

From Foundation to Keystone: 10 Essential Rules of Lasting Relationships



Fulfilling and happy relationships are created from active nurturance and attention. There are no quick fixes or fast-track methods to making a successful long-term relationship. Most strategies for enhancing your relationship require repetition and intentional practice over time. Below are essential guidelines for building and maintaining healthy intimate relationships.

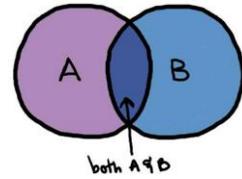
1. **Woo your partner.** Make an effort every day to woo your partner. Every long-lasting couple knows that romance, trust, and desire are not natural phenomena but rather must be cultivated. Work with your partner to learn each other's love languages so that your relationship feels rich with affection, respect, and spontaneity.
2. **Learn to fight fairly.** Conflict is inherent to being in a relationship, but discord does not need to be destructive. Consult counselors and other trusted advisors for guidance on how to resist instinctive impulses and instead communicate with love and a desire to understand the other person.
3. **Ask for what you want.** You don't get to be upset for not getting what you didn't ask for. It is healthy to express your wants and desires, and to advocate for those things. You desire fulfillment, as does your partner, but neither of you can consistently deliver for the other without being given clear instructions.
4. **Talk about issues overtly.** If you ask the question, you do not have to worry about the answer. Worry and anxiety are virtually universal, but you do not need to suffer alone. Talk with your partner about secrets, vulnerabilities, personal boundaries, past histories, etc.
5. **Be mindful when questioning.** The flip side of the coin from #4 is that you should only ask the question if you can handle the answer. As the old adage goes, "Curiosity killed the cat." It is important to learn coping skills for tolerating unpleasant information. Maintaining a relationship built on respect will help soften the blow. However, each person should be honest with themselves and with their partner about their abilities to handle tough news.

"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

- John Milton from *Paradise Lost*

6. **Uphold integrity.** Don't say/do anything that you would not say/do with your spouse standing next to you. Secrets are cancerous to trust and intimacy. Whether or not you agree with your partner's sensitivities, you committed yourself to that person, and therefore should not engage in activities that violate your partner's standards.

7. **Invest in yourself and relationship.** Every marriage has three entities; the individuals plus the relationship itself. You must invest in and care for all three.



8. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** It is nearly impossible to over communicate. Every person is complex, as is every relationship. Whether you are discussing grievances, praises, concerns, expectations, fears, goals, or other sensitive topics, listen with curiosity and speak to inform. Communication born from love and respect is never a bad idea.

9. **Choose your partner.** There are always competing demands in life, and we should strive to balance family, work, hobbies, friends, etc. However, if presented with a binary option between your partner and anyone or anything else, choose your partner.

10. **Be positive.** You can't un-ring a bell. We have all said and/or done something hurtful to our loved ones. Though these negative experiences cannot be fully erased, relationship researcher John Gottman has discovered a "magic ratio" of 5-to-1 evident in healthy couples. Gottman's studies indicate that for every one negative feeling or interaction between partners, there must be five positive feelings or interactions to balance the equation. Stable and happy couples share more positive feelings and actions than negative ones. Actively express affection, concern, appreciation, understanding, and acceptance of your partner.

