

Healthy Relationships

Carole W. Sebenick, Ph.D. (2004)

www.FairfaxPsychologist.com

We are bombarded by messages that promote relationship dynamics that are less than optimal, if not dysfunctional. Use the concepts listed below, as you contemplate the health of a relationship.

I. WHAT SOCIETY TELLS US RELATIONSHIPS SHOULD BE ABOUT

- A. Rigid gender roles
- B. “Love hurts” (enduring a lot of pain is a true sign of an important relationship)
- C. “Opposites attract” (it’s okay if you have nothing in common)
- D. “Love ‘em and leave ‘em” (if you’re cool, you’ll avoid commitment at all costs)
- E. Romanticized tragedy and despair
- F. Sex, sex, sex
- G. Conquest/seduction and submission

II. ASPECTS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:

- A. Respect (of self and other)
- B. Openness (honesty, communication, willingness to see self and other for who you really are--- not what you want or need the other person to be, opportunities for learning, not insular)
- C. Balance (support and challenge, power and responsibilities shared)
- D. Resilience (maturity, accommodating changing needs, working through tough times)
- E. Reality-based (informed, prepared for consequences, not operating out of irrational beliefs or external pressure)
- F. Shared interests and experiences

III. WHEN A RELATIONSHIP IS IN TROUBLE:

- A. Any episodes of violence (including verbal violence)
- B. Balance of power, responsibility, or neediness is disrupted for an extended time
- C. A third party takes a central role (triangulation)
- D. When behavior becomes inconsistent with intuition and values (not being true to yourself)
- E. When there is a significant power differential in social status (e.g., boss-subordinate)
- F. Extreme emotional ups and downs

IV. WHEN EVALUATING A RELATIONSHIP

- A. Are we interested in the same kind of relationship? (See attached “Types of Love Relationships”)
- B. “How does this relationship affirm who I am?”
- C. “How does this relationship help me to move toward my life goals?”
- D. “Does the relationship detract from other sources of pleasure in my life?”
- E. “Is the relationship a source of guilt, shame, or sadness more than it is a source of joy, peace, and encouragement?”

Types of Love Relationships

	PASSION (strong liking, sexual desire)	INTIMACY (warm friendship, deep understanding of each other)	COMMITMENT (pledge of devotion, future-oriented)
Friendship		✓	
Crush/Infatuation	✓		
Empty Love			✓
Romantic Love	✓	✓	
Companionship		✓	✓
Puppy Love	✓		✓
Enduring Love	✓	✓	✓
<i>Based on Psychologist Robert Sternberg's Theory of Love (1986)</i>			