

# RENEWING RELATIONSHIPS

by [Claudette Coombs](#)

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Relationships "work" because of how we feel in them. If we feel loved, appreciated, alive, understood, respected, competent and all those other good feelings then we want to maintain that relationship. That initial attraction is usually sparked by a look or smile or comment and may create an interest in follow up. In the early stages, we pay meticulous attention to details. We want everything to be right. In case you have forgotten, this takes a lot of energy! The dusting, laundry and dishes are forgotten. Homework and music lessons aren't even on the agenda. Other commitments are (temporarily) replaced on the priority list. The world seems to focus on being together and feeling good.

## **Reality Settles**

As time passes, demands come creeping back. They can't be kept on hold. This restricts the relationship. You know how: less time for fun; more episodes of irritability; and a need for new balance in life. Unless we protect the relationship and preserve the fun, we are in danger of losing its real value. Added demands and responsibilities mean less time to enjoy the pleasures of being together. Down this road comes a lot of frustration, disappointment, resentment and even infidelity. The comment: "Things are certainly different" becomes the resounding theme, and is often said with a tone of blame. There's not enough time or energy for sex; work takes priority; chivalry and romance are distant memories; and division of labour is definitely a foreign concept. The original dream seems to have been a mirage and partners become disillusioned with the idea of commitment to "this"!

Well, all is not lost. The real flaw is when we decide to inappropriately seek that same excitement and adventure and believe we can have it at no cost. Trying to generate that same "good" feeling by independently indulging in new hobbies, flirting with others, or taking separate holidays while abandoning time with a partner, is very costly. These alternate activities may provide temporary euphoria but they interfere with the relationship and minimize the opportunities for rebuilding that feeling.

## **Mirage or Icon**

The original dream was not a mirage. It was, and still is, the visualization of a goal. It was our reality. Now we want to regain and maintain it as a way of life. When using a computer we readily click an icon to bring us to a desired program. We can use our goal's image to do the same thing for our relationship. We know that it was good. We remember some of the things that made it so special. Now we want it back. Mentally clicking the relationship icon can bring up the right mental program to begin the work of renewing our partnership.

Making the relationship work, creating the continued excitement of the first date, and encouraging the spirit of mutual care are all part of the process of allowing love to evolve. The "love" that you knew when you first met is not the love that holds together a relationship when things are difficult or routine. Life is not static, nor is love. Everything we experience affects us and serves to expand our world and change our value system and needs. The task is to direct that evolution so that it enhances our health, happiness and relationships.

## **Reciprocating the Feelings**

The relationship will only last if the feelings are reciprocated. Getting to know each other's needs and mutually supporting them is mandatory. We are only able to learn more about each other and share more of ourselves when we share a trust in each other. Trust is an odd concept. At times we try to explain it as knowing that someone will always be there for us. In real life, there are no guarantees. Death can quickly steal the value of that explanation. Instead, consider a definition of trust which has three basic assumptions. It is a sense of certainty that a partner will not deliberately, nor knowingly, cause harm; will actively seek ways to offer support; and will not inappropriately use personally divulged information. When this level of trust is in place, the mutual comfort encourages further receptivity and growth of the relationship. We are then willing to risk discussing issues, fears and dreams. We are also better able to give and receive those good feelings.

## **Knowing the Work To Do**

Although we want to make a relationship work, we may not possess the knowledge and skills to do so. It's time to learn! Increasing awareness of our partner's feelings, dreams and unique needs is a good beginning. Don't make the mistake of believing that all females or all males think, feel or behave identically. The best way to determine what is important to your partner is to ensure that you offer and encourage honest communication. When this is done in an atmosphere of

respect, trust and consideration, even difficult topics can be handled.

### **Sharing Fairly**

Sharing in a relationship includes everything from emotional involvement to energy use. A perception of "fairness" in the relationship precedes an individual's ability to give totally. Learning about your partner's interests, activities or plans as s/he describes them to an outsider is unfair emotionally and damages intimacy. Expecting meals to be prepared and household duties handled by one partner, without trading off other tasks, is unfair physically. Using the "Golden Rule" of treating your partner as you want to be treated is a quick check to determine whether your language or behaviour promotes harmony and growth.

### **Sustaining the Efforts**

Occasionally we need to boost our motivation to actively protect the integrity of our partnership. We know the relationship's benefits outweigh the costs and (theoretically) we are willing to do the necessary work. However, sometimes the impediments of daily life dominate. At those times we need to consciously remind ourselves of the value that has been added to our life.

The many factors interfering with our efforts to maintain a healthy partnership include: use of our time, energy and patience with other family or job responsibilities; biased interpretations from previous relationships; views of parents, family or friends which impede adhesion and introduce or reinforce conflict; or personal sabotage by electing other priorities.

Setting common priorities and the strategies to achieve them and discussing areas of real or potential conflict presents a wise approach to planning a lifestyle that advances mutual interests.

### **Reaping the Benefits**

Besides living longer, people in satisfying relationships have the added benefits of being healthier, sharing pleasures, buffering problems and enhancing life experiences. By agreeing to work on a relationship, we have the advantage of determining what is important to us and we have the opportunity to create the kind of life we would like to live.

### **Conclusion**

We insure our possessions. We put markers around our property and rust proof our vehicles. We use child gates, seat belts and door locks. We feel ownership and a need to protect what is ours. How do we justify taking less care and precaution to protect the treasures within a relationship? Of course it takes work and energy and patience and understanding. It also takes compromise, self control and generosity. At some point we made a commitment to this relationship. The intent was to create a fulfilling relationship to last a lifetime. We can't expect survival of the fun, trust, excitement and support without doing regular maintenance and preventive work.

Johnny Cash sang: "I keep a close watch on this heart of mine. I keep my eyes wide open all the time because you're mine" There are no guarantees. We choose to "belong" to each other. We only make that choice because we see and feel and believe in the benefits. It is essential that we vigilantly monitor the status of our relationship –; keeping its requirements in mind and continuously updating our maintenance efforts.

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