

# What's the secret to a lasting relationship?

This month, three readers discuss compatibility, taking your partner for granted and whether there's such a thing as the 'perfect couple'...

## What key things do you do to ensure your relationship remains a happy one?

**Genevieve:** "We'll send the children to their grandparents so the two of us can go for a meal, or watch a film. That reminds us that we're a couple in love and not just parents."

**Pam:** "Similarly Justin and I really make time to talk to each other. We have regular date nights, but that doesn't always involve going out – often on Fridays or Saturdays we'll get some nice food, put the children to bed, turn off the TV and just have a really

good chat. I find that from Monday to Thursday we're like ships passing in the night and although we see each other, we don't get a chance to talk properly. It's important to make time for that, so you can get things off your chest and also just enjoy each other's company."



## What are the basic requirements to ensure a happy and enduring relationship?

**Sherylin:** "Having good quality time together is really important, but I think it's also essential to maintain your independence and remain your own person. Wanting to always do the same thing as your partner and not have any of your own interests is often when problems will arise because you both end up feeling suffocated."

**Genevieve:** "For me it's honesty. I'm not just talking about being faithful – if you don't open up, the other person won't get to know the real you and the partnership

## READER PROFILES:



**PAM BARRETT, 38**  
Lives with Justin and their two children in Chester and runs domestic cleaning franchise Bright and Beautiful. She says it's important for couples to make time to talk.



**GENEVIEVE ZAWADA, 41**  
Has been married for 23 years and has two children. She arranges events for lovematchweekends.co.uk and thinks honesty is key to any relationship.



**SHERYLIN THOMPSON**  
A relationship counsellor and psychotherapist

will suffer in the long run because you're not expressing yourself."

**Pam:** "It's also really important to compromise. Relationships are about give and take so you have to be open to the fact that you might not always get your own way. People seem much more open to compromise in their friendships than they are in their relationships, but I think you should treat your partner as you would a friend. If you force your hand all the time they will just resent you for it."

## How important is compatibility to success?

**Genevieve:** "Oh I think you've got to have things in common and the same interests – that's the foundation of a good relationship."

**Pam:** "You don't necessarily have to come from the same background or like everything the other person likes, but

having the same family values and ethics is important because that means you'll reduce conflict when making decisions in the future. A common sense of humour helps too – you've got to be able to laugh together to enjoy good times and keep smiling through the bad."

**Sherylin:** "I think as long as your personalities are compatible and you're both open to each other having separate interests you can make a relationship work. But if one of you is less flexible about that it will cause problems."

## How can change affect a relationship?

**Sherylin:** "A relationship is strong when it can withstand major changes, whether that's having a baby, relocating, changing jobs, or experiencing a bereavement. As time moves on people naturally change and life changes around you. As well as accepting that for yourself, you have to accept the same for your partner. You ➤



can't expect them not to grow or change over 20 years."

**Genevieve:** "The problem is people don't always change at the same pace – one person might start enjoying nights in, while the other wants to go out every weekend, so it comes down to whether or not you're willing to compromise. I think having children is one of the biggest changes you can go through and it often shifts the balance of the relationship because as soon as you have a child the man isn't the focus of your attention any more – some men find that hard."

**Pam:** "Changing careers can also have a huge impact on your relationship. My husband and I met through our jobs and we spent several years both working very long hours. Then when we had children I had a period of time when I didn't work. Now I've just started my own business so I'm busy again. As a result we've had to adjust our routine and re-evaluate who's responsible for things like the supermarket shop and the school

run. But to get through a period of adjustment you have to support each other and remember to think about your partner's needs too."

**Is arguing with your partner a good or bad thing?**

**Sherylin:** "I think disagreeing is healthy – there's nothing wrong with it because you're just being honest, which is really important because it means you'll both know where you stand. But it's how you do it that counts – if you're regularly getting very angry that's not healthy and you need to look at what's causing that anger and why you're reacting in such a way."

**Pam:** "It's good to be open with your opinion, but it's not healthy to start raising voices and getting nasty."

**Genevieve:** "I was always advised to never go to bed on an argument and that's something I try to stick to."

**What are some of the common mistakes couples make?**

**Genevieve:** "They stop communicating and respecting each other. They go off on their own path

without thinking about their partner, or asking what they think."

**Pam:** "I think it's all too easy for couples to get bogged down in day-to-day routines. It's a juggle to look after the children, move your career forward and keep your home looking nice, but sometimes people are afraid of admitting they need help. If you don't have time to do everything you've got to prioritise what's important to you and what you need help with."

**Sherylin:** "Another common mistake is feeling anxious when change is taking place and trying to push things back to how they were. A lot of people are afraid of moving in a new direction, but often it can strengthen a relationship."

**Pam:** "Yes that's something I've found. My husband and I moved to Ireland for two years with our jobs and that tested us as a couple because we went from being very supported by our family and friends, to not knowing anyone. Thankfully we came back stronger."

**Do people have unrealistic expectations of relationships?**

**Pam:** "I think when you grow up and imagine falling in love, you don't factor in all the boring stuff

that goes with being married and having a family, like doing the washing up and making the dinner night after night. It's unrealistic to expect that every day is going to be filled with romance and passion."

**Genevieve:** "Often a person's expectations are shaped by their upbringing. People look at their parents and want the same kind of relationship for themselves, but it doesn't always happen that way, especially if you fall for someone who's had a very different upbringing. One person might expect more from the relationship than the other, whether that's emotionally or in terms of marriage and children. That's not to say that either person's expectations are unrealistic, but if you're not getting what you want from the relationship then it's unlikely to remain happy."

**Is maintaining your looks an important part of having a happy relationship?**

**Genevieve:** "I think being happy with your image is important for your self-confidence, but it

shouldn't have to be maintained for the sake of the relationship"

**Pam:** "Yes, but then if you both take care of yourselves and feel good about the way you look, it will have a positive effect on your relationship."

Still being attracted to each other can only be a good thing really."

**Sherylin:** "Rather than maintaining external beauty, I think keeping healthy with diet and exercise is more important for your relationship because that boosts psychological well-being. Plus activities like cycling or walking are something partners can do together, which is also good for the relationship because it's a way of bonding."

**Is there such a thing as a perfect relationship?**

**Genevieve:** "No, nothing in life is perfect. I have just started up a business running singles weekends and sometimes people come along with a whole list of what they want in a partner, so the first thing that we do is make them rip it up. They think if they meet someone who

has all the criteria they're looking for, their relationship will be perfect, but they're just setting themselves up for a fall because there's always going to be something in a person that you can find fault with."

**Pam:** "You have to really work at any relationship to get the rewards. You can't become complacent, you've got to keep making an effort."

**Sherylin:** "I think there is such thing as a great relationship, and that's one where the couple are willing to accept each other's imperfections. Nobody's perfect, so you shouldn't be ashamed of having flaws or going through difficult times as a couple. But as long as you both have the desire to look beyond each other's limitations and work through issues that arise between you, then you can't really ask for a better relationship than that."

*17% of married couples describe their relationship as 'perfect'*\*\*

As told to Amy Sailer. Photos: Colin McPherson. Hair and make-up: Caroline Parry, England. \*Saga survey. \*\*eHarmony survey.