

Healthy Relationship

Continuum



Healthy romantic attachment is a developmental process, with corresponding changes in brain activity over time, as depicted in the graph below. The early stage of romance is particularly active as dopamine rapidly increases, bringing couples together for what we affectionately call the 'honeymoon phase'. Engaging in sexual activity this early, before developing a friendship, poses possible dangers. The small increase in oxytocin signals that this person may have potential for bonding and attachment. However, the incredibly wonderful giddiness provided by the huge spike in dopamine lowers impulse control. This may lead to risky sexual behaviors and falsely projecting safety and compatibility onto the new person.

DOPAMINE: The neurotransmitter that is the primary nervous system communicator of pleasure. It increases with novelty, such as a new relationship, in addition to influencing motor activity and emotional responses.

OCYTOCIN: A hormone and neurotransmitter associated with affiliative bonding in mammals. It facilitates attachment between infants and parents, and pair bonding between intimate partners. It is known as the 'love hormone' or the 'hug drug' and is released during sex, childbirth, and lactation.

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