

Let's Talk: A relationship exercise

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Hi everybody, my name is Erica Hanlon and you probably know that relationships are a really important part of your wellbeing. They enrich your life. And if you're in a romantic relationship with somebody, you might be trying to figure out how healthy is this relationship for me? So today, let's talk about a quick and easy exercise you can do to take that temperature of your relationship.

Your dream list

So step one, we are going to make a dream list. So I don't want you to think about your partner. What I want you to do is kind of go into a fantasy land, a fantasy state, and I want you to make a list of every single trait you would have in your dream partner. It can be frivolous stuff like what color their eyes are. Maybe they play guitar. Maybe they like sports. But I also want you to include important things that you would like in your fantasy partner. So somebody you can trust. Somebody who is loyal. Somebody who likes you. So I want you to put together this long, lengthy fantasy list of your dream partner.

Your 'must-have' list

Okay, now that your dream list is done, it's time to move on to step two. So for step two you're going to make another list. And you're gonna pull from list number one. So what you're gonna pull are those traits that you must have in your relationship. So these are your non-negotiables. So things like somebody who's trustworthy, somebody who's loyal, somebody who has good communication skills, somebody who is faithful. Maybe it's somebody who wants to have children if you wanna have children. Maybe it's somebody who's the same religion that you are, the same political persuasion you are. Whatever is really important to you, whatever you can not negotiate on in your partner, these are those items you're gonna put on list two, pulling from list number one.

Diving deeper

All right, now that you have your second list, your must-have list, it's time to move on to step three. So if you're currently in a relationship, what I want you to do is think about the partner that you have right now, and looking at list number two, I want you to mark off those items that your current partner has from your must-have list. So is your partner loyal? Are they faithful to you? Do you trust them? And then you can make a check mark, you can circle those traits, you can underline them, and this will help you gauge the temperature of your current relationship.

Understand the results

Okay, so our fourth and final step is to unpack what you've learned from doing these exercises. Look at your second list. Look at which items you marked off for your current partner. Do they have everything on the list? If so, great, it sounds like you've got potential for a really healthy and satisfying relationship. But maybe your partner didn't really meet very many criteria. Maybe they only met a few or a handful, or they're missing a couple of items that are really important to you. At this point, I would ask you to do some self exploration. Why are you negotiating on items that are non-negotiable for you? Why are you making excuses for this relationship on times that again are really important for you, that are must-haves? Now there are lots of things that could be going on here. Maybe your self esteem is a little bit low. Maybe you learned some unhealthy messages about relationships when you were young, so you have a really questionable template when it comes to pursuing romantic relationships. So I would encourage you to do some work on yourself if that's the case and maybe even meet with a therapist on how you can set healthy boundaries and get to a healthier place.

Put into practice

So I have done this exercise not only with clients in the past, but I've also used it myself. In fact, I used this exercise when I was in a relationship in my early 20s, and then I held on to the list and when I met my husband about eight years later, I pulled them out, I took a look, and he not only met every single item on my list number two, my must-have list, he met almost all of my items on my fantasy list. He doesn't play guitar, but we can still work on that, right? So I would encourage you to do this exercise. Now remember, it's not 100%, but it can give you a lot of information and it can be a good jumping off point for working on yourself and working on your relationship.

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