

*Love Demystified: Strategies for a Successful Love Life is attractive to readers in any stage of a loving relationship-finding a new love, fixing a current relationship, loving again after a loss. It gives them the tips and techniques they need to get through many difficult times in loving.*

## **Love Demystified: Strategies for a Successful Love Life**

by B. Beverly Palmer PhD

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A couple is walking away from the viewer on a gravel path that leads into a misty, sunlit landscape. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that fills the sky and the mist. The couple is silhouetted against the bright light. The path is made of small stones and leads towards the horizon. There are some bushes and trees on the right side of the path.

# Love Demystified:

**STRATEGIES FOR  
A SUCCESSFUL LOVE LIFE**

Beverly B. Palmer, Ph.D.

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## INTRODUCTION

A premature infant is gasping for breath, as he lies struggling for life in his incubator. His parents, with tears streaming down their cheeks, carefully poke their index fingers through a porthole on each side of the incubator to touch him, perhaps for the last time. Suddenly two tiny hands reach toward the outstretched fingers and clasp around them tightly. Is this just a reflex? His parents certainly don't think so. For them, it is the beginning of a new love. Three people reaching out toward one another forming a bond of love.

By reaching out to touch us, infants ensure that they will be loved. Hence, as adults, we are still actively reaching for love. Through that initial touch, we create the longing to be touched again. Moreover, we create an even deeper longing, once again to become one with our loved ones. We want to return to that early feeling of total fusion with the parents who loved us.

As an adult, add sex to the mix and you have what almost everyone longs for—a truly loving connection. But I have to break it to you: it's only a fantasy. It can't last!

Love is not just having your needs met, and it's not just spending a lifetime gazing into each other's eyes. For many of us, love is a mystery.

I'm Beverly Palmer, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and psychology professor, and my goal is to clarify what love is really about. During the past 45 years, my patients and students have told me what they really wanted to know about love. They wanted to solve the mystery of how to build a lasting, loving relationship. So I began to read scientific books and journal articles to find answers about love that I could then share with my patients and students. As a scientist, I wanted to answer the questions

- “What makes love thrive?”
- “What makes love die?”

Being married to my psychiatrist husband during the past 50 years has also enriched my understanding about how to make a relationship with one person not only last but also promote growth and happiness.

In my practice as a clinical psychologist, I encounter people of all ages and backgrounds who are in unsatisfying relationships. Suzanne wants a man to make her feel good about herself, but wonders what she is doing that drives men away. Christine feels discounted and taken for granted. Brett thinks women in his present relationships treat him as his parents did—valuing him only for what he achieves. Maria depends on being loved by David. And there is Sally, whose lover felt alone and unappreciated but never told her. Instead, he had an affair.

Some of these experiences might be similar to yours because, like you, they are real people with real problems. In this book, you will discover the way to resolve your love life problems, just as I helped people like these find the love they need.

As you may have experienced, nothing is as exhilarating, frustrating, and mysterious as love. Finding the person who will love you forever is challenging. Then just when you think the relationship you finally have will never change, it turns into something quite unexpected. Moreover, sometimes you even have to cope with the loss of that love without knowing where to start.

This guide to the way loving relationships develop will help you create the love life you need. You will discover the expectations and feelings you have, and how they influence the progress of your relationship. You will learn the bumps to watch out for along the way and how to either avoid or repair them.

You may have many questions about love that arise at different times in your life.

- How do I know if this is the right one for me?
- What makes love last?
- How can I fix a relationship that has gone bad?
- Why did we break up?



- How do I love again after the loss of a love?

You may turn to the internet or to friends to help you with these questions. However, these sources are usually giving you their advice and opinions, which are just one person's view of the situation. That person often will not even know what you really need before giving advice. Basing your actions on this advice could easily lead you down the wrong road.

What you need is information you can trust. Scholars and scientists have made discoveries that lead to success in love. In this book you will find out how to use these discoveries to create the love you need. Whether you are longing for a new love to enter your life or wanting to change a struggling relationship, you can get the love you need by making these science-based techniques work for you.

Whether you are looking for the road or are already traveling on it, this guide will help you find out more about where you have been, where you are now, and where your relationship is going. You will then be able to successfully navigate the bumpy road of forming and keeping a loving relationship. You will find out what you (and your partner) did right and wrong, so you can determine how to make the relationship into the one you need.

This book is for you, but is also for sharing. You can share this book with a partner, a friend, or even an adult child just beginning to date. Two people can respond to the many checklists, questionnaires, and activities in order to get a better understanding of themselves and each other. You might suggest that your partner read a section, even if they do not want to read the entire book. Just leave this book open to that section—maybe even highlight it—and put it somewhere it will be noticed.

## **What Makes Loving So Difficult?**

We all want to love and be loved in return. Yet the reality is that some of us have a full life, full of love, while others have a half-life, with only half-loves or no love at all. Some people seem to have discovered a way to have a deep and lasting love and know what love is all about. Others live lives of quiet despair—being locked into relationships that seem to have little love, or being forced continually to face the loss of a love.

Why does love become a way of life for some of us, while for others it means repeatedly crashing headlong into a dead end?

Let's start with what love is and what creates problems in relationships. Daniel's feelings after the breakup of an intense two-year relationship give us a glimpse of what separates the winners from losers in love.

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"Ain't love grand?" he exclaimed, with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"Yes, it really is wonderful, isn't it?" I replied brightly, not wanting to acknowledge that I had also heard the shakiness and bitterness in his voice. Yet I felt relieved that here was someone willing to show me his true feelings.

Daniel continued, "I don't know what went wrong. I thought Sophia and I would always be in love. After all, if it's true love, it's supposed to last forever, isn't it?"

"You are terribly disappointed that this love didn't turn out like you wanted it to," I responded.

"I had it all. I had finally found the perfect person for me—someone who would fulfill all my wildest dreams and desires. I was so happy, and I thought she was too. But then something happened. I don't know if it was just that she started to feel differently about me or if it was something that I did or didn't do."

“When her feelings started to change, you felt her love for you was slipping away. And maybe you’re blaming yourself for these changes.”

“All I know is that I just didn’t want anything to change. We were so in love at the beginning. Why couldn’t it always stay that way?”

“Maybe it just couldn’t stay the same. Yet you still expected that if it was true love, you would always feel the same way about each other.”

“I still can’t help feeling that if only she loved me enough, or I loved her enough, we would still be together. But I’m not so sure I know what love is anymore.”

“Yes, I know that feeling of not being able to control love,” was all I could muster, for he had identified the heart of love.

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Loving is like sowing oats and ending up with turnips. It is never what we expect it to be.

## **When Your Feelings Change, Are You No Longer in Love?**

We expect our feelings to never change. We are continually presented with the image of true love as an unchanging state of bliss where the initial feelings of passion, togetherness, and tender caring are the only feelings we should have if we are in love. Love becomes only the “lovey” feelings. After all, it shouldn’t be too much to ask for no disappointment from broken promises or ambivalence about our commitment. Should it? If it is real love, we expect we will always be “in love.”

Yet in reality, to be in love is to feel overwhelmed by a rush of conflicting feelings. At the very moment you meet, and throughout the relationship, you feel both secure and scared, both needed and vulnerable, both valued and misunderstood.

Nevertheless, you resist recognizing all the feelings connected with loving. You hide some of your feelings from yourself as well as from your partner. When you are feeling the excited high from passionate love, you don't want to think about your equally compelling feeling of being out of control. It is too scary to consider that falling in love also means falling into a state of vulnerability. Therefore, you stroll together along new paths, not noticing the hidden holes you might fall into.

Moreover, you use the phrase "I love you", to describe all the feelings you are experiencing. You connect these magical words with only feeling secure, needed, and valued. So when the scared, vulnerable, and misunderstood feelings emerge, you conclude you are no longer in love. No longer do you say or hear those tender words. You end the relationship, and you end up being losers in love.

We only belatedly discover love is not what you were told it would be, nor is it just the feelings you had at the beginning of the relationship. You begin to realize that the way to love is along a very rocky road, and that your feelings when you are on this road will continually change. Two lovers who thought their feelings would never change are Charlie and Sally.

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During a company picnic, Sally was wistfully sitting alone watching her coworkers enjoy a softball game. While Charlie waited for a new team to form, he glanced in her direction and thought, *All right! Looking good!* Then he leaped up and invited her to play with him. Sally liked the way Charlie took charge and included her, and Charlie liked the way Sally enthusiastically cheered on all the team members.

After a few dates, they felt like they were a "couple" and couldn't wait until they would see each other again. "You bring so much excitement into my life," Charlie told Sally, and she responded with, "You make me feel so protected." And yes, within two years they were living together.

Then the disillusionment set in. Charlie became tired of Sally's constant need to be liked and her frequent outings with her friends. Sally began to see Charlie's protective spirit as overcontrolling.

"I feel so alone and unappreciated," Charlie thought. But he did not tell Sally because he did not want to hurt her.

Sally, meanwhile, spent more and more time with her friends to escape the control she resented. To anyone looking at them from the outside, they seemed to be a well-matched couple. Gradually, though, their intimacy became lost in a sea of unexpressed negative feelings.

As Charlie's and Sally's feelings moved from excitement and security through disillusionment and resentment, they discovered that a loving relationship never remains static; it develops through a wide range of feelings.

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Yet we, like they, resist dealing with some of the unexpected and unwanted feelings. No one tells us that our feelings will change. So when uncomfortable feelings enter our love life, we continue to expect that if we love someone and that person loves us, we should always feel the same.

## **Changing Feelings Cause Conflicts**

Parents also experience, sometimes painfully, the changes in feelings that occur in their relationship with their children. One of parents' biggest disappointments is the realization that their teenagers do not love them in the same way they did as a child. Parents often react to this disappointment by trying to stop their teenagers from growing into people capable of giving them love built from autonomy. After all, doesn't love mean always being in harmony? Kimberly's relationship with her parents foreshadows her possible relationships with partners as an adult.



Kimberly was a considerate child, respectfully complying with her parents' requests. Her parents valued how close they felt as a family. Yet as she moved into her teenage years, she became more involved in social activities with her friends and less interested in what her parents had to say. Sometimes she would even defiantly blurt out, "You don't know what you're talking about!"

Her parents worried that she was starting to have experiences that went against their values, so they restricted her time with her friends. However, the more her parents tried to hold on to her, the more she resisted their attempts. Her feelings toward them became resentful. She still wanted them to love her—just not to do so by overprotecting her. But this left her mystified parents wondering how they could have a loving relationship with this very difficult child.



Parents would not be so disappointed, and teenagers would not have to react so strongly, if our relationships were based on an understanding of how our feelings change, rather than the expectation that the way we feel and express our love does not change. Sometimes a loving relationship between two adults has the same characteristic of moving from a close compliance to a need to separate and become one's own person. Moreover, with these changes in feelings and perceptions come conflicts that are often difficult to handle. Yet if we look at loving in terms of how it starts, where it goes, and how it changes, we can become aware of how to handle the conflicts that do arise.

## **What Is Love, Anyway?**

All the feelings that contribute to a deep and lasting love are with us right from the start of a relationship. Love is a

kaleidoscope of changing feelings, with some in the foreground and others in the background at any given time in a relationship. Yet few of us see the total picture during our first encounter. We try to cut off some of the unwanted feelings or end the relationship when our feelings change. Those of us who do see the total picture, though, have found the way to a lasting love, for the ability to accept our changing feelings is the essence of an enduring relationship.

Lasting love develops not despite, but because of, the changes in our feelings from one moment to the next. Love is a journey with many destinations. Indeed, the word, “love”, can become an acronym for the destinations and changing feelings we encounter when we love.

When you initially want someone to enter your life, you are expressing your **longing (L)** for love. Later, you might even utter those powerful words “I love you,” as you begin to feel the **oneness (O)** that emerges as you share our lives with each other. Then some of the frightening feelings of jealousy, anger, and hurt creep into the relationship as you realize your total **vulnerability (V)**. Finally, you develop an enduring **empathy (E)** with your partner and feel free to reveal the depths of yourself.

What, then, is love? Love is the journey of longing, oneness, vulnerability, and empathy that each of us and our relationships go through. Each destination along the road of loving leads us into, and prepares us for, the next destination.

Longing for love to enter your life is what helps you find someone to love. Then the fear of losing that love creates the motivation to remain in the relationship, as you move along into the destination of oneness. Yet the increased closeness during this time makes you vulnerable to unpleasant feelings as well as pleasant ones.

When your partner’s shortcomings and your own vulnerabilities are exposed, you may think you want to exit the relationship. If you stick it out, though, the final destination of the relationship—empathy—begins when you face the unpleasant

feelings and changes in your perception of your partner. You more deeply understand and accept your partner. Then your love develops into a fully formed love that does not fade.

## **Getting Stuck**

Just as each destination contains the guidance that help us move on to the next destination, it also contains the roadblocks that can keep us stuck. We may have known people who, when they become stuck at a particular destination, either live a life without a thriving love or end their relationship without ever giving themselves or their partner a chance to move on. An enduring love becomes an elusive goal for them.

Let's look at some of the roadblocks you might encounter as you move along your journey of love.

## **Love Is Passion**

Some partners who become stuck in the stage of longing see love as only the passionate feelings. Then one partner becomes the “dumper” who makes a quick exit when the newness of the relationship wears off. Despondently, the “dumpee” wonders, “What did I do to make it go bad?”

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Randy entered my office carrying a motorcycle helmet. He was gorgeous in a very masculine way, with curly, dark hair, a ready smile, and an athletic build. Most women would fall instantly in love with him—and many did. He reveled in the euphoria of passionate sex with one woman after another. He loved the excitement that occurred when he first “fell in love” with a new woman. However, after a while, he no longer felt the passion. In fact, he became bored. Then off he went seeking another sexual partner.



Now he was in my office because he had recently contracted herpes, which had interfered with his sex life. He complained, "If I can't have fantastic sex all the time, what's left? After all, love *is* sex, isn't it?"

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## **Love Is Need Fulfillment**

Then there is the needy person who becomes stuck in the destination of oneness. The needy person loves only as long as their partner fulfills their needs. In fact, most love stories are based on this type of oneness, with the lovers walking into the sunset hand in hand.

However, eventually, the sunset turns into a moonless night. When we no longer respond to our partner in terms of their desires and vice versa, the oneness we felt together is shattered. Our real-life relationship then might end, but not in the way the love stories would predict.

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Christine did everything for her husband. After long hours at her office, she still found the strength to make a home-cooked meal for him and the children every night. When he would call her wanting advice about a business issue, she always made time for him. Sometimes he would leave a list of errands for her to do over the weekend, and she would always complete them.

When asked why she was so invested in doing so much for her husband, she replied, "He tells me how much he loves and appreciates me."

One day, though, she started to realize the imbalance in the relationship. "I give, give, give and all he does is take, take, take," she complained. Then she stopped giving so much.

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## **Love Is Risky**

Finally, there is the frightened person who runs so fast from feeling vulnerable that they run away from their partner. Thus ends another relationship that got stuck.

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Jim and Sarah had been living together for five years when Sarah tried to increase the emotional intimacy in their relationship. She sought out suggestions for increasing closeness on the internet because she could feel him drifting away. As was suggested on the internet site, she asked Jim what she did that sometimes upset him, to which he replied, "I'm never upset." When she asked what his relationship with his parents had been like, he replied, "Fine."

The message she received was "Don't ask and don't tell—just leave feelings out of it. And if you ask me to reveal more of myself, I may have to leave, one way or another."

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## **Moving on to a Successful Love Life**

If there is any secret to loving, it is that you don't have to get stuck. There can still be love after the passion fades. Similarly, when the hurtful feelings come, you can face them and move on to a deep and developing love. Once you let go of your expectation that the love you now have will be the love you will have forever, you will always find love.

Yes, it is a paradox that to have love, you have to let go of not only your expectations about love, but also your expectations of your loved one, so your loved one can develop. To live this paradox is the most difficult task in achieving a meaningful, loving relationship. It is contrary to everything you want to believe about love.

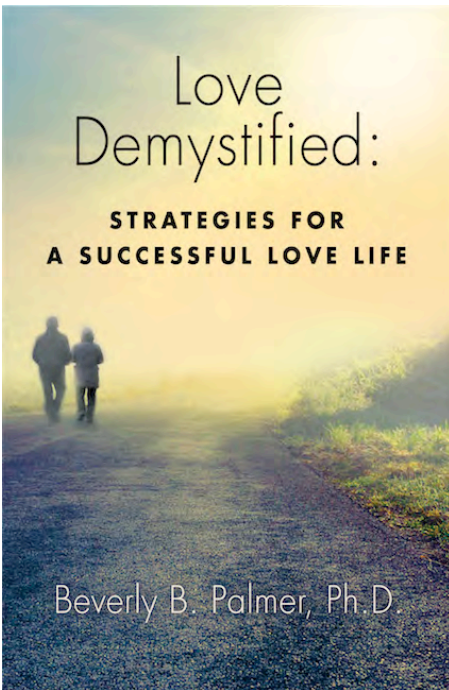
## **Here is the Map You Need to Guide You**

When you understand how love both progresses and persists, you will have a successful love life. By looking at the central feelings and perceptions during your relationship, you will find the signposts that can then guide you in your quest for love. Moreover, by becoming aware of the crucial potholes and roadblocks, you can see what makes your loving relationships sometimes fail and at other times move on.

As you saw with Charlie and Sally, just when you think you have found the love of all time, a new feeling emerges and throws you into a crisis. You do not have to avoid these crises, though. You can use them as transition points that tell you what to watch out for and give you the opportunity to grow beyond your present place. Therefore, besides recognizing the changing feelings along the road, you need to look at how to navigate the transitions from one point to another.

We may not ever be able to control love, but we can take a map with us. Fortunately, the direction of the road of love is predictable, with all the roadblocks and detours as well as the fast-moving freeways and bridges clearly marked. A map allows you to let go of the expectations and assumptions that have been keeping you off the road of love. When you know the direction, you can then love and live more fully.

Thus, each of the subsequent parts of this book will show you what happens at each destination on the road of love, provide strategies to deal with obstructions, and give clear direction about how to move from one destination to the next.



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