

# Blind Time

Mark O. Jarvis

07/14/2020

## Blind Time



One of the things that fascinates (and concerns) me about relationships is the fact that some couples can be so certain that they will be together forever, only to see their relationship unravel relatively quickly. As many as [half of first marriages will end in divorce](#), and the [risk of divorce is highest in the early years of marriage](#). Why does this happen? Why is it that some couples who loved each other enough to commit to forever don't even make it to their fifth anniversary?

Part of the answer can be found in your brain. Researchers Andreas Bartels and Semir Zeki have used fMRI to [study the brains of people who are in love](#) and have found that people experience two significant shifts in brain activity when they are in love:



**1. Our reward centers are on overdrive.**

**2. Our social judgment is on underdrive.**

With our reward centers on overdrive, interactions with our partner are especially pleasant, sparks fly with every touch, and we feel a sense of euphoria when we are together. Then, with our social judgment on underdrive, we tend to think of our partner in glowingly positive ways: they're so smart, they're such a good person, everything they say is so funny, we're a perfect match, etc. Bartels and Zeki point out that this may be why people say "love is blind." It leads us to downplay or overlook potential problems in the relationship.

But this "Blind Time" doesn't last forever: by 2-3 years into the relationship, the rewarding euphoria fades and critical thinking increases. We begin to notice things that bother us about our partner. Personality quirks and behavior that may have seemed charming before begin to bother us.

**So, how can a couple prepare themselves for the days ahead when the blinders come off?**

**First, be informed:** it's important to recognize that the loss of the euphoric early years isn't a bad thing. The human brain isn't designed to operate like that forever. Blind Time is a wonderful and fulfilling time, but it is designed to bring you together, not keep you together.

**Next, be intentional.**

Use this somewhat-protected time to work on building a relationship that will last beyond those early years. Here are just a few suggestions about how to do that:

- **Attend a relationship class/event/workshop**
  - Research has shown that [couples education](#) can help strengthen relationships. These workshops and events typically teach couples communication skills and other strategies that can help them navigate the challenges they will inevitably face as a couple. (Research shows that most couples experience a fairly predictable set of relationship challenges over time.) Get started with the menu at the top of this page—it includes links to events around the state that are designed to help.
- **Consider couples' counseling**
  - Unlike attending a class, going to a counselor/therapist together is customized to your specific situation. It can provide targeted help for difficult areas in a relationship.
- **Practice research-based interventions**
  - There are a lot of self-help resources out there, but not all of them are based on research. Websites like this one can help you find research-based strategies for strengthening your family relationships. One of my favorite at-home intervention strategies was developed by a research team at the University of Rochester. Their work has shown that couples can reduce their risk of divorce simply by watching particular movies together and then discussing how their own relationships compare to the couples onscreen. A simple intervention packed with a lot of power! Click [HERE](#) to learn more about it.

With some information and intentionality, those early years together can help you set the stage for a healthy relationship that can last a lifetime.