

Unrequited Love: How to Stay Friends

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Unrequited romantic feelings don't have to sink friendships, according to research by Michael Motley, a professor of communication at the University of California, Davis.

"When romantic attraction is disclosed and rejected within a friendship, the result is virtually always awkwardness and embarrassment for both partners, and usually this causes the friendship to end," Motley says. "But certain behaviors and conditions allow some friends to handle the initial awkwardness, put the episode behind them, and reestablish a mutual friendship."

Through analysis of hundreds of interviews with college undergraduates, Motley has found that friends who stay friends tend to:

- Affirm that they can accept and can handle the situation, and that they value and want to maintain the friendship -- and then drop the matter.
- Return to their earlier patterns of communicating and getting together, rather than avoiding each other.
- Tell each other about new romantic interests as they develop.
- Have known one another as friends for a long time and spent a lot of time together before the disclosure-rejection episode.

Motley has also identified big "don'ts," including:

- The platonically inclined friend should not tell any third parties about the amorous disclosure.
- The platonic friend should not invent a new love interest to justify the

rejection.

- The romantically inclined friend should tone down any flirtation or sexual innuendo that may have characterized the friendship.

According to Motley, deciding whether to reveal romantic attraction for a friend is among the most common serious communication dilemmas reported by college students. He says that eight in 10 have experienced at least one instance of unrequited romantic attraction within a friendship by the age of 20.

The research appears in "Studies in Applied Interpersonal Communication" (Sage Publications, 2008), a new book edited by Motley.

Provided by UC Davis

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