



Healthy relationships

Surviving the ups & downs



Introduction

Relationships are a key aspect of our lives, from family, to friends, to spouse, all of our social connections have the ability to shape who we are. Whatever our age, fulfilling relationships accentuate our best qualities and allow personal growth, but take commitment, understanding and compromise to uphold. Healthy relationships can be enormously beneficial to both your health and life satisfaction and can result in:

- Better health and increased happiness
- Reduced depression and cognitive decline
- Reduced stress, a condition that can harm the heart's arteries, gut function, insulin regulation and immune system
- Improved self-esteem and cooperation with others
- A decreased risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- A longer life.

In adulthood, romantic relationships often become the most valuable, providing love, security and passion. However, this intense relationship can turn volatile and problems are often ignored until things become critical.

Common relationship problems

Infidelity

If a partner is unfaithful it puts a great deal of strain on the relationship and causes distress to both parties. The trust that is essential to a healthy relationship has been broken and is often left beyond repair. However, many couples do try and move past infidelity and with the right support from friends, family and perhaps a professional they can emerge as a stronger unit.



What is infidelity?

Infidelity (also known as cheating, adultery or having an affair) is when a partner(s) breaks the expectations of exclusivity upheld by the relationship. However, what constitutes 'cheating' varies between cultures and types of relationship and is not necessarily physical.

A physical affair would involve a partner(s) having sexual relations with someone outside the relationship. This can lead to feelings of distrust, disloyalty and anger.

An emotional affair is often more complicated as the partner may not realise they have breached the boundaries of friendship. Generally, if your partner would not want to see or hear these interactions then you have crossed the line towards infidelity. Advances in technology mean we can communicate with others behind a 'screen' making flirting or inappropriate behaviour seem innocent. However, your partner may view such interactions as a betrayal. Redirecting time, attention and love to somebody other than your partner causes a great deal of hurt and can often lead to a physical affair.

What causes infidelity?

The evolutionist, Charles Darwin would lead us to believe that affairs are the result of our natural instinct to reproduce and increase the quality of our offspring. However, there are a number of factors that contribute to infidelity that are perhaps more complicated than an intrinsic desire to mate. In identifying the cause of the affair it is often better to look at the relationship rather than the adulterer.

- **Lack of intimacy** - Intimacy bonds two individuals together emotionally, sexually and spiritually, but if one partner is directing their energy elsewhere (e.g. children, job, etc) or if the intimacy has simply disappeared it may leave one spouse looking to emotionally connect with someone else.

- **Boredom** - In long-term relationships it is sometimes inevitable to develop a routine and to stop growing as

individuals, which can often lead to dissatisfaction and boredom. Many seek to escape and relish the thrill of an affair.

- **Communication problems** - We are sociable beings and enjoy talking about our feelings, hopes and aspirations but if our partner is unwilling to listen or share their own thoughts it can lead one partner to seek conversation elsewhere and this could result in an affair.

- **Superiority/inferiority** - When one partner views themselves as superior to the other, either physically or intellectually, they often feel they have more 'leeway' to act inappropriately and have a cause to cheat. On the other hand, partners who feel they are inferior to their spouse may seek to punish themselves by seeking out someone who they feel they are more deserving of. If they get caught they have fulfilled their own belief that they are not good enough for their original partner.

- **Jealousy** - If one partner is paying a lot of attention to something other than their relationship (i.e. career) it might cause jealousy. In this situation, an affair might be tempting in order to get revenge on your partner. On the other hand, someone with a jealous partner who is always being accused of infidelity might act out in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

- **Extrication** - An affair can sometimes be an opportunity to 'escape' a relationship. If a partner feels they have outgrown their spouse they may opt to avoid initiating the break-up and instead hope, perhaps subconsciously, to get caught.

- **Genetics** - studies suggest that some people are genetically programmed to be more promiscuous.

- **Personality** - Loud, enthusiastic and assertive people tend to have more sexual partners and could be more likely to cheat.



Dealing with infidelity

- **Don't blame yourself.** If your partner has been unfaithful it is not a reflection on you. Problems in the relationship may be the cause of the infidelity but it was the adulterer who chose to betray the expectations of exclusivity.
- **Avoid blaming the third party.** It is understandable to feel anger towards them but they did not hold a loyalty to you.
- **Set boundaries.** If you have chosen to continue your relationship, the unfaithful partner must make it clear to the third party that their relationship is over.
- **Be honest.** If you are the adulterer, be honest about your reasons and actions. Let your partner know if there is a risk of a sexually transmitted disease or pregnancy.
- **Be patient.** Understand that rebuilding a relationship after an affair takes time and commitment. A relationship counsellor can help you understand the cause of the affair and support you in conquering these issues.

Signs of infidelity

Despite their best efforts, an adulterer can elicit certain behaviours and signals that can help identify their infidelity. However, exhibiting these signals is not necessarily evidence that someone is being unfaithful. There may be other reasons. On the other hand, a partner may not exhibit any of the following signals, but could be engaging in an affair.

- **Emotional disengagement** - we do not have enough emotional resources to invest in an affair without having to withdraw some investment from our home life.
- **Changes in routine** - longer working hours or more business trips could actually be time spent with another partner.
- **Increased attention to appearance** - aiming to impress new partner.
- **Spending more time online** - could be communicating with others and engaging in an emotional affair.
- **Inability to account for time.**
- **Unexpected and expensive gifts** - if a partner is feeling guilty they may try and ease their conscience by giving presents to their spouse.
- **Becoming angry, critical and even cruel** - engaging in a 'double-life' can be demanding and the adulterer may direct their stress at their partner.
- **Issue of control** - if a partner complains of feeling 'trapped' or 'controlled' they are more vulnerable to infidelity as a means of escape.

Gender and infidelity

Some psychologists believe men tend to engage in extramarital affairs more often than women and evolutionary psychologists say this stems from our animal instincts where a male's reproductive success depends on the quantity of mates whereas a female's depends on quality.

They believe men and women cheat for different reasons with sex being the primary motivator for men (75-80% of males who have cheated admitted that sex was the main appeal compared to only 20% of women). Males may desire more sexual variety and a need to reaffirm their sexuality more than females who cite their main reason for cheating as a need to fill unmet emotional needs or dissatisfaction in their relationship.

Sexual intercourse problems

Sex is an integral aspect of a healthy relationship. During intercourse our body releases hormones that affect us in a number of beneficial ways:

- Induces pair bonding
- Aids sleep
- Helps relaxation
- Creates desire to stay with partner
- Burns calories
- Increases levels of oestrogen that protects against osteoporosis and Alzheimer's.
- Increases energy
- Eases depression
- Makes us feel happy
- Reduces stress
- Increases body's pain threshold
- Lowers blood pressure
- Increased number of ejaculations decreases chances of prostate cancer.
- Boosts immune system
- Boosts confidence

Sexual dysfunction

Despite the benefits of a healthy sex life, many couples experience sexual dysfunction. This refers to any difficulty experienced by an individual or a couple, during any phase of normal sexual activity. You may be surprised to hear that sexual problems are more common than we might imagine - 43% of women and 31% of men report some degree of difficulty. Sexual dysfunction can cause a great deal of distress and may result in anxiety, low self-esteem and frustration.

Sexual dysfunction in women

Sexual dysfunction is primarily psychological in females unless they have major health problems. If there is unresolved tension with a partner, or even with themselves, then the physical relationship will inevitably suffer.

Many women become anxious during sex, due to performance anxiety or self-esteem issues and may withdraw from their partners. If this is the case, communication is essential to help your partner understand they are not to blame.

Menopause causes a number of physical, hormonal and emotional changes. The woman must come to terms with the end of her fertility and can often suddenly feel much older. This coupled with the physiological changes can often diminish a women's desire for sexual intercourse.

Sexual dysfunction in men

Sexual dysfunction in males can be physical or psychological. A good indicator of the route of the problem is whether the difficulties occur only during sex with a partner. If it is the case, the problem is probably psychological.

Male erectile disorder (or impotence) is the inability to achieve or maintain an erection. 40% of men experience erection problems up to the age of 40, which increases to 70% at 70. If this is an occasional problem it could just be down to stress, distraction, too much alcohol or being run down. However, if the problem persists and only occurs during sexual intercourse with a partner there could be deeper

psychological reasons such as: problems with the relationship, depression, sexual boredom, and performance anxiety. In many cases an initial cause (i.e. too much alcohol) can develop into anxiety as men worry it is going to happen again.

Another common sexual problem is premature ejaculation. This is when male sexual climax (orgasm) occurs before a man wishes it to. If this happens only during intercourse then it is likely to be due to anxiety which, like erectile dysfunction, can lead to performance anxiety and become a downward spiral.

Sexual dysfunction in couples

Many sexual problems can happen to either or both partners. In other cases sex is not the real problem - the dysfunction is an expression of deeper-rooted problems in the relationship.

Treatment for sexual dysfunction

Many of the symptoms of sexual dysfunction are reversible, so it's important to talk to your GP who will assess your physical, psychological and sexual health and offer ways to help. Your GP may suggest lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking or cutting back on alcohol as these can all impact on sexual dysfunction. They can also prescribe some drugs and treatments to help with sexual dysfunction. There is a range of self-help guidance available in books and online, but it is important not to rely solely on this for diagnosis and management of the problem.

Therapy - Psychosexual therapy (PST) has proven effective in treating sexual dysfunction. It involves addressing an emotional block behaviourally by discussing the problem and examining the physiological and psychological cause of distress. As the cause of sexual dysfunction for men is often anxiety about performance, men may also benefit from psychotherapy which can help explore the cause of their anxiety. Couples counselling may also be useful for couples affected by sexual dysfunction as problems can be caused by disharmony in a relationship.

Dealing with sexual dysfunction

- **Communicate.** Whether it is talking to your partner or a professional, opening up about the problem is the first step and often reduces some of the anxiety.
- **No pressure.** Do not put pressure on yourself or your partner during sex.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Poor diet and lack of exercise, smoking and excess alcohol can all have a negative impact on your sexual satisfaction.
- **It's not boring.** Remember that with time comes greater intimacy, trust and less inhibition.
- **Seek help.** If you feel your problems are rooted in your relationship, speak to a relationship counsellor.

Preventing and curing conflict

Thankfully, everyone can learn how to communicate and resolve conflicts efficiently in order to achieve mutual understanding and relationship satisfaction.

- **Shift behaviour to get different results.** For example instead of jumping down your partner's throat for spending money on an unnecessary item, explain that you need their co-operation in managing the finances.
- **Think about your emotions.** Before an argument begins, consider the true reasons behind your emotions. If they are the result of a different issue do not raise them over something trivial.
- **Understand your own needs.** If you do not know what you want then it is very difficult to communicate what is troubling you with your partner.
- **Try and see the issue from your partner's perspective.** Sympathising with their view and feelings will help you understand their actions.
- **Do not seek to win points.** Maintaining the strength of your relationship by respecting your partner should remain a priority during the discussion.
- **What are the triggers?** Think if there are any triggers to your arguments. If so try to recognise them and defuse the situation before high emotions become involved.
- **Apologise when you are wrong.**
- **Steer clear of generalisations.** Generalisations like "You're always late," tend to make people defensive.
- **Communicate!** The longer a problem is not discussed the more tension will build up causing greater conflict in the end.

Conflict

There can be many reasons for constant arguing and it can create a very hostile atmosphere that can slowly diminish your love for one another. A certain degree of conflict is healthy in a relationship and it is understandable that two individuals living in an intense relationship will occasionally clash. Research suggests couples who partake in low levels of conflict are happier, make more joint decisions and are less likely to divorce. However, there is a limit to how much confrontation you can handle. Many couples find themselves in a vicious cycle in which past issues are continuously brought up but never resolved.

Why people argue

Arguing is just a way of communicating what is important to us. Many issues can be resolved through peaceful discussion, however some provoke anger, defensiveness and frustration.

- **Poor communication** - If your partner doesn't realise something has upset you it can be frustrating. Sometimes it feels easier to blame them for not understanding than to tell them.
- **Jealousy** - You may feel jealous your partner is giving more attention to somebody or something other than you. These feelings can quickly turn to rage and result in conflict.
- **Trust** - A lack of trust in a relationship can lead to regular interrogations, causing annoyance and conflict.
- **Past infidelity** - Conflict can arise when trying to move on from infidelity and past feelings of betrayal.
- **Finances** - You may have different views on how to spend money or one partner may feel entitled to more than the other. This can cause conflict.
- **Raising children** - Differing parental views and styles can result in conflict.
- **Outside influences** - Friends and family can offer an opinion on your relationship/partner and create doubts that can lead to conflict.

What are the effects of conflict?

Often, the cause of the argument is superficial and the frustration and anger stem from much bigger problems in the relationship. If you find yourself arguing about who should wash the dishes when you are actually upset they have been flirting with a co-worker then you are in danger of distancing yourself further from your partner.

A couple can slip into old inefficient patterns when arguing about an important issue meaning the discussion goes in circles. This can sometimes end in one partner making a hurtful comment to 'win' the dispute. If their partner has gone into the argument feeling insecure about this particular issue these comments can sometimes severely damage their self-esteem and even the relationship.

Life changes

As you mature and grow so does your relationship. At the beginning of a relationship everything is new and exciting, but romance cannot be maintained through the stress and practicalities of everyday life. Despite the love that bonds two people together at the beginning of a relationship there are many reasons why people grow apart.

One person's needs change

When you were young, your partner's relaxed and carefree attitude many have been attractive. However, when there are mouths to feed and bills to pay and you might find yourself wishing for someone with more focus and determination.

You pull in different directions

We often meet our partners when we are young adults. This is often the stage of our lives when we complete our education, begin our career and start a family. As we grow older our skills, values, interests and goals may differ from those we held when we met or those of our partners. Without realising we might be heading down different paths with entirely different goals. While compromise and negotiation are key aspects of a relationship it is often difficult to share the same path without one (or both) partner(s) sacrificing something important to them.

Children

If one partner does not want children it can often be a deal breaker early on. However sometimes people realise they don't want or can't have children when they have committed to a relationship. This can cause great upset, as each partner has to weigh up the relationship against his or her desire for children.

When a couple does have a child their relationship may slip into a co-parent relationship rather than a romantic one. Having a child changes your life completely and the impact on your relationship should not be underestimated. A new baby presents many challenges. Sleep deprivation can lead to stress and conflict and many new parents feel guilty about not enjoying every moment of parenthood. In addition, they may disagree about how to parent.

If one parent decides to leave their job and stay at home with the baby then their conversation may be centred on the child. Or alternatively, they may crave adult conversation while their partner just wants to switch off after work.

Careers

Whether one partner is climbing the career ladder or descending it, job changes can have an impact on the relationship and can push you apart. For example, if a male partner has always been the 'breadwinner' he may feel emasculated if his partner starts earning more money and feel he has lost his purpose within the relationship. A new job may demand more attention leading to feelings of rejection and jealousy from a partner.

Lifestyle changes

As you get older and gain more responsibilities you might change how you enjoy spending free time. If your partner doesn't change you may grow apart.



Preparing for life changes

- **Get to know each other.** Before diving into a new relationship, understand one another's values and life goals.
- **Think ahead.** Anticipate what you will want from a partner in the future.
- **Keep doing the little things.** Always be aware of each other's emotions and needs.
- **Have realistic expectations of your partner.**
- **Be flexible.** New parents should stay flexible and understand that their relationship is still imperative.
- **Write it down.** If you feel you have drifted apart write down the reasons you loved and chose your partner initially then ask yourself whether these reasons are still important.
- **Be proud.** Share your partner's career achievements and support their downfalls.
- **Find common ground.** If you find yourself enjoying different activities, try finding a hobby you can both enjoy and share.

Managing psychological problems in a relationship



It is estimated one in four people experience some kind of psychological problem over the course of a year. Yet, it is still a taboo subject. Many people are too embarrassed to seek help or do not realise they are suffering from a diagnosable problem. Women are more likely to be treated for psychological problems than men - not because they are more susceptible but because they are more likely to seek help. One alarming statistic states men are three times more likely than women to die from suicide – this perhaps demonstrates the dangers of suffering in silence.

Psychological problems can have a significant impact on relationships as you both struggle to understand the changes in behaviour. Recovery can be slow and difficult, requiring support and commitment. This can put a strain on even the strongest relationship.

Symptoms of depression

The following are the most common symptoms of depression. If you experience five or more of these symptoms during the same two-week period for most of the day or every day go and speak to your GP.

- Depressed mood
- Diminished interest or pleasure
- Significant weight changes
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping) or hypersomnia (excessive sleepiness)
- Restlessness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death/ suicide

Depression

Depression is the most common psychological issue in the UK with 9% of the population meeting the diagnosis criteria. Sufferers experience intense anxiety, hopelessness, negativity and helplessness. Recovery can take six months to a year or more, but unfortunately, half of sufferers will experience depression again.

Causes of depression

There may be many causes, or none at all. It can be the result of a physical illness, childhood experiences, unemployment, bereavement, family problems or any life changing events.

How depression affects a relationship

If one partner develops depression the other partner will be faced with difficulties as the relationship system has changed. People suffering from depression can become withdrawn and show little interest in things they once cared about, including their partner. This can leave their partner feeling unwanted and unloved and they might interpret their partner's low mood as hostility towards them.

Depression can make the sufferer feel negative about themselves. This low-self esteem may cause them to avoid interactions making it difficult to socialise as a couple. In addition, they may become irritable and angry causing friends to be pushed away.

Sometimes a person in the midst of depression doesn't understand their own feelings or needs and may give very mixed messages. For example, they might want love from their partner but also feel overwhelmed so want to be left alone.

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety and fear are our natural responses to danger. They cause the body to release hormones that help protect us against threats. This short-term anxiety is useful as nerves often make us feel more alert and enhance our performance. However, over a long period it can begin to affect our wellbeing.

Fear and anxiety become categorised as a disorder when they start to feel overwhelming and severely affect a person's life. In some cases they will prevent the sufferer from meeting new people, travelling or leaving the house. There are many types of anxiety disorder including panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, and generalised anxiety disorder.

Causes of anxiety disorders

Most people suffering from anxiety disorders are also more prone to stress. This vulnerability means external stimuli could trigger an anxiety response more easily than in someone who has a low stress response. A person's genetics, biochemistry, environment, history, and psychological profile can also influence the development of an anxiety disorder.

How anxiety disorders affect a relationship

The problems affecting a sufferer of an anxiety disorder can have a large impact on their relationships. A recent study reported 77 percent of people with social anxiety believe their disorder has impacted romantic relationships in negative ways. For example, the lack of sleep and feelings of panic experienced can lead to irritability which might drive a loved one away.

With many anxiety disorders, certain things have to be avoided because they may trigger a panic attack. This can greatly restrict the activities you are involved in as a couple and perhaps stop you spending time together. In addition, it is often very hard for the partner to understand certain characteristics of the anxiety disorder, such as ritualistic behaviours, which can lead to frustration from both partners.

Symptoms of anxiety

Symptoms vary depending on the type of anxiety disorder, but generally they include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness
- Uncontrollable, obsessive thoughts
- Repeated thoughts or flashbacks of traumatic experiences
- Nightmares
- Ritualistic behaviours, e.g. repeated hand washing
- Problems sleeping
- Cold or sweaty hands and/or feet
- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations
- An inability to be still/ calm
- Dry mouth
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Nausea
- Muscle tension
- Dizziness

Signs and symptoms of addiction

Regardless of the type of addiction, they all have similar signs and symptoms. If you are experiencing any of the following seek the help of a GP.

- Becoming tolerant to the addictive activity or substance and needing more to get the desired effect.
- Experiencing unpleasant withdrawal symptoms when not engaging in the addictive activity or consuming the addictive substance.
- Inability to stop or control the addictive behaviour.
- Becoming preoccupied with the addictive behaviour and spending a lot of time planning and engaging in it.
- Neglecting or putting at risk your job, family and social life because of addiction.

Many addicts do not want to admit they need help but others may notice certain behaviours. However, addicts can be very successful in hiding their habits and so may not show any of the following signs.

- Lying or being secretive
- Stealing
- Extreme changes in mood
- Changes in sleeping patterns – more, less or at different times of day or night
- Changes in amount of energy
- Changes in weight
- Changes in social groups, new and unusual friends
- Changes in finances - having large amounts of cash and then none at all

Addiction

Addiction affects approximately 2 million people in the UK and is regarded as a psychological problem as the sufferer cannot control their actions. Addicts struggle to manage compulsive behaviours despite their negative consequences. These behaviours or impulses are often harmless to begin with but then spiral out of control and affect a person's ability to function properly or may even take over their lives completely.

Common and harmful addictions include: alcohol, drugs, gambling, work, Internet and sex. These addictions offer a short-term escape from the realities of life and are used by many as a way to cope. In the long run however, this false sense of freedom turns into physiological dependence and/or feelings of guilt and shame that in turn, leads to a destructive pattern of behaviour and often the breakdown of relationships.

Causes of addiction

Not everyone who drinks becomes an alcoholic and not all those who gamble become gambling addicts, so what causes some to succumb to addiction?

Experts believe there is a link between the brain's reward area and addiction. Your brain can become dependent on a substance or a behaviour when it frequently occurs, to the extent that you need it just to feel 'normal'. This is due to the disruption in the reward system that has become so accustomed to increased levels of pleasure that it adjusts in such a way that if the pleasurable activity is stopped you will experience withdrawal effects.

Certain addictions such as alcoholism have a degree of heritability. This means if your parents are alcoholics you may have an increased susceptibility to addiction. However, genetics do not mean addiction is inevitable.

How addiction affects a relationship

Addiction not only has the power to change a person's behaviour but can also alter their personality. It can often feel as if the person you love and trust has disappeared completely causing detrimental effects on a relationship as the partner struggles to keep supporting their addict spouse.

Somebody who is abusing a substance will spend a lot of time away in order to get his or her fix. This will infringe on the time you have to spend as a couple and can create distance between you.

Practically, addiction can cause a huge financial burden. Alcohol and drugs are expensive and addicts will buy them in excessive quantities with no regard to any savings or plans for the future you may have held. An addict will lie to cover up their extreme spending which can lead to trust issues within the relationship.



“The
secret of
a happy
marriage
remains a
secret”

Henry Youngman

Tips for dealing with psychological problems in a relationship

- **Don't be embarrassed.** Do not be embarrassed about any psychological problems. Confide in your partner and seek help from a professional.
- **Remember the person you love is still there.** If your partner is suffering from a psychological problem, remember the person you love is still there but they have an illness. Support them in their recovery and the symptoms will eventually ease and you may even build a closer and more satisfying relationship.
- **Exercise with your partner.** An activity such as walking gives you both a lift and an opportunity to spend time together.
- **Remember improvement is likely to be slow.**
- **Treat yourself.** If your partner is experiencing mental health problems, do not feel guilty about occasionally treating yourself. You need to look after yourself too.
- **Get help.** Therapy is a good alternative to antidepressants.



Symptoms of trauma

The strong emotions you feel after a traumatic event are your normal reactions to an abnormal situation. You may be experiencing psychological trauma if you feel the following symptoms:

- Shock, denial, or disbelief
- Anger, irritability, mood swings
- Guilt, shame, self-blame
- Feeling sad or hopeless
- Confusion, difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety and fear
- Withdrawing from others
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Insomnia or nightmares
- Being startled easily
- Aches and pains

Trauma

Psychological and emotional trauma is often the result of a sudden and distressing event. After a traumatic experience (such as death of a loved one, an accident or an injury) you can be left feeling frightened, disturbed or even have a sense of constant danger. This damage to your sense of self can have ripple effects into your relationship as you struggle to trust others and feel comfortable.

It is normal to experience symptoms of psychological trauma after a traumatic event, and everybody heals at their own pace. But if months have passed and your symptoms aren't letting up, you may need professional help.

Causes of trauma

Not all upsetting events lead to trauma and some people can bounce back quickly. There are certain risk factors however, that increase vulnerability to psychological trauma. If a person is already under heavy stress, has recently suffered a series of losses or if they experienced trauma in their childhood they are more susceptible to psychological trauma. An event is likely to lead to psychological trauma if:

- It happened unexpectedly
- You were unprepared for it
- It was unpreventable
- It happened repeatedly
- Your ideas regarding your human rights were violated.
- It happened in childhood

How trauma affects a relationship

If either person in a relationship has been disturbed by a traumatic event it will affect the relationship as a whole. If you have experienced trauma you may lose your desire to socialise and could distance yourself from your partner and friends. Psychological trauma may mean you cannot concentrate, relax or even listen to your partner and unfortunately this may result in you being considered poor company. Recovery from psychological trauma takes time and patience and partners of sufferers can often feel discouraged by the lack of progress. If your partner is becoming frustrated because you are struggling to deal with an upsetting event you might interpret this as a lack of understanding.

10 relationship tips



- 1 Never stop doing the little things.** Compliment your partner, offer to help them, etc and appreciate and acknowledge when your partner does the same.
- 2 Do not have unrealistic expectations of your partner.**
- 3 Think about your true feelings.** When an argument occurs, take a second to check what is going on inside your head rather than immediately blaming your partner. Trust that we are usually upset for a different reason than we think.
- 4 Apologise when you are in the wrong.** Admit if you are in the wrong. If your partner is wrong accept their apology and move on.
- 5 Try new things.** Experiencing new and exciting activities keeps a relationship alive.
- 6 Celebrate and commiserate together.** Celebrate each other's triumphs and support one another's downfalls.
- 7 Accept there will be times of stress.** Understand that holidays such as Christmas can put extra strain on a relationship. Just have faith that this stress will ease after the holidays.
- 8 Write a letter to your partner.** If you are finding it difficult to express your emotions, write a letter to your partner to communicate how you feel.
- 8 Make time for each other.** Assign a date night to ensure you spend quality time together.
- 9 Laugh together.** Laughter is sometimes the best medicine for relationship trouble.
- 10 Seek professional help if you need it.**

Seeking professional help

There are times where relationship problems cannot be resolved on their own. In these cases it is often beneficial to seek the help of a knowledgeable third party. A relationship therapist is in a position to see underlying issues and behaviour that you are too close and involved to spot. They can guide you towards options that you otherwise would never have thought of and help you understand your feelings. Communicating calmly in a neutral space allows you to appreciate how your partner is feeling, which is difficult to achieve during conflict.

There are many different types of relationship and fortunately many types of therapy. Most therapists will use a combination of methods to tailor the right treatment for you and your partner. It is more beneficial for both partners to attend sessions, however it is possible to come alone and seek relationship help and advice too. Relationship therapy is not necessarily a magic cure, but it can guide you towards a better understanding of your problems and give you the support to tackle them.

Relationship counselling

Humanistic approach

The humanistic approach is very much centred on the client(s). The main goal is to establish how you perceive yourself and how you can grow and reach your full potential both as an individual and as a couple rather than simply liberating you from your past. The sessions focus on both present and future and the therapist takes an optimistic stance.

Humanistic therapy is unique to every client and couple so it is difficult to say what it will involve. The therapist aims to increase your awareness of yourself and may use methods such as role-play or creating patterns with objects to help you do this.

The therapist provides a non-threatening environment so you can feel comfortable and accept your own values and sense of self-worth. The humanistic approach gives you the opportunity to find out who you are away from society's expectations of who you should be.

This approach is unique because it focuses on your current understanding of yourself and behaviour rather than unconscious motives or someone else's interpretation of your understanding. Humanistic therapy is also distinctive because the client/s and therapist are viewed as equals rather than an expert treating a patient.

How could the humanistic approach help my relationship?

Any therapy that improves an individual's life satisfaction can benefit the relationship greatly. When one partner understands who they are and are happy with themselves it can ease any inner conflict they might have been feeling. This will make them more pleasurable company and alleviate many relationship troubles.

Humanistic therapy can help you to reach your full potential as a couple and grow as a pair. Understanding how each of you wishes to develop yourself can be useful when planning a future together, ensuring you both understand each other's expectations.

Psychodynamic approach

The theory behind psychodynamic approach is that we all have an unconscious mind with feelings, often stemming from childhood, that are sometimes too painful to face. The primary focus of this approach is to reveal unconscious feelings in order to alleviate internal conflict. Psychotherapists will encourage or guide you to express feelings and emotions to get to the root of the problem.

This approach might also involve looking for patterns in past relationships. Childhood attachments are considered immensely important so if you have a series of failed relationships, a psychotherapist might examine whether this stems from childhood relationships.

How could the psychodynamic approach help?

When we understand where our behaviours come from we can control them easier. If your behaviour has been the cause of relationship trouble, this type of therapy can help alleviate the subconscious emotions causing them.

A psychotherapist will guide you both to bring your emotions to the surface and you can gain a great understanding of why your partner is the way they are. Knowing your partner's subconscious thoughts creates a strong bond that can last long after the therapy has ended.

Cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT)

CBT adopts a structured and goal oriented approach. The aim of CBT in relationship counselling is to identify negative and unhelpful patterns and develop strategies to modify and enable change for the future. It focuses on current thoughts and behaviours surrounding the relationship.

CBT normally involves one or both partners meeting with a therapist, usually once a week for an hour, for roughly six to 20 sessions. During these sessions the therapist and client(s) will discuss the current problems faced and develop strategies to enable change.

This will include applying the techniques learnt between sessions - 'homework'. Part of each session will then be spent reviewing the 'homework' (e.g. behavioural experiments or diaries) and understanding how these skills are necessary to develop and prevent future problems.

During CBT, the therapist will help you and your partner make connections between the negative and biased ways you think, behave and feel. This helps break vicious cycles and change your relationship for the better. You will also examine what first brought you together and acknowledge the expectations you brought into the relationship.

How could cognitive-behaviour therapy help?

If you find yourselves repeating the same arguments and behaviours then CBT may help you understand why and provide you with the skills to break the cycle. CBT gives couples the tools to understand each other's (and their own) thinking processes and behaviour. This helps a couple to communicate better, negotiate differences and solve problems.

Systemic/family therapy

Systemic therapy addresses the relationship as a system rather than the individuals within it. The theory is that we cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather we are part of a unit that influences and defines us. Emphasis is not only placed on the relationship but other systems such as our parents or children. We all have our roles within a relationship that can affect our behaviour. Systemic therapy aims to examine these roles and the possible effects of change.

Systemic therapy approaches a problem practically rather than analytically. The therapist will support any changes in the system and address any current relationship patterns rather than analyse causes such as childhood trauma or subconscious impulses.

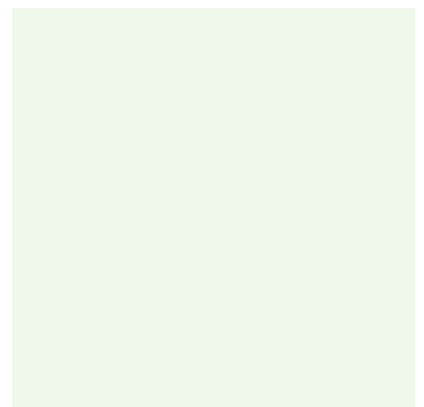
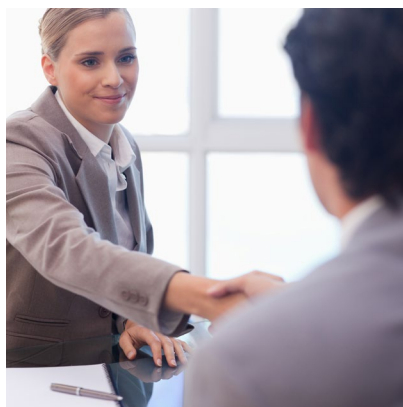
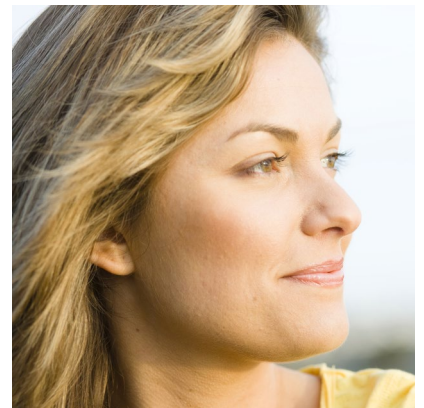
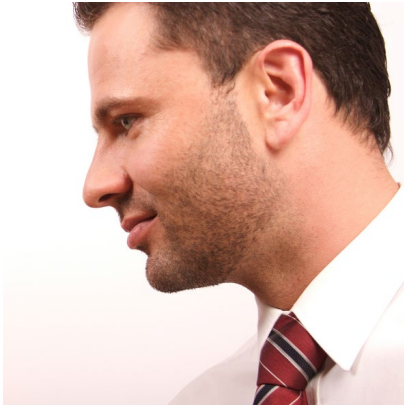
This type of therapy looks at outside influences on emotions and behaviour rather than blaming the individual. It can help to understand that social circumstances and pressures can trap us in negative systems that cause us to act in a certain way.

How could systemic therapy help my relationship?

The main benefit of systemic therapy is that it eases the blame directed at one partner. Understanding your relationship is a system where certain behaviours are the culmination of many outside influences can alleviate the anger you might feel towards your partner.

Systemic therapy will often examine what issues within the system are maintaining the problem (i.e. anger) rather than what caused the problem (i.e. infidelity). This approach means future problems can be resolved quicker and with less upset.

Systemic therapy has a different focus to other therapies so is able to work with you and your partner as a unit rather than two individuals. By strengthening the system you can advance as a couple and challenge the negative systems that bind you.



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