

Extension Update From: Sarah Purcell, Extension Educator Phone: 402-269-2301
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MAKING COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS WORK

February, the month for lovers, is a good time for committed couples to examine their relationship to make it work better. Love is wonderful, but no one ever said love relationships are simple or easy.

Any partnership, even good marriages, can have bad times. It may help to consider relationships as a work in progress, a long-term commitment in which the “downs” sometimes can outnumber the “ups.”

Couples need to realize that relationships are developmental and cyclical. One isn't necessarily happy every moment. Ups and downs are part of a cycle couples can expect to experience many times in their relationship.

We may not love our partner all of the time and the other person won't always be there for us. If we accept this reality, we'll have a better chance of getting through the “down” times. It has been said that love does not preserve the marriage, but the marriage preserves the love.

Happiness is more likely to happen when people are working toward mutual goals. A good partnership comes when people just let it happen as they experience together the transitions and crises of life.

Shared goals, values, and dreams clearly help keep a relationship alive and vital. Do other factors indicate whether your relationship will make it? There's no crystal ball to give us the answer, but here are some signs of strength to look for and build upon.

- Flexibility and the ability to compromise, knowing when to agree to disagree.
- The ability to communicate or at least, the desire to learn how.

- Shared decision-making and the ability to acknowledge and respect important aspects of each other's lives.
- Pulling together in times of trouble. Sometimes a specific problem can be a wake-up call that can lead to a stronger relationship.
- Sense of humor, the ability to lighten up and let go.
- Caring enough to fight. Partners who are passionate about their differences stand a better chance of healing.
- Realistic expectations and acceptance of the other person's frailties.
- The ability of each partner to go their separate way, pursue different interests, then come together and share their experiences.

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Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached as 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu.