



Retie the knot

What is normal? When is it time to see a counsellor? Vasavi Seethepalli reports on making the most of your relationships

“Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation” Oscar Wilde once said.

Human relationships are complex. For expats, living away from familiar surroundings and family support network can put an added

strain on relationships. Not all Valentine's go to plan and sometimes you need to compromise.

The good news is that humans possess the ability to commit, compromise and restore frayed bonds. This month, Reshma Chugh, a relationship counsellor who works with teenagers, adults and couples shares advice

Reshma's tips for a healthy relationship

1. Learn to communicate better
2. Let go of smaller issues
3. Use phrases that assume some responsibility such as “I feel hurt that ...” rather than phrases that place all the blame on the other person such as “you did this...”
4. Plan a date night once a week when you don't talk about finances, children or schedules.
5. Appreciate each other and focus on the positives in the relationship.

Reshma Chugh gave up a high-flying career in banking to study psychology. She set up a practice in Hong Kong to help others learn, grow and work towards a happy, healthy and balanced mindset. hk.counsellor.com

on how to overcome relationship turmoil.

What is your definition of love?

Love means different things to different people. To me, love is about respect, trust and knowing that person will be there during good times and bad. I strongly believe that you must love yourself before you can begin to love someone else.

Is arguing a good sign?

Arguing is normal, but it's how the couple communicates their feelings to each other that is crucial in a relationship. Getting your point across doesn't have to be malicious.

What is the purpose of couples therapy?

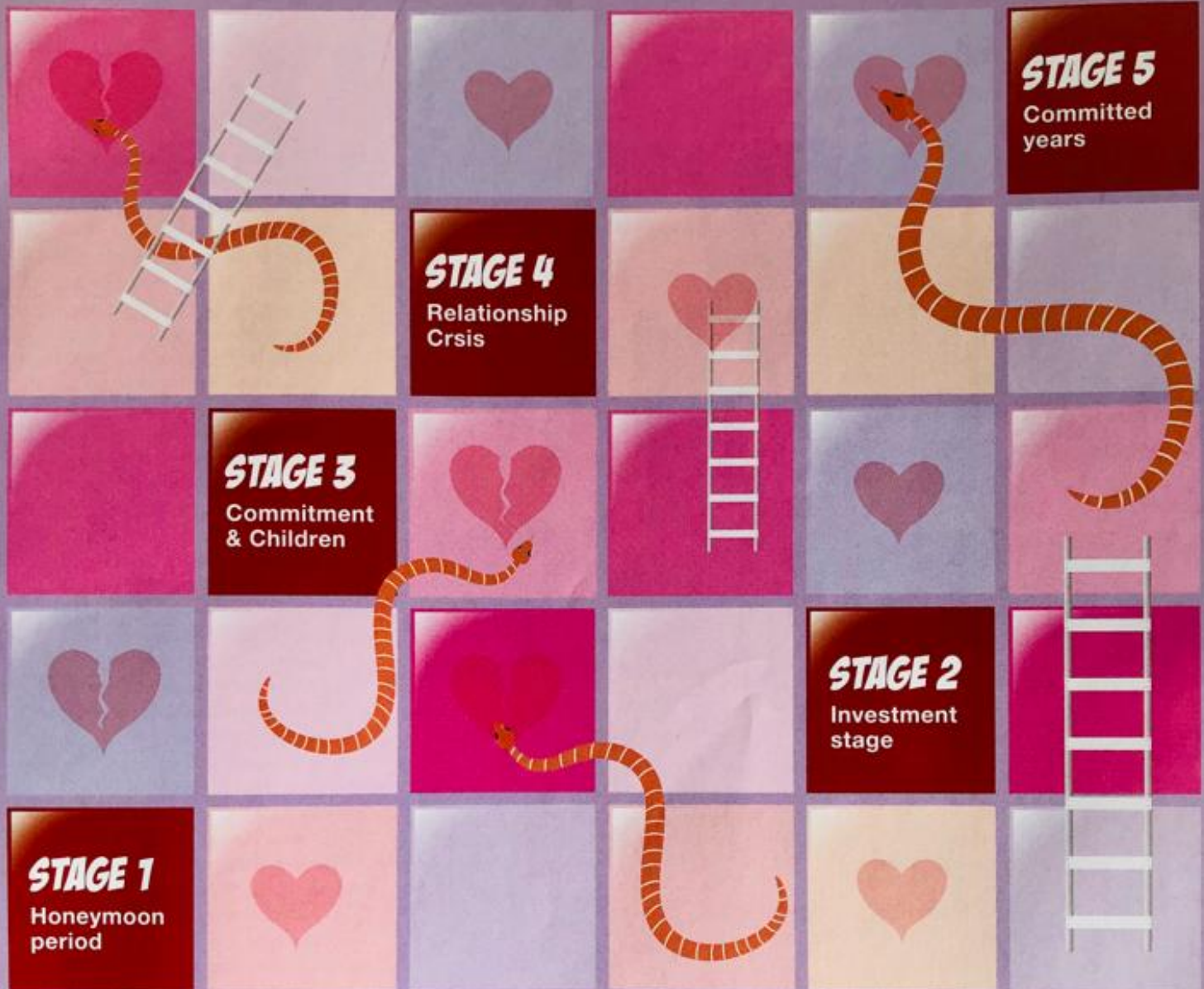
Therapy should not be looked at as crisis management, more a chance to work on communication skills in order to help a relationship become stronger and healthier. Therapy provides techniques to resolve conflicts.

When is it time for couple's therapy?

There is no perfect relationship. When couples start to realise they need a little help to learn how to communicate with each other more effectively and when couples feel stuck but are willing to go the distance to resolve. Someone once told me, “having therapy when you're not in crisis, is like getting your car serviced rather than waiting until it breaks down.”

What are the stages of a relationship?

Every relationship is different but there are a few basic stages that most relationships go through.



Stage 1: Honeymoon period

Otherwise known as infatuation. The love is new and intense, passionate feelings of affection are displayed and both partners are careful to show their best side.

Stage 2: Investment stage

You are in it for the long haul. You start to get to know more about your partner and begin to build trust. This is a stage of exploration and a few arguments can

occur as you start to learn more about each other's personalities.

Stage 3: Commitment & children

Couples are committed and at this time some become parents. This can be a particularly testing time as children become the priority and partners can forget about each other.

Stage 4: Relationship crisis

Can be termed the 'mid-life crisis' stage.

Another tough stage during which partners may pursue different directions but it is possible to work together to get through this stage.

Stage 5: Committed years

The couple have learnt how to handle what life throws at them together, they appreciate what each other does, rather than doesn't do.

What is the secret to a successful therapy session?

There is no one formula, but generally when both parties are committed, honest and open to making their relationship work.

So many people in Hong Kong are

committed to their jobs, is there therapy to help with that?

Corporate therapists are becoming increasingly popular in Hong Kong as more companies see the long-term benefits of investing in their staff. These benefits can include increased work productivity and staff

morale. There are benefits in the home too since partners are better able to cope with work stress and able to create a better work-life balance. **S**