



Seven Ways Of Building A Strong Relationship

The Relationship Maze

therelationshipmaze.com

Learn to understand yourself



In each relationship there are two people who are coming together – both bringing with them a wealth of experiences which influence the way that they view and make sense of the world. Your own experience will provide you with a lens through which you filter and interpret interactions with your partner. Being clear what makes you react in a way enables you to review and reassess your responses. Sometimes your reactions may not be very helpful; they may be rooted in earlier experiences which merited a particular response then. Understanding yourself enables you to have more control over your actions responding in a calmer, more measured way. It also enables you to have more compassion for yourself and to be less self-blaming or critical.

Being open to each other's perspectives

While the focus in the early days of the relationship is very much on similarity, the longer you know each other the more aware you become of your differences. After all it's highly unlikely that your upbringing and your experiences as adults were the same. Consider your partner's differences as an opportunity to develop a different perspective. Or alternatively, take the opportunity to test the robustness of your own points of view. Do they always stand up to being tested?



Moving towards differentiation

In a mature relationship both partners have learned that they need to learn to balance separateness with togetherness. This means that partners can both depend on each other as well as be independent of each other. Differentiation is the opposite of emotional fusion where both partners say that they are 'one'. In today's world there is a lot of emphasis on independence and autonomy, but you can only truly be independent in relation to another person. Otherwise you are simply alone. Most relationships go through a form of power struggle in relation to separateness and closeness and relationships that achieve a good balance between the two will be stronger; both partners feel more connected.



Paying attention to your relationship

In our busy lives it is easy to get swept away by all sorts of demands, be they related to work, friends, wider family or to your children. Relationships do need tending to and nurturing. Couples who regularly pay attention to their relationship by making time for each other – however brief- fare better. Ensure that you create time in your relationship to 'check in' with each other, enquiring after your partner's wellbeing, not just their daily routine. Don't take your relationship for granted. Surprise your partners occasionally with a gesture that demonstrates your love. Make time for fun activities too.





Being able to listen and talk to each other

Listening to your partner is not easy. This is particularly true if you feel wounded by something your partner did or said. Conversely, it's also not easy to hear your partner tell you that you have hurt them. Really listening to what your partner has to say takes practice. It is hard not to interrupt and step in with your own point of view. It may be equally hard to honestly express how you feel. However, not letting your partner know what you are feeling, in particular if you are feeling angry, will not be helpful in the long run. Sulking or punishing your partner in other ways is undermining and does not resolve the issue.

Knowing how (not) to argue

Arguments are normal in any relationship as you both will have different perspectives in life. Being able to listen and talk are the foundations of building a strong relationship and clarifying your different positions. Arguing may require some rules in your relationship - it helps to have agreement what is not acceptable, e.g. using insulting language, being disparaging of each other's families or dragging up the past again and again. In addition, there are other factors that are particularly undermining like constant criticism, putting each other down, not being able to take on board what your partner is expressing or not making yourself emotionally available to your partner.



Understanding your different relational styles

When growing up and in subsequent relationships you developed an attachment style: secure or insecure. This style will influence the way that you both view your partner. If you both have an insecure attachment style where one or both of you are anxious or avoidant you will need to develop some understanding of how you both influence and trigger each other. Your attachment system will get activated in situations where you are both feeling less safe in the relationship. Spotting the signs, your own as well as your partner's way of reacting and knowing what to do in this situation will bring safety and stability into your relationship. Having safety and stability in turn can enable both of you to be more playful and take risks occasionally too.

