

SOS Détresse

Couples today

- more important and more complex than ever

In our globalised frenetic world, a couple's relationship is increasingly important. A couple is often the only place where we are protected and supported, a place where we can reveal our true personality.

Yet it is more and more difficult to establish good relationships.

Within our changing society, couples are faced with quite different challenges to those of earlier generations.

Up until the 1950s, marriage was the most common social model. The roles within a marriage were clearly set. The husband was responsible for providing the financial upkeep and the wife was responsible for the children's education and household organisation. Men and women practically lived in two separate worlds and their responsibilities were clearly defined. Love and affection were not the essential foundations of a relationship. Values such as loyalty and trust were more important, and the certainty that each one would do their best to fulfil their role.

After the sexual revolution and the emancipation of women, the traditional distribution of roles within a couple disappeared. The way in which relationships are developed and families are established are now much more varied. Financial support is no longer solely dependent on the man, since many women also work either by choice or by necessity. These days, the main aim is simply to live as a couple. It is therefore natural that romantic relationships and love are central to these unions. The cohesion of the partnership has therefore become essential for the preservation of the family.

The quality of the connection - a new basis for a relationship

As families and marriages are neither cemented by the constraints of society nor by financial concerns, the quality of the relationship plays a much greater part in guaranteeing continuity.

A stable and accomplished relationship needs love and intimacy and must be kept alive. Intimacy in a relationship develops when both partners are ready to open up to each other, to trust one another and to accept and establish this closeness. To achieve

this, each partner must show themselves to be understanding towards the other's needs and to their points of view, and both have a right and must have the possibility of expressing themselves in discussions. A living relationship means spending time together, sharing similar interests, having fun and enjoying a fulfilling sexual relationship. To find long-lasting happiness, you must invest in a relationship, assume responsibilities and keep your promises in difficult times. On the other hand, it is also important that both partners are allowed to and have enough space to grow within the partnership and develop their own personalities.

These days, internal motives, such as love, a sense of belonging and the need for understanding and approval have become more important than external pressures. Both partners are therefore required to actively invest themselves in guaranteeing the emotional stability and commitment.

How should we live together?

The options and the ways of living together as a couple have become much more varied.

Whilst in the past, life as a couple was principally influenced by the norms of society, today partners have to reimagine and create the partnership which suits them.

They must agree whether the couple will live under the same roof, whether or not they want children... These objectives can naturally change with time. When we change partners, we are often confronted with different visions, so objectives need to be renegotiated to find a common denominator.

The range of possibilities in all aspects of life has also grown and you now need to make decisions much more frequently. In a couple, this concerns at least two people who must agree. Making decisions together means that it's necessary to find compromises and to know when to give in.

The art of living together...

In traditional relationships, few matters required both partners. Today, however, many aspects are organised by both partners, except for work and leisure. Equality between partners in terms of rights and opportunities takes priority. Many couples want both partners to provide for material needs, to take care of domestic chores, the education of the children, time planning and social contacts. It is therefore important that the distribution of responsibilities in the different domains be regularly renegotiated. To do this, you need a way of communicating which is not always obvious and which may need to be learnt.

It is possible that in certain areas where both partners are implicated differences appear in the way of doing things or in the choice of priorities. If the couple's relationship is healthy, these differences can be found enriching or indicative of a partner's affectionate attention. In conflict situations, these differences can become insurmountable obstacles and aggravate problems.

The birth of the first child can cause a crisis, because equality between partners is no longer possible in all things. Responsibilities then often evolve along more traditional lines. This change can lead to long-term dissatisfaction or disappointment and can weigh heavily on a couple's expectations.

... is an art that must be learnt

The conditions of our modern lives can lead to conflicts whose resolution require the creation and organisation of new coping mechanisms.

Dissatisfaction, arguments and conflicts cannot be avoided in a relationship. That is not to say that they are due to personal failures. It's often the case that we have not learnt how to react faced with the contradictory expectations linked to different roles, because our parents probably lived their life together in quite different circumstances. Conflict management was not discussed by our parents and grand-parents.

This is why we often lack effective models to show us how to live together, whilst still being able to express our intimate feelings and desires freely.

Indeed, it seems that these days people choose survival strategies which either push them to suppress their feelings and personal needs, or impose them without consideration for others.

A culture of communication, which allows differences of opinion to be respectfully managed, is needed to manage the problems mentioned above.

Solutions must be negotiated together without one partner having to submit themselves or requiring a total submission of others. These talks can only occur in a climate of trust, free of fear of opening up and where each side makes an effort to understand the other.

Time must therefore be set aside and regularly reserved as "couple-time".

Since communication is such an essential part of so many domains, we have dedicated an entire chapter to this subject.