

## The Intelligent Divorce

And Further Unorthodox Advice on Relationships, Marriage and Parenting

by Mark Banschick, M.D.

### Want Love? Ways to Improve Emotional Competence.

The Psychology of Emotional Competence

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Most people want a [relationship](#) that'll last.

A happy life together is the goal. And, its done everyday.

So, what's required to make it happen? *Find someone with Emotional Competence.*

If he or she has it, you're good.

If not, watch out.

**Emotional Competence:** In order to handle the ups and downs of a relationship, the two of you must be decently competent when it comes to handling feelings, relating, flexibility, intimacy, disagreements, expectations and forgiveness.

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- **Feelings:** Can you talk about important [things](#) without an argument? You or your partner may be easily triggered, and thereby react. Start by waiting a bit before reacting; the relationship will feel safer.
- **Relating:** Can you be kind and tuned into each other? Once you care about what your partner is going through, you may be able to establish trust. It will come in handy if something difficult comes up.
- **Flexibility:** Can you switch the [strong and weak](#) roles when necessary? Good relationship are not asymmetrical. Sometimes he is strong; sometimes you are. You want to know that you can both count on each other.
- **Intimacy:** Can you enjoy [sexuality](#) and cuddling together? Don't underestimate the value of skin to skin time. It builds another layer of togetherness.
- **Disagreements:** Can you stay out of [controlling](#) power struggles? You will disagree and even hurt each other. Try to put yourself into his or her shoes. Power struggles are for the birds. If one of you ALWAYS has to win; you're in trouble.
- **Expectations:** Can you both agree on what to expect from each other? This comes from listening to each other over time. *And stop asking him or her to read your mind.* This is a losing strategy.
- **Forgiveness:** Can you come back to center relatively soon, if you've had a fight? Resentment is the poison of love. Work on letting go. And, I mean both of you.

Intimate relationships inevitably get caught up in The Field of Intimacy. This is an idea borrowed from physics; as in when you enter into this energy field, all the rules change. Intimacy stirs up longings and disappointments of your past.

Some people find themselves incredibly angry or clingy in ways that they never imagined. Sometimes sex itself dissipates from the pressure of being so close. It's sounds paradoxical, but it's true. Intimacy brings up powerful feelings.

No one can hurt you like your beloved; and no one can lift you up as well.

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**Externalizing is Poison:** Most normal people look at life in a balanced way. Sometimes problems that come up are their fault, and sometimes it's someone else's fault; makes sense.

Yet, there are many people out there who need to blame. They may start with their parents, or a sibling, or an unfair work environment. There is often a kernel of truth to what they say. But, the problem is that it always comes back to blame.

This is called externalization. It is a way young children deal with conflict.

- My sister provoked me!
- Why are you so mean?
- It's not my fault!

And, while it may be sweet or annoying in a seven year old, it's a massive problem in a grown up.

Emotional competence requires being able to walk in the other person's shoes. Then, you begin to see that there are often two sides to every story, and life becomes more nuanced.

**So, Your Partner is in Therapy:** Finding the right person to spend the rest of your life with is a big deal. You need to have someone who is there by your side; and who has the emotional competence to deal with all the stuff that life throws at us.

Everyone brings baggage, including you. For some it may be a mood or anxiety issue. For another, it may be unsupportive parents, or poor self esteem; or he may be narcissistic. Long term relationships bring out the best and the worst in us. So choose carefully.

- Is He or She Emotionally Competent? Or, perhaps, you have work to do?
- Is He or She a Blamer? Or, perhaps, you blame too much?

You can be sure that these two questions are more important than whether or not your girlfriend or husband happens to be in therapy for an anxiety disorder. Many people are more or less emotionally competent. And, many are fair minded and don't externalize.

Be reflective about yourself and your partner. If you both have a healthy degree of emotional competence, it might be worth giving the relationship a chance.

Keep perspective; these simple rules may help you make good choices.

Enjoy your partner; look at the totality – and love wisely.