



SEASON TO BLOOM

EXPERTS OFFER RELATIONSHIP SPRING-CLEANING TIPS FOR HOW TO FOSTER HEALTHY, LONG-LASTING CONNECTIONS

BY LAILA ELISE

It's been widely circulated by now that nurturing our relationships with each other leads to better overall physical and mental health. Even though we've certainly all experienced those moments we've felt like the people in our lives are driving us mad, deep down each of us, introverts and extroverts alike, know that we all need close social connection on some level in order to thrive. In fact, according to one recent Harvard study, sustaining strong social relationships has now been proven to lead to the most significant long-lasting happiness in life. But what does that entail exactly? Is it really necessary to actively perform "check-ups" on all of our friendships and romances? Experts say yes, and offer tips for performing proactive maintenance work on the important relationships in our lives.

Take Initiative to Actively Reflect versus Following Routine

In romantic relationships, couples who have been together for a significant amount of time might not actively reflect upon whether their relationship is meeting all their needs. As long as things seem to be proceeding relatively well, many people lack the incentive to investigate further. To put it simply, we tend to fall into complacency, a comfort zone. The same can be said for friendships – especially with the people we have known for a long time and share a strong history.

According to Richard Slatcher, a psychology professor at the

University of Georgia in Athens, a sign of a strong friendship is if it boosts our self-esteem and provides a sense of connection. To assess whether a friendship meets these criteria, Slatcher suggests asking oneself the following questions after spending time with a friend: "Do I feel positive about myself afterwards? Does this individual comprehend my perspective and make me feel heard?" For romantic relationships, the five elements you should be evaluating are communication, quality time, conflict resolution, shared values, and physical intimacy.

Don't Be Afraid to Initiate the Conversation

Oftentimes, while we might be aware of certain things we'd like to work on in a relationship, we can be unsure of how to progress to the next step. Bringing issues to light with a friend or partner can be tricky and intimidating, especially if we know they are not expecting it. That's why a great strategy is to address the questions above together as a team, so neither party feels they are being criticized or attacked. For example, if communication is a concern, initiating an open-ended dialogue (i.e. "Do we communicate well with each other?") will hopefully allow any conflicts and potential resolutions to organically surface in a natural, two-sided, solutions-based conversation. By taking the time to thoughtfully start a conversation, we are performing the relationship version of preventative maintenance that can not only stop future problems from developing, but also bring you closer together. **I**