

How to have a CONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIP

Expert Jan Day explains why deepening your emotional connection with your partner could be the key to a happy life together

At a certain point in a long-term relationship we have a choice. Either we make a commitment to keep facing what arises in the partnership, which means to keep opening up to ourselves and our partner, or we find ways to numb ourselves to what is going on in the relationship, such as through work, alcohol or other commitments.

When we first get together with someone we have all sorts of fantasies about them. We project onto them all the qualities that we are missing in ourselves, and we see (and are often only shown) the attractive side of them. As time passes, however, what we were initially attracted to often becomes what we are irritated by. Small resentments can start to arise alongside a growing fear of rocking the boat. Gradually we stop communicating effectively and we lose the passion, the interest and the intimacy that can be the jewel of long-term relationships.

However, this doesn't have to be the case. Conscious relating refers to making a commitment to yourself and your partner. It involves leaning into the relationship, including all its difficulties, and being willing to face the discomfort of sharing what you long for, what you are angry about and what is scary. It is a guarantee you make to show up so that your partner can see you, even if you fear that they won't like what they see. It's a promise you make to not brush things under the carpet to make life comfortable, to not get into pleasing one another simply to avoid an onslaught of feelings, and a commitment for you both to stay interested and present in the relationship so that you can find a way through things together.

All of this will enable you to keep growing in depth and intimacy and will transform a relationship into a path of growth.



COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL

A key to keeping long-term relationships alive and healthy is to practise communicating in a way that supports hearing and understanding each other. Often we think we have understood, and we might say: “Yes, I get it, I really understand you”. But in reality if you haven’t confirmed that what you heard matches what your partner meant, you have no idea if you have understood them, and they don’t either.

The first step to ensuring you are communicating in the best way possible is to check in with yourself and see how you feel. If you feel hurt, angry or pain, you need to realise that and to relate consciously, you need to be willing to feel that pain and show it without hitting out. Sometimes that means taking a bit of time out to cool down before speaking to your partner. After some practise it can be amazing to be able to say to your partner: “I’m hurting, will you hold me,” and trust that in showing that level of honest vulnerability, you will be held. What can be even more healing is when two people are able to say these words to each other at the same time and then hold each other in their mutual vulnerability. It takes some trust, some courage and usually some practise.

Probably the most important conversations that we need to have are the very same ones that we most want to avoid. A tough conversation is one where you think your partner is not going to want to hear what you need to say. You’re afraid it will really rock the boat and maybe they will walk away from you or get angry. These are the moments when you to check in that your partner is willing to hear you.

You too have to be willing to feel the discomfort (or comfort) of whatever their reply is. If we restrict ourselves to only being how we think our partner wants us to be, life gets very narrow and we can too easily get into a routine where we limit ourselves until we are bored and then resentful.

It’s important to both recognise the reason communication can be so tough is because you care, because you value the relationship and you value them. Stay focused on what you are feeling, what is happening inside you, what you are making the situation mean, what you are imagining and what you’d like to happen. Your aim could simply be to be heard and understood, or you could be requesting something specific or hoping to find a solution together. It’s important to have these conversations because without them you’ll either find yourself withdrawing or resentment building

up. The longer you leave it, usually the harder it gets. If you are both committed to your relationship then whatever you need to talk about can be a vehicle for growing in intimacy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVING TOUCH

As well as a lack of communication, one of the things that often causes distance in a long term couple is a lack of loving physical touch or a difference in desire for sexual connection. What makes things worse is when the lack of sexual connection also leads to lack of loving touch. When we think it is a problem that one of us wants more sex than the other, all manner of power dynamics can kick in and they are usually unspoken. Recognising that loving touch doesn’t have to lead to sexual connection is key to thriving in a loving long-term relationship. A wonderful exercise for couples is to take turns in just giving or receiving touch with an agreement that it is just that.

Loving touch is relaxing, nurturing and heart opening. Being able to both give and receive this can make a huge difference to the connection between partners. It’s really worth making the effort to give each other that time and this can help re-invigorate your sex life and give you a sense of being loved and nurtured.

Keeping the connection between you depends on your commitment to keeping it going.

Jan Day is a relationship expert.

For more information visit janday.com

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5 ways to keep a good connection

Jan Day reveals how you can incorporate conscious relating into your life

1. Be honest about things that matter to you so that resentments and misunderstandings don’t build up.
2. Make sure that you have time to connect with yourself so that you can let your partner know how you are feeling.
3. Set some regular time aside for quality moments with each other - this may include conversation and physical contact.
4. Make sure you spend time with yourself and friends of your own sex. Time alone or away from your partner gives a wonderful counterpoint to the times you have together.
5. Be willing to listen and understand your partner even if you don’t agree.