

Nine things a relationship runs on

None of these is a feeling. Every one is something two people do, or stop doing. Under each is what its absence looks like, because that is the half people recognize.

1. Oxygen

A relationship needs new material coming in, from more than one source, and both of you have to keep supplying it.

When it is there

You each have a life outside this and bring things back from it. There is something in the diary to look forward to. Neither of you can always guess what the other will do next.

When it is not

Every conversation is logistics. Nothing is planned further out than the weekly shop. You have told each other everything, and one of you has started finding the interesting part of the week somewhere else.

2. Constant care

Nothing holds without maintenance, and a relationship is not an exception to that.

When it is there

Small things are done on purpose, regularly, by both of you. Not grand gestures. The repeated ones.

When it is not

It is running on a decision you made years ago. Neither of you has done anything for it on purpose in months.

3. Trust

Your partner should never have to work out whether it is safe to tell you something.

When it is there

They say the difficult thing straight away, because they expect to be met rather than defended against.

When it is not

There is a pause before they tell you things. You brace before you tell them things. Either one counts.

4. Kindness

Anger is allowed. Acting to hurt, punish or get even is not, and it is a different thing entirely.

When it is there

When one of you is hurt they say so, and say what would help. The other one helps.

When it is not

Arguments are about winning. Somebody keeps a score. If you find yourself wanting them to feel it too, that is the signal.

5. Time

Time together is the only thing that can be spent on the relationship itself.

When it is there

There are hours in the week that belong to the two of you and are not about the house, the children or the diary.

When it is not

You are in the same building constantly and alone together never. Busy is the reason, and it always will be.

6. Consistency

Be the person you were while you were seducing them. Doing less of something is fine; stopping is not.

When it is there

They can predict you. The things you did at the start still happen, even if less often.

When it is not

Someone has become a different person. Whoever was courted is not who is here now, and nobody said so out loud.

7. Communication

Say what you feel, clearly and often, rather than expecting it to be inferred.

When it is there

Things get said while they are small. Neither of you is running a private tally of unraised things.

When it is not

You expect them to know. They expect you to know. Both of you are waiting to be understood without speaking.

8. Privacy

Everyone needs some space that is theirs. This is not the same as having something to hide.

When it is there

Each of you has something of your own, and neither treats the other keeping it as a threat.

When it is not

Wanting an hour alone has to be justified. Something of yours is now evidence in an argument you have not had yet.

9. Intimacy

However a couple does intimacy and however often, it needs time set aside rather than whatever is left over.

When it is there

It is something you both arrange, in whatever form works for the two of you.

When it is not

It has become the thing that happens if nothing else gets in the way, and one of you has started to read that

as a verdict on themselves.

Caring is something you do, not something you feel

Every one of these is a behavior. You can hold all nine in your head, mean them sincerely, and still be in a relationship that has none of them, because none of them happen by being intended. What the other person experiences is what you actually did this week.

In an argument there are two winners or two losers

If one of you wins, the relationship lost. The point of a disagreement is not to establish who was right. It is to repair the thing that got damaged, which is why being right so often makes it worse.

Your partner has friends, and they matter

People who have been in someone's life longer than you have are not competition. Being liked by them is not a social nicety. It is one of the conditions under which a relationship gets to last.

Counting these in your own relationship is a different job

The nine above are true of everyone. What you need is not, and no list can guess it. That is what the audit at twowholelives.com is for.

This is a self-help tool, not therapy, counseling or a clinical assessment, and it does not diagnose anything. If you are in distress or at risk, contact a qualified professional or your local emergency service.