

One word to warm or harden hearts

In the whole English language one word is guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of gadabouts or dilettante Juliets.

What is it that makes some people avoid the “C” word: commitment, like the plague, while others crave the security of it?

For those, who try to avoid commitment it could be about fear. They worry that if they commit to a relationship they are saying that they want to be with a partner for life.

They wonder what would happen to them if the partner dies or leaves – they fear losing something of great importance to them.

Other people are afraid that they won't measure up in a committed relationship, and worry about not being able to satisfy a partner's long-term needs.

Some people may have grown up observing an unhappy committed relationship and so fear that commitment means unhappiness and the loss of freedom to be yourself.

People who crave commitment usually have an extremely positive picture of what it means, which can be unrealistic.

They equate marriage or a defacto relationship with a guarantee of lifetime emotional safety and happiness. This is also fear, dressed up in different terms.

To others, being in a committed relationship means you're a loved and loveable person.

The good news? A Relationship Australia study has found that people who want a committed relationship believe that relationships do drive happiness.

A massive 94 percent of people in marital or defacto relationships say that they are satisfied or extremely satisfied.

Timing is important in the decision about commitment. While they may be positive that they will love each other forever, teenagers are not at the best life stage to make a decision about permanent commitment.

They have not had enough time to become individuals away from their own families. This can be true at any stage.

To make a success of a marriage-like relationship, couples need to have been able to leave home emotionally and be separate from the families in which they grew up.

Once a couple have decided to commit to each other, they usually bring certain expectations of what commitment means.

Being a permanent couple usually (but not always) brings expectations of sexual faithfulness.

Trust is important to commitment, and they should be able to talk frankly about what each expects from the commitment. Be clear about your expectations.

You may decide you're going to have a particular living arrangement, or share financial burdens. At this point, it's important to be sure you are working towards similar goals.

Talking freely with your partner about your commitment expectations is the key to a happy and emotionally healthy relationship that can stand the test of time.

Survival tips

- **Work and good-will make happy-ever-after marriages. There's no magic recipe**
- **Build up reserves of good times so you have them to shore up when the going gets tough**
- **If communication seems to be failing, get professional help.**