

# The 10 Stages of a Relationship That Every Couple Should Understand

From getting to know a person to breaking up, there are ten different stages of a relationship that you may experience. Learn about what they are and why they're important.

When you meet someone and fall in love, you probably think that you will ride off into the sunset and live happily ever after. At least that's what all the Disney movies and romantic comedies tell us, right?

Well, as we all know, it doesn't always work out that way.

If you are wondering what stage your relationship is in, and if it's 'normal' or headed for disaster, then there is some research to help you determine what to do. There are 10 main stages of a relationship that you may end up experiencing.

With that said, let me start by saying there are many different types of relationship stage models out there, but I am going to focus on just one by Dr. Mark Knapp because it is a classic, well-accepted theory.<sup>[1]</sup>

## What Are the Stages of a Relationship?

According to Dr. Knapp, there are ten different stages to a relationship. That being said, there are certain things that happen during these phases.<sup>[2]</sup>

While there are ten different stages, they are divided up into two different phases: the coming together and the coming apart phases.

Let's start with the Coming Together phase:

### The Coming Together Phase

Relationships have to start somewhere, right? Obviously not every relationship starts out the same way. Some couples may meet on a dating app, while others meet through friends or at work.

Regardless of how a couple starts out, there are some distinct stages in the coming together phase.

#### 1. The Initiation Stage

This stage occurs when you first meet someone. It's exchanging pleasantries and facts about yourselves. It's the brand-new 'getting to know you' stage. At this point, your focus is mostly on superficial attributes like appearance and how the person presents themselves.

## **2. The Experimentation Stage**

If you make it past the initiation stage (and many people don't), then you will enter the experimentation stage. Some people don't make it this far because they find something in the first stage that they don't like so much. During experimentation, you dig deeper into the interests and values of the other.

## **3. Intensifying Stage**

This stage is sometimes called the 'bliss' stage. The reason for this is because things are starting to become more serious and intense. You have found out enough about each other that you now want to share more deep and intimate information about yourself with the other person. Feelings start to develop and there is excitement about being in the relationship.

## **4. Integration Stage**

Now that you are officially a couple and have feelings for each other, in the integration stage, you will start to blend your lives together. You develop routines and habits as a couple. Your family and friends also start to recognize you as a unit. In other words, you have gone from 'me and you' to 'us.'

## **5. The Bonding Stage**

Since you now view yourselves as a unit instead of two individuals, the bonding stage is when real commitment tends to happen. Both of you are very sure of the bond you share, so you will either move in together or get married. Everyone has their own way of showing bonding, but regardless, this stage involves some formal commitment in the eyes of society.

## **The Coming Apart Phase**

We all want to be happy and live happily ever after, but that's simply not the case for many couples. Whether you are married, living together, or just dating, the coming apart phase happens to most of us at one time or another.

Here are the stages of the coming apart phase:

## **6. The Differentiating Stage**

Being crazy in love and walking on Cloud 9 doesn't last. Even in the happiest of relationships, life is not always perfect. But if you have entered the differentiating stage, then you are probably headed toward a breakup. This is the time when you start seeing differences, incompatibilities, and start to see cracks in your unit.

## **7. The Circumscribing Stage**

This stage is just a continuation of the differentiating stage. You pull further away from each other, you set boundaries for yourself, communication falters, and you become less and less intimate (in all ways – emotionally, mentally, and physically). You start to see yourself as an individual now more than you did before. The unit is unraveling even more. There will be a lot of blaming, defensiveness, and resentment.

## 8. The Stagnation Stage

In this phase, you are no longer going anywhere in the relationship. You are at a standstill. Think about a pond with algae on it. It doesn't move; the water just sits there and grows more gross stuff on it. That's pretty much what is happening during this stage. The coming apart is almost complete. Apathy may have even set in as well – on one or both people's parts.

## 9. The Avoidance Stage

This stage involves avoidance – either physically, mentally, emotionally, or all of the above. One of you may move out of the house, leading to a true separation. Or perhaps you are still living under the same roof, but you don't really talk or interact anymore. You're like two roommates who don't really get along, so you try to avoid each other as much as possible.

## 10. The Termination Stage

In the termination stage, a relationship formally ends. If the couple is married, then the divorce is started or finalized. If you are just living together, then one or both of your physically moves out and makes the separation final. In a nutshell, this is when the relationship is emotionally and/or legally over.

## Why Is It Important to Understand the Stages of a Relationship?

Relationships are difficult for many people, but they don't have to be. Most of the time, it's the people who make them difficult because of their negative emotions and behaviors.

A lot of the problems happen because people are not very familiar with these different phases of relationships. The more awareness we have, the easier it is to repair a relationship when problems start to appear.

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