

Very Important Principles of Relationship Satisfaction

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- ***The Relationship is the Overall # 1 Priority.***

Satisfied couples have the highest priority on their relationship – before careers, kids, relatives, leisure activities, etc. although in real life at times other priorities may draw more attention and focus for a while. In healthy couples, each partner knows he or she is the # 1 priority to the other, no matter what. This is the foundation of feeling “special.”

- ***Healthy Relationships are Founded in Personal Equality.***

An indispensable principle of many contemporary satisfying relationships is that partners are “equals” and operate as a “team” together. While gender roles may influence some role or task allocations, each person is of equal value or worth in the relationship.

- ***There is a priority on Cooperation.***

Satisfied couples cooperate, not compete. Couples cooperate to establish overall mutual empathy (feelings) and mutual conflict resolution (behavior).

- ***Partners interact from the principle of “Give to Get” – each puts the partner’s feeling and satisfaction first.***

Putting the other person first builds resentments when it is not reciprocated. When both put the other’s feelings and happiness first, and then seek one’s own emotional satisfaction in the problem solving, the emotional benefits can be wonderful.

- ***There is a Priority on Mutual Emotional & Sexual Empathy.***

Emotional empathy (acceptance, affirmation, comforting, support, understanding) with sexual involvement is the “glue” of intimacy. It is fundamentally important in healthy, satisfying relationships. Above all else, most individuals look to their marriage for empathy, and emotional and sexual wellbeing.

- ***Partners Distinguish Feelings and Behaviors.***

Feelings and behaviors are different. Healthy couples “track” this difference, being careful to not automatically link their own feelings with the other’s behaviors. Feelings are not caused by another’s behavior, but rather by one’s *interpretation* (thoughts about) or attribution of the meaning of that behavior. When feelings are joined with behaviors (rather than the perception of the behaviors), the person trying to understand and empathize with the partner’s feeling will feel blamed, and “trapped” into agreeing with the other’s causal attribution for the feeling (blame). When feelings are not distinguished from behaviors, it opens the door to emotional exploitation, conflict and gridlock. For example, if I tell you that I am angry (the feeling) because of what you did (the behavior) rather than how I interpreted your behavior (and how that feels), I am unwittingly using my anger (feeling) to coerce a change in your behavior. Or, if I adopt a quiet, irritated stance, I unwittingly use this emotional avoidance to coerce a change in the other’s behavior. These are examples of emotional exploitation -- the use of feeling to pressure the other for a behavioral resolution to the conflict. Satisfied couples avoid emotional exploitation; they affirm each other’s feelings first, and then cooperate to mutually problem-solve any behaviors.

- ***All Conflict Resolution has as its Goal Mutual Emotional Satisfaction.***

In happy couples, conflicts are resolved with emotional satisfaction for each partner. The goal is to work out wise solutions that are emotionally pleasing for BOTH partners → “Win-Win” resolutions. On the other hand, when one person wins and the other loses, both will eventually lose and the resolution will fail. When each partner feels emotionally satisfied, the resolution perpetuates itself because it feels good, is an improvement, a better way.