

Why Trust Matters in Relationships and Marriage

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Trust is a valuable asset in every relationship. It is the cornerstone that shapes an individual's ability to engage in a happy relationship. Trust provides the comfort in a relationship where two people can learn to count on each other. People develop the ability to trust in relationships based on experiences they have had throughout their lifespan, beginning in infancy. Thus, trust can be thought of as a process.

Most marriage and relationship education (MRE) curricula discuss trust and its importance in successful relationships. However, this concept can be difficult to both define and explain. Marriage educators may want to teach some necessary keys in developing a trusting relationship and offer exercises and/or other tools that could enhance trust between partners. It is important to present this information in a manner that does not bring up past issues where a couple's trust may have been violated. Rather, trust may be presented in a strengths-based way by discussing the five keys necessary for both creating and building on trust.

This Tip Sheet offers concepts for MRE practitioners to help explain this complex issue, and the keys to



it. Trust is something that needs to be developed and nurtured in any relationship. Helping couples understand that both spouses have a role in creating a trusting relationship is important when teaching MRE.

Trust between couples is built by investing time in each other. Individuals relax when time spent together is respectful and honoring, maximized and fulfilling, and rewarding (even when challenging). Consequently, trust matters as a tool to help construct a healthy relationship.

T The first key is **time**. Healthy relationships and healthy marriages require time to learn each other's likes and dislikes, hot button issues, favorite topics, life experiences and expectations. Trust between couples is built by investing time in each other. Individuals relax when time spent together is respectful and honoring, maximized and fulfilling, and rewarding (even when challenging). Consequently, trust matters as a tool to help construct a healthy relationship. Even couples who have been together for a long time must continue to invest time in each other to nurture the trust in the relationship.

R The second key is **reliability**. Reliability is important because of each person's need to have someone they can safely count on. As couples

grow together, spouses take on specific roles and responsibilities in the relationship or family. The ability to rely on each other to effectively manage a family or marriage together is essential to sustain trust. Reliability builds an abiding trust that is essential to successful relationships.

U Understanding is the third key in deepening a trusting relationship. The greater the understanding, the more likely it is that spouses will develop unconditional love. Many relationships suffer from what appear to be half-hearted attempts at understanding and accepting differences in each other. Part of this is also understanding when relationship expectations are realistic and when they are unrealistic. It is difficult to establish trust without understanding. It is easier to walk away than to walk in someone else's shoes.

When a person exhibits behaviors in which they sacrifice something for the good of the relationship, trust develops. This can be thought of as the opposite of selfishness in a relationship. It is difficult because many people (unknowingly) expect greater sacrifice from their spouses than they are willing to make themselves.

S The fourth key in developing a trusting relationship is **sacrifice**. When a person exhibits behaviors in which they sacrifice something for the good of the relationship, trust develops. This can be thought of as the opposite of selfishness in a relationship. It is difficult because many people (unknowingly) expect greater sacrifice from their spouses than they are willing to make themselves. Sacrifices of both partners must be balanced and must be mutual in order to avoid any resentment of one partner toward the other. A healthy marriage is the product of two individuals, each making sacrifices for each other to better the relationship. It is helpful for partners to discuss with one another what their expectations are

and be open about what sacrifices each partner feels he or she is making for their relationship or family.

T The fifth and final key to develop a trusting relationship or marriage is **thankfulness**. This means recognizing and appreciating a partner's efforts. As spouses or partners grow in relationships, they should never be taken for granted. They should always be shown they are appreciated for their kindness, concern and care. Doing so expresses to them that they are important, and their efforts are rewarded. Trusting one's heart to another demands reciprocity, as it is easier to continue to perform lovingly when your gestures are appreciated. Thankfulness matters, because one will seldom continue to pour love onto an unappreciative person. A lack of thankfulness can doom a relationship.

Understanding the necessary keys of trust is important for couples to thrive and grow in their relationship. Marriage educators can help couples create and build trust by encouraging them to spend time connecting with one another in meaningful ways and understanding each other's needs. Couples should also be taught ways to communicate compromise, respect and appreciation of each other, as these skills foster trust. A marriage

in which each spouse can be trusted fully will provide dividends for their family for years to come.

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