

ELEMENTS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

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After years of counseling couples, I've come to believe that *communication, especially about feelings, is overrated* as an essential element of a good relationship.

Some people are better communicators than others, and some are better at identifying and talking about feelings in particular. While it's often helpful to know what you are feeling, in fact it may not always be a good idea to tell your partner: you might hurt their feelings, or be misunderstood – or be understood and told you are wrong!

A familiar complaint: “She says she wants to know how I feel, but then when I tell her, she gets mad – or she tells me I shouldn't feel that way!” Message to partner: if you're not ready to hear the truth, then don't ask.

Actions speak louder than words: judge your partner, or a potential mate, by what they do more than what they say. Does he or she treat you with kindness and respect? *Mutual respect is the foundation of a good relationship*. Does he do what he says he's going to do? Does she keep her promises? *Being consistent and trustworthy* is an essential element of a healthy relationship.

So is *being attentive and considerate*. The simple little things count, like remembering to get his favorite brand of soda when you're at the grocery store. Each thoughtful gesture is like money in the bank (and a year's worth of them might just make up for forgetting your anniversary). A healthy relationship is one in which *each person feels understood and accepted* – for who they are, not who their partner hopes to change them into!

Another essential element is *personal responsibility*: in a healthy relationship, each person is accountable for his or her own behavior, but not responsible for controlling their partner's. Neither person treats the other like a child.

Being responsible for your own behavior means apologizing promptly and sincerely when you make a mistake, like forgetting to tell your partner that you'll be working late and won't be home for dinner. *Be quick to apologize for your mistakes*, and slow to blame your partner for theirs.

Conflict is a normal element in relationships. Happy couples know this, and deal with their conflicts in ways that aren't destructive. They've learned that *it's often better to be happy than right*, and that some disagreements don't have to get resolved.

One of the most important elements of a healthy relationship is *connection*: do you and your partner “check in” with each other about how your day went? Do you find ways to let your partner know that he or she is in your thoughts when you're apart? Do you feel like you're both on the same team, working toward the same goals?

And finally, an essential element is *enjoying each other's company*, whether out on a date at a fancy restaurant, or just hanging out at home.