

**HANDOUT...****Healthy and Problematic Expectations in Relationships**

Each of us enters into romantic relationships with ideas about what we want based on family relationships, what we've seen in the media, and our own past relationship experiences. Holding on to unrealistic expectations can cause a relationship to be unsatisfying and to eventually fail. The following will help you to distinguish between healthy and problematic relationship expectations

**RESPECT CHANGES**

What you want from a relationship in the early months of dating may be quite different from what you want after you have been together for some time. Anticipate that both you and your partner will change over time. Feelings of love and passion change with time, as well. Respecting and valuing these changes is healthy. Love literally changes brain chemistry for the first months of a relationship. For both physiological and emotional reasons, an established relationship will have a more complex and often richer type of passion than a new relationship.

**ACCEPT DIFFERENCES**

It is difficult, but healthy, to accept that there are some things about our partners that will not change over time, no matter how much we want them to. Unfortunately, there is often an expectation that our partner will change only in the ways we want. We may also hold the unrealistic expectation that our partner will never change from the way he or she is now.

**EXPRESS WANTS AND NEEDS**

While it is easy to assume that your partner knows your wants and needs, this is often not the case and can be the source of much stress in relationships. A healthier approach is to directly express our needs and wishes to our partner.

**RESPECT YOUR PARTNER'S RIGHTS**

In healthy relationships, there is respect for each partner's right to have her/his own feelings, friends, activities, and opinions. It is unrealistic to expect or demand that that he or she have the same priorities, goals, and interests as you.

**BE PREPARED TO "FIGHT FAIR"**

Couples who view conflict as a threat to the relationship, and something to be avoided at all costs, often find that accumulated and unaddressed conflicts are the real threat. Healthy couples fight, but they "fight fair" - accepting responsibility for their part in a problem, admitting when they are wrong, and seeking compromise.

**REMEMBER HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE ONGOING MAINTENANCE**

Most of us know that keeping a vehicle moving in the desired direction requires not only regular refueling, but also ongoing maintenance and active corrections to the steering to compensate for changes in the road. A similar situation applies to continuing relationships. While we may work hard to get the relationship started, expecting to cruise without effort or active maintenance typically leads the relationship to stall or crash! Though gifts and getaways are important, it is often the small, nonmaterial things that partners routinely do for each other that keep the relationship satisfying.

Courtesy UT Counseling and Mental Health Center, The University of Texas at Austin <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/healthyrelationships.html>