

Why Maturity Matters in Relationships and Marriage

Maturity plays a major role in the success or demise of relationships.

Society has historically placed limits on behaviors based on chronological age (such as voting and driving restrictions) because age is typically a measure of maturity. However, age and maturity are not necessarily synonymous, especially when it comes to relationships. Maturity plays a major role in the success or demise of relationships. Therefore, it is essential for marriage and relationship practitioners to understand how maturity affects a person's ability to understand the concepts and implement the skills needed to form and maintain healthy relationships.

Certain life experiences are foundational to the maturation process. However, maturity in relationships can also be learned. If couples are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, they can develop a mature perspective about relationships.

Maturity and Trust

Maturity influences a person's ability to truly commit to a relationship for life and understand that commitment implies giving up all other partner choices. This, in turn, determines the level of trust and dependability present in a relationship. Maturity allows partners to



be supported in exploring individual interests so their own uniqueness can be honored. It also maintains the integrity of the commitment and restores trust when it has been violated.

Many Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) class participants may currently be struggling with difficulties in their relationship or marriage tied to past hurts. Maturity enables couples to stick it out when the going gets tough and to let go of negative feelings. Mature people love their partners unconditionally and do not stay focused on resentments or imperfections.

Maturity and Forgiveness

A person's ability to forgive their partner when needed—a distinguishing characteristic in successful long-term relationships—is also influenced by maturity. Many Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) class participants may currently be struggling with difficulties in their relationship or marriage tied to past hurts. Maturity enables couples to stick it out when the going gets tough and to let go of negative feelings. Mature people love their partners unconditionally and do not stay focused on resentments or imperfections.

Maturity and Personal Responsibility

Maturity plays a role in a person's ability to accept responsibility for his or her own thoughts, feelings and

behaviors. It governs a person's ability to monitor his or her thinking and control the various emotions (anxiety, frustration, etc.) inherent in any intimate relationship. When tensions are high in a relationship, it is common to handle the pain by blaming the other partner. In emotionally mature relationships, partners are able to have realistic expectations about relationships, marriage and their partner. Emotionally mature individuals do not blame their partner or others for any anger or anxiety they feel.

Maturity and Effective Communication

Because maturity affects emotional control and reasoning, it affects a couple's ability to successfully make joint decisions, work together toward relationship goals, and to resolve conflicts effectively. Mature relationships offer space for individuals to be vulnerable and share ideas and feelings, rather than to dominate. Maturity clears the way for shared communication and allows for an openness to the other person's perspective, allowing conflicts to be more respectfully understood and resolved. Mature partners own their contributions to the relationship (both positive and negative) and are able to personally search for solutions to problems that arise.

Challenges in the Marriage and Relationship Education Setting

Teaching the necessary skills to communicate and resolve conflicts is one way to enhance maturity in the relationships of the participants you serve. As you facilitate your MRE class, identify those in your class who may need to work on these concepts more than others. Set goals with these individuals to address areas for personal growth. Do not make assumptions about a person's maturity level based on their age. Rather, observe participants to assess for immaturity.

As you facilitate your MRE class, identify those in your class who may need to work on these concepts more than others. Set goals with these individuals to address areas for personal growth. Do not make assumptions about a person's maturity level based on their age. Rather, observe participants to assess for immaturity. You also may want to have them assess themselves to bring about the self awareness that will ultimately lead to identifying individual goals.

You also may want to have them assess themselves to bring about the self awareness that will ultimately lead to identifying individual goals.

Immature participants may see some of the material as being impossible or unreasonable to accomplish. They may be closed to the notion that they personally present barriers to their own relationship success and/or may be uncomfortable with some of the educational content in your class. The good news is that while a person may not have control over their age or level of intelligence, every person can choose to develop appropriate and healthy relationship skills that are conducive to more satisfying and lasting relationships. This concept is especially important for young adults and teenagers to understand.

Maturity plays a role in a participant's ability to understand and integrate the material you present. It is important to understand the ways in which maturity can affect a person's ability to have and/or maintain a healthy relationship. Teaching these concepts in your MRE class will help participants identify areas where their personal growth will lead to a more satisfying relationship with their partner.

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) would like to thank Joyce Webb, PhD, a psychologist with 18 years experience working with couples, for her contributions to this Tip Sheet. This is a product of the NHMRC, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR, and Jeanette Hercik, PhD, and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH.