



How well do you know your partner?

Did you know that having relationship difficulties affects your ability to remember happier times? When you are happy in your relationship, negative experiences and their associated emotions fade away quickly compared to happy ones. Not so when you feel unhappy in your relationship. The longer problems persist, the more vividly you'll recall negative experiences and dark feelings. Happy times fade quickly when you feel consumed by negativity.

When a couple initially makes a decision see a psychologist, their focus is often times on all the aspects of their relationship that is not working well. They may well have forgotten or placed on the back-burner all the characteristics or traits that attracted them to each other. Often I ask unhappy couples about their last joyful memory. To see their genuine struggle in answering this question is painful for me. They try very hard, but have great difficulty in recalling positive experiences and the connected feelings of happiness.

This month's topic is around reconnecting with those things that initially attracted you to your partner, and seeing how well do you really know your partner and how well your partner knows you. Usually there's a passionate fire early in the relationship, which brings a desire to know everything about your new partner that there is to know. This is wonderful and a great way in which to become acquainted with one another. All good beginnings usually have many question and answer sessions. As you come to know each other at deeper and deeper levels, you achieve real intimacy.

The truth is that you grow, adapt and change all the time. We all do. Unfortunately, unless you and your partner take time to know one another as you grow over time, you lose touch with who your partner is. This leads to a sense of disconnection, and the distance which follows, can cost you your relationship. Intimacy and connectedness is the key to the long-term survival and quality of a relationship.

This month is a great opportunity to become re-acquainted with each other. Take time to answer each of the questions below and set a date to give each other feedback. Make it a special occasion, over a nice evening out somewhere to share your answers with each other.

- What does my partner value most in life?
- What are my partner's religious beliefs?
- What experiences with my partner do I treasure?
- What does my partner worry about the most?
- What are my partner's strengths or talents?
- What are my partner's 3 favorite movies and rock groups?

If my partner suddenly inherited a decent fortune what would they want to do?
Can my partner list the relatives I like the least?
Does my partner know who my best friends are?
Could your partner tell you in detail what his/her first reaction was to you when you met?
Can your partner tell you what you stress over the most?
Is your partner your best friend?

The fall from intimacy to disillusionment usually begins 2-3 years after marriage. Couples are often bewildered, saying, "What happened?" A big part of what happens is the change in dynamics after the first year or two together. Once you feel you know all there is to know about your partner, conversations slow down and become more challenging. You stop asking questions, or you stop giving meaningful answers. This is when the "work" of marriage begins. It takes effort and interest to continue to ask, even when you think you already know the answer!

The great part is that we are not static, unchanging individuals. Our interests change as well as friendships; some friendships fade away and other new ones begin and flourish. New hobbies are discovered. Children may be added to make a family. We are always in a state of growth. The same questions asked this month may bring fresh responses as you each grow. Continue to build your relationship into one of the best friendships you have.