

11 Relationship “Rules” You Can Safely Break

Rules were meant to be broken, right? In this case, YES.

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Rule: You should be totally yourself with your partner



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Needing to hide your desires or ideas from your partner is a red flag. But that doesn't mean you should be totally filter-free around your partner, says Shaunti Feldhahn, social researcher and author of *The Kindness Challenge: Thirty Days to Improve Any Relationship*. “The problem is that all of us have a pretty distinct capacity for both kindness and harshness and are more careful

with other people to not let the worst versions of ourselves come out,” she says. “When we say ‘I can just be myself,’ sometimes what we mean is we can be the harshest version of ourselves.” Close romantic relationships are some of the most important ones to protect, she says, so make sure that you treat your significant other to the best version of yourself instead of constantly using your partner to let off steam. Don't miss these sure signs you're in a healthy relationship.

Rule: Sex should always be about mutual satisfaction



A healthy sex life will leave both partners happy overall, but that doesn't mean that every romp has to involve equal attention to each of you, says Jane Greer, PhD, a New York-based relationship expert and author of *What About Me? Stop Selfishness From*



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Ruining Your Relationship. “Sometimes sex can be for one person and sometimes for the other,” she says. “It doesn’t always have to be both of you about all the time.” Give your partner some extra attention sometimes, and don't feel selfish for asking for a bit more other times. Find out what happens to your body if you stop having sex.

Rule: Venting is better than pent-up anger



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When you’re upset with your partner, don’t let all your gripes out. “When you vent, you think you’re letting steam out of the kettle so it doesn’t explode later,” says Feldhahn. “But neurologically what you’re doing is actually turning up the heat. When you express anger more and more, it further activates an interconnected anger system in your brain.” By discussing every little frustration, you’re just replaying those annoyances and dwelling on your anger. Instead of complaining to your friends or to your partner's face, force yourself to think of what you love about your significant other. Pretty soon you’ll find those annoyances don’t bother you as much, says Feldhahn. Here are other things happy couples do during fights.

Rule: Be honest, even when it hurts



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Make no mistake—honesty is key in a relationship. If you do need to bring up an issue, make sure that you say it gently instead of bluntly letting out your harsh complaints. “The best relationships are absolutely honest with each other, but not brutal,” says Feldhahn. Just like you would think carefully about how to give constructive criticism to a coworker or friend, use kind words with your

partner. You'll still be able to let your feelings out without hurting your loved one in the process, especially if you avoid these phrases that make arguments worse.

Rule: The partner who's wrong should apologize first



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Even if you're absolutely sure that you're right during a fight with your partner, don't sit around waiting for an apology. Be the bigger person, and say sorry for your part in the argument. That way, you can both move on instead of stewing in unresolved anger, says Dr. Greer. If you're always the one apologizing in every fight, follow up by asking if your partner feels sorry, too. "Pose the question

and engage your partner's response," she says. "If they say they aren't sorry, prompt them about what may need to change, because you need to be able to trust he or she won't do this again." Here are some ways you accidentally ruin your apologies.

Rule: Never go to bed mad



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Supposedly, ending an argument to get some sleep will leave you both fuming instead of making productive steps to fix the problem. In reality, though, happy couples actually do hit the sack before resolving a fight, says Feldhahn. "When you have two exhausted, angry, upset people trying to duke it out at one

in the morning, nothing good will come from that," she says. The key is that people in strong relationships don't pretend it never happened, she says. Instead, they agree to revisit the fight the next day—even if that means laughing about how silly it was—when they both have clearer heads. Here's what you should never do after a fight.

Rule: The guy should always foot the bill



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It's high time this old-fashioned rule went out the window. "Guys don't like having to pay all the time, so women can offer to pay for certain aspects of their shared life rather than always expecting her partner to pay," says Dr. Greer. "Make him feel cared about too." Offer to pay for a nice dinner out, or start covering the cost of a class you take together, she suggests.

Rule: Big gestures are the best way to show you care



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Romantic gestures like giving a dozen roses or planning a weekend away aren't the only—or even the best—way to show your partner you care. How you treat your significant other on a daily basis will mean much more to the strength of your relationship, says Feldhahn. "Those big ones are nice, but those are the big moments. Those do not make a marriage," she says. "It's the little day-to-day acts of

generosity and kindness that have the big impact." Thank your partner for doing little things like changing the light bulbs so that your relationship has a foundation of appreciation and love.

Rule: One partner is in charge of initiating sex



If your significant other almost always initiates sex, don't assume it shouldn't happen if he or she doesn't make a move. As long as you're both satisfied, it doesn't matter who acts first, says Dr. Greer. "What matters is



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that both people initiate freely when they're in the mood so there's constant give and take," she says. Give your partner some signals instead of silently hoping the your significant other heats things up. But if your partner isn't in the mood, don't push it. Just discuss a time in the future when you both will be more receptive, says Dr. Greer. If you're having trouble getting in the mood, check out these natural libido boosters.

Rule: Random acts of kindness mean more than giving your partner special treatment



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No one is telling you to stop being nice to strangers, but planning out those generous gestures could mean more than performing random acts of kindness. Targeting your kind acts toward your significant other could actually bring you more happiness, says Feldhahn, who started the 30-Day Kindness Challenge to encourage people to spend a month strengthening one relationship. "It's not the random acts of kindness—it's the targeted acts of kindness, targeted to one person," she says. "When you're really intentional and specific, like with the 30-Day Kindness Challenge, it impacts the other person, and it really changes you." Your partner will feel more appreciated, and you'll train yourself to see the best parts in your relationship. Start with these small ways to be just a little nicer.

Rule: Never keep score



Making a mental tally of all the times your partner messes up is sure to build resentment, but that doesn't mean score-keeping is off-limits in a relationship. "You should keep



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score—you just need to keep score of what the other person is doing in a positive way, the amazing things about them,” says Feldhahn.

By noticing all the little things your partner does for you, you’ll build a deeper sense of appreciation and be more inclined to reciprocate with more acts of kindness. Check out these other surprising secrets of happy couples.