls her](#). She starts to cry. He announces he needs to work on his truck and leaves the room.

Arguments like these are full of accusations, making it difficult to determine the underlying cause. What is clear is Steven's unwillingness to accept Lauren's influence.

## Rejecting Influence

It's not that marriage can't survive moments of anger, complaints, or criticism. They can. Couples get in trouble when they match negativity with negativity instead of making repairs to de-escalate conflict. Dr. Gottman explains in [The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work](#) that 65% of men increase negativity during an argument.

Steven's response doesn't show that he hears Lauren's complaint. Instead, he responds with defensiveness and sends a complaint right back: *Why didn't she remember his plans?*

The Four Horsemen – criticism, defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling – are telltale signs that a man is resisting his wife's influence.

**My point is not to insult men. It takes two to make a marriage work and it is just as important for wives to treat their husbands with honor and respect.** But Dr. Gottman's research indicates that a majority of wives – even in unhappy marriages – already do this.

This doesn't mean women don't get angry and even contemptuous of their husbands. It just means that they let their husbands influence their decision making by taking their opinions and feelings into account. Data suggests that men do not return the favor.

Statistically speaking, Dr. Gottman's research shows there is an [81% chance](#) that a marriage will self-implode when a man is unwilling to share power.

## What Men Can Learn From Women

There are books that say men are from Mars and women are from Venus. While this isn't literally true, men and women often do feel alien to each other.

This starts in childhood. When boys play games, their focus is on winning, not their emotions or the others playing. If one of the boys get hurt, he gets ignored. After all, "the game must go on."

With girls, feelings are often the first priority. When a tearful girl says, "we're not friends anymore," the game stops and only starts again if the girls make up. In *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, Dr. Gottman explains, "the truth is that 'girlish' games offer far better preparation for marriage and family life because they focus on relationships."

There are plenty of women who are unaware of these social nuisances and men who are deeply sensitive to others. In Dr. Gottman's research, however, only [35% of the men](#) were emotionally intelligent.

## Two Roads Diverged

...and I took the relationship-focused one.

The husband who lacks emotional intelligence rejects his wife's influence because he fears a loss of power. And because he is unwilling to accept influence, he will not be influential.

The emotionally intelligent husband is interested in his wife's emotions because he honors and respects her. While this man may not express his emotions in the same way his wife does, he will learn how to better connect with her.

When she needs to talk, he'll turn off the football game and listen. He will pick "we" over "me." He will understand his wife's inner world, continue to admire her, and communicate this respect by turning towards her. His relationship, sex life, and overall joy will be far greater than the man who lacks emotional intelligence.

The emotionally intelligent husband will also be a better father because he is not afraid of feelings. He will teach his children to respect their emotions and themselves. Dr. Gottman calls this [Emotion Coaching](#).

Because this man is deeply connected to his wife, she will go to him when she is stressed, upset, and overjoyed. She'll even go to him when she is aroused.

## How to Accept Influence

Dr. Gottman suspects men who resist their wives influence do so without realizing it. Accepting influence is both a mindset and a skill cultivated by paying attention to your spouse every day. [This means building your Love Maps, expressing your fondness and admiration, and accepting bids for connection.](#)

And when conflict happens, the key is to understand your partner's point of view and be willing to compromise. Do this by identifying your inflexible areas and searching for something both of you can agree to.

**For example:** Steven understands that Lauren is stressed about having company when the house is a mess. While he may not be able to delay his trip until the next morning, he can push it back to later that evening so he can help her around the house first. Maybe instead of Steven vacuuming and wiping down the counters (typically his task), Lauren could wipe them down in the morning before her friends arrive so Steven could leave a little earlier with his buddies.

Accepting your partner's influence is a great strategy for gaining more respect, power, and influence. Want to have a happy and stable marriage? Make your commitment to your partner stronger than your commitment to winning. If you do that, your marriage wins.

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