



RELATIONSHIPS

Immature love says: I love you because I need you. Mature love says: I need you because I love you.

Erich Fromm

If you are in an intimate relationship it is worth putting extended effort into maintaining the health of that relationship. Beginning in 1938 The Harvard Grant Study is the longest scientific study of male development and adjustment to life. The study has revealed a wealth of incredibly rich information about the factors that lead to physical and psychological health in men. The finding that I want to focus on in this article is the most consistent finding in the study. The most important contributor to joy and success in life is having a long-time loving relationship. In addition to this particular study, research finding after research finding has found that married adults (and those in long term committed relationships) are both physically and emotionally healthier than single people, especially when the long term relationships are characterised by trust, productive ways of responding to disagreements and high levels of intimacy.

The bonus is that oxytocin (dubbed the cuddle hormone) is released when we have social contact, especially intimate contact, with others, and oxytocin feels good – even addictive – which has us seek more intimacy. It becomes a virtuous, self-sustaining cycle.

Opening yourself to higher levels of intimacy with another person requires courage and vulnerability. To be intimate with someone you need to be willing to self-disclose and to listen with caring and compassion to their self-disclosure.

The word 'love' is a verb. It involves doing acts of love. Here are some to try:

- Find at least 1 opportunity to listen completely, without distraction, to your partner for at least 30 minutes. During this time do things to encourage your partner to talk more such as using verbal prompts (tell me more, yes, uhm, mmm), comfortable eye contact, being seated or still. Avoid offering opinions, judgments, or criticisms of what your partner is talking about, simply listen and let them talk.
- Every morning find out 1 thing that your partner will be doing that day that they are looking forward to.
- Every evening greet your partner with a cuddle that goes for a bit longer than usual and ask what they did that day.
- Write a list of 10 things that you admire about your partner and find at least 2 opportunities to tell them something that you admire about them in the next week.
- Look for at least one opportunity every week in which you can pamper your partner.
- Tell your partner 1 thing about you that they would not know (something from your past, a new thought you have had, something that is concerning you).
- Challenge yourself to be more vulnerable with your partner as vulnerability leads to honesty and to trust and increased caring. Watch Brené Brown's talk on vulnerability:
http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability?language=en
- Assess the positive to negative ratio of interactions (e.g. smiles v's frowns, compliments v's complaints) in your closest relationships. John Gottman a key researcher on intimate relationships has found that at least a ratio of 5:1 is necessary for healthy relationships.
- Give your partner a compliment. Make sure the compliment highlights a personal characteristic they have rather than the impact what they have done has had on you (e.g. "kindness is something I see in all you do", rather than "you make me feel special when you are so kind").

- Write a letter to your partner that helps you to positively clear your mind of any unresolved conflicts. You may find that it isn't even necessary to give it to them. If you do decide to give it to them make sure you are in a fantastic mood when you do, and are looking to make it a positive experience.
- For a week keep a tall of the amount of times you either laugh or cry with your partner. At the end of the week develop a list of at least 10 different ways you can laugh with your partner.
- Once a month have a date night with your partner.
- Learn how to actively and constructively repond to your partner: watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU3y2AprG7Y>