

Designing a Relationship or Marriage

Relationships take work. Regardless of whether you are a perfect couple, or you fight often, you must put time and consideration into any relationship.

Love is a wonderful feeling, but it's not enough to keep a relationship alive and thriving.

What happens when your relationship starts to unravel? What are you supposed to do when you and your partner grow apart? How do you deal with fundamental differences? What if you or your partner does something that seriously jeopardizes the relationship? Can the relationship be mended?

It can be exceptionally painful when a relationship or marriage falls apart. You've had a connection with this person for a period of time, sometimes for years or decades, and then you no longer feel as close.

You feel alone and scared. You're not sure what will happen. Will you be able to patch things up? Or is it better if you go your separate ways?

Today, we're going to discuss the traits of successful couples. Then we're going to talk about ways that you can save a relationship that has begun to deteriorate. In our discussion, we will attempt to implement the positive behaviors displayed by happy couples to help keep repaired relationships alive and strong.

Section 1: Healthy Couples

Successful couples display several traits in areas in which other couples might be lacking. They love each other, but they are also aware that it takes more than love to keep a relationship flourishing.

Here are a few of the key characteristics of strong couples:

They LIKE each other

Healthy couples are friends. They truly, deeply, sincerely like each other, and they think the world of one another. They view each other positively.

Just like any other friends, they want to hang out, talk with one another, and care about each other's thoughts and feelings.

They respect each other. They view their partner as a friend and ally. They are on the same team.

Of course there are things about their partner that probably drive them nuts on occasion, but they are able to look past these elements because, overall, they genuinely love and care about their significant other.

They want to be around their partner, and they want to make them happy. At times, they are able to put their partner's needs before their own. They don't do this out of obligation. They do it because they care about their partner.

These couples bring out the best in one another.

They Talk

Successful couples are masters of communication. They may not always know exactly what to say, but they know the best way in which to say it.

They trust each other, and they feel safe. They speak their minds and are respectful of one another's feelings.

Communication is vastly important for a successful relationship. Couples who communicate well have the ability to be completely honest with their thoughts, opinions, and feelings during disagreements.

They express themselves in healthy ways. They are truthful, but they convey their emotions in a manner that isn't hurtful to their partner. They understand the importance of both talking AND listening.

They don't feel forced to keep their feelings hidden deep inside. When couples feel as if they must suppress their feelings, it's easy for things to escalate and eventually explode.

These couples don't play emotional games, and they don't shut their partner out.

When you allow your partner to know your deepest thoughts, desires, fears, etc., and your partner allows you to know the same things about him or her, this gives both of you a huge advantage.

You know each other better. You communicate better. Overall, you *understand* your partner better, which can help you to react more wisely when difficult situations arise.

Healthy couples also talk about plans, chores, and anything else that requires a discussion. They make big life decisions. They understand one another and are able to compromise when necessary. They also communicate and divide up housework.

These conversations reinforce the idea that they are a team working together. It helps keep the relationship positive, and prevents one or both sides from becoming resentful.

Good communication helps both parties to feel safe and confident in the relationship. There's no guesswork. It's less stressful when you know how your partner feels.

They Laugh and Play

Happy couples don't live with a permanent rain cloud over their heads. They are able to find humor in situations and enjoy a laugh together.

Laughing helps to break tension and minimize conflict. Healthy couples realize that not every fight is the end of the world. In fact, a lot of fights can be avoided if both partners have a sense of humor – or generally approach life in a lighter way.

They enjoy each other's company, and they are able to laugh at or *with* one another. They have fun!

They also realize the importance of kicking back and enjoying life. They show affection by hugging, tickling, cuddling, and more.

Again, they like being around each other. They enjoy touching one another. This doesn't necessarily mean that they indulge in constant public displays of affection. It means showing one another that they care with a smile, a back rub, a quick kiss, or sending an "I love you" text during the day.

They also know that they have the freedom to have fun with other people. Each partner is allowed to have his or her own friends, hobbies, interests, and plans. Neither side is threatened by the other's outside interests. They are not manipulative or controlling of one another. They are able to enjoy fun times together and apart.

This way, when they come back from spending time away from each other, they are reinvigorated and excited to be near one another again. It helps keep things fresh and exciting.

Regardless of how long you've been in a relationship, you're never too old to have fun and show affection. Showing warmth towards your partner helps to keep the romance alive.

When you stop enjoying yourself, take things too seriously, and cease showing tenderness, it can be easy for the relationship to feel cold and lackluster.

They Forgive and Forget

Happy couples know how and when to deal with conflict.

They pick their battles. They are aware that their partners have quirks. They may not love all of these little quirks, but, for the most part, they learn to live with them – and sometimes, to even *embrace* them.

They communicate their feelings in a more productive way when addressing annoyances. Ultimately, they love their partner more than they dislike their partner's idiosyncrasies.

When they do have discussions, both sides make an actual attempt to be better. They are aware that they are a team. It takes two to keep a relationship alive.

They are also able to admit fault and to say "I'm sorry." It may not always be easy to do, but they know that it will make things better in the long run.

No one actually wins an argument when one or both sides doesn't put in an effort to make things right. Partners in successful couples take the blame when it's their fault. In turn, their partners are able to forgive them and move past the conflict.

Successful couples communicate, learn from their differences, and move on. They don't dwell on issues forever.

They Support One Another

Happy, healthy couples support one another. They are for each other there when needed. They show up. They do their best to be there for each other, especially when times get rough.

They are able to rely on each other. There is a sense of stability. They love and trust each other. They know that they can count on one another in any situation.

Healthy couples make each other a top priority. This doesn't mean that you have to base your entire life around the person that you love, but it's important to make sure they know how important they are to you.

Communication helps in this area. When couples communicate well, they know the things that are meaningful to their partner.

Another thing to note is that "reliable" does not equate to "stale." Successful couples are happy together, but they don't allow themselves to become complacent. They do their best to keep things fresh! They put in effort so that they don't get stuck in the same routines, fall into ruts, or take each other for granted.

Again, they are there for one another because they WANT to be, not because it's a requirement.

They Have Sex

Happy couples keep the spark alive!

They desire to be close with their partner. They have a healthy sex life. This means that they don't force sex, make it feel like a chore, or feel the need to schedule it. It simply means that they love each other, and enjoy showing their attraction to one another. They still find time to be sexually close with one another. They desire it.

The sexual relationship must be mutual. Neither person should withhold or use sex as a weapon, especially when fighting.

Both sides must remain open to new ideas. Or, if they're uncomfortable, they have the ability to be honest with one another. Healthy couples are on the same wavelength both inside and outside of the bedroom.

It's important that partners have a give and take relationship. Each partner needs to be sexually satisfied. If not, it can lead to resentment or dissatisfaction.

They Are Not Cruel

John Gottman, PhD created the term "Horsemen of the Apocalypse" for relationships. He believes that these are behaviors that slowly but surely tear relationships apart. He describes the traits as, "criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling."

These four elements work against all of the other positive traits that should be exhibited by couples.

When you pick away at your partner, it grows old. No one likes to be needled day in and day out. No one likes to be treated as if they are not good enough, or as if they are full of imperfections.

Be careful of constantly criticizing your partner. It may start out innocent enough, but over time, it can develop into a habit. It can wear away at your partner.

Imagine how you would feel if the person you loved most always had something negative to say about you. It would hurt deeply.

Similarly, showing contempt, disdain, or even dislike for your partner can be incredibly painful. Gottman says that when you show contempt for your partner, you are intentionally trying to belittle them or make them feel bad.

A partner must feel loved and valued. Why spend time with someone who doesn't appreciate you?

It's hard being around couples that are mean to one another. "He can never do anything right...He's such an idiot...She drives me crazy." These are not words that convey love.

When you're defensive, you aren't communicating properly. You're not taking in the information that your partner is presenting to you. You are unable to laugh or let things slide off your back. You are unable to accept blame graciously. You use anger as a weapon.

Defensiveness deflects emotion and makes communication very difficult. When you're defensive, you don't take responsibility for your words and actions. There's no empathy or apology. You shut your partner down and refuse to deal with problems in a productive manner.

Lastly, when you stonewall your partner, you shut your partner out. Problems cannot be remedied.

Remember, you must talk and you must also listen. In a lot of cases, listening can be the most important element in a discussion. If both you and your partner are able to truly hear each other's words, then actions can be taken to improve situations. If not, nothing will be resolved. Nothing will get better.

Stonewalling completely shuts down communication. It can be very hurtful and frustrating, and it prevents the resolution of any conflicts. It can very easily cause a partner to call it quits. If they can't get through to their partner or communicate in any way, they inevitably reach a point where they feel it's easier to end the relationship.

Successful couples do not behave in these ways. Rather, they are kind, caring, receptive, and communicative.

Section 2: Saving a Relationship or Marriage

Now that we've discussed the traits of successful couples, it's time to look at ways to revive relationships that are on the verge of collapse.

Take Some Time to Think

Before doing anything drastic or desperate, take some time to think. Spend some time by yourself to contemplate the relationship. As the saying goes, "Think before you speak."

Think about important questions. This is the time to take a step back and organize your thoughts.

What went wrong? How did you contribute? Is the relationship something that you want to fight for? Do you see yourself growing old with your partner? Can you come to terms with the things that bother each of you?

Do you truly believe that you can make things work again, or if you get back together, are you just postponing the inevitable? Will you be able to trust your partner again? Are you willing to make adjustments? Will fixing the relationship make you happy?

When a relationship is on the rocks, it's important to think about whether the relationship is salvageable AND worth saving. Don't force anything simply because you're scared or because getting back together would be the more comfortable move.

Recognize when it's time to work on problems and when it's better to simply end things and walk away. It can be easy to talk yourself into staying because you're scared or you've been together for a while.

Either way, spend some time alone and compose your thoughts. Think about what you want and need out of the relationship. Plan out the things that you'd like to say so that your thoughts are coherent.

Make sure that your words are not offensive or perceived as an attack to your partner.

Even though it might be difficult, give it some time. Allow your partner to have some space. Don't smother him or her. Both of you need time to think and process.

It's okay to let your partner miss you a little, and it's okay to miss your partner. This isn't an emotional mind game. Rather, it helps to ensure that you distance yourself from negative feelings and anger. It allows you both to cool off, clear your head, and view the situation more clearly.

Although you might be tempted to seek an immediate resolution, remember that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Disconnect from your partner for a bit. Don't message, call, or pester them. Give them some room to breathe. In the long run, it will be better for the both of you.

Take time for yourself. Check in with your emotions. Try to be happy and regain a sense of calm.

You can also spend time with friends and family. Confide in those that you love, and get input. Listen to their thoughts and advice, but take everything with a grain of salt. An outside perspective can be helpful, but it's easier for third parties to give advice because they have nothing invested in the relationship.

If you can, get your mind off of your partner and focus on being good to yourself. Take care of your mind and body. It can be a very difficult time, so be extra kind to yourself. Meditate. Exercise. Journal.

Once you have taken the proper amount of time and feel ready, you can then ...

Talk to Your Partner

Sit down and have a serious discussion with your partner. Again, a discussion means that both parties must talk AND listen.

Don't go into the conversation with guns blazing, blaming your partner, or demanding that he or she change.

Remain composed and speak your mind. It's important to be honest, but you also need to hear your partner's thoughts and acknowledge their feelings.

Another key element of making amends with someone is to provide validation. Admit when you were wrong. Sincerely apologize for the ways in which you contributed to problems. Own up to the things that are your fault. Put yourself in your partner's shoes. Try to empathize.

If your partner is willing to do the same, this is an excellent start and a good sign.

If you want to attempt to mend things, it has to be mutual. Both parties must take steps to improve. Both partners have to give a definitive YES to saving the relationship.

Furthermore, if your partner apologizes and promises to work harder, you must forgive them and agree to move on. *Forgive and forget*. Don't hang onto issues or hold them over their head.

How would you feel if someone said that they forgave you, but then every time you had a disagreement, they threw your faults back in your face?

If you say that you forgive your partner, it means that you move past any issues and look ahead to a brighter future.

Focus on positivity and strengthening your bond.

Make Adjustments

If you decide it's best to stay together, both parties will need to make adjustments. If nothing changes, then nothing will be fixed or will improve. Remember, successful couples know that relationships are a team effort.

Both parties must make an effort and follow through. If one or both partners fail to make any adjustments, the bond will never strengthen. The situation will deteriorate again, and you will end up experiencing the same arguments that you had before.

Do your best to fix the things that need tweaking. Don't worry – a complete overhaul may not be necessary. Small changes add up. Most couples will tell you that it's the little things that end up making or breaking a relationship.

If your partner can see that you're making changes and putting in a sincere effort to do better, and your partner is doing the same, you will both feel better and more secure.

Sometimes you may need assistance. There's nothing wrong with seeing a therapist. A lot of couples need a neutral third party to help sort out differences.

Or, perhaps one or both partners would benefit from seeing separate therapists on a regular schedule. This would allow each of you to express your feelings, get feedback, and feel more regulated. That way, you won't take every emotion out on each other.

The key to growing is accepting change. You must adapt to keep moving forward, whether that means making a concerted effort to improve communication, attending couples therapy, having a sit down talk once a week to "check in," or scheduling a "couples" night once a week.

You can also work with your partner to devise ways of dealing with conflict in more productive manners. For example, you could instate a rule that says that you and your partner must take an hour apart to calm down after a disagreement. After that hour, you will agree sit down and calmly discuss your issues.

Do whatever you need to improve your relationship. The important thing is to be communicative. Once you've opened up a dialogue, each of you can begin taking action.

Rekindle

After agreeing to push forward with your relationship, you will need to start over again, in a sense. It takes work to relight the flame.

Make time for one another. Remember, healthy couples make each other a top priority. Now, more than ever, it's important to realize this. Give your partner and your relationship a little tender, loving care. Make it a habit.

Imagine how you would feel if you and your partner decided to give your relationship another try, and he or she didn't make any attempt to make improvements. It would hurt and be very disappointing.

Both parties have to put in effort. It can't be one-sided. If it is, it will inevitably lead to resentment.

Spend quality time with one another. Make plans together to do things that you both like to do. If you watch television in separate rooms every night or allow the relationship to get stale again, you're going to grow apart.

Make a fresh start, and focus on keeping your relationship fresh and exciting. Do activities together. Go on dates, and double date with other couples. Start a hobby together such as dancing, bowling, pottery club, book club, or anything else that you both like. Take a trip together.

Focus on communication, rather than on arguing. Things may not go as smoothly as you like initially, but if you concentrate on communicating well instead of all of the things your partner is doing wrong, you'll find that there will be less anger and tension.

When you do have disagreements, try to calmly discuss your feelings rather than yelling or blaming each other. Work on HOW you communicate. Do you get annoyed and talk with a "tone?" Be conscious of your habits, and try speaking quietly, calmly, and kindly. See if it makes a difference.

Express your thoughts without tearing the other person down. Talk in "I's" rather than "you's." For example, you can say, "I'm feeling frustrated because we don't spend a lot of time together," instead of "YOU never make time for me. YOU obviously don't love me anymore." One explains, the other one blames. Explain your feelings, and your partner will be more receptive.

Also, try to avoid arguing about everything. It's exhausting and it breeds more negativity. Both you and your partner are human. Everyone makes mistakes and slips up from time to time. Again, you have to LOVE your partner more than you hate their quirks.

Make an effort to always view your partner as a friend, rather than as an enemy. If you want your relationship to succeed, focus on positivity. Think about the good times and the characteristics that you love about your partner.

Express your love for your partner through both words and gestures. Make a point of telling your partner often that you love them. But don't just tell them – show them. Do nice things for them. Be willing to compromise. If you say that you're going to do something, do it. Surprise your partner every now and then.

Consideration

Relationships are not inherently easy. To become easy, they require work and effort.

When you find someone who's a good match for you, the relationship will feel much simpler. But even perfect couples must be careful not to become complacent.

If something isn't working, you must take action to fix it. Otherwise, it will never improve. To be able to move past issues, both parties must be willing to communicate constructively.

Whether your relationship is perfect or on the rocks, it's important to remember the keys to success. These key elements can be combined into three basic steps:

Communicate
Show Love and Affection
Adapt

Thanks for reading. I hope this information is helpful.

Love and Blessings,
Diana Hart