

Bringing children into a relationship changes it radically. Couples with children learn to successfully integrate them into their relationship.

Positive signs include:

You accept that there are times when you must place your own needs after the needs of your child. You do your best to stay in touch with each other emotionally and nurture your relationship. You set aside time every week for the two of you to spend time alone together.

The following signs indicate that you have not fully integrated children into your relationship:

You resent the times when you must put your child's needs ahead of your own. You are overly focused on your children. You have lost touch with each other emotionally. You hardly ever find time to be alone with your partner.

Every relationship is challenged by crises and life transitions. Losing a job, a death in the family, a serious accident, or other significant event can test any relationship.

If your relationship has successfully navigated life's crises and transitions, the following statements are most likely true:

You never blame each other for the stress that comes with the crisis. You face difficult times as a team. You look for ways to support each other emotionally. You help each other keep your perspective when there is a crisis. You seek outside support during times of crisis (talking to friends and family, seeing a counselor, etc).

If the crises and life transitions have done harm to your relationship, you have probably experienced the following during the difficult times:

One partner seems to emotionally abandon the other.
One partner blames the other.
One partner becomes extremely angry, worried, or anxious.
You don't seek support from people who could help you.

Successful relationships are safe places where anger, conflict, and differences may safely be expressed. Each partner is allowed to have and

express his or her own views.

The following signs point to this being true:

You have had serious conflicts, but you have not allowed them to damage your relationship. You respect the other person's right to stand his or her ground. You may find anger uncomfortable, but you accept that it is a part of life.

In relationships where it is not safe to express conflict, the following things are true:

Your conflicts have harmed your relationship.
You disagree about many things but never talk about them.
You both try to intimidate the other into agreeing with your point of view.
Anger is so uncomfortable that you avoid it.
There are no limits to what you will do when you become angry.

Successful long-term relationships have a positive sexual component. The partners take care to protect their sexual relationship from the demands of work, family, and outside affections.

The signs of such a relationship are:

You sometimes have different levels of sexual need, but you make room for each other's changing levels of desire. You are honest with each other about your changing sexual desires and feelings. You set aside time for your sexual relationship and protect your privacy.

If a sexual relationship is less than satisfying, the following statements are true:

You find it hard to talk about sex.
Sex is like a battlefield.
You never have time for sex.

Successful partners share laughter and fun times, and work to maintain their mutual interests.

For example:

You have fun together.
You make each other laugh.

You find each other interesting.
You each have your own interests that you pursue on your own.

If your relationship is becoming stale, you will tend to describe it like this:

You rarely have fun together anymore.
You don't laugh much when you are together.
You are bored with each other.
You avoid spending time together.
You have few shared interests.

Relationships that last are safe places where you can let down your guard and be vulnerable. You know you can count on the other to comfort and encourage you.

If this is true, you might describe it as follows:

It is okay to be vulnerable when you are with your partner. You understand each other. You encourage each other. You pay attention to each other's moods and respond when the other seems needy.

If your relationship is not a very safe place, the following is probably true:

It is not safe to be needy and vulnerable in your relationship.
You exhaust each other's emotional reserves.
You don't pay attention to each other's moods.
When you are worried about something, you avoid telling your partner.
You feel worse about yourself when you are with your partner.

People who have successful long-term relationships stay romantic and idealistic about each other, even though they are growing older.

These are some of the signs of such a relationship:

You have good memories of when you fell in love with your partner.
You are glad to be growing older with your partner.

If you have lost some of the romance of your relationship, you are likely to agree with these statements:

You can hardly remember the days when the two of you first fell in love.

Seeing your partner grow older makes you feel badly because it reminds you that you are growing older.

You have far more positive moments in your relationship than negative ones.

Some signs of positive moments include:

You show affection for each other.

You apologize for the hurtful things you may say or do.

You show each other empathy.

You are polite to each other.

Examples of negative moments include:

Your discussions often leave you feeling frustrated.

You often pick on each other.

Many of your conversations turn into arguments.

You behave disrespectfully toward each other.

You are physically violent with each other.

People in successful relationships are able to manage conflict productively. They are skilled at keeping times of discord from getting out of control.

For example:

You call a time-out when your emotions escalate.

You know how to calm yourselves down.

You take care to speak and listen not defensively.

You take care to validate the other person's point of view, even when you disagree with it.

Couples in less successful relationships allow conflict to become damaging in the following ways:

You blame each other.

You treat each other disrespectfully.

You deny responsibility for your own actions.

You become so angry that you leave or emotionally withdraw.