

QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS @ UNI?

RELWELL:
RELATIONSHIP WELLBEING SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

By Dominika Dabrzalska, BA Psychology

We asked our recent grads: What is something you wish you had known about relationships before you started university?



That's a great question! There are as many answers to it as there are students.

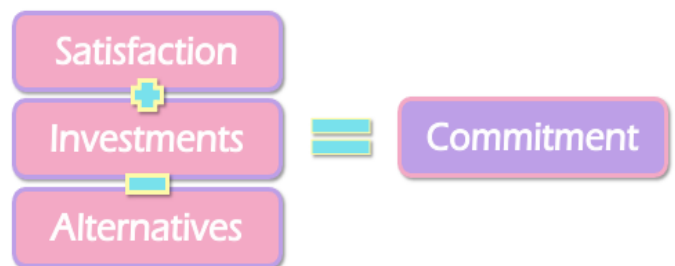
As you enter university, you realise this is a new home for many people with different backgrounds. I personally think this is the most important point. Each person has a unique idea of what a perfect relationship looks like, but what happens if two people fall in love with each other but they both have different expectations toward their relationship? This is when you have to learn how to compromise. I'm not talking about giving up your dream life, but rather learning to acknowledge that your special someone also has their dream life. Once you understand how important both of these are, you will start to realise how to create a joined reality for your relationship or even start building your beautiful future together (based on both of your values). A shared goal is actually more important than you might think! Having an

instrumental (i.e. positively supporting) partner not only motivates you to achieve more but also keeps you more satisfied with that relationship. Think about studying for an important exam. Of course, it would be nicer to go out on a date rather than study together in the library, but the joy of celebrating an awesome result is even more wholesome when you know you have done it together!

Another point I believe is worth discussing is how to maintain a relationship throughout "the most fun years of your life". Some say you should stay single and enjoy your freedom while it lasts. Others say university is the best place to meet the love of your life. Well, don't limit yourself to choosing only one option. Keep your mindset open to new experiences. However, if you find yourself getting committed to someone, I'll let you in on my favourite tips I have learned!

The Investment Model shows how to maintain a relationship. Technically, all you have to do is stay in love, right? Well, it seems easy, but let's break it down:

Based on [research](#) (and my experience), your relationship will blossom when you put effort into it and enjoy the journey (high satisfaction). Additionally, you shouldn't give much attention to other candidates (Low Quality of Alternatives), even though I know, there are so many attractive students here! Well, if you care about the persistence of the relationship, you should not focus on them. On top of that, go to the same weekly activity, maybe even go out with the same group of friends which you would hate to lose due to a breakup (High Investment). Having something you both share is a great way to stay committed!



These are only my insights into university relationships which I wish someone told me about before I started. The most important is that you enjoy your time and do what feels right to you! Good luck!

About the Author: Dominika Dabrzalska completed her BA in Psychology at the University of Essex in 2023. During her time at Essex, she took a module on the science of relationships with Dr Veronica Lamarche, Director of the RelWell Service and Senior Lecturer of Psychology. Since graduating, Dominika has gone on to pursue an MSc in Forensic Psychology.

About RelWell: RelWell is the Relationship Wellbeing Service at the University of Essex, led by Dr Veronica Lamarche. The RelWell Service is an educational space that promotes relationship wellbeing in the community through workshops, research and other educational platforms. Follow us on social media (X.com @RelWellEssex; Instagram/Threads @EssexRelWell)