

Coping with College Series

Going the Distance in Relationships

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Let's be honest: relationships are tough. Whatever the label - family member, friend, co-worker, or romantic partner - each relationship takes time, energy, and effort for the relationship to remain healthy and grow. Moreover, each type of relationship comes packaged with its own unique challenges and rewards not necessarily found in other types of relationships. Long distance relationships (LDRs) are no exception. In fact, it is often the distance itself that creates unique challenges for us, as we struggle to maintain close bonds across many miles. Yet, a relationship of this kind can also offer unique rewards that may not always be a part of other relationships.

Some of you may be involved in a LDR right now, while others are facing a split in the near future, as people move back home at semester's end. Still others may be thinking about entering into a LDR, but are afraid that, "Long distance relationships never work." The truth is that these relationships CAN and DO work, provided each person gives the time and energy to make it happen. Below are some helpful hints for people involved in a long distance relationship, whether it's with a romantic partner, a friend, or family member.

First, as with any relationship, it's essential to maintain open, honest, and effective communication. In fact, this is the "glue" that often holds these relationships together. Both parties must communicate their thoughts and feelings openly with one another. What are your expectations and needs? What are your limits regarding acceptable behavior? It's important that each person answer these questions, and communicates those answers to each other.

Another important factor is that each person makes a sincere commitment to the maintenance of the relationship. Just like children on a see-saw, each person must put work into the relationship to make it "go." If one person sits around like dead weight, there is no movement, hence no growth. The balance of "give and take" becomes essential. It's also important to balance independence with dependence. While a healthy level of dependence on a significant other is important, it is equally important to maintain your own independence in the relationship. We need freedom and autonomy in our lives, just like we need to depend on others to meet our emotional needs. When this balance is achieved, the pair grows as each separate individual grows as well.

You may be struggling to keep in touch with that person far away, particularly if the phone bill is swallowing your bank account. To keep a relationship going, connections must be maintained, and it can be inexpensive. Email works wonders, and handwritten letters or cards are fairly cheap as well. If you need to hear that person's voice, try stocking up on phone cards or make homemade videos. Be creative and let your imagination go!

Any relationship is hard to maintain, and long distance relationships are often the most difficult. Yet, opening the lines of communication and contributing equally to the "give and take" of the relationship can help make the distance easier to manage. In the end, if you build and maintain a close, emotional bond with another person, a few hundred miles can't tear that apart.

