

Debunking 12 Myths About Relationships

1. Marriage is just a piece of paper.

The psychological and physical benefits of actually being married are enormous. After 50 years of [social epidemiology](#), it has been established that in developed countries the greatest source of health, wealth, longevity, and the ultimate welfare of children is a satisfying and healthy marriage.

2. Living alone with occasional relationships is a lifestyle choice that is equivalent in terms of life outcomes to being married.

Again, social epidemiology has shown that – everywhere on the planet – people who live alone die sooner, are less healthy, are less wealthy, and recover from illness slower than people who are married. This is especially true of men, who have much worse social support networks than women. When men are in a committed relationship their social networks increase.

3. Conflict is a sign that you're in a bad relationship.

Conflict is inevitable in all relationships. Furthermore, conflict is there for a reason – to improve our understanding of our partner. Conflict usually arises from missed attempts to communicate, especially in one person attempting to get emotionally closer to the other. Conflict also emerges from discrepancies between partners in expectations. These are worth talking about.

4. Love is enough.

Love is not enough, because in most marriages – especially after a baby arrives – people stop courting one another and they stop making romance, great sex, fun, and adventure a priority. Relationships have a tendency to become endless to-do lists, and conversation becomes limited to errand talk. You need to intentionally make (or keep) these parts of a relationship a priority.

5. Talking about past emotional wounds will only make them worse.

Faulkner once said, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” It is possible to process past emotional injuries. You can’t change the past but you can change your recollection and retelling of it.

6. Better relationships are ones in which people are more independent of and less needy of one another.

Interdependence is what relationships are all about. In a great relationships, people try to meet one another’s needs. They adopt the motto, “when you’re hurting, baby, the world stops and I listen.”

7. If you have to work at communication, it’s a sure sign that you’re not soulmates.

The sure thing is that if you don't work at communication, the relationship will deteriorate over time, just like a car that's not taken care of will fall apart. All relationships require work. The work in relationships is down-regulating your own defensiveness and listening to your partner.

8. If a relationship needs therapy, it's already too late.

There are 900,000 divorces a year in the USA, and fewer than 10% (!) of those couples that divorce ever talk to a professional. Couples therapy is now very effective and many of these couples could have made it work had they sought help.

9. What couples fight about most is sex, money, and in-laws.

The one thing that couples fight about most is *nothing*. These fights result from failed bids to connect emotionally. In these small moments, it's important to turn towards instead of turning away.

10. All relationship conflicts can be resolved.

Quite the opposite. In fact, 69% of relationship conflicts are perpetual (they keep recurring), so what is required is acceptance of one another's personality differences. Dialogue about these perpetual issues to avoid gridlock and resentment. The goal then is to manage conflict, not resolve it.

11. All relationship conflicts are the same.

Some conflicts are deal breakers and, for those issues, compromise can be very difficult. It's important to understand your non-negotiables when it comes to conflict. What are you willing to give up?

12. It's compatibility that makes relationships work.

It's diversity that makes relationships interesting. We are not looking for our clones. The famous [T-shirt study](#) by Claus Wedekind shows that the pheromones we find most sexy are from people most genetically different from us (on the immune system major histocompatibility complex).

Agreeability and conscientiousness are the characteristics that people really mean when they talk about "compatibility." These qualities are indexed by a person being able to say things like "Good point," or "That's interesting, tell me more" or, "You may be right, and I may be wrong" during a disagreement.