

The ABCs Of Building A Long-Term Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

Valentine's Day brings thoughts of cute greeting cards and heart-shaped boxes of candy, but it's also a good time to think about long-term relationships. While our Valentine's relationships are usually romantic in nature, they share many of the same basics as any close relationship. Long-term relationships, whether a marriage, a friendship or even a business relationship, are based on some common foundations and make a number of common demands of us. It's worth examining what makes a long-term relationship work.

On some level, it is amazing that any two people can build and sustain a long-term relationship at all. Each of us is the product of so many different influences and personal choices, that it's a wonder we're able to find other individuals with whom we share enough things to establish a close relationship.

Such differences also explain why building and sustaining a long-term relationship really does take work – work by both parties. Marriages and friendships survive because the people involved are willing to work through differences and disagreements – because they value the relationship more than things over which they disagree.

One way to look at how this works could be called the ABC method of sustaining a relationship.

The "A" is to **A**ffirm the value of the relationship. In other words, agreeing that the relationship itself is more important than either of your views on a particular subject.

"B" stands for **B**ehaving in ways that, when discussing points of disagreement, reaffirm the value of the relationship. This means letting the other person know that while you may disagree on this subject, it won't affect the basics of the relationship. You need to show respect for the other person's point of view. It means not setting ultimatums or trying to force the other person to your point of view.

The "C" means **C**larifying issues when there are disagreements. Each person must monitor and control his or her own tendency to want to "interpret" the words and actions of the other, as opposed to being open and talking with the other person to clarify his or her intent and meaning.

Long-term relationships are important in our lives. But there is no denying that it takes work to make them last and grow. The key is often finding room in the relationship for the differences that are going to exist between any two people.

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