

Skip gifts but embrace romance, lov



Miki Ma Man-ki arranges flowers in Mong Kok yesterday. Psychologists say couples should not resolve problems with flashy gifts. Photo: May Tse

Every day should be Valentine's Day when you're in a relationship, says counsellor

Barclay Crawford

Shops and restaurants may be encouraging lovers to spend on Valentine's Day, but counsellors believe even the most wealthy should skip the expensive gifts in favour of simple romance.

Helios Lau Kar-cho, chief clinical psychologist at the social welfare department, said this was the healthy approach to Valentine's Day. Couples should not view the day as a chance to resolve deep-seated relationship problems with flashy gifts and expensive dinners, he said.

"There is a Chinese saying that making a relationship work is about treating the other as a valued and respected guest," he said. "If you buy a big bunch of roses and some chocolates and then go back to hammering each other the next day, it's not going to get you very far."

Mr Lau warned there was the potential for the weight of expectation to damage relationships. "The meaning of Valentine's Day can get

lost in the commercialism," he said. "But the essential message is a good one, about expressing your love for your partner."

Relationship counsellor Richard Gee, from ReSource The Counselling Centre, said Valentine's Day for singles could be like "Christmas without family".

"This can particularly be the case for teenagers, who are teased mercilessly if they don't fit in, and if they don't have a Valentine this can make them a target," he said. "Many of the people we see today in counselling are dealing with problems resulting from what happened to them when they were at school."

Mr Gee has a suggestion in the spirit of Valentine's Day.

"Yes, make it a special day, but also make the 15th, 16th and 17th a special day too. Make special days part of your relationship in all 365 days of the year," he said.

Teresa Mui Yuen-kwan, youth worker with the Federation of Youth Groups, said it was important for teenagers not to learn to associate love with money.

"Love should not just be how

much you spend on a person," Ms Mui said. "Many people in Hong Kong don't understand that especially when they are young. People need to understand that if you maintain a relationship only with money then it is not a relationship."

Eric Cheung Hau-chung, 25, who was shopping with his girlfriend Jessie Cheung Yung-yue at Pacific Place in Admiralty, said he definitely felt pressure around Valentine's Day. "If you forget about it or don't make a fuss, that would be the end of the relationship," he said.

Ms Cheung said it was still important for couples to demonstrate their love today. "The gift doesn't have to be big or expensive, but it has to be well thought out," she said.

Ignacio Kwok Chi-bo and his girlfriend, Idy Ip Wai-pan, have been together for seven years. For them, their spoil-each-other day is the anniversary of when they became lovers. "For Valentine's Day we make something for each other to show our love," he said. "But we don't go to fancy restaurants or anything like that because it's too expensive on the 14th."

Immigration Department figures show there will be fewer couples marrying on Valentine's Day this year. Last year, 151 happy couples tied the knot through civil celebrants, while this year the figure will be only 144.

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