

## Does an unhappy partner make you less happy?

Level 3: Advanced

### 1 Warmer

a. How can you describe healthy and unhealthy relationships? Write adjectives in the chart.

Healthy relationships	Unhealthy relationships

### 2 Key words

a. Match the words to the correct definitions below. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. a person who is often annoyed and angry ____  | a. happy-go-lucky |
| 2. when two or more things become similar or merge ____  | b. upbeat         |
| 3. not caring or worrying about the future ____  | c. grump          |
| 4. copy how someone speaks, moves, behaves, etc. ____  | d. mimic          |
| 5. positive and enthusiastic ____  | e. convergence    |
| 6. happy, excited, or pleased ____   | f. dip            |
| 7. the length of time for which a person, animal, or thing exists ____                             | g. gleeful        |
| 8. the way two or more things or people affect each other ____                                     | h. reluctant      |
| 9. a decrease in the amount or success of something, usually for a short time ____                 | i. interplay      |
| 10. not willing to do something and therefore slow to do it ____                                   | j. lifespan       |
| 11. something used to represent something else that you want to measure or calculate ____          | k. contagious     |
| 12. with little or no hope for the future ____   | l. dynamic        |
| 13. the way people or things behave and react to each other in a particular situation ____         | m. proxy          |
| 14. describing a disease that can be caught by another person or a person with such a disease ____ | n. bleak          |
| 15. a situation in which something is not likely to move or change ____                            | o. stability      |

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You might have to change the form of the word.

1. The \_\_\_\_\_ between life and art is well established.
2. The toddler was \_\_\_\_\_ to try the new food and pushed it away.
3. The common cold, the flu, and COVID-19 are all \_\_\_\_\_ diseases.
4. Giant tortoises have an average \_\_\_\_\_ of over 100 years!
5. Their family \_\_\_\_\_ is very loving and supportive.
6. When I'm sad, I listen to \_\_\_\_\_ music that cheers me up.
7. After the very hot summer, everyone welcomed the \_\_\_\_\_ in the temperature.
8. That customer is a \_\_\_\_\_. He's always complaining about something.
9. In their relationship, a gift was a \_\_\_\_\_ for an apology.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ can help lower people's stress levels and enable them to enjoy their lives more.
11. The child's \_\_\_\_\_ attitude made everyone else happy too.
12. Some octopuses can \_\_\_\_\_ other sea creatures such as jellyfish, lionfish, and sea snakes.

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#### ***A study shows the more positive person is 'dragged down' by an unhappier partner – but relationships are still beneficial overall***

Shayla Love

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- 1 When I meet a friend's new partner for the first time, I desperately want to like them. I hope they're generally pleasant to be around – not just for my sake, but for my friend's. When people date someone who is miserable, it can rub off on them. Maybe you have had that happy-go-lucky, upbeat friend who starts dating a grump, and gradually, they become one too.
- 2 Research shows that people often become similar to those they spend a lot of time with. Even strangers tend to mimic each other's movements and expressions, and studies have shown that friends', strangers', and lovers' heartbeats or brainwaves often sync up. In romantic couples, a number of studies have shown that they have similar well-being, both when they first start dating and also over time.
- 3 "Convergence has been shown for different characteristics like personality, lifestyle, daily activities, sports, nutrition, leisure and also wellbeing," said Olga Stavrova, a professor of psychology at the University of Lübeck. So if two people date and become more similar to each other, who becomes more like who? In a recent paper co-authored by Stavrova, she went after this very question. She said she wanted to understand if the happier person in a couple is "dragged down" or if the unhappier person is "lifted up".
- 4 She looked at data from more than 20,000 German and Dutch couples who were followed for 37 and 14 years, respectively, focusing only on couples that differed in well-being at the beginning of their relationships. Within each partnership, if one person started out saying they had higher well-being and life satisfaction than the other, they experienced declines in their well-being over time. The person with lower well-being might experience a small increase in happiness but often didn't improve at all. And the satisfied person's dip was always greater than any improvement in the unsatisfied person.
- 5 Stavrova said the findings probably stem from the types of interactions that couples have over time. You share what happens in your day and how you feel with your partner. If one person is always negative, it can bring the other one down. In another study, researchers followed couples over a few weeks and found that negative emotions are more commonly passed back and forth than positive ones.
- 6 "The idea that we soak up inputs from the people that we spend our time with is important to understanding how relationships shape health and wellbeing across the lifespan," said Darby Saxbe, a clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Southern California, who wasn't involved in the new study.
- 7 But the findings don't necessarily mean you should avoid people who seem slightly unhappy. You don't need to find a partner who is super gleeful all the time or feel worried about dragging others down. "I would be reluctant to say, 'Don't couple up with someone who's a downer,'" Saxbe said.
- 8 The interplay of long-term relationships and well-being is more complicated than just this one factor. A large body of work consistently finds that close relationships make people healthier across our lifespans. If we were consistently affected by less happy partners, there wouldn't be so much evidence that relationships are overall beneficial.
- 9 Saxbe, who trained as a couples therapist, said that the way couples affect each other's mood can vary. If one partner comes home from work each day upset, Saxbe has seen toxic stress be "contagious": the other person is drawn into a negative emotional state. But if a couple has a healthy emotional dynamic, one partner can help to calm the other down, and they can co-regulate together.
- 10 Happiness is not the only thing that matters in relationships. For example, parents often report low moods and low well-being when they're with their children, but when you ask them if they are happy they had children, they still say yes. "Your momentary mood is just one proxy for your wellbeing," Saxbe said.

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- 11 Stavrova said that despite her team's findings sounding bleak, she can't comment on whether this convergence is always a bad thing, even when one partner's well-being decreases. Having similar traits or behaviours to your partner can lead to more relationship stability; when people have high satisfaction gaps in their first year of marriage, it increases the chances of them getting divorced later.
- 12 You don't have to choose to date someone who is sunny all the time, but you should be aware that they will probably affect you over time. You're making sense of the world together, with its ups and downs, Stavrova said. Having a partner with a resilient temperament is probably going to matter more for quality of life.
- 13 "It's not so much, 'Do you never experience dips in wellbeing?' or 'Do you not encounter frustrations?'" Saxbe said. "What's more important is: how do you recover?"

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### 3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What happens to people who spend a lot of time together?
2. What two things often “sync up”, according to studies?
3. How many couples were part of the study?
4. How long were the German and Dutch couples followed, respectively?
5. What did the researchers notice about well-being and life satisfaction for these couples?
6. What did the researchers find about negative and positive emotions among couples?
7. What does a large body of work find about close relationships?
8. What are two ways couples can affect each other’s moods?
9. What do parents often report about their children?
10. What does having similar traits and behaviours to your partner lead to?

### 4 Key language

a. Write each phrasal verb from the article next to its definition.

drag down

lift up

rub off on

soak up

stem from

sync up

1. \_\_\_\_\_ become part of a person’s character as a result of that person spending time with somebody who has those qualities
2. \_\_\_\_\_ lighten someone’s mood or make them feel better emotionally
3. \_\_\_\_\_ happen at the same time or move at the same speed as something
4. \_\_\_\_\_ be the result of something
5. \_\_\_\_\_ take in and hold liquid
6. \_\_\_\_\_ make somebody feel weak or unhappy

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b. Complete the sentences using the phrasal verbs above. You may need to change the verb form.

1. Her mother's illness was difficult to cope with, and it \_\_\_\_\_ her \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Spending time with loved ones after a long time apart can really \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_.
3. His brother's love of video games \_\_\_\_\_ him.
4. Did you \_\_\_\_\_ your watch, phone, and computer?
5. His interest in cooking largely \_\_\_\_\_ spending time with his grandmother after school.
6. Let the meat marinate overnight so it \_\_\_\_\_ all the flavours.

c. Write personalised sentences using the phrasal verbs above.

### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "The only thing you can change is your reaction."
- "Happiness is the most important thing in a relationship."
- "In close relationships, you should hold back negative feelings to keep your partner happy."

### 6 In your own words

a. Do some research about emotional well-being in relationships.

- What are good ways to develop a healthy emotional dynamic?
- How can you release stress without making it "toxic" or "contagious"?
- What are healthy communication techniques?
- How can you recover from frustrations and dips in wellbeing?

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- b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinions. Here are some phrases to help you when you discuss facts.

*According to my research, ...*

*One example is ...*

*Some ways to do this are ...*

*A technique you can try is ...*

*Another possibility is ...*

**Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.**

*I think (that) ...*

*In my experience, ...*

*From my perspective, ...*

*In my understanding/opinion, ...*

*I (dis)agree with ...*