

THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

This is not a definitive list. It does, however, itemise the majority of those principles needed for a healthy and successful relationship.

1. Communication

Communication that is open and honest is the greatest evidence of love. Only through open and honest communication can the bridges of understanding and respect be built. Unless we dare to step into another person's reality, we are left standing on the platform of assumption. Sometimes our assumptions will be accurate, but often they will merely reflect our own projections. And so, the first and foremost of these essential principles is communication. For this, time has to be made to consciously sit and share one's innermost reflections. Communication needs to be proactive rather than reactive. One should not wait until there is a pressing need to share one's feelings. The act of sharing should be an ongoing and continuous process in which both parties freely and willingly participate. So, make time on a regular basis to speak from the heart.

2. Honesty

Frequently in relationships individuals subjugate their feelings by denying, pretending and justifying etc. Most relationships lose their way, forcing each individual to become increasingly insular and superficial, talking less and less about what really matters. In order to change this, make a pledge to yourself and to each other to say what you really feel, as and when it arises. If, in the moment, it is not appropriate, then at least raise the flag for the need for discussion at some future point. Don't leave things unsaid; they will simply be stored and grow into something bigger, that in some way or another handicaps the relationship.

3. Compromise

So many relationships are disabled by the lack of compromise. Too often, due to stubbornness and dogma, individuals within relationships are fixed in their own camps, rarely daring to venture beyond their own view and opinion. Because of the unwillingness to step into the other's shoes, small yet meaningful compromises which would enhance the relationship and be mutually beneficial are simply not undertaken. Pointless exchanges then continue unabated when in fact the original reason for conflict no longer exists. It is simply the habit of the role play that continues. An easy way to be free of this pattern is to practice being the other person in the relationship and learn the art of 'active listening'. Until we have the courage to step outside of our own view and perspective, we will always be caged by the limitation of that attitude and approach.

4. Spontaneity

The reason so many relationships, rather than maturing with time actually decay and break down, is in part due to a lack of spontaneity. Relationships, especially of the intimate kind, need the injection of the unpredictable and the unusual. So, in order to keep a relationship youthful, developing and beneficial, do those things that are outside of the ordinary every now and then. Ensure that you don't take the other for granted.

5. Respect

It is so easy, particularly in intimate relationships, to lose sight of what is beautiful in the other person. It is when we lose sight of such beauty that relationships find themselves on difficult terrain. If your relationship is to blossom and achieve its potential, then mutual respect is important. Therefore, find time regularly to point out the good in each other and celebrate each other's virtues and qualities. Maintain respect for each other and you will never take the blessing of your relationship for granted.

6. Trust

In truth, trust is the foundation of a successful relationship. Trust flourishes when all other qualities are present, for example, honesty, communication, respect etc. Without these qualities, trust will never develop. It requires faith and courage to increase its stature and influence within a relationship, especially where the relationship has broken down and is therefore in need of repair. One needs to invest belief in the other person (faith) and underpin this with courage to allow trust to grow. Unless you dare to believe in the possibility of positive change, a fresh start will never be possible.

7. Friendship

The biggest oversight made in so many intimate relationships is the one of friendship, because in truth, one's life partner should be one's best friend. In time, everything on the physical level fades and all that one will be left with is friendship. This is where so many relationships break down because they are built on physical attraction, lust, infatuation etc. and the foundation for a successful relationship is friendship. Make time to develop common interests that will allow both parties to prosper within the relationship. By all means pursue those things that may individually be important but don't lose sight of creating space, time and activities specifically aimed at the growth of the relationship.

8. Quality Time

In view of all the things listed so far, it will come as no surprise that the commodity that makes all these things possible is time. So many relationships lose their essence and beauty

because the value of time is not understood and respected. If you want your relationship to go from strength to strength then you must make time simply to be with each other - not necessarily with an agenda or a focus but just to be in each other's company in a way that is relaxing, nurturing and reflective.

9. Responsibility

Unless we take responsibility for our actions and are willing to own our mistakes, then relationships go round in ever decreasing circles because core issues never get resolved. So, it is crucial to take responsibility for one's own contribution to the challenges that the relationship may be facing and more than that, to take the responsibility for change. So, individually and collectively, identify what stands in the way of the relationship, and play your part in creating the solution. Don't expect change - make it happen.

10. Accommodation

Unless we are willing to be flexible, adjusting and responding constructively and creatively to the blockages in the relationship, nothing can change. There really is no value in relentlessly pointing the finger of blame. If we are to break cycles and patterns that exist in relationships, then there will be periods where we need to understand that the other's change cannot come overnight and therefore a degree of tolerance and patience is needed. Both parties need to develop this kind of self-talk otherwise their expectation of the other will undermine both their endeavours.

11. Fun and Laughter

'Laughter is the shortest distance between two people'. It is a universal language that everyone the world over understands. Intimate relationships often forget to maintain this spark. Happiness is our greatest commodity and so obviously an absence of it will cause us to go in search of it elsewhere. The truth is that real happiness comes from within and therefore, if it is to exist in a relationship, both parties must cultivate their own happiness whilst engaging in the positive exchange of fun and laughter. So, find ways to bring lightness, sweetness and a child-like nature to the interactions you have. To be too serious destroys humour. Learn to laugh at yourself and each other without malice or negative intent.

12. Encouragement and Support

In intimate relationships, where so much gets taken for granted, it is vital to encourage and support one another. Often greater encouragement and support comes from, or is sought, outside of the relationship, but in an ideal world most would be found within it. Though there will undoubtedly be times when one partner is in greater need than the other, neither should take the mantle of total responsibility but each should identify those areas where the other

needs support and encouragement. As long as the attitude of reciprocation is maintained, then a balance will be struck.

13. Love and Commitment

One of the most over-used and least understood words is the word love. Love is not about kissing or sex etc., although it may have a physical display, which can be legitimately called love. Real love, however, is about commitment, honesty, truth and integrity, care and responsibility. In fact, love is all the things listed and more. It is a synergy of everything that is good, kind and untainted. Love asks for nothing for itself and is willing to give abundantly in return. Until we find unconditional love in our relationships, our giving will always have the price tag of expectation. This will create the potential for repetitive disappointment when those expectations aren't met. Of course, there needs to be a foundation on which a relationship is built, but beyond that, if one truly loves another then it is really about giving without counting. So, practice enjoying the benefit of giving rather than receiving and then receiving becomes a natural by-product of your interactions.