



RELATIONSHIP

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Things they don't tell you about modern love, marriage and more



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What do we talk about when we talk about love? With Bollywood, Hollywood, TV series, literature, poetry, and even childhood fairy tales glorifying great romantic love, it has shaped generations upon generations' views of what love really is. Grand gestures, oaths of undying love, searching for 'the one' and the whole 'you

complete me' idea have become an unreal everyday standard. Now, why is this a cause for concern? Because adding the stress of unrealistic romantic comedy scripts to your real-life story can do more harm than good. Especially because the happy ending of the film is where the beginning of real love starts.

Rose-tinted Love vs Real Love

To make your real love successful, we often need to take off our rose-tinted glasses and reboot this mindset by adjusting our emotional expectations. Here's how we can do this:

The first thing you need to do is realise you are not an incomplete puzzle or a half person looking for another to make them whole. More than loving someone, most of us are in love with the idea of being in love. Why? Because besides the dopamine rush, society has taught us, especially women, that we are incomplete on our own. It is time to erase this message from our lives. You are enough. Enough to love yourself, enough to make yourself happy, enough to learn to live a fulfilling life on your own. Love is an added bonus.

The second thing is to let go of the idea that you or your partner will love and accept each other unconditionally 24x7, 365 days a year. We're all just human and all of us have had days where we're physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted. On these days, it can be hard enough to love yourself, let alone another person. So expecting your partner or yourself to be actively affectionate every single day is unrealistic. On such days, instead of concentrating on what's not happening, give them their space and indulge in a little me time for yourself.

The third thing is to stop using the loaded phrase, "If you love me, you will..." all the time. While we walk into a relationship with our eyes open — well, at least half open — we are far more likely to be accepting of all the good or perfect parts that appeal to us. As for the not-so-great imperfections we perceive, we hope we can change them in our partner. Or worse, our partner will change themselves for us if they love us. True acceptance is loving your partner just as they are. Constantly asking them to prove their love by demanding they change everything about themselves is a recipe for disaster. You know how hard it is for you to change, why would you ask them to?

The fourth thing to realise is that no human being, even if they love you at a cellular level, can be a mindreader. Even if the love of your life tries to, it's quite possible they will get mixed messages or misinterpret what you want, or even if you want anything at all. Truly successful couples work at making their relationship a success by communicating their expectations, needs, wants and more. Open, direct communication is the key to real emotional intimacy, which is what keeps love alive till even the golden years of our lives.

The fifth thing is to embrace change. Ten, 15, 20 years into your relationship, you cannot expect it to be a photocopy of

what it was during the initial years. People change, grow and mature over the years, and so does a relationship. As long as your foundation is based on love, respect, and kindness, the way you'll express your love will not affect your relationship. In fact, it will evolve into a stronger, deeper bond each year. However, for those who feel or fear drifting apart, use positive statements to communicate your issues. Sometimes, all it takes is a single talk to rekindle your love.

Commitment Conundrum

People today are desperate to be loved and understood but terrified to be vulnerable and committed. And really, what's their incentive right? When you can swipe left or right and treat human connections like an online shopping experience, why would you want to work hard at something long-term when you can move onto one person and then another to fuel your temporary needs? Because love isn't fast food. If anything it's a slow-cooked, multi-course gourmet meal.

If you're looking for a deep, emotional connection with a partner for life, you have to open yourself up and understand that you are going to get hurt. That's part of the journey and very natural. Building a wall around yourself and flitting from one shallow hello to the other will leave you feeling empty if what you really want is a companion for life.

With so many "ships" — situationship, textationship, skinship — it can be hard to navigate the world of romance. To knot or not to knot is also a common question in today's emotional climate. We often get so caught up in the idea of a wedding that we forget about the whole marriage that comes after.

Whether love or arranged, marriage is a commitment that you need to enter into carefully. And before you do, there are some serious conversations you need to have with your future partner.

Culture Shock and Dating Dos

Not discussing different personal and family values is one of the key reasons for a relationship to go sour soon. Once the initial honeymoon phase is over, you should sit down and discuss lifestyles, habits, and how you envision a life together so that once you settle down, there are no rude culture shocks waiting in the wings.

While opposites attract is a nice phrase for romantic love, real love is built on solid compatibility. You can't always be emotionally, physically, socially, financially, intellectually, and politically compatible but you can

definitely make sure you're compatible on the matters that matter most to you.

VEGETARIAN/NON-VEGETARIAN: Whether it's a choice stemming from personal, health, or family reasons, the idea of making a whole household veg or non-veg has become outdated. If you are vegan/vegetarian and your spouse is eggetarian/non-vegetarian, there is absolutely no need for either of you to adopt each other's habits. A friend of mine, who is a strict vegetarian, has been happily married to a non-vegetarian for over 30 years. She still doesn't get the appeal of meat and he still doesn't get the appeal of 'ghaos poos', but what they get is each other. They have accepted the person as they are and choose to respect their love's choices.

DRINKING & SMOKING: Expecting either partner to stop or start either habit will only lead to more conflict. This is a make or break point for most people, so have this conversation as early as possible.

RELIGION & CHILDREN: If both of you follow different religions or one practises their faith while the other is an atheist, decide what everyday life and religious holidays will look like in the future. Also, it is important to decide beforehand which faith and what degree of active practice your child will follow. It is also important to have a conversation on how many children you'll want, figure out your views on adoption and surrogacy, or if you'll want children at all.

What we all need to understand is that it is completely possible to bridge cultural gaps while holding on to your individuality as a person. Establishing and keeping communication channels open is the way to a genuinely happy, successful relationship. The whole idea that one person — usually the woman — has to sacrifice their happiness to prove their love for the other is a lie most of us have been fed since childhood.

Fighting Fair

The most important thing to know regarding arguments is this — it is perfectly normal and healthy to have disagreements in a relationship. In fact, if a couple always seems to be agreeing with each other, it is possibly because one partner is not voicing their preferences or concerns. There are two things that are essential to help a relationship through cloudy, stormy, rainy periods — one is learning to "fight fair" and the other is learning how to "agree to disagree".

If something is bothering you, don't keep it bottled up inside. Express your feelings rather than letting them build up to the point of volcanic eruption.

Fix a time and place. If you know you need to address issues that will make your partner defensive, don't spring the topic on them out of the blue. Sit down with a cup of tea or coffee and calmly state your points in a non-accusatory fashion.

Respond, don't react. If you know you're about to lose your cool, take a cooling-off period. Rather than walk off in a huff or shout on top of your lungs, tell your partner that you need time to calm down and respond in a way that doesn't hurt either of your feelings and go sit in a different room.

Stick to a topic. If you're having an argument about one issue, stick to that. Don't add more issues, new or old. Not only will this make you more emotional by bringing up old hurts, it will prevent you from solving the issue at hand.

Don't label or hit below the belt. All of us have weak points and insecurities that make us vulnerable. Do not use these to push their buttons and get a reaction or to hurt them more than they have hurt you. An argument is not about who wins, but about finding mutually acceptable solutions for your relationship problems.

Don't fight in front of family, friends, or children. Your loved ones will not only be uncomfortable, but it may affect

your relationships with them too, as inevitably both of you will ask them to choose sides. Getting other people's opinions in the middle of an argument is a sure way of making things more problematic. Children should never have to see their parents or family members fight as it leaves deep psychological scars and threatens their sense of safety and security.

Do not throw things. Besides the risk of potential injury, it is childish and only displays your lack of control rather than emphasising how hurt you are. If your partner is violent or abusive, please get the help you need. Nothing justifies physical or emotional abuse in the guise of disagreements or love.

Relationship Counselling

If you've tried multiple attempts at positive conversation but there still seems to be a disconnect, it's a good idea to go in for some sessions of relationship counselling. Most couples think the time to speak with a therapist is when things get really bad — when you've practically given up on the relationship. However, the ideal time would be when the initial cracks in communication start to appear. Here are some points that will help

you decide if you two need professional help:

- # You two have been arguing with increasing frequency.
- # You feel your partner prioritises their job, family, and other things over you.
- # You feel you give more effort than your partner to maintain the relationship.
- # You stop being yourself to keep the peace in the relationship.
- # Your emotional needs are being ignored.
- # Your physical needs are not being met.

Also remember, relationship counselling is not just for marriages in trouble, but for couples across all ages during any stage of their relationship. In fact, I would definitely recommend it for couples dating seriously and exclusively as a must before they commit to marriage or moving in together.

I Will Always Love You

The most important relationship you will ever have in your life is a relationship with yourself. Whether you have a partner or not, if you do not love and accept yourself for who you are, you will continue to seek something from other people, which in reality you can only find in yourself. So, this month of love, make a promise to love yourself

unconditionally first. After all, you are your own Cupid!

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