

AVALON

SEVEN STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP





WHY DO PEOPLE GET MARRIED?

Well, for some it was:

- A rush of blood to the head... Also called being in love
- To prove that they are *ok*: 'Someone wants me'
- It feels like it's the *right time*
- Everyone else is getting married
- Financial and practical reasons
- Religious convictions or family pressures
- She was the only one that said 'yes'!

Between 2008 and 2009 over two thousand Irish couples were surveyed and asked to name five reasons why they were planning to marry. Most could come up with only a few answers. The majority responded that they wanted to show commitment; that they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together; or that they wished to start a family. However, a worrying number of couples responded that family pressure had played a role; that they felt marriage was expected by society; or that because they had been together for so long, marriage was simply the next logical step.

There are no right or wrong reasons for getting married as such, but certainly not having realistic expectations would be unwise, to put it mildly. For example, expecting your husband or wife to give up their addictions if they have one, just won't happen because you get married.

Nor will your families treat you much better as a couple, if they don't already do so. Thinking that personal characteristics like laziness, untidiness or selfishness will change, is what we call magical thinking. Your partner won't change that quickly, no matter how hard you wish upon a star!

Wishing to spend the rest of your lives together and have a family are valid reasons for marriage. However, in the developed world it is quite possible to do this without getting married. Yet people still choose to marry. In some countries there may be financial and legal benefits to being married, and to raising children in a union recognised by the state, but very few couples mentioned these practicalities and they rarely prompt people to get married. Despite the fact that marriage is a big decision and should be a positive step in a couple's relationship, when questioned further, most couples were unable to say how getting married would benefit their relationship.

What are the goals of marriage? Family and relationship therapists believe that marriage has three major goals: the creation of a family; happiness; and the personal growth of the individuals involved. The vast majority of couples marry with the intention of having children, so starting a family is the most obvious goal. However, there is a great difference between having children and the creation of a loving family, which is much harder to achieve. It demands time, skill and lots and lots of patience.



Therapists suggest that a good rule of thumb is to strive to become the parent you would like your partner to be and to develop within yourself the qualities, that you value in your partner or valued in your parents.

Therapists believe that most people get married in the hope that this will increase their store of personal happiness. A good marriage can and will increase happiness, but even the best marriage can help only so much. If you are a naturally pessimistic person or regularly suffer from low moods, marriage is very unlikely to change you. However, spending time with those who cherish, value and care about you creates positive sentiments, and you feel happier as a result. Marriage does not form a barrier to the stresses and strains of life, but a good relationship can make them easier to bear.

You see here's the problem with marriage: when you were both children you were read fairy tales where a princess was usually rescued by a prince, and the very last page said "...and they lived happily ever after". They didn't actually. What it should have said was something like "...and they thought they would live happily ever after, but then he was sorely disappointed with her princess-like qualities and she was upset to discover that his big white steed was only borrowed for the day, and he really didn't have a clue about horses at all!"

Our closest companions are often the ones who bear the brunt of our bad moods and complaints; because of this it is important to spend enough time together where you act in a loving manner towards each other. This is called 'positive sentiment override'. Without enough positive sentiment, the setbacks of life and the struggles and difficulties of marriage can overwhelm you. Lack of positive sentiment makes a relationship unstable; a husband or wife in this situation is likely to question the relationship and conclude that the marriage is not contributing to his or her personal happiness.

Marriage affords an opportunity for personal growth. Therapists believe that this is one of marriage's most important goals. When prompted, most of the couples interviewed said they believed that marriage would help them to grow and develop – in that it would help them to become more mature and responsible adults. However, very few of us think through the implications of how this might work. When we are single or living alone, we do what we like. If we choose to spend our free time watching sport, cleaning the house, playing computer games, shopping, drinking with our friends or working, there is no one to stop us – we please ourselves. Marriage helps us grow because it holds up a mirror to our shortcomings. While we might well have disliked things about ourselves as single people, most of the criticism directed at us was self-criticism. When we marry or live with a partner, it is a lot harder to hide from our flaws – there is always somebody willing to tell us!

So, what are the benefits of marriage? Read on!

SOME BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE

- A Virginia University study found that married men earn 22 percent more than their single colleagues – research which has been backed up in many western countries.
- Married men receive higher performance ratings and faster promotions than bachelors, according to a study of U.S. Navy officers and other professional bodies.
- Male victims of violent crime are nearly four times more likely to be single than married. Any ideas why this might be?
- In 2006, British researchers reviewed the sexual habits of men in 38 countries and found that in every country, married men have more sex (Hopefully with their own wives!)
- In a Norwegian study, divorced men had 11 percent higher mortality rates than married men.

So all in all men do really well from marriage. But what about women?

- They are less likely to attempt or commit suicide
- There is a decreased risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- They are less likely to contract STDs
- They usually have better relationships with their children
- They may be physically healthier than single women

However...

- They are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or other violent crimes

Notice a difference there? Why do you think there is a significant difference in how marriage benefits men compared to women?

DID YOU KNOW?

An unhappy marriage can increase your chances of getting sick by 35% and shorten your life by 4 years. Women especially are walking targets for heart disease, high blood pressure and higher body mass indexes.

Women need a good quality of marriage to be happy, men just need to be married. Married men live 7 years longer than single men due to better care in times of illness, improved nutrition, a home atmosphere that reduces stress and discourages unhealthy behaviours.

Marital stress triples the risk of heart surgery, heart attacks and death from heart attacks especially for women as it increases cortisol – a harmful chemical that lowers our immune systems. (See the section on the Human Brain for more information on cortisol.)



WHAT MAKES A MARRIAGE WORK?

- Sharing the same reasons for getting married
- Liking your partner – funny how that might help!
- Emotional intelligence – knowing your partner’s buttons, and of course choosing not to push them.
- Being able to remember the good times – helps during the bad times.
- Don’t dump all your stress on your partner. Find other sources of support.
- Keep one evening a week as a date night, where you get dressed up and flirt with each other.
- Turn off the telly when your partner comes in from work, show them that they are more important than the sports event or the soap.
- Maintain healthy friendships, hobbies and interests
- If you want to be happily married, make sure you are happy yourself!
- Marriage doesn’t necessarily bring happiness, this is something that each of us has to find within ourselves. But a loving, kind supportive partner, (which we all crave) is a really big help too.

“Marriage is a wonderful invention; then again, so is a bicycle repair kit.”

Billy Connolly

One of the smartest things a couple can do is to have regular discussions about their relationship. You could decide to do this every three or six months.

During this ‘state of the nation’ a couple discusses how the relationship has changed and developed over the last period, what positive adjustments both parties have made, and where improvement is still needed.



Positive feedback is just as important as problems and complaints. Positive feedback reinforces our goodwill to grow and develop as people and makes us more willing to tackle problems. A frank and honest discussion about the marriage also offers a chance for both people to reflect on the relationship, reaffirm why they are together, discuss what they hope to achieve as a couple, and reignite the meaning behind their marriage.

CONFLICT

NAGGING

Nagging is a continual, indirect, negative reminder about the things a man or woman hasn't done or is a reminder of their shortcomings. The more you are nagged, the less likely you are to do what's being asked. People usually ignore a nagger so he/she feels even more isolated and resentful. Recognising their powerlessness, the nagger waits until their victim is exhausted or distracted before beginning all over again.

To avoid becoming a nag, try telling your partner how you feel about their lack of support for you... then give them time to change.

Here are some more questions we ask our clients:

- In what way will society treat you differently once you are married? Think in terms of socialising, work and family.
- What other words come to mind when you say 'husband' or 'wife'? What roles does society give to them?
- How does society view people whose marriages have failed? Think of employers' perceptions, the local gossip and how your families tend to react to separated or divorced couples.

Answers are on the very last page!

ACTING OUT

We have all heard the term 'acting out'. A person who is acting out is expressing negative feelings by engaging in self-destructive or attention-seeking behaviour and may be motivated by factors that she or he is not consciously aware of. Let's say you are at a party and your wife runs into an ex-boyfriend. They have not seen one another for many years and have a great time catching up. Your wife is not flirting or acting inappropriately, but you wish she was not talking to him. You may not be able to acknowledge this to yourself – that would mean admitting to feelings of insecurity and jealousy. Instead, these feelings are suppressed, only to come to the fore as acting out. Acting out can take several forms – throwing a tantrum over a minor issue, sulking or perhaps drinking excessively. Any behaviour that cannot be rationally explained is considered to be acting out.

Acting out can affect your relationship if you do not recognise what you are thinking and feeling, or if you do not know how to behave appropriately in spite of your feelings. Taking our example above, a wife is more likely to be sympathetic to a husband's twinges of jealousy than to a drunken tantrum.

If you believe your partner is acting out instead of admitting what is bothering him or her, you should wait until he or she has calmed down and talk about what has happened. Trying to reason with your partner when she or he is acting out may just add fuel to the fire.



DISMISSIVENESS

Ignoring or refusing to acknowledge your partner's feelings or beliefs is called dismissiveness. If your partner came home from work and told you that his or her boss was a bully, you could react in a number of ways. You could listen and ask him or her to explain the situation; if you have had a tough day yourself you may launch into your own complaints; or you might think he or she is overly sensitive and tell him or her not to take the boss so seriously. If you reacted in either the second or third ways, your partner would be aggrieved. He or she was trying to share something with you, but you were unwilling to listen.

Dismissiveness can happen in many ways. For example, you may be happy to hear about your partner's work troubles, but dismiss his religious beliefs out of hand, or think his political opinions are naïve and foolish.

Many people do not see dismissiveness as a great 'crime' in relationships, generally because it happens subtly. However, dismissiveness invalidates a person's experiences and this creates an obstacle to open and honest communication. Constant dismissiveness lowers self-esteem and leads your partner to believe that you do not regard his or her feelings as important or that your care and love is not really available.





MARRIAGE BUSTERS

A marriage buster is any significant event, experience or difficulty that puts a marriage in jeopardy, and may lead to separation or divorce. Marriage busters can happen at any time in a relationship. Even a couple who have been happily married for thirty years can experience a crisis of this magnitude. Marriage busters do not always spell the end of a relationship – some couples manage to weather the storm, grow through the crisis, and deepen their relationship, but many do not. Common marriage busters include infertility, the illness of a parent and the disagreements regarding the discipline of children.

Unless a couple is aware that they may have trouble conceiving, infertility is not a problem for which most of us plan. Most couples presume that marriage will give them the right and ability to have babies. If a couple has not discussed how they will proceed if their hoped for children do not arrive, the discovery that one partner may not be able to have children can cause great strain. Fertility treatments may not be possible or too expensive, nor do they always work. Adoption is not an option for some people, and disappointment may lead to blame or guilt. This can cause irreparable damage. A husband or wife who blames their partner for not giving them a child may decide to end the relationship and try again with somebody else.

What would you do if your mother needed constant round the clock care? Should you take on the responsibility or outsource this to a nursing home? How best to handle this situation can cause a huge clash in a relationship. For many of us, loyalty to our parents suggests we should take in a sick mother or father, but if your partner is against the idea, accepts it with bad grace or vetoes it outright, this can cause feelings of resentment and anger. If you and your partner agree to use a nursing home, feelings of guilt can gnaw at you.

Accepting another adult into the home can exert enormous pressure on a family in terms of space, privacy and expense. If your mother clashes with your partner, belittles him or her, interferes in your relationship or spoils the children, this can make home life unbearable. Your partner may feel that he or she has been asked to sacrifice too much and that that his or her needs and feelings are being ignored. This may lead to resentment, conflict and the withdrawing of intimacy and affection.

A third common marriage buster is the discipline of children. There are a number of different parenting styles and different ways of disciplining children, and if your partner and you disagree, this can cause a serious breach in a relationship. To make matters worse, older children are generally clever enough to recognise how best to use this divide to their own advantage. Once children become teenagers, they may 'prove' that one or other style of discipline was not successful. This can cause a huge rift between parents, particularly if teenagers misbehave, rebel or get into trouble. You may believe that your partner has been too authoritarian, while he or she accuses you of being overly indulgent, and both of you may blame the other for children's bad behaviour. This can manifest itself in contempt or lack of affection towards each other.

Many people believe that infidelity is an unforgivable act of disloyalty. The discovery of an extramarital sexual liaison can put a marriage in serious jeopardy. The straying partner may decide that being caught gives him or her an opportunity to call time on the relationship; or the betrayed partner may feel that trust cannot be re-established in the relationship. Infidelity is often a symptom of more serious relationships problems. A couple that is unwilling to deal with these problems may use infidelity as a reason to separate. Most therapists believe that marriage busters can cause infidelity. The good news is that with a willingness to confront the reasons why infidelity has happened, genuine remorse and a sincere effort to forgive and forget, infidelity is not necessarily a marriage buster by itself.

GOTTMAN'S MARRIAGE BUSTERS

John Gottman is one of the world's leading researchers on why marriages survive or fail. With a team of researchers at his University of Washington laboratory, affectionately known as the "Love Lab", Gottman has studied hundreds of couples having arguments. After years of research, Gottman is able to predict with 88 to 94 percent accuracy if a marriage will fail. His research shows that certain negative behaviours are more corrosive to marital happiness than others. These are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

Criticism: Criticism is the act of attacking or being negative about one's partner. Most couples argue and have complaints from time to time. A complaint is a statement about wanting something to change; a criticism is a negative statement with the underlying message that someone should change. Here is an example of a complaint: "I am upset because you promised to pick up the groceries and now we have nothing for dinner. I want to be able to rely on you when you say you'll do something."

This same issue could be phrased as a criticism: "You said you'd get the groceries but you just couldn't be bothered. I can't trust you do anything. You don't care about anyone but yourself."

Defensiveness: Defensiveness is a refusal to accept that any of your partner's complaints may be valid. Defensive people are unable to admit that they have flaws. When you are having an argument, agreeing with your partner when you are in the wrong defuses tensions and makes a resolution easier to achieve. Taking our argument about the groceries above, here is an example of defensiveness: "It's not my fault. You can't expect me to do everything. You know how hard I work. You could have easily picked up the groceries yourself."

A smarter strategy is to try a response such as this: "I'm sorry, I was distracted at work and it totally slipped my mind. I know my memory isn't the best, but I will try to do better in future. Maybe you could help by reminding me next time?"

Contempt: Contempt tells your partner that you have no respect for him or her. Sarcasm, disrespect and extreme criticism are all forms of contempt. People who use contempt are unable to argue without belittling their partners. Let us return to our couple arguing about the groceries: "I think saying I don't



care about anyone else is unfair. When you criticize me like that, it makes me angry and upset.” Here our forgetful partner does not resort to contempt in the face of criticism. Contempt would look something like this: “I don’t care? I didn’t do exactly what you said – oh boo hoo! Pass the tissues! Give me a break! You’re so selfish you wouldn’t know what caring looked like. When was the last time you did anything for anyone except yourself? Let me think. Hmmm, uh, that’s right – never!”

Stonewalling: Stonewalling or “giving the silent treatment” is a refusal to talk to your partner, negotiate the conflict or look for a resolution. Stonewalling is silent contempt – the message is that you cannot be bothered resolving the argument. If an argument is getting heated, you may feel a break is necessary. This is fine, but you should let your partner know. Say something like: “This is getting too intense. I need a break. I’d like to go for a walk and calm down before either of us says something we’ll regret. I’ll be back in an hour and we can finish this then.” Stonewalling would be more like this: “Yeah, whatever. I’m going out.”

Men are more likely to use stonewalling than women. In the face of their partner’s anger, men may feel unable to respond, and therefore they choose not to engage at all. Unfortunately stonewalling adds extra fire to an argument and makes the person on the receiving end frustrated and angry. Furthermore refusing to acknowledge or discuss a problem simply prolongs the argument.





OTHER SOURCES OF STRESS

HOUSEWORK

When your partner does not do his/her fair share of housework, it leaves you feeling resentful, taken for granted and unappreciated. *(Please see the section on Compatibility.)*

CHILDCARE

When men expect women to do all the childcare work, it can kill the passion in any relationship.

EXPECTATIONS

Having unrealistic expectations of your partner after marriage, expecting them to be someone they are not, makes them feel inadequate and will leave you frustrated

ADDICTION

Addiction also causes stress. Addictions are diseases of the brain that affect our behaviour, our thinking and how we feel. We can be addicted to sex, drugs, alcohol, food, gambling or even shopping. Addictions get worse over time. Many people hide their addiction due to shame, but this prevents them ever getting the help they need. Addictions are often inter-connected, e.g. gamblers can be alcoholics, while sex addicts may have drug addictions too.

When married to an addict, it is very difficult to ever have trust, intimacy, closeness, stability, money and security as the addiction is competing for all of the above. Contact Avalon if you are worried about addiction in your marriage.

“Love at first sight is easy to understand; it’s when two people have been looking at each other for a lifetime that it becomes a miracle.”

Amy Bloom

EATING DISORDERS

The reasons why people develop eating disorders are complex and depend on the individual. Experts note that it is a combination of factors, including biological, family, socio-cultural and psychological reasons. Eating disorders are often linked to feelings of powerlessness and may have their roots in a dysfunctional relationship within the family.

Bodywhys, an independent voluntary organisation, dealing with eating disorders notes that dieting and low self-esteem are two major risk factors for eating disorders. While it is not possible to draw a direct causal link between the media and eating disorders, Bodywhy notes that the media can influence those of us who are vulnerable to eating disorders. A culture that promotes a particular body shape as ideal can erode self-esteem and the constant promotion of dieting can contribute to an unhealthy relationship with food and the body.



Unfortunately eating disorders can be much harder to spot than problems such as alcohol or drug abuse, and in many cases partners may be unaware that their husband or wife is hiding a problem. Eating disorders pose a grave health risk and can lead to death. If you or your partner, friends or family suffer from an eating disorder we strongly urge you to seek professional help.

CHILDREN

Our little darlings also cause stress. New parents can feel shocked, afraid, overjoyed, swamped, confused and out of their depth

- Men don't have the 'mummy chip' – women don't either
- Provider panic is triggered in men
- Men feel excluded, women feel over-worked
- Families often think they have a right to see your child even if you don't want to see them and it's hard to keep space
- Libidos crash and burn-up to three years in some cases



Have you thought about:

- What personal changes will you have (or have you had) to make if kids come along?
- You have just walked into the sitting room to find your imaginary 4 year old slapping your imaginary two year old. What do you do next?
- How much will having a child cost you financially each month do you imagine?
- What benefits do you imagine children will bring to your relationship?

IDEALISATION

Most people have an idea of what relationships should be like, but very few ever live up to this ideal. Our ideal relationship can be constructed from a number of sources. This could be films, books and love songs, especially those that describe love and passion in glowing terms or depict relationships that seem to be pretty close to perfect; we may compare our relationships to those of celebrities or friends and family and decide that we want our relationship to be like theirs seems to be.

If you idealise relationships you may start to think that your own is less than perfect. It probably is, but that is true for all relationships.

FAMILIES

When it comes to families, did you know that there are two main types? Enmeshed families are characterised by an extreme form of closeness. These families tend to live in each other's pockets, keep in touch frequently, they might holiday together and they make a big deal of 'Family Occasions'. Disengaged families function separately and individually but have little sense of connection or loyalty with one another. They tend to like more alone time than family time and keep their problems to themselves.

So how do you relate to your family? Which type, if you had to choose just one, best describes you?

What might the consequences be for your marriage if one of you comes from the enmeshed family but your partner hardly ever sees theirs?

People often ask us for advice on managing the in-laws, here's what we usually tell them.

- Never, ever criticise your in-laws to your partner.
- Respect that their family 'traditions' may never make sense to you.
- Realise that you have to make an effort with ALL of your partners brothers and sisters.
- Don't expect your partner to want to spend lots of time with your family. This is unrealistic.
- During get-togethers with your in-laws, try to avoid getting too drunk. You may be tempted to say what you really think of them which is seldom a good idea.
- Never start an argument with your husband or wife in front of their families. They will get defensive on their behalf.

Did you know that where you come in your family is also important for determining your personality traits? We know from research that:

- Eldest children are often over-responsible, over-controlling and more stressed as a result of parental pressure to achieve.
- Youngest children maybe spoiled, attention-seeking and under-responsible.
- Middle children often feel as though they don't belong in the family, remain quiet and try to keep the peace.
- Only children may be more independent, adult-orientated or spoiled depending on how they were reared
- About 85 % of your personality was formed before you were eight years of age, and the first three years was when we needed to receive constant care from our parents as our brains were most vulnerable to external stresses during that time.

MONEY

Money issues often plague us. Here's our advice:

- Keep your independence. Pay bills and expenses together but keep your own money for personal spending
- Make financial decisions and keep records together. Don't allow one person to assume the money manager role – it's unfair to both of you
- Be honest about your level of debt and how you view money. If you are not a saver, at least admit it
- Learn to compromise around money. You can't expect your partner to change their value system around money overnight
- Discuss what you want to achieve from the money you earn. Do you want to spend it or save it?
- Think about getting adequate insurance. But why? Well because:
 1. One in three of us will get cancer
 2. One in four of us will lose our income due to ill-health
 3. 25% of health insurance claims relate to back pain
 4. 23% of us will claim for psychological reasons or stress
 5. More men get prostate cancer than women get breast cancer
 6. 75% of the Irish workforce may not have a wage or salary after 6months (or less) of sick leave
 7. If you are sick, are you covered for health insurance and for how long will your employer pay you?
- Don't allow money or lack of it, to ruin your love for one another

“Getting a dog is like getting married. It teaches you to be less self-centred, to accept sudden, surprising outbursts of affection, and not to be upset by a few scratches on your car.”

Will Stanton

MATERIALISM AND AFFLUENZA

We know that we live in a materialistic society and that materialism affects us in negative ways. But can we say anything more about how it affects relationships?

A British psychiatrist called Oliver James has travelled the world studying what he terms Affluenza – a mental illness that affects nations who are striving to produce more and more wealth in monetary terms. You see, psychologists identify that people have five main needs: to feel secure, emotionally and materially, to feel part of a community, to give and receive from family and friends, to feel competent and to feel that we have some control over our lives, our levels of happiness are dependent on how we measure on these areas.



Oliver James however introduces us to 'selfish capitalism', which as the name suggests means that we focus more on having things, such as bigger cars, bigger houses rather than focus on anything else. Affluenza theorists consider that the prizing of endless increases in material wealth may lead to feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction rather than experiences of a 'better life', and that these symptoms may be usefully captured with the metaphor of a disease. They claim some or even many of those who become wealthy will find the economic success leaving them unfulfilled and hungry only for more wealth, finding that they are unable to get pleasure from the things they buy and that increasingly material things may come to dominate their time and thoughts to the detriment of personal relationships and to feelings of happiness. The condition is considered particularly acute amongst those with inherited wealth, who are often said to experience guilt, lack of purpose and dissolute behaviour, as well as obsession with holding on to the wealth.

The psychologists, Leaf van Boven and Thomas Gilovich studied which made people happier: buying stuff or spending the money on experiences. Guess which won!





Take this little quiz to see how materialistic you are. Answer between 1 and 5. 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strong agree.

- I am impressed by people who own expensive cars and houses
- I tend to judge how well I am doing in life by the possessions I buy
- I like to buy things I don't really need
- I like to be surrounded by expensive items
- I think that my life would be better if I owned more expensive luxury items
- I am sometimes bothered by the fact that I can't afford to buy certain goods
- Buying expensive items makes me feel good about myself
- I seem to put more emphasis on material things than my family or friends
- I am prepared to pay significantly more for branded items
- I enjoy owning items that others find impressive

If if you scored between 40-50, then you may be suffering from affluenza – where you never quite feel contented with the 'stuff' that you own.

If affluenza is affecting your relationship then you will recognise the following symptoms:

- Not feeling content in each other's company unless you are in an expensive restaurant or on an expensive vacation
- To distract yourself from marital problems or the feeling of being unloved, you go shopping
You hardly see one another due to long working hours but you convince yourselves that this is a good thing in the long run
- You wake up feeling restless and can't quite figure out why
- You buy a new car, handbag or house, but after 6 months you look enviously at your neighbours possessions and think they must be happier with theirs than you feel with yours

What this means is that we have less time for our family, our children, and our partners because our goals have become distorted. There are plenty of mothers and fathers who work more than they need to, leaving their children with strangers so that they can afford a big house or expensive cars. Here's the clever bit – we have been so brainwashed by the marketing gurus that we don't even realise there's anything wrong with this kind of lifestyle. You know why? Because so many people do it!

In his research, James has found that the richest countries have the least happiness. In fact the more that selfish capitalism is pursued as a national policy, the more antidepressants, obesity, depression and marital break-ups that country experienced.

Something is very wrong. Maybe it's time we asked ourselves what are we really doing it for? If we work sixty hours a week, sleep little, hardly ever see our friends, are cranky with our partners because we are always so tired, is selfish capitalism working? Can you see how this disease could be ruining the very essence of your relationship? Any guess what the cure is?



OVERCOMING MATERIALISM AND AFFLUENZA

Spirituality is the cure for affluenza.

Spirituality is the ability to find meaning in nature, the world around us, people and prayer. It is the ability to connect with something bigger than us, something that we cant make in a factory or purchase in a shop, it is the ability to have a relationship with the universe.

Throughout the history of humanity it has been said that the self we know – the individual ego – is a very limited form of identity. Ignorant of our true selves we derive a false sense of identity from what we have, or what we do – from our possessions, our role in the world, how others see us, etc. Because the world on which it is based is continually changing, this derived sense of identity is always under threat, and our attempts to maintain it are responsible for much of our “self-centred” behaviour.



Behind this identity is a deeper identity, what is often called the “true self”. This can be thought of as the essence of consciousness. Although our thoughts, feelings and personality may vary considerably, the essence of mind remains the same. We are all very different people to who we were twenty years ago, but still we feel the same sense of “I”. This sense of “I-ness” is the same for everyone, and in that respect is something universal that we all share.

When we discover this deeper sense of self we are freed from many of the fears that plague us unnecessarily. We discover a greater inner peace, an inner security that does not depend upon events or circumstances in the world around. As a result we become less self-centred, less needy of the other’s approval or recognition, less needy of collecting possessions and social status, and become happier, healthier and more loving people. In many spiritual teachings this is called “self-liberation”.

Most spiritual teachings also maintain that when one comes to know the true nature of consciousness, one also comes to know God. If God is the essence of the whole of creation, then God is the essence of every creature, and every person. This is why the search to discover the nature of one’s own innermost essence is the search for God.

Couples who have a deep respect for each others understanding or quest for spirituality enjoy a form of quiet peacefulness than money just cant buy. Have you found yours yet?

Why not try this...

Go to a meadow together or a quiet country field beside a river, take off your shoes. Walk on the grass holding hands, now let go and just gaze at each other. Sit down on the grass and without speaking, gaze upwards observing the shape of the clouds as they change with the wind and the atmosphere. Is this not a more beautiful moment between you both than your last shopping excursion?

If you still think shopping is better, don’t worry! It is the remnants of affluenza so keep practising being present to one another and to nature, you will get there eventually and when you do, everything will be different!

“That married couples can live together day after day is a miracle the Vatican has overlooked.”

Bill Cosby

COMPATIBILITY

COMPATIBILITY TESTS

On the Internet, you can download hundreds of compatibility tests for you and your partner. Please don't, most of them are junk. Throughout our programme we are going to help you assess your real compatibility and help you find the areas that may need some extra work.

The following Symbol "C" will be used to indicate a compatibility segment and at this point I need you to both pause, and ask yourselves: Is this an area of concern for us? The solutions you both need will be given in the segments that you watch.

The other symbol that you will see at various times, is the symbol "T". This denotes an exercise designed to help you both work better as a team. These exercises have been carefully designed by my team and I think you will enjoy them, though at first you might find them a little strange, and that's ok.

C: THE TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS THAT JUST WON'T WORK

Welcome to our first compatibility segment. In my experience there are a number of different relationship types that are very difficult to manage:

- When love is not shared equally between the couple, one of you is pretty much disinterested or is just coasting along
- You love your partner's future more than you love them now – when you fix them, you think they will be perfect
- You are in love with an addict, and they are in love with their addiction
- When your partner refuses to work, to contribute or to support you
- Loving a victim, in other words loving a person for whom being unwell or helpless, has become their way of "getting" love.
- When your partner's family refuse to accept you either for religious, cultural or class or financial reasons
- When one of you wants children desperately but your partner refuses to even discuss the situation
- If your partner refuses to compromise around the big issues, like where are you going to live, how many children will you have, how much money you will spend on various items
- Mental health issues or brain disorders, many people suffer from psychological conditions that may appear to the outside world as if they are just being difficult, this might not be the case
- Difficult personalities, someone who chooses to be uncompromising, unyielding, unforgiving and moody, if you are a real pain-in-the-neck, then funnily enough, your relationship probably won't work out



HOUSEWORK

There is no doubt but one of the most contentious issues in relationships is housework. Across the world, somewhere, right now, someone is arguing that its not their turn to take out the trash. So what can you do to prevent the housework from ruining your relationship?

Here's our advice:

- Write down the list of chores that you think need to be done
- Let your partner do the same
- Write down how often you think this chore needs to be done
- Mark off which chores you really don't mind doing, which ones you will do reluctantly and finally which chores that you really can't stand
- Swop over your list, see what matches and what is different. Write down a new list where you both agree which chores you are going to do and how often you are going to do them.

Stick to the list! Simple!





ROMANCE

Most of the thousands of couples we have met at Avalon, admit that there has been little or no romance in their relationships in the last twelve months? Is this you? Why not take our short quiz to see how well you score in terms of romance, no need for any complicated points system, simply give each other a kiss for each question that you can answer yes to!

So in the last 12 months have you:

- Made your partner their favourite meal without them having to ask you?
- Offered to do a chore they didn't like so that they could enjoy a more pleasurable activity instead?
- Arranged or facilitated for them to take part in an activity with their friends that you knew would make them happy?
- Gave your partner a non-sexual massage, where you blindfolded them, and slowly caressed their body for a minimum of one hour?
- Planned a weekend away together, just the two of you, doing something that you both love to do?

Well, are you looking at each other a bit bemused? If you haven't been that romantic, then now is the time to change. You see, without romance, erotic love can't survive. Domestic issues, like housework and childcare, often become more important, which is not good.

Let me give you a solution: Create a romantic wish list. Tell your partner ten things that you would consider to be romantic, and each week both of you commit to doing at least two things for each other from that list, we guarantee that doing this faithfully each week, will help to reignite the spark between you both.





COMPROMISE

Ask anyone what makes a successful relationship, and the necessity of compromise is bound to come up. Most people – including psychologists, marriage counsellors and relationship experts – believe that willingness to compromise is essential for a happy relationship.

Here is an example: John wanted to spend his holiday golfing; his wife Catherine did not mind the destination as long as she got some to spend time with her husband; and their children wanted to visit Disneyland. In order to keep everyone happy, John decided to take the family to Florida, but asked Catherine if she would be willing to let him spend three days on the golf course instead of in the theme parks. Catherine felt this was a fair compromise, provided they scheduled a few romantic dates together after the children had gone to bed. John agreed. In this instance, John and Catherine reached a compromise that allowed them, and their children, to get what they wanted from the family holiday.

We all know that compromise can be tricky. Here is another example: Thomas and Gina were engaged and planning to marry. Gina wanted to keep her surname instead of taking Thomas', but he was unhappy about her decision. They considered using both surnames, but they agreed that this double-barrelled name was too long and unwieldy. Gina suggested that Thomas take her surname instead, but he was unwilling to do so, since this was not 'tradition'. Because neither of them wished to change their names, the couple reached an impasse and they were worried that their inability to find a compromise meant that their marriage was doomed.

Interestingly, psychologists have found that sometimes compromise is the worst thing you can do. If one person always compromises – particularly if this is done automatically without letting his or her partner know – there is a good chance that, sooner or later, he or she is going to feel resentful. In a case like this, it is compromise that has caused a problem.

We find it hard to compromise when we are asked to give up our ideals, dreams or something we believe is central to our sense of self. This is why Gina was unwilling to take her husband's surname – she felt her surname was a part of who she was and losing it would mean giving up her identity as a person. If we agree to compromise our ideals simply to resolve an argument, our feelings are unlikely to change, and again, we may feel we have compromised too much of ourselves for the relationship. This is not a successful strategy for long-term happiness.

HOW TO COMPROMISE

There are instances when you should compromise and times when you should not. It is never a good idea to compromise your values and principles – doing so may lead to far greater problems in the long run. Instead, you should accept that you and your partner are individuals who see the world differently and that neither one of you has all the answers.



Always look at the situation from your partner's perspective before deciding whether or not you need to compromise. For some 'hot-button' issues, such as money and sex, you both may have to compromise. For example, if one person wants sex to be romantic and the other prefers something a little more daring, you may find that agreeing to do what your partner wants means that he or she will be more willing to please you as well.

Be willing to compromise for each other's families. In-laws can be difficult and demanding, but when you marry someone, you marry their family too – at least to some extent – and finding a way to get along will help you to avoid conflict.

It is necessary to find a workable compromise when it comes to childrearing and discipline. Children, even young children, learn very quickly that their parents disagree, and are well able to pit parents against each other and exploit this to their own advantage.

Psychologists such as John Gottman believe that we have to learn to accept conflict and difference as part of a good relationship. Gottman tells the story of how he and his wife Julie, who is also a relationship expert, once had a problem that took five years to resolve. Couples who are happy and have strong relationships still have terrible fights now and again and are not always able to find a neat compromise to solve the problem.





RELATING

Dr. Daniel G. Amen, one of the world's leading psychiatrists, tells us that couples should learn the art of RELATING.

R is for responsibility

Stop blaming others for your problems or unhappiness, actively seek out solutions rather than trying to get someone else to take the blame for what is wrong in your life? Taking responsibility in relationships means continually asking yourself what you can do to make your the relationship better. So think about that for a second, this means not telling your partner what they should do differently but means that you reflect yourself on what you can do to make things better.

E is for empathy

If I asked you what yawning and empathy have in common, what would you say? That you're confused? That's okay. Actually, empathy and yawning have a lot in common, as they are both the result of what we call mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are parts of the brain that light up when we see people doing something or feeling something. When you see someone yawn, or just even say the word, yawn, as I have just done, then you probably want to yawn, maybe you just have.

This is the result of mirror neurons activating in the brain and telling you to yawn. When your partner is upset and crying, your mirror neurons should activate and help you to feel empathy for them. By being empathic with each other we help to build stronger relationships, so choosing to ignore your partners feelings for whatever reason, and focusing on your own issues, makes your partner feel like you don't care, and then they will probably become defensive as a result.

L is for listening

Listening is crucial to successful relationships. To become more empathic, try listening really hard, without interrupting your partner to give your own opinion, also try and imagine how you would want to be treated and treat them in the same way.

A is for assertiveness

Assertiveness means that you express what you mean clearly, with strength and with respect, it does not mean shouting or being aggressive or talking someone down.

T is for time

How much time, in hours do you both spend in your relationship? Now remember watching TV does not count! Browsing the internet while your partner watches TV, does not count either! I bet that there is not a huge amount of hours involved is there. How much time does it take to create a loving healthy relationship with one another? Probably twice the amount of time you think!



I is for inquiry

If you feel that you are suffering in a relationship, ask yourself if it is because some of the thoughts you choose to feel cause you to feel miserable?

N is for noticing

Notice what your partner does that you like and tell them so. In many of the broken relationships that I have worked with, couples come to me telling me tales of how bad they have been treated that week and how inconsiderate or lazy their husband/wife was. I then challenge them to think of all the things that happened where they did have their needs met and I ask them: “Why do you think your partner did those things for you? This reframing means that they have to reconsider exactly what they think of their partner.

G is for great groups

Finally Dr. Amen uses the letter G to tell us that connecting with great groups is the key to our future success and happiness. Rather than sitting at home alone feeling sorry for ourselves, we should be out chatting to others, forming connections and making ourselves happier. Your relationship will be better as a consequence of following these steps. Go go on, try them and if after one year, you do not notice a huge difference, then I am happy to give you your money back, no questions asked!

“I think men who have a pierced ear are better prepared for marriage.
They’ve experienced pain and bought jewellery.”

Rita Rudner

EMOTIONS

EMOTIONS

Many people find it hard to identify what they are feeling at any given time. We know what sadness feels like as it makes us cry, we know that anger makes us feel tightness in our stomachs and our fists clench. But are you able to recognise when you are feeling these emotions?

A

Affectionate, airy, amazing, agreeable, at ease, appealing, absolutely, angry, annoyed, awful, abused, anxious, aware, alarmed, afraid, awkward, adequate, aggressive, awesome, apprehensive

B

Bright, bubbly, brilliant, brave, bored, burdened, bothered, bitter, bushed, beaten, bewildered, bad-tempered, breathless

C

Capable, cheerful, caring, close, committed, courageous, confident, cuddly, calm, cooperative, creative, comfortable, curious, cool, carefree, compassionate, considerate, cruel, cold, content, creepy, clumsy, confused

D

Delighted, dominant, determined, dutiful, dreamy, dishonest, defiant, disgusted, depressed, dismayed, down-in-the-dumps, disturbed, dull, discouraged, distant, disorganised, dependent, dumb, disappointed

E

Excited, enthusiastic, exuberant, energetic, elated, encouraged, ecstatic, empathetic, enraged, exhausted, edgy, evasive, embarrassed, envious, explosive

F

Fantastic, free, frisky, friendly, forgiving, funny, full-of-beans, fearful, frustrated, fed-up, furious, freezing, foolish, frumpy, frightened

G

Generous, groovy, giddy, grateful, glad, gentle, great, grief-stricken, grumpy, greedy, guilty, gloomy

H

Honest, heroic, happy, hopeful, high, humble, helpless, horrified, humiliated, hesitant, hard-done-by, hopeless, hurt

I

Important, interested, inspired, independent, ignored, immature, irritated, inadequate, insecure, immobilised, impatient

J

Joyful, jolly, jaunty, jovial, justified, judgemental, jealous

K

Keen, kooky, kept-in-the-dark

L

Loving, lively, lost, lonely, low

M

Merry, magical, mind-blown, magnanimous, mediocre, mean, miserable, mixed-up, mad, mournful

N

Natural, nutty, nauseated, nerdy, naughty, nasty

O

Overjoyed, open, overwhelmed, out-done, out-classed, ordinary

P

Peaceful, pleasant, powerful, playful, proud, pensive, panicky, paralysed, peeved, puzzled, petrified, pooped, powerless

Q

Quiet, quirky, quivery, quarrelsome

R

Relaxed, respected, relieved, ready, rejected, resentful, run-down, rattled

S

Satisfied, strong, surprised, super, self-assured, smiley, sensitive, safe, special, stretched, seething, shut-out, silly, sharp, scared, sorry, stupid, sorrowful, serious, shy, stressed, stubborn, spiteful

T

Tender, talkative, thoughtful, thrilled, thankful, tolerant, trusting, tense, threatened, timid, tired, troubled, tied down, tearful, trapped

U

Understanding, unafraid, uncaring, ugly, uneasy, used, uncertain, uncomfortable, uptight, unnatural

That's a whole lot of other feelings in there! Being in a healthy relationship with your partner means two things: identifying how you are both feeling at any given time, and managing those feelings appropriately.

What brings many people to therapy is the belief that someone else, i.e. their husband or wife is causing them to feel bad. However, our feelings are our feelings – we have to take responsibility for the fact that we feel them and no one else makes them happen to us. Of course if someone shouts at you, you will feel angry, but after that how long you choose to stay angry is your choice. If someone tries to make you feel ashamed because you didn't do what they wanted, you can choose not to feel ashamed.

When emotions take over it means that our cortex, which controls logic, is under-functioning. To maintain a healthy relationship, we need to practise using logic and positive self-talk to calm ourselves down. In very troubled relationships, people think it is someone else's responsibility to calm them down. This always ends badly.

THE HUMAN BRAIN

Your brain consists of 100 billion neurons, or cells that make up who we are. However your relationship will suffer if your brain is unhealthy. Very simply, you will be moody, lazy, tired, temperamental, cranky, dissatisfied, uncaring, unloving, unfriendly and hard to live with if your brain is unhealthy.

Dr. Daniel Amen has been studying healthy brains for over 30 years. He has a list of behaviours that make our brains unhealthy and subsequently make our relationships difficult.

1. A lousy diet-freezer food, fast food, diet coke or other fizzy drinks, etc
2. Lack of exercise. Have you exercised today? Yesterday, this week...
3. Risking brain trauma. Have you driven without your seatbelt for example?
4. Chronic stress-are you choosing a life-style or career that makes u stressed
5. Negative thinking, chronic worry or anger
6. Poor sleep. We all know how bad sleep deprivation can be!
7. Cigarette smoking
8. Excessive caffeine. Too much coffee restricts blood flow and makes us irritable
9. Aspartame and msg-aspartame is found in diet coke drinks. Google it and see
10. Exposure to environmental toxins
11. Excessive TV. Do you know what is excessive? More than one hour per day
12. Excessive video games. Again more than one hour per day
13. Excessive computer or mobile phone time
14. More than a little alcohol. Drinking binges or steady drinking each day damages you and your relationship

In relationships, if our brain is not functioning properly, the way we understand our feelings, our thoughts and how we behave will be diminished as a result. Sometimes people who are mentally unwell, struggle to be compassionate to their partners needs or find that depression takes over their minds so much that they no longer know how to be happy

DID YOU KNOW?

- Every cell in your body is made anew every five months
- Everything you eat affects your brain function and your mood
- Exercise boosts blood supply to the brain making it work better and increases brain-derived neurotrophic factor, a chemical that helps with neurogenesis. The best exercise involve aerobic elements with some form of co-ordination movement. Co-ordination movements activate the cerebellum and enhances thinking, cognitive flexibility and processing speed.
- Stress releases cortisol, a harmful chemical, in our brains. Cortisol shrinks the hippocampus and also makes you fat by disrupting several hormones involved in appetite control.
- Daily stress disrupts sleep patterns and increases negative thinking patterns.

- We need to exercise, to meditate or to pray to keep our stress levels under control.
- Sleep deprivation is killing us. 30% of adults have sleep deprivation issues, we are sleeping on average three hours less than we used to fifty years ago, the brain can't function without proper sleep.
- Nicotine prematurely ages the brain. It also causes impotence and restricts blood flow to the skin making us look older. However nicotine also stimulates the brain and makes us feel better, it releases a chemical called acetylcholine which improves your reaction time and your ability to pay attention and it releases dopamine and glutamate which help with learning and memory. This is why quitting is so very hard.

Cortisol

Cortisol is a hormone. Normally, it's present in the body at higher levels in the morning and lowest at night. Although stress isn't the only reason that cortisol is secreted into the bloodstream, it has been termed "the stress hormone" because it's also secreted in higher levels during the body's 'fight or flight' response to stress, and is responsible for several stress-related changes in the body.

Small increases of cortisol have some positive effects:

- A quick burst of energy for survival reasons
- Heightened memory functions
- A burst of increased immunity
- Lower sensitivity to pain
- Helps maintain homeostasis in the body

While cortisol is an important and helpful part of the body's response to stress, it's important that the body's relaxation response to be activated so the body's functions can return to normal following a stressful event.

Unfortunately, in our current high-stress culture, the body's stress response is activated so often that the body doesn't always have a chance to return to normal, resulting in a state of chronic stress.

Higher and more prolonged levels of cortisol in the bloodstream (like those associated with chronic stress) have been shown to have negative effects, such as:

- Impaired cognitive performance
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Blood sugar imbalances such as hyperglycemia
- Decreased bone density
- Decrease in muscle tissue
- Higher blood pressure
- Lowered immunity and inflammatory responses in the body, slowed wound healing, and other health consequences

- Increased abdominal fat, which is associated with a greater amount of health problems than fat deposited in other areas of the body. Some of the health problems associated with increased stomach fat are heart attacks, strokes, the development of metabolic syndrome, higher levels of “bad” cholesterol (LDL) and lower levels of “good” cholesterol (HDL) which can lead to other health problems!

To keep cortisol levels healthy and under control, the body’s relaxation response should be activated after the fight or flight response occurs. You can learn to relax your body with stress management techniques, and you can make lifestyle changes in order to keep your body from reacting to stress in the first place.

The following have been found by many to be very helpful in relaxing the body and mind, aiding the body in maintaining healthy cortisol levels:

- Guided imagery
- Journaling
- Self-hypnosis
- Exercise
- Yoga
- Listening to music
- Breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Sex

Cortisol secretion varies among individuals. People are biologically ‘wired’ to react differently to stress. One person may secrete higher levels of cortisol than another in the same situation. Studies have also shown that people who secrete higher levels of cortisol in response to stress also tend to eat more food, and food that is higher in carbohydrates than people who secrete less cortisol. If you’re more sensitive to stress, it’s especially important for you to learn stress management techniques and maintain a low-stress lifestyle.

It is very hard to retain a low-stress life-style if you are the full-time parent, cut-off from your friend, tired from sleepless nights, and no money because you gave up your job to care for your family. Meanwhile your husband goes to work every day, meets other adults and feels some sense of pride in his career, not to mention his role as the bread-winner. Kids are tough work!