

Ten Tips for a Strong Vibrant Relationship

By Dr Sue Johnson,
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So love is illogical, random and mysterious, yes? Not any more. We have cracked the code. In the last few years social scientists and therapists who practice emotionally focused therapy (or EFT) have made a breakthrough. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we have a map to this passion, this fever that has baffled poets and lovers all through human history.

Here is some of what we know:

1. We are born to need each other. The human brain is wired for close connection with a few irreplaceable others. Accepting your need for this special kind of emotional connection is not a sign of weakness, but maturity and strength.

So don't feel ashamed of this need for a safe loving bond.

2. In love relationships emotional hurt is a mixture of anger, sadness but most of all, fear. Fear of being abandoned, and rejected. This hurt registers in the same part of our brain as physical hurt. It is too hard to push these feelings aside or ignore them. The first step to dealing with injuries in love is to pinpoint the feeling and then to send clear messages about this hurt to the one you love

So don't just "ignore hurts" with the idea that they will up and go away.

3. The strongest among us are those who can reach for others. Love is the best survival strategy of all. We all long for a safe haven love relationship. Self-sufficiency is just another word for loneliness.

So risk reaching out and fighting for this safe haven. It is the best investment you'll ever make.

4. Relationships can survive partners being very different. Even if you think you are from different planets it's okay. The one thing love can't survive is constant emotional disconnection. Conflict is often less dangerous for your love than distance.

So after a fight, put it right. Repair it, heal the rift between you.

5. There is no perfect lover. That is only in the movies. We shut down when we think we have failed as lovers, when we have disappointed. But our lover doesn't want perfect performance. In the end he or she needs our emotional presence.

So it's okay to say "I don't know what to do or say." Just stay open and present.

6. The fights that matter are never about sex, money or the kids. That is just the ripple on the surface of the sea. They are about someone protesting, often in an indirect way that is hard to understand, the loss of safe emotional connection. The most terrible trap in a love relationship is when one person really wants to say, "Where are you? Do I matter to you?" but instead becomes critical and demanding and the other person feels hopeless and inadequate and moves away. The lovers then get caught in emotional starvation, stalemate and more and more disconnection.

So do try to tell each other when you feel lonely and like you are failing at being the perfect partner, especially if you are having lots of fights about tasks. Look beneath the surface.

7. We only have two ways to deal with the vulnerability of love when we can't connect. Get mad and move in fast to break down the other's walls or try not to care so much, and build a wall to protect yourself. Which one do you do? You probably learned it very young.

So do try to listen to your longings and risk reaching to connect. These other two options are traps that drive your lover away from you.

8. A loving relationship is the best recipe for a long and happy life that exists. Holding your lover tight is the ultimate antidote to stress. Cuddle hormones turn off stress hormones!

So do take time to hold and canoodle. It's better than taking your vitamins.

9. Lasting passion is entirely possible in love. Infatuation is just the prelude. An attuned loving bond is the symphony. This kind of bond creates what I call synchrony sex. Sex becomes a safe adventure.

So don't give up when sex goes into a temporary slump. Talk about it. Making love without candid conversation is like landing a 747 without help from the control tower!

10. The key moments in love are when partners open up and ask for what they need and the other partner responds. This demands courage but this is the moment of magic and transformation.

So take a deep breath and listen into your emotions. Let them tell you what you need. Then tell your partner that they are so special to you that you want to take a risk and tell them what you need from them most. Keep it simple and honest.

When you have a blueprint for love you can build it. In EFT studies seven out of ten couples repair their relationship. Love doesn't have to be a mystery anymore.