

Healthy Dating

&

Relationship Tips

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Introduction to Dating & Relationships

In this guide, the Dating and Relationships content discussed focuses on traditional male/female relationships. For supplemental material and resources with regards to significant others in same-gender relationships, simply key in words or phrases pertaining to the information you seek into your favorite search engine directory.

This guide presents an overall look at the basics of relationships and dating, both in the real world and online. Since the latest reports show that nearly everyone can learn the most important social skills needed for relationship building, this guide focuses on the ABC's of Healthy Relationships. And so that you can be alerted to possible problem areas, the ABC's of unhealthy relationships are also covered.

For help, support, a shoulder to cry on, for fun and to meet new people and interact with others, sections follow that offer support groups, organizations, programs, tips, self-help and other resources.

Since Dating and Relationships are such a large, important part of everyday life, this ebook strives to help clear up myths from facts and present an overview of surrounding issues. It includes information along with a variety of helpful tips and resources available based upon the most recent studies, research, reports, articles, findings, products and services available, so that you can learn more about Dating and

Relationships.

Note that the contents here are not presented from a medical practitioner, and that any and all health care planning should be made under the guidance of your own medical and health practitioners. The content within only presents an overview of Dating and Relationships research for educational purposes and does not replace medical advice from a professional physician.

Back to Basics

Let's take a peak at some of the more common concepts above "love" relationships and see if they are myths or based upon reality.

"All we need is love." Myth or not? Since love does seem to be able to overcome anything and everything, at least on television and at the movies, this seems like a reality. However, truth is, making relationships work takes skill and hard work, regardless of the "love" factor. This is a myth here.

Just like in fairy tales, once true love is found, people live happily ever after. Truth or myth? Granted couples can look into each other's eyes and have those warm fuzzy feelings. However, truth is, all couples will have their ups and downs. "Happily ever after" seems to imply a perfect, problem-less relationship when in reality, those don't exist.

It has to be “love at first sight” in order to work long-term. Myth or truth? While this can be true for some, it certainly doesn’t have to be for all couples in long-term relationships. Many people grow together over time.

Since practically anyone can learn the nuts and bolts of relationship building, focusing on some basic techniques that can be learned is a must. The main ones, in no particular order, are:

- **Read:** “Read” people well.
- **Rapport:** Develop rapport with others well.
- **Finesse:** Have some finesse; i.e. handle conversations and activities in a cordial manner
- **Conflict Resolution:** Resolve negative issues and conflicts without too much friction
- **Support Co-Op:** Gain the support and cooperation in working towards a common goal

Let’s take a little closer look at each and what learning is involved.

READING PEOPLE: BODY LANGUAGE BRIEFING

Body language is the meaning behind the words or the “unspoken” language. Surprisingly, studies show that only up to an estimated 10 percent of our communication is verbal. The majority of the rest of communication is unspoken. This unspoken language isn’t rocket science. However, there are some generalizations or basic interpretations that can be applied to help with the understanding or translating of these unspoken meanings. Here are some basics below.

Smile – People like warm smiles. Think of a heartfelt warm-fussy, maybe your favorite pet, and smile.

Eyes - -If you don't look someone in the eyes while speaking, this can be interpreted as dishonesty or hiding something. Likewise, shifting eye movement or rapid changing of focus/direction can translate similarly. If more than one person is present in a group, look each person in the eye as you speak, slowly turning to face the next person and acknowledge him or her with eye contact as well. Continue on so that each person has felt your warm, trusting glance. Some suggest beginning with one person and moving clockwise around the group so that no one is missed, and so that you are not darting around, seemingly glaring at people.

Attention Span / Attitude – Other people can tell what type attitude you have by your attention span. If you quickly lose focus of the other person and what is being said, and if your attention span wanders, this shows through and makes you seem disinterested, bored, possibly even uncaring.

Attention Direction – If you sit or stand so that you are blocking another in the party, say someone is behind you, this can be interpreted as rude or thoughtless. So be sure to turn so that everyone is included in the conversation or angle of view, or turn gently, at ease and slowly, while talking, so that everyone is incorporated, recognized

and involved in the conversation. Again some suggest the clockwise movement when working a group.

Arms Folded / Legs Crossed– This can be seen as defensive or an end to the conversation. So have arms hang freely or hold a glass of water, a business card or note taking instruments while communicating with others. Be open with open arms. Note: If you need to cross legs, cross at your ankles and not your knees. Sitting tightly folded up says that you are closed to communications.

Head Shaking – This is fairly accurate. If people are shaking their heads while you speak, they are in agreement. If they are shaking, “no,” disagreement reigns in their minds.

Space / Distance – On the whole, people like their own personal body space. Give people room and keep out of their space. Entering to close can be intrusive and viewed as aggressive.

Leaning – Sitting or standing, leaning is viewed as interest. In other words, an interested listener leans toward the speaker.

Note others’ body language – While you are with others, note how their bodies read. If a person suddenly folds his arms across his chest and begins shaking his head “no,” you’ve probably lost him. Might try taking a step back and picking up where the conversation began this turn for the negative and regroup. It’s all about strategic planning!

DEVELOPING RAPPORT

Now let's take a quick peak at the basics of developing rapport with others. In a nutshell, what it takes is to ask questions, have a positive, open attitude, encourage an open exchange of communications (both verbal and unspoken), listen to verbal and unspoken communications and share positive feedback. Here are a few details on each step.

Ask Questions – Building rapport is similar to interviewing someone for a job opening or it can be like a reporter seeking information for an article. Relax and get to know the other person with a goal of finding common ground or things of interest. You can begin by simply commenting on the other person's choice of attire, if in person, or about their computer, if online, and following up with related questions. For example, in person, you could compliment the other person on their color choice and or maybe a pin, ring or other piece of jewelry and ask where it came from. In online communications, you could compliment the other person's font, smile faces or whatever they use, mention that the communication style seems relaxed and ask if he or she writes a lot. Then basically follow up, steering clear of topics that could entice or cause arguing, while gradually leading the person to common ground you'd like to discuss.

Attitude – have a positive attitude and leave social labels at home (or

in a drawer, if you're at home). Many people can tell instantly if you have a negative attitude or if you feel superior. So treat other people as you would like to be treated. And give each person a chance.

Open Exchange – Do encourage others to share with you. Some people are shy, scared or inexperienced in communicating and welcome an opportunity to share. So both with body language and verbal communication invite an exchange. Face the other person with your arms open, eyes looking into theirs gently (not glaring or staring), and encourage a conversation with a warm smile.

Listen – Be an active listener. Don't focus your thoughts on what YOU will say next. Listen to what the other person is saying and take your clues from there, while also noting the body language. For example, if the other person folds his arms and sounds upset, you may need to change the subject or let him have some space and distance; maybe even try approaching him later on and excusing yourself to go make a phone call (of head to the buffet table or somewhere to escape). On the other hand, if the other person is leaning towards you, following your every word and communicating with you as if you were old friends, BINGO. You've built rapport!

Share – People like compliments. So hand them out freely without over doing it. Leaving a nice part of yourself like a compliment is a good memory for the other person to recall - -numerous times. That's

good rapport. But do be sincere! False compliments aren't easily disguised.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FINESSE

Basically using finesse in handling relationships means use subtle skill, tact or diplomacy when handling a situation. This doesn't mean you need to use fancy, flowery phrases or lengthy 10-letter words or anything. It means focusing on the positive in a friendly way, and not embarrassing the other person.

For instance, finesse means not telling a host that he or she has body odor or that his or her house is looks and smells like a trash dump. Instead, it means politely excusing yourself upon entering, and informing the host of an unplanned meeting that came up or family member who dropped by unexpectedly, and that you wanted to drop by for a quick "Hello" to thank the host for the invitation before rushing off to your appointment. Keep things simple here, smile and think, "James Bond" with that English gentleman concept.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How do you handle conflicts? If you can put your ego aside pretty much and try to keep friction to a minimum, your relationships should move along fairly smoothly. Where you feel disagreement, if you can "agree" to disagree on certain things with the other party involved, that will help, too. In short, conflict resolution means to

pretty much deal with others as you would want them to deal with you.

For example, let's look at fictitious John and Mary, out on their first date at a restaurant. A drunk man passes by their table and accidentally spills Mary's glass of water. John gets upset and says something along the lines of, "That makes me mad! I hate drunks. They should all be put in jail."

Mary, on the other hand, who has an alcoholic father (unknown as this point to John), may feel embarrassed and saddened by John's revelation and get quiet, giving only brief "yes" or "no" answers from that point on.

Hopefully, John picks up on this. He can use finesse and conflict resolution and say, "Mary, I'm sorry for my outburst and really didn't mean that. Actually, a drunk driver caused an accident that I read about recently, and I'd really like to learn about alcoholism and understand it more."

A statement like this could help ease the conversation into a more productive stage. Then instead of having an argument about social versus addictive drinking and possibly ending or breaking up the relationship because of conflict, the relationship between two people could actually develop a little farther along or deepen. And John and Mary could both learn more about each other and broaden their

perspectives in the process.

SUPPORT CO-OP

Relationships may begin with just two people, but more people eventually become involved. Work friends and associates, family members, old school chums and various other assorted persons interact daily, so gaining the support and cooperation in working towards a common goal is a plus in relationship building.

To put this into perspective, we can look at John and Mary again. If John gets along fine with Mary, but can't be in a room for 10 minutes with her dad or the rest of her family and friends, the relationship will probably eventually bottom out; i.e. not grow. However, if John can help build some type of relationship with them as Mary does, like joining and participating in a holiday meal celebration, that is a plus and can help build and grow a more solid relationship.

In summary, by learning to use more of these "nuts and bolts" of relationship building, focusing on some of these basic techniques can help build and grow relationships. More can be learned about each technique by simply heading to the local library or typing in the technique into your favorite search engine. Forget that, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," saying. We're not dogs. And humans CAN learn – at any age!

ABC's of Healthy, Happy Relationships

For Healthy, Happy Relationships, here are some basic guidelines for reference. They are in alphabetical order only, not order of importance.

Acceptance – Don't try to change someone. This is a must. If a person really wants to change, that person will need to be motivated and take action. Period. Also regarding acceptance, accept limitations. He is not Superman; you are not Wonder woman. No one is perfect; so do not expect perfection. Accept the little flaws that come with each person. You accept theirs; they accept yours. That's life!

Bonding – Bonding with another person generally does take time. Communicate – talk, listen, share the good and the bad, ask questions, compliment instead of nag or insult. In short be a friend; make a friend. That is healthy. If this bonding is lacking, it may mean professional help is needed (like a counselor or therapist) or it may be time to move on to healthier relationships.

Communications – Be open to the other person. Check judgmental attitudes at the door. And give chances. Be fair, flexible and friendly. If and when things get out of hand and it is your fault, apologize and ask forgiveness and move on. Similarly, be acceptable to apologies and grant forgiveness, too. Life is too short to stay focused on the negative too long. No need to deny it; face it, deal with it and move on past it

to improve and strengthen your relationships.

Dependable – Be a friend; i.e. be dependable. Things happen from time to time and cancellations are a part of life. But on the whole, if you say you'll do something, do it. Take responsibility for your own actions.

Expectations – Movies, romance novels and television shows often portray life, especially human relationships, very differently than it is in the real world – this is no secret. How many people really always look like movie stars, have zero health ailments, endless income without hardly ever going to work, fabulous cars and homes, friends and family who totally adore them and come to their beckon call, no long-term problems because they all end so quickly, etc.? And who can battle serious issues like one person having an affair with someone else, and wrap the whole storyline up in two hours? Get real. Expect a little less than the media portray and learn more about humans by joining the real world scenario.

Flexible - Keep a little mystery in the relationship. Juggle your schedule and invite the other person to a surprise picnic or walk at a local public park area.

Goals - People usually have some goals together over time. Develop some together. Toss what no longer works, what you outgrew or what may no longer seem important or is finished. And then inherit or

create new goals. Working toward a common cause like saving for an annual vacation or a new garden area can help people grow together.

Health – Take care of your own health and encourage others, too.

Even in this day and age of cable television with movies and the Internet available 24 / 7, it's still amazing the number of people out there who can't "Just say no" to unhealthy behaviors like smoking and drug abuse. Don't be afraid to share your healthy views and encourage healthy choices and living.

Intimacy – Closeness with a person takes time to develop. And there's more to intimacy than physical contact. Intimacy can mean a hug during a tough time, a smile of encouragement in the face of adversity and compassion when you least feel like giving. Don't abuse or take advantage of the other person. And don't let yourself be abused or taken advantage of. Intimacy takes commitment and sharing.

Just say no – You don't always have to be voiceless or agree with someone in a relationship. Be able to say, "No" and be an individual, too.

Keep in Touch – Don't let life separate you too long. With technology today, you can stay in touch with cell phones and email. No need to overdo it and be obsessive and controlling, but do stay in touch off and on throughout the day with quick "Hellos" and "How are things going?"

Lemonade – Make lemonade out of those relationship lemons. And “yes” there will be some, since life is not perfect! For example, when your partner is late and you miss a movie date or restaurant reservation, don’t make it a night of terror and destroy what’s left when you finally do get together. Do something else instead, like relax at home with a video and scented candles, and order subs (and lemonade!)

Make the Honeymoon Last – Remember how you felt when you first got together? Do those little things that you did at the beginning and make the honeymoon last. Bring home fresh flowers, shut off the television, turn on some music and dance with your mate, compliment your mate, make dates to go to places you used to frequent (the old neighborhood pizza parlor, a local drive in, a hotel you went to on your honeymoon, etc.)

Nuts and Bolts – Don’t focus so much on the “nuts and bolts” of who said what, when, how often and why they were wrong.... In other words, sometimes during an argument, try losing your memory of who did what, when and how many times in the past. Instead, humble yourself, apologize for having messed up and hug your mate!

Open – Open windows when doors close. If you feel you’ve been pushed to the limit and don’t want to try one more time, close the door on that angle of the issue. Take a walk, get some ice cream and

cool off (literally). Then return relaxed and refreshed, and open a window to air differences.

Parental Issues - Even the best of relationships deal with someone's past parental issues from time to time. Counseling can help, yes, but something out of the blue can still trigger a parental issue that someone struggles to deal with regardless of age, it seems. In these cases, just realizing and stating that it's normal, may never get resolved and is okay to move on, can work wonders – for both parties.

Quality – With hectic schedules, quality time is important. So even if you can only meet to watch a 30-minute comedy together every evening, make and keep that date. You'll probably be especially glad you did when times get tough and have the wonderful memories to help get you by.

Respect – Respect not only each other, but each other's property, friendships, time, job and ...everything. Remember you are sharing life together and need to be courteous to one another and all the affects you.

Sharing – Likewise share and don't be stingy. "You reap what you sow," and "You can't take it with you" when you die, as the sayings go.

Trust – Healthy relationships involve people who trust one another. One person doesn't get involved in unhealthy risks with a third party

or lie to the other. There is an open, positive exchange of trust. So if this is lacking, seek help from a professional counselor, if necessary, and see what's wrong.

Understanding – Happy, healthy couples try to understand each other even if it means joining a self-help group, reading library books about something foreign or unknown, or taking time to research and delve into an issue. In other words, take time to gain knowledge and wisdom before jumping the gun on something you may not really understand.

Violence – Violence is not welcome. Period. Don't accept it. Don't dish it out. Anger Management is not just a movie term today. There really is help out there if you or your mate needs it.

Warning Signs – Healthy people are generally alert to warning signs of trouble and head them. Denial isn't part of their life.

X-Ray – Happy people in healthy relationships generally don't look at each other as they look at x-rays. They don't see close-ups of each flaw and character make up. They learn to look beyond the bare essentials and see the whole person.

Youthful Attitude – A youthful attitude can go far in relationships. Old outlooks can spawn resentment, skepticism and other negative connotations. A little dose of daily humor (reading comics, watching or listening to comedy, etc.) and keeping in touch with youth (church

activities, neighborhood / social nonprofit functions and events, etc.) can help maintain a fresh, youthful outlook.

Zombie – Don't go through life like you're a zombie! It's not up to your mate to fulfill your life. You need to take charge yourself!

ABC's of Unhealthy, Sad Relationships

Unhealthy, Sad Relationships have some general notable characteristics in common. Here are some basic guidelines for reference. They are in alphabetical order only, not order of importance.

Avoidance – Many people in unhealthy relationships simply avoid facing reality. There are many reasons for this. For instance, deep down inside, the people involved may be trying to make themselves appear superior. Or perhaps they don't want to face the fact that their mates really aren't who they say they are. For example, Person A might cover up and make excuses for his mate, Person B, who is always late coming home from work and almost always misses family functions. Person A could be trying to avoid reality and make up excuses to cover up an affair that Person B is involved in so that it doesn't destroy their "perfect image" in everyone's eyes. Or Person A could be avoiding the fact that Person B is a workaholic.

Burnout – Although many can carry out romance throughout their entire relationships, the actual honeymoon period does have to end, in reality. And those who can keep the “love” fires burning, not 24 / 7 but off and on regularly during their relationship, have better chances of healthier relationships than those who suffer burnout and don’t know where to turn or who turn to unhealthy solutions. In short, every relationship has its highs and lows. During the low times, like maybe when one person begins to feel disillusioned with marriage, or maybe trapped, tired, helpless, depressed or let down, if this person reaches out to unhealthy alternatives, like getting a fake substitution – maybe seeking another mate in secret, getting “high,” or some other negative behavior, once-healthy relationships can suffer. Instead, the couple needs to face issues together; add some new goals to the relationship, do some fun things together more, talk more, etc.

Compatibility Issues – Opposites attract; or do they? Sure it’s great to have some “spice” in your life. But relationships are about getting your needs met – at least on some level. And constant negativity can certainly hinder intimacy. So those who have a difficult time focusing on what attracted them to their mates in the first place can suffer unhealthy, sad relationships, constantly in conflict over issues with which they can’t agree.

Devotional Void – A lack of commitment or ardent love can make for

unhappy relationships. Being friends or roommates is one thing. Being committed, loving soul mates is another. Being "in love" 24/7 doesn't necessarily have to be a requirement, but being in a "loving" committed relationship can make the difference.

Enthusiasm Dwindles – If you don't add in some spice once in awhile, you can get the same old, same old. Couples caught up in routines can lose that spark of enthusiasm; i.e. zest of life in their relationships if they forget to be spontaneous once in awhile or forget to flavor their relationship with fun, adventure, romance.

Forgiveness Void – No one is perfect. Mistakes are a part of life. Those unwilling or unable to forgive, can pretty much count on having more unhealthy relationships over time. Relationships based or growing on anger, spite, disgust, resentment or other negative feelings associated with lack of forgiveness are like wilted flowers. They need tending to or they'll die.

Guise - Simulated relationships or those under the guise of having a solid, happy relationship are not destined for success, on the whole. Or rather false is as false does, as Forest Gump might say. Pretending wears thin and doesn't last long.

Harm – Harmful thoughts, words and actions can sure lead to unhealthy relationships. An occasional outbreak during a stressful moment might be considered normal like swearing; i.e. if someone

hasn't been raped, battered (or other severe trauma has occurred) by the other party. However, harmful, violent actions such as those and repeated verbal negativity is abusive and not healthy in relationships – or life.

Indulgence – Instant gratification or indulgence of unhealthy behaviors is a sign of trouble. Grabbing chocolate to satisfy a craving is one thing. Grabbing illicit drugs or another mate in secrecy is another. Yielding to unhealthy temptations and desires is a pathway to unhealthy relationships.

Just say yes – Not being able to draw boundaries or sustain limits is another possible path to sad relationships. For example, if one person in the relationship has a difficult time saying “No” and setting limits, his or her mate could always come in second, third or fourth - - rarely first in the other person's eyes and agenda. And while it's fine to take a back seat once in awhile, people make time for priorities and in healthy relationships, both parties feel and share the value of being number one with one another.

Kick the Dog – Kicking the dog, not in a literal sense (although that would be negative, too!) is characteristic of unhealthy relationships. For example, if a person comes home angry and passes this anger on to the dog by kicking it, that is not a healthy release of anger. The unhealthier people are, the unhealthier they generally deal with stress.

Help is available.

Lemons – Unhealthy relationships often have at least one party who can't seem to make lemonade out of life's lemons. Maybe he or she has the wrong recipe. Or maybe the person is a bad cook. But assistance is needed in this department!

Management Mania – Remember the "Odd Couple?" A super manager personality can ruin an otherwise healthy relationship. Likewise a super sloth can wreak one, too. A little give and take is called for.

"Neverland" – Ever heard something like this in an argument, "You never....?" Well trips to Neverland are for Peter Pan. Skip the "always" and "nevers" in arguments and avoid unhealthy relationship issues. It's rare that someone does or does not do something 100 percent of the time. Memories just seem to fail during opportunistic, stressful episodes sometimes (not always, though!)

Ominous – Bad or ominous feelings, an omen...a feeling deep inside that tells you something is wrong - this often accompanies unhealthy relationships.

Pressure – When one party pressures (or forces) the other to have sex, this is characteristic of an unhealthy relationship.

Questions – Part of communicating is asking and answering questions. If this process causes problems, i.e. even the simplest of

questions arouses anger, suspicions, fighting, etc., this is a trait often found with unhealthy relationships. The party who has difficulty answering questions may be hiding something, dealing with control issues or dealing with substance abuse (or other).

Responds Inappropriately – Some characteristics of unhealthy relationships include playing head games, trying to humiliate, using threats, insults or jealousy. These inappropriate responses suggest unhealthy environment between the couple.

Silence – Silence isn't always golden, as the saying goes. If one person shuns or ignores the other, outside of a solitary or very brief occurrence, this can reflect an unhealthy relationship.

Treatment – If healthcare treatments are being ignored or stopped without the help of a professional; for example, in the case of stopping anti-depressant medication after a severe (negative) episode (like suicide), this can signal an unhealthy relationship. People need to take care of themselves and not leave everything up to their mates in relationships.

Untidy / Unkempt – When one or both partners disregards physical appearance for the duration (long-term, not just for a weekend), this signals an unhealthy relationship. One or both could be abusing substances, for example, or suffering depression.

Verbal Abuse /Violate – When one or both partners use verbal

abuse and / or violate or cause harm to the other's person or personal property, things or friends, this can be a red flag for an unhealthy relationship. People should respect each other and each other's property, things and friends. And verbal abuse is not appropriate.

Weapons – Threatening a partner with a weapon, even if it's a household (or other) item used as a weapon is a sign of an unhealthy relationship.

Xerox – A trait of an unhappy relationship can be when a person is copying another, failing to be himself or herself. Some personality disorders are also characterized by this trait that reportedly shows up in a number of unhealthy relationships. And help is available.

Youthful Outlook / Emotions – An energetic, youthful attitude toward life is one thing. Youthful expectations; i.e. outlook, and emotions can be characteristic of unhealthy partners. Growing couples need maturity as they grow together and face adult issues. Childish displays of anger, hostility, selfishness, etc., don't have much place in healthy, growing partnerships.

Zero – Growing relationships need a foundation. Zero to grow on is difficult to multiply. Got to start somewhere!

Dating & Relationship Resources

Support and help is available for relationships in many forms. And with the Internet, there is now help available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Here are some places to turn below.

Online Support:

About.com/People – Popular resource sections focus on Dating Advice, Sexuality and Spirituality, Seniors, Marriage, Divorce, Honeymoon Getaways and more. Surf categories for chat rooms, forums and other online communication / tools and targeted support.

LoveTactics.com – sponsor of About.com, well known for Internet resources. This site focuses on Lost Love, Dating, Relationship and Commitment areas. Site features articles and consultation options.

Psychologytoday.com – Relationships (left-hand column category). Then choose from dozen of relationship topics that contain hundreds of articles to view online. Need help? Ask their therapist a question for \$19.95 online (educational purposes only – see your healthcare provider for therapist referrals and help.) The site also shows therapists available throughout the different states for help locating someone near you.

Sage-Hearts.com – Site presents overview of various dating services and shares a variety of dating success stories and tips, books, movies and poems section, and top dating sites on the Internet with ratings.

Mail / Phone Contacts:

The American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT), PO Box 5488 Richmond, VA 23220-0488. Phone: 804-644-3288.

American Psychological Association 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242. Telephone: 800-374-2721.

Other:

For other online and offline recommendations, it may be safer to go through a favorite magazine site (like in Psychology Today above) and search contacts. Also check in the Yellow Pages under listings for Therapists, Psychologists, Psychoanalysts and Counselors. Other methods of finding help are to ask friends, relatives, colleagues, church members or clergy for assistance and recommendations.

Books:

The Relationship Rescue Workbook, by Phillip C. McGraw; Hyperion (October 4, 2000).

Communication Miracles for Couples: Easy and Effective Tools to Create More Love and Less Conflict, by Jonathan Robinson; Conari Press (June 1, 1997).

We Love Each Other, But...: A Leading Couples Therapist Shares the Simple Secrets That Will Help Save Your Relationship, by Ellen F. Wachtel; Golden Books (February 1, 1999).

Dating & Relationship Tips

Enjoy the variety of dating and relationship building tips that follow.

They are listed in no particular order.

Show Off – If you have a great body you're trying to show off and young physical appearance, yet worry because you still seem to have difficulty finding dates and establishing relationships, here are some pointers. Turn off the "ME" focus. Others tend to see that as boorish and think you only care about yourself, not others and certainly not them. Instead, turn the focus on outside interests that the other person can relate to, even if it has to be the weather. For help, tune in to an online news source like CNN or subscribe to a national or other major newspaper or magazine like *Newsweek* or head to the public library for the latest news briefs. Online dating might be a good outlet for you, to as it generally offers a place to list all your great physical qualities as well as outside interests and more, presenting a more rounded dating candidate. Then those who are VERY interested in great abs, youthful appeal, etc. will be able to check you out. And those who are interested in the other interests can focus on those, too.

Sit, Don't Take a Stand – Instead of voicing your opinions over issues that you pretty well know cause heated arguments, don't take a stand. Just sit them out. There's no shame in passing up an argument. For example, if you both call yourselves "Christians," yet one of you firmly

has a complete set of rules and regulations about what a “Christian” really is, and doesn’t hesitate to voice this, skip over conversations about religion. If you have to, simply say something along the lines of, “This gets us too heated, so let’s pass on it for now and move on to something else.” Agree that it’s okay to disagree. Because it is!

Traditions – Keep up with some old traditions from each family. Alter some; create new ones. The main thing here is to make positive memories that you can share and relive over and over, especially during rough spots when you can’t remember why you are together. Traditions can be like glue and bind you with a common past.

Sex VS Love – Sex and love are not the same thing. Learn the difference and don’t measure love by your hormones.

Negotiator – Forget “his” and “hers” roles and who “should” do what when...Learn to negotiate. What works one day may not work another when timing is off, kids are on the run and disaster strikes, for instance, when your mother-in-law drops by unexpectedly.

Love and Hate – Love your mate. It is OK to strongly dislike (or “maybe” hate) a **behavior**, like cracking knuckles or biting nails. But remember to love the person.

Online (and Classified Ad) Dating

The Internet is still pretty safe overall, even for seniors, according to research of various Internet safety sites like WiredSafety.org who estimated a 90 – 97 percent “terrific” Internet. People are chatting with one another, making cyber-dates. However, there are some general rules of Internet etiquette or “netiquette” and some precautions to take for possible dangers lurking there. Here are some pointers compiled from several websites experienced in cyber-dating techniques and most tips work for those who reply to classified ads, too.

SAFETY TIPS

1. Do Not Give Out Personal Information - Whether it's via email, online chat rooms, message boards, in your personal ad, etc., do not disclose your personal information like your complete name, address, telephone number, work place, etc. And use a third party email address instead of one with your domain or work domain, too, that is easily traceable. For example, instead of using joe@seniortimes.com , set up an email account like joe@yahoo.com or joe@hotmail.com (search “free email accounts for places like this”). Preferred dating sites offer email forwarding so that members do not see private information like this. So if you are on one that differs or makes you uncomfortable, move along and click elsewhere.

2. Do Not Lie - Be up front about your age and appearance. Better to not be caught in lies later on or lead someone on falsely.
3. Be Tactful and Leary - Do not believe everything you read in posts, in emails: in general online. You could be chatting with a child or someone faking their sexual orientation. The odds are that you will probably encounter someone a tad "undesirable" from time to time, so try to use appropriate replies, using tact, or ignore the encounter, if it suits the situation.
4. Use Caution in Sharing Images - Whenever you think about sharing a digital photo online, keep in mind that it may be possible for thousands to see it on the Internet, not just one person. Plus your photo can be copied, altered with different software out there today and posted elsewhere. If you do use your image, send one that shows you with a warm smile, not a frown.
5. Ask if Unsure - Go slow like the tortoise in the race with the hare and ask questions if you are unsure how to proceed in your contact and communications. Contact the site owner or webmaster (check for contact info when you register), ask trusted friends for helpful resources, check with local authorities. Remember that old adage, "Better safe than sorry!"
6. Be careful if you decide to meet for the first date. Remember there is safety in numbers, so meet in a public place with other friends

around.

7. Keep copies of communications in a file so that you can show friends or the law in case your meeting or continued contact takes a bad turn. And do report any problems and cooperate with authorities. They can get information from your computer and communications to aid in tracking down culprits in some cases. Don't try to take matters into your own hands and stalk the culprit yourself, though. Be safe.

8. Let men instigate online and offline relationships. Men still like to pursue. Online studies show that this has proven safer, too, with Internet dating. Men should make the first email move. And women should NOT reply to men's ads; let the men pursue. (Sorry guys!)

9. So that you don't appear anxious or desperate or both, generally wait for a day or 24-hour period before replying. And forget about replying on weekend and holidays, at least at first, and being available via instant messaging. This is especially important for women (double standards are still around and even exist in the Internet dating scene) – you want to “appear” socially active, confident – blah, blah, blah, even if you are just home washing your hair.

10. Don't date someone who is already married to someone else – even if that person says he or she is getting a divorce. Let the divorce happen first. Otherwise things could get ugly. And you may even have to face the spouse / ex-spouse and children down the road. So think of

others, too, when even considering someone who is not single.

11. If after several emails or letters you decide to talk on the phone, keep the first call short, around 10 minutes. Plan to have to "rush" off. Your goal is to hear the person's voice and talk a short while only, not seeming over anxious.

12. Some gents do complain that the ladies do not reply. So ladies, reply! At least say, "No, thank you."

NETIQUETTE

Here are some general guidelines to refer to in your online communications.

- Use respectful tones and wording. Swear words and hurtful remarks are not good for anyone. If someone presses you, for example, to share confidential information that you shouldn't, just say, "No" and tell the site monitors / webmaster of the forum, chat room or online dating site, if necessary.
- Look for dating and other resource websites that list street addresses instead of post office boxes or nothing at all. Ask friends for referrals.
- Try to avoid stretching the truth about your accomplishments, job title, etc. Then if a relationship develops, things will run much smoother.
- Try to avoid many 1-word replies and 1-sentence

communications. Take some time to develop your thoughts and share in your paragraphs. In short, be a friend.

- All capital letters mean “shouting” and is difficult to read at any length.

Take care and have fun with your cyber-dating 😊

Lowdown on Long Lasting Love

Now it's time to take a look at the lowdown on how to handle long lasting love. Here are some pointers on how to deal with some of the top issues that when mishandled, can separate the men from the boys, as they say, or rather the successful couples from the less-successful ones.

Conflict Management- The key here is to realize that most couples do not solve every issue. In fact, reports show that couples don't solve most of their problems. So if you think your girlfriends or buddies are winning more frequent battles than you, forget about it. It's not happening.

Next realize that statistics still reflect about a 50 percent survival rate for married couples long-term. (I.E. the other half divorce). And for those who do make it, it's not so much about whether or not they “love” each other more than the divorced people did. It's generally

more about that fact that they developed better communication skills and learned to understand each other better. And developed and learning - -these are action verbs.

As you develop and learn your own job skills for advancement, so can you and should you do the same for relationship advancement. There is no shame in reaching out and improving in this area. Tips for developing better communication skills and learning to understand your mate better; i.e. improve conflict management, are as follows:

1. Take turns speaking and listening to each other. As a speaker, speak only for yourself and keep your comments brief. The stop and invite the listener to sum up what you said (to make sure he or she understood).
2. Then allow the other person to take over and follow the same format.
3. Share back and forth in this same manner, jotting down conflict management notes as needed for following up later and establishing new boundaries in your relationship.

Some tips for handling conflict resolutions are:

- A. Start with the person presenting his or her complaint in a general format, without blame. For example, instead of saying, "You keep leaving dirty dishes out on the counter all night," say "I don't like it when dirty dishes are left out

on the counter. During my college days, that attracted cockroaches.”

- B. Encourage each other to come to an agreement in a calm, friendly manner. Negotiate. Give and take. Maybe the dishes from late night snacks don't have to be washed with soap and hot water, but can simply be rinsed off instead and stacked in the sink's dishpan or strainer, for instance.
- C. If negativity starts, stop it ASAP. In the above example, maybe the mate wants all sinks clear and free for emptying coffee cups and other snack and breakfast dishes. So this person starts swearing, calling the other person a lazy idiot or something...STOP.
- D. Calm things back down. Use hand signals like coaches do in sports, if necessary. Men can often relate to this. Do a "time out" mode. And take a breather or break for a few minutes.
- E. Then go back to where things were fine, just before step "C." Inject some humor and try to resolve the conflict again. Maybe joke about how you pay much more for your residence now and don't have cockroach problems. And that OK, one sink can be left clear, the other will hold a strainer of rinsed-off items. Any dirty ones can be placed /

stacked on one side of the strainer; rinsed items on the other. Done deal!

Money Management – Some counselors say that money handling is the number one priority issue of conflict among couples. Problems arise with how money is viewed, how it should be save, spent and even earned. So here are some general guidelines to money management to help iron out some financial issues for couples.

1. Decide to set aside some time for discussing your financial matters in peace and quiet. Doing this quarterly (or monthly, if time and patience allow) is a good idea. Then you can make sure your budget is on track and allow a glance ahead at possible items coming up that may have been missed (like renewal of driver's licenses) and look back to see how you are doing.
2. Gather all of your budgeting materials in one place; notebook paper, 3-prong folder with pockets for storing bills as they arrive in the mail, stamps, calculator, envelopes, check book, savings book, pencil, pen. When it's time to work on your finances, bring everything out at once (maybe store in a special drawer or box for handy pick-up-and-go.)
3. On a sheet of notebook paper (or a sheet from a budget planning guidebook or software print out), list each monthly

expense; rent / house payment, each utility, charities / tithing, grocery money, misc. funds (to allow for medicines, snacks, CD rental, etc.), car payments, insurance, credit card payments, etc. For guidelines, there are several things you can do; check with your local bank for budget planning help, ask a librarian for help finding budget books, check your computer's software (Microsoft Word has some business / budgeting sheets that could be altered to fit your family planning needs, for instance), visit local office supply stores to see which types of budget planner notebooks and guide they may have available, surf online or use the following one enclosed and revise it to suit your needs. Hint: visit www.digital-women.com/daily-planner for lots of planner pages to choose from (for men and women!)

4. Fill in the blanks on your budget planner page. List how much each monthly payment is in #3 above. Then total the list to see how much income you need to cover all your expenses.
5. Note your incomes in a separate column off to the side. Does your income exceed your expense total? If so, great. Simply have fun choosing what you'd like to both do with your extra income, with long-term and short-term goals that are compatible with both of you. If not, if income does not exceed expenses, and this is the area where discourse usually strikes,

it's time to whittle down your expenses and / or earn extra income. Here are tips on whittling down income and being more budget-conscious with your available funds:

- A. Use coupons, even cyber-ones like from www.valpak.com
- B. Check with your insurance about higher deductibles and any special rate savings programs they may have (like good driving discounts).
- C. Visit second hand stores for used books and clothing.
- D. Donate time and volunteer work instead of tithing money
- E. Buy no-name foods, toiletry and household items (shampoos, deodorants, light bulbs, etc.) instead of brand names.
- F. Cook at home more as entertainment and invite your neighbors and friends over. And skip eating out so much, renting CD / DVDs and going to movies.
- G. Track and monitor your spending. Jot purchases in a notebook and keep handy with your checkbook for quick reference. Review and see how you do weekly. Improve!
- H. Plan ahead. For example, save a little each month for Christmas so that in December, you'll already have what you need for gifts already saved up. Likewise for annual insurance billings (like for the house) or for any other

annual billings.

- I. See if you can trade services with others. For example, if you have a computer and can toss up a decent web page maybe you can create web pages for small business in the area in exchange for gift cards to use in their stores.
- J. Sell some of your stuff – try online auctions, garage sales, cheap classifieds, bulletin boards around town...
- K. Resist the urge to “immediately” fulfill a want. Instead, keep a list going of “wants.” If an item has been on there for a year, for example, then begin shopping for it. Look for bargains, try to trade for it, negotiate for a better deal. Waiting generally means you’ll really want it more (or not, and cross it off your list) and will actually USE it when you get it and not just toss it in a pile with other unopened or hardly used things that you just HAD to have.
- L. Check out library books like:

The Cheapskate Monthly Money Makeover, by Mary Hunt; St. Martin's Press; Reissue edition (March 1, 1995).

Miserly Moms: Living on One Income in a Two-Income Economy, by Jonni McCoy; Bethany House Publishers; 3rd edition (October 1, 2001).

The Complete Cheapskate: How to Get Out of Debt, Stay Out, and Break Free from Money Worries Forever, by Mary E. Hunt, Mary Hunt; St. Martin's Griffin; 1st edition (August 1, 2003).

Self-Help Guide

Self-help to help your relationship improve, here are some exercises to take by yourself and share with your mate. Take them slow and steady, at your own pace. Have fun with them. (There are no grades!)

Instructions: Jot your replies down on paper if you like or in a private "couple's" journal for future reference. Add to them, modify them, edit them as you'd like. The key is to have fun, learn more about yourself, your mate and your relationship together, and grow.

Exercise A: List your three best traits. Then list your mate's top three traits you admire.

Exercise B: List the top three areas in your life that you would like to work on improving. These can be any range of things from improving income to education to giving more, losing more weight, being less shy, etc. Then list the top three areas in your mate's life that you'd like to see improved.

Fill in the blanks, and then have your mate reply to the same questions. Take turns reading your replies and learning more about each other:

Regarding my appearance, I think I am _____

A funny thing that happened to me was _____

One place I would love to visit is _____

If money was no object, I would buy _____

A person who meant a lot to me while I was growing up is

_____ because _____

A major lesson I learned in life is _____

If I could have any job in the world, it would be _____

A hero of mine is (can be fictional) _____

If a dream could come true, I'd like _____

One way I'd like to give back would be _____

On a personal note, here is where I would like to be:

1 year from now: _____

3 years from now: _____

5 years from now: _____

As a couple, here is where I'd like us to be:

1 year from now: _____

3 years from now: _____

5 years from now: _____

One thing about you that makes me smile is _____

I'll always remember this about you _____

Exercise: List what you feel is good about your relationship.

Exercise: List what you feel could use work / improvement in your relationship.

Exercise: How could you help improve your relationship? And how do you think your partner could help improve the relationship?

Reply:

1. What is the best memory that comes to mind about your mate?
2. What do you see in the future for your relationship: Location?

Jobs? House? Pets? Children? Travel?

3. What fun things would you like to try and do with your mate more (Ballroom dancing? Gourmet cooking? Snow skiing? Other?) When will you schedule one of these new things?

In summary, since the latest reports show that just about anyone and everyone can learn the important social skills needed for relationship building, use what you can of this guide and its resources mentioned to focus on your own Healthy Relationships. Be alert to possible problem areas, and take action to improve your life.

Addendum: Generic Budget Worksheet

Monthly Budget Guide	Amount
Income	
Person A: Employment net income (after taxes)	
Other income	
Person B: Employment net income (after taxes)	
Other income	
TOTAL INCOME	
	Amount Budgeted
Mortgage / Rent	
Cable / Internet Access	
Cell Phones	
Utilities (gas, electric, H2O)	
Phone (landline)	
Groceries	
Insurance (Car/Home/Life)	
Car Payment	
Auto Insurance	
Gas	
Misc (car maintenance, clothes, entertainment, emergency, etc.)	
Credit card payments	
Savings / Investments	
Other expenses	
TOTAL EXPENSES	
INCOME – EXPENSES:	