

Valentine's Day: Reflections on Relationships

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-- Valentine's Day provides an annual reminder to focus on the importance of frequent practices of love, laughter and healing for couples. Relationships are a maturation machine in need of regular maintenance and fine-tuning. Dr. Linda Miles recommends these twelve tools to maintain, repair and restore love bonds:

1. Kindness and Respect

The expression, "we should treat family like strangers and strangers like family," is indicative of the amount of disrespect that is tolerated in relationships. This attitude is a barrier to the basic building blocks of long-term goodwill and respect.

2. Ability to Learn

Although it is normal to have disagreements and power struggles, many couples fail to learn from conflicts and may repeat the same self-destructive scenarios and behaviors for decades. As James Thurber noted, our tendency is to look back in anger or forward in fear, instead of "around in awareness."

3. Flexibility

Many people grow up in rigid families, with rigid roles. Since the brain is accustomed to the familiar, patterns are repeated even when not working.

4. Ability to Hear the Partner's Pain

Inability to hear your partner's pain is a common reason that couples seek therapy. It is vital that partners take the necessary time to sit and listen with empathy and compassion.

5. A Deep Inner Life on a Personal Journey

Often couples become too fused together, losing their individual joys and passions.



Dr. Linda Miles

6. Similar Passions

Many couples lose their pleasure bond with each other, sharing mostly complaints and drudge. The ability to have a variety of positive experiences together.

7. Similar Values

Unfortunately, couples read too many “happily ever after” fairy tales. Instead of understanding the importance of conscious negotiation of rules, roles, religion and money issues early on in couple-hood, it is often left as an afterthought.

8. Compassion

Many people learn “shame and blame” games from their families. They engage in rascal hunting and learn to use these behaviors in close relationships. Families fail to watch each other with “soft eyes,” in order to address problem behaviors in a gentle manner without judgment about partners. Often a partner will take the “moral high ground” and lecture to the other about perceived inadequacies. Instead of compassion shared between two equals, partners often relate to each other like they are parents of children.

9. Ability to Laugh at Oneself

Because many people grow up in a shame-blame environment, it is often difficult to respond to inadequacies with some humor.

10. Honesty, Vulnerability and Avoidance of Substance Abuse

Dishonesty and cover-ups erode trust. A lack of knowledge about substance abuse introduces a wild card into the relationship. To maintain lasting love throughout relationships, we need protection and connection.

11. Ability to be a Friend and not Just a Lover

In relationships, passion without friendship is like doing somersaults on a circus trapeze without a safety net.

12. Make the World Bigger

Couples can make the world smaller for one another by being judgemental or controlling. Smaller relationships don't allow room for the required maintenance or fine-tuning. In great relationships, people make lives bigger for one another.



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Although this is an easy list to memorize, the difficulty lies in breaking the patterns that prevent maintenance of our desired behaviors. Peggy Papp, a famous family therapist, remarked that we come out of our own family of origin with a “cookie-cutter” approach to life which requires “heroic moments” to reshape our own cookie-cutters. Visualizing your dream relationship several times a day will help begin reshaping your cookie-cutter and allow room for positive maintenance within your relationship.

ABOUT DR. MILES

Dr. Linda Miles is a leading psychotherapist, crisis therapist, award-winning author, and relationship expert. She has studied and worked in the field of counseling psychology for over 35 years and focuses on mindfulness, stress reduction, mental health and relationships. She has published several books on relationships and mindfulness (the latest: Change Your Story, Change Your Brain) as well as articles in the Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, Reuters and Miami Herald, and has appeared as a guest expert on numerous national TV shows including CNN, Fox News, ABC, and NBC. You can find additional resources on Dr. Miles’ Facebook page, Mindfulness Rewrites, or at www.DrLindaMiles.com.

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