

A relationship is a cake

Tips from Dr. Darek Dawda
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According to our expert on well-being, relationships are like layered tortes, the bottom layer being the foundation of the whole structure.

MW: How do you maintain healthy intimacy in long-term relationships?

Dr. DD: When people come to me wanting to work on their intimacy, I suggest to them that they think of their relationship as a three-layered cake, with sexual intimacy being the very top layer. If the two bottom layers are not solid, there is no point focusing on sex life. It's best to start with the foundation and work your way up.

MW: What is the bottom layer?

Dr. DD: I call the very bottom layer BUSINESS, and this is the first layer I encourage people to sort out. Think about you and your loved one as business partners. The goal here is to accomplish a mutual sense of fairness. Who does what at home, where does the money come from, who drives kids to sports, where do you leave your tooth brush, who cleans the countertops, etc., etc., is all a part of everyday business that needs to be run well.

MW: So ideally, everything should be balanced on the business level?

Dr. DD: Not necessarily. Relationships are rarely balanced. One person may be bringing more money, whereas the other might be doing more housework. One person might be going out with friends more, while the other might stay home with the kids more. One person might take care of the garden, while the other does all the cooking. One person might be a more giving person and be OK with it. Nothing has to be equal, as long as both parties feel they are getting a fair deal.

MW: What happens when the business level is out of balance?

Dr. DD: One or both partners start growing resentments. And the resentment is what kills relationships. There is no point talking about intimacy if you are angry with your partner for not contributing enough to the day-to-day well being of your relationship.

MW: So this level has to be fixed first?

Dr. DD: Absolutely. And the important thing to realize is that there is no need for much emotional processing when you deal with the business level. All you need is to be in touch with your needs, aware of the other's needs, and able to communicate openly with the other to figure out a system that will work for both of you. If one of you feels things are unfair, you've got to go back to the negotiating table and make necessary adjustments to make the business level of your relationship work well.

MW: And then?

Dr. DD: I call the middle level of the relationship FRIENDSHIP. Personally, I consider friendship to be the most important part of any of my close relationships, intimate or not. To me, business is something that I need to get out of the way to create a strong foundation for a sustainable friendship.

MW: What can you say about friendship?

Dr. DD: Friends unconditionally accept, support, and respect each other, care for each other, and are honest with each other. It is unfortunate how often people become dishonest and disrespectful with each other when they get into so-called intimate relationships. Or think about how often people try to change each other so that the other fits their expectations, instead of accepting and supporting the other as they are. Those same people would never treat their friends this badly.

Intimacy

Friendship

Business

MW: And then on top you have intimacy?

Dr. DD: There is a great degree of intimacy in any friendship, but SEXUAL INTIMACY is the icing on the cake, something that makes relationships complete.

MW: I can think of at least two long-term couples I know who seem to have good friendships but very little sex.

Dr. DD: Sexual intimacy is the most emotionally complex part of relationships, especially when it comes to long-term relationships, which might be the topic for one of the upcoming articles. The important point to remember here is that lots of relationships can actually function superbly well without sexual intimacy if they have a strong friendship and a fair business foundation.

MW: So to summarize?

Dr. DD: Instead of stressing out about having a poor sex life, make sure you get the day-to-day minutia figured out first, and then work on becoming good friends with your partner.

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