

Relationship Checklist

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Relationships are real, living organisms. Relationship Organisms come into being for a certain time and have a life and evolution of their own. The people in the relationship are the individual cells that make up any organism. All organisms have certain criteria needed to stay alive and grow.

Living organisms are in constant flux, they are moving, changing and growing. Healthy relationships are also in constant flux (as are the individuals who make them up). To ensure that balance and aliveness prevails in our relationships it is a good idea to review them periodically.

The following is a checklist of ingredients for healthy relationships that you can discuss with your partner to enhance the love in your life.

The sections here listed are:

Have Fun Together
Maintain Individuality
Engage Fully
Spend Time Together
Speak your Truth
Be Vulnerability
Honour Each other
Be Responsible
Develop Trust
Enjoy Sex

Fun.

If you are not having a lot of fun in your relationship why bother being in it? Your relationship should be a play ground for both of you to experience joy. Often couples get caught up in all the responsibilities that come with life (houses, children, work...) and the fun gets forgotten. It is very important to do some fun things together that have no functional purpose other than a place to enjoy doing something with the person you love.

You may need to get your relationship back into balance before you feel really free to participate fully in having fun with your partner. On the other hand, having fun together may help you to loosen up some of the stuckness in the dynamics between the two of you and may make it easier to implement some of the other strategies.

- ❑ Are you willing to put the things that have to be done aside and do something for fun only?
- ❑ Make a list of the fun things you used to do when you were dating.
- ❑ Make a list of some fun things that you would like to do with your partner. Pick one that you can do this week and do it.
- ❑ Make lists of the things that you like to be done to or for you and exchange it with your partners.

Maintain Individuality.

The apparent contradictory desires for unity (a sense of oneness) and individuality (a sense of difference) need to both be accommodated for a healthy relationship. Any living organism is only going to function at its peak when each of the cells are whole and complete in themselves. Similarly, a relationship is not going to be whole if the individuals in it are not whole in themselves. Sometimes the dissatisfaction we feel about our own life can be projected onto the relationship. A common flaw in relationships is to expect our partner to make us feel whole, lovable and happy. Nothing outside of us is going to bring lasting satisfaction or happiness. If we are not whole and happy in ourselves, then a relationship will not fix it (though it may distract us from our emptiness, dissatisfaction or sadness for a while). When we look to others for our inner happiness we become dependent (co-dependent) on them. We lose our independence and wholeness. This can lead us to do things that are not what we want 'for the sake of the relationship' such as; holding back on our truth, taking on unfair amounts of responsibility for running the house and participating in sex when we don't really feel like it. Inevitably, doing things that we don't want to do leads to resentment, tension and separation.

You can't give what you don't have. Taking care of yourself could be the most loving thing you can do for some one else. The degree to which you can give freely of love and happiness and compassion to anyone else will be proportional to the degree you have found it in yourself. I believe that it is only in being of service to others that we find true satisfaction with our lives. Our being of service to others is most fulfilling when our cup is full and the giving comes from a place of overflow. So get your own house in order before you worry about anyone else's. When you do you will automatically be a source of love and happiness in the world;

- Make a list of personal goals that you are currently working toward in areas such as: career, recreation, fitness, diet, hobby, spirituality, music, artwork, holiday, new car...

- Take one night a week for yourself.
- Develop your spirituality, explore your understanding of God. Cultivate a sense of the divine.
- Meditate daily - connect to your essence, feel inside yourself for the source of happiness, love and satisfaction.
- Love accept, sit with and feel your fear, sadness, anger and feelings of emptiness, unworthiness, loneliness, and unlovableness (god is in there!) without wanting your partner to fix you or make it better.
- Let your partner have his/her feelings without taking them on as something you have to defend, fix or satiate in any way (see Honouring)
- Heal your past hurts.
- Develop friendships outside of your relationship.
- Speak your truth. Listen to your heart and follow it.
- Become self nurturing by taking regular:-
 - massages, exercise, baths, healthy food, sleep and time out.
- Take care of your self image by:-
 - Buying/wearing new clothes, cleaning up your house, wardrobe, car and garden.
- Be gentle, understanding and loving of yourself, forgive yourself for the things you regret that you have done.
- Give to yourself by spending money on yourself.
- Support your partner in spending money on his/herself.
- Decide on how much 'Fun' money each person should have for themselves.
- Don't do anything that you don't want to without expressing your feelings before you do it.

Engage Fully.

The desire to be fully in relationship with your partner is an essential consideration to be addressed for the building of strong relationships. Being fully in the relationship means that you are willing to stay in contact with your partner when you feel in pain, sad, scared or angry and not run away, cut them off or withhold or withdraw. It means that when an issue comes up you are willing to engage until you reach a loving place. If you have a commitment to being fully present in the relationship then you can create loving feelings. If you are not fully in the relationship then it is not possible to resolve the issues that naturally arise in any relationship. If you do not really want to be in the relationship fully then you are only going to create pain if you don't say so.

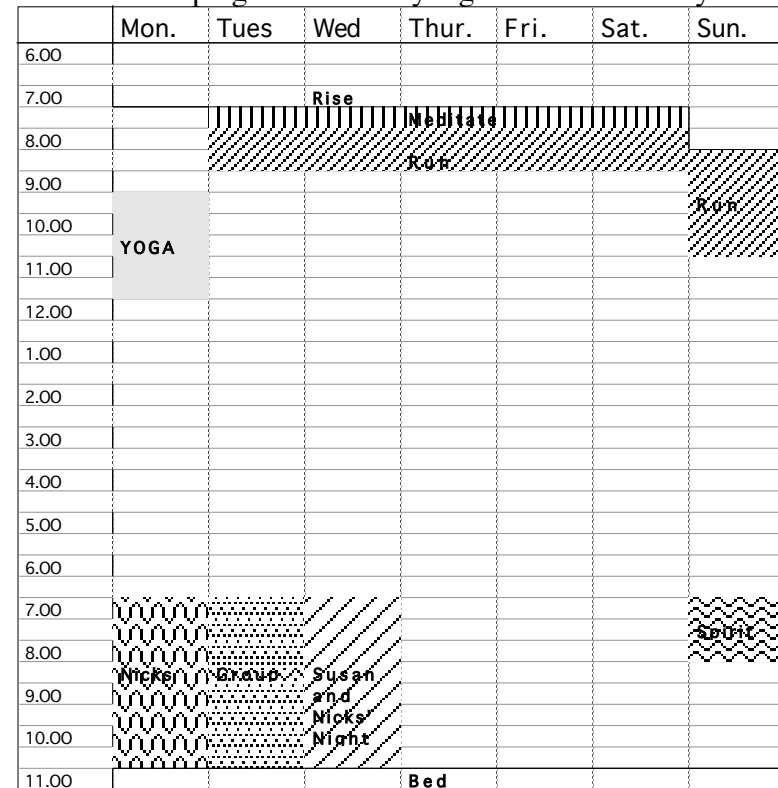
- Reflect on how important it is for you to give and receive love.
- Reflect on and share if you want to be in a relationship with your partner. Do you think it is going to be better with anyone else, if so, why?
- List the major commitments in your life.
 - Number them in order of priority that they are currently.
 - What priority in your life do you take?
 - What priority in does your partner take?
 - Renumber the list in order of your ideal priority of importance.

Spend Time.

Fulfilling Relationships don't just happen on their own. They require attention and time. It is easy to get caught up in the commitments and hum-drum of every day life. As the old saying goes 'there are only so many hours in a day', the key is to be well organised and efficient with the time we do have. Here are some suggestions to help make having time with each other more regular;

- Decide on one night a week for just the two of you to spend time together.
- Each night before you go to sleep spend 5 minutes each sharing how you are feeling.
- Plan a weekend getaway for just the two of you.
- Plan a out your ideal weekly schedule. Below is an example.

Make it realistically achievable. Mark in your ideal waking and sleeping times and any regular commitment you have



Be Responsible.

This is your life and things can only move to a loving space when each person in a relationship is willing to accept 100 % responsibility for what is being created.

Responsibility and Power go together - Claim responsibility for your experiences and you claim the power to create what you want. Deny your responsibility and you deny your power. People who deny responsibility BLAME others and stay stuck as powerless, helpless victims. Blame is the antithesis of responsibility and can be relied on to inflame a conflict and prevent a resolution from occurring. The most common projection is to blame our partner for the wound that we experienced in our families, giving them the feelings we did not express to our mother or our father.

Being responsible does not mean being guilty or blaming yourself. It means that when we are in pain we are willing to open up and feel deeply into ourselves about what thoughts and feelings and past experiences (often unconscious) we have that could have created this experience. It also means being willing to feel the pain inside us so that we can heal and free ourselves of the karmic cycle that created the painful experience in the first place. Blaming others for 'what they are doing to you' may temporarily deflect your attention off your pain but it will never heal it or stop it permanently.

Some words infer blame even though they are not directly accusations. The most responsible (and vulnerable) way to express your feelings is by not making reference to the other person at all. I have listed some of the common words that infer blame and have made suggestions for alternate words that are non blaming. Usually the sentence would begin with; "I feel...

<u>Inferring Blame</u>	<u>Responsible</u>	<u>Inferring Blame</u>	<u>Responsible.</u>
Abandoned Insignificant	Separate, Lonely	Unimportant to you	
Attacked	Angry, Scared, Sad	Taken for granted	Worthless
Abused	Angry, scared, Sad,	Dominated	Powerless
Used	Inadequate,	Unloved	Unlovable
Shamed	Ashamed, bad	Not trusted	Untrustworthy
Humiliated	Ashamed	Unappreciated	Worthless

- ❑ Are you willing to be 100% responsible for what you are experiencing?
- ❑ Are you willing to be 100% responsible for what you are feeling?
- ❑ When you are talking about your feelings do not infer blame, if you feel angry about what they have done then tell them directly - with your anger!
- ❑ Be willing to own and feel the wounds that you are carrying in your karma and don't project blame on to your partner.
- ❑ Do you feel blamed for the arguments that you have? Do you blame your partner for your pain?
- ❑ Make an agreement with your partner to do your best to be responsible with the expression of your feelings and to focus on expressing how you are actually feeling rather than laying blame and making accusations.

Develop Trust.

Healthy and fulfilling relationships are based on mutual respect for each other. Trust is an essential quality for building intimate relationships. Without trust we will not be willing to open our hearts to anyone. Sometimes our mistrust of a situation is valid, in which case it is healthy to express this mistrust.

Trustworthiness is built when we honour the boundaries and agreements in a relationship and when we share vulnerably our thoughts and feelings and when we are responsible for what is happening. Trust is eroded when we do not abide by our agreements or when we are not responsible and honest about our feelings or when we react to our pain by blaming and attacking others with our covert anger through aggression or criticism. In such situations our partner will not feel safe enough to trust us to stay present with an open heart.

A lack of trust for someone is a sign of a wound that has not been healed. A lack of trust means a presence of fear - usually a fear of getting hurt again. 'I don't trust someone because last time I did they let me down or hurt me and so now I am afraid that it will happen again'. The fear is actually more about feeling the pain that is already inside me than it is about the actual situation. Until I grieve for the wound I carry inside me I will still be afraid to trust others. As I express the pain from the experiences in which I got hurt I automatically open to trust others. As I deny my pain, blame others and try to avoid being hurt again I will continue to get hurt.

What ever you agree to is not as important as having clear agreements. Unclear expectations and boundaries often lead to hurt.

- Do you feel you and your partner abide by your agreements?
- Make a clear set of agreements for your relationship covering who is responsible for which house duties (cooking, paying bills, pets, cleaning, taking out the garbage etc.).
- Make a clear set of boundaries regarding being sexual with other people.
- What don't you trust about your partner (what do you fear)?
- Clear up past hurts by expressing your anger and sadness about what happened.

Speak Your Truth

Most organisms are not made up of the same cells, each cell contributing an important different function. To subordinate our individual differences is to decrease the potential richness of our relationship. The differences we each bring to a relationship need to be recognised and honoured. Our differences are naturally expressed if we are living our truth. A common fear when we get close to people is of losing ourselves, of being submissive, suffocated, swallowed up, over run. When we stand up and express our truth we assert our presence, claim our boundaries and alley our fear of being lost in the relationship.

The only way to stay in a deeply fulfilling and intimate relationship with anyone is for you to be absolutely truthful. Every time that you withhold your truth you actually distance yourself from your partner. Often it is hard to speak the truth because we fear arousing anger or being rejected, but we dishonour ourselves and lose intimacy anyway if we withhold on our truth. A heart felt truth, compassionately expressed, is a great place for the deepening of a relationship. Intimacy pronounced: 'In-to-me-see' is about showing all of you to your partner.

- Decide on a time each day or week to share your truth with your partner.
- Clear out any unresolved past hurts by expressing your feelings about the incidents to your partner.
- Make an agreement not to keep any secrets from each other.
- Share anything that you are afraid of your partner knowing about you.
- Share your dreams, fantasies, hopes, and fears with your partner.
- When you feel angry at your partner express it directly to them, vulnerably and responsibly (see 'Vulnerability' and 'Responsibility').

Be Vulnerable.

To be vulnerable means to be open and without guardedness. Vulnerability is about opening and showing the inner most (and often shameful) thoughts, feelings and beliefs we have about **ourselves** to another person. Most people fear being vulnerable. I have noticed that hurt it is usually created when we are not completely open and direct. Our shame about not feeling perfect is a common reason for not wanting to show our vulnerability. We confuse a feeling of unworthiness about us with our true worth. These feeling are not us. We mistakenly think that we are lovable because we are good enough. The truth is that the people who really love us accept all of the feelings we have about ourselves. Showing our vulnerability opens a gateway to others for them to truly love all of us.

An essential requirement for vulnerability is a willingness to own what we are feeling. This requires us to be responsible for our experience and NOT blame the other person for what we are feeling. When someone does something that we don't like we have the choice of reacting with blame, anger, and aggression and attack OR we can let ourselves feel our feelings and share them. This requires us to open our heart to our partner. It is going to mean that we will feel our pain more intensely. It is also going to allow us to heal by releasing the hurts (that are already within us).

- When you are feeling down and lonely, lost, inadequate, unattractive, or worthless take a risk and share your feelings.
- Own your reactivity, when someone is sharing something with you and you suddenly feel highly emotionally charged STOP and feel what old belief about yourself or wound in you it is touching and share it vulnerably. Share how what is happening is touching your shameful beliefs about yourself (Do not launch into a criticism of your partner).
- When you want to share start with how you are feeling - especially before asking a question.
- Tell your partner three things that you feel ashamed about - the things that you try to hide.

Honour Each other.

Honouring is a word that I use to describe the act of really hearing, feeling and responding to others in ways that are respectful, validating, empathetic and deeply loving.

Honouring is the opposite of shaming which involves invalidation and ridicule. Each of us has a different set of life experiences and consequently we react to events in different ways. Honouring is about acknowledging each other's feelings as valid and OK, even though our response may be different to theirs.

Our shame can block us from honouring our partner's feelings. When a person shares their feelings a partner will sometimes interpret what is being expressed as being about their own inadequacy - they may interpret what is being expressed as 'it's my fault that they are feeling like this', 'I'm wrong', 'I'm not good enough', 'I'm inadequate' and then start to defend themselves by trying to provide solutions or to justify what has happened. In this way the feelings that were originally expressed go unacknowledged and often even invalidated. This leads to the person who shared originally feeling bad or wrong for having that feeling.

In order to Honour what someone is sharing we need to:

- 1. Listen** to them intently - Be fully present with them, look at them in the eye, be able to feed back to them exactly what they have said.
- 2. Be Understanding** - Imagine being in their situation. Relate what they are saying to a similar experience in your life, if you can't then say so.
- 3. Empathise** - Let what they are sharing touch us by opening our hearts (often this means putting our own reactive thoughts and feelings aside).
- 4. Respond** - express our empathetic feeling response - how it moves us - sharing what emotion we feel in response. Make sure that you relate to what their issue is and don't get lost in your shame.
 - Do you feel heard and respected when you share your feelings?
 - Practise Honouring each other's feelings.

Enjoy Sex.

A passionate desire for sex is a healthy and natural feeling that has ensured the continuation of the human species for a hundred thousand years. Much of our understandings and attitudes to sexuality are still emerging from the Victorian closet. Unfortunately, most of us inherited a lot of shame about our sexuality through religious and cultural conditioning. Most of us have at least one embarrassing or abusive personal experience from our sexual development into manhood or womanhood.

Sexual feelings naturally arise in the presence of a deep open hearted relationship. If your relationship is not sexually fulfilling then it is quite likely that either there is a lack of meeting each other at really deep emotionally vulnerable levels or that you or your partner have feelings of shame about sexuality.

Common reasons for being sexual;

Out of love - As a celebration of a loving union. Sexuality naturally arises when we enter a state of deep open hearted connection with our partner, the sex here is open eyed, fully present, and often a spiritual experience.

For Fun - nothing deep and meaningful here, just a romp in the playground of human sexuality. It is possible that we are using our sexuality here to rev ourselves up and out of our sense of loss of self and into pleasurable distraction.

For Soothing - To release suppressed energy, often felt as tension, anxiety or stress. This involves the use of our sexuality as a means of releasing energy from suppressed emotions of anger, sadness, fear, joy or love. Here we push the energy of the suppressed emotion down into our genitals for release via orgasm.

For self worth - as a way of getting attention and being desired.

For affection - as a way of getting touched and caressed.

For Peace - sometimes it is easier to give in and have sex with our partner rather than saying no.

For Reproduction - Probably the least common reason for having sex.

The cultural sexual shame has tended to lead to a situation where sexuality has been avoided as an open topic for educating pubescent youngsters. A lack of sufficient understanding about our sexuality coupled with adults energy of embarrassment around sexual issues tends to lead to sexually embarrassing experiences by young adults. This creates the transfer of sexual shame from generation to generation.

Our shame on our sexuality tends to make us want to hide our feelings around sex. This hiding only increases the energy of shame. One of the best ways to de-shame and heal your sexuality is to bring it out into the open and discuss your feelings with your partner. Here are some topics for you to discuss;

- ❑ When is sex enjoyable and satisfying for you?
- ❑ Talk to your partner about some of your favourite turn-ons and your turn-offs. Write a list of your favourites and exchange it with one from your partner.
- ❑ Share your thoughts and feelings about foreplay .
- ❑ Talk to your partner about your sexual history from your first experiences to now.
- ❑ What are the feelings that come up for you when your partner wants to be sexual with you?
- ❑ Be playful with your sexuality, explore new ways to have intercourse, buy books on sexuality, watch sexual educational videos and discuss your responses with each other.
- ❑ After intercourse talk about how it felt for you and how you are feeling now.
- ❑ If you ever feel or have felt guilty, regretful or resentful after sexual intercourse share it with your partner.
- ❑ Share how you are feeling with your partner before having sex.
- ❑ Maintain eye contact with your partner during sexual intercourse.