

“What is the formula for a healthy relationship?”

Is your relationship a positive one, or a negative one? For most of us, the answer is... it depends on the day. Like anything in life (family, work, home), relationships are best when the positive feelings and actions outweigh the negative ones. On a good day, when you feel your partner is treating you well, listening to you, loving you and making your life easier, the scales tip to the side of 'positive'. On a bad day, when you feel your partner criticises you repeatedly, doesn't support you and takes you for granted, the scales tip the other way.

Research tells us, the key to a healthy relationship lies in the balance of this scale. The positives vs. negatives that both parties bring. Now you might think that a having NO negatives should be the goal. Surely any relationship would work better with NO disagreements? Well, no. Fortunately for most couples, the negatives are important for a relationship too.

Negatives can include:

- * clashing personalities
- * not being polite
- * being selfish
- * being critical

But how MUCH of this negative do we need in our relationship? What IS the recommended balance?

Research has suggested this formula [1]:

5 Positive: 1 Negative

5 Positive: 1 Negative - What does that mean?

This means that for every one negative interaction, in order to set the balance and keep your relationship healthy you need to experience five positive interactions. These “positive” ones don’t have to be impressive or romantic gestures. They could

just be bringing your partner a cup of tea, or taking the kids off them for a bit to give them some free time. Or even just being polite, paying compliments, laughing, touching, smiling and showing support.

When you’re facing difficult and challenging times as parents trying to run a family, you’re probably not in a position to make big sweeping gestures like cooking your partner a three-course meal, whisking them off for a weekend away or even taking them out for the evening. So it’s just as well that the positives in the 5:1 ratio don’t need to be extravagant or over romantic.

“Stable and happy couples share more positive feelings and actions than negative ones. Unhappy couples tend to have more negative feelings and actions than positive ones.”[3]

It’s worth noting that while a negative to every five positives is encouraged, the word ‘negative’ is quite broad. Certain types of negative (or too many negatives on a consistent basis) can be destructive to the relationship.

These more damaging negatives include:

- * stubbornness
- * contempt
- * defensiveness
- * withdrawing from your partner
- * aggression or physical violence.

These really exist outside of the ratio.

It's important to remember that some actions and behaviours are never beneficial to a relationship. There may be some couples out there who experience a ratio with less negatives, 10:1 or even 20:1 where negatives are rare. Some even say they don't experience negatives at all. When other couples talk about what they argue about, this couple will often turn to each other and say: "We just don't really argue, do we?" And the other one shakes their head and goes "Nope.". But you needn't worry about achieving this with your partner. Research tells us, while a ratio of even 100:1 could be effective in the short-term, in order to have a relationship (or marriage) with real staying power, 5:1 is the ticket.

References:

[1] "Why marriages succeed or fail" - John Gottman p.65

[2] <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/cfs/cfs-744-w.pdf>

[3] "Why marriages succeed or fail" - John Gottman p.5

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