

## **Relationships**

When things aren't going well in the relationship department, the whole Valentine's Day hoopla can be painful. Love isn't all romance and sweetness. One of the symbols of Valentine's Day is the heart shot with an arrow. This goes back to the ancient Greeks. Cupid was the son of the Goddess of Love. He was responsible for making people fall in love. He would shoot their hearts with his arrow to make them love. The significance of this is profound. Love hurts. It does; there is no getting away from this.



Where most people get into trouble is in thinking that love should be that romantic, butterflies in stomach, "in love" feeling forever. But that soon fades, for everyone. That's often when people think that their relationship is over. "We just stopped loving each other" people say. But that's not what happened. It's just the way love works. It shifts and changes and reacts very well to nurturing and attention that comes with relationship work. But it won't be that magical, falling-in-love, heady emotion that sent you into your relationship. You can't sustain that. It doesn't last. But there are things that do.

Let's talk about that.

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## **What's love got to do with it?**

**-Not much.**

Often, when people's marriages are in trouble it seems that no matter how bad things are, how dysfunctional or even abusive I hear the same thing, at least from the women, "but I LOVE him!" usually uttered interspersed with sobs. Somehow, we've been conditioned to accept the fact that love means suffering, enduring the unendurable. That where love is, reason isn't. That's a dangerous idea. And it's wrong.

### **What makes a relationship work?**

What makes a relationship work isn't love, not really. Love comes after. And certainly not the sort that makes one cling to someone who abuses us. Love doesn't build relationships, it doesn't make them work and it doesn't make them last, despite all the movies and novels that use that tired cliché that love is the thing that makes it all come out right in the end. Well then, what does make a relationship work if it isn't love? Here is a summary of how people in a healthy, happy relationship act.

They are friends. They like each other. If they weren't in a relationship, they'd be best friends and want to hang out together. They enjoy spending time together. Not only friends, but they're good friends. They are supportive. They try to keep each other from getting hurt.

They talk to each other. Really talk. About important things, meaningful things. They enjoy talking to each other. It makes them happy.

They show interest in each other. They care about what the other is feeling.

People in healthy relationships know what's important to the other person and it pleases them to try to give it to them.

People in healthy relationships want to give to their partners without expecting something back. Giving with the expectation that you will get something back is not really giving.

They respect each other. They don't talk negatively to or about each other. They don't rub their partner's nose in past mistakes or shame them over their character flaws.

Happily married people feel great affection for each other. Even the small things that drive them crazy are overlooked and accepted.

They are tuned into each other. Their partner's needs are important to them. They ask, "Is everything ok with you? Can I help?"

There is great commitment to the relationship with these people. Being together is more important than getting their own way.

They nurture their relationship. They actively listen to each other, so each feels heard. They put their partners first. They'll tell you relationships are work, and they work at it.

### What's love got to do with it?

Love comes from these ten things and others. It grows where it is tended and nurtured. No one loves being abused. No one loves being ignored. When two people care about each other as friends, as people who are dear to them, who they are affectionate toward and respectful of then love can grow. Love isn't a cause, it's an effect. It grows or it withers depending upon what you feed it.

### And what about sex?

Sex is also able to flourish and improve in this environment. It's hard to be passionate about someone who doesn't treat us kindly or dislikes us. For women, if they don't feel intimacy, they have trouble wanting sex. For men, intimacy comes with having sex. So they can often be at cross-purposes. But over time, and it does take time, as the relationship improves, sex will come more naturally. It will improve and lead to deeper levels of intimacy and loving expression.

Making changes to the nature of your relationship improves all aspects of it, even sex. But it doesn't happen overnight. You can't say, "I went to the stupid mall with her and she STILL didn't want to have sex!" It isn't a tit for tat, so to speak, situation.

Probably the most important piece of advice I could give people in a struggling relationship is "Stop thinking about yourself." Too often, people are obsessed with their own needs and all they want is to see those needs met and to hell with the other ones needs. If you focus on the other (and this takes time), on doing things with them and for them, with respect and affection and without expecting anything in return, you will find that if both partners do this, that everyone's needs will be met and the relationship will grow strong and healthy and all aspects improve, communication, fun, friendship and yes, sex.

Does your partner make you happy? No!

I'll leave this with one last thought. In the end, people make themselves happy. You can't expect another person to fulfill all your needs, to "make" you happy. A healthy relationship is between two whole people. Not two needy people clinging to each other desperate for the other to complete them, to make them happy. That's not their role in life. It's yours.

### **Getting back to basics**

There are ways to help a couple back to friendship, back to respect, to re-structure a strained relationship to be an environment in which trust, love and passion can once again flourish. It takes commitment on both sides. It takes time and it takes compromise.

For those experiencing relationship difficulties, it's important to know that you are not alone. It happens to almost everyone when reality comes bang up against the urban myth of how love should be. And that just because it isn't perfect doesn't mean it's over. Give me a call and we can talk about it, without blame, alone or as a couple.

## **Does Your Marriage Have a Flat Tire?**

### ***Auntie Stress***

By: Marianna Paulson B.Ed., B.P.E.-O.R.



Whether it's a new romance or one that has rolled easily along, life has a way of creating break-downs. Those break-downs could be as quick as a blow-out or could be like a slow leak. Regardless, both have the same result over time - a flat tire or a flat relationship.

Very few people drive around without a spare tire in their car. In fact, they may be better-prepared for a flat tire than they are for the relationship break-downs.

Your married life can change in a heartbeat. Serious illness. Job loss. Relocation. Increased work load. Unexpected bills. Children in trouble. Family issues. All of these events can put even the soundest of relationships to the test.

Without adequate tools and techniques the stress that results from these pressures continue to wreck havoc, both externally and internally. Each bout of negative thinking results in a cascade of 1,400 physical & chemical changes which affect us both in the short and long-term.

Externally, there may be an increased incidence of addictions (alcohol, drugs, food, etc.). Communication breaks down and people may choose to withdraw in order to cope. Or, the number of arguments grow. In either case, intimacy suffers.

Internal changes include changes in sleep patterns, digestive upset, irritability, loss of memory. Stress has a connection to a number of serious illnesses. Over time, it may lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, high cholesterol and immune and fertility issues.

Stress is defined as our internal interpretation of events that leads to internal strain. If your marriage is developing or has a "flat tire," one of the best things you can for yourself is to seek out professional help with a counsellor to understand the rough patches and to give you the tools you need to hold things together mentally and emotionally. Next is to ensure that you have tools and techniques in place to transform your stress. This allows you to look after your emotional, physical and mental health, and get back on the road, whichever one it may be, faster and with more ease.

Change of Heart Stress Solutions

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