

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

You've been exposed to a good deal of information. You've learned how your body produces chemicals which lead to a love "high." You've explored the differences in sexuality, sensuality, and how people vary in what helps them feel loved.

This lesson is to help you look beyond those initial passionate stages of the relationship to where you're celebrating 30, 40, or 50 years together. Those 40+ year relationships faced down a number of challenges. Let's look at some of the skills needed to get past those challenges.

THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY

People change and grow. If you can't change and learn new things, life is more difficult.

A STORY ABOUT CHANGE AND FLEXIBILITY

“Grandma,” Chris asked, “how did you stay married to one man for so long?”

Grandma laughed. “Honey, I wasn’t married to one man. I was married to five.”

Chris’ eyes bugged out. “But you were never married to anyone but Grandpa!”

“Yes, but first I knew him as a young man in love who wanted to give me everything. He then became focused at his job. Later he was a man determined to be the best father he could. After all the children left home, he was trying to find himself again. Now he is a man nearing the end of his life and looking at his mortality. I love them all.”

PEOPLE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE

Emotionally healthy people change. They have new experiences which affect them greatly and result in behavior or temperament changes. Happy people

become sad when they lose a job or a loved one. They become more serious when they take on new responsibilities.

If your partner is the one who changed, you will need to change to adjust to the new person greeting you each day. There can be major relationship challenges when you wish for the way they used to be.

You, also, will change. For a healthy relationship, your partner will need to adapt to the new you. Recall the “A” and the “H” relationship? Growing and changing are what can result in an “A” relationship collapsing if the other partner doesn’t adjust to the growth of the other.

WHEN CHANGE IS NEEDED BUT RESISTED

There are ingrained behavior patterns which need changing if the relationship is to flourish.

THESE BEHAVIORS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP MIGHT SIGNAL DANGER:

1. **Drinking and drug addictions**, which result in physical, emotional, relationship, and job or

school difficulties.

2. **Not keeping commitments**, which disappoint and hurt others as well as yourself.
3. **Hurting people through anger**, resulting in emotional or physical abuse.
4. **Belittling or bullying others.**
5. **“This is the way I am, so accept it”** stance of those afraid of self-reflection and committing themselves to change.

These and similar behaviors are ingrained patterns which take dedication and commitment to shift.

When you see these in the early part of your relationship, you have a choice to say “Yay” or “Nay” before you get to the commitment stage. This is easier to do earlier in the relationship than having to handle it years later.

It’s important to ask yourself, “Do I want to live with this behavior the rest of my life?”

A MISTAKE MADE BY MANY, ESPECIALLY WOMEN

Have you heard the expression, “Don’t try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time and annoys the pig?”

Avoid the mistake of thinking that your love will change someone. Chances are it won’t.

When someone is enmeshed in an ingrained pattern, such as addiction of any kind, they are caught in an illness which affects the brain. As much as you love them, what’s happening in the brain will most likely win.

When making decisions about partners, avoid deciding based upon potential. Decide based upon what is happening. The older the person is, the more likely the behavior pattern you don’t like is not going to change.

Make the best decision for you in choosing your partner. This is your life. Make the best decision for you, not for someone else. Give yourself the best.

SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

Change is a continuous part of life. You and your partner will both change. The more flexible you are, the easier it will be to adjust to the changes in your

partner. There are behavior patterns you may notice early in the relationship which can be warning signs of a resistance to change.

In the next lesson, you'll bring everything together and identify what is most important to you in a relationship. Before you move on, take a few minutes to answer the following reflection questions.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TODAY

REFLECTION

1. What are three behavior patterns you absolutely do not want to live with the rest of your life?
2. What are three behavior patterns you would like to have in a partner?
3. What three behavior patterns do you have that

you find difficult to live with?

4. What are your three best behavior patterns?