

Avoid Divorce – get skilled!

Making your marriage work is all about knowing what successful couples do to create an harmonious relationship.

Here are some of the key dynamics in relationship which I explain to couples I work with. Without these insights, you are likely to struggle. In brief, here are the essentials.

You are no doubt aware, that certain of your own behaviours have the potential to create conflict in your relationship, and that other behaviours have the effect of enhancing it.

1. Understand, accept, and support your own personality style and that of your partner. It is a mistake to think that you can change your partner (and why would you want them to become a clone of you anyway), and those who try to do this are doomed to fail.

2. Personalities are different because their needs and values are different. Ignorance of, ignoring, or non-acceptance of one's own needs and that of your partner's are the key reason people get emotional, and conflict abounds. Any skilled therapist will encourage you to bring an end to destructive behaviours, and instead access the underlying needs and values which, when not recognised, lead to unhelpful behaviours.

3. When needs are not met, or values not respected and accepted, even when we don't recognise that this is happening (which is often), strong feelings arise. What feelings come up for you? These feelings are basically saying to you "Pay attention! Something which is flying under your radar is not working for you. Deal to it!" or alternatively "Something is happening in your life that doesn't met your needs and values, and I (the feeling) will hassle you until you deal with it!"

4. Emotions therefore tell you when things aren't working for you, and also tell you when they are. The blueprint for your emotional reactive style was established in childhood, in combination with your underlying wiring. You don't have to know about these details though. All you've got to do is know that your feelings are your guidance system, and must be taken seriously

and listened to. Read the article “Conflict Styles” to see what style and patterning you will bring to virtually any relationship.

5. Most people think that conflict is caused by the behaviour of their partner. In truth, though, it is caused by difference, and so differences – brought into the light by reactive emotions, must be accepted and understood, and blame (or self or other) left out in the woodshed – the only place for it. You will discover that your emotional reaction in relationship is almost totally about you rather than the other person. It will usually take skilled therapeutic help for both spouses to see this.

6. A good start to your work together is to ask yourself two essential questions. a. “What does the fact that I was attracted to my partner say about me, and what does the fact that I’m bothered by my partner say about me?” b. “What am I like to live with? How many others would also find me difficult to live with, and for what reasons?”

Understand who you are, and who the other is

1. For the most part, we are all damaged. Having said that, don’t be fooled into thinking that there’s anything ‘wrong’ with you. At worst, you are behaving ‘badly’ because your needs are not being met or your values respected. The same is true of your partner. Understand, then, who you both are, how you tick, what you like, and what you don’t like.

2. We are attracted and drawn to those who are different to us. Difference provides variety, interest and allows us to find out ‘who we are’ when we are with those who are ‘not the way we are.’ However, you will be drawn to another more because of similarities than difference. Talk about and discover what commonalities you share.

3. We also tend to love those qualities in others that are either like us, or resonate with a part of us that would like to have qualities like the loved person. It is this admiration or triggering of an unmet need that leads us to love another. Again, discuss and discover what these qualities are.

4. Relationships therefore provide opportunity to discover what we like and dislike by being in the presence of someone who is different. It is this comparative process that helps us discover who we are and want to be.

5. We can very easily interpret these differences as being unacceptable, bothersome, frustrating, or downright wrong. When this happens, we have lost sight of the fact that features in our partner that may once have attracted us, have now become unattractive to us. Behind all behaviours we see in our partner now, are patterns that were present, even if mostly dormant, when we first got together. Harville Hendrix, author of *Keep the Love You Find*, considers that we are drawn to those who have, like our parents, the potential to heal us and to further damage us. Interesting? 6. Relationship requires, therefore, that we learn to work with, and understand, difference. Otherwise, we are destined to repeat this dynamic, over and over again.

7. Relationships also trigger unmet needs from childhood. They thus provide an opportunity to find out who we are, and how we've been damaged, by the way in which we react. We react emotionally when we overlook, (often mirrored by our partner overlooking) needs we have which we've been ignoring.

8. It is easy to make the mistake that our emotions and preferences are telling us about the other person. We call this a projection. It is an illusion. What really happens, is that our partner brings up stuff within us that is waiting for a supportive relationship for the healing process to be possible.

9. Thus, relationship invites participants to consciously notice what is happening, rather than to unconsciously react. We can choose to be and do what leads to our growth, or we can live blind to our inner world that is being activated by the relationship dynamics. To become familiar with your reactive style, visit [Conflict styles](#)

10. Successful couples support this voyage of discovering what is going on within each other by staying loving of the other whilst endeavouring to support the other to more fully become who s/he is.

11. Relationships then, provide an opportunity for us to notice which part of us is going to 'turn up' in any given situation, and why. When we can accept whatever turns up in self or other, and learn to express the related feeling and associated need or value, we grow and the relationship does also.

12. The purpose of a relationship is not to provide someone to lean on and to heal the lonely, unsure, doubting part inside of us. Rather, it is to provide an opportunity in which we can consciously become complete within ourselves by addressing our own needs, wants and values.

13. The irony here, then, is that without another person, we are quite literally nothing, because we can only discover and express parts of self through relating. Our mate can do nothing to make us be anything or anyone – that is totally up to us.

14. So long as we are relying on our partner to 'be someone' or 'be the person we want them to be', then disappointment is inevitable. It is a challenge for all of us to accept them as they are, and to know that they are bound to have warts of their specialist variety.

15. Relying on another person to be who we want them to be is thus fraught with problems, because we can't control another, or have them change to fit our needs, values, attitudes or wants. Yet, most individuals think that their relationship will get better when their partner changes in the way they, the partner, prescribe. And this would normally require that the partner to be more like self – yuk!

16. Thus, it is through focusing on the other that relationships fail. Healthy couples support each other to autonomously support, expand, change and experience the self.

17. Couples often operate from the unconscious perspective that if they love another, then the other will love them. Then they will have the love they seek, and can then love themselves. This will never work successfully. You must love and accept yourself first, and then you will be a more attractive mate, and one that is more lovable to the partner. Only then, will you get the love back that you seek. Thus, love self first, love the other next, and then seek to be loved.

18. It doesn't matter what your partner is doing, being, hoping, having, saying, needing, wanting or demanding. Your job is just to support them taking care of themselves, and not doing all the work. Your job is to notice who the other is, and how they are, but not to fix or alter them. Your job is to love and support self no matter what is discovered about self or the other. Again, love must begin at home (within you).

19. By loving self and by putting self first, we can live and act out of integrity. Then, if it serves our highest good to do so (and it often will), we can make ourselves available to support our partner. Because of what we want for ourselves, it can serve us well to support the needs of others – to a point. We must never help others at the cost of not honouring our own needs, wants and values.

20. Because they are wanting to please or be loved by the other, many lose themselves in relationship. They lose track of who they are, and what they need. They then blame this on the other, and hurt, resentment and anger result. Always take care of your own needs, as well as supporting the other and the needs of the relationship in general. This can result in a person feeling less than when they were single, because they've given up so much of self in order to keep, save and serve the relationship.

21. The irony is that we must be selfish in order to make a relationship work. Selfish is not the same as narcissistic. Being centered on self requires awareness of and commitment to self first so that the relationship can be served honestly and with integrity. Anyone who martyrs themselves to someone else is going to find themselves in an unsatisfactory relationship.

22. The way forward is to notice your feelings, and the needs or values that these are alerting you to. Then you can approach your partner and express these. Eg "I was hurt and angry when you walked out on me with a word. My request is that you tell me what is going on for you, so that I can hear what your needs are and do my best to support you to meet those."

23. Learn to listen, to hear without interrupting, and to acknowledge how the other is feeling. But don't own the other's reaction as if it was caused by you. Unless you've been abusive or controlling, you're not responsible for how another person chooses to feel.

The ten ingredients of a successful primary relationship.

1. Chemistry A quickening of energy with the person loved. This is often called 'chemistry.' Chemistry may play out as passion. There are some who consider that this special energetic connection is a carry-over from a past-

life relationship of some sort, giving the feeling that you've known this special person for a long time. The presence of chemistry provides zing in a relationship, but this can still fade if some other requirements are not met. Chemistry may generate intense feelings, but while these can be strongly positive, they can also be fiercely negative.

2. Existence of true love The ability to love the other person, for whom they are – unconditionally. This is considered to be a 'legitimate need' of all human beings, and fundamental to a successful relationship. It works best if each partner has a high regard – is loving and accepting – of self.

Genuine love will only follow 'falling in love' if the uniqueness – warts and all – of one's partner can be appreciated, respected, honoured, and accepted. Few can sustain this for a prolonged period of time. Love, like chemistry, is a requirement, but not sufficient, to sustain a relationship.

3. Understanding A loving couple understand and accept each other, especially in regards to needs, wants, attitudes and values. This comes from appreciating that people are different, why they are, and being able to manage that fact. Understanding and acceptance is arguably the most difficult challenge in most relationships. Without it, love can die. It is necessary to comprehend the dynamics of relationship, and points 4 to 8 below especially, for such an understanding to be present.

4. A good match of needs. Needs mismatches create tension, disagreements, and ultimately the conflicts that sabotages the relationship. Successful relationships have a high needs match, and low needs mismatch. Matching needs may play out as passion, purpose and alignment, while mismatches as conflict. Neediness, caused by childhood wounding, results in the most serious of mismatches, and thus conflict. If couples are able to recognize, respect and support each others' needs, this will hugely enhance the survival of the relationship. Successful couples choose to act in loving ways, even during times of conflict. Love is expressed as provision of the needs of acceptance, respect, listening, supporting, and being available when the chips are down.

5. A good match of values. Values are beliefs about the 'right' way to live life, and act as a guide to what is important and what is not. Couples who come from a similar cultural, ethnic, or religious background, or who are very flexible and accepting of difference, will find this requirement easiest. Successful relationships have a high values match, and a low values mismatch. Again when acceptance, respect and valuing of the partner is

present, different values are accepted as part of the others' uniqueness and are acceptable (even if uncomfortable).

6. Personality or Gender differences. We are born different to others, and gender difference creates the most obvious of these. These show up as needs mismatches, but their origin lies in 'wiring' differences caused by character preferences or styles and also in gender typing. These differences are hugely variable, such as styles of getting needs met, feelings that are most often felt, ability and style of conversing, coping strategies, patterns of reaction to conflict, and ways of expressing love – all these amount to needs and preferences of one sort or another. Men and women often find that they are often wired differently, and react to this. However, these differences must be understood, accepted and worked with by each partner.

7. Commitment to personal growth. The need to own and address personal reactions to the other's behaviour. These reactions are based on unmet needs, many of which are 'deficiency needs' with their roots in childhood dramas. Whenever we react, our emotional guidance is alerting us to insights, understanding, needs or values which are demanding to be heard and acknowledged – if we are listening. When I work with couples, I can always tell those who are likely to succeed because they are both committed to working on, discussing, and problem-solving issues that arise in their relationship, and are both capable of owning behaviours they have which don't contribute towards harmony. Check out Make me into an excellent partner!

8. Successfully addressing your dysfunctions. Personality tendencies that make it very difficult for anyone to be in relationship with you must be addressed. Virtually any relationship requires, in order to succeed, that you are mentally and emotionally balanced, honest, faithful, trustworthy, compassionate, loving, emotionally available, intimate and vulnerable. Acting like a Victim, Rescuer or Persecutor will undermine a relationship in no time, and these are inevitable if your neediness tendencies are not healed. An unwillingness to address one's reactivity is tantamount to an unwillingness to be responsible for the state of your relationship.

9. Commitment to each other. Because relationships have their ups and downs, it is essential that partners feel secure in the knowledge that the relationship will hold together while issues are addressed. This only works

successfully, though, in concert with point 8 above. Commitment makes no sense when old conflicts continually re-emerge and are not being addressed, and even less sense if power plays are still occurring. Commitment to stay together must go hand in hand with commitment to helping each other get the best out of the relationship.

10. Skills of partnership. There are many skills that will enhance a relationship, and many that must be present for partnership success. Listening skills, sharing skills, being intimate, taking about commitment to each other, being respectful, being appreciative, valuing, being kind, giving love, spending time together, supporting each other's needs, and knowing how to manage and heal conflict are some of the many skills needed to make a relationship succeed. These skills, in conjunction with 7 above, are lacking or are underdeveloped in many relationships. It takes commitment to constantly better your communication style, and especially to work out ways of working through conflict for the betterment of the partnership.

This article is not meant as an alternative to counselling with a well trained therapist. A third party skilled in this work will help you quickly get to the core issues preventing a relationship from reaching its potential.