

# 7 Keys to a Healthy and Happy Relationship

7 ways your relationship can reach its potential

Published on January 2, 2012 by Stephanie Sarkis, Ph.D. in Here, There, and Everywhere

Here's just a little primer of 7 signs of a healthy relationship.

## 1. Mutual Respect

If you don't have this - well, it's going to be a tough road. This doesn't mean you agree with everything your partner says or does. It does mean that you have admiration for each other, and steady undercurrent of love and trust throughout your relationship. You also have each other's back.

John Gottman, a pioneer in studying couples and marriage, could tell within minutes whether a couple was in it for the long haul or if they weren't going to make it - with startling accuracy. How could he tell? If there were any signs of contempt in the couple's interaction with each other, the relationship usually didn't make it.

Abuse, whether it is physical, verbal, or emotional, defies mutual respect in every way, shape and form. You have to have mutual respect to have a healthy relationship.

**2. Arguing, Not Fighting. I've never seen a healthy couple that doesn't argue. They never fight, however - they argue. If a couple comes into my office and tells me they've never argued, something isn't quite right.**

You can argue without fighting. Arguing is non-combative - you and your partner state your points of view without name-calling or raising your voice. Sometimes you agree to disagree - and that's okay. Figure out what your "non-negotiables" are - the things that you will not budge on. Now rethink that list. I like the saying "You can either be right, or married." Hopefully you and your partner's values (see #6 below) match up pretty well - that makes things much easier!

## 3. Agreement on Sex

You're both okay with how often you have sex, how you have sex, where you have sex...and there's mutual participation. Sex is not withheld as a

punishment. And if you or your partner are not comfortable with an aspect of your sex life, you can talk about it openly, without criticism.

You also find time to have sex. I don't care how busy or tired the two of you are - there is *always* time for sex.

#### **4. Agreement on Parenting**

There are basically three main styles of parenting:

a) Authoritarian: The rules are the rules are the rules. No exceptions.

b) Authoritative: This is what I refer to as a "Benevolent Dictatorship". There are rules, and kids can give their input, but the parents have the final say.

c) Lenient or "Laissez-faire": There are minimal rules.

If the two of you don't agree on a parenting style, you need to talk. Also, if you differ on whether your children should be spanked or not - you need to talk.

You may have each grown up with different parenting styles - and we each tend to parent the same way we were parented. If you don't have kids yet but are thinking about it, you must, must, must have this conversation with your partner.

People *can* change their personality styles. A lot of that depends on # 6 (below).

#### **5. Equality with Money**

Even if one of you makes more money than the other, you both have an equal say about where your money goes. There are no "hidden accounts", and you decide together before you make large purchases.

If you are the one in charge of the bill paying, you pay the bills on time. Period. If you can't pay the bills on time, turn over that job to your partner or hire someone to do it for you.

You decide on separate accounts if sharing a joint account is getting too complicated or frustrating. Does that hurt the intimacy of a relationship? No, it actually helps your intimacy. You are no longer fighting about money.

## **6. Common Goals and Values**

Couples with very different interests can have healthy relationships - what counts is that they share common goals and values. Couples of different religions (or non-religion) and cultural backgrounds can have healthy relationships - what makes a healthy relationship is sharing core beliefs. You may both share the belief that giving back to your community is important. You may both share the belief that extended family members are welcome to live with you at any time. Values and beliefs differ for everyone.

Common goals include intangibles like raising happy and healthy children, and tangibles like saving up for a house. You can work together on setting one-year, five-year, even ten- and twenty-year goals. Working towards something together strengthens your bond.

## **7. Fun**

"Sexiness wears thin after a while and beauty fades, but to be married to a man who makes you laugh every day, ah, now that's a real treat." - Joanne Woodward

Enough said. Make time to have fun. Life gets too serious without receiving regular doses of humor.