

# THE compatibility TEST

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**It's the unavoidable season of love: the time when you are supposed to be inundated with proverbial hearts, flowers and happy-ever-afters. In reality, blissed-out newlyweds are outnumbered by more cautious lovers, wondering whether they should stay together or find a new Valentine by next February.**

'At this time of year, you're surrounded by the ideal of the perfect, loving relationship, and this can make you focus on your own circumstances,' says Relate counsellor Denise Knowles. 'It's the peak time for reassessing your relationships. However, it's important to ensure you do this in a constructive and positive way.'

One of the most beneficial tactics is to work out how compatible you are on a profound, long-term level. If you're a perfect match, it's worth working hard to strengthen the bond. And if you simply aren't compatible, then you save later heartache by moving on more quickly.

Start by looking beyond the trivial things that are annoying in relationships: the dirty socks on the bedroom floor, an unwashed breakfast bowl left on the table, or the thermostat set at 20°C when you prefer 25°C. Once the first passion has died down, there is one key factor that predicts your staying power and compatibility more than whether or not he leaves breadcrumbs on the worktop.

'Similarity,' says Phillip Hodson, psychotherapist and spokesperson for the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. 'This is the single most important rule governing relationship success. Contrary to popular folk wisdom, opposites do not attract as much as "similar";' he says.

You don't have to match your partner exactly in looks or personality, but your background, views and expectations need to be in harmony. 'Couples who last for life tend to be broadly similar in interests, class, creed, morals, cultural and family values,' adds Hodson.

## HEART OF THE MATTER

Assess how well you match by asking your partner about their core values, background, and hopes and fears for the future. For example, do you both want to settle in the same area and are your political and religious beliefs broadly similar? What are your views on sex and money?

And, crucially, are your body clocks in tune? If you are always late and he is obsessed with punctuality, it could cause conflict later on. Do you have the same spiritual beliefs and, importantly, do you agree about male and female roles and how children should be raised?

Hodson recommends drawing a Venn diagram with two overlapping circles to measure similarities. Take one area of life at a time, for example hobbies and interests, sexual desire, body clock, religious beliefs, where you want to live, family background, whether you want a family or not, etc. You have one circle each. Overlap them proportionately to show how similar you are in these areas. If you overlap on more than 50 per cent of things, you are compatible and your relationship is in with a chance.

A crucial area is money – Hodson says many people dismiss it as unimportant for love, but disagreements over finances are one of the main reasons for breaking up.

'Chalk and cheese are definitely not a good mix,' says Hodson. 'You are not looking

for a clone of yourself, just someone on your wavelength with sufficient independence for you both within the relationship.'

Michael Myerscough, head relationship coach at [www.therelationshipgym.com](http://www.therelationshipgym.com) agrees a mismatch can frustrate your ambitions, and that can be fatal for a relationship. 'If you want to travel the world and your partner wants to do the same old things over and over again, the best that can happen is a compromise. This will disturb both of you, as your partner is effectively preventing you from doing one of the things you love most in life,' he says.

If you have lots of mismatches like this, you will frustrate each other constantly. 'Frustration often leads to anger, a desire to seek revenge or to hurt each other, so, pretty soon, your new-found soulmate turns into your cell mate. Of course, there are many reasons for a divorce – affairs, inability to communicate civilly anymore, "we just grew apart", etc. But many of these reasons can be traced back to a lack of compatibility right at the beginning of the relationship.'

But Myerscough also warns it's not a good idea to wait forever to find a partner that's 100 per cent compatible. 'What you are looking for is a high level of compatibility in the areas that matter most to you.'

## HOW INTIMATE ARE YOU?

Next, assess the level of intimacy in your relationship – not just sexual closeness, but how much you feel able to share your inner beliefs, hopes and fears. 'This is a key predictor of future relationship success,' says Knowles.

'It's important you feel able to talk to your partner about things that are bothering you – to tell them how you are feeling and what

you want and need. You also need to be able to listen to them as well,' she says.

For lasting love, both partners need to accept each other, flaws and all, and be able to voice and share anger, happiness, secrets, sensuality and sex. Relationships can be driven by sexual desire early on, but if they lack emotional closeness they will struggle to last. Without closeness, you may eventually feel lonely and find yourself looking for love and affection elsewhere.

If at first you seem incompatible, don't despair, says Knowles. There's another test to see if it's worth putting some work into the relationship. Ask yourself how upset you would be if your partner said they were leaving. If you'd be devastated, it's worth trying to bring some compatibility and strength back into the relationship (see box below for ideas).

Your incompatibility may even be temporary, so pluck up the courage and start to talk. Or seek outside help from an organisation that specialises in relationship counselling, such as Relate. Even if your partner won't go along, it's worth going alone, says Knowles. 'It shows them you are serious about making changes, they will be curious about what you are talking about or it may make them realise the relationship is really in danger,' she says.

'Putting effort into working out whether you're compatible is worth it. If you marry somebody and have children with them, but are deeply incompatible, there is nothing anybody can do to save your marriage,' says Myerscough. 'But if you know you are right for one another, you can better face any challenges life throws at you and your relationship,' he adds. ■

## HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

- Devote at least 15 minutes of your day to catch up with one another – no kids, TV or other distractions.
- Have fun together. Find something you both love doing: dancing, singing, watching home movies.
- Book regular 'dates' in your diary – once a week spend a few hours together.
- Similarity is crucial. If your relationship is struggling, invest time in joint projects to stimulate shared interests.
- Listen more.
- Touch more and be more kind and generous.
- Call your partner first when you have good or bad news, or if something is wrong.