

LOVING YOU, LOVING ME: BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

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#WellbeingWarriors

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“Most good relationships are built on mutual trust and respect.”

Mona Sutphen

Relationships are a big part of being human. You may have heard the saying “no man is an island”. It is true, in that all of us live, work, and socialize through relating with others. From childbirth to our old age, we need others. You may have had your fair share of ups and downs in numerous relationships, as we all do. It is essential to know what constitutes a healthy relationship so that you know how to build one, and when to end one which is not beneficial for your wellbeing. The following are a few pointers of what makes up, and how to build, a healthy relationship.



*“Honesty is the key to Trust;
Trust is the door to healthy relationships.”*

J.R. Incer

R.E.S.P.E.C.T

1 As the cornerstone of every relationship we have, respect is one of the most important values we are taught growing up. Each culture has its own beliefs on how respect is shown to another in different ways with the level of closeness, age, position, or relation to the person. However, there are many commonalities and golden threads that are universal. It is in the way you communicate, for example, not interrupting someone or talking over them. It is in the way you treat someone, e.g. not intentionally harming them. It is in respecting their time, intellect, space, body, opinions, and feelings. You show respect by honouring these in another person- in that they are their own, separate being with their own wishes, desires, and goals and are thus deserving of being treated as valuable.

Communication, communication, communication

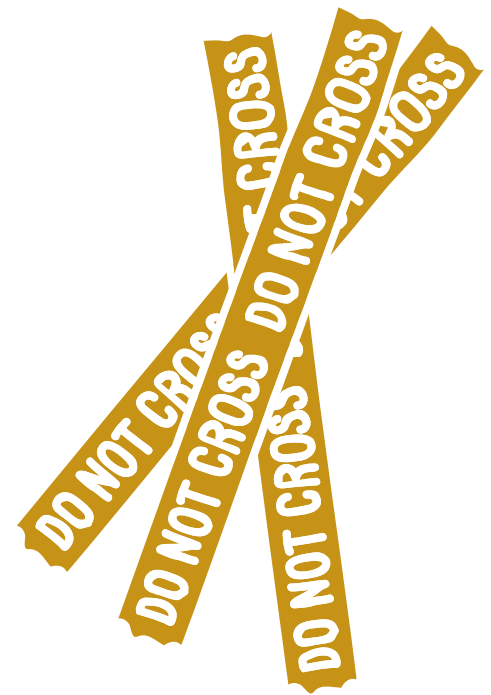
2 We all know that communication is important, but do we know HOW to communicate effectively? Regular discussions on your relationship can prevent future conflicts and is a good way of “checking in” with each other. Sharing your emotions, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions might be hard at first; but it is a skill that can be developed and is essential for a transparent relationship. It is crucial to engage in emotional expression and prevent bottling your feelings. Bottling up does not solve anything and leads to resentment, conflict, and an unhealthy relationship.

When conflict arises, it is vital first to understand what you are feeling and why. For example, your primary emotion might be hurt, but what you show is anger; the secondary emotion. Your primary emotion may be an indication of what you need going forward- COMMUNICATE that. Secondly, in your discussions or disagreements, it's important to stick to the current challenge and not to dig up old issues. Also, be aware of your body language. Crossing your arms, for example, or throwing your hands in the air may come across as hostile and intimidating. Be careful not to shout or be aggressive.



3 Boundaries

Having, setting, and also COMMUNICATING your boundaries is an effective way of ensuring your partner, friend, or family member respects your preferences, wants and needs. Knowledge is the first step - reflect on what your relational needs are, and what you require to feel whole, complete, and well. You may, for instance, need time to yourself, need your space to be respected, or you may need to set specific goals, e.g. with regards to your studies or finances. Once you've ascertained that, ensure that your loved one understands your limits in those regards.



4 Honesty and Trust

Being honest and open is a cornerstone of good communication, and is also essential in building trust. Create a safe space for your loved one to feel comfortable to open up to you, and ensure that you, in return, are open and honest. May it be with your feelings, your needs, or your goals and ideals. Build trust by keeping your promises; otherwise, this could lead to disappointment, resentment, anger, distrust, and eventually, conflict. Mean what you say and say what you mean. Having integrity entails being honest and fair within the relationship, even when your person is not looking.



5 Individuality

Many people lose their own identity to get someone else to like and accept them. But this is a false sense of security. You will end up resenting the person and changing who you are for the wrong reasons. The person who accepts you as you are will not want you to change anything about yourself. Holding shared interests, values, or dreams is healthy, but it is just as healthy to have differences, such as opinions, hobbies, or self-care activities. Make sure you spend time alone to enjoy your own company. If you are unable to do this, it could indicate a lack of self-knowledge, or an overreliance on your partner, and an unhealthy relationship. Know yourself, what you desire, and what you wish to achieve. Know what you need to be holistically well and keep aiming towards instilling these in your life. Don't give up on your dreams, hopes, your style, or your opinions.

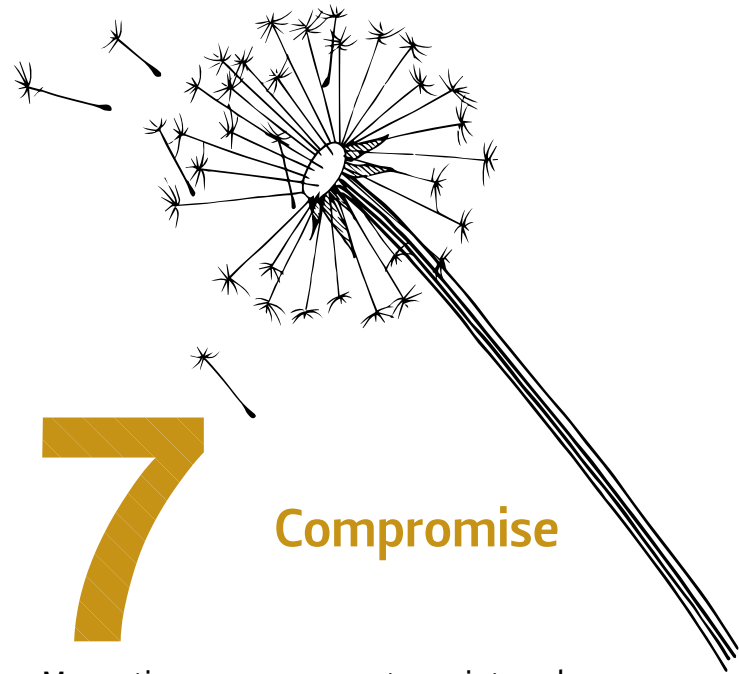


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Forgiveness

As important as it is to forgive yourself for your own mistakes, and to extend compassion to yourself, so it is to do so with your loved ones. Holding on to grudges only breeds toxic resentment. Choose to communicate your hurts or disappointments, and what you need in the future, and then choose to let it go. When you communicate what you feel was done wrong to you in a way your person understands, and allow yourself to recognize that no person is perfect (and also that most are not mind readers), you'll be better able to move forward.

Remember: forgiveness does not condone abuse. The goal is to institute change in your relationship and how your loved ones treat you, through communicating your hurt. Should this not be achieved, forgiving them does not mean condoning their actions and allowing it to continue. It is crucial to instill boundaries that protect your integrity, safety, and wellbeing. In some instances, this may mean walking away.



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Compromise

Many times, we come to points where we disagree with our loved ones. We all hold our own values, beliefs, and different perspectives, and thus it is natural to come to crossroads where you see things differently. In situations where your integrity will not be compromised, or your core values are not challenged, the best way forward may be to compromise. You may need to, through discussion, come to a place of agreement with your loved other that will best suit you both, and which may look different to your initial stance. As long as you are respected and heard, and your wellbeing is not compromised, the health of your relationship and being able to move forward amicably may depend on your willingness and ability to compromise.



8 Deal with distorted beliefs ("own your thoughts")

Sometimes we have experiences with others in our past that lead us to internalize distorted beliefs. A lot of the time, these beliefs tend to inform our relational experiences in the future. It is important to be aware of the beliefs you hold about relationships (for example, not being deserving of love, or not being worthy) and confronting them. Your partner, friend, or family member is not responsible for how the beliefs you hold, lead you to act. You may have built high walls around your heart; you may be pushing people away and isolating yourself because of those beliefs. Sometimes we are not even aware that we are doing so. Challenge those beliefs, even though they may have formed for specific reasons, they are likely no longer relevant and certainly not helpful. Have a look at [this video](#) to see if you hold any unhelpful, distorted beliefs.

9 Efficient problem-solving

Problem-solving entails drawing up all the possible solutions, assessing the pros and cons of each, and deciding on the best way forward. You need to be able to do this with your partner, friend, or family member. Coming together to effectively manage a problem and collaboratively work out possible actions, as opposed to seeing a challenge as a dead end, will help grow the resilience of your relationship.



“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves even when we risk disappointing others.”

Brené Brown

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Love languages



Every one of us has a preferred love language. There are five different love languages in total; acts of service, physical affection, giving and receiving gifts, spending quality time, and words of affirmation. As well as knowing your own love language, so that you communicate your relational needs, it is important to know the preferred love language of your loved ones. Theirs may be different to yours and may require you to learn to express your love to them in a way they will best receive. Similarly, it may be important to communicate your love language to your loved one so that they may learn how best to express their love to you. You can take the [love language test here](#), to discover your love language.



By focusing on these aspects, you are sure to build healthy, fulfilling relationships. They may also help you identify where some relationships are lacking, or if they are indeed healthy - work towards garnering them in each of the relationships in your life. [This final video](#) assists you in further understanding what elements constitute an unhealthy relationship and what constitutes a healthy relationship.

“A healthy relationship doesn’t drag you down, it inspires you to be better”
Mandy Hale

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