

Maintaining Your Identity in Your Relationship

Objective

To maintain your identity while having a strong and satisfying relationship with your partner.

You Should Know

Early in a relationship, you and your partner might want to share everything, do everything together, and develop common interests to create a strong foundation for the future. Gradually, you "merge" into a couple, and that sense of merging might lead you to feel like you are losing your identity—or losing yourself in the relationship. You might let go of passions, hobbies, or goals you had prior to entering the relationship. As time goes on, you might begin to grow resentful, anxious, or even hopeless, causing you to express yourself in unhealthy ways, ultimately threatening the connection.

When each partner supports and respects each other's different interests, personal growth is enhanced and the relationship flourishes. Ideally, you create an interdependent relationship, where you and your partner are mutually reliant on each other while maintaining autonomous identities. While establishing a strong bond with your partner is important, it is equally important to cultivate an interdependent relationship that allows each of you to continue growing.

Your relationship goal is to maintain an identity as a separate person, while creating intimacy, closeness, and connection with your partner. Research indicates that partners who maintain their identities within their romantic relationships are happier and more optimistic. They also have a stronger sense of themselves, allowing them to be capable of more intimacy, love, and passion.

Here are suggestions for maintaining your identity in your relationship:

1. Pursue your own goals for personal and professional development. When you entered the relationship, you experienced yourself and your partner as separate people with distinct identities, with your own goals, interests, ideas, and social connections. Your individuality made you interesting to each other!

- Maintain interests that were important to you before entering the relationship.
- Continue connections and friendships you had when you were single.
- Encourage your partner to maintain interests and connections.

2. Recognize the things you enjoy and the things that matter to you.

3. Ask your partner for what you want.

4. Say "no" to your partner regarding things you do not want (or do not want to do).

5. Spend time with your friends and family – without your partner.

6. Make time for your own hobbies and interests.

7. Take time alone for yourself.

Maintaining your identity is critical to establishing a long-lasting, healthy relationship. So, focusing equally on attending to yourself and making the relationship work are necessary. This worksheet will allow you to identify ways you can maintain your identity while creating a healthy, interdependent relationship.

What to Do

Identify activities, hobbies, friendships, or goals you have neglected or let go of since entering your relationship.

Have you noticed any changes in yourself as a result? Explain.

What interests, causes, and values do you find the most rewarding and meaningful? Explain.

Do you feel comfortable expressing your needs and desires with your partner? Why or why not? Are you able to find other sources to get what you want, if your partner cannot, or will not, provide them?

Do you feel comfortable rejecting a suggestion or request from your partner and then explaining your reasons? Why or why not? Are you able to find ways to compromise with your partner?

With whom would you like to reconnect or spend more quality time? How do these people enhance your life?

Of the activities, hobbies, and interests you identified, which would you like to re-engage? Or, what new activities or interests would you like to try? What steps can you take to make that happen? Describe.

What goals would you like to create or re-ignite for your career, health, self-improvement, or self-care? Who are the people in your life who can best support you?

What are some ways you can decompress and find quiet time on your own?

Reflections on This Exercise

Has this exercise helped you identify ways to maintain your own identity in your relationship? Explain.

Which actions do you think will be most helpful to maintain your identity in your relationship?
Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5= moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
