



## Brief Guide

### Relationships

This is a brief guide intended to help you understand some of the common problems that arise in relationships and how they can be resolved. If you decide to attend Nexus, further written material will be provided during your sessions with us.

The reasons why relationships falter are multifarious. Perhaps the greatest underlying factor is that couples frequently expect the love they feel for each other to be enough to keep the relationship going: but love alone is rarely enough. We must also work on our relationship. We must work to improve our communication, our problem solving skills, we must work to identify and offer the support our partner needs, and we must work to improve the quality time we have together.

Frequently we observe, and especially when relationships are in crisis, that partners do not display sufficient tolerance of one another. They seem to almost expect that their partner will share all their values, views, and outlooks. This, of course, is not possible if the couple are to be two equal individuals. Just as frequently we observe that as a relationship moves into a crisis period, the relationship further deteriorates through a cycle of evoked responses. By this we mean that one partner, for example, becomes demanding (perhaps because they feel their needs are not being met) and this evokes in their partner a tendency to withdraw, which only serves to increase the level of demanding behaviour from their partner, and so on. The relationship then spirals further and further into crisis.

Here are some of the issues that can be observed in poor communication.

1. A partner may hold the view that "If he or she really loved me, they would know what I wanted". This is not a reasonable view, because the fact that a person loves us does not mean they can read our mind.
2. People confuse understanding their partner's point of view with agreeing to their partner's point of view. To understand another is not necessarily to agree with them. Frequently in discussions, particularly discussions with those we love, we are looking for understanding, not necessarily agreement. And if we can begin from a position of understanding each other we are more likely to be able to work towards an outcome we can both accept.
3. Unless we are to have identical views on everything it is inevitable that there is going to be a measure of conflict in any relationship. Conflict is not the issue, how we resolve it is the issue. People generally oscillate between two communication styles in conflict situations: being passive and being aggressive. Neither style is likely to yield a fruitful resolution of conflict. But being assertive is far more likely to lead to win-win outcomes.

There are ways of thinking and behaving that also get in the way of good relationships.

4. Couples frequently say that their family and their relationship is far and away more important than other things, eg., their work. And yet when their behaviour is observed they act as if exactly the opposite was true.
5. Couples frequently do not give sufficient attention to planning for and doing pleasurable activities together. And when they do devote some attention to this issue they think that "the big romantic weekend" is the answer. In fact, every day and inexpensive activities are the key. Without these mutually pleasurable and frequent activities our relationship can become devoid of fun, boring, and can become merely an existence together.
6. Issues can become magnified out of all proportion because they assume a symbolic significance for us: the failure on the part of our partner to do some little thing can be interpreted as a sign that they do not love us. This may be a completely erroneous interpretation and we can only discover that by checking our reading of the situation with our partner.

A better and stronger relationship frequently emerges as a consequence of good relationship counselling