

What is a conscious relationship?

If you ask some couples, as I have, if they're in a "conscious" relationship, some of the partners will respond, "Sure," "You bet!" "Of course!" and the like. Then, I might ask, "Are you in a relationship where you're both completely transparent and honest with each other?" Being transparent means that you honestly consistently tell the truth to your partner - about your feelings, desires, fantasies, thoughts, actions, and all other important aspects of your experience.

This is usually when one or the other or both become a little uncomfortable. They may shift their bodies, squirm a bit, fidget a little or look down at the floor.

So, let's explore what we mean by a "conscious" relationship.

Friendship

Probably the most important ingredient of a conscious relationship is friendship. Friendship means that you actually "like" the other person. In fact, in many relationships one or the other partner might often remark, or think, that while they "love" their partner, they don't really "like" him or her. John Gottman, relationship expert, and author of the best-selling, "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work," says friendship is the "secret sauce" of happy and successful relationships. Specifically, friendship is "...a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other's company." Friends know each other intimately, "... they are well-versed in each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes and dreams."

The importance of friendship cannot be overstated. Many relationships fail because, at the outset, they were created based on the "packaging" rather than on a deeper, more substantial connection, such as true friendship.

Problem-solving

A second element contributing to a conscious relationship is how the partners deal with conflict. Partners in a conscious relationship are able and willing to meet conflict head-on, explore their own and the other's goals and move towards solutions that are mutually beneficial.

The most important element in conflict resolution between partners is that each partner openly communicates they accept the other's personality. Successful conflict resolution depends on "knowing and believing" your partner understands you. And, friendship supports this understanding.

In relationships where friendship is nonexistent or waning, one and/or the other partner often feels misunderstood, or judged or even rejected by the other. Successful conflict resolution is all about telling the truth and truth-telling from the perspective of a friend, not an adversary.

Conscious relationships approach conflict resolution from a place of "I don't have to be right," rather than "I need to be right, so you need to be wrong." Mutual respect and win-win are the operating principles.

Communication

Open and honest communication is one of the most fundamental foundations upon which a conscious relationship rests. Open and honest communication keeps the relationship alive and growing. Open and honest communication forces one to be a truth-seeker and a truth-teller, no blaming, no pointing fingers, no denial, no deception and no defensiveness. Emotions, feelings, fears – it's all good.

Clarity

A third characteristic of a conscious relationship is that each partner is clear about their own life purpose, goals, visions, and dreams. In addition, each is proactively curious about these same aspects of their partner. Further, in conscious relationships, each partner is supportive (rather than be threatened by) of the other's purpose, visions, and goals and contributes to their partner's journey. Moreover both partners are absolutely clear about their own and their partner's requirements, needs and wants when it comes to such factors as: monogamy, drug-taking, open communication, money, shared responsibilities, religion, children, parenting, in-laws, etc.

Quality time

Another characteristic of a conscious relationship - and this is a very critical point especially in this age of social networking - is that that both partners actively choose to spend quality time together, even though at times it may seem uncomfortable or even irritating. This is especially true when one of the other partner is caught up in social networking or electronic gadgetry or personal hobbies. Conscious relationships are first and foremost about the partners' both finding and making time for each other even when it is inconvenient. In essence, this means that one views one's partner as a priority in their life.

Intimacy

Intimacy is another element that supports a conscious relationship. Intimacy is the container in which partners can talk with each other, and be and feel vulnerable, in a place that is safe and secure. In this space, partners can openly speak about their deepest secrets, their deepest fears in a way that allows one's partner to see inside them. With respect to sex, intimacy means requesting what you want and responding in kind to your partner's requests. As John Gottman says, partners in conscious relationships, "see lovemaking as an expression of intimacy but they don't take any differences in their needs or desires personally."

Trust

Conscious relationships create, from the very outset, a container of trust. Partners in a conscious relationship continually build on this mutual trust. It is this solid foundation of trust that that supports one or the other partner to muster courage, strength, will, and steadfastness to move away from anyone or anything that might threaten the relationship.

Equality

In a conscious relationship, no one is "better" than the other. Each brings to the relationship their own, personal biography and biology - their fears, their worries, their challenges, their weaknesses and strengths.

Partners in a conscious relationship are not obsessed with power, control or influence. Each partner in a conscious relationship has his or her own boundaries which the other both understands and respects.

Consciousness

Partners in a conscious relationship are continually moving toward increased awareness and consciousness with respect to "who I am" and "how I am" in the relationship. If either or both partners are lacking in some area of interpersonal, interactive skills, they're open to learning what they need to know - knowledge or skills.

In essence, a conscious relationship means that one partner relates to himself or herself through the other. Each partner acts as a mirror for the other. Each becomes, and this is critical, a source of feedback

for the other. Not judgmental, not critical, but from an open, loving, heart – felt place, each partner mirrors back the other. It's this mirroring that fosters self-awareness and growth.

Everyone is wounded in childhood. And we heal in relationship. But only if we choose to. Those in a conscious relationship have made this choice to heal and grow through their relationship.

When two conscious individuals work in harmonious fashion, growth and change result. Much of this change revolves around dealing with old, self-destructive and self-sabotaging patterns of behavior, fueled by emotional baggage that each of the partners has brought with them from childhood.

Being in a conscious relationship is not easy. Being in any relationship is not easy. The difference? In a conscious relationship old wounds and hurts don't simply surface over and over again but are worked on, massaged, metabolized and understood and in the process of understanding and forgiveness of self and other, both partners change.

In a conscious relationship, where true Love (and like) exist from moment to moment, each partner supports the other, without judgment, and from a place of compassion, understanding and empathy. This is the ground for emotional and spiritual healing. It's not always an easy experience. It takes a great deal of strength, courage, caring and commitment to become conscious.

Conscious relationships are the answer to serial monogamy, continued failed relationships, and to dysfunctional and co-dependent relationships.

Heart- and soul-centered, conscious relationships are a journey, never a destination, but a journey well worth taking.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Would you describe your relationship as conscious? If, not, what's standing in the way? Honestly.
- If you're not in a conscious relationship, how does that make you feel?
- Were your parents in a conscious relationship when you were growing up?
- If you are not in a conscious relationship, what would it look like and feel like to be in one?

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