

Dr. Sue Johnson Discusses How to Develop Your 'Love Sense'



Interview by [Whitney Johnson](#). Written by Brittany Stubbs.

In a society constantly questioning monogamy and companionship, Dr. Sue Johnson, a clinical psychologist and developer of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, uses cutting-edge research to help ordinary people understand why and how we love. In her new book *Love Sense: The Revolutionary New Science of Romantic Relationships*, she presents scientific evidence to show how human beings are meant to mate for life and how to develop one's own "love sense," which is our ability to develop long-lasting relationships. In our exclusive interview with the author, she shared her inspiration for the book as well as her thoughts on our culture's fascination with failed love.

What inspired you to write this book?

I didn't actually want to write books for the public. I'm used to talking to mental health professionals, but I noticed how many people came to our practice and were in need of an emotional connection with their partner. They were talking about the pain involved in watching a relationship dissolve before their eyes. So it felt urgent for me, as a researcher and academic, to share this amazing information on adult bonding and love that has been denied from a more general audience. We know more about love, and we have more control of love than we think. It's my responsibility to help ordinary people know that they need love and tell them about this new science.

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You discuss the idea that humans are meant to mate for life, which is controversial in our society given the high divorce rates and infidelity. What led you to this belief?

There's a good amount of chemical evidence that human beings are suited for monogamy. For example, we're flooded with Oxytocin (often referred to as the "bonding hormone"), which only occurs in mammals that are meant to stay together, cooperate with one another, and look after their young when they're vulnerable.

In our society, we're taught to fully depend on someone in a relationship, and when that relationship doesn't work, instead of fixing it, we go and look for another relationship and try to make that work. When relationships end, you see all the stages of grief people experience before they go on to the next relationship. For me, this is just proof that it's obvious humans depend on and need monogamy, despite all the arguments society has about how we're all so naturally promiscuous.

There's evidence that we're most healthy and happy when we're in these close relationships: with parents, with children, with close friends, and certainly with partners that we make love with. All these chemical and bonding hormones that go on make it obvious that we're meant to be monogamous, but the real issue is that we don't know how to pull it off.

You talk about how romantic love is an attachment bond, like that between a mother and child. If two people don't feel that way, does that mean their relationship is doomed? Or is that a feeling that can be learned between lovers?

If people really don't have that longing for each other, they usually just accept that they're friends. But longing for one another is something that's wired in us, and once that's triggered and you start to feel this closeness, it doesn't mean you know how to take the next step. If you can stay with

each other through that longing and reach each other in those moments of disconnection, it's almost like you will fall more and more in love.

Building on all of this, let's go back to the title of your book. You give your readers the ability to build on their own "love sense." So what would you say is the most important rule someone should follow to sustain that long-term love?

One of the most important rules is to accept the most basic thing about us as human beings: We were never designed to be single or face life alone. Self-efficiency is a lie. So accept that you're a mammal and that you have these needs wired inside and that you need other people's support and comfort – these things are what make you a human being. And if you can accept that you have these needs, then you don't have so much trouble listening to them and sharing them with a partner.

Speaking specifically about the women's movement, for example, part of this time was to empower women and teach them to be assertive and strong, which is really great. But it seems to me that the strongest thing about women is that they know how relational they are. They know they are stronger when they can turn to one another and connect with them. And that's something that I think the feminist movement has sometimes missed. It's something we need to teach men. We get so obsessed with being these powerful individuals, but we're actually wired to be most powerful when we're connected to others. So accepting your needs of longing, of closeness, of support – that helps a lot in building that long-lasting love.

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So much of our society focuses on breakups and divorces. Do you think that fixation on failed-love has an impact on the way we perceive love in general?

I understand that bad news and gossip grabs people's attention, and that's why we focus on these topics. But I

think focusing on instances where marriage doesn't work or doesn't last generates this pessimistic attitude about relationships. It's demoralizing. And the irony is it's not true anymore. Scientist like myself are beginning to make it clear that we need love relationships, and we know how we can hold on to them and better them. The sensationalism around affairs and divorces just kind of obscures the fact that we are getting a handle on love and understand it more than we ever have before.

To purchase Love Sense, check out Amazon or your local bookstore.