

# Dawn Kaffel Blog Archive: Mind the Age Gap 2018

Getting back into work after the summer break is always a varied and an interesting time. Some couples feel the break has been far too long and can't wait to resume their weekly sessions. Other couples feel the summer break has been good for their relationship and decide to end their sessions. It is often a time to reflect and be curious as to what new clients may present at an initial session.

Interestingly a theme that has already presented is navigating couple relationships when there is a big age difference of over 15-25 years?

Traditionally these relationships have been the subject of many clichés – 'It's a mid-life crisis', 'toy boy', 'old enough to be your mother/father', she's only after his money'. Now due to more celebrity relationships being in the public eye age-gap relationships are more common and acceptable and not always regarded as negative and suspicious!

Before beginning a relationship with someone much younger or older it's important to consider your motivations. Someone who dates an older person may be seeking a more parental figure than a romantic partner. They may be firmly established in a career and will be able to provide financial security. Someone who dates a younger person may be seeking more fun and excitement in their lives plus the sexual connection is more energising and exciting.

## **Does Age Matter?**

Research suggests that the success of a relationship depends on the extent to which partners share values, beliefs and goals, trust and support each other and if there is a strong physical and sexual attraction. These factors have little to do with age. It is acknowledged that as long as couples can communicate and work at their relationship, age should not pose a barrier.

Make sure your values, morals and life goals match up. That doesn't mean they have to be the same but to understand where the other is on these issues and to be able to work on them together.

However what brings age-gap couples into therapy is often they are at a very different stage in their relationship where the age gap appears to be more significant and they are finding it very difficult to talk about how they feel and start to behave very differently with each other. This starts to make the relationship feel insecure.

Issues that present in age gap relationships and questions we should ask each other:

- Do we share future goals, where and how we live?
- Do we want a family?
- Do we fit in with each other's family and friends?
- How does it feel to be the older and more mature of the couple?
- How does it feel to be the younger and more of the caretaker?
- Does it feel as if the relationship is equal and one partner doesn't hold power over the other?

At the start of the relationship, the age gap can feel exciting and something couples don't make a big deal of. It's often after many years of being together that cracks can start to appear.

An older partner can slow down and have less energy for the younger partner. They may be happier spending more time at home than previously. The younger partner starts to feel resentful and can decide to lead a separate social life, not wanting to be a carer and no longer showing much interest in sex. This in turn triggers feelings of anxiety in the older partner who feels they may be rejected for a younger model. Alternatively, a younger partner may be wanting to start a family of their own, but now realises this is not what their older partner now wants since they already have a family from a previous relationship and don't want to start again with a young baby.

Having said all this, the age gap shouldn't become the total focus of your relationship. Sometimes unnecessarily dwelling on this can turn things negative when they don't need to be. Whenever there is conflict we tend to go to our vulnerable spots, which in this case may be the age difference, but that might not actually be the issue at all.

Taking time out to understand these feelings is vital to maintain a successful relationship. Each partner needs to understand themselves as well as understanding their partner and what they need to keep any relationship alive and growing.

It's good to remember that when you truly love someone, age doesn't matter, whether it's a difference of 2 years or 30 years, love is love.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on **07976 403741** or **(020) 8959 9528**. Alternatively you can contact me by email [dawn.kaffel@couplescounselling.com](mailto:dawn.kaffel@couplescounselling.com).

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