

Getting it Right

A Guide to Healthy Relationships

By Dr. Robert Puff and Elizabeth Lozano, M.A.

I'm sure we don't have to tell you that finding the right partner or spouse can be difficult, but what we do need to tell you is that it isn't impossible. Many times people have bad experiences in relationships and often feel they want to throw in the towel or think that significant monogamous, healthy relationships only exist in fairy tales. We hope that this e-book can give you a glimmer of hope because the very thing you're looking for is possible-- but it takes work! This is the part that most people forget and a large part of the reason why so many relationships go south after the so called "honeymoon" period ends. Is it that the entire relationship was a facade? Or is it possible that people are conditioned to take things for granted, especially if it's always there.

A smaller scale example of this can be seen in the process of buying a new car. You probably take great care in making the final decision to buy it, and you might have been imagining yourself driving the car months or even years in advance because you liked it so much. And when you get that car, you are ecstatic. You are always worried about keeping it clean and making sure you park far away from any other cars to ensure it doesn't get dinged. Only a rare few maintain this fastidiousness in treating their car with such care. And for those few, their cars maintain their pristine condition. But by now most of you have probably already chuckled at the memory of yourself going out of your way like this for your car because this

behavior is now only a distant memory. The same thing happens for a lot of things in life, even in relationships. And just like the car that is no longer cared for with such love and consideration, the newness of a relationship wears off. If you had maintained the steadfast behavior that you had in the beginning, you would have noticed the little things in the relationship that needed extra care and attention but typically what happens over time is you stop listening and putting in that extra energy, care and love.

The purpose of this e-book is to teach you how to find a healthy partner, how to be the same in return, and how to keep that relationship alive and in existence.

HOW TO BE A HEALTHY PARTNER

First we'll start with you. Have you, ever heard the saying "Two half people don't make a whole relationship"? The premise of this statement is that two unhealthy individuals (those with a lot of old emotional baggage that hasn't been worked through), will never have a happy, healthy and whole relationship--that is, unless they get help and work on themselves. If you have emotional hang-ups that affect your own life, how do you think they will impact your closest relationship? Sometimes people end up with a codependent person who is struggling with his or her own need to care for others Or perhaps you are the codependent who is more concerned about the needs of others than yourself. If you are the co-dependent, stop and ask yourself, are you truly happy? What is it that compels you to care for everyone else except for yourself? The truth is you need to love yourself before you can truly love and care for anyone else, and this message applies to both types of people just mentioned. People who are constantly

hurting others or constantly hurting themselves, be it by direct action or indirectly by placing everyone else's needs first--really don't love themselves, at least not as much as is necessary.

Unfortunately most of what compels us to behave in these ways stems from our conditioning. We have spoken about conditioning at great length in a few of our previous e-books, and we will discuss it again here because we cannot stress enough how much it impacts thoughts, ideas and behaviors. Conditioning is what happens when people are exposed to certain things, and then in turn they act or feel a certain way because of what they were repeatedly exposed to. In short, all those things you were exposed to as a child influence you even today: your parents' behavior towards you as well as towards each other, previous relationships, things and people you spent time with--the life time of experiences that you have had, and all the things you've heard as well.

Your childhood experiences have a lot to do with who you choose as a partner as well as how you interact with and treat him or her. Without any form of reconditioning, be it through therapy, self-help and exploration, or any other form of inter and intra personal growth, you will most likely take on some of the traits of one of your parents and be attracted to some of the traits of your other parent. This phenomena is not gender specific in that a woman may end up with personality traits similar to her father (i.e. domineering and controlling) and be attracted to people with personality traits like her mother (i.e. passive), or vice versa. How you were treated and what you observed between your parents or caregivers growing up has a direct influence on your behavior towards your partner as well as what attracts you to your partner . If you were taught that girls are "pretty and feminine" and boys are "tough," then this is ultimately what you

will believe is true. So if you see someone who goes against what your upbringing was, you typically won't be attracted to that. We are conditioned to be attracted to certain individuals. There are millions of people in this world with different physical characteristics and personalities. Why is it that we find ourselves attracted to a certain "type" when that "type" may be totally unattractive to someone else? Without any changes in your conditioning or interpersonal growth, the answer is probably because that person is similar to one of your parents in one way or another.

If your parents had a great relationship and both of them were emotionally healthy, then you will most likely move in that direction as well, towards a healthy relationship with a healthy partner. But if you are like most people whose parents didn't have a great relationship, then you may need to make changes to be a good partner or spouse. If you are a man and take after your father who wasn't very romantic, and who often hurt your mother's feelings because he forgot birthdays and anniversaries, then you may be like him in this way. In order to make changes toward becoming a healthier partner, you need to become aware and take steps to avoid making the same mistakes, such as using a calendar to write down the dates as a reminder to yourself. These changes are not impossible, but you do need to be aware of the behaviors before change becomes a possibility.

How did your parents' relationship fare as they grew older? Did they get divorced? Are they happily remarried? Were they unhappily married? Even after they die, our parents affect our views of marriage. If they stuck it out until the children were grown, but they were miserable, you might say, "I'm not going to do that." If they got divorced, you might think,

“I’m never going to get married” or “I can get married and divorced.”. What happened to you, and what did your parents do? You need to be aware of the path your parents’ relationship took. How you were treated, what you witnessed growing up, and even what your parents are doing today affects you. If they are elderly and are happy and love life, or if they are bitter and angry and hate the opposite sex, there is a potential that this could rise inside of you. If you like what you see, great, but if not, then you need to be aware of it because our parents impact us until the day we die.

The relationships within your family tie into what your philosophy of relationships is or has become. You may not even be conscious of what you envision a relationship or marriage to be. The dynamics of the relationship modeled to you will unconsciously influence what you think your role should be. Jacqueline Kennedy’s husband cheated on her just as her father had cheated on her mother. Jacqueline made the global assumption that all men cheat and that it is part of their nature. She tolerated her husband cheating because she had a philosophy that this is the way “all” men are. If your mom was a depressed person and your dad’s role was always to help her, then you may feel your role is to get in there and fix things if you take after your father. A lot of this is unconscious and you fall into repeating the behaviors because this is what you saw happen in your family.

PAST RELATIONSHIPS

Your early romantic relationships also affect your philosophy on your current relationships. If your partner cheated on you in one of your early relationships, you may think

that all people cheat. Or you may have gone out with the “nice guy” or “good girl,” who turned out to be too “boring” for you. This relationship might have influenced you to date more “wild” individuals. These early relationships condition you to like and dislike certain qualities in a person. If you are aware of that and realize that you find “nice guys” or “good girls” boring, but connect it to your early experiences, then you may try to date some nice guys or good girls because they are better in the long run, and not all will be “boring.” Again, we suggest you look at the parallels between these individuals you dated early on and your parents. Looking at this might give you insight as to why you were attracted to or turned off by them. Perhaps you found the “nice guy” boring because your dad was never home and would disappear for days. While you might have hated this aspect of your father, a man who is more accountable and responsible might seem boring.

It’s probably pretty clear that we can’t turn back time and change our upbringing or past relationships, even though we all might wish we could. However, a wise man once said “Nothing is an accident,” and all of our experiences have happened for one reason or another and have brought us to where we are at this very moment. Perhaps you don’t like where this moment is right now, but that’s not to say that another moment in time won’t come along to change things for you. Be open to the possibilities, and be very open to change and growth.

HEALING OLD WOUNDS

Emotional wounds are like physical cuts--you have to heal them. If you haven’t done so already please download our free e-book, **Anger Work: How to Express Your Anger and Still be Kind**

to read or to listen to. It will teach you how to rid yourself of anger, stress-induced illness, depression, addictive behaviors, and other emotional baggage that inhibit your happiness and make loving relationships difficult. It is important to heal from past traumas and relationships in your life, be it from the way your parents treated you, how your previous partners treated you, or if you were abused or hurt by someone else in any way. We aren't telling you that you have to be perfect, but you do need to heal; otherwise your past hurts will present themselves in one way or another and make their way into your relationship. If you are hypersensitive to infidelity because your father cheated on your mother, and you had a partner cheat on you in a previous relationship, you may immediately suspect that your husband is cheating if he is 15 minutes late from work. Without healing from your past, you may be unable even to comprehend the idea that he is stuck in traffic, which can lead to a great deal of difficulty and tension in a relationship. Imagine being that partner who comes home 15 minutes late because you were stuck in traffic and have to calm down the accuser. This would get old very quickly. It does not feel good to be blamed and accused for things we have not done, and deep anger and resentment may arise as a result. It also hurts on a deep level not to be trusted by the person you love, especially when you have done nothing wrong. If you are in a relationship and you notice that old stuff is resurfacing, we highly recommend that you get into therapy to heal it. Awareness is only part of the process here. You really need to work on healing in order for it not to interfere with your relationship. Unless it heals, it won't go away.

There are many ways to begin the healing process. This can be done by going to therapy; talking with people who care about you; reading books; attending seminars or workshops related

to self-improvement; doing “anger work” discussed in our book previously mentioned; maintaining a growth-oriented life style; listening to material like this podcast. and getting motivated to be the best partner or spouse possible. These things will teach you what to expect from a partner as well, because the more you heal and truly learn to love and treat yourself with respect, the more you will expect this from others, especially your partner or spouse.

You may be wondering what true healing looks like, or how you will know when you are truly “healthy.” Many people have pondered this question, and several studies have been done to uncover what healthy people actually look like. Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist famous for his conceptualization of a “hierarchy of human needs.” He wanted to know what constituted a healthy human being as opposed to what psychologists had previously studied, unhealthy and dysfunctional behaviors. Maslow created a model of self-actualization--what a person becomes when all basic and meta-needs are fulfilled. He called this type of person “self-actualized.” He found that self-actualized individuals tended to focus on problems outside themselves, had a clear sense of what was true or untrue, were spontaneous and creative, and were not bound too strictly to social conventions. He found that these individuals have more “peak experiences” which include profound moments of love, happiness and understanding, and times when a person feels more whole, alive and self-sufficient, while still remaining part of the world with an increased awareness of truth, justice, and harmony. Maslow felt that the needs of human beings are arranged like a ladder. The most basic needs (air, water, food, and sleep) are at the bottom. Safety needs (security, and stability) are next, and then psychological or social needs (belonging, love and acceptance) are the next rung on the ladder. Above social needs are esteem

needs (achievement, status, responsibility, and reputation), and at the very top of the ladder are self-actualizing needs (fulfilling oneself and becoming all that one is capable of becoming).

Maslow felt that each need on the ladder has to be fulfilled before the next need could be met, indicating that one could not become self-actualized (or truly healthy) until each of the needs are met.

The basic premise of the above is that you need to take care of yourself to be a healthy individual. Love yourself, be patient with yourself, do what you need to do to heal from your past traumas. You should explore how healthy people live. When you meet someone who is in a happy and healthy relationship, query him or her. Find out what really healthy human beings are doing to stay happy and healthy. This is important because in order to start and maintain a healthy relationship, you need to be healthy first and foremost. This means taking care of yourself, even before you take care of your partner. In our society we often have the order of what it takes to be healthy reversed. We often put our jobs first, then our kids, then our relationship, and lastly ourselves. When in reality the prescription for health comes with you first, then your relationship, then your children, and lastly your job. We like to use the image of a pyramid in describing the order or sequence that people should prioritize their lives. If the order is reversed, as mentioned above, the pyramid will topple over, as we so often see in families where this is the case. This may sound like the antithesis of what you learned growing up, but it's true. Let us explain: if you are not in a healthy place, physically or emotionally, you cannot and will not be able to give your partner 100%. In fact, more often than not, you will snap in anger, be irritable or impatient, or sensitive and emotional. The same goes for your

relationship with your children as well. When you are on an airplane and they run through the steps to take in case of an emergency, they tell you to put your oxygen mask on before helping a child. Why? Because you can't help anyone else until you help yourself. That child or person in need may need your help, but you are no good to them if you are unconscious. The reason we discuss putting your relationship before your kids is because you need to work on the issues in your relationship so they don't trickle down and affect your children, We have spent a great deal of time discussing how your parents and their relationship affected you through conditioning. Do you want to impact your children in the same ways, or do you want to be a better role model for your children? Take time for yourself and your spouse--make your relationship a priority.

If you haven't done so already, we encourage you to listen to our podcast "*Living a Peaceful Life*". In this podcast we discuss how to find peace no matter what your life circumstances are and that life is the moment you are living right now. When we move ourselves from living in the past or the future to living in the present moment, there is a true sense of peace that we are able to experience as we begin to become human beings instead of human doers. We are often so focused on what we have done or what we need to do, the precious moments of the now slip past us and are lost forever. We are inevitably left feeling stressed, depressed, anxious, and... you fill in the blank. It is very important for us to note here that your relationship doesn't have to look or be a certain way. What is important is that you are happy and making healthy choices for yourself and your family.

There will be people that you are more attracted toward. As mentioned earlier, our conditioning influences us in regard to our attractions to others as well as who we get along with

better. In the Enneagram there are 9 personality types and at the peak each one looks a certain way, but they have certain traits to them. Some people are more outgoing and vivacious, while others are more sensitive. Each of them can look very beautiful, so it isn't that you have to be a certain way, but it is about being the very best that you can be given who you are. We encourage you to look into the Enneagram and take the test to learn more about yourself and to understand your personalty a bit more.

GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A PARTNER

We know that ending a relationship can be heart-wrenching, but be careful not to jump into your next relationship too quickly, especially if you've been hurt. Take breaks between relationships because when a relationship ends, there is healing involved. There may be anger and sadness that needs to be worked through. It is important to grieve. Jumping from one relationship to the next can be an addiction like any other. It may serve as a band-aid to cover the pain from the last relationship. The new relationship can be a way to suppress feelings instead of finding the true right person for you. If you get a brand new puppy every time you have a dog die, you will never have the chance to grieve the loss of your dog, and this is important to do. Dr. Puff once gave a talk on this topic, and a woman of about the age of 65 came up to him after the talk and told him that she had remarried within 6 months of her husband's death and has been married now for 5 years. She stated that she realized that this was not good for her because she still really missed him and never had the chance to grieve for him.

There is no exact time frame for when you are “ready,” but take your time and really work on loving yourself first before you try to find someone else to do that for you.

FINDING A HEALTHY PARTNER

Even if you are already married, please pay attention to this section. Perhaps this can teach you how to fall back in love with your partner, or teach you how to help others find the love they’re looking for. Finding a healthy partner takes time and effort because it takes time to get to know people. Physics is a hard science in that it has specific laws that we have come to understand. Human psychology on the other hand, is the most complex science to understand. It takes time to get to know someone Don’t think you will meet a person and know that he or she is the love of your life over night. Although it may feel like love, don’t confuse love with lust. Every once in a while you hear stories of people meeting and falling in love and getting married after only a few weeks. We don’t negate this because it does happen, but people win the lottery sometimes too. There are also a lot of people who don’t win the lottery. If you really want to be in a healthy and long-lasting relationship where you really know the person, we advise you against rushing things. Perhaps you may feel that your biological clock is ticking, but wouldn’t you want to make sure you know who the father of your children is before you have kids? It’s pretty important.

In finding a good partner, it is better to have more choices than fewer because this increases your chances of really finding the right person. Look at it this way, if you want to buy a house and only have 3 to choose from, your options are pretty limited. If you have hundreds of

homes to pick from, you will probably find the perfect house. You can choose 1 or 2 stories, location, cooler weather, by the beach, etc. If you live in a small village, you will have fewer options to choose from; whereas, if you come from a large metropolitan city like New York, the broader the selection is and the more people you have to choose from. All this increases the likelihood of finding a good partner or spouse. What we encourage people to do is make sure the net of possibilities they are looking in is broad. When dating and searching for the right partner or spouse, most people only look in their small circle of friends, which is pretty limiting. It is important for you to find ways to make your net bigger, to increase your options so to speak. Go to college, be part of activities and groups. Don't just limit yourself to your few friends. We encourage you to choose your path and get out there and meet lots of people.

The internet has opened up a lot of possibilities to meet people who have similar interests to yours, with sites like Myspace, Facebook, Meet-up .com, Match.com, Yahoo personal, and E-Harmony to name a few. You do have to be careful with these though, and it would be wise to start to meet people as friends first, not just dating them right from the start. Also, be cautious when meeting people at parties, bars and clubs. The main commonality with each of these locations is alcohol, and often times who you may find at a bar or club may still want to be out at the bar 20 years later, only now the person's struggle with alcoholism is much more clear and isn't as "fun" as it might have seemed 20 years earlier. Be safe, involved, active and social. If you are only dating people from your high school or church group, that might be limiting. Don't just wait for the universe to bring you your partner or spouse. If you see someone you might like,

spend 5 minutes talking with him or her. See what you think, and if you like that person, go back again. Spend the time and energy to look-- and look all over the place.

Another one of the things we advocate is meeting people and being friends with them, but not necessarily start dating them right away. Get to know them, and if things work out, your relationship will be that much deeper because it will be based on a true friendship and not just on lust. Once you've met someone you are interested in, don't get physically involved too soon either. Sex makes things more difficult and complicated. It's a lot harder to get out of a relationship once you have experienced physical intimacy. Also, if you're hoping to find a mate, and you sleep with your date on the first night, you might not make the best first impression. Making love prematurely may tie you emotionally to them, leaving you hoping for something more, and if it doesn't work out, it is that much more painful. It is important to respect yourself and the person you are with. How is giving a sacred and special part of yourself to a stranger respecting yourself? Often times your partner might wonder if casual sex is something you do often.

It is also important to be careful because of the many sexually transmitted diseases that exist. Some can even be transmitted through protected sex. Some people may have difficulty discussing a sexually transmitted disease they may have, but they might be more likely to discuss it with you if you build mutual respect and a friendship first. Unfortunately, many people live by the rule "Don't ask, don't tell." Be aware and get to know the person you are spending time and being intimate with. Your life may depend on it!

INSIDE THEIR BUBBLE

Physical attraction can wear off pretty quickly after you get to know someone, especially if the person isn't what you expected. Lust can blind you sometimes. That is why it is important to gather information. Notice how they treat their friends and family. Find out everything you can about them. The more you know, the clearer the picture will be of how and what they will be like when they are married to you. If you see anything that frightens or alarms you, find out more and pay attention to the red flags. If they have a sibling or an ex that they hate, find out what happened. They will tell you their side of the story, but it would behoove you to find out the whole story.

After observing how they treat others around them, pay attention to how they are behaving and treating themselves. Are they loving and respecting themselves? Some people are very gracious towards everyone except their spouse, their children, or their significant other. A friend of ours has an explanation she calls the "Bubble Theory" for why some people, as the old song says, "only hurt the ones they love." It goes like this: Everyone is surrounded by an invisible bubble. This bubble marks the boundary between oneself and the outside world. We are very selective about who we let inside the bubble. Usually it includes yourself, significant others, and your children. The people inside of the bubble are sometimes viewed as extensions of or appendages to the self...my wife, my husband, my kids; therefore, they are treated however that individual treats him or herself. If a person is loving and gracious to him or herself, then this poses no problem. When a person is harshly self-critical and self-demanding, those close to him or her can expect to be shown the same meager amounts of grace by that person.

For example, some people are fastidious about their own housekeeping but don't care when other people's homes are messy because it isn't their home. But if they have a family member living in the same household who doesn't share their neat tendencies, the same grace is not extended. We've seen some families in which "Clean your room!" becomes the battle cry of a civil war that nearly tears the family asunder.

As you search for a soul mate or a good friend to "hang out" with, pay attention to how people treat themselves and those inside their bubble. Sooner or later this is how they will treat you, if you get close enough. Choose people who are kind to others, ones that won't "blast" you when you make a mistake, for you will make mistakes. The way a person treats you when you do something wrong is a good indicator of his or her true self.

Once people get married, they often complain that things have changed and their partner is not doing the same things they once did. For example, a man may send flowers quite frequently to the girl he is dating, but once he gets married, he stops sending them. He hasn't stopped sending them because he doesn't care. Ultimately, he stopped because flowers and romantic things may not be important to him. He is now treating his wife like he treats himself because she has entered his bubble. That is why people often say, "I treat the people I love the worst." Logically it would seem to make no sense, but if you look at it from this perspective, it makes absolute sense. But the truth is that your loved ones may not want to be treated the way you treat yourself.

Another important quality to look for is "Are they growing?" Psychologically and spiritually speaking, people either grow or get worse--they don't stay the same. If they aren't

working on themselves, 20-30 years from now they may be in a very bad place. Do you want to be there with them? Think about it this way, those unhappy and cranky old people you see who may struggle with addictions or have damaged relationships all around them, didn't get that way over night. This holds true for physical health as well. You can be in great shape at any age. Pay attention to how they are treating their bodies. Dr. Puff once worked with a young girl who was a long distance marathon runner but who also smoked. After she finished high school, she stopped doing long distance running and her smoking and health progressively got worse and worse. We can seem to get away with a lot when we are younger, but as we grow older, the problems and effects from the negative things we do to ourselves are only accentuated. If you meet people in their forties who look good, and whose body is in shape, you can pretty much guarantee that they are doing something to make themselves look that way. You really want to look for growth in a spouse if you want the relationship to grow and flourish and for the two of you to have a happy and healthy relationship.

COMMONALITIES

Many studies have been done examining the validity of both the adages "Birds of a feather flock together" and "Opposites attract" because it has been an area of great debate. What studies consistently have found, though, is that the more similarities a couple have, the better off they fair in terms of the happiness and longevity of their relationship. As therapists, a common thing we hear when couples come in with difficulties is, "We have nothing in common."

"Opposites attract" is good at first, but in the long run, the more commonalities a couple has, the

better off they really are. For example, a couple may be physically attracted to one another and get married because of the intense passion and love, but if this is the only thing they have in common, they are likely headed for trouble. If he is totally into sports and watching TV, and she is into nature and the outdoors, they will likely run into problems in the future unless they can learn to compromise and share each other's passions. We will talk later about the importance of compromise, but the moral of the story here is that it is important to have similar interests. You should meet people who like the things you like. If you like hiking, join a hiking club. If you love to travel and your partner doesn't, you will either be traveling alone, not traveling at all as a sacrifice (don't do this); or your partner may come along and be grumpy the whole time. You might love the person, but perhaps this isn't the best person for you to marry. The more similarities and things you have in common the better. No one is going to be perfect, but if one of you is adventuresome and the other is a home body, you probably will run into some problems. When a couple says that they got married because they "love" the other person, but there is nothing about them that they have in common or can say that they like, most times that love is lust or a dysfunction to fulfill some past issue they haven't healed from. Once again, this points us to the significance of the self-care we spoke of earlier.

Religion, philosophy, and goals are very significant areas in our lives, whether we realize it or not. In fact, the more all 3 of those are aligned, the more likely your relationship is to go well and to succeed. If you want 3 kids, and your partner doesn't want any, or you want to raise your child Muslim, and your partner wants to raise them Catholic, your relationship will be more difficult. It is not to say that it can't happen, but it is important to keep in mind that it will make

things much more difficult and may be the cause of anger, fighting, and resentment in the future if these things are not worked out in the beginning. You have to work towards compromise, but especially with these 3. If these 3 are really different, they will most definitely carry conflict.

On this same note, it is important to find out how important marriage is to your potential spouse. Whatever his or her priority is, that is what will be a reality. What are his or her financial plans? To be a millionaire, or grow old and be in love? If the priority is work and attaining a certain level at work, then work will come first. Pay attention to his or her actions right now because you are seeing what is important to your potential partner. If he or she is really busy with work or school now, and doesn't have much time for you, don't expect that to just suddenly change because you get married. In fact, what you should expect is for the relationship to come after work. The truth is if you want to be happily married, you can't spend 70 hours a week working and only a few hours per week with your partner. We encourage couples to have a date night each week to have one on one time--even with couples who have kids. A lot of people say their relationship is important, but their actions need to show this.

When looking for a partner, you should watch a person's actions and inquire about what he or she wants for the future. Be careful not to reveal all that you want too fast because they may parrot that back to you. All the other person may be thinking is that he or she wants to marry you, so he or she might say anything to you without intending to do these things, just to marry you. The truth is that people can also say these things to get you into bed, so be careful! Unfortunately people can be manipulative to get what they want, whether it is to be physically intimate with you, to marry you or to share in your wealth. You may say you like the outdoors,

and they say they do too, even though they've never even been in a tent before. A great movie that exemplifies this is "*27 Dresses*." In this film a woman is dishonest about her likes and dislikes as well as her lifestyle, all to win the heart of a man she knows is a great catch. He is handsome, successful, kind and fun. It all goes terribly wrong later when he learns the truth, which thank goodness he does because he had been about to marry a fraud! Don't make the mistake by letting the other person know everything about you the first moment you meet. Take your time, get to know your dates, and let them get to know you. Pay attention to their actions and make sure their actions match their words.

MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

If you want to stay in a happy and healthy relationship, keep doing what you did that kept your partner dating you in the first place. A longitudinal study was conducted in Washington following the outcome of marriages between couples based on their behaviors both before marriage and after. The study found that couples that were very kind with each other, complimented each other, were gentle with each other, and didn't tease each other fared better, especially if they continued this throughout their marriage. The relationships that fared poorly were the ones where the kind and loving behaviors started to change and they began to tease each other and fight a lot. The key to maintaining a healthy and happy relationship is to make time for it. This may seem like a no-brainer, but all too often people do the exact opposite. Work and children become a priority, and before you know it, the relationship is on the back burner, suffering for obvious reasons. Healthy relationships take work, just like dating did. You

need to communicate your feelings with your partner, and you need to treat him or her with respect and love. You need to make time for your relationship and make it a priority in your life. We encourage all of our dating and married couples that we work with to have a “date night” one night a week to reconnect and have fun with each other. When couples let everything else in life get between them, they stop communicating in a healthy manner, spend less time together, and often take out their stress on each other. If this had been the case when you were dating, you would certainly not have wanted to marry that person, nor would he or she have wanted to marry you. Often times the couples that we work with complain that they have nothing in common with their partner anymore. How could they if they never even spend quality time with each other? In life it is inevitable that we will change and hopefully grow. Why not take the time to change and grow with your partner as opposed to growing apart from him or her.

Be romantic, get away for the weekend, go on dates, buy flowers, and write notes to each other. There are many ways to reconnect and enjoy each other’s company: take a class together, go wine tasting, go to seminars, read together, watch movies, have dinner, go to plays, and sporting events together. Discover what you like. A lot of couples say they don’t know what to do. Find out what you like, and do that. If you still aren’t sure, take a chance and try new things so you can figure out what you like. You may find that one person likes one thing more than the other, and that’s okay. Fairness is important, so take turns.

Healthy relationships are all about being fair. When you have to decide on something there should be 3 options: either agree, take turns, or compromise. For example, if you want to take a vacation and both of you want to go to Hawaii—great, you agree. If one wants to go to

Hawaii and the other wants to go the desert, a problem may arise. At this point you have two options: you can take turns-- this year you go to desert and next year go to Hawaii, or you can compromise by going to another location entirely, such as the mountains. In a relationship, nobody should be the boss, and it should not be about winning or having an eye for an eye. With that mentality both individuals will end up unhappy and resentful. It is important to always be kind with your partner and to treat him or her with respect. Work things through kindly and respectfully, and if you feel like you are having difficulty doing so, take a break to let off some steam, but do come back to discuss the issue in a healthy, mature and respectful manner. Once again this points back to self care because if you are too upset to talk about something and you want to lash out, you need to work on this first, Otherwise you may cause great damage to your partner and your relationship.

Dr. Puff once attended a seminar that had both men and women presenting. Neither of them had rings on and they had different last names, so one would not ordinarily assume any of them were together. One of the women dropped something and one of the men just blasted her in front of everyone--it was pretty embarrassing even to watch. During the break Dr. Puff's wife asked the woman if the man who spoke to her that way was her husband and the woman asked how she knew. Mrs. Puff said it was the way he treated her because if that was not her husband, he probably wouldn't have treated her the way he did.

It is a very sad truth that we often treat the people we love the worst. Our conditioning may cause us do this, but you must always try your best to apologize when you mistreat them

and work towards changing this behavior. Don't take the people you love for granted. And treat them respectfully both in public and in private.

PRIORITIZE THE RELATIONSHIP

Another extremely important element to a happy and healthy relationship is making the relationship a priority. A good relationship or marriage takes time. If you are involved with all kinds of other things and have little time for your relationship, it will suffer. Spend lots of time with the person you love: go on dates and do fun things together. If you have kids, get a babysitter. Do your best to connect everyday with them and spend time on the weekends together. Going on vacations together is also a great way to connect and enjoy each other's company. Make your relationship the priority no matter what you are working on, even if it costs you a promotion, job, or spending time with friends. After all, what will all that be worth if you don't have your loved one by your side? We spoke earlier about the significance of the order of priorities in your life, and if you truly want a happy and healthy life, you need to take care of yourself first, then your relationship, then your children, and then your job. Not the other way around because by the time you reach your relationship and/or yourself, you will have nothing left to give because you didn't start by filling yourself up first!

The old roles of our parents don't work so well anymore, not that they did then either. In those times the husband was in charge and the wife would acquiesce, or vice versa. Once again, a relationship is about being fair, it is not about winning or losing. Where is the fairness or happiness in the dynamic where one person is the boss and the other person has no say? If you

find yourself always trying to “win,” in your relationship, you really need to look at that behavior. What is winning about for you and why is it so important? Are your needs being met in the relationship? Sometimes these behaviors can be like small jabs at our partner because of unsettling issues we are harboring. Communication is key to resolving these deep issues you may be holding onto inside of you. The truth is, however, that your relationship will continue to suffer if you keep trying to ignore the problem. It is important to work things through, even if it takes a year to resolve the problem.

MONEY AND SEX

The two main issues that are often cues to how a relationship is doing are money and sex. If a couple is fighting about money or sex, things probably aren't going so well in their relationship. Here is some helpful advice in regards to the money issue: keep life manageable, lower your standards and don't try to keep up with the Jones's. You don't want to feel stress over money because it is very hard on a relationship. Compromise and take turns, figure out a way to make things manageable for both of you.

Sex is different for men and women. Generally speaking, it is important to a woman for her partner to be nice and romantic with her before she wants to be sexual. More often than not, if you have been rude or unkind to her, she will most likely not want to have sex with you. It is really good in a healthy relationship to be kind and loving with each other first, then be sexual. If you don't feel like being sexual, work towards finding what you need in order to be. Sex is a healthy and important part of marriage or serious monogamous relationship. But don't just do it

because you “should” or feel obligated to because doing so will create great resentment. Have sex with your partner because you want to share that part of yourself with him or her. Learn about sexuality, as it should be a positive and fun experience for both of you. Men and women are different and each person is different, so discuss what you like and find out how to make it work for both of you.

LIFE CHANGES

In life change is inevitable, which is why it is important that you learn how to readjust when it occurs. Having children is the biggest change that most couples will face. Remember what we stated earlier about the significance of your caring for yourself and your relationship? This is where it becomes especially important. Just because you have kids doesn't mean your relationship needs to be put on the back burner. In fact it is crucial that you learn to be creative about spending time together. Keep in mind that you are modeling for your children as well. You are teaching them how to have a healthy relationship. It is true that you will have less time when you have kids, but that doesn't mean you can't hold hands with your partner or kiss each other passionately. If you like to sleep with your kids in the same bed, make sure you have an area in your house where your kids don't sleep with you so you can still be physical with each other.

Many couples find themselves struggling with the change of their children growing up and moving out, often referred to as the “empty nest syndrome.” Part of this is due of course to missing their children, but a great part of this is also due to the fact that by this point most couples have drifted far apart from each other emotionally as they have not taken steps to make

their relationship a priority. In fact, partners may feel like they are living with strangers. This doesn't have to be the case for you.

Unfortunately, accidents and illness also happen. It is important to learn to adjust to these changes and to get help and support for dealing with the changes if it is difficult for you. While we would most likely prefer to avoid it in some cases, change is a good thing. Accept and encourage change, as it can lead to growth and growth is a very good thing. The only thing that is consistent in life is that things will change, so don't fight it.

We don't get awards or bonuses for being a good partner or spouse. The only people that benefit from it are you, your partner or spouse and, your children. Don't expect to get lots of praise from the external world such as from your work or friends, but do expect to get a great deal from your internal world through happiness and peace, including a happy and healthy mate and family.

In conclusion, in order to find, be in, and maintain a healthy relationship, you need to start with yourself first. Take care of yourself, love yourself, and be kind to yourself. Get the help you need to heal from your past traumas and emotional injuries. Do what you can to increase your awareness about yourself and the choices you make in life. Then you will be ready when the right person comes along. Relationships take a lot of work, but they are worth it. Put the time in and keep putting the time in and you will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams.

Final note from Dr. Robert Puff and Elizabeth Lozano, M.A.: We want thank you for reading our e-book. Our goal in creating this writing is to help improve the overall state of your life and encourage you to live at your highest human potential. We will

continue to work together to produce more e-books and podcasts in order to help you improve in various areas of your life. If you haven't had a chance, please listen to or read our previous pieces and come back again to see what's new. Everything that we create is free worldwide, so if you like what we are saying, tell someone to visit our web site at www.DoctorPuff.com and download our material. Because we are working together, you may see a more rapid production of material. The two of us wish you a blessed life, filled with much peace and joy. Dr. Robert Puff and Elizabeth Lozano, M.A.