

Is this the Right Relationship for Me?

by David Steele, Founder and CEO, Relationship Coaching Institute

Prior to making a commitment in a relationship, in the "pre-commitment" stage, is your opportunity to choose your future as consciously as possible.

You are a Pioneer

You are the pioneer of your life. And if you are reading this, you are most likely seeking to be the pioneer of your relationships by striving to break free of past patterns and to make conscious relationship choices. As a relationship pioneer, your goal is to be fully aware of the long-term impact of your choices and date and mate with conscious intention.

You are determined to create the life and relationship you really want and believe that true love and fulfillment will happen only if you go after what you really want and don't settle for less.

Everyone begins their journey towards a successful and fulfilling committed life partnership as a single. When you date and finally find someone to bond with in a relationship, it's very exciting, but at the same time, most are conscious of the question, "Is this the right relationship for me?" and are in, what I call, the "Pre-commitment Stage" of a relationship.

The journey from single to becoming a conscious couple in a successful, fulfilling committed life partnership is what I call "conscious mating." Just as a conscious single must have clarity about who you are, what you want, and how to get it, so must a conscious couple.

As challenging as it is for you to make good, long-term relationship choices when you're single, it can be even more challenging to make good, long-term relationship choices when in a pre-committed relationship.

What is Pre-Commitment?

When singles become couples in today's world, most are wondering at some level, "Is this 'The One'? Should I be with this person for the rest of my life?" They are an exclusive couple, but not yet committed.

It may be tempting to call these couples "pre-marital" as a catch-all term to include all couples that haven't yet taken the step of becoming committed. However, in my opinion, the mindset of a pre-marital couple is, "We want to be married," which is very different from the pre-commitment mindset of, "Is this the right relationship for me?"

When I first identified the pre-commitment stage and started developing some approaches to working with these couples, I recognized this stage as different than "pre-marital" but didn't know what to call it. The label "pre-commitment" was intended to be temporary, but it stuck.

I was amazed at the lack of recognition, information, and resources for this stage of relationship among mainstream relationship experts and the available research and literature. Even today, while this phenomenon has become common practice in our culture it is still largely unrecognized in the mainstream, which I hope to change with articles such as this one.

Two Types of Pre-Commitment

Pre-committed couples generally fall into two categories:

#1 Unconscious: Typically following the "mini-marriage" model of trying the relationship out, acting committed without actually making the commitment. A disconnect of fact and attitude.

#2 Conscious: Aware that they are not yet committed, usually have commitment as a goal, asking themselves, "Is this the right relationship for me? Should I make a commitment?" An alignment of fact and attitude.

Romantic Love and Pre-Commitment

There are many misconceptions about love. Our culture glorifies the romantic love stage of relationship in literature, theater, television, and movies. It is that initial infatuation stage of a relationship when our chemistry is in high gear and we experience euphoria. Powerful amphetamine-like neurotransmitters flood and alter our brain chemistry.

While unsustainable, the romantic love stage serves an important purpose because it gives us a taste of our best and most powerful selves. If the relationship turns out to be a good long-term choice, this stage bonds us together and prepares us to weather life's inevitable storms. Confusing this initial romantic stage with real, sustainable love is a mistake that can be our undoing.

We want and expect to be happy, and romantic love is eternally optimistic. We don't want to believe that when we experience this intense chemistry with someone that it won't work. We want to avoid the pain of failure and can be tempted to try hard to fit a round peg into a square hole, twisting ourselves into a pretzel trying to "make" a relationship work.

In today's world when singles become couples, few jump blindly into immediate commitment. Most new couples are "pre-committed," meaning they are an exclusive couple, but they haven't yet decided the future of their relationship. This stage coincides with romantic love, and conscious couples who understand relationships realize the need to get to know one another long enough for the infatuation to wear off and experience the reality before making irreversible long-term choices.

Conscious Mating – A Radical Position

Here is the radical truth: Relationships do break up. As hard as we might try to prevent and avoid relationship failure, it happens anyway. Because there are many unconscious forces at work in every stage of a relationship, being fully aware isn't easy and controlling the outcome is impossible. These unconscious forces have the potential for undermining our best efforts to sustain love if we are not aware.

In conscious mating, rather than unconsciously believing romantic fantasies of living happily ever after, we accept this truth. Since relationships break up anyway, why not be as conscious as possible in the process and increase our odds of success?

Choosing Your Relationship Challenges

Every relationship has challenges. This is normal and does not mean there is something inherently wrong with your relationship. Some challenges are solvable and can be addressed and resolved, others are perpetually unsolvable. Prior to making a commitment in a relationship, or in the "pre-commitment" stage, is your opportunity to choose your future as objectively as possible.

You can use the pre-commitment stage of a relationship to identify the solvable challenges and unsolvable problems in your relationship. You can then make a conscious choice to take them on and live with them, or decide that they sabotage the long-term sustainability of your relationship and walk away while you still can -- with much less pain and cost than further down the road.

In pre-commitment, you are in an exclusive relationship that is not yet committed. This gives you an opportunity to identify whether this relationship meets your requirements and needs for a successful long-term relationship before you make a commitment. Using the pre-commitment stage to make conscious long-term choices makes good sense.

Pain Prevention

Even if you experience the pain of breaking up in the pre-commitment stage, this prevents you from experiencing even greater pain down the road.

Making the most conscious choice possible before making a commitment is, in my opinion, a pain-prevention gift you can give to yourself. As difficult as it is to make the choice to end a relationship, you will save yourself the devastation you will surely experience at the end of a mini-marriage or a divorce, especially where children are involved.

If you are in a relationship that is not yet committed and are asking the question, "Is this the right relationship for me?," I encourage you to make a long-term relationship choice that will result in the life and relationship that you really want before you make a commitment.

We must acknowledge the possibility that your current relationship is not "The One." Therefore, I suggest you seek to gain clarity about what you really want and need in a relationship and whether or not your current relationship will result in living the life you love with the love of your life.