



Love Bytes

Relationship coach Olga Sheean shows you how to create healthy, loving relationships—from the inside out

Autumn is a time for self-help courses, evening classes or indoor leisure activities to fill the darkening evenings. After months of outdoor summer activity, it's a time for going back inside—for reflection, reassessment or growth. Here's a three-part programme that will help you not only to reconnect with yourself but also to attract your ideal partner. (It can also be used with colleagues, family members or existing partners.)

1. Identify one of your major 'missing pieces' (see box). For the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to work with 'respect'—a key missing piece and the source of tremendous resentment and dysfunction in relationships. Define what respect means for you. Write that down, together with any incidences when you felt disrespected by your partner, family, friend or colleague. Identify four main ways in which this happens—for example: 1) My partner (current/former) loses his temper when I try to discuss something with him; 2) he/she always leaves me to clean up; 3) he/she does not contribute fairly to expenses; and 4) he/she ignores me when we go out with friends. Other examples may include: "My boss barely says hello to me when I see him", "My mother is dismissive whenever I call her with news about my life", or "My friend never calls back when she says she will."

Take a moment to remind yourself of how it feels to be treated this way. What is that feeling? Is it shame, worthlessness or something else? If you feel anger, try to go deeper to see what's beneath it. Anger usually lies on top of some deeper hurt. Try to identify what that feeling is and where you feel it in your body. Being aware of your body's reaction will help you to know when this issue is triggered.

Now ask yourself in what ways you do not treat your partner/mother/friend/boss with respect. And in what ways do you not treat yourself with respect? Do you put yourself down? Do you compromise your values? Do you sometimes speak or act in ways that are not respectful of your body, health or personal fulfillment? Make a note of your answers. And remind yourself that your 'missing piece' must always be filled in

by you in order for you to start having this quality in your relationships.

Commit to spending the next two weeks practising respect—for yourself and for everyone else you meet, no matter how disrespectful they may be towards you. Go out of your way to do this so that you reap the benefits more quickly. Whatever comes your way is a reflection of what's going on inside you, so use this valuable mirror to clean up your act.



2. Look at the 'labels' you give to people in your life. What do you call your mother-in-law behind her back? Is she "interfering", "nosy", or worse? What labels do you attach to your boss, boyfriend, friend, colleagues? Catch yourself when you come up with negative ways of describing others. 'Labelling' is a way of covering up what is going on inside us at a subconscious level. It reveals more about us than about the person we're judging. If we judge our boss to be "critical", for example, it is usually because we are feeling less than confident or have low self-esteem, which often makes us feel defensive. We may prefer to think that our boss is being critical simply because that is his nature, but he is there to trigger our subconscious negative beliefs about ourselves.

Commit to having nothing but positive labels for everyone you meet (or think about!) for the next two weeks—including yourself. Even if you don't like someone, find something good to say about them and focus on that. If you have a meeting with your 'critical' boss, think of positive labels for him—such as receptive, supportive and respectful. And think of positive ones for yourself—such as confident, competent and respectful. The dynamic between you will be much more positive.

3) Catch yourself 'looking for evidence'.

When respect is a missing piece, we often go looking for 'evidence' to support our subconscious belief that we do not deserve to be respected. For example, if your boyfriend has a habit of leaving things lying around your apartment, you may find yourself looking for the socks, coffee mugs or whatever else he leaves in his wake, as soon as you get home. This reinforces your cycle of disrespect. To break out of this, respectfully ask your partner to clean up out of respect for you and him, and do not pick up after him, no matter how much you want to. Step over his stuff, if necessary. When you find yourself looking for evidence of your unworthiness, remind yourself that this perpetuates the problem and find healthy ways to practice self-respect.

By the time November comes around, you will have filled in a great deal of your missing piece and you can expect some nice surprises.

'Missing pieces' are essential formative qualities (such as acceptance, respect, validation, etc) that we needed as children in order to be complete but, for whatever reason, did not get. To identify yours, ask yourself what qualities you do/did not get from your current/last partner. These will be your missing pieces. See the September issue for more details.

E-mail olga@olgasheean.com with your relationship dilemmas. Responses will be printed, space permitting.

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