

Tackling Tough Topics - RELATIONSHIPS & LOVE

What really is love? 5th grade girl
How do you know he is the one? 7th grade girl

Many parents do not discuss relationships and love with their children. Although love is valued by many, it can be difficult to define and understand. Research into the common characteristics of successful, romantic, intimate relationships may provide guidelines for evaluating relationships and offer suggestions for improvement.

Parent SUGGESTION: go over *The Love Test* activity with your child.

1. How can you tell if you have found the right person?

CRITERIA FOR JUDGING FUNCTIONAL INTIMACY - (Frankel, 1982)

1. being able to have nondefensive, unguarded communication.
2. having empathy for each other, that is, being supportive of each other and understanding of each other's perspective.
3. being able to resolve conflicts by mutual accommodation and compromise as well as willing to be accepting of differences that cannot be negotiated.
4. being confirming of each other's lovability.
5. having enjoyable physical contact from affection to sex. Ann Landers found that when women were asked what they longed for most in their sexual relationships they asked for more "cuddling" not more intercourse.
6. having a "we" identity based on an aggregate of shared experiences from joyous to the tragic.
7. being supportive of each other's individual interests, friends, hobbies, and careers.
8. being mutually available during crises.
9. being playful together.

Healthy self-love, self-esteem, is a necessary condition for healthy love of others. A good, intimate relationship is not an easy process. It requires effort and work by two well adjusted individuals.

2. How can you tell if someone is really in love with you?

∞ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (1956) ∞

- Paradox of love - become one and yet remain two (Fromm, 1956, p. 17).
United to another but able to preserve one's own individuality. Fromm maintained that meaningful love can only be attained if a person is secure in one's own identity (self-realization).
- A relationship is primarily giving, not receiving.

Four elements present in all forms of love:

1. "active concern for the life and growth of that which we love.... I want the loved person to grow and unfold for his own sake, and in his own ways, and not for the purpose of serving me (Fromm, 1956, pp. 23-4)."
2. responsibility - attending to the physical and psychic needs of the other person.
3. respect - seeing the person as he or she is and encouraging the person to develop in his or her own unique way.
4. knowledge of the other and his or her reality with no illusions.

3. What does it take to have an intimate loving relationship?

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVING, INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS:

(Chelune, Robison & Kommor, 1984 - In Denney & Quadrango, 1988)

1. Knowledge of the innermost being of the other - involves developing trust and taking part in a great amount of self-disclosure.
2. Mutuality - each must have the perception that the relationship is a joint venture that involves shared interaction and that he/she is receiving a fair share of the costs and benefits of the relationship.
3. Interdependence - develop ways each person can depend on the other for support, resources, understanding, and help of various sorts.
4. Trust - accepting each other,
avoiding purposely hurting each other,
having the best interests of the other and the relationship at heart,
feeling warmth and caring for each other,
responding to the needs of the other,
sharing and desiring that the relationship continue.
5. Commitment - the acceptance of the relationship continuing indefinitely or the attempt to make it continue indefinitely - affects all other characteristics and vice versa.
6. Caring - a strong affection for the other - must be present as it affects all the other characteristics.