

Stronger Relationships

Workbook

"I know you'll come and carry me out to the palace of winds.
That's what I've wanted. To walk in such a place with you"
The English Patient

Nude-Thinking Counseling

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workbook



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Expectations

Well, another chapter, another chance to take a deeper look at the building blocks that shape the way we interact in our relationships. Like the numerous expectations we have. And this is not where I am going to tell you to get rid of them! Just like having needs is human, so is having expectations. They are actually linked, as it is probable that your set of expectations support your idea of how your needs will be met. So having a clearer idea of your top needs now, will also allow you to establish the importance of an expectation being met within the relationship, or outside of that. Let's dive in.

Dreams & Ambitions

Imagine you are sitting on a bench, nice view, soft breeze, a ray of sunshine, nice weather. Got it? C'mon try it, really....

Imagine what your life will be like in 20 years from now. What have you achieved? What goals were realised? Which ones are you still working on? Who surrounds you? Where are you? What does daily life look like?

Having goals in our lives keeps us moving forward, helps us grow. When we are in a relationship with someone who does not have dreams of their own it feels awkward. As if this could hold you back. It can feel disloyal to be striving for what you want when the other is perfectly happy to stay in the status quo. Ohhh dangerous ground here!! I just realised this might sound like I am saying that you must always focus on the future. That the 'now' is irrelevant. It is not. Awareness of life means having your eyes open for what presents itself right here and now. And at the same time we have this beautiful capability of dreaming and consciously building a future. This is what we want the people around us to support. Even join in the dreaming and planning perhaps. Even if the other has very different ambitions for themselves, as long as there is respect and support in each others efforts to realise them, this can be a solid basis for a relationship. Yes, it could be that your paths move in different directions, do not be afraid of that. Surely loving someone means wanting to see them happy. And if that means that they want to move to the other side of the planet and you don't, then this is a shift in the form of the relationship, but not necessarily in the bond. Does that make sense to you? We often cling to what we have now and fear change. But change is inevitable. My choice would always be to embrace what is good for the one I love, and therefore for the shared connection. I have many very dear friends who have moved away to other countries. My partner lives abroad. Yet the love for all these people is unchanged. The relationships have changed over time. And so have I. These days my goals simply include the upkeep of these relationships through travel, not a bad side effect ;-)

Expectations

Exercise 5

Here is a few questions for you:

- How well do you know the dreams and ambitions of those close to you?
- Have you shared yours with them?
- Do you support theirs and have you asked for support in yours?
- Are you feeling rejected by any of their goals and did you share that with them?
- Have you asked them if they feel rejected by yours?

Support

Having used this word a few times now, I realise that we haven't really dissected it. Many of us expect to get support, but do we really know how and when we want it?

What may be intended as a genuine offer of help can feel completely unwelcome to you and even as meddling. Now it could be that you are a very sensitive person and know everyone's motives immediately, but lets just assume that the motive is support. Then why feel this way about it?

First, you have probably shot this person down and they will think twice before offering again. And later on when you do need some help, you feel embarrassed to ask them. So my advise is: be kind. When support is being offered, be grateful. If the timing isn't right for you tell them 'I am not sure yet what it is I need help on, so thank you and may I keep your offer in mind?', if this is not the right person to offer it then find a loving way to communicate that.

Knowing that there are expectations of support in a relationship is one thing. In order to communicate them clearly and openly you would need to know how to recognise when it is needed, what kind of support (simply listening, advice, being a cheerleader, etc), and whom it is needed from. Then the art of asking starts. Be mindful that it does not become a demand (do it now or else..) and that you do not feel rejected when the other is not available to offer it. Instead ask them why and accept that in their world that takes priority right now. They may well have time later on or are willing to support in another way.

Let me give you a personal example again. I am crap at calling for a chat just to keep in touch. And if I am asked by a friend to keep an eye on them then I know that if their need is regular calls, I will disappoint. What I am capable of is texting/apping, sending a postcard, asking them out for a coffee more often. This may not be what form my friend was hoping the support would come in, but it is there as a counter offer. Up to them to accept or not. I won't love them any less if they reject this, I hope they will find what they need elsewhere.

Expectations

Exercise 6

- Do you know how to recognise your when? Your what? And your who?
- How skilled are you at recognising your partners need for support?
- Do you respect your own and the others boundaries when a request is made?

Money

Uhuh, money expectations. Depending on the relationship, this plays a bigger or smaller role, but it will always show up somewhere. When you go out for a drink, how does the bill get paid? What is your expectation? It can be as small as that. When you travel with a friend it is important to talk about the budget. Not just that you have 100 euro each to spend each day, but what you would expect to do from that money. One of you might want to eat in trendy places, the other wants a more upscale hotel, you might hate to spend money on public transport and prefer to walk, the other doesn't think twice about spending 25% of that budget on a ticket for a museum. You will each have your own spending habits, and knowing what expectations each has really takes away a lot of opportunity for arguments to happen.

Now when you get into a relationship where financial decisions are shared. Like buying a house together or a car. Insurance coverage choices, grocery spend, hobby funding, giving to charity, trips, going out, gifts, etc. And let's not forget the money spend on the children. Things get more complicated.

What are your expectations about each others contribution to the financial wellbeing of the relationship? Do you have similar incomes, do you even expect your partner to make a certain income? Do you expect to share all the money together or would each have their own and contribute to a shared pot?

We are often influenced by the way money was dealt with in our family home. The relationship our parents had to money shapes the way we later relate to it. Naturally there are more influences, such as a great financial setback may have made you more cautious, just as affluence may have encouraged not being very aware of money. Knowing yourself, yes I am repeating myself, will be key to getting your set of expectations out on the table. Don't think that this is silly, surely money is not that important.... think again... it is a top 3 cause for divorce. Get clear, get talking, get compromising.

Expectations

Independence

We are in relationships to enhance the experience of life. We can't help ourselves; we have a deep seeded need to connect, interact, share experiences and generally share space.

Fabulous! This is the stuff that brings joy.

We are however not a collective being. Especially here in the west we are highly individualised in our psychology and culture. So we live with this bizarre duality between needing each other and wanting to be our own separate person. Surrendering to a partner sounds like a spiritual melting of souls to one person and like loosing your identity to another.

It would probably not go down very well with a potential partner if you tell them that you are looking for a relationship where you remain fully independent. Besides, that's probably not even completely true. There are going to be areas where you want some of that surrender to come in. So getting specific really helps clarify the expectations between you two.

Just a few examples

- I need to have my own money (as you may have discovered just now)
- You are responsible for your career, as I am for mine
- My friends, your friends and our friends. Let's give each other space for that
- I would love some personal space in the house
- We love and support each other, and know that happiness is a personal responsibility (emotional independence)

Needing to keep some elements in your life a bit less entangled in the relationship does not make you a terrible partner. Somebody who is afraid to commit. But the key word here is 'some'. And as you get clear about your areas in which you need more independence, it is equally justified for your partner to fight you on it, challenge you. And in the end it is only those involved in the relationship that decide what is or isn't acceptable. A joined decision. Openly and honestly discussed.

Growth

Let's immediately separate personal and relational growth, and talk about the latter first.

As I meet with couples about to get married, I am often struck by an expected pattern. The special meeting, that first date, the first kiss, getting to know each other, introducing the family and friends, moving in together, marriage, kids. Recognise this? It is a blueprint that I see in many people.

What is your blueprint? How do you expect a relationship to develop? Does it only apply to romantic relationships or friendships as well? What about colleagues... should they grow into friends? Have a sit down and start writing.

Expectations

Looking back at the pattern of development in your current relationships will give you lots of insight. Or look at the relationships that didn't work out. Could that have been because the blueprint did not fit? Or you both had very different ones?

Just as this 'blueprint' gives you insight into your expectations of the development the relationship will go through, there will also be a vision of what your joined relational growth should be like. Meaning that you probably have an emotional timeline in mind for closeness to happen, secrets to be shared, intimacy to be ok, love can be exclaimed, etc. Any change to this framework can rattle you, scare you and even run you off.

Personal growth will happen throughout your lifetime. Woop woop, 'cause how boring if it didn't. Depending on how you have shaped your life, you will make a certain amount of room for it. And even though you are in a relationship, it does not mean that you do therefore expect or even want this space to become infringed upon. Hell, no. You could also find yourself being in a relationship with a partner who has always made growth more important than you, this could open up more space for you or make you resentful. Your reaction can go either way.

What we often fear is that personal growth means change and that change means growing apart. Whereas staying curious, being playful with life, being open to adventure and discovery will more often keep the juices flowing. As this curiosity extends to each other and makes you more alert to staying connected. You know change will be inevitable in life. Denial will only work for so long, and I cannot recommend it as a relational strategy.

Keep in mind that many changes are very small. Don't imagine huge landslides, those happen only very few times in life. Having a child is a big change, so is moving to another country, losing someone close. Embrace change and keep the communication lines open with those around you so they know what is happening in your universe.

Decision making

How much do you expect to be consulted when the other makes a decision?

Does it matter if the decision relates to you or someone you have in common (like children, parents or friends)?

People can get extremely peeved when decisions are made and they don't get a say. Although this is very culturally diverse. But we do like to feel in control of our lives. How far that control extends in our minds is very individual. But it does speak to our expectations of what we are consulted on.

The way you believe a mutual decision should be made, can differ from what the other would expect that process to look like. You may expect discussion, time to deliberate, gathering more information, consulting others on the matter, whereas your partner may just want to know if

Expectations

there is anything blocking the decision and let that be enough to move on. Clarifying your expectations can avoid grievances.

Lastly I want to touch on your beliefs regarding the flexibility of decisions. Do you believe it is ok to revisit a decision? Or do you consider a decision not final until action has been taken? These nuances can shift the dynamic between two people as they could become very unclear whether to move on the decision, when to do so, if they can rely on the other throughout the process, and even if they will be blamed for pushing on a decision that they believe was taken mutually but to them may not have been flexible.

Exercise 7

Expectations are funny things. They seem to be a collection of deeply engrained beliefs, patterns, thoughts that seem so second nature that they are often lived by completely unconsciously.

Throughout this chapter there have been questions raised and examples shown. Now it is time for you to get cracking answering them. But don't limit yourself to those questions. As you start raising your awareness to get real about your expectations, more may come to the surface. Draw your own map. Take moments to be still in thought, search through your internal dialogue, your data banks, and do not censor yourself. There is no wrong or right in these matters. It could be that you see flashes of relationships where your expectations started a series of events that you never foresaw. There is no going back to the past, but nothing can stop you from learning from it.

Take this, and yourself, seriously. Don't rush through. Write it all down and study your patterns. See what matters to you. And discover where the boundaries are for you.