



TOGETHERNESS



*Keys to Making It Happen
In Your Relationship*

by Rachel Rider



All Rights Reserved

Copyright © 2010 MeetYourSweet.com

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the speaker(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of MeetYourSweet.com.

No part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted or distributed in any form or by any means, electrical or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from MeetYourSweet.com.

The information contained in this book is provided 'as is' without warranty of any kind. The entire risk as to the results and the performance of the information is assumed by the user, and in no event shall MeetYourSweet.com be liable for any consequential, incidental or direct damages suffered in the course of using the information in this book.



INTRODUCTION4

TOGETHERNESS5

GET YOURSELF TOGETHER.....7

HOW DO YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF? 10

TOGETHERNESS IN LOVE.....15

SEXUAL TOGETHERNESS19

STAYING TOGETHER.....26

STAYING TOGETHER THROUGH TOUGH TIMES.....31

GROWING APART35

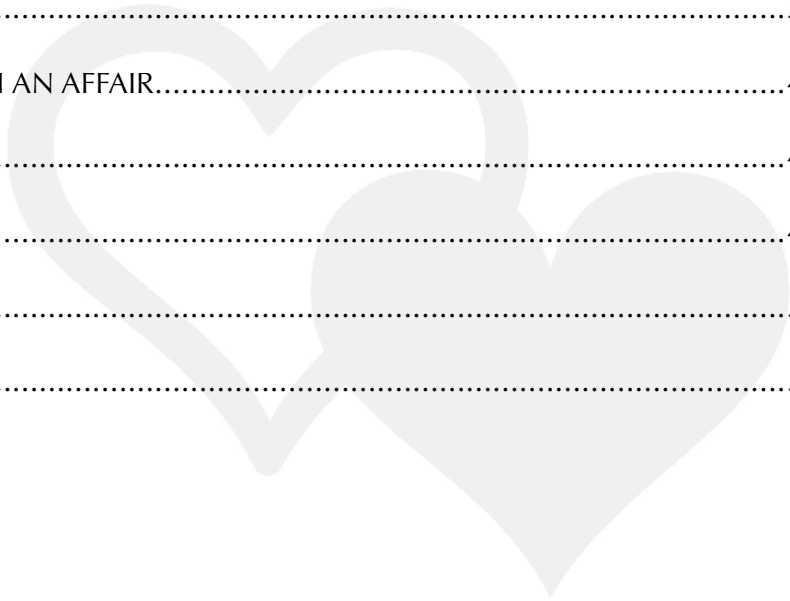
STAYING TOGETHER THROUGH AN AFFAIR.....42

STRUGGLING TOGETHER46

CONTEMPLATING SEPARATION49

GETTING BACK TOGETHER51

REAL TOGETHERNESS54





INTRODUCTION

When you think about the word “together”, what’s the first thing that comes to mind?

Is it about having someone to commit to or spend time with – having a partner?

Is it about feeling close to another person?

Is it about someone who has things under control?

In a relationship, the word “together” carries a lot of weight. You say “my husband and I have been together for x number of years”... Or that you do things “together”.

We use the word so often in the context of relationships that we can assume that togetherness is an important value each partnership must have.

However, we realize too quickly that not all relationships have got it “together”. Relationships fall apart all the time.

It’s not easy to get together, to stay together, and, more importantly, to get back together after a separation.

That’s why we came up with this Special Report. It’s about togetherness. It will tell you what togetherness is about, and what it’s not. And you may just be surprised what you discover.

Read on!

Rachel Rider

Author of ‘Relationship Recovery.’

TOGETHERNESS

“How long have you been together?” A celebrity interviewer asks a famous couple. And the couple proceeds to answer in days, weeks, months or years.

Here’s a question, though -- is togetherness measured in units of time?

We really can’t blame human beings for measuring things in terms of age. We look up to people who live longer, stay married longer, or have excelled at a particular job for a long time. We believe that with age comes experience.

However, in spite of this valuable insight, divorce rates all over the world are in record numbers. Relationships are rocked by affairs, communication problems, personal crisis and a whole range of challenges and issues.

These days, couples already encounter a lot of baggage even before a relationship can take off. They hear about theories that human beings are not supposed to be monogamous; they read statistics about divorce; and they have as role models Hollywood celebrities in revolving door relationships.

Moreover, they’ve been fed a steady diet of on-and-off relationships among their circle of friends, family, and acquaintances.

Apparently, as a consequence of our disposable culture, relationships falter and are discarded before they’re given a chance to survive.

In light of these problems, what, then, does it mean to be together if you’re actually expecting to be apart?

A lot of couples seem to believe that since they’ve poured years into a marriage, the quality of a relationship is a given. The sheer number of failed relationships indicates that this is not the case.

These days, it seems that staying together is not an easy prospect.

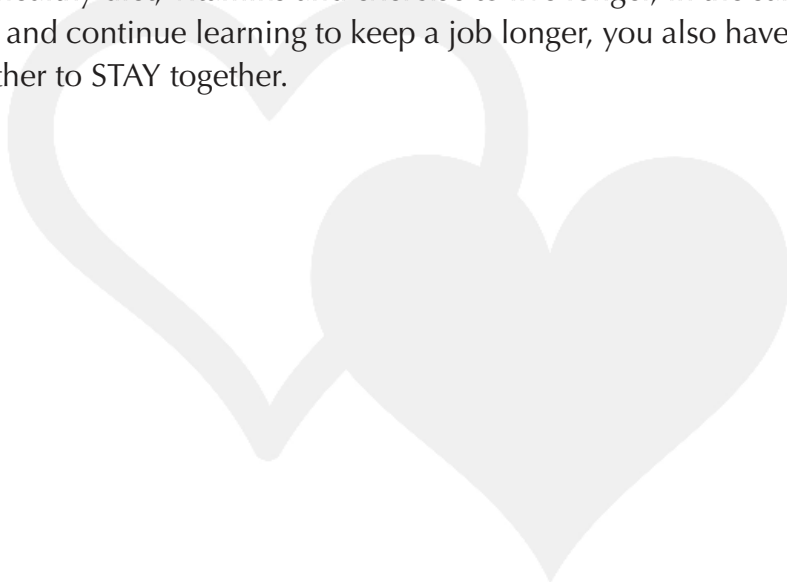
Ask yourself - what is the quality of togetherness in your relationship? What does being

together mean for the two of you? Do you understand what it entails? Are you at that stage where the possibility of staying together is threatened? Or are you at that stage where you are considering getting together with someone?

Togetherness is defined in many ways. It is described as a feeling of being close to another person emotionally. The word communicates a sense of warmth and fellowship; it brings to mind images of family, a hug, a mother and her child, singing in harmony. It also conjures up visions of growing old with your partner, being in tune with him or her, and having confidence in yourself and in your relationship.

We all know that a relationship takes time, trust, and effort to build. However, perhaps the first insight a couple needs to learn about togetherness is that, more than quantity, its QUALITY. You know what togetherness is by experiencing it and no amount of defining the word can simulate what togetherness is all about. Psychologists and sociologists believe that togetherness is beyond concrete "knowledge."

However, couples CAN learn, experience and know how to NURTURE togetherness. They can increase the chances of staying together and, even, getting back together after a crisis. In the same way that you eat a healthy diet, vitamins and exercise to live longer, in the same way that you update your skills and continue learning to keep a job longer, you also have to learn what it means to BE together to STAY together.





GET YOURSELF TOGETHER

If you want to learn about togetherness, you have to start from the beginning.

You can only begin to learn about togetherness if you start with the one person who you have full control of -- YOU.

In short, togetherness begins with YOU.

If you know yourself, if you have a well-developed identity, you trust yourself and your judgment. You're able to tell the difference between giving yourself wholly and being dependent on your partner.

Moreover, if you know yourself, you'll discover the immense amount of esteem, commitment and control you have within you to do what's right for your partner and your relationship, in spite of challenges and temptations.

There are couples who break up because one partner feels that he or she is being held back by the relationship. What they fail to realize is that, for most long-term relationships, the foundations go deeper than they believe.

Below the surface of every relationship is the investment that each one has made. Love relationships are borne of deep feelings, serious commitment, and connected experiences – even if a couple believes that these are no longer valid.

More importantly, a relationship is rooted deep within you, it has made its home within the person you are and what you have made of yourself.

If you want to keep a relationship together, start by keeping yourself together. **BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO BE YOURSELF.**

This doesn't mean that you are selfish. Self-centeredness is not strength of identity.

In fact, selfishness comes from a weak sense of self.

Precisely because a person does not know who he or she is and has not developed an inner



core bolstered with self-esteem and confidence, a selfish person takes and hordes whatever there is that makes him or her feel that they're worth something.

An individual's sense of self is balanced by two aspects: his or her "orientedness" towards others and his or her individual orientation.

Being oriented towards others means that your sense of self is determined by what other people and society has impressed upon you.

In the positive sense, a collective orientation teaches you compassion towards others, a sense of family and obligation, a respect for your culture and society.

In the negative sense, if you are overly collectively oriented, you are detached from your individuality and you always measure yourself by the standards of others. Either you feel too important or you are always insecure about how others view you.

An individually oriented person knows him or herself and can relate to who he or she really is. He or she is determined by their own decisions, judgments, and personality.

Being an individually-oriented person has a lot of positives. If handled well, you become a person who is authentic, self-loving and fully aware. This means that you are able to love others from a genuine core inside of you.

If misinterpreted, an individually-oriented person can become individualistic, cut off from others and disrespectful of the positive values within culture and society.

What you need to do is to strike a balance.

You have to be aware that **YOU CANNOT GIVE WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE.**

If you don't love yourself, it's going to be very difficult for you to love others. Only two people who know their own selves can be capable of giving themselves to the other. Only a strong individual can make the decision to be open, honest and willing to be with another person.

Only a person with his or her own identity can offer the best of themselves to another. He or she will not get lost in the identity of their partner.

Then again, an individual allows him or herself to take the best of what his or her family and culture has taught and integrates these with their own identity. Integrating those values means that you have NOT allowed them to control you.

If you're in a relationship right now or if you want to be, it will be difficult for you and your partner to stay together if you don't have it together, for yourself and as yourself. You need to take a step back and see how you can regain your individuality, for the benefit of your current or future relationships.





HOW DO YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF?

Getting in touch with yourself takes time, patience, and the willingness to confront painful realizations. In the long run though, you have nothing to gain but your sense of self and identity.

How do you do it? Here are a few tips. They are by no means extensive, since the bigger the problem, the deeper inside yourself you have to go – and that will take more than a special report to accomplish. However, what we hope to achieve here is a GOOD START, something for you to get the ball rolling on the road to togetherness.

1. Get to know yourself.

A lot of people go through life without knowing who they are. Or, while they do know themselves, either they can't accept both their good points and their flaws OR they make excuses that they are a victim of circumstance, wronged by life, perhaps already the way they are and can't change.

My challenge to you is to learn to be more self-aware. Be conscious of your emotions and your personality. Ask yourself what made you the way you are. Are you a product of your upbringing? Are you a product of your life experiences? Or are you simply the way you are because of the choices you have made and the way you choose to be? One of the fundamental steps to greater personal growth is in taking responsibility for your past and present.

Ask yourself whether you have insecurities. What parts of yourself and the life around you do you not like? What do you secretly wish was better? Examine your insecurities without judgment and find out how you can condition yourself to change, for the better.

Get in touch with the positive things inside you – this is called your spirit, core, or soul. Learn to look inward to this center. In our book 'Relationship Recovery', we call this concept "soulfulness."

Do your homework. Take time out of your day to sit and meditate. Consider your body, its feelings, and the interaction between your body and the environment around you. Consider the way you interact with others and the impact you have on your environment.

Read and learn about developing yourself, go to counseling, attend seminars – do what you can to heal, grow and develop yourself into a self-possessed individual you and others can be proud of.

2. Life goes through stages, live through them, be aware of them.

A lot of people believe that what they see is what they get. They don't realize that their feelings, perceptions and emotions are colored by their journey through life's stages.

Numerous psychologists have proposed the idea that in each life stage, you learn more about yourself and how to live in the world.

Psychologist Erik Erikson proposes that a person goes through 8 stages of development. Through social interaction, a person develops a sense of self and picks up the life skills and values necessary to make our way in the world. In each stage, Erikson proposes that a person develops competence or lack of in a particular area of life. If the stage is handled well, the person will develop strength of personality. If the stage is managed poorly, the person develops a sense of incompetence or inadequacy. For more information on Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, our book *Relationship Recovery* describes it in depth in Chapter 4.

Marion and Werner Tiki Kustenmacher in their book *"How To Simplify Your Love,"* borrowed heavily from psychoanalyst Clarissa Estes, says that in dividing a person's natural life into periods of 7 years, a person goes through different stages characterized by the typical accomplishment within that stage.

In this special report, our objective is not to expand on these stages. If you want to find out more, look up the two books mentioned above.

The bottom line is this: look very carefully at your life. Perhaps your current personality and reactions and emotions are being influenced by the particular stage of life you're in. Be patient with yourself. Get to know more about stages of development and life journeys.

3. Allow yourself to learn

It's never too late to learn. I encounter individuals who feel that they're no longer capable of learning. Worse, there are those who believe that their partner will no longer change.

Allow yourself to learn. There are many lessons that the world, love and relationships still have to teach you. Allow yourself to learn more about yourself and let your partner still surprise you with something new.

4. Be your own friend.

Are you friends with yourself? If you want to plant the seeds for togetherness and friendship with a partner, you have to be friends with yourself. Appreciate your individuality. Be someone you can be proud of.

Believe that you are capable of self-realization. Making friends with yourself means accepting yourself for your good points and bad, mistakes, and accomplishments.

5. Have a sense of humor.

How do you handle humor, anyway? Do you get offended or put off by jokes? Are you uptight? Start taking yourself lightly and learn to laugh at yourself and with others.

Laughing at yourself doesn't mean putting yourself down. It means having the capacity to still find joy even in difficult situations. It also means that you know how to balance taking yourself seriously with having a sense of humor – about yourself and situations in general.

6. Don't limit yourself.

There are many things that make you limit yourself. One is gender roles. You get so caught up in how a girl is supposed to behave or how a guy is supposed to act that you find yourself frozen and unsure. Don't get too tied up with what you believe society expects you to behave. You have every capacity to be driven and competitive, typically male traits, even if you are a woman. You have the capacity to earn your own keep, to be assertive, and to contribute fully to a relationship.

Or, if you are a man, you can find sensitivity and compassion in yourself, traits usually associated with females.

You also experience limitations with your perceptions – what your social situation is, where you went to school, what your profession is. In short, you may have biases and allowed those biases to dictate your life and relationships.

Open yourself up to the possibility of difference, even falling in love with someone who you don't expect. Make friends with people of different walks of life, gender, beliefs and sexual preference. Allow them to teach you something new about others, which will in turn help broaden your horizons to a wide variety of possibilities.

7. Find beauty in yourself.

Loving yourself means finding the beauty within you. Each one of us has our positive qualities. Rather than beat yourself up over your flaws, focus on your good points and develop them. Allow them to shine, and, in the process, teach you how to adjust whatever traits need improvement.

Take a good look at yourself and make an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses. Understand them for what they are and what makes you the way you are.

8. Be open to real love.

A lot of individuals go around looking for love and yet are suspicious when it presents itself. Or there are those who have starry-eyed ideas about what love is.

These both indicate a lack of openness to real love. We will learn more about real love later on in this special report. However, right now, you have to ask yourself, what are your obstacles to loving someone openly and fully? Do you expect too much or too little? Are you scared of exposing vulnerability to others? Are you skeptical about the existence of true love? Do you turn others off with your biases?

9. Don't wait to be appreciated, be useful.

A lot of us believe that we deserve to be noticed, praised, and appreciated. A person with a strong sense of self does not look out for praise but contributes through his or her own initiative.

Make yourself useful without asking for anything in return. Help someone in need. Volunteer. These types of activities will teach you compassion and will show you that your problems are not as bad as you think.

10. Guilt has no place in a healthy individual.

There's a difference between guilt and true humility. Guilt means constantly berating

yourself, believing that you're not good enough, and taking the weight of the world on your shoulders.

If you want to be an emotionally healthy person, get rid of guilt.

We all make mistakes. Forgive yourself and make amends to those you've hurt – then move on. Learning to pick ourselves up after a mistake is a sign of maturity. Being bogged down by guilt is unhealthy and will poison you and your relationships.

How do you deal with guilt? First, look into yourself and seek out your guilt. Second, forgive yourself. This is important. A lot labor under guilty feelings and are unable to forgive themselves for what they have done. Think of it this way, if others can forgive you, what more can you forgive yourself? Finally, let go and put the guilt behind you. You can even create some kind of ritual where you put the guilt away once and for all to give you some form of closure.





TOGETHERNESS IN LOVE

What important factors can help you stay together with the one you love?

In the previous section, we said that you can't give what you don't have. If you want togetherness in your life, you have to lay the foundation within yourself – you have to have “it” together.

Now, there are certain things you need to consider before getting together with someone.

Remember, it is up to you and your partner to create love together. It is up to both of you to create a relationship that will make you both happy, fulfilled, and that will grow as you both grow.

This is why it's important to choose WELL. And it's also important to be aware of the great responsibility you both have.

This means that you have to be informed about what you are getting into and that you have enough information to anticipate feelings, issues, and phases your relationship will have to go through.

This segment is not about dating or choosing the right partner. It's about the type of information you need to prepare yourself for a healthy, loving and committed relationship.

Togetherness in a relationship is no joke. It takes time, effort, patience and a commitment to making the right choices.

Togetherness also takes a lot of love. And while that may sound like cliché, LOVE is definitely and truly the foundation of every committed relationship.

However, a lot of people either don't know or are confused what love is! We see this every time a Hollywood couple breaks up – they always claim that they've simply fallen out of love.

More than this, we see a lot of relationships fail because of these 10 words: “I love you but I'm not in love with you.”

If you take a good look at these two scenarios you'll discover that there are TWO enemies of love – Indifference and Ignorance.

Love suffers if you are or become indifferent to your partner. Accepting that you've simply fallen out of love is borne of indifference. There was a problem and you did not address it as soon as possible. Just like falling in love, falling out of love takes time through your shared inability and a lack of effort to address the issues as they come up in your relationship.

You can CHOOSE not to be indifferent, even if you don't like it! For the sake of your partner and yourself, rather than let indifference set in, confront the situation. If you feel that you are losing your sense of connection, or can't remember the last time either of you made a commitment to romance, a date, or any intimate effort in your relationship, the challenge for you is to face the problem rather than simply hope that things will magically improve.

Secondly, love suffers because of ignorance. When someone says, "I love you but I'm not in love with you" obviously they don't understand or appreciate the stages of love.

It's sad how many people out there lack an understanding of love. We are fed a belief through popular media that love is all about romance, euphoria, and lust. All too often when that stage ends, many mistakenly believe that the love has died. By prematurely ending love, they don't experience the opportunity to explore it more and discover things about love they don't expect!

To fully understand and appreciate love is to know the five truths of love.

What are these five truths?

1. There are different types of love.
2. Love can change.
3. Love can be created.
4. Love overcomes differences.
5. Love is a decision.



We all have romantic ideas about love –

- That it lasts forever, in exactly the same way it was when you first fell in love.
- That a person who loves you will sacrifice himself or herself for you.
- That love forgives everything.

While love DOES overcome differences – it takes everyday effort to keep a relationship going. It takes more than love. You and your partner need maturity, empathy, communication, and trust to have a healthy relationship. You also have to understand these five truths about love, or you will continue to place high expectations on your partner and relationship that they can't fulfill. Love grows and changes – from raging passion in your youth, to comfortable silence in your older years.

Then again, when you feel that love may no longer there, remember that love CAN be created. You can take the initiative to bring love back into your relationship – no matter how you feel – because what you are focusing on is the DECISION you have made a long time ago to love and the commitment you made to this one person.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE. Just because you no longer feel the thrill of first love does not mean that you should disregard your partner altogether! And, because there are different types of love, it stands to reason that LOVE CHANGES – love goes through phases and stages and the different types of love may even coexist simultaneously during various stages. What are these different types of love? Marion & Werner Tiki Kustenmacher outline 3 types:

- **Eros** – Eros is erotic love which is characterized by sexual desire, attraction, instinct and sexual satisfaction. When we meet our partner, it is often eros that creates the attraction. We instinctively know that there is something special about this person and we are compelled to spend more time with him or her. Eros may be a great kick start but it does not last long enough to build a committed relationship.
- **Amore** – Amore is romantic love, a “love from the heart”. This is the kind of love that inspires great works of literature and music. Amore attracts you to the one, unique person you want to spend your life caring for. It compels you to get to know this person's dreams, desires, and interests. This is the love that gives power to the other to hurt you and expose your

vulnerabilities to others, but you are compelled to love them anyway. You do not romantically love many individuals but your love is focused on one person. This is where the idea of “the one” comes from. Amore is conditional love in the sense that it is conditioned towards one particular person.

- **Agape** – Agape is the love we learn about in religion. It describes a love that is selfless, devoted, empathetic, and responsible. Agape is unconditional love. Religions describe it as the love of God or the universal power. Agape is best described in Christian Scriptures through Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. It is best exemplified by a person’s sacrifice of his or her life for a higher purpose.

In a marriage, loving your partner with an “agape” love means empathizing with him or her, putting his or her welfare above your own, and being prepared to devote yourself to caring for him or her through thick or thin – without counting the cost or expecting anything in return.

What’s important is that you LEARN TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE between these three types and that you are fully aware that each type of love is possible through the different stages of your lives. Accept that you CAN have all these types of love present in your relationship. Learn to cultivate each one and don’t limit yourselves with just one understanding of love.

Allow different types of love to work together. You and your partner may have passion, but without selflessness, your relationship will fizzle out in no time. You may have a lot of romance within you but without channeling that love to one, unique person, you will find yourself flitting from partner to partner with no end in sight.

Together: is cultivated by these different types of love. Eros connects you and your partner intimately and physically, while Amore makes you one heart and mind. Moreover, Agape teaches you both how to look out for one another and prevent yourselves from hurting the other.

SEXUAL TOGETHERNESS

Let's talk about sex.

Sex is one of the more powerful aspects of human life and relationships. It is no wonder then that it is also the most problematic.

Problems with sexual intimacy and compatibility are some of the most common reasons why couples break up.

In the same way that couples can use sex as a gift that brings them together, they can also use it to drive them apart. Promiscuity is used as an escape from an unhappy marriage. Withdrawal from sex is used to punish a partner.

Affairs are rampant and, when a partner is having an affair, one of the hardest hit areas of married life is in the bedroom.

Sexual intimacy in a marriage is so intrinsically linked with emotional intimacy that you know something is wrong when the sex goes.

Then again, many relationships these days are based on sex. I've encountered couples who believe sexual compatibility is paramount in a relationship. Something like "The sex used to be so good with my partner, what happens now that it's starting to fizzle out?"

Consider as well situations where there isn't even a relationship, only a series of casual sexual encounters, if there's anything these scenarios are teaching us it's that we no longer respect sex.

Perhaps it's because sex is now so easy to come by?

These days, young people are exposed to sex quite early. With the sexual revolution came increased sexual freedom, which also brought with it adverse social consequences.

On the positive side, sexual freedom did bring with it personal independence and a shift in the way we view ourselves – from victims of our personal circumstances, we discovered that we are capable of controlling our identities and sexuality. Women, specifically, have



been empowered to become agents of their own destinies, rather than just being sex objects, child-bearers or nurturers of the home.

However, on the negative side, statistics reveal increased sexual relationships and extra-marital affairs which translate to higher incidences of STDS and AIDS. Personal relationships between the sexes are suffering, as shown by the higher incidences of divorce and separation.

However, we also need to consider whether an excess of sexual freedom has actually helped our lives. Sex scenes in movies and television are a daily fare. This conditions us to believe that it's easy to replace a partner and that relationships don't have to last.

In short, too much sexual freedom does not give space for real love to develop.

Psychologists have found that sexual development goes hand in hand with maturity and love. Human beings go through emotional and sexual growth in stages, getting to full adult development by age 25 or so.

Because young people are having sex earlier and earlier, it is no wonder then that many of us end up emotionally and sexually stunted. Unfortunately, it is our emotionally and sexually stunted selves that we bring into a relationship, which heightens the possibility of a relationship failing.

This is not to say that there aren't any young people who are not emotionally mature. What this is saying is that emotional and sexual maturity are key ingredients in a successful relationship. If you and your partner want to stay together, you need to confront sexual and emotional issues within yourself and within your relationship.

It's all part of you getting it together that you get your issues with sex within your grasp. When a person becomes a spiritual and emotional adult, you can fully and completely do your part in a relationship. In the same way, sexual responsibility comes with sexual adulthood.

How can you develop enough sexual maturity to ensure sexual togetherness?

A change of attitude towards sexual experience is an important first step. A lot of individuals think that sexual experience is something they would want their partner to have. Others place a premium on virginity and can't even imagine being with someone who has had past sexual partners.

Our advice is two-fold:

1. **Sexual experience does not mean maturity.** So don't place too much value on it. Instead, when looking for a partner, look for someone who is emotionally mature. Do this for yourself as well.

Developing a healthy sense of your identity goes hand in hand with growing into your own sexuality. What people don't realize is that sexuality is not just sex. It's identity. How you relate in an emotional or sexual manner is rooted in your idea of who you are. As a young adult, focus on developing yourself and discovering how you want to relate and who you want to relate to.

This does not mean that you must reject sex or have extremely conservative views about it. Only that you respect sex and the sexual identity of yourself and others. Which brings us to the next suggestion:

2. **Respect sex.** As we previously mentioned, sex is a powerful thing. When you have sex, you open yourself up to another person. You are vulnerable to the other person's power over your pleasure and emotions. Think about how you feel during sex. Doesn't it seem as if you are completely connected with your body and with your inner self? Because of this, sex deserves your respect in the same way you respect yourself.

Having casual sexual encounters and multiple sexual partners takes its toll on you. You already invest a lot of energy, trust, time and effort in having sex with one person let alone a series of partners. Moreover, you leave yourself exposed to AIDs and sexually transmitted diseases.

Be careful about what role sex plays in your life. Have a healthy regard for your body, yourself, and sex in general. This also means being careful about seeing another person as a sex object. You are both human beings with emotions, experiences and values. Revere all these things.

Being monogamous is more than just having one sexual partner. It's about commitment. Respect for sex translates into respect for the person you are having sex with. When you are committed to one another, you open yourself up for a whole range of experiences that includes more than sexual encounters.

Instead of focusing on just sex, think about your sexuality, think about your partner's sexuality, AND think about how connected you both are to one another. More importantly, think about commitment as the freedom to express your love to another person in any way that you want, not just through sex.

In order to respect sex and to change your attitudes towards sex, you need to have a good grasp of what it is.

More than the physical encounter, sex is actually about knowing and trusting your partner and vice versa. Think of your own experience during a sexual encounter – don't you reveal so much of yourself during sex? You are defenseless, exposed, and literally naked. You look into one another's eyes and see the emotions cross one another's faces. What you are actually doing is saying that:

"You are here and I am here with you. We are doing this together; we are opening ourselves to one another in this profound, intimate way."

What does this statement sound like to you? Doesn't it sound a lot like love? Is it any surprise that the other term for having sex is MAKING LOVE?

This is why sex is so intrinsically connected with love. Without love, a couple having sex has less chance of long-term togetherness. Love means adjusting to one another, learning to accept one another's differences and each other's flaws as well as one another's beautiful qualities.

And, when you love someone, you cannot avoid being honest and trusting with that person. So it is when you are MAKING LOVE. Honesty and trust are two key ingredients to better sexual togetherness.

If you are not honest with your partner or if you don't trust your partner, you will find the sexual well running dry.

Ask yourself if you have ever lied or hidden something from a partner. What happened to the sex then? Did you find yourself withdrawing from your lover? What have you lied or hidden? Secrets? Deceit? Pent-up resentments? Suppressed anger?

Or, ask yourself if you've wondered why your partner has been pulling away from you. Has he or she lost interest in sex? It is highly possible that he or she is not being honest with you in some respects.

If you want sexual togetherness, the first step is to practice honesty. It's a scary prospect but you'll be surprised at how much a little honesty will clear up. Now, in certain cases, you may need to consult a professional to help you and your partner work on healthy ways to communicate. Communication is not about saying what comes into your head. It's about filtering your thoughts and opinions in such a way that consideration is given to how the message is to be worded and how it might be received. However, with practice and by carefully learning new communication skills, you will be surprised with what you accomplish.

To help you navigate the intricacies of communicating about sex, here are 10 valuable suggestions:

1. **Honor your partner sexually.** This means that you don't criticize your partner sexually, you don't measure your partner against past lovers, and that you don't find fault about your partner's sexual shortcoming to others, no matter how close to you they are. Your partner and your sex life is your business as a couple. If you have problems or dissatisfactions, talk about them with your partner rather than with someone else. Seek out professional help if necessary. Honoring your partner also means staying faithful to your partner for the duration of your commitment to one another and respecting his or her body, even if there are flaws you perceive.
2. **Give positive sexual reinforcement.** Talk about what feels good to you or how your partner makes you feel during lovemaking. Praise your partner, especially about his or her traits that you find particularly appealing. Make your partner feel beautiful and self-confident with both verbal and non-verbal feedback.
3. **Practice good timing.** Learn to be in tune to your partner's moods. If you have sexual issues, you know better than to bring them up when you and your partner are arguing.

Discover the best time for your partner to be receptive to discussion. The same applies to when you want sex.

4. **Ask and Listen.** These are two things you can do to make lovemaking a wonderful experience for your partner. Ask what feels good, then do it again. Practice being a good listener – to both your partner’s verbal and non-verbal cues. Most of all, learn to be silent when necessary. Let your partner share his or her feelings without judgment and second guessing. These make your partner feel comfortable around you – a key ingredient in great sex!
5. **Be clear about children.** There’s no going around it – sex brings about babies. If you and your partner want to boost your sexual togetherness, you have to clarify whether or not children are part of the equation. And, this means not glossing over your partner’s feelings or non-feelings about kids! This is where listening and communication come in. Talk about having or not having kids with openness and without judgment. Don’t let your biases about having kids, how many, when, and how, get in between you and your partner. The thing is, you must be open to all possibilities during discussion.
6. **Pay attention to your body.** Needless to say but often forgotten, practice GOOD HYGIENE! Don’t take your partner’s sexual response to you for granted. It may seem superficial but you don’t discount cleanliness, smelling good, and brushing your teeth for your partner. In addition, exercise releases hormones that make sex even better. Not to mention that a strong and fit body heightens sensitivity to touch, makes you a more powerful lover, and gives you stronger orgasms.
7. **Exercise the power of touch.** Practice touching your partner in various ways, not all of them sexual. Be comfortable about touching your partner in support, in praise, in comfort, in love and yes, to give pleasure. Touch builds intimacy and connects a couple even without a need for words. Touching your partner, and having your partner touch you, teaches you to be at ease with one another. If you have issues about being touched, look deep into yourself and ask yourself where this is coming from. You may need to talk to someone if you find that the problem runs deep.
8. **Don’t underestimate AIDS & STDs.** I know someone, married 16 years, who suddenly discovered she had herpes. Confronting her husband about it, he was surprised that herpes was even a possibility when his last casual partner was before the marriage. The wife found it impossible as well since her husband was her first and only sexual partner. Needless to say, the husband tested positive for herpes too. Even if you know you are

faithful to your partner, don't underestimate the reality of sexually transmitted diseases. Testing for sexual diseases right from the beginning of your relationship is the safest way to ensure that you are both safe. This is also why it's safer to be monogamous. If you have an affair or if you are into multiple sexual partners, remember that having sex with someone exposes you to the consequences of this person's past sexual partners.

9. **Make your environment conducive to lovemaking.** Finally, it sounds simple but a clean bedroom and comfortable surroundings do make for better sex. For those special moments, take the time to make a romantic setting for your partner – candles and flowers always work. Or, make sure that next time you have a bath, light some candles and take in a bottle of wine. Even the simplest things can be made intimate with a little thought.



STAYING TOGETHER

So far, we've said that getting yourself together is the first step in lasting togetherness. Moreover, we have talked about sexual togetherness. In many relationships, these are the first two things you consider – "Am I ready for this relationship?" and "Are we sexually compatible?"

Now, let's say you are in a committed relationship ALREADY. How do you ensure that you and your partner STAY TOGETHER?

Our suggestions are by no means extensive but, often, these are things that we tend to overlook thanks to the excitement and thrill of love.

What we fail to realize is that a relationship takes a lot of compromise and the willingness to let another person into our lives.

I'm not going to give you advice that you've heard before. What I would like to do is to bring to light certain things about relationships that you can look over, think about, and discover for your own relationship.

What does it mean to be together?

Consider Jan and Liam. Jan met Liam in college. After 4 years together, they deemed themselves in love enough to get married. After marriage, problems started setting in. Liam was a young doctor trying to make a name for himself in his field. Emergency duty gave birth to long nights away from home. Liam felt too stressed out and overworked to even spend time with Jan at the end of the day.

Because of this, Jan started feeling neglected and unloved. Conflicts became more frequent at home. Liam would spend more nights at work just to avoid what he considered Jan's nagging.

Enter Brian, Jan's high school crush. Jan bumped into Brian one day and before long, they started spending more time together. Jan found herself falling for Brian and drifting away from Liam, before their marriage even had a chance to succeed. When you ask Jan, it's easy for her to blame Liam – for spending time away from home, for not being there for her. If you

talk to Liam, he'll repeat what he's always said – that he works so that they will have a life together, that it's better to sacrifice now rather than later.

Jan and Liam's relationship suffered under so many things: personal pursuits, false expectations, and issues with neglect. We need to understand that all these issues affect the health of our relationships. We all dream of building a stable relationship where we are loved, cared for, and nourished, hopefully for the span of our lifetimes. However, when multiple responsibilities demand our time and attention, when stress rears its ugly head, when conflicts over career, money, and even other people crop up, how can we expect our relationships to last?

Let's examine Hollywood where couples are seen to have lavish weddings all the time. But 2 years, 4 years, 10 years later, the same couples are going through messy divorces.

In Hollywood, icons like Paul Newman and Joan Woodward are praised for the length and stability of their marriage. The funny thing is they are the exception, not the rule.

But if you look at couples like Paul Newman and Joan Woodward you can learn a lot from their marriage – even if you only see what's on the surface.

What are some lessons we can learn from long-term couples?

- **They grow.** Long-term couples grow more in love, more experienced, more mature and self-aware. They allow growth into their relationship.
- **They acknowledge reality.** Life is not all romance. You don't stay in love all the time. Long-term couples realize that there are very real stresses in life and work through them. They also realize that life is a journey, with stages of growth, and that we all experience different stages of development. Moreover, problems are part of life. The question is how you manage problems as a couple. Perfection is an unrealistic expectation in a relationship. There's no such thing as a perfect person, a perfect marriage, or a perfect life.
- **They put a premium on stability.** There are couples who enjoy complications and the passion of volatile emotions. However, if you really want to stay together, you have to accept that stability is a key element in successful relationships. Don't be afraid of stability. Don't think it's going to be boring or that you have to sacrifice excitement in your life. Stability means that you have someone to enjoy excitement WITH and that you can trust that someone to be there for you no matter what.



- **They know that being a couple is an identity, not just a consequence of being together.** You're a couple now. You're no longer alone. Many of us struggle with shifting our perception and mindset from 'me as an individual' to 'us as a couple.' However, the key to a successful relationship is one that involves aspects of both. We expect that we can still enjoy our individual pursuits while married - which is actually a good thing. We need our own interests and to maintain our identity. However, you also need to understand that you and your partner have come together to form a new identity – you are a unit and thus, you need to recognize this new status in your life. You can't really be in this new identity without the other person so the key shift for you is to see the other as someone who shares your life, your plans and your very being. More than this, you know that your life as a couple is actually bigger than your life alone.
- **They share their inner selves with each other.** We keep mentioning that honesty is key in any relationship. More than honesty, there are parts of you that you may feel are embarrassing, shameful, or worth keeping secret. If you want your relationship to succeed, you will allow your partner into those parts of yourself that you may not be willing to share. What sharing your inner life means is that you don't withhold your feelings, fears, plans and dreams from your partner. If you want them to love you completely, they need to know you completely. Try as much as possible NOT to hide things from your partner that he or she needs to know. This includes finances, past hurts, your childhood background, and your feelings about your relationship, both negative and positive.
- **They're clear about marriage.** If you want to cultivate togetherness in your relationship, the idea of marriage has to be clarified. There are many couples who remain unmarried even after decades together. There are dating couples whose main conflict is whether or not to get married. There are those who believe marriage is a natural progression of their relationship. Still others believe that marriage is just a piece of paper. Whatever their reasons to or not to get married, marriage is an important step in any love relationship. Marriage IS a topic that every committed couple are bound to discuss eventually. If a couple wants to stay together, they have to clarify what form their commitment will take. Will they get married? Why? Why not? Here's something to consider – what marriage does is to mark a rite of passage. It is a public and private admission that you and your partner are making a life together. If you and your partner agree that marriage is not your cup of tea, at the very least have some form of ceremony that marks your new life together. It helps you both focus on your relationship for what it is rather than going into it with gray areas and unanswered questions.
- **They know it's about sharing a life together.** What does sharing a life mean? When you share your life you commit to ending looking for a partner and focusing on your partner



NOW. A lot of couples are in a supposedly committed relationship with one foot in and the other wanting to wander, always looking over their shoulder for the next best thing. They may think that maybe this is NOT it, there's something better for me out there. Thinking this way sets up your relationship for failure. Focus on what's happening in your life right NOW. Focus on allowing your relationship to fulfill its potential. Make a decision right now if you want to live in a fulfilling relationship. If so, you share the responsibility in creating one! If you want to stay together, mean it – open up your lives to one another.

- **They are responsible for one another and for their relationship.** You and your partner are responsible for the health of your relationship and for the well-being of your partner. This is a big deal. We think that in a relationship we are the ones that have to be loved and cared for. In a relationship, you have to carry your own weight. If we must paraphrase the Golden rule: Do unto your partner, what you would have your partner do unto you. You have the power to make your relationship healthy and your love flourish. Revere this power and use it wisely.
- **They are not afraid of risks.** When you enter a relationship, you take the risk of getting hurt. You take a risk of it not working out and ending in a breakup or divorce. If you want to stay together, you have to overcome your fears and take the risk of loving another person. This includes recognizing your personal fears, addressing them and making sure that they don't pose as obstacles to your love for your partner. Loving someone completely is about understanding that the benefit of real love is greater than the risk of hurt or pain.
- **They seek out, understand and fulfill one another's needs.** There are four general needs that a person cultivates in a relationship. Material, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs. These needs are the very basic needs of a person and, for a relationship to flourish, each partner must make sure that they contribute to keeping their lives materially, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually fulfilled. Go over the personal needs enumerated below. Are anything missing in your relationship? Be aware of these missing or unfulfilled needs and cultivate them.
 1. Handling your family's **material needs** is about learning to divide financial responsibilities and resources in a fair manner. This does not mean a strict equal share but something that you have both discussed and agreed on wholeheartedly. What this affirms is that partners talk about major financial decisions at all times. Whatever you do, please don't surprise your partner with a big purchase he or she did not sign off on. Moreover, you and your spouse have to discuss the financial implications of future plans as well as to track and budget day to day expenses.

2. What does it mean to provide your partner with **emotional support**? Emotional support doesn't just mean a pat on the back. It's also about treating one another with respect, giving positive feedback and always respecting one another's dignity. Strict gender roles have no place in a healthy, contemporary relationship. So are hurtful words and indifference. Be emotionally present to your partner through showing trust, developing intimacy and helping build his or her self-esteem through kind words, praise and positive feedback.
3. Providing for you and your partner's **intellectual needs** is another vital ingredient in staying together. Talking about ideas, expressing your own opinions, encouraging one another to further his or her learning – these all support an individual's intellectual growth and make a person feel that his or her intellect is valued in the relationship. One important consequence of encouraging intellectual growth is that you both continue to learn from one another, broadening your understanding of each other and keeping up with the changes in one another's way of thinking.
4. Human beings all have **spiritual beliefs**, no matter what we claim our allegiances to be. Unfortunately, many relationships fail because of conflict between spiritual beliefs or religious expression. Staying together requires respecting one another's spiritual conviction. Judging one another's way of expressing his or her faith will only cause conflict, division and resentment in your relationship. Learn to walk your faith walk together, supporting one another – even if you don't share religious beliefs. Support one another's spiritual search. Allow a spiritual area in your home where you and your partner can display symbols of your faith. Talk to one another about your beliefs and share spiritual milestones, without fearing being laughed at or judged. Accepting one another's faith strengthens togetherness. More importantly, spiritual health can support both of you when times are tough.

STAYING TOGETHER THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

In an interview, wrestling superstar Hulk Hogan says that “I’m one of those romantic people who thinks my marriage will last forever.” At the time Hogan was going through a divorce after years in the crucible of the public eye. Before his divorce, Hogan had been married to his wife Linda for nearly 20 years. Four years before his divorce, Hulk Hogan and family had willingly become subjects of a reality television show that focused on their daily life. The pressure of being in the public eye took a toll on his marriage and family life, not that Hulk did not have enough troubles prior to his family’s reality show, just that having cameras follow you 24/7 bared the little mistakes and issues and aggravated them to mammoth proportions.

While a celebrity’s life can be such an extreme example of the difficulties we all go through in relationships and family life, we can’t avoid the lessons we can learn by their example.

We all enter a marriage with the romantic notion that it will last forever. But, we also all go through the stresses of everyday life that include both minor and major difficulties – issues with earning enough money to support your lifestyle and dreams, surviving the death of a loved one, struggling through illness, changes in priorities and values, not to mention the petty arguments about chores and the trauma of raising children.

Difficulties such as these are enough to tear a marriage apart, and it’s increasingly common to see friends, family members and celebrities whose marriages collapse under the strain.

BUT, you need not wait for your relationship to start collapsing before you feel motivated to do something. Just like doctors used to say – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It is easier to start creating a strong relationship NOW before hard times come.

What are some things you can do to ensure that your relationship can be relied upon when times get tough?

1. **Accept that negative experiences are inevitable.** Negative experiences, stress and struggles are part of life. Once you start accepting their reality, you can start preparing for them. This does not mean that you have to be pessimistic about the future. All the more should you overcome fear of the future while at the same time ensuring that you stay positive, doing your best to create a happy, healthy environment for your partner and your family.

2. **Appreciate the good times.** Sometimes, we take happy moments for granted, as if they are our due for being in a relationship. When the bad times come, though, what you remember and appreciate about the good times can see you through. More than appreciating them, make more positive memories. Celebrate milestones, commemorate anniversaries and birthdays, enjoy raising your kids – do these things now so that when the going gets tough, the good outweighs the bad.
3. **Don't assume your partner is the same as he or she was before.** Relationships sometimes suffer because one partner assumes that the other still likes the same things, believes the same things, and will react in the same way as they did 5-10-15 years ago. In the same way you change and evolve from year to year due to life experience, so too will your partner. The things that were important to you 2 or 10 years ago may not be applicable now. Accept the same from your partner. Learn to let go of information about yourself, your partner and your relationship that may already be outdated. Learn new things about yourself and your loved one and learn to appreciate change. Part of staying connected as a couple is always wanting to know more, and never assuming that you will reach a point in time where you know everything about one another. Every day of your relationship and life together is a learning opportunity.
4. **Focus on the other.** We cannot emphasize this enough. Your relationship is about you and YOUR PARTNER. Admire your partner for his or her talents, appreciate who he or she is. Reach out to one another rather than others – especially when you have problems or need advice. Always seek to be their best friend and the best partner you can possibly be. Don't underestimate the power of touching one another.
5. **Create signs of your love.** Show your partner that you love him or her through physical symbols of your love – a daily note, flowers just because you wanted to, charms on a bracelet to mark important milestones, a special meal, special time set aside for one another – and take lots of photographs to remind you of one another and the life you share.
6. **Step on the brakes as soon as possible.** Don't wait for things to get worse before you do anything about problems in your marriage. Approach your partner, even if you think they are not willing to be approached – it's better to face the problem now, rather than be served with divorce papers later. The moment you perceive a problem in your relationship, no matter how big or small, you have a responsibility to each other to face it and fix it. This is part of your commitment to loving each other in good times and bad.
7. **Practice effective communication and LISTEN.** There will never be a time in your



relationship where communication is not necessary. Every day of your relationship is a commitment to loving and sharing through words and actions. In addition to words and actions, communication also involves listening and allowing your partner to share with you their thoughts, dreams, and fears. Don't allow indifference to set in – keep communication lines open. One of the worst enemies of a relationship is lack of communication or poor and ineffective communication. Chapter 5 of Relationship Recovery walks you through the communication process and gives you the proper tools to cultivate positive communications skills.

8. **Allow your partner to teach and influence you.** Let go of pride. Don't think that you know everything about yourself and your relationship. Let your partner teach you and allow your partner to learn from you as well. Each of you have valuable skills and perspectives to bring to a relationship. Share knowledge with one another. Ask for advice, especially if your partner has experienced something you haven't. Emulate positive behaviors from one another that help you adapt to different situations.
9. **Solve problems as soon as possible, be patient with difficult problems.** Prioritizing problems and solving them in order of difficulty gives you and your partner a feeling of control and competence over your relationship. Pick up new problem solving tools and learn to WORK TOGETHER. Don't carry the burden on your own shoulders – remember there are two of you in this relationship. For more complicated problems, be patient but be consistent in spending time solving them. There are those problems, though, that you just need to accept and stop struggling against - don't struggle against the things in your life that you can't change.
10. **Compromise and accept differences.** There are two things you can do to maintain harmony in your marriage. The first is compromise, which involves negotiating some common ground to determine an outcome that reflects the values and feelings of both parties. The other is accepting your differences. Each of you has a unique perspective due to gender, social status, life experience, and the way you were raised. Both aspects of maintaining harmony require openness and the willingness to accept one another's needs, plans, ideas and feelings. Seemingly irreconcilable differences can be overcome through acceptance that there is often more than one correct opinion and that each opinion is based on values and the information that each of you have. It is possible for you to both have different opinions yet still both be right.

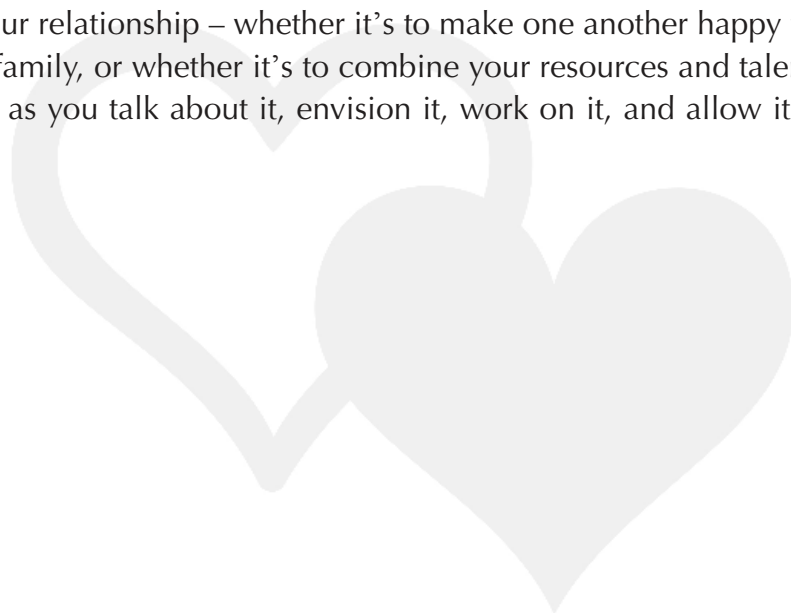
In addition to these 10 rules of staying together and as we shared in our Relationship Recovery book, the most important is this: CREATE A SHARED PURPOSE – TOGETHER.

A lot of couples enter into a relationship for several reasons – one, just because it's a natural progression from dating; two, because they don't want to be alone; three, because they're really in love and want to share a life together.

For all these reasons, only #3 gives us a hint into that most important rule. A relationship is about being together. Hence, a couple needs to understand that, now, for the health and long life of their relationship, they need to focus on a particular purpose, objective or vision that they share. You can't be in a relationship while fixating on how you're going to make YOU happy, rich and fulfilled. Togetherness means making both of you happy and fulfilled.

We said earlier that in a relationship you take on a new identity – that of being a couple. One of the first steps to relationship difficulty is when one or both partners withdraw from the relationship and act according to their own best interests. In that sense they place themselves and their needs above that of the relationship.

Create a shared purpose for your relationship – whether it's to make one another happy for the rest of your lives, create a family, or whether it's to combine your resources and talents to achieve greatness – as long as you talk about it, envision it, work on it, and allow it to keep you grounded.



GROWING APART

When does a couple know that their relationship is in trouble?

When the fighting gets worse? When someone walks out? When a partner files for divorce?

I received this email from James recently and couldn't help but wonder how a couple could have allowed their relationship to get to this point:

"This evening, my wife of 12 years told me that she is filing for divorce next week. 10 days prior to this evening, she told me that she was not happy anymore, that she was no longer in love with me, and that she feels that we are living two separate lives...like roommates. While I was initially shocked, I knew that our marriage was shaky, well over a year ago. I fully realize that I am partly responsible, but I also know that I am not alone in sharing the burden of blame.

When my wife initially told me that she was no longer happy, nor in love with me, my immediate reaction was to beg & plead for a second chance... I even suggested marriage counseling.

But by the next day, I realized that was futile. I also began to realize that my fear of conflict, helped to lead us to this point...we never talk to each other, at least not about anything meaningful. And the more I thought about my unwillingness to talk to her so as to avoid any conflict and bad feelings, the more I realized that she is partly to blame for my inability to approach her.

While I could always turn the other cheek, or let things 'slide', I don't recall, since our children were born (whom I love dearly), a conversation that was pleasant. It was not always this way. Before the kids were born we were as happy as can be and without a care in the world.

Now that the kids are 6 years old, and we are both in our forties, we seem to have grown farther apart than ever. I don't recall when I last held her hand. (There were times that I was afraid of what her reaction would be.) We simply and gradually stopped talking to each other... I for fear of conflict, she from the stresses of upbringing. I may be wrong in thinking so, but I cannot



reconcile to myself that if my tendency to avoid conflict brought us to this point, then my tendency to do so would not have been so great if she were more approachable.

Do you think this is futile and should just end in divorce, or do we still have something on which to rebuild?"

My reply –

Hello James,

I am deeply concerned about one thing you mentioned in your email. You say that you've known for a year that your marriage was shaky and yet, you did nothing. Moreover, you chalk it all up to your tendency to avoid conflict while blaming your wife for being unapproachable.

Your situation is further complicated by your wife's announcement that she is already filing for divorce.

James, your situation seems difficult, however, you need to decide now whether you want to save your marriage or if you will just let things die a natural death – because you simply don't want the confrontation that comes along with opening communication lines.

If you want to save your marriage, it's about time that you started participating in the relationship and being accountable for reaching out to your wife, developing trust, love and intimacy – even through disagreements and conflict. Conflict is a necessary part of human life – it's how you manage it that makes a difference.

You also need to take a good look at the roots of your marriage problems. You mentioned fear of conflict and stress in childrearing. Ask yourself whether these are really relationship issues or whether they are issues you have as an individual.

How can you tell the difference? James, marriage problems come from somewhere. And if you really look carefully, you'll discover that they are part of a whole network of negative behaviors, feelings and resentments.



Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Have I felt that I am the one expected to do the work in my relationship? Or does my partner feel as if she is carrying the load?
2. Do I feel like I no longer have a connection to my partner – emotionally, sexually or emotionally?
3. Do I feel that I can't fulfill my partner's expectations?
4. Have we resorted to withdrawal or have we stopped communicating?
5. Have we resorted to judging and criticizing one another?

If you answer yes to one or more of these questions, then you need to understand that your relationship is in crisis. You and your partner have stopped relating in an open and fundamental manner. You both have stopped compromising, working together and taking responsibility for how you relate to one another. Just because your wife seems unapproachable, it doesn't mean that you should stop reaching out to her. You are married to one another. At a certain point you committed to one another – to love each other and be there for the other. What's really stopping you?

Perhaps there are certain things about YOU that need work. Perhaps at some point your wife has expressed her personal unhappiness. If at certain points, you or your wife have had doubts about your selves, if you've asked yourself the questions below, then it is also possible that your personal issues have gotten in the way of your marriage.

1. Do you feel that you are leading a meaningless life?
2. Do you want to escape the way you are living now?
3. Do you find your life or your job boring? Are you unemployed?
4. Do you feel worthless?
5. Do you have problems in other areas of your life, not just your relationship?
6. Do you feel isolated?



7. Are you anxious about the future?
8. Do you vacillate, not knowing what you want?
9. Do you pretend to be someone you're not?
10. Do you ask yourself whether there is more to this life than what you are living?

If you've answered yes to one or more of these questions – OR if you've observed that your wife may be asking herself these questions, then one of you is having a personal, even an identity, crisis. What many of us don't realize is that relationship problems usually begin with one partner having a personal crisis – that starts affecting the relationship – that escalates into conflict and separation for a couple.

James, have you really asked yourself whether your wife was unhappy in the relationship? Were you? What did the both of you do about it?

Like I mentioned above, you did nothing.

When a relationship is in crisis, it's very easy for a couple to resort to the 4 greatest risks to a relationship: criticism, disrespect, the victim mentality and indifference.

In your case, I observe to negative patterns of behavior: feeling like the victim and indifference.

It seems to me, James, that you are justifying yourself and denying your contribution to the problem. By blaming your wife's indifference as the cause for your fear of conflict, you make yourself out as the victim.

As a result, you both have withdrawn from one another to avoid getting hurt. The problem with withdrawing is that you become indifferent to your partner. Even if you think it's to keep to peace, withdrawing drives you and your partner further apart. And, you don't realize how hurtful this behavior can be to your partner. Perhaps your wife felt that you were no longer interested. Perhaps you felt that your wife no longer cared about you. Indifference builds walls and walls breed separation.

Your wife may be at that stage where the pressures of her responsibilities have convinced her that it is better to leave the relationship than put in useless effort.

However, ESCAPE is the worst thing you can do your relationship. Because your wife feels that escape is around the corner, she fails to realize that your relationship still has great potential! Because you have avoided conflict, you have settled for less than a happy, healthy and connected relationship. Still, escape from a relationship is a temptation many individuals face. I am not saying that you don't get out of a harmful situation. What I am saying is that feelings of escape can be examined, controlled and managed. You don't have to go with what you think you are feeling every time.

But because you are already looking towards escaping what looks like an unbearable situation, James, you and your wife have set yourselves up for failure. If you want to stay together, you have to change that attitude.

While your personal struggles have value, there is something here that has infinitely more valuable even if you don't realize it. Your relationship. A relationship is about struggling TOGETHER. Not suffering in silence. And, if you want to struggle together, here are some tips on what you can do.

- **Take responsibility.** Blaming your partner will do no good. It will only cause feelings of resentment, pride and self-righteousness. There is only one person here who has full control of your feelings – YOU. Take responsibility for your feelings of unhappiness.

- **Think of unhappiness as a wake-up call.** Rather than wallow in self-pity, ask yourself what your unhappiness is trying to tell you. It's as if your inner senses are striking an alarm. Unhappiness, discontent, resentment, anger- these are all signs that something is wrong and you need to do something about it.

- **Take the initiative.** Don't wait for your partner to pick up on your feelings. For all you know, they are going through something themselves. If you want change, you have to start with yourself. Reach out to your partner, even if he or she does not reciprocate

- **Value your partner's support.** If you are going through a personal crisis, if your relationship is in trouble, rather than seek comfort elsewhere (i.e. have an affair), turn to your partner. Seek one another's support – even if your problems are about you or your relationship.

- **Focus on the positives.** Rather than nagging, griping or acting out about the crisis you are experiencing, think of the good times and happy moments you have had with your partner. Look back to your shared history. Your relationship goes deeper than



you think. You have invested love, time, commitment and effort into this marriage. Be thankful for all of these.

-**Don't settle.** Your relationship has great potential to make you and your partner happy. If you simply give up and think that you will be better off elsewhere, what you are actually doing is settling. You don't have to settle. You can work at making a great relationship.

- **You and your partner each have your personal journeys. But don't make them compete with your relationship.** When you are in a relationship, you are actually making three journeys – your individual journey and your relationship's. Each takes a natural progression, based on how you grow with your feelings and attitudes. Your personal journey does not have to get in the way of your relationship. You can harmoniously work through both, appreciating the way they integrate with one another

- **Your love is greater than you alone.** We think that love depends on how we feel. When love is in trouble, we tend to see only the surface – how do I feel, what is going on with ME, my partner's negative behavior and so on. However, if you look beneath the surface, love is more than feelings. It's every decision you have made to be together, it's your internal capacity for love (that we mentioned in the first section), and it's the many experiences you have had as a couple.

- **Remember your commitment.** Finally, no matter what happens, remember that you and your partner made a commitment to love one another. BEFORE you think of separating, think about your commitment to one another. COMMITMENT goes beyond any problems you may be having. Commitment, like love, is not a feeling – it's a decision you made a while back. Look back to that decision and ask yourself why you committed to this person in the first place. More than this, think of it this way - focusing on your commitment means taking separation and divorce off the table. You and your partner need to focus on working things out first BEFORE actually considering divorce, if at all.

James, believe that your relationship still has more to offer. However, if your wife is really no longer willing to participate, there are many options open to you that you need to consider carefully. To help you make the right decisions, SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

A professional counselor can help you process your emotions and teach you new communication tools and life skills. Counseling is a great option, whether or not your partner is willing to go with you.

If your partner is filing for divorce, you need to get LEGAL help right away. A lawyer can help you through the entire process of divorce – even to get you and spouse talking face to face. Interestingly, a large number of couples do decide to forego the divorce during the stage of legal discussions! Many comment that they were alarmed at the sheer number of preparations and discussions needed to actually get a divorce.

Finally, James, during a stressful situation at home, take care of yourself. Get some exercise. See friends. Most of all, be patient and do what you can to allow yourself to keep in control of your reactions.

Best of luck,

Rachel Rider



STAYING TOGETHER THROUGH AN AFFAIR

Who's afraid of an affair?

Perhaps this question is rhetorical because, if you are in a relationship, an affair WOULD be one of yours or your partner's greatest fears. However, in a floundering relationship, an affair can be a very real threat. When one partner's needs are no longer being served by the relationship, it is no wonder that he or she can be tempted to look elsewhere for attention, sexual satisfaction, emotional fulfillment, even love.

If you don't address relationship AND personal issues right away, you risk making an already volatile situation worse, creating emotional and relational emptiness that is vulnerable to infidelity. Relationship problems create a space that an individual mistakenly thinks can be filled by someone else. This someone is often a sympathetic friend or coworker who may also be going through relationship or personal problems themselves. Vulnerable people often attract one another, perhaps due to some psychological motivation to comfort one another and be each other's heroes.

John, an IT professional married 12 years, recently confessed to me that he is having an affair. He blames deeply embedded problems in his marriage as what caused him to withdraw from his wife, Valerie, and become attracted to Melissa, a coworker. From what John describes, he sees Valerie as a shrew who continues to make his life miserable while Melissa is a sweet, loving partner who makes him happy. He claims "You can't help who you love."

Looking into their current situation, I discovered that Valerie and John were actually college sweethearts who first had a child, and married when their son was 5 years old. According to Valerie, the early years of their marriage were happy ones. Even if John's parents were hesitant about them getting married so young, John and Valerie fought for their relationship and eventually had another child.

Soon, the pressures of having two children led them to making painful but seemingly necessary financial decisions. John looked for employment in the city while Valerie would stay at home in a semi-rural area, 5 hours away from the city center. During the week, John would stay at his parents' house while Valerie would work from home, at the same time taking care of their 2 young children.

At first, John and Valerie thought the situation, while less than ideal, was something they had to live with to financially support their family. They would look forward to the weekends when John would be home and they were a family again. Soon though, from a weekly trek to the suburbs, John's trips became once every two weeks, then once a month until eventually it was Valerie who was visiting John more often at his parents' house than he would to their own home. Valerie interpreted John's sporadic trips home as his lack of desire to give his family time and attention. John claims that it was simply tiring him out to make the drive home and back weekly. They started arguing about the arrangement and soon were arguing frequently.

To avoid arguments, John withdrew further from Valerie. He would join the young people at his workplace for their nights out and drinking sprees. Before long, he found himself getting close to Melissa, a newly married coworker. Soon, from being a friend who could offer a sympathetic ear, a sexual relationship developed between Melissa and John.

When Valerie and John came to me, they were on the brink of divorce. John wanted Valerie to let him go to be with Melissa, who was ironically not free herself, while Valerie wanted to take a good look at their problems and work through them.

It would have been superfluous for me to advice John NOT to have an affair, since he was chest-deep in one already. However, IF YOU are still at that stage where you are considering taking that coworker or friend up on that date, DON'T. An affair is the most dangerous threat to any relationship. Whatever you do, DON'T DO IT.

However, divorcing, as John suggests, IS NOT the solution either. A divorce or separation carries with it its share of consequences – financial issues, custody problems, psychological effects and so on. Disconnecting your shared lives will be even more complicated than getting back together. The sheer amount of time, effort and emotions that go into a divorce is enough to cause sleepless nights and lower life expectancy! Even if you do divorce, your relationship with your new partner will forever be tainted by your affair.

Then again, a relationship that survives an affair will take a long time to get back on its feet, if at all. There will be recriminations, feelings of guilt or betrayal, and distrust and mistrust that can color a couple's future relationship.

Because of all these reasons, it is indeed much better to AVOID an AFFAIR rather than have your marriage survive one.

To avoid an affair, you need to focus on that word AVOIDANCE. Nip new feelings in the bud. DO NOT get into an intimate situation with the person you are attracted to. FEND OFF a person who wants to flirt with you. EVEN IF your marriage is having problems, wear your wedding ring, focus on your identity as a committed person, and do all that you can to NOT put yourself in a dangerous or potentially compromising situation. This includes NOT exchanging phone numbers, not returning touches or glances, and not singling out a person of the opposite sex even when you are in groups.

Meanwhile, take a good look at your feelings – do you have feelings because you are attracted to this other person or because your relationship with your spouse is having problems? Take these feelings seriously and take your problems seriously BUT the best thing you can do is address them rather than escape them. Counseling may be a good idea to gain an alternate perspective – and also a good way of examining the issues before they grow into something less manageable!

Moreover, you and your spouse need to be aware that you are having problems and are clear with one another that you want to work on your marriage.

What can you do after an affair?

If you are ALREADY HAVING AN AFFAIR, first, you need to respect your commitment enough to address the immediate issues. Romantic feelings of love can be misleading. Focus on being rational and doing what is right, rather than what feels good.

If you're willing to work on your marriage or even to work on an amicable separation, you cannot be distracted by the third party. Cut off the affair immediately AND permanently if you are serious about counseling and seeking out a reconciliation. There should be no "waiting in the wings" or "when we see each other again" type of promises. Accusing your partner, fighting or arguing about the affair, or suggesting a trial separation – these are definitely not going to help you and your partner overcome an affair.

Ask yourselves why your relationship got to this point. Rather than wielding accusations or excuses, consider rationally the elements that combined to create the affair. Articulate your ideas and perspective with the other listening. The key here is to identify the factors or patterns of behavior and modify them to prevent it happening again in the future.

Go back to the positive points of your relationship. What made you and your partner come together in the first place? What made you happy together? Try to recapture those things and get back to basics. Moreover, learn to appreciate your relationship again for the positive traits it displayed when you first fell in love.

Don't rush. Give yourself and your heart time to recover. I receive a lot of emails from individuals who believe that things have to change fast; otherwise their marriage will not survive. However, time allows you and your partner to heal and do a lot of self-reflection. You and your partner need to commit to healing and recovery, and be aware that it WILL take up to a year for your relationship to show any real signs of healing, much less know if it will survive.

Finally, the key here is NOT just forgiveness but RECONCILIATION. Reconciling means that you are both aware that something wrong has been done, and someone has been wronged BUT that you are both willing to repair the relationship, faults and all, mistakes and all.



STRUGGLING TOGETHER

Many of you have picked up this material because you are in the throes of a difficult situation. Perhaps your partner has left home, is having an affair – or your relationship has turned into a war zone. While there may be extreme situations that WOULD require medical or therapeutic help, there are still some things you can do to manage the situation.

We receive a lot of emails that focus on one thing: “How do I stop divorce from happening?”

Like James’ story above, it’s easy to resort to blaming and feeling like you are the victim and your partner the villain. Or, like Hulk Hogan, the pressures of everyday life were too much for your relationship to bear. Perhaps you can relate to Jan’s experience, finding yourself falling for someone else because you don’t feel loved at home. Or perhaps you are Liam, unaware that your marriage is crumbling around you and that your partner is already having an affair.

You start looking for excuses why your relationship will not be worth fighting for. You start giving up. Given the effort it will take to really fight for a marriage; it should be easier to get a divorce, shouldn’t it?

As a matter of fact, the process of divorce also takes a toll on both partners emotionally, materially and psychologically. Unraveling your shared lives actually takes much more effort, and finances, than putting them back together.

No matter what the situation is, whether your partner is having an affair, whether there has been too much anger in your marriage, YOU can still do something to turn things around. BEFORE the threat of separation looms, here are some approaches you can take to transform that difficult situation.

First, YOU MUST WANT to stay together. If you are doubtful about your feelings, it will be very difficult for you to confront the days to come. Do you still love your spouse, no matter what you or your partner has done? If there is still love in you, you will need to make an internal decision to be patient, to have presence of mind and to decide to be there for your partner and your relationship, no matter if they want to save the relationship or not.

Second, you need to STOP BEING THE VICTIM. A lot of individuals resort to self-pity, especially when their partner has caused a lot of pain in the relationship. You don't have to be the victim to your partner's behavior. Think of how much potential you still have. Look deep inside you and ask yourself what you have done, have not done, and what you can still do. Believe that you can still transform the situation and decide to behave the way you believe.

Third, rather than pull away from your partner, bring yourself nearer. If your partner is creating chaos in the relationship, reach out to your partner and learn to put your foot down. You cannot start finding solutions if you just "let things slide." If you want change, you have to be change itself. And, rather than keep things in your head, start by telling your partner that his or her behavior is unacceptable. Refuse to engage them in conversation when they are being unreasonable. Equally, always tell them you are willing to communicate in a positive and respectful manner when they are ready to talk.

If your partner has withdrawn from the relationship and doesn't want to speak, reach out to them via email or letter. Tell them that even if you don't like the behavior, you still love them. Specify exactly where change is needed in the relationship and the way you interact and what you can both do in the short term and in the long term. Learn to negotiate. Be tough but at the same time be patient and fair. Learn how to make important decisions together – including terms of the separation and arrangements about kids, finances, and other household concerns.

Fourth, in times of stress, the best thing you can give yourself and your partner are breaks or 'timeout'. A break from all the fighting can help you both regroup. However, don't use time out as a weapon to withdraw from positive communication when you are angry with your partner and want to punish them with isolation. Time out is important, but it must be productive and aimed at increasing your wider perspective of the issues being faced and working towards positive communication.

Fifth, LOOK TO YOURSELF RATHER THAN YOUR PARTNER. While blaming your partner is a natural knee-jerk reaction to marriage troubles, stop and take a look at your own contribution to the problem. Remember, it takes two to tango. Recognize that you too have a "dark side." You may be projecting your own guilt or anger at your partner. Think twice before blaming and shaming. Avoid behaving out of spite or to wrestle power or control. Stop yourself before lashing out at your partner, even if he or she is goading you. Remember, losing self control is losing self respect.

Fifth, there must be some LOVE left, even if you or your partner chooses to deny it. Change your approach. Instead of accusation, use appreciation. Thank your partner for the good things he or she has done for you and your family. Remember, this is the person you once fell in love with. Regardless of what you or your spouse has done, treat one another with respect and sensitivity. Appreciation and warmth breeds closeness and may just be the first step in finding a solution for your relationship problems. Sometimes doing the one thing that seems least likely can deliver the greatest benefit.

Sixth, rather than fight fire with fire, BRING LIGHT. If you want to end the negative pattern of behavior in your relationship, you can be the first to break the habit. Without retaliation, the arguments are less likely to continue happening, or at the very least they will abate. Speak the truth and do the right thing. Don't be afraid of your partner's accusations and temper. If you keep your self control, you can keep your conscience clear. Bring light into a negative situation by learning to stand up for yourself in a calm and righteous manner. Be open to your partner and tell him or her how much you are hurt by his or her negative behavior. Then, look at his or her accusations and address them one at a time, with great care and patience. Rather than get defensive and blow up at your spouse, listen to what he or she is actually saying or not saying. Accusations often have some truth behind them but are often couched in explosive and hurtful language. Get to this truth. Playback to your partner what you interpret that truth is. If your partner affirms that you got it right, acknowledge the problem and work on the solution together.

Finally, be VULNERABLE to your partner. Don't hide or rationalize your feelings away. Open up your heart to your partner and ask your partner if he or she is willing to be vulnerable to you. With vulnerability, a door opens and hopefully, the couple recognizes this door as an opportunity to draw closer to one another. Vulnerability also allows forgiveness, love and understanding in and may just transform a negative situation into a hope-filled one.



CONTEMPLATING SEPARATION

What about if you and your partner believe there's no more hope and decide to part ways? There are things you can do to make separation a little easier for the both of you and to assure that you part ways under the best of terms. The same with staying in the relationship, separating requires conscious solutions that allow both of you to split up with dignity and grace.

If separation is your only option, start with resisting the temptation to rush into making decisions. GO SLOW. Tearing your relationship down the middle abruptly will be painful for both of you. Slowly discuss your feelings and your options and decide on this important step TOGETHER, but in a careful and considered manner.

Instead of seeing the separation as a loss, think of it as both of your ways to broaden your horizons. The objective is NOT to look for happiness elsewhere but to step away from a situation that is no longer right for you AS AN INDIVIDUAL. A separation is actually another opportunity for you to seek out your own truth, or to develop as a person. Jumping into another relationship shortly after a separation is missing an opportunity to connect with yourself.

You and your partner can separate without making it too painful for one another. A separation is not a good reason to look for something that's missing in your relationship. If something is indeed missing, it will be better for the both of you to seek out solutions WITHIN the relationship rather than out of it.

However, if separation is the best decision to make, you and your partner can still treat each other with love, loyalty, and respect. See your partner for all the good that is inside of him or her. Respect him or her, even if you ARE separating. Continue to learn from one another how best to handle this painful circumstance. Whatever you do, do NOT bad mouth your partner to your friends, family or anyone else. Even in the midst of bad times, there will have been a lot of good times. At one time you were deeply in love. Don't spoil the memory by focusing only on the most recent past. Respect and cherish the memory of being with your partner with kind words, or by not saying anything at all. The advice in the movie Bambi comes to mind – *"If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."*

Only you and your partner really know what it feels like to actually go through this separation. It's the best way for you to give honor to one another and to the relationship, even if it IS dying a natural death. Agree to talk regularly through the whole process and allow the other to be a friend to you.

Moreover, don't discount PRACTICAL arrangements. Consult a counselor and an attorney as soon as possible. While you remain in good terms with your soon to be ex-spouse, it's important to protect yourself and your children, if any, financially and emotionally. Stay rational though and carefully oversee your finances as well as your attorney. Your attorney is supposed to work with you, not against you. Remember they are your attorney, not your counselor. The more negotiating and discussing you can do as a couple will save you both a lot of money in legal fees. Your attorney should defend your rights while securing for you a fair agreement with your spouse, but only at your direction.

It will also be good for you to talk to several people – perhaps previously divorced individuals close to you. They can help walk you through the process, help you navigate the ins and outs of a divorce and be there for you emotionally. You will also need to inform your employer and colleagues what you are going through, without making it sound like some huge drama in your life. Simply tell your boss that you are going through a divorce and may be called away from time to time. A lot of companies are very understanding of their staff's personal situations. However, this doesn't mean that you should allow your personal life to get in the way of your work. Continue to do your work as well as you can. It may be the only stability in an otherwise uncertain period of transition.

Friends and family are going to be vital lifelines for you at this time. Gather their support. Take up their offers of help, and accept their company. Visits and outings with friends may provide a welcome distraction and escape from the heartache of your separation. Their support may remind you of the many connections you do have to others, and bolster your sense of self-worth.

After your separation, you may lose touch with one another but if you follow this valuable advice, you will always look back at your relationship positively rather than with regret. Finally, don't close yourselves off to the possibility of getting back together. After all, we never really know all there is to know about a person – and you may be surprised how things change BECAUSE of this separation.



GETTING BACK TOGETHER

There are a lot of couples who do get back together after a crisis and yet find themselves separating again after a few months or years.

What this usually means is that issues were not really addressed, perhaps just glossed over in favor of “doing the right thing.” This can also mean that the couple was not really prepared to confront the many changes in their relationship. Think of it another way. A relationship that has gone through recovery will DEFINITELY not be the same one you had before. It’s important for you and your spouse to be aware of this fact.

However, a recovered relationship CAN succeed and the statistics point to the fact that while it may be a challenge, they can succeed... well, successfully.

Here are a few tips to make recovery effective:

- 1. Physical symbols of your reconciliation are important.** Some experts call these “peace offerings.” Others call them renewal symbols. You and your partner need something to remind you of each milestone in your new relationship and for the new relationship itself. Physical symbols can be written words of love, framed affirmations, or an actual symbol such as a renewal of vows or new wedding rings and the like.
- 2. Remember the good times.** It’s very easy for unhappy couples to focus on what went wrong, continually bickering about it and allowing it to destroy their relationship. What they forget are the good times. Remember John’s story in the previous segment? John struck me as someone who forgot about the good times with Valerie and only focused on the bad. John forgot how happy they once were, how they fought for their relationship, how they have 2 beautiful kids out of it and even, how he and Valerie sacrificed time and distance so that they can provide for their kids. You will have good and bad memories of your relationship. Don’t allow the bad memories to overcome the many good ones you have.
- 3. Learn to fight fair.** From hereon, you and your partner cannot argue the same way you did before – with all the anger, blaming and shaming. You and your spouse need to pick up new conflict skills that will help you have more productive discussions. Some tips from the experts are:

- Don't take it personally. Over and above your argument is the love you and your partner have for one another. Learn to focus on issues, rather than taking an argument personally. Talk about concrete solutions rather than thinking each discussion is a slight against you.
 - Don't argue for more than 15 minutes. Stick to a time limit because the longer an argument drags on, you'll bring up old hurts that were supposed to be addressed by your reconciliation.
 - No foul language. Use constructive language and never ever call your partner names.
 - Develop rules of engagement. Talk about what's okay and what's not. Do you agree not to walk out on an argument? Or, are you both allowed to take a time out? When? Under what circumstances?
 - Stick to the point. Focus on the issue you are dealing with right now, no bringing up the past or even accusing of future problems. Look into the issue –_why are you arguing about it? Is it worth your time and energy? After discussing an issue, also learn to put it behind you.
4. **Don't succumb to fantasy.** A relationship is real, involves people's feelings, and takes work. The time is passed for fantasy and the thrill of falling in love. Be realistic. People have problems all the time and you and your partner are not exempt. Then again, relationships are not what they portray in the media either.
5. **Don't hold grudges.** Learn to let go of past issues. Also, learn to let go of WHAT caused you to separate in the first place. Reconciliation gives hope of something new. Grudges will simply creep in and contaminate what you have going now.
6. **Learn to forgive.** Contrary to what you may think, forgiveness does not mean excusing wrongs. Forgiveness means acknowledging that there WAS something wrong and now you are both working on repairing it and learning to let it go. Forgiveness also does not have anything to do with personal weakness. It takes strength of character to forgive because it requires you to be fully conscious that you are forgiving this person wholly and without any recriminations.

7. **NO physical violence, ever.** This item is actually self-explanatory but if I must explain, physical violence is not a consequence of anger but a consequence of CONTROL. Never bring in any type of physical violence into your relationship. This also means no threats of violence and any other form of aggression.
8. **If problems don't go away, GET HELP.** Professional counseling can help you and your partner not just during times of trouble, but even before things get difficult. Moreover, counseling can help you continue to make progress into your recovered relationship.
9. **Face trouble TOGETHER.** Recovering your relationship may make you feel powerful for a while but it doesn't mean that you are exempt from the challenges of real life. Financial problems, illness, death and disappointments are part of life. But, rather than keeping things to yourself OR buckling under the strain, think of your partner as your helpmate and support through difficult times. THIS also applies when you are going through internal upheavals like feelings of anger, jealousy, depression, fears and disappointment. Rather than act on these feelings, share them with your partner and accept them for what they are. In the process, you are naming these negative feelings and not letting them have power over you.





REAL TOGETHERNESS

The path to togetherness is a long and rich journey. It requires presence of mind, the ability to accept change and manage difficulty, AND the aptitude to discover that evolution is very much a part of a healthy relationship.

Real togetherness is all these things and more.

It is also about discovering new things with your partner. It is about learning, about evolving. Staying in your relationship in spite of trouble teaches you so many things – about yourself, your partner, life and relationships in general.

So, rather than see the future of your relationship as a chore, see it as an opportunity for healing, wholeness, change, maturity and, most of all, TOGETHERNESS.

As you go through this journey, constantly renew your promises of togetherness. Learn to find a new purpose, set new goals and let go of old goals that are no longer working. Remember, these things are not set in stone. The one constant should only be your love for your partner.

The other side of the coin is YOUR personal health and empowerment.

You see, togetherness is actually striking a balance between empowering yourself and empowering your relationship. The irony is that each supports and feeds the other. If you feel empowered and self-sufficient, you can empower your relationship. If your relationship is secure and happy, you feel secure and happy as well.

Then again, you won't have all the answers all the time. Togetherness also teaches you that you can't know everything there is about yourself and your partner. This is why it's important to be prepared for this AND to get help when necessary.

An excellent suggestion is to seek out good role models who can show you and your spouse what togetherness means. Enrich your lives with friendships with older couples. Talk to your parents about your relationship concerns, especially if your mother and father's relationship is an inspiration to you.

Join support groups and seminars on marriage enrichment. Surround yourselves with friends who have the same relationship values as you and your partner do.

Finally, don't be disappointed if your love is not as thrilling as it was before. Appreciate this new type of love for what it is – something that is quieter and yet more superior than your old love for one another. It is a type of love that rejoices in both stillness and excitement.

This new love gives support, security and protection for your relationship.

This type of love is characterized by a quiet strength that enables you and your partner to ward off temptations and challenges.

To gain this new love, you and your partner have been through a lot - you have matured as individuals, you have transformed your perspectives of yourselves and your relationships, you are more flexible, but most of all you are willing to no longer distinguish between what's "mine" and what's "yours". Your lives are so melded together that you know and are secure in the knowledge that you love one another, are united, will always care for one another's welfare, and will always be present for one another.

At this point, you are now the best of friends, the most considerate of lovers and the staunchest allies.

It took a long and complex journey to get to this point. Appreciate it. It's called, real TOGETHERNESS.

