

# Characteristics of a healthy intimate relationship



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## Forming a long-lasting bond

According to the New Jersey anthropologist Dr. Helen Fisher “ quick flings, romance, and long-term partners are all part of what we call love” (Love Trap). These are three different mating emotion systems. Lust is the craving for sexual gratification. Romance is “ the elation and euphoria of first love” (Love Trap). The third emotion is attachment, which causes us to feel calm and security which can be felt with a long-term partner. “ Dr. Helen Fisher reveals the significance of vocal cords, sense of smell, pheromones, and hormones such as serotonin, oxytocin, and vasopressin, in creating the emotions and sensations of love” (Love Trap).

A mating pattern in which a partner stays together in a permanent manner is referred to as pair bonding. Studies have shown that this event is practiced by other mammals and even birds and is therefore not unique to humans. Only about three percent of mammals stay in monogamous relationships and thus it's not a common practice. In monogamous systems, pair-bonding relates to permanent partnering, and exclusive mating relationship. When a couple has sex, neurotransmitters, such as oxytocin, vasopressin, and dopamine stimulate the formation of synaptic connections in the brain. “ It has been proposed that intense romantic love, a human cross cultural universal, is a developed form of this attraction system” (Fisher, Aron, Brown). This causes association of the pleasure from sex with the partners involved. What we need to understand is how to maintain this bond despite all the ups and downs a relationship faces. Though sex may help form and maintain the bond sometimes, sex is simply not enough to keep a couple together.

A foundation of a healthy relationship is honesty and trust. There needs to be a mutual respect among partners. If we fail to build a solid foundation for relationship, we risk developing an unhealthy relationship. “ Hurt feelings, ostracism, jealousy, lying, and betrayal- are commonplace events that occur in most relationships somewhere along the way” that cause stress in relationships (Miller, 308). Once the relationship is strained, a couple becomes unhappy and this event can risk fading the bond they had together.

Maintaining a healthy relationship requires a lot of effort on a day to day basis. When we first fall in love, we tend to overlook many specific characteristics that our partner possesses. A new relationship is exciting. You can't get enough of your partner. You want to constantly be with each other. When we're around the person we find attractive, we get a shot of a feel-good chemical called dopamine. Unfortunately, this does not last. In time, once the dopamine effects wear off those characteristics that were there all along may cause stress. Some couples choose to go to therapy once they notice these problems and can't fix them themselves. While couples' therapy can be a wonderful thing sometimes, it may be too late. We also need to realize that we cannot change someone else. They need to make a change alone if they choose to do so. Therapy is not always the solution.

While there are other mammals that mate for life humans don't always mate for life. While marriage is not for everyone, some couples choose to marry to show their commitment to one another This commitment is supposed to be for life. This is when some couples seek premarital education. “ Premarital-education is designed to enable couples to build and maintain a strong partnership” (Williamson, Hannah C.; Trail, Thomas E.; Bradbury, Thomas N.;

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Karney, Benjamin R.). Is premarital education enough to ensure a long and happy marriage? In my opinion, that is certainly not the key to a successful marriage. By this time, you may still have a strong physical attraction towards your significant other. What happens when your brain stops making a synaptic connection that released dopamine from when you were drawn to your partner only due to their physical attributes? If you don't know how to deal with the ups and downs of relationship the bond that was formed from the synaptic connection will eventually fade. While marriage can last for a life time many couples choose to get a divorce if that bond is damaged and irreparable.

This shows that teaching about healthy relationships are very limited.

Couple's therapy and premarital education " fail to address three important things. This includes genuinely knowing what you want and need from a partner in a relationship, selecting the right person and developing and using skills right from the beginning." (Davila). Attraction is important. So, when you spot a person you're attracted to it's not their personality that draws you in. It's their physical features. After some time, you will get to know your partner's personality. Some personalities are more compatible than others. If you're not truly compatible and don't have much in common your relationship may suffer and sometimes end. " Major and unpleasant life experiences can lead to severe personal distress" making it crucial for us to learn how to have and maintain healthy relationships (Bowman, 463).

Romantic competence includes having " three skills: insight, mutuality and emotion regulation" (Davila). These skills are " about awareness and understanding and learning. With insight you'll have a better idea of who you

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are, what you need, what you want and why you do the things you do” (Davila). It takes time to know yourself. Your needs wants and expectations may change as you age. What was important in a relationship in your adolescence will no longer have much significance once you’re a senior. For example, as a young adult you may want an intensely sexual relationship while as a senior you only look for companionship in a partner. When you’re young you tend to be more sexually active which leads to reproduction and having a family. As you age and your kids are grown you just need to have a companionship so you can be looked after. Change is the only constant in life. You need to be in a relationship that is constantly evolving so that your wants and needs are met. “ The second skill is Mutuality. Mutuality is about knowing that both people have needs, and that both sets of needs matter. With mutuality you’ll be able to convey your own needs in a clear direct fashion that increases the likelihood that you’ll get them met” (Davila). For example, you may have given birth and you’re still suffering from postpartum depression. You’re feeling down, and you would rather stay home than to attend your partner’s top performer work event. To avoid conflict, you must communicate directly by stating how you’ve been feeling depressed and even though you’d really love to be there for your partner to support them you still need time to yourself. Many women suffer from postpartum depression. Some suffer for months and others suffer for years depending on its severity. Your partner should be understanding. It is also important to note that not all women can have maternal responses. Human maternal responses are “ contingent on circumstances and on the mother’s social environment” (Sarah Blaffer). Given that humans are iteroparous species and therefore breed multiple times during a long period of time they

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require a lot of support for their offspring to reach maturity and independence. Mothers may rely on allomothers while they are away from their baby. What is interesting is that an allomother can be any gender and is therefore not specific to females. When you have children, mothers rely on fathers for support and understanding. This cooperation allows children who are highly dependent to receive maternal investment by individuals other than their birth mother. “ With mutuality you’ll be willing to meet your partner’s needs” (Davila). Both people’s needs must be factored in when you decide in a relationship. There should be a mutual respect for everyone’s needs. What’s key here is communication of needs to one another. “ The third skill is emotion regulation” (Davila). If you can regulate your emotions, you will be able to maintain a calm demeanor. When your relationship faces an obstacle, you won’t jump into conclusion without giving your partner a chance to explain their side to you. “ With emotion regulation you’ll be able to maintain a sense of self-respect and commitment to your needs even when bad things happen in your relationship” (Davila). Nobody is perfect. We tend to make mistakes not matter our age. For a relationship to survive it’s important to discuss the consequences of our mistakes. If you made a mistake and hurt your partner’s feelings, it’s important to apologize. You must learn from your mistake and move on. Your partner must also be able to forgive you. “ Forgiveness is more likely to occur in close, committed relationships” (Miller, 336). When you’re in a new relationship you may not be able to forgive your partner as easily. It may be easier to end the relationship and move on to a different relationship. I believe it’s easier to forgive your partner when you have formed a bond and attachment. This may not always be an option as incidents, such as domestic violence, may

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be not be forgiven, but forgiveness “ an important element in romantic relationships; the capacity to seek and grant forgiveness is seen as one of the most significant factors contributing to marital longevity and marital satisfaction” (Fincham, Frank D. ; Hall, Julie ; Beach, Steven R. H., 415).

As a child you only seek the approval of your parents. As you go through adolescence you make this transition where we now need the approval of your peers. It is very important for parents to allow kids to acculturate. This transition is a highly stressful and anxious period of our lives. This is when we are supposed to learn to rely on others. Unfettered access to dopamine producing devices and social media has resulted in a generation not able to develop deep meaningful relationships. Relationships are often superficial. Now we have a generation who has no real knowledge on how to cope with mechanisms to deal with stress. When significant stress starts to show up in their lives they are not turning to a person, instead they are turning to a device where they can have access to social media, shopping, porn, or even gambling. This offers a temporary relief that can result in addiction to multiple things. “ Fueled by our need to belong, most of us care deeply about what our intimate partners think of us” (Miller, 309). We are social creatures and we fear rejection. “ The desire to achieve acceptance and to avoid rejection is widely acknowledged to be a central human motive” (Downey, Geraldine, Feldman, Scott I.) Some lie or even pretend to be something they are not. This includes people who are homosexual and despite this some get involved in heterosexual relationships just so they can be accepted by the society. Until recently same sex couples were not able to get married. As a nation we have made an important step towards accepting

everyone in the society regardless of their sex, gender, or sexual orientation. We need to learn to be more accepting of each other's differences. We tend to marginalize certain members of society based on things they did not choose such as their sexuality. It's important to stay true to yourself. It's just as important to know how to accept and appreciate other people's differences. It can't be easy to pretend to be something you're not. I can see how it could be emotionally draining. To avoid this, you must be honest with your partner. Deception is "deliberate falsification or omission of information by a communicator with the intent of simulating [in the partner] a belief that the communicator himself or herself does not believe" (Peterson, 280). It's important to be honest in relationships. A healthy relationship requires authenticity. There are "four dimensions of authenticity: being aware of one's own intrinsic motives, feelings, and cognitions; being able to evaluate the self in an unbiased way despite others' opinions; behaving according to one's inner values and needs rather than external expectations; and engaging with close others in ways that reflect openness and sincerity so that others see one's real self" (Gouveia, Tânia; Schulz, Marc S.; Costa, Maria Emília).

It's not easy to form a long-lasting bond when you start a new relationship. Physical attraction may fade. A bond that can result from that initial physical attraction could last a lifetime and for it to last you both need to work hard to maintain a healthy relationship. Disagreements arise when you're in a relationship causing arguments. Arguments can range from differences of opinion on how to raise kids to managing finances. There needs to be a clear boundary. No fight should at any point become physical. Unfortunately,



many couples come to experience domestic violence. Domestic violence of victims could be both men and women. This is a worldwide issue. We know of many unfortunate cases of domestic violence in the Western civilization. After reading "The Life And Words Of A ! Kung Woman" it's clear that domestic violence happens even in hunter gatherer societies that I previously thought to be a peaceful society. Nisa's violent behavior and the violence she faced surprised me. For example, Nisa is hit by her husbands. When Nisa's daughter Nai is a victim of domestic abuse, you see this vicious circle of violence handed down from generation to generation. When Nai refused to have sex with her husband, she is pushed, and the fall results in her breaking her neck and dying. "She fell down with a great force, so great that her neck was broken- one of the bones even stood out so you could see it" (Shostak, 279). Nai's husband should've understood that she was too young and was not ready to be intimate with him despite being married. Her husband who clearly does not know how to control his emotions responds in a physical manner that causes her to die. If they had communicated each other's needs and had mutual respect, Nai might have lived long enough to even have children of her own. "We may know what a healthy relationship looks like, but most people have no idea how to get one and no one teaches us how to do so" (Davila). It's important for people to know what they want and need in a relationship. This must be explained in the beginning of a relationship, and the couple must understand and respect each other's needs. Partners must be honest with one another. Communication is key. "Reciprocated and escalating forms of negative affect are believed to be particularly pernicious, as they create self-sustaining cycles that are difficult to exit once entered, leaving both partners feeling misunderstood and less

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inclined to engage difficult problems in the future” (Kuster, Monika, Bernecker, Katharina, Backes, Sabine, Brandstätter, Veronika, Nussbeck, Fridtjof W., Bradbury, Thomas N., Martin, Mike, Sutter-Stickel, Dorothee, Bodenmann, Guy). We need to learn how to communicate effectively and respect and value each other in order to avoid an unhealthy, toxic relationship. We need to learn how to form and maintain a long-lasting bond.

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