



# Marriage Matters

Volume 1, Issue 3

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

For Dating Couples

### How Attached is Your Relationship?

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As a relationship develops, a couple's attachment to each other grows stronger. According to Dr. John Van Epp, author of *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*, attachment in healthy relationships is based on five factors: knowledge, trust, reliance, commitment, and sex.

For the strongest and most enduring attachment relationship, each of these five factors should always be at or near the same level of intensity. For example, a couple's level of commitment should not be significantly higher than their level of trust or their level of knowledge about each other's dreams, likes, dislikes, values, etc. Understanding more about these five factors, communicating openly and honestly about any differences, and striving to keep each in balance can help build a solid foundation for a happy marriage.

**Knowledge.** Knowing your partner requires time. When couples marry they can be surprised by how little they really know about each other. Things to "know" include understanding your partner's likes and dislikes, their family background, and past dating experiences. It is important for couples to learn about each other's values and important relationships to clearly "know" the circumstances or situations in which conflicts might arise. Then couples can compare their compatibility.

**Trust.** Like knowledge, trust develops slowly over time as each person in the relationship behaves as expected, communicates honestly, and follows through on their promises. Trust can also result from times of disagreement when couples develop and perform a plan for handling disagreements in a positive way. This trust helps each person in a relationship predict how their partner may behave in a given situation.

**Reliance.** As a couple develops their knowledge of and trust in each other, they learn whether or not they can "rely" on their partner to meet their needs. Knowing each other's needs, strengths,

and weaknesses can help couples avoid unhealthy emotional demands and unrealistic expectations.

Learning to balance personal and relationship needs and learning when to rely on each other are essential components of a healthy "give and take" relationship. Over time, all couples will endure hardships. The degree to which they successfully navigate through them is dependent upon their ability to mutually support each other.

**Commitment.** Choosing to stay in a relationship for a lifetime requires a commitment to the relationship and your partner. In other words, each person must be dedicated to maintaining and regularly improving the quality of that relationship. Commitment also involves a sense of obligation to each other to remain in the relationship, even when times are hard or emotions are at a low.

**Sex.** Physical sharing between partners can increase their feelings of attachment. In fact, when the physical sharing between a couple matches their level of trust, knowledge, reliance, and commitment, the intimacy shared can be more fulfilling to them.

Positive attachments lead to strong healthy relationships that survive tough times, celebrate strengths, and remember good times. By understanding how attachment grows, a couple can purposely build the foundation for a successful marriage.



## ACTIVITY

According to Van Epp, forming a positive plan to handle disagreements helps to foster trust. Think of a recent disagreement you had with your partner. What steps did you and your partner take to resolve the disagreement? Were you both satisfied with how you solved the problem ("the process") as well as the outcome? Together, create your own positive plan to enhance trust that can be applied to most disagreements.