

What happens when the love goes?

by Ethna Vernon

The first flush of love is wonderful. People express feeling complete, being totally understood and at home. The mere thought of our beloved makes us tingle with excited bliss. The intensity of passion at this stage in a relationship can sometimes invade our waking and sleeping thoughts. Our body is literally flooded with feel-good hormones and neurochemicals including adrenaline, dopamine and serotonin. This is nature's clever way of keeping us bonded long enough to conceive and help raise an infant. At this stage the thought of a baby looking like a carbon copy of one's new found soulmate stimulates images of happy families living happily ever after.

Sadly the hormones created in the initial period begin to wane. The wonderful projections of perfection begin to wear away and we realise that our once adored Adonis is actually a mere mortal. This period frequently coincides with the pressures of everyday life increasing such as the commitment of marriage, living together, a new baby, stepchildren or money issues. Couples can find that the idyllic picture of family life is not exactly what they had imagined. Cracks can appear as life's stresses begin to take their toll as various problems can begin to cause conflict.

Some relationships can manage these tests smoothly but many don't, sadly leading to divorce. Others stay and can find themselves trapped in a cycle of arguing, bickering or putting one or other down. Couples can sometimes stop communicating completely. As resentments grow affection and sexual relations can sometimes suffer.

Couples often stay in unhappy relationships for the sake of the children. Some believe that this is actually how commitment is, or others hopeful that things will improve. When life gets like this being in a relationship can feel far lonelier than being single. Eventually something has to give and too often it can be the commitment. A couple,

like an individual, has a desire to solve its own problems. However, it can be difficult to get beyond the immediate situation or issue without an objective party to help neutralise the high emotions so that the problem can be addressed. This is when couple therapy can help move a relationship along. Simplistically put, it can help you have a fresh view on things so that you stop 'not seeing the wood for the trees.'

Couples often come to counselling as the last chance to salvage the relationship or because one, other or both cannot bear it anymore. It is understandable how people find it difficult to seek professional help. They can see it as an admission of failure or fear of exposing powerful feelings in front of each other and a third party. Research suggests that the

sooner a couple seek help the greater the chances of success. A pre-requisite for helping a troubled relationship is that both parties are willing to keep working on it and want it to continue and succeed. The next step is to figure out what the problems or issues are. Are there money problems? Issues around children? Has one or both parties been unfaithful? Perhaps other issues are a factor involved such as depression, anxiety, unemployment, infertility or problems with friends or family. Identifying the problem is the start to potentially finding ways to help the relationship.

Couple counselling is proving an effective way to help relationships out of their difficulties. It offers a safe, neutral space where couples can begin to communicate again with each other. In counselling

couples often reveal thoughts or feeling that they have never felt able to express before. Empathy and understanding of where partners and ourselves are coming from can help break the negative patterns. It can be a time, away from all the other demands of life, for exploration of why and from where the problem issues originated. By examining the past together couples can begin to understand why they and their partner behave the way they do. They can reflect on how learnt relationship styles are affecting their present ones. Through honest, respectful communication the couple can then begin to find new ways of relating and hopefully begin to find their way back to love again.

*First published in ABC Magazine
July 2010. www.abcmag.co.uk*

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“Children are happier when their parents have a successful relationship.”

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Counselling and Psychotherapy

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