

FINDING AND KEEPING LOVE
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If you're one of the lucky few who happen to be "in love", life is beautiful, you're busy thinking about roses and chocolate and romantic getaways (and this article isn't for you). But the time around Valentine's Day can be a difficult time, even a sad and lonely time, for those who:

- are desperately searching for Mr. (or Ms.) Right
- have "lost that loving feeling" in their marriage or relationship
- have recently broken off a relationship, separated or divorced

If it seems like you're having trouble finding love, or keeping it, you might be misinformed about what love is. Here are some **common misconceptions about love**:

- There will only be one true love in life: your "soul mate"
- You must find your "soul mate" in order to be happy
- "Love at first sight" is true love
- If you truly love each other, everything else will work itself out
- If the love has gone out of your relationship, it's time to move on

In his book "Getting the Love You Want", Harville Hendrix explains that most of us didn't get the kind of love we needed as children – even if our parents loved us dearly, they may not have known how to show it or give it in the way we wanted. So we unconsciously look for a partner who will love us the way we want to be loved, to make up for that lack. When the object of our affection isn't able to live up to those unrealistic expectations, we may feel angry, disappointed or rejected. We might even decide to give up on the relationship, which could be a mistake.

Another mistake people make is to get "love" and "chemistry" confused – while good physical chemistry is important for most of us, it's not enough to build a successful relationship on, nor is it essential for everyone. It's possible to be happy in a relationship without great sex, or even without "romantic" love. There are different kinds of love – in my experience, it's the kind that involves consistently treating someone with kindness, thoughtfulness, and respect that endures.

Here are what I believe to be the **elements for a successful relationship**:

1. **Respect** – for yourself, for your partner, and for your relationship
2. **Compatibility** – most of your strengths and weaknesses compliment, not conflict; you have enough similar interests, desire similar level of intimacy
3. **Shared values** – this is especially important if you have, or plan to have, children
4. **Good boundaries** – you're able to give each other space as needed
5. **Ability to deal with conflicts constructively** (conflicts are inevitable, and even necessary for a healthy relationship)
6. **Willingness to forgive** yourself and your partner, for not being perfect, and move on without resentments
7. And you **enjoy each other's company**, at least most of the time!