

How to Maintain Realistic Expectations Within Your Relationships

Written by admin

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By Greg Baker

Everyone enters a relationship with expectations. There is just no getting around this. Our own nature and desires form our ideas of what a good marriage means, what a friend ought to be, and even how children and parents ought to interact with each other. This article details a means of forming realistic expectations in any relationship.

Problems crop up in any relationship the moment you expect a higher level of action or reaction than the other is either willing to do or is capable of doing. In most cases, our expectations are born out of how we were raised. In either a positive sense or a negative sense, we form our expectations around what we believe to be the best case scenarios for ourselves.

I would suggest that the average person holds, to a greater or smaller degree, unrealistic expectations in his or her relationships.

BE CAREFUL OF EXPECTATIONS BORN OUT OF TRAUMA

Some of the more common unrealistic expectations we form are the result of living through or being exposed to a harsh traumatic experiences. For example, a child who suffered military style discipline by her parents sometimes grows up vowing that she will never treat her own children in such a manner. Or a spoiled child upon suffering social repercussions due to a careless lifestyle may vow to discipline his own children so they don't suffer or commit his indiscretions. Both of these examples often end up being parents in their own right as polar opposites of their own parents as possible. The first one spoils her children and the second one becomes militant in his discipline.

Another case in point is a woman I counseled who had been deeply injured by the pornographic perversions of her own father and later her first husband. Now, in her second marriage she has these unrealistic expectations of her husband. She once said, "I wouldn't mind living where there were no women for him to ever see!" For her, her pain and emotional injuries formed expectations and barriers that were just not realistic or good for her marriage.

Traumatic experiences cause us to build walls around us that would hopefully prevent us from experiencing similar emotional stress. We then expect our relationships to abide by these barriers and any breach or attempted breach in these barriers is often dealt with harshly. This is not good for any of your relationships.

BE CAREFUL OF EXPECTATIONS BORN OUT OF YOUR IDEA OF NORMAL

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It is rare for any two people who enter into any sort of relationship to have been raised in a similar fashion in even the majority of areas of their lives. Normal for us is what we are used to. If your mother, for example, was a stellar house cleaner you will most likely have a similar expectation of everyone else you meet particularly of your own wife. If, however, she had a mother less than stellar in house cleaning, she may not have the same diligence about the issue as you do. This could cause problems.

Too often, we enter a relationship and immediately impose our own ideas of what is good and bad based solely on what we are used to or what is the norm for us. This is often a mistake as your expectations and the other person's expectations will likely clash.

Just because this was the way things always were does not mean it is healthy or good for your relationships.

IDEAS ON BUILDING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

First, in any particular area, study up on the subject and get wise counsel on the area. The Bible says in Proverbs 20:18a, "Every purpose is established by counsel" One of the mistakes we make in forming our expectations is that we assume them to be good just because that was the way things were. This is not good. Seek out good advice from wise men and women in forming your expectations. Don't limit yourself to your own experiences.

Use many different relationship examples in determining your expectations. Don't just use your parents or whoever it was that raised you. If your parents' marriage was a bad one, don't just try to be a polar opposite, instead study couples who have strong marriages. Use several of them as examples in your own life.

Be sure you understand the limitations of your relationships. By this, you need to recognize that others may not be as strong as you are in any particular area. This is not a failing on their part; it is merely a strength on yours. Don't judge them by the same standard. It would not be fair. Hold yourself to that standard, but them to a lesser one.

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