

Nurturing Social Relationships - Activity Five:

Happy people are exceptionally good at their relationships with friends, family, partners and colleagues. The happier a person is the more likely they are to have a happy marriage, a large circle of friends, ample social support. This casual relationship between social relationships and happiness is clearly bi-directional. This means that romantic partners and friends make people happy, but it also means that happy people are more likely to acquire lovers and friends. On the basis of numerous studies, this implies that if you begin today to improve and cultivate your relationships, you will reap the gift of positive emotions. In turn, the enhanced feelings of happiness will help you attract more and higher quality relationships, making you even happier and so on. By applying a happiness increasing strategy, you will embark on what psychologists call an upward spiral.

We as humans have a strong “need to belong”; a lesson from Darwin is now classical theory. We also need to have relationships for social support in times of stress, distress and trauma. Research shows that there is no better way of coping with a problem than confiding with a friend. Social support can be tangible (e.g. driving a friend to hospital), it can be emotional (e.g. listening, reassuring and helping to generate solutions), and informational (e.g. providing advice). Indeed people with strong social support are healthier and live longer.

Activity 1 – Make Time: The secrets of successful marriage are often that partners talk ... a lot. Successful couples spend five hours or more together, often talking. So make a ritual of spending time together. Try 5 minutes a day expressing gratitude; create media free zones (no TV, cell phones or computers).

Activity 2 – Express admiration, appreciation and affection: Over two decades of research has shown that good relationships are characterized by a ratio of positive to negative affect (comments) of five to one. This means for every negative statement or behavior, criticizing, nagging, lecturing, there are five positive ones. Make your weekly goal to increase the positive comments, communicate your gratitude and admiration directly, and give genuine praise

Activity 3 – Capitalize on Good Fortune: This strategy involves taking delight in your friends’ and family members, and partners’ windfalls and successes. Social psychologists have shown what distinguishes good and poor relationships are not how the partners react to bad news and disappointments but how they respond to good news.

Activity 4 – Manage Conflict: Happy couples do not fight any less, they just disagree differently. Unhappy couples generally start disagreements harshly, starting with accusations, sarcasms, criticisms, contempt, defensive behavior and stonewalling. By trying to make arguments more friendly (a smile, expressing affection or humor) happy couples manage to diffuse hostility.

Activity 5 – Share your Inner Life: Try to support your partner’s dreams and goals, the things that are most important to them