Building Healthy Relationships

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Evidence-Based Keys to Relationships

Tips & Tricks

Questions
What Does Healthy Mean?

Who decides what is healthy?

How are we influenced?

What happens if who we like, love, admire, want to be intimate with is “different” than the messages from the dominant culture?
Defining Relationships
Conflict is Normal

When we have relationships with people, it is inevitable that we will experience conflict, and *that is ok!*

Conflict can often feel like a time when we are **failing** or something that we should avoid, but conflict happens most *when we begin to grow closer to others.*

In fact, conflict and navigating conflict well means that you are moving towards closeness with others.
Relational Functioning -

What goes “wrong” in relationships?
How Do Problems Develop?

People struggle to communicate their needs, emotions

Interactional patterns get stuck

Positive affect is diminished

Problem solving skills are decreased because of emotional activation (hard to problem solve when we are mad!)
"Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

Based on attachment theory - considers insecurity to be the main driver of conflict in relationships.

Focuses on emotional connection and responsiveness.

The fix that is needed is relational – not individual.
"Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

Conflict →
Emotionally unavailable →
Panic emotions: anger, sadness, hurt, fear →
The internal alarm goes off (amygdala) →
Strategies to deal with losing connection →
"Hold Me Tight" – Dr. Sue Johnson

Underneath all the stress and complaints, the bottom-line questions are:

- Can I count on you?
- Are you there for me?
- Do I matter to you?
- Do you need me, rely on me?
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Stay in the present
Focus on emotion, connection
Be responsive
Recognize your impact
Increase bonding
Most relationship problems (69%) never get resolved -- but are “perpetual” problems based on personality differences between partners.
THE FOUR HORSESMEN

CRITICISM
Verbally attacking personality or character.

CONTTEMPT
Attacking sense of self with an intention to insult or psychologically abuse.

DEFENSIVENESS
Seeing yourself as the victim in efforts to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame.

STONEYWALLING
Withdrawing as a way to avoid conflict in efforts to convey disapproval, distance, and separation.
Stop the Four Horsemen with their Antidotes

- CRITICISM: Teach Gentle Start Up
- DEFENSIVENESS: Take Responsibility
- CONTEMPT: Build Culture of Appreciation
- STONEWALLING: Do Physiological Self-Soothing
The Sound Relationship House

Create Shared Meaning

Make Life Dreams Come True

Manage Conflict
- Accept Your Partner’s Influence
- Resolve ‘Solvable Problems’
- Dialogue About ‘Perpetual Problems’
- Practice Self-Soothing

The Positive Perspective

Turn Towards Instead of Away

Share Fondness and Admiration

Build Love Maps
- Know One Another’s World
Positive Connection
Manage Conflict
Shared Meaning

Positive Connection
Manage Conflict
Shared Meaning
“Emotional Bank Account”

Positive connection

If you feel like your person(s) is/are your friend...

Shared Meaning

... you will live life together in a way that helps you feel that things are good...

Manage Conflict

... you will give them the benefit of the doubt when you disagree...

If you feel like your person(s) is/are your friend...
... you will give them the benefit of the doubt when you disagree...
WHAT ARE “DEPOSITS” AND “WITHDRAWALS” TO THE ACCOUNT?

All relationships have a kind of imaginary “emotional bank account.”

When you do something to make another person feel good about the relationship, you make a deposit in their emotional bank account.

When there is conflict, the relationship feels less positive. At least one person, and sometimes both people, feels a little less connected to the other. Then we would say that you made a withdrawal from the emotional bank account.

As long as the overall total, or “balance,” of your account is positive over time, you will probably feel close, or connected, to the other people.
Emotional Bank Account - Deposit
“I want to feel connected to you.”

1. Turning Toward
2. Turning Away
3. Turning Against

Adds to the emotional bank account.
In a Nutshell, what works?

Intervention studies that have produced lasting results have changed three things in relationships:

1. Increased positive feelings outside the conflict situation (e.g., when things are going well)
2. Reduced negative feelings during conflict
3. Increased positive affect during conflict
Tip!

"Every positive thing you do in your relationship is foreplay."

John Gottman
TRY THIS!

- Date nights // Fun!
- Simple “getting to know you” conversations
- Love mapping (dreams, stories)
- High fives
No, Really, All-The-High-Fives!
TRY THIS!

- Complain w/o blame
- Listen w/o interrupting
- Validate one another
- Repair strategies
TRY THIS!

• Share life goals
• Find ways to support one another’s dreams
• Identify shared values
To make a relationship last/work/have meaning, relationships must focus on friendship, learn to manage/repair conflict, and create ways to support each other's hopes and dreams.
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Questions