

## The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

### Tips For Building And Maintaining A Long-Term Relationship

from the American Counseling Association

Each year, 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. Our romantic Valentine's relationships actually share many of the same basics as any of our close relationships. Long-term relationships, whether a marriage, a friendship or even a business arrangement, are based on some common foundations and make a number of common demands of us.

Building a long-term relationship takes work. We are all different, even the people we are closest to. We are each a product of many different influences and personal choices. This means that there are always times, whatever the type of relationship, when there will be differing opinions. The reason that marriages and friendships survive is because the people involved are willing to work through differences and disagreements. In other words, they value the relationship more than the things over which they may disagree.

For a relationship to grow and evolve, it's important for both members in it to be honest with one another even when disagreements come up. Doing so helps build the essential trust that makes a relationship work.

One way to look at this 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. 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 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 allow for clarification of his or her intent and meaning.

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

*Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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