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FIELD GUIDE / FLOODING

The One-Page Version

Many people describe asking their partner something simple and being met with a reaction far bigger than the question, and afterward they replay the moment looking for what they did wrong. Dr. John Gottman called that state flooding: the heart rate climbs, stress hormones surge, and the parts of the mind that listen and solve problems shut down until the body settles, which takes about twenty minutes, and only if the person stops replaying the argument during the break. Think of an oversensitive smoke detector, the kind that shrieks when the toast browns. It was built to be safe rather than accurate, and a person's alarm can be set the same way by old hurt, so that a tone or a topic sets it off before the thinking part has weighed in. For most couples, the reaction was never aimed at the partner in the room, and a break that comes with a return time gives the body a chance to learn that the fire is out.

Three ways the conversation can begin:

- 01 | When their alarm goes off: "Okay. I can see that landed hard. I'm not going anywhere. Take a second."
- 02 | When yours does: "I'm getting too worked up, and I'm about to say something I don't mean. I need twenty minutes, and I'm coming back at eight thirty."
- 03 | When you return: "I'm back. I'm sorry for how loud that got. I still want to hear what you were asking."

This page is the short version of *The Flooding Field Guide*. The full Field Guide adds every script, the worksheet and a one-page cheat sheet.

couples-conversations.com/fg-flooding-guide

One important note: This program is not in place of therapy or clinical treatment or diagnosis, but for education. Many relationships struggle with various issues; this is normal. However, they should always feel safe. If there are any mental health concerns, or concerns for safety, or if the relationship feels dangerous in any way, please seek professional support rather than continuing in this program. When in doubt, it is best to consult with a proper therapist.