

## Does an unhappy partner make you less happy?

### Level 2: Intermediate

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

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. very unhappy ____   | a. satisfaction |
| 2. a pattern of electrical activity in the brain ____                                  | b. miserable    |
| 3. relating to love or a close, loving relationship ____                               | c. decline      |
| 4. the regular movement that the heart makes when it sends blood around your body ____ | d. romantic     |
| 5. gradually become less, worse, or lower ____   | e. brainwave    |
| 6. a pleasant feeling when you receive or achieve something you wanted ____            | f. heartbeat    |
| 7. time, knowledge, ideas, etc. that you put into something to make it succeed ____    | g. trait        |
| 8. get well again after being ill or hurt  | h. input        |
| 9. difficult to understand ____  | i. recover      |
| 10. a particular quality in your personality   | j. toxic        |
| 11. the way you feel at a particular time ____   | k. complicated  |
| 12. something that harms you physically or emotionally                                 | l. mood         |

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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. What \_\_\_\_\_ do you look for in a partner?
2. I was in a good \_\_\_\_\_ until I heard the bad news.
3. It can take many months to \_\_\_\_\_ from a breakup.
4. This recipe is very \_\_\_\_\_. There are over 25 steps!
5. The company called with a survey about customer \_\_\_\_\_.
6. If you have young children at home, lock up any \_\_\_\_\_ chemicals and cleaning products.
7. The popularity of sending cards in the post is on the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. A normal adult's \_\_\_\_\_ ranges from 60–100 beats per minute.

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- 1 When people date someone who is miserable, it can rub off on them. Research shows that people often become similar to those people they spend a lot of time with. Even strangers tend to mimic each other's movements and expressions, and studies have shown that heartbeats or brainwaves often sync up. Studies have shown that romantic couples have similar well-being when they first start dating and over time.
- 2 So if two people date and become more similar, who becomes more like who? In a recent paper, Olga Stavrova, a psychology professor at the University of Lübeck, asked this 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".
- 3 Stavrova looked at data from more than 20,000 German and Dutch couples who were followed for 37 and 14 years, respectively, focusing on couples that differed in well-being at the beginning of their relationships. If one person started out saying they had higher well-being and life satisfaction than the other, they experienced declines over time. The person with lower well-being might experience a small increase in happiness but often didn't improve. And the satisfied person's decrease was always greater than any improvement in the unsatisfied person.
- 4 Couples share what happens in their day and how they feel. If one person is always negative, it can bring the other one down. In another study, researchers found that negative emotions are more commonly passed back and forth than positive ones.
- 5 "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 psychology professor at the University of Southern California.
- 6 But this doesn't necessarily mean you should avoid people who seem slightly unhappy. "I would be reluctant to say, 'Don't couple up with someone who's miserable,'" Saxbe said.
- 7 The connections between long-term relationships and well-being are more complicated than this one factor. A large body of work consistently finds that close relationships make people healthier. If we were consistently affected by less happy partners, there wouldn't be so much evidence that relationships are overall beneficial.
- 8 Saxbe 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 negative emotions. But if a couple has a healthy emotional dynamic, one partner can help to calm the other down.
- 9 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.
- 10 Stavrova said she can't comment on whether this "syncing up" is always bad, even when one partner's well-being decreases. Having similar traits or behaviours to your partner can stabilise your relationship. When people have high satisfaction gaps in their first year of marriage, it increases the chances of divorce later.
- 11 You don't have to date someone who is sunny all the time but 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. "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. What did Dr Stavrova want to find out?
4. How many couples were part of the study?
5. How long were the German and Dutch couples followed, respectively?
6. What did the data show about well-being and life satisfaction for these couples?
7. What did the researchers find about negative and positive emotions among couples?
8. What does a large body of work find about close relationships?
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

sync up

1. \_\_\_\_\_ become part of a person’s character as a result of spending time with somebody who has those qualities
2. \_\_\_\_\_ improve someone’s mood or make them feel better
3. \_\_\_\_\_ happen at the same time or move at the same speed
4. \_\_\_\_\_ take in, absorb
5. \_\_\_\_\_ make somebody feel weak or unhappy

b. Choose three of the phrasal verbs above and write personalised sentences with them.

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#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Happiness is the most important thing in a relationship.”
- “You should do everything possible to make your partner happy.”

#### 6 In your own words

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

- What are good ways to have a healthy romantic relationship?
- How can you reduce stress in your life and your relationships?
- What are healthy ways to communicate?

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

*The research said/found that ...*

*One example is ...*

*One / Some ways to do this is/are ...*

*Something you can try is ...*

*Another suggestion is ...*

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

*I think (that) ...*

*In my experience, ...*

*From my point of view, ...*

*In my understanding/opinion, ...*

*I (dis)agree with ...*