

## Knapp's Stages of a Relationship

### 1. Initiation:

- 1st impressions are given, and are never forgotten.
- Opening lines, some are odd, some bizarre, some work.
- We are "saying" I'm interested.
- 1st impressions are both sent and received.

### 2. Experimenting:

- We engage in small talk, we call this Phatic Communication. This is very important.
- We are auditioning, both ourselves and the other person.
- It is a safe way of showing who we are.
- This stage is pleasant and non-critical it may continue for 10 minutes or 10 years. Some people never want to leave this safe stage.

### 3. Intensifying:

- We begin to form a common identity "we like to eat there."
- You know their wants and whims; e.g., you order for them at the bar, because you know exactly what they want.
- Nicknames and terms of endearment are formed here: huggypoo, and cupcake-lips.
- An interpersonal relationship begins here.
- Self-disclosure will start here. This means we begin to reveal private information that involves a bit of risk. If I tell you who I really am, you may not like me that is the risk.

### 4. Integrating:

- Others see you as "a pair" "an item." The invitation comes to Bill Smith and Jane Jones.
- Common Property "our song"
- Sharing clothes, both wear the same t-shirt, or she wears his shirt as a nightgown.

### 5. Bonding:

- Something happens to the two of you that causes you to be forever different, closer. The common one in our society is marriage, but it can be other things too. Sometimes bonding is very private and personal.
- In a romantic relationship, the norm is a formal social recognition, engagement and marriage.
- The participants may feel a disorientation or uneasiness until they adjust to the social formality and institutionalization of the relationship. People have been known to say, "What have I just done?" When they adjust to the bonding, they usually are happy with their decision to bond.

## 6. Differentiating:

- You can't be bonded as one without rediscovering the **you** in the **us**. If you so not do this stage, you will probably feel smothered, or cause your partner to feel smothered.
- Here we reestablish individual identities.
- "How are we different?"
- "How am I unique?"
- Former "we" now emphasizes "I."
- Usually occurs when the relationship has its first really big fight or noticeable stress.
- **\*\*Key\*\*** maintain commitment to the relationship and create space for each other to have her/his own identities.

## 7. Circumscribing:

- Termination probably begins here, but all happy, satisfying relationships enter this stage from time to time.
- Communication decreases in quantity and quality.
- Restrictions and restraints are put in place.
- Communication becomes static.
- Disagreement causes withdrawal (mental or physical).
- Shrinking of interest and commitment

## 8. Stagnation:

- If you are moving toward termination you go into this stage next.
- Go through the motions without growth.
- The relationship is a hollow shell of its former self.
- You experience routine without joy.
- Some relationships may last years in this stage.

## 9. Avoiding:

- As termination continues, you move on with this stage.
- Partners create distance indirectly, "I've been busy."
- Directly, "Don't call me."
- The handwriting is on the wall.
- Partners will go through great efforts to avoid physical and communicative contact.

## 10. Terminating

- The end
- "Drop off the key Lee"
- This is the walking out stage.

Some points about this theory: It is dynamic. You may skip over a stage, and you may jump back and forth among stages.

You can fully terminate and then restart the relationship. If you do this, however, you are beginning an entirely new relationship than the two of you had at first.

Good relationships move to stage 6, they move on to stage 7 once in a while, back to 5 (that's the rekindling thing we all do) and then stabilize in 6 once again and so on and so on throughout the life of the relationship.

Usually, people do not enter stages together, except for stage one.

**This is a great theory to help us understand the process of relationships.**