

## **Surviving & Thriving in Your Relationship During Vet School**

### **Helpful hints for any intimate relationship**

#### **Make it a shared goal to regularly nurture your relationship**

1. ***Maintaining a relationship is like managing a bank account.*** Vet school can involve lots of withdrawals, so you'll need regular deposits as well.
2. ***Little gestures count a lot.*** Offering a back rub, bringing a cup of coffee, a little love note, compliments, texts and calls during the day, asking about your partner's day and LISTENING—all communicate that you care and are thinking about him/her.
3. ***Share the work.*** Take time to in the next 2-3 weeks to discuss fair ways to divvy up the maintenance tasks and duties. Changes from the past will probably be necessary. Be willing to let chores be unequal for a while. Plan to re-evaluate in a few weeks. Panelists may have examples of this process.
4. ***Daily talks*** Establish a regular time together to review your days and/or plan for the next day. Find at least 15 minutes/day without distractions like TV, internet, or studying, etc. Don't make time together just about problems—share good things!
5. ***Weekly together time*** Set aside a short time together each week to focus on and enjoy each other. This may include discussions about dreams, ideas, and for relaxation and romance.
6. ***Regular dates*** Have a date at least once every 2 weeks. Doesn't have to cost anything or involve going out—just do something you both enjoy that fits your needs at the time. If one is an extrovert and the other more introverted, take this difference into account and vary how social your dates are.
7. ***Take out the garbage*** Don't let resentments build for too long! Sometimes they do have to be put aside until there is a good time to talk. Avoid ambushes: ask your partner when he/she will be able to talk about an issue. Say, "I'm having a problem and would like to talk about it when you can." Remind yourself of the good things, and show appreciation for your partner's willingness to listen and share in a solution.
7. ***Use humor, not sarcasm*** It's good to laugh, play, and tease to relieve tension.
8. ***Recognize some issues will always be there and require regular work.***  
 These differences are natural, normal, and expected; they don't mean you're wrong for each other. Work towards win-win solutions and give and take: you both need to get some of what you want. *All* couples experience issues that can't be resolved well. Instead, you'll have to accept and work around them, kind of like having a chronic backache. Some common ones:
  - a. Differing needs for space / togetherness
  - b. Priorities and values about spending and saving money
  - c. Differences in romantic and sexual expression
  - d. Preferences about social time and friends

9. ***Feelings come and go*** Remember that feelings of love, romance, satisfaction, and closeness ebb and flow. Enjoy when the feelings are flowing nicely; relax and take care of yourself when they're not.
10. ***Watch your non-verbals and tone*** Nonverbal information trumps anything you say if the two messages don't match. The tone you use may be much more important than what you say. See Gottman's "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" handout.
11. ***Continue to express affection***, especially after difficult interactions, to affirm your love.
12. ***Connect with other couples*** you enjoy, who may share some of the same struggles. Perhaps there are ways you can support each other, e.g. child or pet care.
13. ***Do things that make you happy, too.*** Make time for some of your favorite pursuits, make some friends of your own, and work at maintaining a life-work balance that is sustainable. *Don't count on your spouse/partner to make or keep you happy.* That's your job!

### **Pros, cons, and issues in Long Distance Relationships (LDRs)**

- A. In some ways LDRs are easier, as there's not as much guilt about not spending time together.
- B. Often lots of pressure on times you are together. Those times don't necessarily coincide to when the student's load is lighter. Your moods may not match up.
- C. Keep each other informed. Touch base every day or as you agree upon. Try to do some things while apart that you can also enjoy when you're together.
- D. Often, communication by phone or e-mail may be an encouragement to discuss important issues that might otherwise be neglected.....eg. one's hopes and dreams, values, expectations.
- E. Communication, frequency of time together, how to pay for visits, how you'll handle issues as they arise, such as one phone call/week to "clear the air, first bring up issue in e-mail, using "I" language.....to give partner some time to think before you talk.