

Healthy Adult Relationships: Being a Couple

Because people change over time, so do their relationships. When two people initially get together there is the excitement and passion of a new relationship. Then they make a commitment to one another. During this time of commitment each person has an expectation that things will feel wonderful forever. This period of relationship development lasts for 1 to 2 years. During this time they begin to notice that there are differences in beliefs and how each would like to handle various situations. However, they continue to put their best foot forward, feeling close and enjoying one another.

As this period of discovery continues there are disagreements and differences of opinion, but they don't talk about it. They tend to hold back fearing and increase in disagreements. They are struggling to find a way to go beyond being two people in a relationship to being two people who are sharing their lives together and building a future.

Unfortunately, avoiding conflicts doesn't make them go away. In fact, if issues are being talked about a lot, without problem solving, there can be increased frustration and distance from one another. The couple may be doing things separately now, which leads to a fork in the road for them. They can choose one of two courses of action: 1) continue to pull away from each other resulting in a separation, or 2) recognize that they have not been making the necessary efforts to strengthen their relationships and make a commitment to invest themselves in creating a successful partnership.

With a recommitment to each other a couple feels that excitement that they originally experienced returning. They have found out some very important things:

- To feel good about your partner you must have positive thoughts about them.
- There must be an enduring commitment to get through the good and bad together.
- There must be a collaboration of efforts.
- Since leaving their family of origin couples begin to recognize their partner comes before others and the importance of their family including their partner as they would you.
- There is a need to balance individual time to allow adequate time to be together and build the relationship.
- It's important to listen without interrupting, and acknowledge and accept how their partner thinks and feels even if the thoughts/feelings are not shared.

Special Circumstances

1. Single parents need to build and maintain a strong support system to help balance stress.
2. When a couple has children from previous relationships there is a necessary process of gradually blending families.