

## **Eight Tips for a Healthy Successful Relationship**

It's a typical Sunday and I am at the park walking my dogs. As I walk I notice many couples, some I recognize from previous trips to the park and others are new to me. I observe a mature couple that I have seen many times on my trip to the park. What brings my attention to this couple is that they always appear happy, smiling, talking with one another and holding hands. I find myself wondering what their story is, they look connected and in love.

So what's the secret you ask? As a couples and family therapist, I have had the privilege of walking alongside a couple's journey as they search for the answers to a successful relationship. Having been married for 29 years with three children, I have discovered that the foundation of a long lasting relationship begins with commitment. Relationships are not always easy and in order to endure the ups and downs it is necessary to be committed to one another. Although I do not believe there is one "secret" to a successful relationship, I would like to offer eight techniques for rekindling love, new found energy and caring in a relationship.

### **Remember what attracted you to the person in the first place?**

It's possible that what may have attracted you to your partner in the first place may eventually become a maddening characteristic as well. I suppose this is one of life's interesting paradoxes. For example, if one of the traits you fell in love with was your partner's work ethic, it might be the very thing that keeps your partner working late into the night, taking time away from you and the family. Perhaps you loved how organized your partner was when dating. For instance organizing social plans and making dinner reservations. Over time it may be perceived as controlling and perfectionistic. Perspective is everything. It is important to try and remember first dates, the feelings that were stirred, and rekindle them. You are, after all, still in a relationship to the same person that sparked that romance!

### **Remember what it was like to have fun together as a couple?**

Engage in an activity you both enjoy. Do what you used to do and consciously speak about the fun or romantic memories; try something you are both not very good at where you can each be a bit silly and carefree (try bowling or miniature golf!); and/or try something for the first time that you both think would be amusing (a cooking or couple's yoga class – where teamwork is an essential part of the activity).

### **Learn to compromise;**

Chances are your partner will have interests and hobbies that differ from yours. You may not enjoy some of your partner's activities and choose not to participate in them. Eventually, these differences may develop into feelings of resentment. I often see that couples can rapidly find themselves at a standstill. Try to break the pattern by compromising or taking the high road. This can demonstrate to your partner your willingness to participate in something you recognize is important to them. It may be emptying the dishwasher to going to the theater or football game. Healthy relationships establish give and take.

### **Relationship tune – up;**

Sometimes, the assistance of a third party professional can make all the difference. A wise therapist once said to me "seeking couples therapy periodically throughout your relationship is like getting a relationship tune-up". We maintain our vehicles shouldn't we maintain our relationships? So whether you and your partner are experiencing struggles or in need of a tune-up, couples therapy may help. That said, it can be difficult to persuade your partner to attend. Words matter. Instead of arguing about whether or not to take this step, try putting the responsibility on yourself so your partner will not feel blamed. For example, "I would like to gain a better perspective on what it is I do that leads to not fighting fair and square. It would help me a lot to have you at least try a session or two with me so that I can get your perspective on this as well."

### **Date Night;**

We live in a busy overscheduled world which can create distance in our relationships. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to schedule date nights. Put them into your calendars on a weekly basis and hold the date sacred. It is so important and needed to reconnect as a couple. Consider taking turns as to who will plan the date. Even taking time to go for a walk and a sandwich qualifies as time together. Remember it doesn't have to be expensive to be fun!

### **Agree to take a break;**

There may be times when a specific issue is creating havoc in your relationship. Agree to take a break from these issues or hot topics. If you find yourself in an ongoing loop arguing about the same issues (money, sex, children, in-laws, etc.), mindfully decide to take a moratorium. For example, decide "for the month of September, we agree not to bring up the hot-button issues." Additionally, you may come back together and decide it is best to agree to disagree and leave it at that. After trying these techniques

and you continue struggling with an issue, perhaps seeking counseling might be helpful.

**Communication is key:**

Some of the most helpful advice that I received from the same wise therapist was to “remember your partner is not a mind reader”. Communicate what you need in a realistic and kind way. Furthermore, rather than going from zero to 60 because your partner has yet again left the dishes in the sink, try something like this: “I know that you’re not intentionally trying to upset me, but I would greatly appreciate it if you would try your best to make a conscious effort to remember to load and empty the dishwasher. It would be a great help to me”. You will hopefully find when communicating with your partner using “I” statements, the outcome is much more successful. You feel heard and they don’t react defensively.

**It’s okay to not always be right:**

Would you rather be happy or right? I once asked a woman celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary what her advice is to maintaining a happy marriage. She summed it up as follows: “Would you rather be happy or right?” Enough said....

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