



What Makes a Relationship Healthy?

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"We're captains of our ship: partnership, friendship, lovership."

That's a saying I once heard passed along that describes the very topic of this book—a healthy relationship.

Is it possible to be happy, in love, and have a relationship that lasts in today's electronic, e-mail, voice-mail culture? Absolutely, yes! But like everything else that is worthwhile to achieve, you have to work at it. Of course, every relationship goes through changes. Surviving the ups and downs becomes the glue that keeps you together. Even wife Camille forgave TV celebrity Bill Cosby for his affair when he went public about it, saying that they had been through so much together that she was not willing to give up their love and partnership.

I'm sure you're as tired as I am of hearing families or relationships referred to as "dysfunctional." A popular New York radio station even named their day-long music concert the "dysfunctional family picnic." Dysfunctional has become the buzzword of the 1990s. Fortunately, there are causes for dysfunctionality that we can point to: dissolution of the family, lack of corporate security or loyalty, disconnection from communities and religion, desire for instant gratification precipitated by flashing images of MTV, and the desire to escape into the anonymity of the Internet.

"Toxic" is another buzzword of the 1990s. Once the environment was recognized as toxic, everything else became subject to being labeled as bad for your health—employers, families, children, and even lovers were called toxic, especially when they were out of control or hurtful.

A New Buzzword for the New Millennium

Everywhere you look, there are dangers to our emotional and physical well-being. That's where this book comes in. Since our entrance into the new millennium, declare with me that the new buzzword is healthy. Commit to that new attitude toward life in general and relationships in particular. Let's face it, designing a health plan for all Americans was the major challenge of the previous political administration—fraught with major roadblocks. At least these efforts have reflected how much Americans today care about health. Let's strive for—and remove the roadblocks on—a successful and loving healthy relationship. This book is not about dwelling on dysfunctional relationships, but about how you can achieve a healthy love.

A healthy relationship can come naturally to some people—they fall in love and everything else seems to fall into place. They always seem to get along and rarely argue. But if this doesn't happen for you, don't despair. You can learn (and relearn, and relearn) to get past the rough spots. A healthy relationship takes time and work. However, it also takes trust—that is, trust in your own feelings, and trusting your partner with your feelings. This is critical—and my wish for you—since an unhealthy relationship can make you feel literally ill! This book will inspire you to not get caught up in dead-end, unhappy, and unhealthy relationships, but to aspire to a growing one—one that makes you feel strong, invigorated, and renewed. That's healthy.

When It's Not Healthy

Let's face it. You just don't wake up one morning in a bad relationship. The unhealthy symptoms have been there all along—you just weren't paying attention to them ... or you chose to ignore them.

For instance, you and your mate may have explosive sexual encounters, but how does he treat you outside the bedroom? Remember how you felt when she stared at and flirted with other guys in front of you, after you said how that made you feel? Remember when he didn't give you the support you needed when you had to make that important life decision?

Throughout the coming chapters, I'll address when a relationship is healthy and working, and when it's not healthy and needs to be reevaluated. For now, let's take a quick look at how an unhealthy relationship may make you feel.

Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

- You feel insecure and weak around each other.
- You suffer from low self-esteem as a result of what happens between you.
- You are dishonest with each other.
- You spend more time feeling hurt than feeling good about how you treat each other.
- You find yourself complaining to others about your relationship.
- You are unable to talk about your feelings or problems with your mate, much less solve them.
- You are unable to resolve your differences together.
- You become unenthusiastic about life because of what goes on between you.
- Your trust is irrevocably broken.
- Seemingly small things erode your relationship, like trickling water that wears away at a rock over time.
- Priorities other than each other constantly present themselves.
- What goes on between you interferes with other aspects of your life.

Think about what you would never put up with over the long-term. What would make you end the relationship? For most men and women, dishonesty is intolerable—just as honesty is the most desirable quality. For Alex, “She has to be into personal growth all the time. And I couldn’t stay if we couldn’t be physically active together.” George couldn’t put up with his girlfriend’s constant criticisms. Sherry had to break up with her boyfriend when he wouldn’t stop flirting with her friends. Ladonna left when her boyfriend cheated on her, and Christine broke her engagement when her fiancé admitted, “I love you but I’m not in love with you.” Kelly said, “I know this sounds silly, but smell is important to me. He has to smell good.” Other irritants men and women have told me about over the years include complaining or nagging, forgetting important events, criticizing, and being ignored. What keeps bothering you?

Priorities

For your relationship to last, the two of you must have similar priorities. For example, if hot sex matters to one of you but not to the other, there will inevitably be arguments, strife, and disappointments in your love life.

Who Is Number One?

In a healthy relationship, there are three “people” involved—each of you, and the relationship itself. All three have to be number one at appropriate times. You and your mate each need to have enough self-esteem so you matter, so you respect yourself (so others will respect you) and so you are not desperate (meaning you wouldn’t fall apart if you separated).

Healthy or Unhealthy?

Making the other person number one all the time—being too much of a giver or people pleaser—is unhealthy. People who do this subvert their own needs and often drive others away by being too suffocating. By the opposite token, those who always demand to be number one are narcissistic and feel that others are only extensions of themselves. This is equally unhealthy, as they can never truly love, because the only one they love is themselves.

When It’s Healthy

So far, I’ve outlined what makes a relationship unhealthy and how you may feel if you’re stuck in one. Now, what makes a relationship healthy? Good judgment about this requires a three-part analysis: using your mind, heart, and intuition. Use your mind, analyze the qualities of your relationship and determine whether it is healthy. (Take the quizzes in this book to help.) Use your heart and the emotions you have for your mate. And follow your intuition, that gut sense that tells you whether pairing the two of you is “right.”

Signs of a Healthy Relationship

- You feel secure and happy when you’re together and alone—not sad, suspicious, angry, or deprived.
- You are inspired by each other to fulfill your dreams and become the best you can be.
- You are generous and giving—you want to give all you can to your partner, and are so fulfilled that you also want to give to everyone else around you.

That's Healthy with a Capital "H"!

Since we are always learning about life and love, I enjoy referring to different concepts that are important in this book in terms of the alphabet, like in school. For example, in my book *Generation Sex* (Harper, 1995), I summarized the three R's of good sex: Respect, Responsibility, and the Right to say "yes" and "no" to sex. Here, let's look at the six H's to a healthy relationship:

1. **Honesty.** I have asked thousands of men and women in surveys over the years, "What is the most important quality of a lasting relationship?" The number one quality mentioned was honesty. Finances can be shaky, sex imperfect, stress overwhelming, but all those things can be overcome. Trust is essential. If trust is broken, your heart is broken. Everything else seems to tumble down, problems become less tolerable, and compromises less appealing.
2. **Harmony.** The sweetest sounds in music are created when two voices harmonize with one another—one hits a note that is not exactly the same as the other, but blends in perfectly. Better yet, it enriches the first note, filling out the sound. Two people in love similarly make beautiful music together. They don't need to be the same; in fact, they are more well-rounded when they have differences, like the harmonized musical notes. Their individual choices of notes fit. You make a harmonious duet together.
3. **Heart.** The heart is the major organ of the body. It pumps the blood supply throughout the body, bringing nourishment. Having "heart" for one another means nourishing each other. Opening your heart to one another exposes your deepest feelings. And connecting your hearts binds you deeply and inextricably.



Love Bytes

Opposites can be harmonious when they blend together to create a whole, as feminine and masculine, light and dark, positive and negative. For example, all colors blend together to create white. Men have feminine energy and women have masculine energy. The goal is to achieve a state of balance in which energies complement each other.



Dr. Judy's Rx

To get to the soul, close your eyes and sense the other person, feeling what's in his or her heart and inner being.



Dr. Judy's Rx

In intimate times, couples can ask each other, "How can I help you heal?" The answer may be, "Tell me you love me." "Never betray me." "Help me trust again."

You may have to similarly suffer through love wars before you find your one true love. The rejections and hurts along this path require healing in order to open up your heart again. I'm not suggesting that you become each other's therapists—it would be unhealthy to expect a partner to repair all your past hurts or to project onto your partner all the ghosts of your past. But there is some aspect of healing in every healthy relationship. A true love partner becomes a haven from the hurts of the past, while providing a new positive example of how nurturing love can be.

6. **Hot.** Satisfying, sensuous, and erotic sex can certainly be a part of the healthy relationship equation. Having such a healthy sexual connection can increase your intimacy and bind you closer together.

Spelling a Healthy Relationship

Consider these other crucial elements of a healthy relationship.

The Five E's:

- **Empathy.** Being able to feel what each other feels, walking a mile in the other person's shoes, being able to put yourself in his place. This goes beyond sympathy where you can feel for the other person (you're sad if something sad happens to them) to the point where you feel what it feels like to be in his skin (feeling sadness as he does).
- **Equality.** Respecting the fact that you both count.
- **Energetics.** The exchange of vibrations between you, experienced like an electrical force, drawing you to each other and allowing your interactions to feel like well-oiled and perfectly fitting gears.

- **Enthusiasm.** Excitement about being together.
- **Empowerment.** Supporting each other to feel effective.

The Five A's:

- **Acceptance.** Knowing that you approve of each other.
- **Accommodation.** Making adjustments for each other's needs.
- **Appreciation.** Being responsive to and grateful for each other.
- **Adaptability.** Being able to make changes when necessary.
- **Agreements.** Making and keeping agreements is essential for trust in a relationship. When agreements are broken, trust is shattered and must be carefully rebuilt with new agreements that are kept.

The Five L's:

- **Love.** Cherishing each other and holding one another dear. Love should be unconditional, meaning it does not waver depending on what you look like, earn, do, or say.
- **Loyalty.** Being devoted to each other unquestionably, knowing you would not betray each other.
- **Listening.** Paying attention to what each other says.
- **Laughter.** Humor is the most appealing characteristic that men and women find attractive. Laughter is both physically and psychologically healthy. Having fun is a great way to make you feel good about each other.
- **Lust.** Longing and desire draw you magnetically to someone. For a relationship to survive the stresses and grind of daily life, flashes of lust are necessary to spark the union and keep you together.

The Five T's:

- **Trust.** Feeling you can rely on one another without question, and that you will not hurt each other. Having confidence and faith in each other that you can depend and count on each other without reservation. Feeling safe with each other.
- **Talking.** Communication is key.



Love Bytes

More than three quarters of the 1,500 men and women surveyed in a recent Harlequin Romance Report found great security in being part of a couple. Ninety-eight percent of the men said their lover is their best friend. Half of the respondents said the best reason to marry is "because they love each other" and "want to share their lives together."

- **Time together.** Making time to be together without distractions.
- **Tenderness.** Treating each other with kindness.
- **Thoughtfulness.** Being understanding, showing consideration in thoughts and deeds.

And “Y” for “Yes”:

Wipe the negative out of your life, mind, and love! Affirm, that “yes,” you both care; “yes,” you can make it work; and “yes,” you will try to give each other what you need.

What Else Is Important?

Enjoy this exercise: Go over the following list of relationship traits. Circle the ones that are important to you. Then go back and rank your top 10, with number one being the most important. Have your partner do the same using a different-colored pen. Compare your answers. Discuss the importance of each quality to you individually and as a couple.

What’s Important to Me in a Healthy Relationship

Acceptance	Gentleness	Responsibility
Admiration	Gratitude	Security
Appreciation	Honesty	Sensitivity
Balance	Individuality	Sensuality
Caring	Integrity	Sex
Commitment	Liveliness	Shared values
Common interests	Love	Shared experiences
Communication	Maturity	Sincerity
Compromise	Nonpossessiveness	Stability
Compatibility	Openness	Supportiveness
Fairness	Passion	Tact
Family	Patience	Tolerance
Flexibility	Playfulness	Trust
Forgiveness	Politeness	Virtue
Friendship	Practicality	Warmth
Fun	Reassurance	Other: _____
Generosity	Respect	

From all the surveys I have done over many years of thousands of men and women, here are the most often mentioned qualities: trust, honesty, communication, love, commitment, respect, good sex, and shared values. Other qualities often mentioned include: appreciation, friendship, forgiveness, compromise, passion, fun, not taking each other for granted, not letting stress interfere, learning new things together, and enjoying each other's company.

Sexual energy and compatibility often play a big role in the first phase of a relationship, but as time goes on, other factors become increasingly more important, such as honesty and mutual respect. Some qualities sneak up on you. For example, without being consciously aware of it, your mutual needs for closeness or separateness will affect how satisfied you are with the amount of time you spend together. While many factors affect your happiness together, studies show that the most important factor that determines a lasting relationship is a shared view of life that includes similar lifestyle preferences, career and family priorities, ideas about child-rearing, and shared values.

A recent Arizona State University study showed men are less selective than women when choosing a casual sex partner, while women select mates who better match their self-ratings of attractiveness and social status. When it comes to a longer-term, serious relationship, the gap narrows, whereby both sexes prefer partners close to their own emotional stability, agreeableness, attractiveness, and likelihood of having healthier, more attractive offspring. Additionally, women consider finances more than men.

The Importance of Agreements

"Cross your heart and hope to die!" It's an old-time pledge that kids used to say to each other when they made promises. We learn from childhood that making agreements and keeping them makes us feel secure. It's a sign of friendship.

Notice I said agreements, not agreeing. Each stage of a relationship requires making agreements. Keeping those agreements gives you a sense of integrity within yourself, is a sign of dedication to the relationship, and instills trust in you by your mate. On the other hand, breaking agreements destroys trust, breaks down communication, and erodes your intimacy. When agreements are broken, it is crucial to acknowledge that and make new ones.



Dr. Judy's Rx

Instead of panicking over disagreements, agree to disagree. Feeling you have reached some consensus, even on differing, gives you a feeling of working together.

Healthy or Unhealthy?

Disagreements are not automatically unhealthy in a relationship. They can be a way of considering your opinions, creating new options, expanding your individual and collective vision, and testing your ability to compromise. Healthy disagreements can lead to resolutions that make you more resolved about staying together.

Agreements are often implied instead of stated, with one person assuming the other will behave in a certain way, consistent with his own view. The perceived betrayal is then based on one person's expectations that are not met, and leads to disappointment and distrust. This is common in the case of one person having a so-called "affair" when you may not have made a fair and clear agreement to be sexually exclusive even though one of you assumed it.

I so often heard about that situation during my years of answering people's questions on the radio. One person calls upset about a mate having an affair, and I ask, "Did you agree that you would not see other people?" And the answer is, "We didn't talk about it, but we have been seeing each other for two months and neither of us has gone out with anyone else." I know it's nice to feel committed but you really have to spell out the terms so there are no misunderstandings and one-sided expectations.

Being a Team Player

Healthy love partners become more of who they are with the other person. They realize their potential. Notice I didn't say through the other person—that would be dependence or codependency. In a healthy relationship, you each preserve a separate sense of self, while still feeling and acting like a team.



Love Bytes

A long, healthy relationship is possible when you share the same values and have similar ideas about money, kids, and sex (the three most commonly argued-about topics).

Relationships work when you both have the same goal: to be a happy, healthy family and be in love forever. Few celebrity couples make it. Superstar songstress Gloria Estefan is considered the most family minded singer in the music world. She has been married to her first and only boyfriend for 18 years and often brings her family on the road. Goldie Hawn insists her love of 14 years, Kurt Russell, check with her before taking roles, and even fly home if he's filming on location—to attend family dinners, Little League baseball games, and dance and piano recitals.



Dr. Judy's Rx

When you are in a healthy relationship, you feel connected. In Eastern terms, this connection happens on seven levels called "chakras," or energy centers in your body. These start from the base of your spine and work up your body, and each level is connected to an experience that describes qualities of a healthy relationship: security, sexuality, power, sensitivity, expression, mental connectedness, and spirituality.

Ever watch or play basketball, hockey, football, or any team sport? The team members know where the other members are on the field. They look out for each other. They cover for each other and rush in to pick up the slack if a teammate is out of action for some reason. Each depends on the other to do his job well for the good of all. They're even ready to beat up anyone on the other team who attacks one of their teammates. I'm not advocating violence, but I am recommending a fierce sense of loyalty toward your partner. My mother refers to it as the "mother lion" sense, that she would attack anyone who endangers her cubs. Devoted lovers have that sense toward each other.

Think of you and your partner as a team, working in tandem to reach a goal. Working toward a common goal facilitates closeness and helps you better appreciate each other's good qualities. The goal can be painting the living room, cleaning out the basement, budgeting, planning a trip, or buying a new car. Or the best goal of all—a happy and healthy life together.

The "Is It Healthy?" Quiz

Before you move on to other chapters in this book, let's examine what your current thinking is regarding relationships. Take the following quiz to see how good you are at recognizing the qualities of a healthy relationship. The answers are explained throughout the upcoming chapters, and in Appendix A at the end of this book.

Read each of the following statements and then circle in the appropriate column indicating whether you think it is healthy or unhealthy for your love life.

The “Is It Healthy?” Quiz

Statement	Circle One	
1. You say, “I love her/him to death.”	Healthy	Unhealthy
2. You decide to marry because you’re fed up with the dating scene.	Healthy	Unhealthy
3. You ask for all the details about a past love or affair.	Healthy	Unhealthy
4. You think that dreaming about an ex-love means you don’t love your present mate.	Healthy	Unhealthy
5. You cannot bear to be separated.	Healthy	Unhealthy
6. Your mate’s ex calls all the time.	Healthy	Unhealthy
7. You blindly agree with parents or friends about whether your relationship is good.	Healthy	Unhealthy
8. You disappear from your mate’s children’s lives if you break up (or you don’t let your children see your ex).	Healthy	Unhealthy
9. Whatever worked to help you get ahead in your career, you should also do in your love life.	Healthy	Unhealthy
10. The more easy-going person should always be the one to go along with the other’s plans if there’s a conflict.	Healthy	Unhealthy
11. After you are together for a while, you can finally relax and not worry about impressing one another.	Healthy	Unhealthy
12. Pleasuring yourself or having more sex fantasies or dreams when you’re with your partner than when you were single means that you aren’t having enough sex (or satisfying sex) now.	Healthy	Unhealthy
13. Having lots of sex is essential for a good relationship.	Healthy	Unhealthy

The Ten Commandments of a Healthy Relationship

Before closing this chapter, I'd like you to remember the following commandments. Remember these rules during good and bad times in your relationship:

The Ten Commandments of a Healthy Relationship

1. I will do my best to be the happiest person I can be.
2. I will be honest in my dealings with my partner.
3. I will keep my agreements.
4. I will have integrity about my actions.
5. I will honor all others I am in a relationship with.
6. I will practice forgiveness for myself and others.
7. I will nurture my spiritual soul and that of others.
8. I will accept others for who they are without judging them or insisting they change to suit me.
9. I will be open to suggestions and change when it's in the best interests for both of us.
10. I will trust in the powers that be that what happens is for the best.

A Concept Whose Time Has Come Regarding a Healthy Relationship in the New Millennium

In re-reading this book now, three years from when I first took to tapping the computer keys to write the first edition, I realize that the messages about what it takes to create a healthy relationship are even more true now than ever before. I have always been accused of being “before my time,” but now I see that time has come. The central theme of this book has come true more than ever before: that “health” is the key to a lasting relationship.

“If we have our health, and each other, we have everything,” said one lovely woman to her partner. How well put. That word—“health”—has taken on deeper meaning in this new age. It is no longer just strength of physical being; in fact, a healthy relationship has eight dimensions.

The Eight Dimensions of New Millennium Health

So what exactly does health mean in this new age? Certainly it means a healthy body. You all know that when you are beset with the smallest touch of flu, you lose interest in nearly everything. You want to crawl into bed, pull the covers over your head, and wait for the illness to pass. But a sound body is only one dimension of what it takes for a healthy personal life and lasting relationship.

Certainly a healthy relationship requires the second dimension: a healthy mind. Distractions, obsessions, and confused thinking cloud your judgment about love and prevent you from recognizing true love or allowing it to blossom. Recent awareness about the interaction between body and mind has made it clear how integrally these two are tied. Negative thinking can cause ill health and vice versa. Either, or both of these, can harm your ability to open yourself to lasting love.

The third dimension of healthy love is emotional health. You know what happens when you are deeply hurt by something that goes awry in your life, work, family, or friendships, which can make you so discouraged or depressed that you feel like retreating and giving up hope that anything—or anyone—can be trusted or meaningful. The foundation for emotional health is self-esteem, knowing that you are worthy and capable of loving and being loved. That's why I give you lots of encouragement in Chapter 7, "A Healthy Self First," so you can come together as two healthy and whole beings.

The fourth dimension of a healthy relationship for the new millennium is the ability to extend your love to your social environment—to an "extended" family. The modern concept of "family" actually goes back to ancient days, going beyond blood relatives to include those with whom you develop such close bonds that you wish they had been part of your family tree. Think about the people in your intimate circle—these are the members of your "tribe." In this new millennium it is time to fix—or let go—of relationships that drain you and strain your love life and to embrace those into your tribe (extended family circle) who nurture you. I help you do that in Chapter 26, "It's Not Just the Two of Us."

The fifth dimension of a healthy relationship is having a satisfying daily life. This means handling the practical side of your life, including having your work and financial life in order. Does your work truly satisfy you, or do you get up in the morning and dread your day? It's not just the privileged few who can enjoy what they do for a living; even if you feel trapped or strapped now, you can create more satisfaction in your job and finances. Chapters 20, "Dollars and Sense: A Healthy Couple's Guide to Handling Money Issues," and 21, "Working Nine to ... with Time Off for Love," show you how to do that, with many quizzes, and helpful tips about how to balance your work and love life as well as how to be compatible about money matters—so your investment in each other pays off!

The sixth dimension of a healthy relationship is healthy sexuality. As a sex therapist, I know how a strong sexual connection can draw a couple to each other or how a

“bad sex life” can tear you apart. That’s why an entire part, Part 3, “How to Keep the Passion Alive,” is devoted to keeping the love fires burning!

But there are two other dimensions of a healthy relationship that have emerged in this new century and that are crucial for love to thrive. These dimensions are part of the reason for this new edition of *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to a Healthy Relationship*.

The seventh dimension of a healthy relationship is spiritual connection. That aspect of our lives is being revived in this new century, as evidenced by more books published about “soul,” “spirit,” and “visions” and popular TV shows based on belief of spirit, like *Touched by an Angel* and *Beyond Chance*. The success of these books and shows has surprised many media critics and even the writers and producers themselves. But they reflect the direction that people are turning to in this new age. Chapter 2, “The Seventh Dimension of a Healthy Relationship: Spiritual Love,” shows you how to achieve more “spirit” in your relationship, to reach higher states of bliss.

The eighth dimension of a healthy relationship is the technological connection. The world of computer chips can seem, on the surface, antithetical to striving for spirituality, but technological advances are an undeniable progress in our world today, affecting every aspect of our life. More about how to prevent the information superhighway from derailing your love life and how to harness electronics for a fulfilling relationship are in Chapter 3, “The Eighth Dimension of a Healthy Relationship: Digital Duos in Cyberlove.”

The dimensions of health—emotional, physical, mental, social, practical, sexual, spiritual, and technological—are inextricably tied. But how do you get the whole package together? By working on the individual parts. This book will help you in this journey.

The Least You Need to Know

- Honesty is mentioned most often by men and women as the most important aspect of a healthy relationship.
- Other aspects of a healthy relationship include good communication, compatibility, and teamwork.
- Always keep your agreements, but never assume your mate will conform to certain behaviors unless there has been a previously discussed agreement.
- The eight dimensions of a healthy relationship—physical, mental, emotional, social, practical, sexual, spiritual, and technological—are all possible to attain if you and your partner focus on overcoming any blocks in each area, make necessary changes, embrace your worthiness, and work together for mutual fulfillment.
- Being in the process of building a love built solidly on these eight dimensions is guaranteed to be fulfilling.

