

Choosing Safe Relationships

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How many times have you found yourself choosing the wrong guy over and over again? How many times have you said to yourself you won't settle, or you'll know better next time but before you know it you find yourself caught up in the excitement of a relationship you know will end in heartache. If you are like millions of women who seem to always fall for the wrong guy your Relationship IQ may need a bit of tweaking.

Why do some women continually choose unsafe relationships? One's upbringing may be a factor. If you from a divorced home, have been abused or neglected, witnessed domestic violence as a child your chances are greater that some of these patterns will manifest themselves in your adult relationships. With such a background, you may have learned not to trust, depend on others or be vulnerable because if you did people would hurt you or just leave. As an adult you might then put up with much more than your fair share and tolerate behavior such as cheating, drug use, non-commitment or disrespect.

Another reason is past wounds. When you've been made the same promises time and time again to no avail, when you've been told that you're the reason why things didn't work out is that you weren't good enough, pretty enough, or didn't put out like you should, it's hard to trust again. So what do we do? We may then close ourselves off to the "good guys." With your self-esteem in the toilet it then becomes hard to value yourself as someone worthy of love. Our hearts are fragile and when it's been stomped on it is hard for us to open up again and be vulnerable.

A third reason is our own stubbornness. We may see the red flags in a relationship such as uncontrollable anger or possessiveness but in our pride we rationalize it away telling ourselves it will get better because 80% of the time he's "perfect." Our closest friends or family may even tell you he's not "the one" but you still hold out waiting for him to change.

A fourth reason why women choose unsafe relationships may be because of fear. Perhaps you are dependent on him financially or you're afraid of him losing connection with your kids. You may even be fearful of losing your status or of what others may think if you end the relationship. These reasons and many more sometimes paralyze women into not acting.

So with these reasons in mind, what does a healthy relationship look like? Here are the top 6 things to look for:

1. **Trust & Commitment** - Relationships work the best when partners reassure each other of their love and commitment. Jealousy, suspiciousness or possessiveness are not the hallmarks of your relationship. There should not be "another woman" to worry about. You should have a calm sense of security knowing that your partner is yours and yours alone and will always be there for you.

2. **Open Communication** - People need to be able to talk freely with a romantic partner. However, being open with a partner is not always easy because it requires spouses to tell the truth and to LISTEN to things that may be difficult to hear. In a healthy relationship, partners listen instead of controlling or judging. Partners also compromise and resolve conflict through negotiation.
3. **Safety**: People in healthy relationships do not hit, threaten or otherwise scare each other. They do not pressure each other to use drugs or alcohol or engage in sexual behavior that compromises one's boundaries.
4. **Personal Responsibility**: People in safe relationships take responsibility for their own actions and feelings. They do not blame each other if they lose their temper or make a bad decision. They own their wrongs and are able to ask for forgiveness and say, "I'm sorry."
5. **Shared Values, Goals & Interests**: Ask yourself, do you and your partner want the same things out of life? You may not have the same career goals but you both should want some of the same things out of life such as to one-day live debt free. It is also important to be in agreement about how best to parent kids and about what role spirituality or religion will play in your relationship.
6. **Have Fun Together**: People in healthy relationships like hanging out with each other whether it may be going to the beach or going window-shopping no matter how painful it may be for the guy. They have fun together and take the time to build memories. They admire each other and show affection for one other.

But what if you are already in a questionable relationship? Do you just run out and break up with your guy? Here are a few things to consider:

1. **Take Your Time**: Have a frank discussion about what your needs are and what you would like your relationship to be. Pray that your partner will be willing to listen. Agree to set a time limit to evaluate the viability of your relationship to see if differences can be worked out or needs met.
2. **Try Forgiveness**: You may need to forgive your partner for what he has done or neglected to do in your relationship. Remember that forgiveness benefits the person who imparts it the most. It frees you from developing bitterness, resentment and gives you the opportunity to look forward instead of back. Your relationship can have a fresh start.
3. **Change Yourself First**: Perhaps there are old habits and lifestyle changes you need to make so you don't keep meeting the wrong kind of guy in the wrong places. Develop interests such as mentoring or volunteering for Habitat For Humanity that will put you in places to meet quality people.
4. **Seek Counsel**: You may need some extra help either in your present relationship, in helping you to heal from your past or in helping you change some behavioral patterns. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your pastor or a therapist. A trained therapist can help you and your partner heal past hurts, increase your communication skills and find the path to forgiveness.
5. **Don't Tolerate Dangerous Behavior**. If you are in an unsafe relationship that is life threatening please don't hesitate to call law enforcement. See professional advice from an attorney if necessary. There is free or reduced legal help you may be eligible to

receive. Florida's 24-Hour Domestic Violence Hotline number is 1-800-500-1119. Seminole County's Bar Association and Legal Aid Society can be reached at 407-834-1660.

As women, we must learn to leave the fairy tale behind and live in reality. We must first recognize that we are worthy of love and that finding the right love takes time. Start by loving and respecting yourself. Doing so will give you the right instinct to choose safe relationships.

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