



Expectations Key To Successful Relationships

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Starting college or university is a big change, and when life changes, friendships and relationships often change too. That doesn't mean they have to end, says Marilyn Barnicke Belleghem.

Barnicke Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist, says it's easier than ever to stay connected, but planning is key.

E-mail, instant messaging and cheap long-distance plans are all great tools, she says. The trick is to get people's contact information before you leave high school, pick and choose the people who really matter, and then plan in advance to get together when you're not in school.

"So, you want to pick a specific time, and say, 'Let's meet the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend,' for example," she says.

When it comes to romantic relationships, she says clarity is key. "I believe that good relationships are based on good deals, and when each person knows what's expected of them, what their side of the deal is, and that they agree to it."

For example, do you refuse to go out in mixed groups? Are you allowed to dance with members of the opposite sex? Whatever your limits are, Barnicke Belleghem suggests setting them before you go.

"Because, a lot of times, people get carried away, and if they don't know what those expectations are, the peer pressure can be pretty heavy."

Josee Lafleche, whose boyfriend went to university in Ohio while she studied in Ottawa, says the first year is the hardest. "That's when you establish all the rules, sort of, and your trust basis.

"You just have to take it a day at a time. That's what we finally told ourselves. Just, no pressure."

Ten years later, they're married and happier than ever, she says.

For both friendships and romances, Barnicke Belleghem says keeping an emotional connection becomes extra important when distance removes the physical connection. "When we share with people, and we share with them who we are and how we're feeling and what we're thinking, not just what we're doing, it tends to make a stronger bond," she says.