

Bonds have more fun in coupledness

The word “bonding” has become one of the buzzwords of the 21st century. But what does it mean, and how does it affect our adult relationships?

Bonding is all about intimacy, about how we juggle our needs for closeness and distance with the competing demands of our busy lives. How do we achieve the right degree of togetherness and separateness, and balance the “I” and “we” in our relationship?

Managing a relationship sometimes requires all the skills of a circus performer to get it right.

Bonding and relating to people is something we learn as small children. Our first attachment experiences – the way we communicate with our parents – set the pattern of our adult experiences.

There are many styles of bonding – some people learn to be the dominant force in a relationship, while others take on a more dependent role. Some people’s relationship style is competitive; others prefer a collaborative model. No one style is completely right or wrong. Just as we are all individuals, our relationships styles are individual too.

What is important is that we make the best of our particular way of relating to our partners, accentuating the positives and work on improving the negatives.

For example, if one partner is very dominant, this can in some ways be a very attractive feature. This person is strong, definite and good at making plans and decisions. However, the dominant person’s partner may sometimes feel a little frustrated that they don’t get enough say in the relationship. The key to making this relationship work better lies in the dominant person being aware that they can be a little overpowering, and taking a step back occasionally so that the other partner can make some decisions. This is only a small change but it can have big, positive effects on a relationship.

There are two common patterns when it comes to what attracts us to a partner. Often we are attracted to someone similar, someone like us. This kind of attraction is comfortable and familiar, even if it’s not always desirable.

And sometimes this comfort factor makes us brave enough to have a go at making an even better relationship model than the one we learned when we were children.

In other words, it’s like loving a particular model of car – you might always be attracted to one particular kind, but happy to buy the new, improved version.

It’s still a Holden, Ford or Hyundai, but it’s the new improved model. And so it might be with a relationship between similar people. Relationships are moving, living, dynamic things that can grow if the partners want this.

The other common type of attraction is that between opposites. If one partner is a dependent person, they may find a strong and independent person very attractive. The dependent partner would like to have a bit of that strong independence, and by attaching themselves, may hope that some of that attractive independence will rub off.

This kind of thinking is rarely conscious, but it often rears its head when people have a hunch or feeling that the prospective new partner is “right” for them.

If we were happy in our early relationships with our parents, it’s quite common for people to want to replicate that in their adult relationships. They grew up with something that worked, and they would like to recreate that.

However, if the childhood bonding experiences were not so happy, the adult will want to create something completely different in their own relationships, so that the unhappiness is not repeated.

Relationships are tricky, endlessly fascinating things, and most of us will spend a lifetime trying to get them right, but being aware of how they work can be very helpful to this process.

Survival tips

- **Early experiences of our relationship with our parents affect how we conduct our adult relationships**
- **People can be attracted to someone very similar or someone completely different**
- **There is no one “right” relationship pattern – every model has its strengths and weaknesses.**