

10 Guiding Principles for a Successful Relationship

By Marisa Broughton, MPNLP, CMH

1. Respect each others individuality.

Forget about changing the other person. Accept the fact that there may be things you don't like or agree with that your mate thinks or does.

Often we find our selves in love with what we think the person could become if only s/he changed. Permanent change will only occur if the person wants it and not because you want it. Resentment builds which guarantees marital discord if one is pushed into change or to be something s/he is not or does not want to be.

Accept that your mate will change and grow and that it's impossible for you to determine or mold the person s/he will become. What your mate may have first wanted when the relationship was new may change over time.

If the things you don't like, outweigh the things that you do like, then perhaps you need to rethink why you are in this relationship.

2. Avoid restricting each others freedom.

Just as you need to allow individuality, you must also allow each other the freedom to make his or her own choices, providing those choices are not harmful to your health or anyone else's. In other words, freedom to be abusive is not an option. I'm talking about personal freedom which includes where s/he wants to sleep in the house; what s/he wants to eat; what time s/he comes home; what music, movies, books and hobbies s/he chooses; who s/he chooses for friends; occupation s/he wants to work in; clothes and style of hair.

The main point here is that you are in a relationship by choice and neither one of you has the right to tell each other what s/he can or can not do.

3. Negotiate agreements regarding shared responsibilities such as cleaning duties, money & spending, decorating, time alone, noise levels and so forth.

Basically, anything that one does that can affect the other needs an agreement. Note: Reaching an agreement is not permission. Here is where the boundaries of the relationship are defined and agreed on. There are certain things that if the other person does or does not do, the relationship will be in jeopardy. Things that you do not want to tolerate such as substance abuse, infidelity, physically or mentally abusive behavior etc.

The idea is to discuss and agree on the rules and boundaries of the relationship. It's like a contract in a way, where you negotiate what each person will contribute; divide the work; discuss money issues, bill payment, investment agreements etc.

Negotiation is not about winning or losing, it's about agreement and compromise. If there is something that your mate does that you absolutely hate and if s/he continues to do it, it's likely that the relationship will end – then this is the time and place to discuss it. Be reasonable and be willing to compromise and give a little to get a little. Because this is about an agreement, there is no cause to fight. Either you will or will not do something. If you decide that you are not willing to give up something that is important to you, that your partner wants you to – that's okay, just understand what the consequences are and whether or not you can live with it.

4. Recognize that both are equal and therefore have equal rights.

You are both equal partners. You both have equal say on how things are and what needs to happen. Neither one of you is property of the other. Marriage does not make anyone a possession. If your mate asks if you mind if they do this or that, remember that they are not asking for permission, they are being courteous towards your feelings. Traditional titles and roles do not apply unless you both agree to them.

5. Treat each other with kindness.

Remember you are friends and partners. You have a special relationship, one that holds the elements of love and caring. Remember that your mate is not the enemy. Treat him or her with love and respect and you'll find that things go a lot smoother.

When we are feeling threatened or hurt, we tend to lash out and want to hurt back. This is a defense mechanism. If your mate verbally lashes out at you, instead of reacting to the situation as a fight, ask yourself and then your mate – what is causing the pain and what can you do to help.

Remember your mate doesn't really want to be angry or hurt, nor does s/he want to hurt you or fight with you. At the moment s/he is reacting to a perceived or real situation and really needs you to be understanding, supportive and loving. To fight back will only get you a fight, to respond as a friend would is to disarm them.

6. Remember that you are together by choice, not obligation.

There is nothing forcing either one of you to stay in the relationship and at any time you are unsatisfied, you can call it quits. Staying in a relationship for the wrong reasons is just plain old stupid. Each of you deserves to be loved in the way that you want and you are unable or unwilling to do or be that – then do the other person a favor and let them go.

Threatening to kill yourself or the other person if they leave you is even more stupid. Why on earth would you want to keep someone with you against their will. Regardless of how hard you try, you cannot make anyone love you – they either will or will not.

Staying together because of the kids is also unwise. It is more harmful for the children to grow up in a tense or adversarial environment than with a single parent or in shared custody.

7. Your mate does not have to be your everything.

Each person should have hobbies and friends of their own. It's unreasonable to expect that your mate do everything with you. Just because s/he doesn't enjoy all of the same activities as you, doesn't mean that you have to give up doing those activities, it means that you would be better off engaging in that activity with a friend.

At the same time, if there is very little that you have in common, it would be a good idea to find a few activities that you can do together. As a show of support and friendship, take turns picking activities and do something that your mate likes to do even though it's not really your thing.

8. Be supportive of your mate's goals, dreams and aspirations.

Instead of finding fault with what they want (unless it is harmful to another) help them find ways to make it work. Even if you think it won't work, recognize that it may be just as important for the person to have the experience.

Even unrealistic (to you) dreams can be supported. If your mate wants to change careers, but you are depending on his or her income to pay the bills, you can still support the dream and work together finding a way to make it feasible. For example, s/he can work on their project after work or on days off. If more education is required, there are loans, night school, correspondence and so forth.

If their goal requires relocating, then you have to decide whether this is something you are willing to do or not. If you are not, then they have a decision on whether to go on and do it without you or to alter their plans. After all, if you hold someone back from their dreams, it will only hurt the relationship in the long run.

9. Learn your mate's love language and make an effort to ensure that they feel loved.

Even if each others love language is not the same, give each other what is needed to feel loved. How do you find out each other's love language? Simply ask your mate, what is it that you do that makes them feel loved or what is it that you don't do that they would like you to do so they feel loved.

Note: Your version of what you think they need or want doesn't count. Listen to what they specifically tell you. It's not enough that you do the things that you do to show them how much you love them, you need to do the things that are meaningful to them for them to feel loved.

Love language ideas:

Affirmations: Be ready with a genuine complement and words of encouragement. Tell him or her how much you love and appreciate them.

Acts of Service: Take a few extra minutes and do something nice for your mate. Clean the snow of his or her car. Make him or her lunch.

Quality Time: Engage in a conversation or activity with your mate. Watching TV or going to a movie doesn't count.

Touch: Massage, sex, holding hands, etc.

Gifts: Anything from a card to something you make. It doesn't have to be expensive, only thoughtful.

Of course, we all want a bit of all of these, so why not do them all?

10. Take responsibility for your own happiness.

Your mate does not make you sad, happy or mad – you choose to feel a certain way in response to his or her actions or inactions. You are in control of your emotions.

No one can make you happy but yourself. Just as no one can hold you back unless you let them. At the moment, you may not have the emotional control that you would like – just know that it can be achieved and begin working at it.

You are also responsible for how others treat you because you allow it to happen. If you are finding yourself constantly in adversarial positions, look within yourself to see how you are provoking it. If you find yourself constantly in abusive situations, look within yourself to discover what you are doing that enables someone else to believe they can get away with doing that. This is perhaps the toughest step for anyone to master, but it is possible.