



**FIVE THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING  
WHICH DIRECTION TO TAKE YOUR  
RELATIONSHIP**

# History

Relationship history is very important. It shows up most obviously in the form of family photo albums and children. These are the things that ground us in space and time. They often help to make sense of the present and create a foundation for future. If, when a couple looks at their history, they see about the same thing, the likelihood of moving forward together increases dramatically. If, however, each holds a very different understanding of the past, reconciliation can be very difficult. Joining for a solid future together requires a joint understanding of the past.

So, ask yourselves if the two of you see roughly the same thing when you look at your relationship past. If you do, choosing to move forward together can be good. If you don't, moving forward together will be difficult.

- Break your history into five-year segments. How were the first five years? ...the second five years? And so on...
- When you listen to yourself talk about your relationship and its history, what do you hear yourself saying?
- When you listen to your partner talking about your relationship history, what do you hear him/her saying?

# Strengths

Identify those things that are clearly relationship strengths. Notice things that were strengths at the beginning of the relationship and those that are currently strengths. Pay attention to how solidly these strengths are held. Do they show up often? Are they noticed by both of you? Do they offer comfort and security? Are they things that will matter in the future? Can they be sustained?

Sometimes strengths are transient. For example, having and raising children can be a relationship strength but when they get older and create their own lives the strength they represented earlier may evaporate.

Noticing strengths is a bit like attending to resources in anticipation of retirement. Will there be enough to sustain us over time?

- Do you value the same things?
- Where does physical intimacy fit into your relationship? A strength? ...a weakness?
- Can you have conversations that feel good... connecting?

## Response to Incompatibilities

No couple is completely compatible. There are always points of disagreement...points of disconnect. It's not incompatibility that dooms a relationship so much as it is the couple's response to their incompatibility. Couples can live full, deep and productive lives together despite their incompatibility if they are able to respect and feel respected. It's when differences result in an inability to respect that trouble shows up.

For example, a husband and wife may have very different parenting styles. If, however, they are able to see the value in the other's style and respect what it brings to the situation, life together can be dynamic and productive. If, on the other hand, each sees the other's style as fundamentally flawed and even dangerous to childrearing, their incompatibility will destabilize their relationship and each will have a hard time feeling respected for what he/she offers.

So, ask yourself if the ways in which you and your partner are incompatible actually strengthens the relationship. Notice how easily or how difficultly you feel respected by your partner when incompatibility shows up.

- When you notice a difference, what happens next?
- Do you differences show up in areas you consider important?

# Social Support

Everyone knows “no one is an island.” At our core we are relational beings. We all want to love and be loved. It’s basic to who we are. In the same way, relationships grow and sustain themselves best with they are supported by friends and family. When those around us communicate their appreciation for the relationship we are in, it is much easier to appreciate it ourselves. When they withdraw their support for our relationship it becomes difficult to maintain the level of commitment necessary for relationship growth.

So, look around you at friends and family. Do they see good things when they look at your relationship? Are they supportive? Or, do they see you needing to move away and find a new direction for your life?

- Are there people out there who would be sad if the two of you were NOT together?
- Do you have friends/family who casually check-in with you to see how you’re doing?

# Hopes and Dreams

Like history, how we see the future is very important. Goals, hopes and dreams are the kind of things that bring about forward movement. They give us something to work toward...a direction. A relationship without hopes and dreams flounders at best and is dead in the water at worst. It's important that a couple have occasional conversations about what they hope for the future. It can be something as simple as conversations about a vacation and as complicated as what to do in retirement.

So, take note of the future you and your partner envision and how often that is a topic of conversation. Notice how similar your dreams are and how much each of you supports the other's hopes.

- Can you dream out loud with your partner?
- What happens when/if you do?
- Are you goals similar?