



Positive Partnerships

Sometimes our relationships—with significant others, family members, friends, co-workers, supervisors—can get stuck in patterns that make keep us from enjoying our relationships as much as we would like. They thrive when we enjoy what we have in common and celebrate each other's differences. But how do we do that? Below is a list of concrete strategies for reducing/managing negativity and increasing positivity in our relationships.

- Recognize the negativity bias—we are more naturally prone to notice what is not working (both in our relationships and in general) and less likely to perceive what is.
 - Identify strengths:
 - What you bring to the world.
 - What you bring to your relationship.
 - What your partner(s) bring to the world.
 - What they bring to relationship.
 - What they think you bring to the relationship (and vice versa).
 - The strengths of the relationship.
- Identify values (do same as above):
 - List 5-10 most important values to you.
 - Identify the values that are most important to your relationship.
 - Identify the values that your partner thinks are most important to your relationship.
 - Identify where you converge and diverge.
- What are you individually and collectively trying to accomplish?
- If you had a million dollars what would you individually/collectively do with it?
- Differentiate between preferences and needs:
 - There is no right or wrong way, only different ways—what *must* you have (needs) versus what you *want* to have (preferences)?
 - How do you know the difference?
 - What is a deal-breaker/What you are certain you want/need and what you are certain *do not* want or need!
 - Identify not just what you need to have but also what you need to not have.
 - You want to identify needs/preferences even if they are not normal, practical, or reasonable.
 - Is there a way that your respective needs/preferences can be met that is congruent to both parties?
 - Notice implicit assumptions you have about relationships (romantic, familial, work, friends, acquaintances). What do you think is a good/bad friend, family member, colleague, boss, relationship?
 - Find out the assumptions the people you are in relationship with have about those things.
 - Be more mindful of yourself and others in the relationship—who are you at your core and who is *actually* in front you?
 - Identify yours and others' tendencies toward optimism/pessimism, thinking/feeling, introversion/extroversion, and different ways of seeing the world:
 - The more we are alike the more different we are.
 - The more different we are the more we have in common.



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Positive Partnerships Continued

- When we perceive that we are being threatened by someone, we will usually try to dominate—we get entrenched in our position. “They are wrong. We are right.” They will do the same.
- When it comes to relationships, most of us are about 8-12 years old at best. Be pleasantly surprised when you and others behave like grown-ups.
- Don’t avoid unpleasant encounters or repress negativity and conflict:



- Negative emotions are information (anger/injustice, frustration/feeling powerless, sadness/something is important, fear/something is being threatened, guilt/I transgressed, shame/I *really* transgressed).
 - Conflict can help identify wants and needs.
 - Negativity and conflict can serve as a correction— helps identify the need to implement a boundary, to engage in self-care.
 - This is not usually the best time to negotiate.
 - Not all problems can be resolved.
- Not all problems need to be resolved.
 - Everyone is high maintenance.
 - You do not have to “love yourself” before you can love someone else. We are all works in progress. Loving ourselves and loving others is a lifelong process which happens as much through relationships as it does through work on ourselves alone. We cannot wait until we have high self-esteem, good boundaries, self-reliance, or are not co-dependent to be in relationship. It is *through* relationships, however painful they can be, that we develop those tools.
 - Take good care of yourself—figure out what you need to be as well as you can be (see our handout “Increasing Wellbeing”). It will help you bounce back quicker from challenges and see situations differently.
 - Relationships are not fair—someone in the relationship at one time or another will shoulder some burdens more than others.
 - Notice that when we become less tolerant, more irritable, and/or less willing we likely need to engage some form of self-care (sleep, breathe, eat, exercise, step away, do something that feels good and is fortifying).
 - Attend to the good—regularly take time to notice concrete/specific and general/global ways that our relationships are functional, what went well in our interactions, what we and others did that were positive, and what motivates us to be in relationship with these others despite difficulties we encounter in the relationship.
 - Relationship building does not have to be a two-way street. The other person/people may not be either willing or able to contribute and we can still improve our relationships.
 - Be the agent of your own wellbeing and the steward of that of others.
 - Figure out tricks to create win-win situations.
 - Remember the Platinum Rule: Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.
 - How do you know how they would have you do unto them? Get curious, find out.

Resources

- How to Be an Adult in Relationships: The Five Keys to Mindful Loving David Richio
- AuthenticHappiness.sas.upenn.edu
- The Gottman Institute <https://www.gottman.com/>
- Center for Nonviolent Communication <https://www.cnvc.org/>
- The Upside of Your Dark Side Robert Biswas-Diener & Todd Kashdan
- Appreciative Inquiry <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/>
- The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom Don Miguel Ruiz
- The Five Love Languages Gary Chapman



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