

Improving the quality of your relationship with your partner

Research shows that couples who stay in successful relationships tend to follow specific behaviours that contributes to their success. These successful behaviours can be summed up as expressing interest (that is, treating your partner like a good friend), being gentle in conflict and repairing negative reactions.

To help you improve the quality of your relationship, you may like to try some of the following:

1. Expressing interest (treating your partner like a good friend)

- Make an effort to **understand** what your partner is going through day-to-day (e.g. “Has that part you needed arrived yet?”, “How did you go with that bookwork?”)
- Ask questions to show your **interest**. It is damaging to forget to check-in or ignore their attempts to connect with you. Open-ended questions about how your partner is feeling or thinking are best (e.g. “How are you feeling about the season ahead?”, “Tell me about that fencing job you did today”)

2. Being gentle in conflict

- Everyone reacts to conflict differently. You may make decisions quickly or be willing and able to change your mind easily, whereas your partner may take a while to make up their mind and hold their thoughts quite firmly. Despite your differences, remain **respectful** of your partner and listen
- If you are fighting, **focus on the way forward** – not on blame or criticism. Avoid saying this like “you always do...” or “you never help with...”
- People in successful relationships tend to stay positive in conflict and treat their partner with respect, interest, acknowledgement and good humour (even when they disagree)
- Avoid criticising, putting your guard up, or acting as though as you are better than your partner
- We cannot always avoid conflict – but make **attempts to repair** relationships, when everyone has calmed down
- Keep arguments about **issues**, don't personalise the problem
- Remember that no one can change yesterday. Focus on how to make today and tomorrow better (not on how to apportion blame for yesterday)
- Remember that the only people who don't make mistakes, are people who don't do anything
- Never compare your partner unfavourably with someone else – everyone comes with their own set of strengths and weaknesses
- **Never threaten** your partner
- Never accept violence, instead make a plan to safely remove yourself from that sort of situation

3. Repairing negative reactions

- Although it is often difficult to admit to a mistake or that we might have been in the wrong, it can be helpful to take responsibility, even if it is just for part of a problem
- Be quick to say **sorry**
- Remember that conflict can actually strengthen relationships, and give you the opportunity to learn how to love your partner better
- Feelings of closeness, acceptance and safety are always important in a relationship. Do what you can to foster this. **Making an effort to notice the things your partner does right** (rather than wrong) can help

Learning techniques in the ifarmwell modules will also help.



Remember to notice and mention the GOOD things your partner is doing!!