

The long and the short of it

by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

Physical separation can put immense pressure on even the best relationship, so can a long-distance relationship ever work?

Most people appreciate the closeness, intimacy and comfort that a stable relationship can bring. This stability can be threatened if your partner doesn't live locally or has to move away for one reason or another.

To help understand how a relationship might be affected, it's worth examining whether both people feel that their needs are being sufficiently met. Each person needs to feel that their partner listens to them and respects their feeling and opinions and also that they still have their own space. Each person needs to be stimulated: emotionally, intellectually and sexually... The list goes on. Compatibility is a mutual balancing act that is fundamental to the success of any relationship.

Keeping it together

If you are attracted to each other AND compatible in terms of personality, attitudes and lifestyle, then there's a good chance that you can make a long-distance relationship work. If there are some shaky areas, things could get tougher further down the line. Quite simply, if a couple is not compatible enough, then there is not enough glue to hold the relationship together in the long term.

Physical separation can put MAJOR pressure on a relationship. The particular reasons for the geographical distance have a bearing on how things develop.

Where did it start?

Did you live some distance apart when you first met? ...On holiday, on a business trip or online? In this situation, the couple will often expect that one person will move to be with the other, so that they will finally be together. This hope can be enough to make the separation bearable.

Things are different for couples in an established relationship who become physically separated, perhaps by work or study commitments. This can be especially hard to deal with: it creates a new and significant change in the pattern of the relationship.

Must try harder

For example, when two teenagers go off to university in different cities, it can become very difficult to keep things going ... Relative inexperience, along with obstacles (practical and economic) to frequent travel can threaten an established relationship – as can the new temptations of student life. It really depends on both people's commitment to making things work and on how they feel their needs are being met. They'll certainly need to be very patient when it comes to physical intimacy. Couples in a long-distance relationship really have to learn to make compromises and special efforts.

Can you hear me?

Communication during periods of separation can also be a determining factor in the success of a long- distance relationship. It's a matter of the quality, as well as the frequency of communication. No matter how determined two people are initially, it can

be all too easy to start losing touch. They'll need to think laterally and creatively in order to keep things going. Phone calls are fine, but the addition of emails, texts, letters, cards, photos and even flowers and occasional presents (which need to be reciprocated), makes things are even better. Both halves of the couple will need to make the extra effort and both will want to feel that they are important to their partner.

It's worth the trip

It's true that two people who live a long way from each other are less likely to become a couple in the first place; and if they're already a couple, then they're also more likely to split up. This doesn't, however, mean that long-distance relationships can never work. If the two people in a couple are really right for each other, and if they're both willing and able to make some extra effort, they can, indeed, last the distance.

Do you have any questions that you would like to see discussed in future editions of the PARSHIP newsletter? Then contact Dr Lukats at drlukats@parship.co.uk.*

Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc works as a psychiatrist.

If you want to meet the love of your life, visit www.parship.co.uk and take PARSHIP's free compatibility profiling test.

*Any reader questions that appear in the PARSHIP.co.uk newsletter will do so anonymously. Unfortunately, PARSHIP.co.uk and Dr Victoria Lukats cannot enter into personal correspondence on relationship issues raised by readers.

© PARSHIP GmbH 2006

Ready when you are by Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc

We've heard it a thousand times before ... You've got to be happy in yourself before you can be happy in a relationship.

There's something intuitive about it. It sounds like sensible advice but is it really true that you can't find a fulfilling relationship until you're 100% happy with yourself?

Emotional pinball

A recent survey by PARSHIP.co.uk revealed that, on the rebound from a break-up, a staggering 38% of people had gone out with someone completely unsuitable.

If your heart's been broken you can be desperate to do something to heal the wounds. That can include jumping straight into another relationship if the opportunity presents itself. But as many of us have discovered, this can mean settling for something that just isn't right. Worse, it can lead to further heartache down the line. Is it maybe safer just to take an unsuitable fling at face value?

Well there's no simple right or wrong answer. For some people, a little fling can be just what they need to regain their self-confidence, but you still need to handle the situation with care. As long as both of you are aware that it's just casual, there's far less chance of anyone getting badly hurt. It's when deeper feelings are aroused that things can get more risky.

In your own time

So, if you've been single for a reasonable length of time – perhaps a few months or maybe more – how do you know when you're ready to find someone new?

If you are looking to go into a committed relationship, you should aim to achieve a positive sense of stability in your single life. It will stand you in good stead for those inevitable moments of mixed feelings about your partner. No matter how much you love someone, after a few years together there will always be times when you find them irritating or even have doubts about the future of the relationship. It's all perfectly normal, but those moments will be easier to deal with if you can reassure yourself that you fell in love for all the right reasons – that you weren't in a state of desperation when the chance for love presented itself.

Great expectations

This balanced attitude should also help prevent any unrealistic build-up of expectations. For example, if you already have a wide circle of friends and are managing on your own financially, then you won't feel that it's your partner's

role to magically solve all the problems in your life. He or she won't be pressured to live up to some unreasonable standard, and you won't run the risk of building up resentment if those expectations are not met.

Over to you

When it comes down to it, though, only person can say when you're really ready for a new relationship – and that's you. When it comes to matters of the heart, there is no way to be 100% sure. The best route seems to be to simply trust your feelings.

All of us have a basic desire for the warmth and emotional intimacy that a relationship can bring. It's no good waiting until you are *perfectly* happy and stable before you make the decision to look for a serious relationship, otherwise you could be waiting a lifetime.

Do you have any questions that you would like to see discussed in future editions of the PARSHIP newsletter? Then contact Dr Lukats at drlukats@parship.co.uk.*

Dr Victoria Lukats MBBS MRCPsych MSc works as a psychiatrist.

If you want to meet the love of your life, visit www.parship.co.uk and take PARSHIP's free compatibility profiling test.

*Any reader questions that appear in the PARSHIP.co.uk newsletter will do so anonymously. Unfortunately, PARSHIP.co.uk and Dr Victoria Lukats cannot enter into personal correspondence on relationship issues raised by readers.