

The keys to healthy relationships

1. Mutual respect

Healthy relationships operate out of mutual respect.

Mutual respect is where both people treat each other in a thoughtful, considerate and courteous way.

This means that you appreciate each other's opinions, values and wishes. Mutual respect happens when both parties make an effort to not only understand these opinions, values and wishes, but to take them into account when making decisions.

Mutual respect is about holding each other up, supporting one another and looking to build up the positives in the other person.

Central to mutual respect is also taking an interest in the other person, their lives, daily activities, work, and ideas.

Mutual respect is not: belittling, being rude, inattentive or demeaning. If these are present in any of your relationships, you need to work on building mutual respect. If this is not possible, then it may be time to put some boundaries in place, or walk away from the relationship altogether.

2. Empathy

Empathy is about being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes, and understand where they are coming from. It is key to positive relationships.

If you want positive relationships you need to practice empathy, and also have empathy given back.

If you need to practice empathy here are some tricks:

- Put aside your view, and try and see a situation from someone else's perspective
- Acknowledge how the other person is feeling (remember acknowledgement is not agreement, it is just stating that you can see a person is feeling a particular thing). e.g. "That must have been really distressing, I can see how upset you are".
- Shift your attention from your own personal feelings to really listen to what the other person is saying, without leaping to conclusions.
- If you are confused by what someone is saying, ask them to clarify what they are feeling or saying.

If you feel someone isn't being empathetic towards you, or if you feel that they lack empathy, you may want to gently explain empathy to them.



Then, without accusing them, explain how you are feeling and why you think empathy may be the key to improving your relationship. Remember the principle of mutual respect – don't attack them, rather try to frame your discussion around how you can both move forward in a healthy way.

3. Two-way communication

Relationships are a two way street. You need to be able to speak, and the other person also needs to be able to speak. You also need to be able to listen, and the other person needs to be able to listen.

When you tell the person something, make sure that your message is received and understood. And when you listen to the other person, make sure you listen and understand what they are saying. It's as simple as that.



Keys to good communication include:

- Being clear in what you are saying, and what you need.
- Thinking about what you say, and how you will say it, before you speak.
- Talking about what is happening to you and how it affects you.
- Using 'I' statements, like "I feel", "I need" and "I want".
- Listening to the other person when they talk and trying to understand what they say.
- When you are listening to the other person, set aside your own thoughts and feelings, and practice empathy.
- Understand that you don't have to be right all the time, and embrace compromise. Your relationships are more important than always being right.

4. Accepting and celebrating differences

We're not all the same, and what makes us different can be the glue that binds relationships together.

You don't always want to be in relationship with someone that is a carbon copy of you, that would be very boring.

When accepting differences, you need to understand that there is no right or wrong way to approach life.

Someone's untidiness may drive you to distraction, but it is that same disorganisation that may make them very spontaneous and fun. It's not right or wrong, it's who they are.

What you offer the relationship, and what they offer, may be different qualities. But you both bring something to the table. Try to appreciate what makes someone else unique, and practice empathy towards them.

To the same end, you also need someone to celebrate your differences, not criticise them. If you find yourself under a barrage of criticism for your differences, explain how that makes you feel, and why your differences make you who you are. If they are still critical, it may be time to put some boundaries in place, or walk away.



5. Using “I” statements

It’s important when you voice a concern, you don’t come out and attack someone. Statements like “You made me feel terrible”, or “You are impossible” are never helpful.

Instead, frame the situation with “I” statements, this takes the sting out of the conversation.

For example: “I felt very hurt by that situation”. This opens up the conversation, rather than shuts it down, and can often resolve conflict more quickly and cleanly than when you come out on the attack.

6. Sharing your needs

People are not mind-readers. As much as we would all love people to just understand what we want and need without having to ask for these things, that is simply not how the world works.

If you need something or want something, ask for it. You will find that people are much more attentive to your needs if you simply ask for things. The added benefit is that you get your needs and wants met without having a fight over them.

Regarding the other person, clearly and kindly explain that if they want or need something, you are more than happy to help, you just need to know what their want or need is.

7. Allowing space

Sometimes people need some space to process things. We may not always like it when someone asks for space, but we have to accept it. And at the same time, sometimes you may need space.

Space helps people to get distance between themselves and the situation. It allows you to see things more clearly.



8. Appreciation

It's important in any relationship that there is mutual appreciation. Complement the person, and thank them regularly. Acknowledge their achievements and show gratitude when they do something for you.

In the same vein, it's important that you are being recognised and acknowledged in relationships. If you feel you are not, let the person know that acknowledgement is something you need.

Good relationships make you feel good about yourself, they lift you up, and in turn you lift the other person up.

9. Self-care

You can't be everything to everyone. You will at points need to take some time out for yourself.

This is called self-care. It means is taking some time for yourself to engage in activities that maintain your physical, mental and emotional health.

Self-care activities can be different for different people, and they may include walking, yoga, painting, listening to music, having a bath, going to the gym, seeing a movie.

If you notice your friend/partner/family member may be burning out, you could also encourage them to engage in a self-care activity.