

#18 Gridlocked Perpetual Problem and Solvable Problem

What are perpetual problems?

- Fundamental differences in your *personalities* that repeatedly create conflict *or*
- Fundamental differences in your *lifestyle needs*, need that are basic to your own identity, or who you are as a person.
- Issues that you've had a long time that keep arising.

What are the indicators of a perpetual problem?

- Both of you feel rejected.
- You keep discussing the same issue, spinning your wheels and making no headway.
- Both of you are entrenched in your position on this issue. (You're right, your partner isn't)
- Your conversations about this issue leave you feeling frustrated, in pain, betrayed, or hurt.
- You each show little humor, affection, or amusement when you discuss this.
- You never get anywhere when you talk about it. The lack of give and take (gridlock) on this issue leaves both of you feeling more polarized, taking more extreme positions, and being uncompromising.
- You increasingly feel emotionally disengaged and lonely.

If one person feels like an issue is a perpetual one, it is one.

- Violence or an extra-relationship affair is going to be a perpetual issue.
- Chronic illness or depression is likely to be.

What are the indicators of a solvable problem?

- The problem is situational and relatively superficial.
- There are no disguised hidden agendas.
- There is no deeper, symbolic meaning.
- Problem solving skills are needed to resolve them, but resolution is possible.

#18 Choosing One Gridlocked Perpetual Problem and One Solvable Problem

Instructions: Here is a list of some possible examples of perpetual problems. Look over each item. Individually, select one and only one perpetual problem that has become gridlocked in your relationship that you wish to discuss with your partner. Put a check next to that item. After this, proceed to the list of solvable problems.

Gottman Perpetual Problems List

1. *Differences in neatness and organization.* One person is neat and organized and the other is sloppy and disorganized.
2. *Differences in wanting time together versus time apart and alone.* One person wants more time alone than the other, who wants more time together.
3. *Differences in optimal sexual frequency.* One person wants more sex than the other.
4. *Differences in preferred lovemaking style.* There are differences in what each person wants from lovemaking. For example, one sees intimacy as a precondition to making love, while the other sees lovemaking as a path to intimacy.
5. *Differences in handling finances.* One person is much more financially conservative and perhaps a worrier, while the other wants to spend money more freely and has a philosophy of living for the moment.
6. *Differences with respect to kin.* One person wants more independence from kin, while the other wants more closeness.
7. *Differences in how to approach household chores.* For example, one person wants equal division of labor, while the other does not.

Differences in how to raise and discipline children.

8. - One person is more involved with the children than the other.
9. - One person is stricter with the children than the other.
10. - One person wants more gentleness and understanding with the children than the other.
11. *Differences in punctuality.* One person is habitually late, and the other feels it is important to be on time.
12. *Differences in preferred activity level.* One person prefers active physical recreation, while the other is more passive and sedentary.
13. *Differences in being people-oriented.* One person is more extroverted and gregarious than the other.
14. *Differences in preferred influence.* One person prefers to be more dominant in decision-making than the other.
15. *Differences in ambition and the importance of work.* One person is far more ambitious and oriented to work and success than the other.
16. *Differences with respect to religion.* One person values religious values more than the other.
17. *Differences with respect to drugs and alcohol.* One person is far more tolerant of drugs and alcohol than the other.
18. *Differences in independence.* One person feels a greater need to be independent than the other.
19. *Differences in excitement.* One person feels a greater need to have life be exciting or adventurous than the other.
20. *Differences in values.* There are major differences in what we value in life.
21. *Differences in relationship fidelity.* There are major differences in what it means to be sexually loyal to one another.
22. *Differences in (You supply here):*

Part 2: Gottman Solvable Problems List

Instructions: This form contains a list of categories in which many couples have disagreements. Look over this list and identify a solvable problem. It will probably be a small issue within a category. It may also refer to a particular situation. It must have a concrete, tangible, easily defined solution. Jot down a few notes, describing it next to the category list.

Example: Money and Finance

Description: “My partner wants to save money for a long vacation this summer, and I want to spend some of our savings on weekend dates and take a shorter vacation this summer.”

Possible categories for solvable problems:

Description:

- Money and finances
- Diet and food issues
- In-laws and kin
- Sex
- Religion
- Household chores
- Recreation and having fun
- Friends
- Children (having children, raising children)
- Issues of power and respect
- Balancing career and family
- Handling stresses
- Other: (please specify)

Part 3: Selecting Your Gridlocked Perpetual Problem and Your Solvable Problem

Instructions: Now return to the perpetual problems list. Discuss the item you each chose, and pick only one item you will discuss later. It doesn't matter whose item you choose, as it will only be used as a means of learning a new conflict-management skill. Write your selected gridlocked perpetual problems below, either in the (talk about it) "now" and "later" section.

Perpetual Problem to work on Now:

Perpetual Problem to work on Later:

Now read aloud the solvable problems you identified, and choose which one you'll work on. Write your selected solvable problem below.

Solvable Problem to work on now: