

## **Good Relationships - With Dr. Swati Desai Chowdhry**

Tips for modern independent couples on how to keep the communication going, and enrich their relationship even in the midst of a hectic schedule

In the first of a series titled "Good Relationships," CNBC-TV18 spoke to Dr. Swati Desai Chowdhry, visiting psychotherapist at ISB, Hyderabad, on the challenges faced by modern couples, and tips on how they can work towards better and more effective communication.

Q: What are the key challenges that young Indian couples face?

A: The young modern Indian couples, the main challenge that I have seen they have to face is..with the more modern couples, the expectations of equality are there. Probably they both are working. They have independent minds. They have more personal expectations from the relationship. However the hidden traditionality is still there. And what I mean by hidden traditionality is, there are three key points about hidden traditionality. The one main point is, extended family interference is still there and that can create problems more so than before for two people who are having independent minds and as I said expectation of equality. The second thing is, the idea of respect. In old days, there were some notions of what it means to respect each other. But those notions are now broken. So our ideas of respect are different but the rules are not yet established. And the third point about this is that the social expectations from the couple are still the same. Although both have hardly any time, for example, weddings, birthday parties or social events and everything, that can put a lot of pressure.

Q: How do couples really need to grapple with this? What are the key pointers as a psychotherapist that you would recommend?

A: I think the change of attitude - that you have to respect differences - that's the key point. Typically people are afraid of differences. They get threatened. Their ego gets threatened. However to relax about differences and to keep the communication open, that is the key point. And to keep communication open with changed attitude of respect is the most important. So must have an atmosphere of safety that just because you say something to the other person, it doesn't have to explode, it's open communication with understanding and love. So I am going to call it communication for the SOUL (Safe, Open, Understanding and Love).

Q: What are the key ingredients of SOUL?

A: There are ten key points that I have come up with - if you want to keep the communication open, like we were talking about.

The Art of Listening, The Art of Being Assertive, Managing Your Anger, Encouraging Each other...It has to be an ego-enhancing relationship, as opposed to an ego-diminishing relationship.

Q: Lets start with the Art of Listening. What are the key ingredients for it? It's simple enough as a concept, but many of just don't listen.

A: As a culture in India, we all are very expressive, but we are not very good at listening. So listening basically means you have to hold your judgment, do not personalise whatever the person is saying, but just listen in order to understand. It doesn't mean that you have to agree, but you have to try to understand the feelings and not offer solutions right away. That is a very common mistake...When a spouse comes in and talks to you about anything, maybe something that had happened in the office or something that happened with the mother-in-law or her sister, instead of listening to what the person has to express, listening to the person's personal feeling,

the other thinks about what it means to me or what about me? It's that kind of a feeling and they are not able to listen to the real thing that's being expressed.

Q: What is the solution to this?

A: Think about a situation where your partner comes in and starts talking about something emotionally, just listen, don't give the solution, do not try to think about your own issues but just listen - to understand - and say things like, 'okay I know what you are saying' or "I can see that".

Q: Should a person actually put themselves in another person's shoes to gauge?

A: If it is possible but typically it is very hard for people to put themselves in another person's shoes. But at least, even if there is disagreement, at least, to listen, to try to understand instead of judging if the person is right or wrong.