

Stages of Relationship

©2006 Deanne Carter, LMHC, NCC

Romance, Courting, Fantasy

The brain is flooded with feel-good chemicals. Typically the euphoria is attributed to the other's presence, character, and/or behaviors rather than our own charge or fantasy that is created. Our own self and strengths are tuned and amplified.

While swept away by the romance it is easy to minimize differences, avoid conflict and be wide-open since we tend to feel loved as we are, and have a sense of belonging beyond what we've experienced before. Therefore, free time is dedicated to spending time with the other and staying focused on the positive.

Disillusionment, Familiarization, Adjustment

There tends to be a reality check that comes within a few months or sometimes a couple of years. You recognize that there is not a constant flow of love and acceptance available to you and flaws, both yours and your partners, are exposed. You may find yourself feeling betrayed or lied to by the other (your fantasy of the other). You may experience disappointment and withdraw or be angry and lay blame.

When we rely on our partner to feel loved, enough, important, etc., we feel unimportant and unloved when we experience their humanity and imperfections. Even when partners fail to give space, it is likely we will respond unfavorably by feeling smothered or controlled and lose touch with our own sense of self.

Many people begin to focus on being right, so they may continue their fantasy and euphoria. People who are uncomfortable with conflict, may minimize differences, attempt to please, and convince themselves that they can easily adapt (become enmeshed).

Again, this is only perpetuating the fantasy and keeping you from experiencing the potential depth in relationship. This is an invitation to grow together rather than grow apart. Honest communication with yourself and your partner is essential at this stage to grow yourself and the relationship.

Power Struggle, Disappointment, Distress

When initial adapting or negotiating doesn't return ones euphoria, the pleasing tends to cease. Our old wounds from childhood tend to surface more than ever. It is natural to have ebb and flow of emotional availability toward each other. However, oftentimes we react to our partner's lack of availability with blame.

Unhealthy coping skills such as withdrawal, blame, labeling, mind reading, and other cognitive distortions add to resentments and break down communication.

Partners may resign by giving in or may act out by having an emotional or physical affair. It is normal to have tension while you explore your relationship with yourself and yourself as part of the relationship. Your individual emotional needs can be negotiated with clear boundaries and autonomy within the relationship can be established in this stage.

Effective communication will help your work with your barriers. Maintaining an intention to face concerns together supports growth of both individuals.

Stability, Friendship, Reconciliation

It can be tempting to subdue emotions and be afraid of dealing with ongoing insecurities. Yet, by genuinely showing up with all of you, your self and the relationship will gain depth, predictability, and connection. As people get closer, fear of intimacy can show up.

The brain may use cognitive distortions to keep you distracted from taking personal responsibility. Again, this is an opportunity for personal growth where the relationship can nurture your individual goals.

Problem solving and romance are co-created here as shock and denial subside. Connecting your conflicts to your inner work help expose your vulnerabilities and deepen trust with your partner. Creating a safe container to explore difficult emotions and value differences will help you go even deeper and become more accessible to each other.

Commitment, Acceptance, Transformation

Clear acceptance of each other happens here. You have done the hard work of communicating with vulnerability and set boundaries to take care of yourself. There is no need for defenses and denial here for you to be your own individual.

Only about 5% of relationships make it to this point. Relationship becomes a choice rather than a means to get emotional or ego needs met. You work more as a team, yet your individual self flourishes within a shared vision of relationship.

I can help you move through the stages toward a deeper, more intimate relationship with your partner.

©2006 Deanne Carter, LMHC, NCC

Differences don't have to mean difficulty.

I help stressed out couples stop fighting and start communicating.

Heart Healing Counseling Corporation

www.hearthealing.org

253-651-3752