

Recently I received a promotional flyer for a series of workshops for couples. This is a topic that comes up regularly in my workplace. Couples, parents, partners, whatever description that we apply to two people who are in relationship is a pretty important piece when it comes to quality of life, not only for those two individuals but for everyone in their sphere of influence.

One of the foundational pieces in a significant relationship is how each one defines love. The other is how they would describe a "good" relationship.

Several years ago I was working with a group of five couples and to start things off I asked them to split into two groups, one for the men and one for the women. Each group would brainstorm ideas and come up with a list of things that would represent an ideal relationship.

The women identified a loving relationship with open communication, support in the home, especially with the children, and spending time together on common interests. The men's list included having meals cooked and on time, a good housekeeper, a good mother and an active sex life.

Obviously, these two groups were not on the same page. When two people have a completely different idea about what makes an ideal relationship, it is not surprising that things don't go that smoothly.

The first step is to talk about this together and figure out what is important to you as a couple. For instance, what are your values as individuals and how does that translate to the choices you make together?

If one partner values rituals and traditions and the other wants to avoid any kind of formality, this can be a source of conflict. If one person values family gatherings and needs an extensive support system to feel secure, while the other values privacy and personal space, this could rock the boat. These are pretty dissimilar values. If one is a planner and the other likes to go with the flow, it can create stress in everyday life for both parties. These issues are not

insurmountable but they require several thorough discussions and quite a bit of compromise to get to a place that works for both people.

Setting goals for the relationship is not something every couple automatically does. You meet, you like, you want to get together, and then you establish some permanence. It is only after you are together for a while that you might recognize that working toward the same goal doesn't necessarily happen on its own.

Once you have come up with some common values, you can identify some common goals. Your goals can be about having a family, where you will raise the family, saving money, buying a home, travelling together, going back to school to improve work opportunities, moving closer to extended family, or saving for retirement. Your values will have a relationship to your goals.

Now that you are connected to someone else, your goals need to work for both of you and your children when they come along. It is about listening and talking and listening. Have I said that before?