

## How To Create a Conscious Relationship

### # 1. Ask yourself the below questions



At first glance this concern about where a relationship is going may seem rudimentary, perhaps even inane. Yet, in my forty years of counseling people who are seeking intimate partnerships, I encounter this problem every day. Many people have a goal in mind as to what they want and what they are looking for, not necessarily in accord with another's wants and dreams for the future. They are so busy exploring whether or not a potential partner will fit into their own scripts that they forget any new relationship must start from where people are in the present, not who they might become later on.

There are, of course, many legitimate reasons why people continue to do this. They have fashioned their own interests, goals, desires, needs, expectations, and even entitlements, on past relationships, media influences, peer relationships, childhood fantasies, and sometimes irrational attachments. The problem is, of course, is that both partners do this. Most partnership seekers rarely begin relationships authentic or even knowledgeable enough about what truly drives them. Those who do often don't want to risk sharing those vulnerable feelings with a new person who may not respond as they wish.

All of us need, and seek, security, at least the belief that we have some influence in getting what we need in a partnership. Working for so many years with patients in the midst of both ecstasy and tragedy, I know that true security is an illusion. Life often brings both negative and positive surprises that we could not have predicted and are often unprepared to handle. The phrases many new lovers use to soften that reality are framed as promises of eternal love, safety, and forever attachment, driven by the passion and lust of the moment. In almost all cases, if the relationship doesn't continue to deepen in care and interest, those promises are unsustainable, leaving many once-hopeful lovers, once more disillusioned.

To attain a premature sense of security, new lovers will often ask for, and give, promises they have no way of knowing they can provide. Focusing on the outcome they want to achieve, they lead with what they believe is their most valuable assets and hold off sharing potential liabilities, and avoid risking anything about themselves that might turn their new lovers away. The belief is that, if the present moment can be secured by limiting any possible negatives, then the future goal will be more likely to happen.

Unfortunately, nothing can be farther from the truth. If every phrase and action in the moment is being controlled by the attachment to outcome, it will not be authentic or a true replication of long-term reality for either partner. And, anything that flies in the face of that future goal might be seen as a reason to end a relationship that might have had a chance were the partners to focus on the present. If they were, instead, more attuned to how each must be ready to transform to make room for the other, they would use those present moments for an exploration of each other that is not driven by a personal, pre-transcribed agenda.

Great relationships do not come pre-packaged or pre-defined. Two people, laden with history, desires, assets and liabilities, legitimately both hopeful and wary, must be willing to create a relationship between them that has not existed before. Most people automatically drop into this kind of behavior when they meet someone in a new place, during a limited time, never knowing if they'll see them again. They speak to each other about what they are both experiencing in the limited time they are together, letting the future go, and focusing on what they can share in the moment. They don't pretend to be someone they're not in order to make sure that person will stick around. Many of my patients tell me of unbelievably wonderful moments they've shared with people they knew they might never see again.

If you had only a few hours with a new person, and wanted that time to leave you both treasured and deeply known, what would you want to feel like at the end of that interaction? Separate from the obvious need for

some physical attraction, what would you really want to know about that person that would make you look forward to seeing him or her again? If you were to be absolutely the most authentic and real you've ever been, what would you want that person to remember about you?

Have you ever know what it's like to be on the other end of a person who genuinely wants to know you in whatever time you have together? Have you known what it's like when another person is so into you that time stands still and the future doesn't seem to matter? Do you know people who, no matter what disappointments or disillusionments they have suffered in the past, live in the moment ready to love again? Have you ever been with a new person whose present is absolutely focused on being the most authentic person-in-transformation he or she can be? Can you imagine what it's like to not be self-conscious about whether or not a certain future will happen, but, instead, be focused on how a great present has the best chance of a great future?

To live in the moment from the first minute you are with a new person does not mean expressing private information that no one should be privy to until trust is established. Whether you had childhood trauma, have made terribly foolish decisions, have hurt or been badly hurt by others, have an illness, are financially in trouble, or have dysfunctional family members, should never be said as a way of telling someone who you are. Nor should you be asking those things. There are ways to know someone very deeply within a short period of time that are far more intimate than the sharing of private histories.

Here are some simple examples of questions that are not only not threatening, but show true interest in another person. The caveat is these questions or statements must be made from the heart of an emotional anthropologist with a reverence for a culture not yet known. There cannot be an agenda to see if that person is okay or not. The questions come from the heart and are only meant to know and understand, not to correct, challenge, or criticize.

1. What are some of the experiences you've had in your life that have affected you deeply?
2. What makes you truly happy, or sad?
3. Have you ever been deeply in love, and, if so, how was that for you?
4. What are your proudest achievements?
5. What would a great relationship look and feel like to you?
6. If you don't get what you want from a partner, what do you do?
7. What do you think are the most wonderful assets you bring to a relationship?
8. What would a person need most to know about you that would make you feel genuinely cared about?
9. What are your beliefs that are sacred to you?
10. Who are the people who have had the most impact on your life, and how?
11. How would someone know that they were important to you?
12. What would a partner need to know about you not to turn you away?

Of course, before you would ask any of these questions, you would need to answer them for yourself. They are created to bring out the depth of another person without being threatening, prying, or satisfying a personal agenda. Most people on the other end of these kinds of inquiries who perceive them as genuine curiosity and a desire to learn about them, are grateful and excited to answer them. They also often come away feeling as if the person who asked them treasured who they were without being critical or negative.

You can be so much more successful in seeking a quality relationship if you do not let the past define your future. But, you can add so much to that potential for success if you do not let the future define the present. Once you learn to use the past only for lessons and the future only for possible dreams, the present will be the deepest and most satisfying time of your life.

**Here are some suggested articles I've written for Psychology Today Blogs that might help:**

The Myths of Romantic Expectations

10 questions to help you tell if you're ready to commit

Is this true love?

Touch and Go Relationships – Do they need to be superficial?

Ten important questions you should ask a potential partner

What is your relationship approach style?

The most important quality of an intimate partner

How can romantic love transform into long-term intimacy

What should I have told you?

Should I date this person again?

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## # 2. Follow the 3 tips below

To have a conscious relationship, you need two people who are aware that they are individuals forming a commitment that is equal, respectful and fair. That means both want the same things and are willing to do what is necessary to create the mutually satisfying union.

**What do you need to do to experience this kind of relationship? Here are some steps you can take:**

**1. Be careful you don't expect perfection from your partner.** In other words, know we all make mistakes, so be as forgiving and as nonjudgmental as possible when dealing with disagreements, disappointments and anger. The more you talk and keep the dialogue open, the more understanding and less resentments you'll experience.

**2. Enjoy each other's company by having fun, playing together and sharing mutual interests and outings.** While this seems obvious, many couples fall into a routine that becomes boring, predictable and automatic, which tends to isolate or alienate your partner.

**3. Be a happy person, in general.** Be the kind of person YOU want to be around. Exude who you really are and project that energy because he would love to share in your joy and enthusiasm – forever and always.

Remember to keep false expectations, invalid assumptions, laziness and complacency out of your relationship. Take nothing for granted, especially when it comes to your partner. Put your priority on growing together, not apart, by making sure you each feel important and special in each other's eyes.

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## # 3. Define what it means to your relationship

**If you want a conscious relationship, you'll first have to decide what that means for you and your partner.** Just saying you want this doesn't tell the other what you really want. Define what constitutes a conscious relationship with you and how you want to make that happen. For example, what does spirituality mean to you and what kinds of consciousness raising activities do you plan to do together? Having a common goal that is understood by both of you is a great place to start.

You might start with a discussion of values that you each have and that are very important to you, the values you base your life on. This will go a long way to defining what a conscious relationship will look like. You can find lists of values all over the internet, and this might be a good way to spark a discussion. It's also a great way to find out what means the most to your partner.

**Once you've settled on values, talk about what activities you'd like to explore together and how much of your time you'd like to devote to that.** Do you both want to attend a class on meditation or a particular religious or spiritual institution together? Do you want to go on a yoga retreat or a volunteer expedition for your next vacation? Do you want to go to a group to learn how to heal your past trauma and bring back what you are learning about yourself to strengthen your relationship? How much is too much, and when do you just get to have fun?

**Now that you've begun your communication about how to change your relationship to being more conscious, how will you continue communicating?** Do you have time set aside weekly or monthly to talk about what is working and not working? When can you renegotiate the terms if you're not happy with how things are going? How will you both listen to each other so that you aren't feeling defensive when difficult topics arise?

**Finally, think about how others may affect your consciousness and your relationship and make sure to set aside to talk about that, too.** This can be both positive and negative depending on the person and circumstance. Some people will question your new path if they don't agree with you, and others will even put up roadblocks because of problems in their own lives when they see you succeeding. Find solutions that work for both of you to get through these possibilities.

And enjoy yourself! You're embarking on an incredible journey.

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#### **# 4. Cultivate mindfulness**

Mindfulness has become very central to our concept of mental health, and rightly so. Being mindful means being conscious of each moment of your life, whether you're working or playing, and certainly when you are interacting with the people you love. It's understandable why we lose our focus and begin to operate on automatic; we are busy and it requires effort to really notice every aspect of your present experience.

Partners are notorious for taking their relationships for granted. It's easy to do. We come to expect that our partners will always be there and so we tend to neglect them and make them less of a priority. It's ironic, given that for most of us the loss of our partner/relationship would be devastating.

To be mindful you must teach yourself to live in the present and notice the world around you. To create a conscious relationship you need to really focus on your partner and on all of the myriad aspects that make up your relationship world. While it's probably not practical to think that we can or maybe even want to live with that level of focused intensity all of the time, most of us could be a lot more focused than we are.

We are busy people with busy minds. We get preoccupied with the past and worry about the future. It is really hard to quiet the mind and stay in the present. We are so busy that most of us are just trying to keep up with our lives. Our culture rewards people who work all of the time. It's seen as a virtue to be constantly active and productive, but to have a quality relationship we must focus on it in the moment that we are living it. It's useless to regret past mistakes, just as it's useless to take our focus off of the present moment to plan how much better we'll be in the future. We need to be mindful of what we bring to our relationships and conscious of how we care for it.

To some degree we are trapped. To step out of the paradigm of our activity-obsessed culture requires a kind of bravery that most of us would have trouble finding. I think it begins with a serious look at the question of purpose. Why do we live as we do? Why do we work? What do we want our relationships to look like? When you begin to answer those questions you become more aware of your actions and therefore more mindful. Life

becomes intentional. It's that focus that allows for a more conscious and meaningful relationship. As far as we know, we only get one life, a life that we are creating every moment. A big part of that life is the time you spend with the people you love. Don't let it be random. Live it with meaning.