

How to Tell If Your New Relationship Will Last

When it comes to getting reliable relationship advice, whom can you trust? Everyone has his or her own opinion, usually based on bitter experience, or long-term love. So it's lucky that lots of research has been done in this area, and we're now able to offer relationship advice that's based on research rather than hearsay.

How you start discussions with your partner is absolutely vital in determining your future prospects together. It's not how much you argue, but how you argue that determines your relationship prognosis. According to this well regarded research, how you conduct the 'start-up phase' (the first two minutes) of disagreements or disputes reliably predicts your chances of being together 5 years later. Generally, the more negative emotions you display during this initial period, the more likely your relationship is to fail. Apparently, the best predictor that a disagreement will be resolved is a female partner that can initiate discussion of a problem 'softly' (that is without negative emotion or criticism), and a male partner that can respond openly rather than defensively.

How you handle conflict is the most critical predictor of relationship satisfaction. The five common relationship cancers are criticism, defensiveness, contempt, stonewalling, and flooding.

A) Criticism rather than complaint

Attacking statements starting with 'you' are criticisms. A complaint would often start with an 'I' statement and be far less confrontational. Example: "You always spoil everything!" would be a criticism. Where as: "I really don't like it when you refuse to speak to my mother!" would be a specific complaint and not a global attack on the partner's character.

B) Defensiveness

Another major predictor of eventual relationship breakdown is over-defensiveness. If someone begins yelling as soon as their partner broaches a subject and feels overly threatened or attacked (whether or not they are being criticised or complained to) and this is a continuing and regular feature of the couple's interactions then the relationship is in crisis.

C) Contempt

Name calling, face pulling, cursing at, insulting your partner and basically behaving as if they revolt you can be termed 'contempt.' Again John Gottman and his researchers (1) in Seattle found that if this was a regular feature in the start-up phase of a disagreement then the relationship's days were very likely to be numbered and the couple much less likely to last.

D) Withdrawal or 'stone walling'

Emotionally withdrawing or stonewalling, 'closing your ears' or 'shutting off' when a partner is complaining is another huge predictor of breakdown. Whilst criticising was generally more of a female trait, men used stonewalling more. The partner may withdraw during conversations by 'switching off' or ultimately spend more and more time away from the relationship as a way of 'escaping.'

E) Flooding:

This is the habit of literally flooding one's partner with words and emotion to such a degree that they begin to drown. You can flood your husband with intensity,

long-winded attacks, repetition, and an obsessive recounting of details which all overwhelm the other person to such a degree that nothing productive can occur. It most often results in stonewalling by the person who is being flooded.

Rather surprisingly, if even one of these factors (A to E) is present regularly in disputes, the outlook for the relationship is poor