

Integrity Counseling Inc.

Five Stages of Relationships

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1. Happiness Bubble-Romance stage: We feel elated, fulfilled, ecstatic. We put our mate on a pedestal. They're "special, perfect, irreplaceable." We have a fantasy of who we need the other person to be and we project that fantasy on to them. We only see and hear what we need to and bury any facts or feelings that are contrary. There are many hidden agendas, from within self and our partner. We tend to effectively manipulate each other in order to obtain a match of our version of the perfect relationship and try to keep the Happiness Bubble intact. Co-dependency is present at this stage. We have two, less than whole individuals trying to make a whole. There are often under-currents of desperation and fear of abandonment. Marriages are formed with the unspoken understanding that we will maintain this fantasy forever.

Positive aspect of this stage: We need to bond and dream in order have the motivation to do the work required in the next stages.

2. Bursting Bubble stage: We start becoming disillusioned with our partner and are faced with the loss of our fantasy. Our partner is falling off of their pedestal. Denial of their "negative" attributes is fading, and we feel anger, disappointment, grief, and sometimes rage. A power struggle ensues. The guilt trips and manipulations are now more overt. We are desperate to revive our fantasy. This stage is characterized by arguments or withdrawing, physical illness, seductive sexual ploys or withholding of sex, increased use of alcohol/drugs/food, and sometimes violence. We discover that two halves don't make a whole. Relationships often end here or there is a lifetime of power struggles and withdrawing, which is a "cold war" type of relationship.

The first two stages represent the unconscious relationship. The next 3 stages represent the conscious relationship.

3. Self Discovery stage: "OK, if my partner won't meet my needs, then I'll do it myself." We become more self-reliant and have less need for our partner's approval. We start finding out who we really are-strengths and weaknesses. This stage involves exploring and updating your programming regarding your self concept and what you value in terms of relationships, sexuality, spirituality, finances, relatives, work, play, friends, living habits, parenting styles, etc.

4. Bridge Building stage: We begin sharing and asserting our real selves with our partner, so true relating can happen. We are now two, self-knowledgeable adults attaining what we want or need through honesty and negotiation. We are no longer being demanding or manipulative. We consciously choose to stay in the relationship, instead of being guilted into anything. We only agree to give what we are truly willing to give. We look for win/win solutions, instead of win/lose. We use "I" statements when communicating, i.e., "I feel scared, I need or want", instead of "you always or you never." We ask for help and graciously receive it. There is real compromise, instead of sacrifice and then resentment. We identify and share our deepest desires, feelings, and fears with our partner.

5. Reconnection stage: This is the pay-off for doing the hard work of self-discovery and bridge building. We now have a foundation of trust and freedom of choice. We have real knowledge of self and of our partner, not imagined. Co-dependence is replaced with interdependence. Two wholes are now working together for the greater good of both. Each knows they can stand alone, which decreases fear of abandonment. There is a deep sense of personal integrity. Agreements are kept and renegotiated as needed. Sex is now making love, not just getting relief from the stress of the relationship. Sex now contains a spiritual and emotional connection with safety and honesty.

Both partners now recognize that growth and a continued deepening of their relationship is a life-time process and commit to working through stages 3, 4, and 5 on a continual basis. It's never done and it keeps getting better!!

This process is designed to heal our wounded, inner child and to complete and heal unfinished business from our past. It takes tremendous commitment, heart and courage!!

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