

# Common Relationship Issues

## Potential Gamebreakers in your Relationship

Here are some common personality game breakers that couples often find themselves grappling with. If one or more of these is occurring in your relationship, and doing so unabated, then your relationship could be facing extinction. Check out with your partner if any of these are going on. If so, then you will need to work towards developing a middle path – one with less extreme behaviours, attitudes and expectations. I make some suggestions for moving forward in each case. (Where reference is made to personality [attachment] styles, a link to the page describing these is included.)

**1. ME focus versus WE focus.** It is essential that you strengthen the sense of ‘me’ in your relationship, and mutually support each other to become the best ‘me’ possible. This means that your marriage/relationship strengthens your ability to be the person in this world that you are designed to be. If you feel unable to even know who ME is or ME wants to be or become, then check out my book on this topic at [Relationships: How to Find Yourself](#). In this book, I provide guidance in how to find yourself if you’ve lost track of who you are or want to become. Some partners, however, are unable to focus on both ME and WE. They tend to behave as loners, withdrawing when arguments or other unpleasant stresses arise. They tend to focus their time and interests on their own lives, rather than the couple WE needs and maybe even the family US needs. I’ve found that this is a particular problem for guys who have never really left their bachelor lifestyle for their couples’ lifestyle. They still have their activities that take them away from their partner too often, require too much money, or disrupt WE functioning. The way forward is to recognise that a marriage or similar primary relationship requires a great deal of time, effort, and combined planning even though alone time is also important – but in a balanced way. You can focus on ME together supporting each other, but not at the expense of the needs of the relationship which include walking forward together and meeting the priorities – quality connection, sharing, working together, setting and following through on goals together including how to parents as a WE team.

**2. I’m blaming you vs I’m blaming me.** Blame sabotages a relationship, whether it’s towards others or self. It arises because of a lack of compassion and understanding towards self or others, and because self or other is not meeting your needs. Others might not meet your needs, desires, wants or values because they are different, don’t understand you, have their own focus, or are busy protecting themselves (from who, you might ask). You may even consider that the other person is bad, wrong, hurtful and should change (to be like self). When you don’t meet your needs, desires, wants or values, you will be tough on yourself. This could happen when you’ve behaved in a way that feels as though you’ve done ‘wrong’. The way forward in this relationship is to recognise that people inevitably make mistakes as they struggle to feel empowered, safe, and doing what works best for them. Once you appreciate that people are just trying to be happy in the best way they know how, you’ll learn not to take personally their stuff-ups (or your own for that matter). Rather than fight them, try to talk so as to understand them (when feelings have settled somewhat). Ask yourself, “What can I do to manage my own reactions, and behave so as to minimize causing others to react?” People try in their own way to do their best – but are often misunderstood by either self or other.

**3. Emotionally connecting vs emotionally unavailable and alone.** Relationships do best when there is consistent and reliable affection, support, talk, listening and respect shown by both parties.

Yet, all sorts of things get in the way of this, such as hurt and resentment, long hours at work focusing on tasks, attending to the needs of children, lazy or very relaxed relating skills, just to mention some. An emotional bond is essential if a relationship is to survive, and work needs to be put into this. The way forward is to prioritize the couple connection, or and above family activities. This can vary from hugs and kisses on a frequent basis, to chats about the day and how each is feeling. Times set aside for the relationship are also necessary. These could be anything from a bath together to movies, walks, talks, meals out, or shared activities such as gardening or watching TV together. These connecting times don't have to be fancy, but they do have to be frequent and consistent. See more about these 'attachment styles' at .

**4. Very flexible boundaries vs very rigid boundaries.** Those who are very lax about stepping up to their responsibilities in a relationship (such as appropriate connections with others who could be seen as competing sexual partners) can be seen as risky to relate with, and likely to be disloyal or behave in unthinking ways. In contrast, those who are determined that their values and ways must hold sway can be tiresome and rigid to relate to. They may also be seen as constantly anxious that their partner may err in some way. Neither of these extremes makes a good partner. The way forward is to negotiate middle ground, so that the rules of the relationship are neither too harsh nor too waffly. Relationships require negotiation, and an ability to give a little and take a little. Crucial is the ability to express one's needs and have these heard without judgment.

**5. High expectations versus low expectations.** Similar to the point above, those with 'higher' expectations (of self or other) seek standards that may be hard to meet, seem never to be satisfied, and are usually anxious that what are known as **Drivers** be adhered to: I (or you) should please others, I (or you) should be perfect, I (or you) should work hard, (I or you) should be on time, I (or you) should cope with whatever needs to be coped with. A person with 'lower' expectations is more relaxed about these requirements, so is usually more laid back and less anxious in general, including their impact on others. Trouble arises when the person with 'high' expectations seems to do more because the person with 'low' expectations seems to be happy to do less. Both extremes are difficult to live with, and not very functional. Talk about and learn to accept such differences, possibly finding some middle ground, recognising that both patterns have their strengths and weaknesses.

**6. Very tidy vs untidy or inconsistently tidy.** Surprisingly, this is a big issue in many relationships. The avoidant insecure style, being task focused, is the more likely to want everything to be sorted and ship-shape. Those who prioritize connection, are more likely to have a blitz every now and again, rather than clean up as they go. If you are just plain messy, you will be difficult to live with. Order and tidiness goes hand in hand with an ordered and tidy life. Yet, a rigid approach to tidiness can go hand-in-hand with a less flexible approach to thing not being quite your way. Extreme tidiness or orderliness, and the ability to let mess accumulate for a while, can both be stressful to others. The way forward is to discuss these differences, noting that the more tidy person may need to ask the less tidy individual to help sort clutter. The less tidy person may not even notice accumulating disorder, so some form of mutual support will be required.

**7. Open about money versus secretive about money.** Many avoidant insecure and withdrawing people will tend to keep the family financial details in their head, and overlook the need for their partners to be not only privy to this information, but also involved in its management. Whenever one person has information that the other doesn't share in, a power imbalance occurs. This may be intentional or unintentional, but it creates inequality in the relationship. The way forward is to trawl

through the finances together, and talk about the flow of money in and out of accounts, where this money goes, and who spends it. Many find it also very helpful for each individual to have their own personal account so that they know they have total say how some of the collective family monies are spent.

**8. Someone who wants to be right vs someone who wants to be understood.** Being right never saved a relationship, but has ruined many. I've never seen a relationship in which one person was right and the other wrong. This concept doesn't even make sense, because there is no 'right way' to be. In the power play that develops in a relationship, each party can fear not being heard, validated, taken seriously, or having their needs, wants and preferences acted upon. This can result in a war of words, which usually takes the form of 'he who is right' versus 'she who also wants to be considered.' It will also play out as 's/he who is clinical and rational' versus 's/he who is emotional and seemingly irrational'. Reading the article about attachment styles will tell you more about each of these approaches to problem solving and arguments. (See more about these 'attachment styles' at [\[link\]](#)). The way forward here is to both equally value each other's personality and contribution, and be determined to fully hear and accept what the other has to say, as well as also being fully heard yourself. The argument needs to be slowed down so that each fully hears and validates the other. Whether feelings are expressed or opinions, both must be taken seriously by both parties.

**9. Relationship worker vs shirker.** In general, relationship tasks, chores and planning need to be shared about 50/50. But it's fine if each person specializes in certain activities, provided each is contributing. One may do indoor work, the other the gardening. One may put the kids to bed, the other attend to the banking. What matters is that the roles taken have been discussed, and no one feels that they are pulling more than their share of the weight. As a rule, this needs to be discussed so that each feels that they are both contributing and being supported. Tasks can easily, over time, fall to those most willing or most accomplished at achieving them. Not good. Your relationship must feel like an agreed team effort. The way forward is to tell the other what you needs are for support, and where you most like to contribute. There will be tasks that no one wants, but if these feel shared fairly, then balance has been achieved.

**10. Personal development plan vs no plan.** People who succeed in relationships recognise that everyone undergoes change, appreciate that change is required, know that they can take positive steps to relate better, and work together to make this happen. However, others think that "I am who I am and that's the way I'll always be". Clearly, no-one stays the same, and those who aren't prepared to make changes are really not ready for a relationship. Relationships require the development of new skills, new attitudes, learning to become a functional two-some and work as a team. The way forward is to recognise that relationship challenges result because of personality differences, and that adding skills enables you to bridge these differences. Examining the dynamics of their relationship, understanding why these occur, and working to create more harmony and understanding is a requirement in every relationship.

**11. High sexual desire vs low sexual desire.** This is a common difference for couples, and leads to much despair. For some, a relationship can't survive without good sex, and for others, quality and intimate connection rather than sex is what matters. Some will simply have a lower libido, or are too stressed or tired to have the sex life they (or their partner) would like. High workloads, long work hours, a focus on achieving, a focus on domestic requirements (eg children), ageing or other stresses can torpedo a good sex life. There are many couples who can't have sex, evidence that a good

relationship without sex is indeed possible. The way forward is to discuss your sexual energy, what enhances it, what gets in the way of having the desire for sex, and getting help to bridge gaps. That help could be anything from improved nutrition, better sleep and relaxation, a more balanced work-leisure life, more exercise, supplements, timing of sexual encounters, or a greater variety of sexual expression to name a few. Specialist advice from a health professional may be useful.

**12. Quick decision-maker vs reflective decision-maker.** Decision-making speed can be a stress especially when a couple is facing a crisis, but even when day to day decisions are conducted at different thinking speeds. The speedy thinker may find it frustrating that his/her partner takes so long to decide, or changes their mind after a decision had been reached earlier. The reflective more contemplative person may take time to fully consider their options, and may even get so bogged down in the decision-making process that they fear committing to any decision at all. This reflective person may get flustered or anxious when decisions have to be rushed and made at speed. The way forward is to recognise that each person's style is acceptable and is unlikely to change. This will require time for important decisions to be reached amicably, and so a time to review the facts and then come back and renegotiate will be essential. Try slowing everything down, so that time and care is put into each and every decision.

**13. Order vs spontaneity.** It is possible to be so well organised and structured about the way you live your day, or manage your affairs, that to your partner your style can feel controlling, inflexible, contracted, perfectionist or even anal. The structured person likes to ensure that matters are dealt with, and may even make lists to ensure that nothing gets overlooked. The spontaneous individual, by contrast, likes to be open to whatever events may unfold in their day. Their preference is to risk uncertainty for the benefits inherent in going with the flow, and allowing life to unfold in its own time and manner. The freedom the spontaneous person enjoys can be challenging to the structured individual who may feel that s/he doesn't know where they stand, and that arrangements can't be made, leaving them concerned about if or even when things will get done. The way forward is to recognise that both styles have their strengths, and in fact most people operate their lives with something of both these patterns in evidence. Discussion is important, so that each can recognise the need behind the other's behaviour, and the inherent concern for order or concern for freedom that drives these patterns.

**14. Forgiving vs vengeful.** The ability to forgive is fuelled by the realisation that holding on to hurts, resentments and blame is injurious to both self and the relationship. Forgiveness does not and should not include the practice of forgetting and making up as if something never happened, or that it didn't matter. It is wise to remember behaviours of the other that were experienced as unhelpful or even worse, injurious, but only so that in future the unacceptability of such actions can be emphasised. Those who are vengeful may feel that the other must be reminded of their indiscretions because that is the only way to keep them from repeating those past behaviours. The vengeful position argues only by dragging up the past can one's partner be guaranteed to never forget those actions that caused pain. Adopting a vengeful position, however, takes an emotional toll on both self and the relationship, and ensures that bad feelings will be maintained, sabotaging the interests of companionship. It is important for wounds to be talked about in a way that puts them on the table, emphasises needs for safety, sensitivity and compassion from the other, and states very clearly which behaviours are wounding and why. This expression of how the relationship could proceed with love to the fore is essential for its survival.

