

Evaluating Romantic Relationships

A challenging question in relationships is: How do I know if I have a healthy relationship? Listed below are some negative and positive qualities found in relationships. Read both lists and consider how the qualities listed may relate to your current relationship. If your relationship is characterized by more negative than positive qualities or few positive qualities, discussing your concerns with your partner may be an effective way to work towards improving the overall quality of your relationship as well as your satisfaction in the short and long run.

Negative Qualities:

Negative Affectivity. Negative affectivity has been suggested to be one of the most consistent predictors of relationship difficulties over time.

Unmet Needs. Often strong negative emotions in relationships result when important needs are not being addressed. Frustration, anger, and hurt are likely to develop when a partner does not satisfy certain needs that are important to the other individual.

Negative Behavior. Compared to happy couples, distressed partners engage in much less positive behavior and much more negative behavior toward each other. Reasons for partners' negative behavior: he/she is unaware that it is negative, he/she uses it to force their partner to change, he/she uses it to create distance, it results from psychopathology, and/or it is a response to a negative behavior of the partner.

Avoidance. Some people avoid addressing problems in relationships for many reasons (e.g., because they are uncomfortable with conflict, sensitive to negative moods, wish the partner to remain happy, and want the relationship to be positive at all costs). Unfortunately, unprocessed problems can fester, and may set a couple up for tension/conflict.

Problematic Communication. Four types of communication have been suggested to predict distress and separation/divorce in relationships:

1. **Criticism** – Any statement that implies that there is something globally wrong with one's partner.
2. **Contempt** – Any statement or nonverbal behavior that puts oneself higher than one's partner
3. **Defensiveness** – Any attempt to protect from a perceived attack
4. **Stonewalling** – Withdrawal from the interaction

Positive Qualities:

Support. It has been shown that the provision of support, particularly during times of stress, is vital to a healthy relationship.

Self Control and Self-Efficacy. In a healthy, intimate relationship both partners are individuals as well as a couple (unit), and both have a sense of control and efficacy in the relationship.

Intimate Interactions. Sharing personal information exclusively with your partner, creating a positive emotional tone, and feeling heard or understood by your partner are key components of a healthy relationship.

Discussion. Research has consistently shown that couples in more satisfied relationships respond to problems and differences of opinion by mutually engaging in discussion about the area of concern in a respectful manner.

Positive Behavior/Positive Exchange. Small, frequent, day-to-day positive behaviors for many have a larger impact than less frequent major positive behaviors. In a healthy relationship, partners also appear to trust that they both will give to each other in positive ways

Egalitarianism. Couples are more satisfied when there is a sense of egalitarianism in the relationship.

Importantly: It is crucial in a relationship for each person to be able to say I really like and care about you and I also like the kind of person I am in this relationship.

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