



Making a Relationship Successful

Self-Love: The happiest couples consist of two emotionally healthy and independent individuals. Happy couples practice self-love. They treat themselves with the same type of care that they give their partner... or at least they try to.

Emotionally healthy people know how to forgive; they are able to acknowledge their part in any disagreement or conflict and take responsibility for it. They are self-aware enough to be assertive, to pull their weight, and to give love when it's most difficult.

Commitment: After their emotional health comes an unquestioning level of commitment. The happiest couples know that if things got real, their significant other isn't going to walk out on them. They know that even if things get hard—no, especially if things get hard, they are better off together. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

Trust: Happy couples trust each other. They have earned each other's trust. They don't worry about the other person trying to undermine them or sabotage them because they've proven over and over again that they are each other's biggest advocates. That trust is built through actions, not words. It's day after day after day of fidelity, service, emotional security, and reliability.

Establish that foundation, and you're in good shape.

Intentionality: This is the icing on the cake. There's a difference between the couple who drives through the rainstorm and the couple who pulls their car to the side of the road to make out in the rain. (Yes, that's a true story.) There's a difference between the couple that kisses for 10 seconds or longer when they say goodbye and the one that just gives each other a peck... or nothing at

all. There's something special about partners who encourage each other to pursue their personal goals at the expense of their own discomfort or inconvenience... even if it means their partner has to stage kiss another woman.

In my work as a couples therapist, the couples who try on a daily basis to experience some sort of meaningful connection or create a fun memory are the couples who shattered my perception of what was possible in a loving relationship. One woman I worked with gave some pretty amazing advice. She and her husband have been married for over 60 years, and after being asked what their best relationship advice would be, she paused and said, *Don't be afraid to be the one who loves the most.*

Resolving Disagreements

Don't Fight to Win: A huge number of couples talked about how they didn't fight against each other. I mean, if you're in love, you should be playing for the same team. Your goal should be to resolve the issue, not to emerge victorious over the love of your life, and let's be honest, you just feel guilty when you win anyway.

Seek to Understand: If you're having a hard time playing on the same team, stop fighting and instead try to understand why your partner is upset. Typically, what's being talked about isn't the real issue. People are inherently bad at being vulnerable, especially in threatening situations. Be willing to ask sincere questions and let the answer sink in. If they are complaining that you're spending too much time at work, maybe the real issue is that they miss you and want to feel connected with you. Rather than arguing about how you're providing for the family, and they need to respect how hard you work, try to listen to what they're really saying. Then hold them. Come home early one day and surprise them with a date or some special one-on-one time. Reassure them that they, and your relationship, is a priority for you. If you don't want that same issue to arise again, keep investing in the solution.

Just Be Nice to Each Other. Seriously. Don't call names. Don't take jabs. Don't try to hurt the other person. Argue naked if it helps, but just be kind and civil and respectful.