

Build a Bridge

How to develop and maintain healthy relationships

Relationships are very important to enriching our lives. Our relationships with family members, friends, colleagues, and romantic partners really add colour, purpose, and meaning to our lives. However, as much as we are dependent on and highly value relationships with other people in order to be a lot happier in this world, not many of us handle our relationships as well as we could. Here are a number of relationship tips that you can use to improve your life.

Successful relationships are based on:

Communication - Listen to your partner. Avoid blame and judgment. Do not make assumptions. Don't let your emotions dictate your behaviour.

Trust and respect - A sense of trust is present when each person feels safe to be open, honest and genuine. Respect helps build this through not judging or criticising the other's opinions, feelings and beliefs.

Team approach - When difficult times hit, try to remember you are on the same team. You either both win or both lose. Support each other and work together. Relationships are not meant to be a tug of war against each other. In fact, you both should be on the same side pulling in the same direction.

Share responsibility and decision making - Healthy relationships are partnerships. This applies to the power dynamics between the couple as well as the decisions you make together.

Fight fair - Judging your partner undermines a relationship. Address behaviour without criticising the person. Know where your partner's vulnerable spots are and never use these during conflicts.

Take care of yourself - It is your responsibility to know what you want and determine how to achieve that. Make any requests of your partner clearly and directly. It is not okay to blame someone for your failure to assert yourself.

Deal with problems as they arise - Conflict is a natural part of any relationship. Addressing differences one at a time helps avoid bad feelings spoiling a good relationship. Do not hold grudges; work through the matters as they present themselves and then let them go.

Dealing with conflict in relationships

- Treat conflict as normal and expected. Conflict does not need to be catastrophic or personal. Conflict is simply part of being human.
- People have varying degrees of comfort with conflict. Some prefer avoiding it at all costs. Unfortunately, those costs tend to increase the longer issues are left unaddressed. Therefore, learning how to manage and resolve conflict is a crucial skill and benefit.
- Deal with issues as they arise. Avoiding conflict makes situations worse. Time does not resolve matters. Instead, it decreases the chance of a positive outcome.
- Attempt to understand the other person's point of view. Dismissing the other's views, assigning blame, and exclusive focus on your own perspective are all counterproductive.
- Don't judge emotions. No one's feelings are more or less 'right' than the others. Emotions reflect a valid perspective of an individual at a moment in time. Even if you don't understand it, acknowledge the other person's reaction as important.
- Focus on the behaviour, situation or problem area without attacking the person involved.
- Do not assume your values or beliefs are 'right'. They reflect a view of the world from your unique perspective. Respecting another's viewpoint as equally valuable opens an opportunity for learning and growth.



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Maintaining a healthy relationship

Spending quality time

Devote at least half an hour every day to your family members or your significant other. Spend at least one day every month where you and your partner will be exclusively together. Time is a gift that nobody can buy, and not surprisingly, time is also the most important and affectionate gift that you can give your relationship.

Give and take

Compromise is often believed to be a negative word, especially by idealists. Listen to the other person and take into serious consideration the things that they want. You cannot expect to have your way all the time. A relationship, especially a romantic one, is made up of two people with different personalities, needs and wants. Giving as much as you take is another of the most common relationship tips out there, but it is very effective. Letting your romantic partner, family member, or friend know that you are into the relationship, as he or she is, will foster a better time and life for everyone.

Balance

Find the balance between your dependence and independence from your partner (or family member or friend) will be very crucial in maintaining a relationship. Your partner should know how much you need him or her, but this does not mean that you will be clingy. While you can request for more time with your partner, do not demand anything. Demanding for your partner to spend more time with you can make your partner feel trapped.

Appreciation

Appreciate your partner, family member, or friend, and all the things that they do for you. Do not, however, expect them to say a compliment back. Making a person feel appreciated and needed is one of the simplest ways to enrich your relationship; make sure that you do it for the people you love.

Honesty

Being honest does not end with not lying to your partner. It means that you should be honest about whatever you feel, think, or wish. If something bothers you, do not hesitate to say it. Your loved ones cannot read your mind. You cannot expect them to know exactly what you are thinking or feeling and many people tend to hide what they really feel or think. Also, if you keep everything bottled up, you will just end up resenting your partner and eventually destroying your relationship.

Acceptance

Once you love a person, you have to accept all their little unlovable characteristics and quirks. You cannot change a person. While there are things that you cannot change, there will be things that will change. Stop trying to believe that your partner will be the same person he or she was when you met each other. There are changes that are positive, too.

Punishment does not work

Punishing your partner for something wrong he or she might have done is not in the list of healthy relationship tips. Whilst punishment might make you feel better, this does not make the situation any better. Reward your partner for the things that you approve of and like, and overlook all those things that you do not (i.e. provided that your relationship is not jeopardised by your partner's actions).

Boredom is just a disguise of anger and resentment

People who are 'bored' with their partners may need to own up to what they are angry or resentful about. Sit down and ask yourself how and what you really feel about your partner and work through it tactfully and constructively.

Forgive

Forgiveness is a very important aspect of every relationship. Forgiving is not just about accepting the apology now and bringing it up later, it is about completely moving on from the experience unconditionally.

Laughter really is the best medicine

Laughter is one of the best relationship tips out there because it can be a great diffuser of tension. You should learn how to laugh at yourself and all the silly mistakes happening around you as it is definitely a lot better than getting angry and upset.

Counselling does not mean failure

After you have exhausted all the relationship tips that you can get your hands on, maybe try a more specific approach. Not all relationships are created equal, and if you want better attention to your problems, don't just relying on relationship tips, see a relationship expert for counselling as they will help you regain your perspective and build solid relationships.

Further Reading:

Conflict Resolution Skills, http://helpguide.org/mental/eq8_conflict_resolution.htm, 26 April 2012

References:

Maintaining a Healthy Relationship Tips, <http://relationship.lifetips.com/cat/64854/maintaining-a-healthy-relationship/index.html>, 26 April 2012

Top 24: Relationship Tips, <http://lovendar.com/articles/Top-24-Relationship-Tips-Awesome-Couples-Follow>, 26 April 2012.