

Romantic Love, What it is, What it isn't, How to get it and How to keep it!

So how's your love life? Is it stellar or does it suck like a bucket of tics?

If by chance yours falls into the latter category, know that you are not alone. In fact, of all the questions you send me, enquiries about romantic relationships are always at the top of the list.

So I decided enough already, let's get to it. And so today's show was born: Romantic love, What it is, What it isn't, How to get it and How to keep it!

That famous chanteuse Tina Turner of Ike and Tina Turner fame, once musically posed the question about the nature of Romantic Relationships thusly – “What's love got to do with it?” Well, I don't often get the opportunity to respond to a rock and roll icon but this query, I think, must not go unanswered. So Tina, the fact is that love has everything to do with it, absolutely everything!

Romantic love is one of life's great levelers. Regardless of your sex, occupation, socioeconomic status, race or ethnic origin most everyone seeks it, yearns for it and yes, even covets it.

Mature romantic love is both extremely simple, and is at the same time unbelievably complex.

Now right from the get go let me address something really important. There are certain disorders and forms of mental illness that make initiating and maintaining intimacy quite challenging. Some of these are depression, bipolar disorder, various personality disorders and schizophrenia.

Many's the time that a deeply troubled couple has sought my help and unbeknownst to them one of the above is part of the problem. But we're not going to talk about love and mental illness today.

What we are going to focus on is a set of linear, stepwise, how to, by the numbers, love lessons.

So all you stud muffins and love monkeys out there put on your thinking caps and use your listening, not just your hearing ears because we're about to embark on a crash course in the art of amore at the college of conjugal connectedness, the school of snuggles or dare I say it Love U. Hmmm, that has real T-shirt potential.

Lesson 1 – Romantic Love, What Is It?

Mature adult Romantic Love is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding relationships you will ever have. It combines friendship and sexuality in such a way as to inspire monogamy and lifelong devotion.

Lesson 2 – What Romantic Love Isn't

It will not solve your problems, it will not make you happy and it will not turn you instantly from a child to an adult or from an immature person into a mature one. Those are things you need to do on your own. Preferably before you attempt to choose an adult romantic life partner.

Well, that answers to first two parts of our question, now let's move on to How to Get It and How To Keep It.

Lesson 3 – Important Questions

People live together and/or get married for a myriad of reasons. Some of them are really healthy and others not so much...

There are some questions you really need to ask yourself if you're thinking about spending the rest of your life with someone.

1. If this person weren't going to change at all for the next thirty years would you be happy with them just as they are today?
2. Who do you become when you are in the company of this individual? And do you like that person?
3. Who do they become in your company? And do you like that person?
4. Would you be happy if you had a child, or children, that was just like the person you are planning to marry? So, there would be you and George and three mini-Georges.

If the answer to any of these questions is not a resounding yes then please put the brakes on and don't send out the wedding invitations just yet. If you already have there's still time...

Believe me getting married or moving in together before your potential partner has resolved his or her drinking problem, spending problem, sex addiction and any of the of the other ills that flesh and soul are heir to is an invitation to disaster and just plain won't work. And oh by the way, having a baby won't fix any problems you may have either. In fact it will make matters worse. A child is the greatest single stressor that you can put on a marriage or relationship. Just thought I'd mention that while we are on the subject.

Lesson 4 – Whom Will I Fall In Love With?

Now I hope you're sitting down because this is a big one.

There is a lot of 'brew ha ha' these days about internet dating sites and how, with their proprietary formula, they and they alone will find you the perfect woman/man/hermaphrodite or intergalactic hottie. Now, how do I know about the intergalactic part? Well I've read some of the profiles on various dating sites and I know some of these folks are from another planet!

While there is nothing wrong with making sure that you and your 'sweetie to be' have a lot in common and possess similar values, there is a glitch in the system and that glitch is chemistry. And no dating site in the world can guarantee you chemistry and without chemistry, there's no match.

Lesson 5 – What the heck is 'Chemistry' and is there an app for that?

Let's do the easy one first. No, there's not an app for that. Chemistry is, well, it's a feeling. Different people experience it in different ways physiologically but the bottom line is it's sexual attraction.

Now here's the problem with dating sites. While it's great to find someone with whom you share values and have lots in common or, to put it another way, find someone who looks great on paper it doesn't guarantee chemistry. You can find someone who is a great match socially and psychologically and you can even find him or her incredibly physically attractive, but you may find, surprise, surprise, that there's no joy, no magic, no butterflies in the stomach, no tingling in the loins, in short, no chemistry. And yet, you can find another person who's not model perfect physically, who doesn't like to do everything you like to do and is possibly of a completely opposite political persuasion and yet, you find you fall madly in love despite everything: its instant chemistry!

Lesson 6 – So what makes chemistry work?

OK, this is probably the part you aren't going to like so much. I want you to remember to breathe and remain calm. Here it comes... wait for it. We always choose our parents as romantic partners. You didn't remain calm did you? I can hear you now leaping out of your chair and screaming, "No, no, say it isn't so!" Sounds dreadfully Freudian doesn't it? But I'm not talking oedipal fixation or attempting to explain the consequences of an overactive id. I'm also not talking about personality types, what I am talking about is fundamental characteristics. Specifically, the fundamental characteristics of your mother, your father, or some combination of the two. And by the way, don't let gender confuse you. If you're a guy you're just as apt to have chemistry for your father's fundamental characteristics as for your mother's, and vice versa. So you see, this is why dating sites can only take you so far and, frankly, if you find the perfect person, whether it's from an internet dating site, a blind date or a chance encounter it's really all about kismet, you're going to meet that right person when you and they are ready and not before.

Now, understand, you have no control over the urge to choose your lover in this way. It's so deeply embedded in your psyche as to be almost present at a molecular level.

But before you freak out entirely, because your family of origin is a veritable hotbed of pathology, the progenitors of which are your parents, whom you now realize that your either going to fall in love with or marry, or both, and your life is ruined and you are damned to an eternity of miserable cohabitation, there is something you do have control over. You see, there is a silver lining and that is that you can choose a partner who is the same as, your parents, worse than, your parents, or the new and improved model. Feel better? So, let's use me as an example. My father had a big blustery persona but fundamentally he was a very scared person. Interestingly, nobody else seemed to pick up on that, especially not my mother, but it was patently obvious to me. And by now you've probably guessed that my father is my romantic model and you would be correct. Why I picked my father vs. my mother or some combination of the two, is beyond my powers of reckoning but choose him I did.

Anyway, my father was very phobic, in other words he would avoid, deny or in general run away from challenges. He usually did this by employing his big persona and making lots of noise, puffing up real big and scaring the scary person or situation away. He would attempt to solve problems with gruffness and intimidation.

I have always been attracted to men that are fundamentally afraid, just as he was.

However, I didn't choose same as, I didn't choose worse than, I choose, you guessed it, the new and improved version! So, the men I find sexy are counter phobic, which means they move toward or into what they fear, so that unlike my father their fear does not control and guide their lives. Get it? Good! Because this is really important!

Lesson 7 – So how do I figure out what my parents' fundamental characteristics are?

I'll be honest, this is not an easy question to answer because there are these things called family myths. And family myths are all about the family's need for its members to believe that certain things are true, because there are issues they don't want to face. For example, in my family of origin, my mother was a very intelligent and well educated woman who really wanted a career. However, society in general at the time, and my father specifically, had other ideas. So we all had to pretend that my mother was a happy homemaker which, believe me, she was not. My mother could do things to food that were truly unspeakable and I think it is in large part accounts for my very small stature. Until I learned to cook, which was at a very early age mind you, my survival was dependant on her culinary skills and I damn near starved to death! Remind me some day and I'll tell you about the great round steak incident – it still sends chills up my spine. Anyway, we were supposed to pretend my mother was someone she wasn't, and to do otherwise was to be unloving and disloyal. It's just like what extremists everywhere do when you question their practices or ideology. You've got to love human behavior, macrocosm or microcosm, it's all the same. Anyway, it can be difficult to discern the fundamental traits of your parents if you weren't supposed to notice them. But in general look at their problem solving skills, the way they expressed themselves, their values and their ability to nurture or not. And this might be something you might want to seek some professional help for, because figuring this out is key to your future happiness, and that's worth a little investment of time and money don't you think? Because picture this, if your mom was a

narcissist and for whatever reason you unconsciously choose her as your romantic model, you are going to date, become engaged to, and marry or cohabit with, a narcissist! There's no getting around it. But remember you can choose the new and improved narcissist, and that brings us to...

Lesson 8 – How do I get ‘new and improved’?

What an excellent question! See how smart you are?
Finally an easy one. To get new and improved you have to be new and improved! Because you must be, the person you want to attract. You will draw people to you that are fundamentally like you. Notice I did not say the personalities would be the same, we're still talking fundamental characteristics here.

Lesson 9 – What happened to opposites attract?

Gets the buzzer! Another urban myth or old folk tale. Personalities can look very different, but fundamental characteristics are fundamental characteristics. It's a common occurrence in my office for my staff to say something like, "Oh, Ms. Jones is so sweet but her husband is a real ... unpleasant person. Why does she stay with him?" They ask me because I'm supposed to know about things like that and yet they never believe me. I always smile and say that, "despite their outward appearances underneath they're exactly the same." "You must be wrong they insist, she's so sweet." "Watch and wait", I say. And sure enough he'll come in by himself and be as sweet as one of my strawberry glaze pies. And she will come in by herself one day and be an absolute barracuda! They wouldn't stay together if it weren't so.

I said we wouldn't get into pathology today but I feel that I would be remiss if I did not mention this by way of illustration. An alcoholic and a codependent are the same. The codependent is every bit as ill as the addict. But instead of being addicted to a substance or a behavior per se, they are addicted to pathological relationships. But a behavioral or substance addict may look very different on the surface from their codependent partner. One of them appears to be bad and the other appears to be a good, long suffering, infinitely patient, martyr. Wrong, they are both fundamentally addicts with different surface behavior. See how it works?

Lesson 10 – OK, so I'm going to marry my parents, it's weird but I'm getting it. So how do I do the marriage/civil union thing?

First thing you need to know is that being married and living together are not the same thing. And by the way, just to be perfectly clear, all these rules apply to homosexual and heterosexual relationships. So for purpose of shorthand, even though, sadly, homosexuals are sometimes denied the right to marry we will refer to civil unions as marriage.

So, living together and being married are not the same thing. A lot of people try to pretend that it isn't true, but it is. Your family doesn't look at it the same way, your friends don't, the law doesn't, and deep down, as hard as you might try, you don't either. There are many personal and societal expectations and patterns that you can use to make or break a marriage. You just expect different things from a husband or a wife that you do from a significant other. That husband/wife thing is very, very, very ancient and comes with lots of inertia and baggage.

There are in fact predictable cycles in marriage.

It actually takes three years to 'make' a marriage. By 'make' a marriage, I mean the couple constructs their first emotional, psychological and behavioral contract. It is actually your first baby – your 'love child'. That's why so many marriages fall apart sometime around year three – the couple just couldn't make the 'love child' that their marriage needed. Or they may have tried to make a 'love child' but it died, and they grew apart and moved on.

If your 'love child' survives the first three years, the next time you 're-up' the contract is in year 7. Yes, the 7 year itch is a real thing. It's often about year 7 when a couple chooses to have a biological child, their second baby.

The mistake that's often made, is that the couple gets all wrapped up in their bio-baby or babies, and forgets to take care of the 'love child' that is their relationship. So the next group of people 'call it quits' around year 7.

The next contract is negotiated around year 14, and if the couple hasn't been taking care of their 'love child' then their relationship has degenerated into just parenthood or being roommates. It is likely that someone has had an affair or that they are living parallel rather than interconnected lives.

And the cycle of regenerating the 'love child' continues in groups of 7 years, that's why you hear about a couple that's been married 35 or 49 years and decide to divorce. The reason they usually give is that, "We just grew apart." But what's really happened is they didn't take care of their 'love child', and it died.

Lesson 11 – OK, so we came together, we made our 'virtual' baby, which is our relationship, how do we know we're taking care of it properly?

Think about romantic intimacy as a stool. No, not the brown poopy kind – the kind you sit on! And the stool has three legs. The saddle of the stool, the part you sit on, is the relationship itself, and the three legs hold it up.

In romantic intimacy the three legs are passion, play and productivity.

Passion is affection, sex and the appreciation and attentiveness that you show toward one another.

Play is just that, your ability to have fun, to use humor and to relax, flirt with and tease one another.

And finally there is productivity. That's the business part of the relationship. Paying the bills, walking the dog or cleaning the cat litter tray, mowing the lawn and planning for retirement.

Now this is how it works. Life in its infinite glory impinges on the stool. You know, all the things that happen, experiences of joy, illness, money problems, promotion, the birth of children, stuff!

All the things I just listed both pleasant and unpleasant, put pressure on that stool and if the legs aren't really strong, your stool will begin to wobble and eventually it will go down.

Many people are confused by the appearance of one strong leg. Sometimes it's the outside world that's taken in in this way, and sometimes it's one member of the couple. Here's a very common example. Given what I do for a living people often come to me and want me to explain things. Here's one I hear frequently. Somebody says "Oh the Joneses broke up, can you believe it? What happened, they always seemed so happy and full of fun?" And my response is usually, that I'm just surprised it took them so long. When the questioner picks their jaw up off the floor, I explain that yes, there was lots of play in their relationship, but did you ever see them express passion for one another? And, the business end of their marriage was a mess, they are in financial ruin, they never follow up on their commitments, and they are the kind of people who don't pick up after their dog in the park. I hate that!

The 'three Ps' are a handy measuring tool with which to check on the status of your romantic relationship. It's something that you and your partner can review from time to time, to take your temperature if you will, and make adjustments as needed to keep that 'love child' healthy

Lesson 12 – OK, that's all fine and good but I've had experiences where although I love someone very much, they either seem not to get it, or they don't appreciate what I offer. What's up with that?

You know, we tend to express our love in ways we want to be loved. There are six basic ways that love can be expressed:

- Love words
- Love actions or behaviors
- Sex/affection
- Gifts
- Time
- Commitment to commitment.

Now each of us wants these things in varying degrees, and it is very rare for two romantic partners to want the same things with the same level of intensity. And that's why when you attempt to love someone they may not get it, or appreciate it.

So, what to do? Well as it happens I have an answer. And the answer is the first thing you need to do is figure out what your own love formula is. In other words, what combination of things do you want, and to what degree do you want them? The next thing you need to do, is find out your partner's love formula. And that last thing you need to do is find the love formula for the couple, the way to love that baby, your 'love child', the best. So, you

look at the six things and draw yourself a picture, perhaps in the form of a bar graph or a pie chart, with the appropriate space allocated for the amount of the given expression of love that you want. For example, your love formula might look like this, sex/affection might be the highest bar in the bar graph or the biggest chunk of the pie chart. Followed by gifts, commitment, time, love actions, and finally love words. Now the reason that I don't suggest just ranking these things hierarchally, is because some people want all six things in equal measure and /or the increments of gradation between them might be very small or very large. Now let's say you choose a partner whose formula looks like this: love words, love actions, gifts, time, commitment and sex/affection. Given your formula I'm sure you can see there might be problems. For the purposes of our discussion today let's just pick the top two pieces of the love formula for each partner and do an analysis. So when your partner attempts to show love to you he or she is going to talk about it, lots of words, "I love you", "I miss you", "I think you're so sexy", that kind of thing. Now you on the other hand are a sex/affection person, so you are going to want to kiss him or her or hug or fondle or grab or want to have sex a lot.

One day your partner says to you, "I don't think you really love me" and you're stunned. But you rejoinder, "I'm always kissing you and hugging you and grabbing you". "Yes", he or she replies, "what's with that?" "I'm sick of you grabbing me all the time, I feel like a piece of meat!" "You never tell me you love me, you never talk about how important I am to you!"

And then you respond with, "Well, now that we're on the subject I don't think you really love me either. All you do is talk, talk, talk. You hardly ever want to kiss me and you don't want to have sex very often!"

So, there we are. Now, again using just those two items this couple could come together and make a third formula that's not his or hers, but theirs. So when she talks about how much she loves him or her, she would pair it with some physical affection. And when he wants to be physically affectionate he will learn to pair that with words. Now of course, this has to be done with all six parts of the formula, but you get the idea.

So here's a little homework you can do. First I want you to draw a bar graph or pie chart of your love formula, and then I want you to draw a picture of what you think your partner's love formula looks like. Do this without consulting your partner. Next, ask them to do the same for you. After you've done this, come together and compare notes. This will give you an accurate picture of what each of you wants, talking points, and a method with which to construct your third formula, which is for the couple

Lesson 13 – That's a lot of information and my brain is pretty full. There's one more thing I need to know. Some people just seem to make others putty in their hands, romantically speaking. I want to know how to do that.

Men and women want the same thing but they are motivated by different things. A woman, or the person in the couple who takes the nurturing role, begins to think about taking care of others, and meeting the needs of others almost from the moment they exit the womb. "Do you have your mittens, did you get your lunch, did you brush your teeth, can I get you your sweater?" Now, women, or nurturers, nurture each other without

thinking and if we are heterosexual, the woman who nurtures us most meaningfully becomes our best friend. In the homosexual world, he or she would become your lover. If a woman says to another woman for example, "I love double fudge ice cream", you can bet on her birthday her best friend will show up with double fudge ice cream. If she'd made mention of the same, to a male friend, the chances are good that he would reply, "Really? I like strawberry." And that would be the end of that. Actually she'd probably remember strawberry ice cream for his birthday, but that's another story. The most powerful and meaningful thing a man can give a woman is 'skillful deference'. Now I say 'skillful' because Madison Avenue will attempt to tell you what deference looks like. The right car, the right cologne, the right kind of chocolates. But that's a lot of 'camel pucky'. Deference is unique, and special to each woman or nurturer. And, it changes throughout the lifespan, so it requires your lover to pay attention, and it requires the woman or nurturer to communicate clearly about what he or she wants. Now for men, or people who take that role, the thing that makes them light up like a Christmas tree, is to have the women they love tell them how great they are. Even women they don't know well will do in a pinch!

I was carrying some packages and I dropped one and a young man came along and offered to help me. I thanked him most profusely and when my husband showed up a few minutes later he was chuckling and I asked him what was so funny. And he said, "You made that guy's week when you praised him, there was more swagger in his step and a light in his eye when he walked away", and he didn't even know me. Men need to hear that they are our heroes.

Now there are all kinds of reasons why this system breaks down and it would take a whole other show to discuss them all, so I have just given you the basics.

Bottom line, if you want to be one of those couples who are still holding hands when they are 80 or 90 years old, you need to observe what I call the 'love circuit'. You skillfully defer to her and she tells you you're wonderful. She tells you you're wonderful and you skillfully defer to her some more. It's an endless, loving wonderful loop that if done well never fails.

So there you have it! A thirteen step program on how to be a better lover/partner/spouse.

Chances are that you will have a question or two and if you do you know where to find me. In honor of your varied learning modalities you can, of course, listen to this program more than once, if you are auditorily inclined. If you are more visual I will also post the text of it on my website www.drcochran.com

Remember, no matter what experiences with romantic love that you've had in the past, you can learn new things, you can pick better partners, and you can give and receive love with the best of them!