

## Relationships - tips for success

A 'good relationship' means different things to different people. However, good adult relationships generally involve two people who respect each other, can communicate, and have equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Most of us would also expect our relationship with our partner to include love, intimacy and sexual expression, commitment, compatibility and companionship.

### Working at a relationship

All couples want to have a successful and rewarding relationship, yet it is normal for couples to have ups and downs. To meet these challenges, and to keep your relationship healthy and happy, you need to work at it. Relationships are like bank accounts – if there are less deposits than withdrawals, you will run into difficulties.

### Tips for a good relationship

Tips that may help you improve your relationship and to be better prepared to meet the challenges along the way include:

- **Talk to each other** – just because you love each other doesn't mean you will be able to communicate well or can read your partner's mind, or that they can read yours. Communicate your needs – don't wait for your partner to try to guess what is going on with you. If you have something to bring up, do it gently. Going on the attack rarely gets you what you want. It is also important to listen to each other. Often we are so busy defending ourselves that we don't actually hear what our partner is saying. Focus on letting your partner know that you have heard them before you give them your response.
- **Make repair attempts** – if your attempts to talk about an issue don't go as planned, try not to let the situation become even more negative (such as not talking for extended periods or ignoring the other person's attempts). Saying sorry or touching your partner in a caring manner shows you care even though you disagree.
- **Spend time together** – make your relationship a priority and make time for each other – even if you have to book it in. Regular 'deposits in your relationship bank account' will help protect your relationship. It has been found that you need to deposit five positive experiences as a couple to counteract the impact of one negative experience (such as an argument).
- **Work on feeling good about yourself** – this will help the way you feel about your relationship.
- **Everyone is different** – accept and value differences in others, including your partner. We often choose people who have qualities and abilities we would like more of. This is one of the reasons why our relationships offer us significant opportunities to grow and develop as people. Remind yourself of this.
- **Make plans** – set goals for your relationship and plan for your future. This shows that you are both in the relationship for the long term.
- **Be supportive** – try not to judge, criticise or blame each other; we are all human. Remind yourself that you are a team, and in order for the team to be successful, you each have to cheer the other on.
- **Learn from arguments** – accept that arguments will happen and try to resolve them with respect. The strongest predictor of divorce is 'contempt' which is any action whereby your partner feels 'put down' by you, whether it is the tone of your voice or what you say. Often in arguments, we become overwhelmed and this can often lead to behaviours that harm our relationship. It is important to stay calm during disagreements or, if this is not possible, to take time out.
- **Be sexually considerate** – be affectionate (sometimes a lingering kiss or a warm hug are just as important). Accept that individuals have different sex drives and to sustain a healthy and happy sex life requires negotiation. A reduction in a couple's physical connection is often a warning sign of problems in a relationship.

- **Be attentive** – demonstrate your commitment to the relationship. It is what you do for someone that tells them that you love them.
- **Enjoy yourself** – have fun and celebrate your life together. Rituals are a really useful way of enhancing your relationship. It's also important to try new things as a couple.
- **Be flexible** – let your relationship grow and adapt as you both change.

## Long-term relationships

In a long-term relationship, it's easy to assume you know all there is to know about your partner. But people change. Try to be aware of what is happening in your relationship and understand who your partner is and where they are at.

Stay curious about, but respectful of, each other. It is really important to stay up to date about your partner. Friendship is at the basis of all successful long-term relationships. It has also been shown that successful couples tend to be realists who recognise that a relationship will go through 'ups and downs'.

## Seeking help for relationship issues

If there are issues in your relationship that are difficult or painful to talk to each other about, consider seeing a counsellor. A counsellor can be of great value to help you talk things through.

## Where to get help

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
- Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054
- Relationships Australia Tel. 1300 364 277
- Family Relationship Advice Line (Australian Government) Tel. 1800 050 321

## Things to remember

- A good relationship doesn't just happen – you have to work at it.
- All couples experience problems and challenges in their relationships.
- There are many things you can do to help build healthy and happy relationships and prepare for the challenges along the way.
- Relationships change. You need to be aware of how they are changing and adapt to those changes.
- If problems become too difficult or complex, consider seeking the help of a counsellor.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Relationships Australia Victoria

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