

Love Sense- from Infant to Adult (Sue Johnson and Ed Tronick)

speaker 1

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Science tells us clearly that bonding goes from the cradle to the grave. Staying close to a protective loved one is the main survival strategy of our species. We can now look at pivotal moments in the dance we call bonding in infancy and romantic love and pinpoint the core moves in the emotional dance that defines so much of our lives and our happiness. This drama has just five basic moves. We reach invite connection. If we don't get a response, we protest on push or we turn away and shut down to protect ourselves from rejection. We finally go into meltdown in a good relationship. We find a way to turn back and reconnect. If we love, we will do anything. We can to get a response from our loved one.

speaker 2

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Some of you have seen how this drama pans out in a YouTube video. My lab released a few years ago called the still face in it. We see the powerful impact. A simple lack of emotional response has on a child and the emotional gymnastics. The child goes through to try to deal with this loss connection. We need loving contact like oxygen. We really do not have many ways to deal with the pain of disconnection. At any age, we will show you this original video and then show you how the exact same drama plays out with adult lovers.

speaker 3

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Oh, and she gives a greeting to the baby. The baby gives a greeting back to her. This baby starts pointing at different places in the world. And then the mother's trying to engage her in play with her. They're working to coordinate their emotions and their intentions, what they want to do in the world. And that's really what the baby is used to. And then we asked the mother to not respond to the baby. The baby very quickly picks up on this. And then she uses all of her abilities to try and get the mother back. She smiles at the mother. She points because she's used to the mother looking where she points. The baby puts both hands up in front of her and says, what's happening here. She makes that screechy sound at the mother, like, come on. Why aren't we doing this? Even in this two minutes, when they don't get the normal reaction, they react with negative emotions. They turn away, they feel the stress of it. They actually may lose control of their posture because of the stress that they're experiencing.

speaker 1

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Now let's look at the exact same drama in an adult couple and a moment when emotional connection is lost, we're going to be filming the session today so that you can watch it later. Yeah. Okay. I'll be back in just a second.

speaker 4

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Think this is going to be good. Yeah. Yeah.

speaker 5

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Yeah.

speaker 4

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I also think that we're going to have fun at my sister's birthday on Saturday. I love when you and I do things together as a couple. Yeah. Look, I think we already talked about this, so I'm not, I don't want to go. I'm just not, it's just not my thing. So I'm just going to stay home and watch TV. But you're saying you would, and this matters to me. It's important that we do things with my family, that we all be together. What is happening here? Are you going to talk to me Now? You're putting up your wall. Like you always do.

speaker 4

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Are you listening to me? I just don't see how your family reunion is my issue. Okay. Can we talk about it later? We'll talk about it later. It seems like my feelings and what's important to me is never an issue with you. This

matters to me, Ted. And you said you would come. We can talk about it later. You don't have to get so upset. Swear. I feel like we're not even a couple. You don't care about my feelings here. We never talk about these things. Well, now, if you're just being critical and that's not talking, you know, there's, I'm just going to go back. I feel like I'm all alone here. Where are you? Any way you do have to make such, it's like a total emotional thing. It's not a big deal. Okay. Do I matter to you at all? You're mean mean it's selfish. You don't care about anybody but yourself. Jeremy, that question. Why did I? You don't care if you're hurt. You're just not there for me.

speaker 2

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When we feel cut off from our loved one, we go into a kind of panic. We have lost the connection. That is our main source of safety and comfort. The baby becomes overwhelmed by fear and anguish. When the mother does not respond to her, she loses her balance. Her ability to regulate her emotions. There is no solution here to her sense of abandonment. And we see this same kind of process in Jill. Yes,

speaker 1

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Jill is a strong, capable lady, but her mammalian brain codes, this situation as totally painful and as a danger cue, she cannot rely on Ted to respond to her when she needs him. The reaching, calling, protesting, desperate, demanding, and turning away and meltdown are the same in adult and infant. Now let's see a moment of repair in both relationships.

speaker 6

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you too. Oh, he is so

speaker 4

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Okay. Good luck. You're really upset and it's not you. Okay. It's not you. And you're right. When it comes to this topic, I just, I shut right down. It's just your family is just so intimidating. And they're always asking questions about my career and how I'm doing and how we're doing. And it just it's a little much. I just, I just block it out. Okay. But it's not, it's not huge. And you're really upset right now. And I don't want to see you upset. And I don't want you to think that I don't care about your feelings. So when this thing is done, we'll get out of here and we'll just, we'll talk some more cause you're right. We have to talk. Okay. All right. I'm sorry.

speaker 1

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This is the moment of repair. That seems to separate love. That lasts from love. That ends up in the divorce court or constant conflict. Every bond has moments of painful disconnection, but as long as there's a way out of the aloneness and the connection can be restored, the bond becomes safe. Again, the key is that Ted finally chews into his latest distress and responds on an emotional level. Just like the mother with the infant. Ted helps Joe with a vulnerability by just opening up and being present with her. This contact calms down her nervous system, and now they can talk in a different way about any issues that come up between them. So ed, now we know that the drama of romantic bonding is an adult version of the bond between parent and child.

speaker 2

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Exactly disconnection hurts and how we handle these inevitable moments of vulnerable disconnection, define how these bonds work out for us. We often don't see the impact on our partner of our lack of response to their emotional call,

speaker 1

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Right? Reaching and responding on an emotional level is what transforms these moments of disconnection. But we can get stuck in angrily pushing for a response or shutting down. Now we know the basic steps in the bonding dance and that this dance is often defined by how we deal with our fear of disconnection. And if we're able to move into repair, we are learning to actually shape the dance called lasting love and togetherness. Imagine that this changes everything, you know, and it reminds me of Walt Whitman's comment on life. He said, we were together. I forget the rest.

