4 Keys to a Drama-Free Relationship

Giving yourself the gift of healthy, secure love.

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KEY POINTS

* Both partners usually cause relationship problems, so blame only creates negativity and avoidance of responsibility.
* Toxic thoughts can keep a person constantly focused on what they don't like about their partner.
* Alcohol and drugs can be a springboard to relationship drama because they remove the filters on what partners say and do.

Once, years ago, on a warm beautiful day, I climbed Piestewa Peak in Arizona. There I was, getting directly in touch with Mother Nature, hiking up this scenic mountain when, to my astonishment, I heard hikers complaining about their spouses and significant others as they passed by. There’s no escaping relationship angst—even in the wilderness.

It seems that everywhere we turn, we see and hear about unhappy people, and their unhappiness stems largely from what they feel is missing in their intimate relationships. I have overheard complaints about relationships in grocery store lines, restaurants, waiting rooms, and even on park benches (“He’s so sensitive, he can't even handle me joking around about my past boyfriend!”). So many people go about their lives like the “walking wounded” because they are emotionally drained by the drama in their intimate relationships.

Social Media Serves Up Heaps of Relationship Drama

Social media, reality shows, and even the news (which has itself often become a form of entertainment—like the story of a certain famous actor and his ex-spouse battling it out in court) have one thing in common: They are all about finding drama. If it is missing, they find a way to create it, and many of us get sucked in.

Drama is stimulating to our minds, just as junk food is to our tastebuds. We find ourselves being tempted to gobble it up when it presents itself, yet programming our brains to think that relationships have to have drama destroys relationships. Drama-laden relationships end with partners being on the bottle-it-up-and-explode-or-implode-later plan.

The good news is that there is a much better plan.

4 Ways to Stop Drama From Becoming Relationship Destiny

1. Manage your toxic thoughts about your partner. If you’re telling yourself over and over again that your partner is irresponsible and lazy, what feelings are you going to have about them? Bad ones. You’re going to feel like you’ve hooked up with an irresponsible, lazy person. How could you not?

As I discuss in my book, *Why Can't You Read My Mind?*, if your internal [self-talk](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/self-talk) tape has “She’s holding me back” on constant play, you will end up focusing on all of those events or experiences that prove to you that your partner is somehow holding you back—and you are going to feel bad about yourself for letting him or her hold you back. You are going to feel bad about them—after all, they're the one preventing your [dreams](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/dreaming) from coming true. Such toxic self-talk patterns toward ourselves and others start out in our youth.

What happy couples share, above and beyond anything else, is a better, more realistic, and healthier way of thinking about each other. This way of thinking enables these couples to improve communication, solve problems, and enhance romance. This true foundation for relationship success can be found in only one way: through healthier self-talk inside of you.

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2. Do random acts of kindness. One good way to keep things fresh is by remembering to commit to a few random acts of kindness for your partner throughout the week. These meaningful deposits into your shared positive-emotion bank account will bring you and your partner closer. Seek to do at least one nice thing or random act of kindness for your partner each day: Give them a 10-to-20-minute back massage. Pick them up something they like to snack on. Read a book out loud or listen to their favourite music together

3. Watch out for problematic [alcohol](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/alcohol) or drug use. Alcohol and other substances may create a relaxed mood, but I have had many couples come into my office after one or both being drunk or having used another substance in excessive ways. When inhibitions are limited, filters do not work, and partners can say and do things that are springboards to intense drama and hurtful behaviour.

4. Lead with [empathy](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/empathy) for calm, constructive conversations. Whenever there’s a problem, there’s a strong chance that both you and your partner share responsibility for it. If you keep blaming only each other, you both avoid responsibility—and the more you blame each other, the more negative energy and drama you create. Instead, look inside yourself, and try to understand where your partner is coming from before you blame them. Have a calm, rational, and honest conversation with them. The more you can calmly talk things out, the less your ego can try to destroy everything with drama.

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