Developing Healthy Relationships

You are in love. Your partner is your world.....means everything to you. You are inseparable. Your worlds revolve around each other. You derive your happiness from him/her. You feel empty without him/her. Sounds wonderfully romantic....the perfect relationship. Right?

Well, maybe not. In the early stages, we sometimes see a relationship in such idealized terms. Popular songs and movies certainly encourage us to expect this kind of blissful perfection. And relationships can be full of fun, romance, and excitement. However, healthy relationships will also see change; see intense feelings, boredom, comfort, struggle, closeness, distance, joy, pain, heartache and growth.

Expecting (and demanding) this perfection of ourselves, our partners or the relationship can lead to some unhealthy behaviors, such as relying on our relationship for all of our good feelings, being too tolerant, being too giving, and compromising what you want to please your partner. These behaviors not only risk the relationship, but more importantly risk your sense of self and happiness.

Consider these guidelines to help you develop meaningful, healthy relationships in all areas of your life.

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Know yourself
Before you involve yourself with another person, it is important to know yourself....what you value, what you want from life. Know that you are lovable, deserving of love and capable of returning love. When you know and are responsible for yourself, you are in a better position to remain true to yourself.

Be respectful
Being respectful in a relationship means that each partner values the other as a separate individual. When we are respectful of each other, we listen without criticism to what the other says, show understanding of differences, and do not challenge others' decisions or boundaries.

Trust yourself & your partner
Trust in a relationship means that each of you is confident in your feelings for each other. Another way to put it is that there is an absence of significant jealousy or vulnerability in the relationship. Because of this security, each of you is free to be involved with others and pursue your own interests without taking away from the relationship.
Use good communication
Building a foundation to a trusting relationship begins with open and truthful communication between partners. Good communication requires specific skills and a concerted effort from both partners. Skills include: asserting your needs and not expecting your partner to know what you are thinking or feeling, asking not ordering, compromising not controlling, maintaining a spirit of good will, discussing behaviors not personalities, and focusing on the present not past grievances. These skills work to reduce defensiveness, critical communication, and domineering behaviors that lead to emotional distance and a breakdown of trust.

Show support
Showing support means consistently providing an emotionally affirming and understanding attitude towards your partner. In a supportive relationship, there is recognition that your partner has a right to his/her own goals, feelings, friends, decisions, activities, and opinions which may differ from yours.

Maintain separate identities
While you and your partner will spend much time together and share many goals and interests, it is equally important to recognize the freedom to pursue new interests, friends, and moving forward outside of your partner. You are two people and much of the excitement and interest in the relationship may come from the differences you bring to it. It is important to remember that you have a right to privacy in your own life and set boundaries (both emotional and physical) while respecting your partner's boundaries as well.

Be fully committed
Make an effort to turn toward your partner emotionally in good as well as difficult times. Accept that there will be change and difficult times in the relationship. It is not a sign to run, but a time to come together and work to resolve conflicts. Recognize that while you are separate people, you can share mutual goals. If you intentionally give energy, time and attention to the relationship you will experience more satisfaction and fewer struggles.

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