

JUDGING RELATIONSHIP POTENTIAL

By Christine Knife, LCSW

“How do I know if this is the one?”, I’m often asked. This is single handedly the most commonly asked relationship question that everyone wants answered. Unfortunately, there is no definitive test or magical combination of characteristics that will alleviate the fear and risk that many of us feel when entering into a new relationship. I have often referred to myself as a *hopeless romantic*. However, I do not believe in the concept of “the one”. There are many “ones” out there for us in life. Those people you admire who currently possess a long lasting, healthy relationship do not do so because they found the *needle in the haystack*. There are many potentially healthy relationships out there just waiting to happen. However, certain relationship characteristics must be present if a relationship is to have any real potential at all.

Too often, people are focused on common interests as the main measure for potential in a new relationship. However, I could line up 10 people with the same interests as you and that does not mean that they are necessarily capable of having a relationship. Your ability to communicate as a couple far surpasses any other characteristic as the best gauge of the relationship’s chances for survival and happiness. *Communication is key*. The ability to tolerate, negotiate and eventually accept each other’s differences is another key indicator of a relationship’s potential. That means that once the differences are acknowledged both partners must show willingness to compromise for the sake of the relationship. The ability to bring up and deal with uncomfortable topics in a safe and respectful manner is another big indicator of the relationship’s potential for longevity. A relationship cannot thrive if either partner is afraid to discuss how he or she is being affected by the other partner’s behavior.

If you have just started dating then you have the perfect opportunity to develop your internal gage for measuring a relationship’s potential. We all operate in *la la land* when we first enter a new relationship. Wake up! Start paying attention early on to the flexibility of the person you are dating. If you are dating someone who *repeatedly* says, “this is just how I am...take it or leave it”, then you had better leave it. There is nothing wrong with someone who doesn’t want to change. However, this person should remain single because this is never going to work with someone who wants a happy and fulfilling relationship. If in hindsight your date said something that did not set well with you, then you should bring it up. Don’t be afraid to rock the boat. Let’s find out early on how your date does with honest questioning and possible differing of opinions. Also, how does your date do with compromise? Are you always going to your date’s house and him or her rarely going to yours? Are you always doing what your date wants and not what you want? Lastly, express your feelings early on. How does your date handle your emotions? Are they validated and acknowledged? This is essential as well if a relationship is to have any real potential. Again, communication is the key. Focus on this at the beginning and save yourself a lot of wasted time if it is not happening.

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