

Enhancing Relationships at Home

Tips for getting the most out of your personal relationships

Living in close personal relationships (partner, family, friend) is a part of everyday life and brings comfort, support and fun, and also, at times, distress and frustration.

Normal relationships fluctuate in enthusiasm and satisfaction and this can be influenced by the way we feel, communicate, solve problems, and manage stress.

Relationship hurdles and problems are natural and can be managed effectively with good communication in order to bring people closer together. Here are some tips for enhancing relationships and managing the bumps along the way.

The following skills build and maintain a feeling of trust, enjoyment, openness and caring in relationships.

Self awareness & Flexibility

- Over time (and with constructive feedback) we gain a greater understanding of our own needs, expectations and patterns within relationships.
- Knowing and accepting your own personality style and how this affects a relationship can help you remain flexible to changing the way you approach situations in order to get the best results in times of change.
- Be mindful of your own patterns on doing things and the pros and cons of those patterns

Realistic and Open Expectations

- We often have unrealistic expectations of others and the relationship - 'expecting' by default that things will be the way we want them to be.
- We can also expect perfection from others, or that 'they should be able to read my mind'
- Expect and realise that everyone is different and relationships require regular healthy compromise
- Expect that at some time you and the other person will be misunderstood, doubtful, make a mistake, need to make a change, or have to 'work on something' to enhance a relationships & THIS IS NORMAL
- Check that your needs (and demands) in the relationship and of the other person are reasonable
- Some people prefer defined roles in relationships and others are more egalitarian. It's important to be open with or agree on your expectations, rules or guidelines for managing things (eg money; spare time; chores)

Enhancing communication

- Talk often, openly and freely about the important things so that talking becomes a good habit: eg differences and similarities in your ways of doing things, interests, ideas, feelings etc
- Talk early about things that cause strain so that negative tension does not build up and BLOW UP
- Be prepared to give honest feedback (constructive criticism) and ask for things you want or need to be changed. Accept and listen for feedback about things that you could change for the better.
- Listening is perhaps the most important way to enhance relationships - it generates important information for solving problems and provides an atmosphere of understanding, support and win/win.

Early Conflict Resolution & Problem solving

- Both people define their understanding of the problem or issue or need (it may be a difference of opinion)
- Both people describe the impact of the issue on themselves as the other person listens
- Both brainstorm possible solutions (eg compromise or change in behaviour) and pros and cons of each idea
- Both decide on the best solution and give it a go. Have a follow up chat to see if the solution is working
- If the other person usually responds with aggravation, withdrawal or sidetracking you might need a rehearsed, consistent and persistent approach.

Quality time & Support

- Talk regularly about your interests, ideas, plans, beliefs and be open to differences of opinion.
- Make a list of pleasant activities you can do together and plan ahead to make time to do them (also try something spontaneous, fun, romantic or unexpected).
- Remain appreciative and curious about the other person and how they see, do and want things.
- Affirm your relationship. Give the other person compliments and discuss what you like about them and your relationship.
- Develop patience and tolerance for mistakes and vulnerability in others - no one is perfect.

If these relationship enhancing skills are not used regularly and effectively and there are significant changes/differences/stressors in a given relationship then you may notice **signs of trouble** including; poor communication, lack of support, withdrawal/distancing, arguing versus talking, uncertainty, lack of intimacy, lack of trust, increased frustration, not feeling listened to, ongoing unmet needs,

vague criticism or sarcasm, emotional outbursts, clingy or needy behaviour, unrealistic expectations, repeating problems and past issues resurfacing.

During signs and times of trouble it is easy to forget good communication skills and feel pulled into a win/lose position inadvertently. Trouble in relationships can produce strong emotions and obscure your best intentions to communicate and care for the other person.

The '**5 VOW-els**' for effective communication: is an approach to trouble that can increase the likelihood of effective outcomes (win/win) by positioning you in a respectful and mindful approach to difficult or important conversations.

- | | | |
|---|-------------|---|
| A | Acknowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that you are both different - needs, expectations, beliefs, preferences, ways of dealing with and doing things (etc) & that this is normal • Acknowledge that the normal road has bumps - there will be disagreements, mistakes, frustration's, doubts, changes and misunderstandings |
| E | Emotion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationships require appropriate expression of positive and negative emotions. If not expressed, negative emotion often builds up and may block communication • Emotion has a purpose of alerting us to important needs/issues • Dealing well with emotions can be done with your communication skills • Acknowledge emotions AND work toward solutions underlying negative emotions |
| I | Intend | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intend to communicate well and to aim for win/win (cooperation/compromise) • Intend to listen first and to respond assertively • Intend to relax, take your time to think and do the best you can • Intend to act sooner than later and to work on joint problem solving |
| O | Openness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to talking further and prepared for important or difficult information • Be open to follow up on issues, to problem solve and to receive or give constructive feedback - to learn and use assertiveness skills • Be open to other ways of doing things or thinking about things |
| U | Understand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the key message behind feedback and emotional situations • Understand the key needs or expectations that you both have • You don't have to agree on everything |

If you find that, despite your efforts to enhance your relationships, things are not travelling so well then please consider utilising professional counselling assistance (by yourself or as a pair) which coaches people in effective relationship/communications skills.