

Emotional Intelligence in Love and Relationships

Learn why emotional intelligence (EQ) matters in romantic relationships and how you can use it to strengthen your partnership, increase intimacy, stay connected, and build a love that lasts.



How emotional intelligence (EQ) impacts relationships

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the secret of lasting intimate relationships, largely because it makes us extremely aware of the changes—large and small—that are constantly occurring in ourselves and others. By [building your EQ](#), you'll have the sensitivity that each of us is always seeking in a significant other. You'll automatically sense, through active awareness and empathy, the little shifts in the dynamics of your romance that signal a need for action.

We have the potential to attain the kind of love we all dream of—deep intimacy, mutual kindness, real commitment, soulful caring—simply because of empathy, our innate ability to share emotional experience. But to reach the height of romance we need all the skills of a high EQ: sharp emotional awareness to avoid mistaking infatuation or lust for lasting love; acceptance to experience emotions that could harm a relationship if left to fester; and a vigilant active awareness to appraise us of what's working and what isn't.

Building emotionally intelligent romantic relationships

We don't have to choose the wrong lovers, end up in multiple failed marriages, or let the romance seep out of our long-term relationships. We don't have to let conflicting needs and wants to come between two people who love each other. We don't have to resign ourselves to boredom or bickering in our love lives.

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Fortunately, your EQ doesn't need to have peaked before you embark on love. In fact, for many people, falling in love serves as motivation for reeducating the heart. That's why some of the most deeply passionate lovers are in their eighties: They discover that two high EQs add up to a romance that never stops growing, never loses excitement, and always strengthens them both, individually as well as collectively.

Actively seek change in your relationship

When you ride out your fear of change, you discover that different does not necessarily mean worse. Things often come out better than ever on the far side of change. Relationships are organisms themselves, and by nature must change. Any relationships not nudged toward the kind of growth you want will drift into change of another kind—maybe one you don't want. Your ability to embrace change pays off in courage and optimism. Ask yourself, does your lover need something new from you? Do you need to schedule some time to reevaluate together? Are external influences demanding a change in your respective roles? Are you as happy as you used to be? Without EQ, such questions are often just too scary to face, so many lovers ignore signals of change until it's too late.

View the challenges you encounter as opportunities rather than problems

Your courage and optimism allow you to view dilemmas not as problems, but as challenging opportunities. How creative can the two of you be? When you don't need to blame each other for your emotions, you're not controlled by negative emotional memories, and you're alert not to repeat the same old mistake. When you have a high EQ, you're liberated from ruts and resignation, and you can get down to resourceful problem solving. You can meet differences between you and unavoidable crises, as invitations to find each other, challenges to get closer and emerge individually and collectively stronger.

Respect all the feelings you have for each other

We're not always delighted by the discoveries we make about the person we love, but when it comes to emotions, it's necessary to [accept them all](#). Being in love doesn't mean never feeling angry, disappointed, hurt, or jealous. How you act on your emotions is up to you; what's important is that you actually feel them. Many relationships have been ruined by blame, and millions of couples have missed out on deep intimacy because of shame. Both are cruel reminders of unfelt anger, fear, and anxiety. If you've done the work of building EQ, you'll experience the emotions and get on with your life together.

Keep the laughter in your love life

To avoid intellectualizing emotions you, need acceptance, and a big part of your acceptance [comes from laughter](#). Lovers who can't laugh together about themselves probably aren't very accepting of their relationships. They may not be able to tolerate its unique flaws and inevitable stumbles, any more than they can put up with their own. They're also less likely to be open to a relationship's most pleasant surprises. Your high EQ, in contrast, means you can keep improving your relationship, but you'll never get trapped by intolerant expectations of perfection.

Pay attention to how you feel when your lover is not around

Fortunately, you have a flawless way of monitoring exactly how your relationship is going: Use the three gauges of well-being to figure out how the rest of your life is going. Are you feeling restless or irritable in general? Do you drag through your day at the office or school after a night of marital bliss? Do you resent family and friends even though the two of you are spending every available minute alone together? Love never benefits from tunnel vision.

If you don't feel energetic, clear headed, and benevolent all the time, it doesn't really matter whether you coo like doves when you're together. If the sex couldn't be better but you're slipping at work, if you feel safe and cozy hearing "Hi, honey" when you come home at night but are having trouble getting up in the morning, something's not right—even though everything feels warm and fuzzy in the castle.

When this happens, all the information about you, your lover, and your relationship that your emotions and your intellect have gathered will steer you to the best solution.

10 Ways to Love Smart

If you're new to love or new to EQ, your course will be surer if you remember to stick to these tips:

1. **Let the three gauges of well-being inform you about the romantic choices you make.** If you feel energized, mentally clear, and more loving generally, you're in a relationship with a future.
2. **Let your lover know what you feel.** If you're going to communicate anything, express what you feel—as it defines who you are. If you pretend to be someone or something you're not, you'll never feel loved.
3. **Listen from emotional experience.** Attune to your lover's feelings as you listen to his or her words.
4. **Show the support and love that your lover needs.** One person may find a suggestion or a helping hand useful or comforting; another person may find the same action intrusive. Not everyone likes to be touched in the same way, enjoys being affectionate in public, or responds the same way to receiving gifts. Let empathy guide you.
5. **When in doubt, ask.** Love doesn't grant that you'll know everything. If you don't ask how your lover feels about something, you'll never know.
6. **Be prepared to work at the relationship.** Why do so many people believe their work is done once they've found true love? Relationships grow and thrive with attention, or wither and die of neglect.
7. **Learn from your lover.** Active awareness keeps you from relying on past assumptions.
8. **Watch out for emotional memories.** Emotional remainders of past hurts are most dangerous with those we love today.
9. **Remember that the only problem with making mistakes is not admitting it.** The complexities of relationships guarantee error, but even mistakes are opportunities for

growth if met without blame.

10. **Use change as an opportunity to grow your relationship.** Any change is stressful, but it is also an opportunity to renew and revitalize your relationship.

Finding “the one”

When you’re first falling in love, how can you tell [whether this person is “the one”](#)? How do you know whether you’re in love with a real person or just in love with love? If you’ve been burned before, how can you avoid repeating your mistakes?

Listen to your body, not your mind

We choose a mate for reasons that have to do more with what we think than how we feel. We conduct our relationships based on how things should be or have been. This is exactly where we go wrong. We don’t lose at love because we let our emotions run away with us, but because we let our heads run away with us.

People think they’re in love for many reasons—lust, infatuation, desire for security, status, or social acceptance. They think they’ve found true love because the current prospect fulfills some image or expectation. But unless they know how they feel, their choice is destined to be wrong.

Whenever your daydreams of a prospective lover take the form of mental debates justifying your choice or agonizing over it, breathe, relax, and focus to get out of your head and check in with your body. If a feeling that something’s wrong persists or grows, chances are your choice is probably wrong. If you let mental images versus physical sensation guide you, you’ll never know what you really want.

Heed the messages from your entire body

For most people it’s hard to get clear signals from the whole body during new love, because they’re often drowned out by sexual desire, which is why it’s important to notice other, more subtle feelings. Muscle tension, migraines, stomach pains, or lack of energy could mean what you desire is not what you need. On the other hand, if the glow of love is accompanied by an increase in energy and liveliness, this could be the real thing.

If it’s more than infatuation or lust, a benefit will be felt in other parts of your life and in other relationships. Ask yourself these high-EQ questions:

1. Is this relationship energizing the totality of my life? For example, has my work

improved? Am I taking better care of myself?

2. Is my head on straighter? Am I more focused, more creative and responsible?
3. Do my “in love” feelings go beyond feeling positive caring for my beloved? Do I feel more generous, more giving, and more empathic with friends, coworkers, or total strangers?

If the answers you get from your body aren't what you wanted to hear, try to push beyond the natural fear of loss we all experience. Finding out now that you haven't found true love can spare you the pain of a pile of negative emotional memories—a legacy that can keep you repeating the same mistakes or sour you on love altogether.

Take a chance on reaching out

We're often on guard with someone new, and we automatically build barriers to getting to know each other. Leaving yourself open and vulnerable at this stage can be scary, yet it's the only way to find out if real love is possible between you, and if you're each falling for a real person or a façade. Try being the first to reach out—reveal and intimate secret, laugh at yourself, or show affection when it seems most frightening. Does their reaction fill you with warmth and vitality? If so, you may have found an empathic, kindred soul. If not, you may have found someone with a low EQ, and will have to decide how to respond to them.

What you need to feel loved vs. what you want

To find the person who is really “the one”, know the difference between what you can't live without, versus what you'd like. The following exercise can help.

1. Select five qualities or characteristics in descending order that feel most important to you in a lover. For example: neat, humorous, adventurous, considerate, emotionally open, athletic, attractive stylish, protective, creative, conversational, smart affectionate, monetarily successful, well known, well respected, popular charismatic, maternal/paternal, spiritual, nurturing, empowering.
2. As you consider each characteristic, ask yourself whether it energizes, calms, and stirs you emotionally. Is the experience pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?
3. A desire will be fleeting or rather superficial, while a need will register at a deeper feeling level.
4. Do the exercise several times to get an even clearer understanding of the differences between your desires and your felt needs in love.
5. Does this person you think you're in love with fulfill these needs?

Responding to a low-EQ romantic partner

We don't all grow emotional muscle at the same rate. If you're ahead of the one you love, here are some high-EQ ways to respond to low-EQ behavior and poor listeners.

Take time to consider the feelings as well as the words that you want your partner to hear. If you're not clear about what you need and why you need it, your message may be mixed up.

Select a time when you and your partner are not rushed or hassled. Take a walk together or make a date for brunch or dinner, but watch the alcohol if you want them to remember the discussion.

Send "I feel" messages—about your needs—if you want your partner to hear that something is wrong with them. For example, "I feel like making love more often, but I have this thing about the odor of onions and garlic, so would you be willing to brush your teeth before coming to bed?"

If your partner reacts defensively to the feeling you've expressed, repeat their concerns: "You're afraid that if I take this job you and the kids will be neglected."

Repeat your "I feel" message, then listen again and keep up the process until you're satisfied you've been heard.



Get more help

[The Language of Emotional Intelligence: The Five Essential Tools for Building Powerful and Effective Relationships](#) (Book)— Jeanne Segal, Ph.D

Adapted from [Raising Your Emotional Intelligence: A Hands-on Program for Harnessing the Power of Your Instincts and Emotions](#), by Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.