

A new book claims eight exercises could lead to a better relationship. *Rosie Mullender* gives it a whirl

THE EIGHT CONVERSATIONS EVERY COUPLE SHOULD HAVE

THE NEXT EIGHT evenings you spend with your partner could seal your future together. At least, that's the premise of *Eight Dates*, a new book by Dr John Gottman and Dr Julie Schwartz Gottman, which claims that all couples, old and new, should set aside the time for eight crucial conversations to cement their relationship.

Don and I have been together for four years. It was a classic tale of boy meets girl, boy asks girl out, girl refuses, then eventually gives in – it took four years of Don sponsoring my office's fun runs for me to agree to a date, but that date was fantastic. Two years ago, we bought a tiny flat, and have been living shoulder to shoulder ever since. There's not much we don't know about each other, so could the Gottmans really improve our relationship? Since they've spent 46 years studying over 3,000 couples, I'm willing to give it a try.

Date One: Lean On Me

The first date focuses on the bedrock of any relationship: trust and commitment. 'In a relationship, commitment is a choice we make every single day,' the Gottmans say – and you show it by everything from keeping a promise, to telling your partner what you cherish about them.

Don and I have to ask each other direct questions like, 'Can I trust you?' and 'Will you be faithful to me?' I've not had great

experiences with previous partners, but with more dating experience between us, and by being honest about our histories from the start, Don and I have established a really deep trust. We fly through this one feeling pleased with ourselves.

Date Two: Agree To Disagree

How couples manage conflict can be an area of disagreement in itself. The book says we should approach our differences with curiosity rather than trying to correct them, and suggests choosing a handful of differences in our personalities to explore.

I pick those that reflect the biggest point of conflict between us – that Don's an introvert and I'm an extrovert. Fed up with his habit of being on his phone whenever we go out, I now socialise alone. It upsets me that he doesn't know my friends better,

and has probably triggered more arguments than any other issue.

But as we talk through Don's dislike of socialising, I realise I've never put myself in his shoes. He explains that going out in groups makes him feel anxious and tired. It's a great jumping-off point for us to look at ways we can compromise in future.

Date Three: Let's Get It On

Sex is a tricky topic, but being dissatisfied with it can affect a relationship. 'Approach this conversation with lightness and honesty,' the book advises. Although we're tactile and affectionate, we don't make it to the bedroom as often as we could. It's not something that bothers me – but I can't help worrying that Don wants more. I'd hate for him to feel rejected.

The book advises couples to 'find your

