

By: Tracey Porpora

While we'd all like to have the secrets to maintaining a blissful relationship, there's no one key to success. However, top dating experts say there are several things you can do to ensure a successful relationship. Follow the following ten steps to strengthen your relationship.



1. Get a life.

People entering a relationship should already have their own likes, dislikes, hobbies and interests. "If you expect your partner to be everything to you, you will be disappointed and they will be annoyed," says Jennifer Hancock, author of the *Humanist Approach to Happiness: Practical Wisdom* (CreateSpace). "Partners should supplement and make your life better, not be the 'end all be all' of your existence."

2. Show each other courtesy.

"Manners are not gender specific, whether it's holding open a door or saying thank you. Familiarity doesn't mean you can stop saying 'please'." says Susanne M. Alexander, a Cleveland, OH relationship coach/character specialist.

3. Change bad habits that can contaminate your relationship.

"These include playing the victim and blaming others, avoiding conflict, being critical, self-righteous or controlling, or lashing out in anger when things don't go your way," says Lauren Mackler, a world-renowned Boston-MA-based coach, psychotherapist, *CNN* relationship expert, radio show host, and, author of the international bestseller, *Solemate* (Hay House).

4. Be a good listener.

Many people love to talk, but fail to listen to their partners' wants and needs. "Actually listening to the things your partner says can be hard at times, but when you make an effort to listen to what he or she is talking about, he or she will be happier with you than if you just insert 'uh huhs' into the conversation occasionally," says Hancock. "Take the time to actually listen to the things your partner is talking about. This will endear them to you."

5. Accentuate the positive:

Dwelling on the negatives you see in your partner will never result in something positive. "Make sure to take time every day to think of reasons why your partner is as wonderful as he or she is," says Hancock. "If you take time to think about how wonderful they are, you will not be thinking about how annoying whatever it is he or she does that annoys you. It is much better to focus on the positive reasons why you want this person in your life."

6. Be honest.

Lying to your significant other is never a good policy. When caught, you will often have a disagreement. "Practice truthfulness with tact in all your communications. Being straight with each other is vital, but it doesn't have to hurt. Add a little kindness to have your words delivered smoothly," says Alexander.

7. Respect each other.

"It isn't enough to think your partner is wonderful," admits Hancock. "You must actually remember



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that he or she is a real human being with real feelings and emotions that can be hurt, just like you. They aren't an accessory that you can put on or throw away. Remembering that your partner is a real person will go a long way towards ensuring that you treat him or her well."

8. Actively nurture your relationship on an on-going basis.

When you fail to make time for each other is when a couple starts to grow apart. "Make reconnecting at the end of the day a daily ritual. Delight each other with small, unexpected gifts. Schedule weekly date nights. A relationship is a living system that fails to thrive without on-going care, love and attention," says Mackler.

9. Don't get trapped in rigid or stereotypical roles.

"In healthy relationships, partner roles are fluid and interchangeable. This allows you both to meet your different needs, keep your relationship fresh, and sustain an equitable and balanced relationship," explains Mackler.

10. Find someone sane:

"You can't be in an emotionally healthy relationship if you or your partner are not emotionally healthy," explains Hancock. "Looking for someone who can handle stress well is the first step to being in a happy and successful relationship."

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