

Don't Try To Fix Your Partner

Unsolicited Advice Can Destroy a Relationship/Partnership

There's a fine line between thinking your relationship needs a tune-up and thinking your partner needs one. No one is perfect regardless of wishful thinking, fairy-tales, or idealizing relationships. The fact is, the imperfections and differences that initially attracted you to your partner will inevitably be the same ones that get under your skin.

I don't know why it happens.

I don't know how it happens, either.

People are attracted to you to change the parts of you that get in the way of living well.

Maybe it's a matter of togetherness, closeness — the more you're with your partner, the more these nuances become less subtle; they begin to trigger you to be reactive. The upside of togetherness is in getting to know your partner on a deeper and more intimate level. The downside of together is in getting to know your partner on a deeper and more intimate level.

Both are true.

Or, perhaps it's a matter of idealization that has turned the corner into devaluation where your partner starts showing that they're human and not something to "worship" on a pedestal. As amazing as that pedestal is for both partners at first, the crash, the chaos, is inevitable. And the collateral damage from the crash can be irreparable.

Maybe it's about vulnerability where superficial good times are no longer sufficient. Yet, the idea of becoming vulnerable with your partner intimidates you — what if you realize your love for them is shallow? What if they realize they're only in it for the sex?

If you continue veering down the path of disillusionment in your relationship, you may arrive at the intersection of communication issues and feeling unheard. Here's where their adorable quirk of being unable to talk to you while playing on their phone has now become a deplorable habit. Adding insult to injury are the millions of thoughts likely buzzing in your head — everything from questioning whether

they're intentionally ignoring you, to why you thought that habit was adorable in the first place.

The process in the relationship that requires great discipline is to meet them with empathy, being competent in stating your needs, and finally letting go of the outcome. Returning to empathy, stating needs, and letting go. This is the circle of intimacy and vulnerability that will help the growth of your loving well with your partner.

It's a matter of trust. If trust issues were there early on, you're lying to yourself if you believe the relationship is healthy, or that this issue can be ignored. If you're unable to trust your partner, it's based on one of two things: either they've shown you that they aren't worth trusting, or you're carrying unresolved baggage from the historical residue of your past unresolved relationships. Maybe that was why you were attracted to this person in the first place.

The worst case scenario is if your partner knows you have trust issues and still chooses to screw with your ability to trust them by reinforcing why you have trust issues in the first place.

While these issues are not deal-breakers in and of themselves, the longer they go unchecked in a relationship, the greater the gap between emotional fulfillment and loving well.

Intimacy is a process of trust, one agreement at a time.

There are two deal-breakers that should be addressed here that signal there's little hope for improving your relationship. First, any relationship that has blatant incompatibility between partners, won't work. I'm not necessarily referring to differences in hobbies, or differences in personality where one may be Introverted while the other is Extroverted. However, these same differences which may have drawn you to each other can inevitably cause imbalance in the relationship if compromise and understanding aren't reached.

Instead, I'm referring to values, morals, goals and who each of you are at your core; your True Self. If you're desperate to be in a relationship because you struggle with being alone, you're at a greater risk of settling down with anyone just to fill a void and to keep your inner critic at bay, regardless of whether you don't see eye-to-eye on core values and issues.

The other deal-breaker is when a relationship is toxic — where abuse is running rampant. We already know what to watch out for — arguments about the same issue with no solution offered, blatant contempt for one or the other where things like house rules, relationship boundaries and interpersonal respect are violated, or where cheating is the norm. If these are happening, now is a good time to re-evaluate your relationship and yourself as to why you allow this, and why you don't believe you deserve healthier.

However, abuse is not always obvious and can be covert, which is more dangerous in the long-run for an unsuspecting partner. When abuse is covert, it's about pretending to fill every need you have while filling their agenda. They may play the role as being kind, attentive, compassionate, reliable and consistent. Behind your back, is a different story.

Pay attention to what they're saying and doing and that it's consistently adding up — if they have an agenda, they won't be able to retain consistency. Pay attention to the subtle "indifferences" you may brush off as a bad day because their boredom is likely when your number is up. Take note of things said in gist as these are often clues to the bigger picture you may not (yet) see, but in time won't be able to unsee.

If serious incompatibility or emotional abuse are in your relationship, this can't be "fixed" or "saved". Walking away may be the toughest thing you do, and yet may be your saving grace in the long-run.

A partner's reaction of blame, defensiveness, and withdrawal is a form of emotional abuse.

Improving Your Relationship/Partnership

If your relationship can be improved, you'll know. And you and your partner will both be on board in wanting the best for each other and your relationship.

Avoid The Project Mentality. It's easy to get caught up in trying to 'save' or 'fix' your partner as if they're a project or something to build to create a "better" version of them. People are imperfect and no amount of looking at your partner as a project will make them any less imperfect. This is a power-over situation and not collaboration.

Look at Their Experiences From Their Perspective. Use Empathy. Another way it's easy to get caught up in trying to 'save' or 'fix' your partner is by

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examining their experiences from your perspective. Here is where the temptation comes in to offer advice, or to try and 'fix' their issue. Sometimes, all our partner needs is to be heard, to feel valued, and to have us there to listen, non-judgmentally. This is empathy.

Practice Listening. Listening deeply is a learned practice and skill and can take awhile to master. Remaining quiet and not interrupting when your partner is speaking is one way to practice this skill, even if in the middle of a disagreement. Soliciting their feedback, by summarizing what you believed they were saying, and asking them to confirm if you understood their perspective is an excellent way to ensure listening. In return, they may be willing to follow the same pattern when it's your turn to speak. Listen first, speak last. Be aware of your reaction, develop a pause before you speak. Being "right" is a way to continue arguing and fighting and will destroy the relationship.

Remain Objective. This is easier said than done. We automatically lose objectivity when we're in an intimate relationship because our emotions are involved. One way to help retain some objectivity is by simply asking, "What do you need from me?", instead of trying to 'fix' or 'save' the situation. Another option is to hear their thoughts before you interject yours. Some relationship issues need to find their own solutions.

Remember, You're In It Together. It's both partners conquering the world together, not one partner who tries 'fixing' everything while the other gets "fixed". Balance, win/win, and empathy are important qualities for any intimate relationship and are foundational for long-term happiness. Compassion is the ability to sit with your partner's struggle, and to believe in them.

You are the best judge of your motivations and your reasons for being with your partner. Listen to your own wisdom. If you're in the relationship for the right reasons — not out of desperation or to prevent being alone — then you'll know. You'll know if your relationship has lasting power or whether it's based on an agenda.

If your relationship started for the right reasons, and you and your partner are in it for the right values and reasons, then appreciate each other's quirks and differences (regardless of how they may have veered into an annoying habit). The imperfections are your teachers toward loving well.