

## **RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT FOR SISSIES!**

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

Everyone wants a loving relationship! As social beings, humans have an innate need for love and belonging. We fantasize about that ideal relationship with the ONE PERSON we believe will complete us! And, when we find the perfect partner, we expect to embark on a happily ever after fairy tale love story.

NOTHING is more enjoyable than a budding, new relationship. In the beginning love IS blind. But as the initial euphoria wears away, we uncover the inevitable flaws in our dream relationship!

What happens to relationships? How do we continue to love once we have seen our partner – “warts and all?” Why do so many relationships fail? Why do we keep making the same mistakes time after time?

Relationships are not for sissies! Life’s biggest challenges come in relationships. Our “dream lover” is apt to have some of the best and worst characteristics of our primary caregivers. We look to our partner to make us whole. Instead, they hold a mirror that reflects our weaknesses and wounds.

Most relationships begin with erotic, romantic love. Over time, in healthy situations, this evolves into *consummate love* with the elements of intimacy, passion, and commitment. To achieve consummate love, each partner must be responsible for their own healing and personal growth. Instead of depending on partners to make us happy, we must learn that happiness is an inside job. A relationship can be only as healthy as the *least healthy person* in the relationship!

Couples who evolve to the level of consummate love share certain qualities. They enjoy each other’s company and honor individualities. They have a strong *commitment* to the relationship, a genuine *concern* about each partner’s wellbeing, an understanding that *conflict* is inevitable, the willingness to *compromise*, a *connectedness* and openness in *communication*, a sense of *compassion* and caring for each other’s feelings, and the *character* to be honest with their partners and themselves.

If you find your relationship in a rut, don’t wait until it’s too late. Ask for help.