

Ashcliffe Psychology

Newsletter

October, 2023

Welcome to the latest edition of the Ashcliffe Psychology Newsletter. The focus of this newsletter is "Relationships and Mental Well-being". Often, we get so busy we forget the people who are important to us.

Healthy Relationships

A large body of research shows strong links between healthy relationships and lower rates of anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem and greater empathy. Strong, healthy relationships can also help to strengthen your immune system, help you recover from disease, and may even lengthen your life.



Research conducted by Mental Health (UK) describes 5 key indicators of a healthy relationship. You can always look for ways to develop those which may not be present in your relationship.

1. **Work at maintaining your relationship.** Don't expect your relationship to always be the same. Over time, people change. You and your partner are not the same people you were at the beginning of your relationship, so some adaptation is essential.
2. **Talk and listen.** All relationships have disagreements and that's ok. What matters is how you talk and listen to one another. Listen to understand, rather than listening to respond. Don't be afraid to express your emotions or vulnerabilities with people who you trust.
3. **Set and respect boundaries.** Setting boundaries is not only about what you don't want or like in your relationships, but also about letting the people around you know what you appreciate. Think about, and let others know where your boundaries are. However, be reasonable. Mutual respect with boundaries is important.
4. **Let go of control.** A lot of life is about how we react to our experiences and encounters. Knowing that you can only really control what you do and not what anyone else does will save you time and stress. Also, needing to always be in control is often a sign of insecurity, particularly in relationships.
5. **Reflect and learn.** If you have a healthy way of expressing your feelings, then you're able to respond to the behaviour and emotions of other people in a healthy way. Being angry with someone often comes from a place of feeling hurt and upset. If you can recognise that, you can communicate it, and build better relationships with those around you.

Key Sources of Relationship Conflict

There have been many studies of conflict and disagreement in marriage and intimate relationships. *Psychology Today* (June, 2021) made a summary of these.

Apart from destructive behaviours, such as unfaithfulness (having sex with another person), physical or verbal abuse, persistent name-calling and emotional abuse, there are two other areas where couples either disagree or don't address until things have become a major issue. Unless these are addressed early, they often result in on-going disharmony.

1. Attitudes and behaviours. When people are in the bliss of an early relationship, they often dismiss warning signals or make excuses for a partner's inappropriate behaviour. Relationship therapist, John Gottman, says he can tell within minutes of listening to a couple's interaction, whether their relationship will last. Some attitudes and behaviours are unacceptable in a relationship and these can come from either partner towards the other.

Condescending behaviour. Treating a partner as if they're stupid or inferior.

Controlling. Possessive, jealous or taking over all the other's finances or social life.

Continual criticism. Rejection of the other partner's opinions and ideas.

Inconsideration. Doesn't help at home and expects the other partner to take all domestic and parenting responsibilities.

Moodiness. Emotionally unstable behaviours.

Sexuality. Using Sex to manipulate the other person. Criticising the other's sex drive.

2. Finances. Couples need to consider their finances prior to co-habiting and look at potential issues. This is essential, as conflict over managing finances is better to be dealt with early, than argued about later.



Source: Australian Institute of Family

Facts about Marriage in Australia

Since 1970, the Australian population has doubled, yet the average number of marriages each year has not increased over that time.

The lowest number of yearly marriages in recent times was during the pandemic in 2021-2.

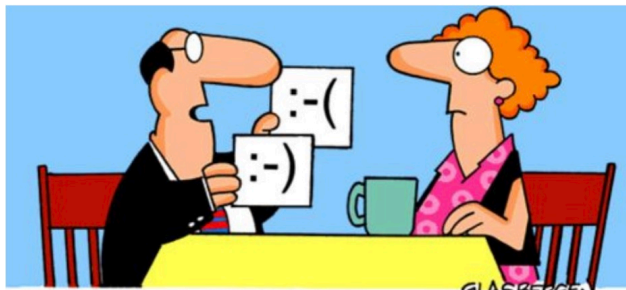
The number of cohabitating relationships has risen significantly in the past 40 years and unofficial research indicates the number is significantly higher than marriages.

Around 80% of all marriages occur between September to November and March to May.

2019, 85% of couples had cohabitated prior to marriage. In 1970, that figure was only 16% of couples.

In 1960, 95% of all weddings were conducted in a religious service, while only 5% were conducted by in a civil ceremony. In 2020, this figure had reversed.

Same sex marriages represent more than 6% of all marriages. 58% are females and 42% are males.



"You always complain that I don't know how to show my emotions, so I made these signs."

5 Relationship Alarm Signals

Here are five alarm behaviours that can impact on your relationship in a powerful way. It's important you pay attention when any of these behaviours arise.

The **Anger** Alarm. Everyone feels angry about something at some time. When one person loses control of his or her emotions to the degree they quickly and constantly become aggressive (verbal or physical) to the other person, this is a big alarm signal. Say "STOP", learn to cool down, get advice, or work together in counselling. However, be clear, this type of behaviour is unacceptable.

The **Language** Alarm. How those in a relationship speak to each other, either when they're alone or in company is important, as it defines the level of collaboration in the relationship. Everyone makes mistakes, forgets to do something or gets things wrong. Constantly nagging or criticising only breaks down the relationship, because one or both parties just stop listening. If it's a major issue, stop, problem-solve and look for a mutual solution instead of getting defensive.

The **Addiction** Alarm. This is a big one. Addictions can be bio-chemical (smoking, alcohol or drugs) or they can be behavioural (gambling, shopping, internet or TV). An addiction can't be treated as harmless when it costs ever increasing amounts of money or time. When someone in a relationship has an addiction, it will always impact in some way on their partner.

The **Resentment** Alarm. Do you enjoy and celebrate your partner's achievements, successes and special times? If not, and you feel resentful, an alarm has gone off. Relationships are collaborations, not competitions. Resentment of your partner's success will only destroy the relationship bond. If you feel there's a problem or some inequity you're feeling annoyed about, sit down and discuss how you feel, look for options to manage the situation, but don't stew and let your resentment fester.

The **Missing Out** Alarm. A relationship means you have to be present and interact with your partner for at least some of the time. What's considered reasonable will differ according to how you and your partner interact and the lifestyle commitments you have and accept with each other. Always being late home from work or constantly going out with your friends is saying to your partner, "I don't want to spend time with you". For any relationship to work, you don't need to be always around each other, but you do need to spend some quality time together.

Ashcliffe Psychology is a private practice in West Perth. Counselling is provided in-person or via tele-health. For more information about counselling or training, call 1800 468 001.