

I LOVE YOU BUT I'M NOT IN LOVE WITH YOU

Article by: Cheryl Sol

What does this well worn and much used break up line mean? Whatever the confusion about this, it is never really received as a positive thing. It implies something like “*I care for you, I care about you but the passion has gone and maybe I don't want to be with you anymore.*”

However does having this feeling towards your partner always mean that the relationship is over? Let's look realistically at love and how the recognition of this feeling can be the start of a necessary shake-up to a relationship.

Sternberg looks at relationships as having 3 possible components i.e. intimacy, passion and commitment.

Intimacy in a relationship is the emotional connection based on sharing personal information, mutual acceptance of each other, feeling close etc.

Passion is the sexual attraction and the drive to be sexually intimate with your partner.

Commitment refers to the decision that you want to be with and intend to be with this person in the present and the future

How these elements combine defines what kind of relationship results. Sternberg gives the following examples:-

1. Consummate love is the ideal and involves all three of these – intimacy, passion and commitment.
2. Nonlove does not involve any of these. e.g. you are not attracted to, committed to or share emotional closeness e.g. a casual acquaintance
3. A Liking love involves intimacy without passion or commitment
4. Fatuous love consists of passion and commitment but lacks emotional intimacy
5. Romantic love involves passion and intimacy but not necessarily a commitment. An affair is an example
6. Infatuation is based on passion for someone but has no intimacy or commitment.
7. Empty love is based on commitment but does not have intimacy or passion. This happens when someone stays in a relationship out of duty or because they fear change.
8. Companionate love is found in a relationship where there is intimacy and commitment but no passion e.g. a committed friendship or a relationship that has lost its fire over time.

So when someone honestly says “I love you but I'm not in love with you they are probably referring to the fact that they are there out of commitment to the relationship but that the passion and possibly the attraction is not there anymore. This is what Andrew Marshall refers to as “Affectionate Regard”.

While no relationship maintains the exciting erotic love that it starts with, it is possible for a relationship not to become stale and dull over time or to revive it if it does.

Tennov describes the beginning heady stages of love as LIMERANCE. This is when thoughts of the other person intrude, daily stressors seem much more manageable, you feel as if you are walking on air, only noticing the positive aspects of the person and of course there is physical attraction. This we interpret as “being in love”

When limerance i.e. the magical euphoric feeling wears off, people are afraid that they are falling out of love. Realistically though, research has shown that the normal period for limerance to continue is between 18 months to 3 years. Then it fades to make way for more realistic feelings. However while the crazy and obsessive side of limerance can't be maintained or recaptured, feelings of joy, excitement and closeness can be maintained. Love after limerance can be just as meaningful and rewarding as well as exciting. Marshall refers to this as the period of “Loving Attachment”.

Limerance is fed and sustained by the rush of brain chemicals. It doesn't necessarily need a huge amount of work to sustain the attraction.

The myth of romantic love is that it will always be this way, that your partner will always be as devoted, uncritical, forgiving, attentive and able to meet every need that you have. The bond will always be strong and withstand any amount of neglect or disrespect.

However when the relationship moves to the stage of loving attachment it has to be maintained, worked on and consciously fed or else it will dry up.

Loving attachment can easily slip into affectionate regard. This is where the relationship is at its most vulnerable. This is where it can become easy to look to someone else to re-experience that longed for feeling of limerance. This is where it is also possible to recognize the problem, be honest with each other and work hard on seeing what potential there is to increase emotional and physical intimacy, respect and interest in each other and the capacity for shared fun and joy. It is a time of vulnerability in the relationship but possibly also a time of possibilities.