

Managing Long-Distance Relationships

Students can find themselves wondering whether their romantic relationship will survive while separated over the summer months, while away at college, or while studying abroad. While long-distance relationships can be challenging, there are a number of things you can do to ensure success and deal with the sadness of being apart from a loved one.

One of the most important keys to success with long distance relationships is effective communication. It's important for both parties to be able to feel that if they can really talk about any concerns and that the discussion will be welcomed. The quality of the relationship is more likely to improve if both partners develop the ability to share feelings openly.

The second key to relationship success is a demonstrated commitment to the relationship by both parties. What kind of commitment are we making? How serious or casual will it be? Relationships need a solid and secure trust between the couple. Trust is very important. If it isn't strong, you can make a conscious effort to work on it, both on your own and together. Being far apart can be scary and risky, so it's important that each partner is willing to take risks. For example, each partner can trust that the other person's social life will not be a threat to the relationship.

It's important for each partner to have independence, while still having a healthy level of dependence upon each other. When these are present, there is a balance of power in the relationship, and each person can be autonomous but still get their emotional needs met by the other person. With an appropriate balance of independence and dependence, each person is allowed, even encouraged, to grow and change as an individual, which everyone needs. Therefore, it is wise not to expect that you or your partner will always stay exactly the same as when the relationship started.

When these aspects of the relationship are healthy, the final factor tends to be naturally present, a mutual respect for one another. Each partner has to have clear expectations that they communicate. It's extremely important to figure out personal expectations of the other person and the relationship, and then discuss them with your partner so that you are both clear. Lastly, make the time you have together quality time, and build in some alone time during visits. Do things that draw the two of you closer, rather than emphasize the distance between you.

Strategies for Coping

- Put meaningful things into your life other than your significant other. Spend time with friends and family.
- Help those who have challenging circumstances. Volunteer.
- Make sure there are supportive people and places in your life.
- Every once in a while, do something that is atypical of yourself, although not self-defeating.

What to do when the depression of missing gets to you

- Let out your emotions: cry, scream, exercise, play a sport, meditate.
- Write a letter to your partner (whether you send it or not) to say how you feel.
- Write in a journal.
- Call or visit with a friend.
- Speak to a professional counselor.

Though long-distance relationships are extremely challenging, they can work with a little effort. Hopefully, these tips can help you sustain a solid, happy, and successful relationship, no matter the distance.