

Handout: Challenging Unrealistic Expectations

Social media often presents an idealized version of relationships, setting unrealistic expectations that can impact personal perceptions and relationship satisfaction.

The following table includes portrayals you often see posted on social media, as well as the unrealistic expectations they might cause. For each portrayal, identify what might be unrealistic about it—consider how it differs from real-life relationships. Then reframe the expectation to reflect the natural complexities of relationships, focusing on communication, emotional growth, and balance. Some examples are provided for you first.

Social Media Portrayal	Unrealistic Expectation	Realistic View
Couples are always on vacation.	Relationships should always be glamorous and exciting.	Relationships have ups and downs; daily life is not always picture-perfect.
Couples share photos with extremely elaborate setups.	Everything must be grand and perfect.	A meaningful event is about the connection, not the setting or extravagance.
Individuals share lavish gifts they've received from partners.	Love is proven through expensive gifts.	Thoughtfulness and emotional support are just as valuable as gifts.
Partners in relationships are constantly together.	Happy couples spend every moment together.	Healthy relationships include both quality time and independent activities.
Parents always post perfect "family moments."	Family life should always be joyful.	Real family life involves challenges and moments that aren't always shared online.
Couples are fit, attractive, and always in sync.	Couples must look perfect and share every hobby.	Appearance and shared hobbies are not the only indicators of a strong relationship.
Individuals post surprise romantic gestures from their partner.	Romance must be spontaneous to be meaningful.	Small, everyday acts of love and kindness sustain romance.
Couples post celebrations with all their friends.	A successful relationship includes a large social circle.	Quality friendships matter; close private connections are just as valuable.
Couples show photos from flawless holiday parties.	Holidays must always be perfect and stress-free.	Meaningful memories can be made, even if things don't go perfectly.