

Positive Psychology Shows Benefits of Relating

By Ilene L. Dillon, M.S.W.

Love and committed relationships, have benefits for individuals and families. Research reports, especially from the new field of Positive Psychology, are giving evidence of additional benefits to the longevity and life satisfaction we already know come our way through love and long-term commitment and marriage. They include:

- 1. We get to give and receive** The most positive things about most people's day is doing things for or with others. Positive Psychology teaches us the paradox: Giving is receiving. What better place to practice "giving and receiving" than in relationships? Loving others allows us to focus on the joys of giving, yet allows us to more graciously accept what is given to us, as well.
- 2. We open ourselves more to others** Being "in love" allows us to accept another person's influence, which according to relationships expert and researcher John Gottman, is a big predictor of marital (and relationship) success. This is particularly important for men, who feel more pressure to be in charge and to be the decision-maker, and so benefit from sharing the load.
- 3. Good news for singles! The most powerful and stabilizing of all relationships is the one we have with ourselves!** According to Christine Arylo (*Choosing Me Before We*), "As a culture, we are so fixated on where we are going that we just can't be good with where we are. This really unhealthy tendency has caused way too many women to rush into commitments way before they knew themselves." Gottman's research shows the more whole and complete each individual is, the more successful our relationships when we do commit, allowing happiness and wholeness whether or not we are in a relationship.
- 4. We expand our opportunities to grow personally, emotionally and spiritually** Growth can occur during a relationship, yet can also occur as the result of a relationship breakup. From *Divorce and Its Consequences*, we learn that men have more of the most severe symptoms after divorce. While women have less severe problems, they last longer. Distress, depression and other negative emotional effects following marital breakup, according to one study, took about 2 years for men compared to three years for women. Women are more likely than men to report they have experienced positive growth and a new sense of independence and self-confidence, "good things" from post-divorce.

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**Ilene Dillon, M.S.W., aka The Emotional Pro**, facilitates personal and global transformation as a coach, psychotherapist, author, professional speaker, radio host and product creator. A 42 year California Marriage and Family Therapist, Ilene teaches parents to Raise Incredible Kids, end manipulation, master anger, and create ease and balance as children grow up. Ilene is author of over 20 books, workbooks and media courses on emotions and parenting, and creator/host of Full Power Living Internet radio. She's a Certified Mentor with Accessing Universal Intelligence & a Founding Expert with CCFL Global Academy. [ilene@accessingui.com](mailto:ilene@accessingui.com) [www.emotionalpro.com](http://www.emotionalpro.com)