The Language of Love
By
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As we begin another February and move closer to Valentine’s Day our thoughts naturally turn, for better or worse, to the inevitable day set aside for romantic love. Our culture seemingly rewards those who are involved romantically, while those who are not are somehow viewed as “less than.” Having professionally worked with many couples and with singles who desperately want to be in a relationship, I can objectively state that it is just fine to either be single or coupled. How we “live out” being in a relationship or being single is where I find the “real work” exists.

We are all familiar with the symptoms of new love and the ensuing physiological chemical reaction where phenylethylamine (PEA) is released in the brain. This chemical is responsible for the “love sick” symptoms of butterflies in the stomach, light-headedness, and the inability to focus on anything other than the new love. PEA is a natural amphetamine causing our brains to rev up while combining with other chemicals in the brain to create the reaction of “love sickness” and thus our ability to attach and fall in love. Sadly, this romantic love only lasts for about two years, and then the real work of a relationship begins. They don’t sell a Hallmark card for that kind of romance.

This is where the decades of relationship research done by Drs. John and Julie Gottman proves invaluable. The Gottman’s have found that two main ingredients are central to healthy intimate relationships: love and respect. This type of love is not the PEA induced romantic phase of love; instead it is the love that allows our partners to be themselves…less than perfect, with all the flaws and warts. You know, the perpetual bad breath, the toilet seat thing, and the never can find the dirty clothes basket kind of real love things. Being able to accept our partners, flaws and all, along with having shared meanings and personal and relationship goals and aspirations is critical to having a successful relationship.

Learning about how your partner experiences love, as Dr. Gary Chapman articulated in his multi-million seller The Five Love Languages along with knowing ourselves and feeling comfortable within our own skin allows room for our significant other to be themselves. Being able to fight fair, to understand that certain issues will always be perpetual disagreements and therefore can be removed from daily arguments goes a long way in building a healthy, vibrant relationship.

Kindness is central to the ingredients that the Gottman’s postulate as necessary for having a healthy relationship. Kindness shown to an intimate partner is guaranteed to build a solid foundation for the relationship. Singles too can benefit from kindness, in any daily interaction with other persons.

On February 6-8th, the Counseling Center along with Morris Recreation Center will be conducting educational outreach focused on Random Acts of Kindness, and on Feb.8th specific information about relationships. Come out to the atrium in the RSC and learn more about kindness, an invaluable ingredient regardless of one’s relationship status.