

KATHRYN FORD, MD

Relationship Expert

featured in

The New York Times

Psychology Today



Kathryn Ford, M.D. specializes in teaching people "how to be a couple" (it's hard!) through her unique method called, Aperture Awareness, Dr. Ford guides couples to stay in the present moment – which, she explains, is the key to a successful relationship. The present moment is where learning, growth and connection always happens.

Dr. Ford has been practicing psychotherapy in private practice for more than 20 years. She received her M.D. from Brown University Medical School and completed her psychiatry residency at The Stanford School of Medicine. She offers workshops for couples, teams and therapists through Stanford Continuing Studies.

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Talking Points

- **What Love Really Looks Like in a Successful Relationship**
- **The 2 Biggest Mistakes Couples Make that Drive Them Further Apart**
- **How and When to Have a Difficult Conversation**
- **The Myth that People Can't Change**
- **How Repair is Different than Accepting Blame**
- **Using Mistakes to Strengthen a Relationship**

8.2

**years is the average length
of a marriage in the U.S.**

Overview of Aperture Awareness

by Kathryn Ford, MD

What is the one most important thing you can do to keep the love you have or to get back the love you've lost? How do you succeed in what is the most satisfying, frustrating, joyful, painful, fun and interesting adventure of your life.

You're a couple because when you encountered each other in the vast sea of "others," something clicked. Chemistry happened. You opened to each other in a way that felt special, unusual, maybe even magical. And the connection that happened because of this unusual openness felt good. You may have said to yourself or to each other, "Let's do this more... again... next Friday... a lot... forever."

95% of Americans will at some point in their lives attempt this amazing feat. Everything in their bodies, hearts, minds and society tells them this should be the most natural and wonderful thing in the world. And so, with no training whatsoever, they set off to be a couple.

Two individuals, who since birth have specialized in learning to be separate and independent, now attempt an ongoing, intimate connection while maintaining and developing themselves as individuals. What could go wrong?

Then at some point you discovered that your secret connection has another side to the secret: an increased vulnerability to feeling hurt, ignored, betrayed, disappointed, frustrated. These injuries, large and small, trigger your brain to close, slam the door. You're now more protected, but also cut off from love and companionship. With the "end of the honeymoon" you are launched into the full mind-bending puzzle: open you have the pain of being emotionally injured, closed you suffer the loss of connection that you want and need.

We learn about couples from watching others, and we see examples of success, failure, and everything in between. As you read this, somewhere couples are flirting and fighting; taking long walks; having hard talks that bring them closer; having hard talks that seem endless and make things worse; becoming engaged; becoming enraged over small,

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very small, misunderstandings; looking forward to having sex; having sex and enjoying it; having sex and not enjoying it; wishing they knew how to fall in love again; falling in love again; falling in love again but with someone else; feeling wrong and wronged; repairing injuries; kissing; feeling disappointed, contented, ecstatic, and desperate.

But watching other couples is like watching a magic show: the important stuff is kept out of sight. Much of what couples do to create or destroy love, trust and understanding happens behind closed doors. So how do you succeed? What is the most important thing for penetrating this mystery of being a loving couple?

Here is the secret: Everything in the grand adventure of being a couple depends on your openness to each other in the moment—your emotional aperture—and your ability to sense that openness in each unfolding moment—your aperture awareness. This is the superpower perfectly designed to steer us through the many dark and stormy moments.

For more than 20 years as a couples therapist and psychiatrist, I have been helping hundreds of couples in difficulty figure out how to turn the downward spiral of relationship distress into an upward spiral of relationship success. Early in my work with couples I saw them doing two things that were counterproductive. Counterproductive Thing #1 was tuning out and going on autopilot, allowing habitual reactions to drive them further apart. Counterproductive Thing #2 was to try to think their way out of the tangled moments. Both tuning out and thinking can get in the way of using our brilliant minds for the direct perception of what is happening in the present moment. This present moment awareness, also known as mindfulness, gives you the power to steer toward connection.

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Each moment in the life of your couple is a complex weave of your histories, with each other and with other people, your personalities, your patience, dreams and desires, what you had for breakfast and how you slept last night.

I provide couples with ideas, theories and research that help them to understand the neurological and psychological basis of emotional aperture and aperture awareness. Most importantly I provide a guided path of exercises. The exercises are experiments with new behaviors and new ways of paying attention that helps couples to develop Aperture Awareness and to know how to use it to find their way forward in tricky, sticky moments. Using the exercises couples navigate, in new ways, the conversations that are already a part of their life as a couple. These powerful exercises are designed to develop awareness as couples experiment with new behaviors and communications skills.

I help couples to understand:

- Why being a couple is so difficult
- What changes after the honeymoon and why
- How coupling is different than mating
- How to work with the natural abilities of your own brain
- How to connect with and develop your Aperture Awareness
- Simple steps for dealing with the most common aperture closures
- How to turn a downward spiral into an upward spiral
- How to maximize loving connection while minimizing injury

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