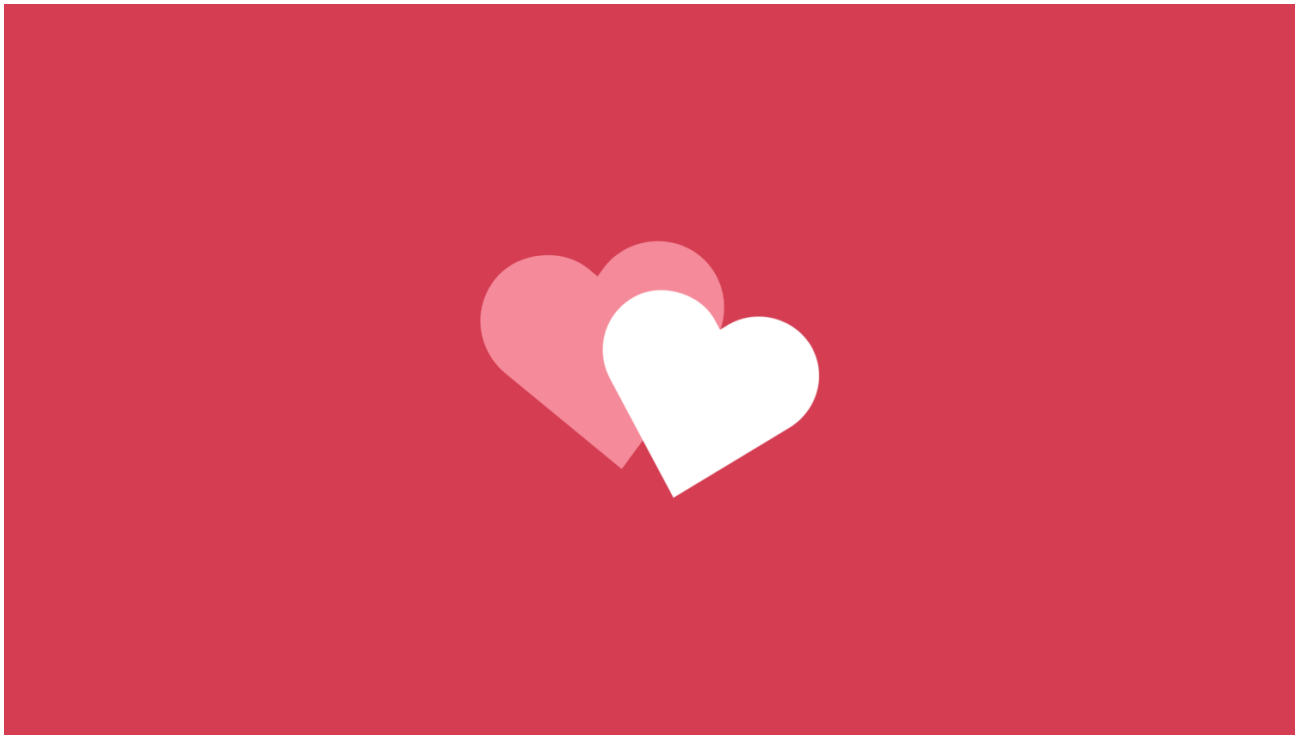
Checklist for a Healthy Love Relationship

Relationships are like house plants. If you want them to flourish, you must tend them carefully. You must fertilize and water them, give them sunlight, pinch off the dead parts, and supply fresh soil from time to time.



- [ ] 1. You have fun together and seize opportunities to celebrate your relationship. There are lots of things you can do in this department. Take time to be silly together. Find ways of enjoying even the simple housekeeping chores. Create new anniversaries. Invent other occasions to celebrate. For inspiration, pretend today is your last day on this earth.

- [ ] 2. You like some of the same things and share some of the same outlook on life. Shared pleasures highlight the bond between you. It is satisfying, even validating, to have company in your likes and dislikes. They remind you that you belong together.

- [ ] 3. You have a life apart as well as a life together. You are both independent people and self-sufficient, able to look after yourself even if one of you is hit by a truck. To avoid undue stress on your relationship, you each need to have a separate life. There may be a girls' night out or one for the guys, time with your sisters, a knitting club meeting or hours spent on the golf course. The idea is to keep you from putting all your emotional needs in one basket. Your engagement with the outside world also allows you to return to each other fresh and ready to reconnect.

- [ ] 4. You trust each other to be honest. It is simply not practical to assume that the other person is dishonest and then wait for proof to the contrary. If you operate on this basis, your partner will eventually fulfill your negative expectations. It is better to agree between you that you will both be honest and above board. Then, if there is a problem, you can claim to have been blindsided.

- [ ] 5. You ask each other up front for what you want (no mind reading is expected). No two people think alike. Your beliefs as to what your partner should know about your inner workings are very subject to bias and may be completely without foundation. To avoid misunderstandings, ask for what you want.

- [ ] 6. You are each able to set limits and observe those set by the other person so that you don't meddle in each other's business. Please stay out of my handbag and cell phone. Don't text me after 9:00 pm. When I'm upset, don't force me to talk before I'm ready—and give me space if I ask for it.

- [ ] 7. You know how to show respect for each other, heeding each other's stated preferences. Don't multitask when I am talking to you! When I need to speak with you, please make time for me or tell me when you will be available. Please listen

to me. If my words don't make sense, ask questions. Please make eye contact. People differ in what they want as a sign of respect. You honor each other by remembering the quirks.

- [ ] 8. You provide help with your partner's problems only when asked for help. For example, don't tell me how to raise my child, how to speak to my mother, or how to respond to my boss unless I ask for your advice. And I will follow the same rules where your life is concerned. I will listen without butting in.

- [ ] 9. You take a team approach to life's challenges. When there's a problem, you don't draw up the battle lines. Instead you identify the sore spot and suggest that the two of you must put your heads together to reach a solution. I want to quit my job. What would that mean for us? Our child needs to stop tantruming. How do you feel about that?

- [ ] 10. You listen to each other without interrupting. People who talk over or through other people are trying to take control in order to offset their anxiety. The people who are interrupted feel unheard. The best way to persuade anyone of anything is first to listen and second to demonstrate an understanding of the other person's point of view. The other person will then be more obliging.

- [ ] 11. One of you calls for a serious conversation when something goes wrong between you. Don't let problems fester. Someone must say, "Wait, there's an issue here. We need to talk." In this way you jointly produce solutions and move forward, and the glitch just past doesn't produce lingering bad feelings that worsen over time.

- [ ] 12. You both fine-tune your communication by focusing on things to change going forward rather than bad things in the past. The past is a goldmine of mishaps. No one can change it. If something went awry, your best bet is to figure out how to avoid a repeat performance in the future. If you talk about it as if it were an unending series of offenses extending from medieval times to Armageddon, you are actually reinforcing it.

- [ ] 13. You are both able to halt a conversation when it goes bad. Your relationship is fragile and needs protecting. Insults, accusations, harsh judgments, and verbal or physical destruction all undermine the foundation. You both must be able to step back and say, "Wait, we must stop talking about this now, because we are starting to hurt each other."

- [ ] 14. You express emotions to each other without insults, accusations, or destruction, verbal or otherwise. It is okay—even good—to express anger up front. But voice it as something that you are feeling. Say, "It makes me so mad when you—" Don't say, "That's the stupidest thing I ever heard!" or "You are such a jerk!" Such statements sound as though your judgment is somehow superior to that of your partner—an implication that will never win you points.

- [ ] 15. You both accept responsibility for what you said and did. You must acknowledge your words and your actions. You are not responsible, however, for what the other person thought or heard. The distinction is important, because we all bring our own subjective bias to reality.

- [ ] 16. You are both able to apologize and make amends. If you didn't make mistakes you wouldn't be human. You want to be able to accept the mistakes you identify and to forgive yourself. You also want to be able to forgive others. Your acceptance of yourself will be an indicator of your capacity to reach out to others, make amends, and put injuries behind you.

- [ ] 17. You communicate with each other about problems before telling others about them. Don't rat each other out to third parties! The problem between you must be solved between you to protect the integrity of your relationship. As a matter of principle you want to protect it from outsiders.

- [ ] 18. You show each other appreciation and caring, focusing on feelings rather than on the supposedly correct version of the facts. People can argue about the "facts" of a situation until the cows come home, because no two people will see it the same way—and there's always a question about where the problem started. The facts don't really matter. What does matter is the way people react. When you stood me up and went out with someone else, I felt hurt, ignored, betrayed. When you took something that belonged to me, I felt angry and violated. And so forth.

- [ ] 19. You don't sweat the small stuff. Some things just aren't worth the fuss. If you are in doubt, ask yourself: in twenty years, who will know the difference? It won't matter if the floor wasn't vacuumed or if someone forgot to buy milk or eggs. Decide that when your head hits the pillow at night, you will forget the petty worries that plagued you throughout the day. Start fresh in the morning.

- [ ] 20. Together and individually you are a force for good in the world. Our own woes are dwarfed by uncertainty and suffering

on a global scale. We can do worse than to pay it forward each day or to do some good as a couple and not just as individuals. When we join forces to make this positive difference, we honor the friendship between us.

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