

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Starting The New Year By Improving Relationships

from the American Counseling Association

Relationships come in many flavors. They range from very casual to quite close, such as those individuals we consider real friends, often people we have known for a long time. And closest of all, as you might expect, is usually with someone with whom we are romantically and emotionally involved, a spouse or a significant other.

But what many of us fail to appreciate is that all good relationships require work and that's especially true as a relationship ages. While it may often feel that our associations with others simply "happen," these connections require thought and effort if we want them to endure and grow.

One important step in strengthening a relationship is simply being accepting. No two people are exactly alike and what often helps establish a relationship is that each party brings something a little different to the association. However, over time, we may forget that some of those differences were what helped establish the initial relationship. We, instead, may unconsciously be trying to make the other person more like ourselves. It helps to step back, evaluate what makes that relationship special, and refocus on the positive things rather than the differences you may have.

Good relationships also have to be able to survive disagreements. There are going to be times when friends or spouses are going to have differing opinions about a particular subject, with each going in quite an opposite direction. While it might seem nice (if boring), if everyone agreed all the time, for a relationship to thrive it's necessary sometimes to accept the other person's thoughts and to simply agree to disagree.

Another basic element for a good relationship is being able to communicate with the other person. That sounds simple, but in our busy, often stressful world, it can be easy to ignore someone you care about without really meaning to do it.

The key is to take time to focus on how well you are communicating with those you care about. And that doesn't just mean sharing all of your ideas and problems. It means making time for the other person, asking questions and really listening, especially when there are problem areas.

Improving your relationships is a wonderful resolution to make for the New Year. And making it work isn't all that hard. It just requires paying more attention and making time to listen to and enjoy that other person.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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