



What Makes a Good Relationship?

Defining what makes a fulfilling, intimate relationship.

A 'good adult relationship' means different things to different people. There are many different kinds of relationships. The couple relationship may be the most important one in our society. It is often the main relationship in people's lives; it is the basis of a family (and this is the place where most of us learn about adult love, about negotiation, about how to change and how to compromise), and it is often an economic unit.

What do we mean by 'adult relationship'?

Some relationships between adults are mainly sexual, but all good relationships are based on people respecting each other and being able to communicate clearly. An adult relationship is about two people who have equal rights, equal opportunities and equal responsibilities

How can we define a fulfilling, intimate relationship?

Most people have very personal definitions of what a fulfilling, intimate relationship means for them. Some of the things most of us expect in a relationship are:

- love
- intimacy and sexual expression
- communication
- commitment
- equality and respect
- compatibility
- companionship.

Myths and misunderstandings about relationships

Many myths and misconceptions exist about relationships. These are based on romantic ideals formed by what we read, hear or see portrayed in the media.

- "People who love each other automatically communicate well": **FALSE**

Good communication does not come naturally. Communication can be improved by learning and practising some simple skills. This includes skills in assertiveness, listening

and clarifying to make sure messages are not misunderstood. Open communication between couples is essential.

- "Maintaining romantic love is the key to a long and happy relationship": **FALSE**

Studies show that there is a change in the type of love in a partnership from a romantic, passionate love early in relationships to complicated love later in a relationship called companionate love.

- "If my partner loves me, he/she should instinctively know what I want and need to be happy": **FALSE**

This is called the "mind-reading myth" - expecting your partner to know instinctively what you want and need. In reality people must communicate their wants, needs and expectations to others in order to get those needs met.

What does a good relationship need?

It will vary from one person to another, but most people would probably agree that respect, companionship, mutual emotional support, sexual expression, economic security and, often, childrearing, are all important parts of an adult relationship.

Ask your partner to write down the five qualities/needs that are most important for them in a relationship. Have a look at the list and see which of the needs you can do something about, and which you need to negotiate with your partner.

Do the same yourself. Then talk about each other's relationship needs. It is essential for each partner to try to understand and respect the other person's needs.

What are the important life needs of my partner?

We don't all want the same things out of life. You and your partner could each make a list of what is most important in life. Talk to each other about what is on your list. Remember, most people will want different things.