

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO

# Healthy RELATIONSHIPS

5 PROVEN STEPS TO TRANSFORM  
YOUR CONNECTION WITH OTHERS



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# THINK OF ONE PERSON THAT YOU WISH YOU HAD A HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP WITH.



You know that one person, the one you kinda ache over the state of your relationship? Got them in mind? Maybe it's your spouse or one of your kids.

Maybe it's a boyfriend or girlfriend, sibling or a friend. Keep that person front and center in your thoughts. Maybe you wish there was more closeness, less conflict, better communication, more understanding, or maybe you just wish it was an all-around healthier relationship. Let yourself feel that ache. Let's face it, you can probably think of more than one person. We all can.

You don't have to just "wish" your relationships were healthier. You can make them healthier. Picture a closer, more fulfilling, more satisfying, deeper relationship with that person. No more ache. Great, huh? Now, picture all that good relationship stuff with all the important people in your life. That would be pretty good, right?

Sounds way more than pretty good. **You can make that happen. You actually have that power.**

## RELATING TO PEOPLE IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING CERTAIN SKILLS.

It's kinda like cooking or being handy around the house. Yeah, maybe some people seem to have a "knack" for those things, but what they really have is a skillset. Good meals don't happen by accident. Wall outlets don't get fixed by accident. (ZAP!) **Healthy relationships aren't an accident either.** They don't just happen. Or not. Healthy relationships aren't the product of a couple of personalities that "click" or a matter of "destiny" or the planets aligning or something...

## THERE ARE SPECIFIC SKILLS YOU CAN DEVELOP TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.

And you can start on them today. A ton of research has gone into studying what makes relationships work. You're gonna get the best of that research right here. All of your relationships can improve if you understand and develop these skills. After all, you are half of every relationship you are in! And the cool thing is that you are surrounded all the time by people you can practice these skills on. It's definitely worth it...

**KEEP THINKING ABOUT THAT ONE PERSON. REMEMBER THAT ACHE.**



## STEP #1

# ***SELF-CARE, SELF-MANAGEMENT & SELF-AWARENESS***

“

*Talk to yourself like you would  
to someone you love.*

BRENÉ BROWN

“

*Of all deceivers fear most yourself!*

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

# ARE YOU THE KIND OF PERSON THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH?

**Self. Self. Self.** This sounds like a lot of self. Having healthy relationships with others begins with you. Do you know yourself? Are you cultivating a healthy relationship with yourself? Are you comfortable in your own skin? If you are not, it will be harder for others to have a healthy relationship with you. Full stop. Think about it. **Here's the breakdown:**



## SELF-CARE

It's just what it sounds like—taking care of yourself so you can be the best version of yourself. Inside and out. Sure, this can include things like eating right, getting some time outdoors, and some exercise. But it also includes being able to tell when you are getting burned out and maybe need some rest, or being able to recognize and work through your stress in healthy, productive ways. A poet once said that we have two hands—one to help others and one to help yourself.



## SELF-MANAGEMENT

This is about knowing your strengths and weaknesses and knowing how to play to your strengths while working on areas where you need to grow. Self-management is having goals and knowing what it will take to reach them. It's about being able to motivate yourself to do what you have to do to be successful. Managing yourself means knowing what is in your control and what is not. It's not being bullied by your emotions but knowing how to respond instead of reacting to people and situations.



## SELF-AWARENESS (PART 1)

There are two parts to self-awareness. The first is being aware of what is going on inside you. This is being aware of what you are feeling and why—knowing your own unique personality, passions, and character traits. In short—it's knowing what makes you tick. Many people don't know why they feel the way they feel. They are a stranger to themselves. That's no way to go through life.



## SELF-AWARENESS (PART 2)

The second part of self-awareness is knowing how you come across to other people. It's understanding how other people see you. You might think you are just really confident, but you might come across to others as totally full of yourself and cocky. You might be quiet and shy but come across to others as a pushover who can't be assertive.

# DO YOU KNOW YOU?

## DO YOU KNOW HOW YOU COME ACROSS TO PEOPLE?

Self-aware people tend to have healthier relationships because they use the same skills to know themselves to get to know other people and also have deeper insights into how they relate to others.

### SELF-AWARE PEOPLE HAVE HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS

BECAUSE THEY ASK THEMSELVES QUESTIONS LIKE:

*Do I feel better after spending time with this person?*

*Do I feel secure, or do I feel like I have to watch what I say and do?*

*Am I myself around this person?*

*Is this person supportive and do they treat me with respect?*

*Is this a person I can trust?*

# YOUR 3 SELVES

They say that everyone has three Selves they have to live with—their **Past, Present, and Future**. All three should constantly work together to make you a whole, healthy person. You bring all three of these Selves into all of your relationships.



PAST  
SELF

Your Present Self has to learn from your **Past Self**, maybe forgive it, and be at peace with it. Come to terms with it. Be grateful for your Past Self, even if it made some bad choices and especially if it had to go through some hard things. **“Good job, Past Me!”** Learn from Past Self’s relationships—was Past Self always trying to “fix” people, did insecurity make it “clingy,” did it have good personal boundaries?

Your **Present Self** owes it to your Future Self to make choices today that set up your Future Self for maximum success in life. Don’t sabotage your Future Self. Don’t let Present Self screw over your Future Self by not planning, not having goals, not working hard, choosing immediate gratification, not trying to get better at relationships, and never interacting with your Past Self. **“This is for you, Future Me!”** Present Self needs to be developing relationship skills that Future Self will be able to use and benefit from.



PRESENT  
SELF



FUTURE  
SELF

Your **Future Self** should be able to look back at your Present Self and be thankful for the choices you made that paved the way for a great future and great relationships. **“Future Me is gonna thank me for this!”** Future Self will be using Present Self’s relationship habits, tendencies, skills, and relationship lessons learned.

**Press pause a second.** Can you see how self-care, self-management, self-awareness, and being in a healthy place with your Past Self, Present Self, and Future Self totally lay the foundation for all your healthy relationships? Can you see how healthy relationships begin with a healthy relationship with yourself?



Think about that one person you wish you had a better relationship with. Are you bringing your best self to that relationship? Whatever the disconnect is, how much of it is you? Be honest with yourself.



## STEP #2

# COMMUNICATION

“

Communication works for those  
who work at it.

JOHN POWELL

“

Communication leads to community-  
understanding, intimacy, and mutual valuing.

ROLLO MAY

# ARE YOU **LISTENING** OR JUST WAITING FOR **YOUR TURN TO TALK?**

---

**Communication is a simple, complicated thing.** It's simple in the sense that you have ears and a mouth; you can hear and speak. So communication should be super easy, right? But every day you experience miscommunications, don't you? Someone sure didn't look like they were listening. Someone took something you said the wrong way and it turned into drama.

Miscommunication can be as simple as someone distracted by their phone and as complicated as someone attributing motives to you that you don't have. It can hurt to not feel heard. You can get frustrated and flustered by someone who sounds like they are attacking you. It can be depressing when someone dominates a discussion. Yeah, communication is real simple...

**If you're gonna have healthy relationships you're gonna need a good communication skillset.**

This begins by acknowledging a few things about communication and cultivating more of that self-awareness. **People have different communication styles.** Some people like to talk a lot and some people don't. Some people are better at speaking and need to work at listening. Some people are better at listening and need to work at speaking. Some people need to open up and share to feel connected. Some people have to feel connected to open up and share.

**LEARN YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLES AND  
LEARN TO OBSERVE HOW OTHER PEOPLE COMMUNICATE.**

...

“

Communication is a skill that you can learn.  
It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing  
to work at it, you can rapidly improve the  
quality of every part of your life.

BRIAN TRACY

## ADD THE ACRONYM

Here's that practical, easy to remember, good, good stuff...

# ATTUNE

## TO YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLSET.

FOR BETTER SPEAKING

FOR BETTER LISTENING

**A**WARENESS: Of your tone of voice and volume, your body language, if it's the best time and place to talk, of how the person you're talking to is receiving what you're saying.

**T**OLERANCE: Of perceived miscommunication, believing the best in the other person, giving them the benefit of the doubt, not escalating a conversation, separating the problem from the person, not being adversarial, trying to win the person—not the argument or discussion.

**T**URNING CRITICAL "YOU" STATEMENTS INTO POSITIVE "I" STATEMENTS: Not using phrases like, "You always... You never," but instead using phrases like, "I feel... I need... I think." (And drop the "always" and "never." People never always do anything.)

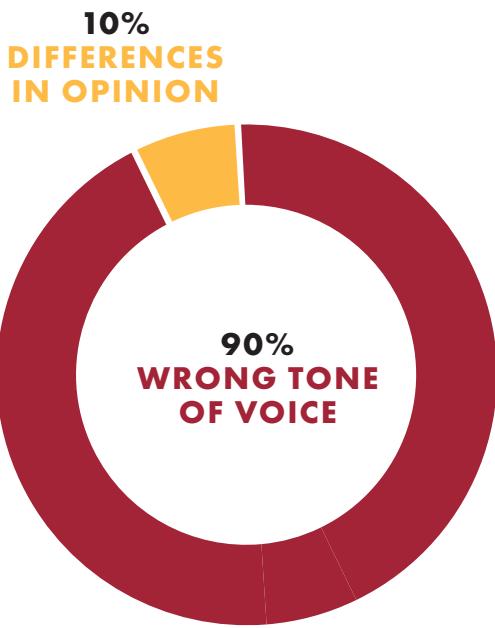
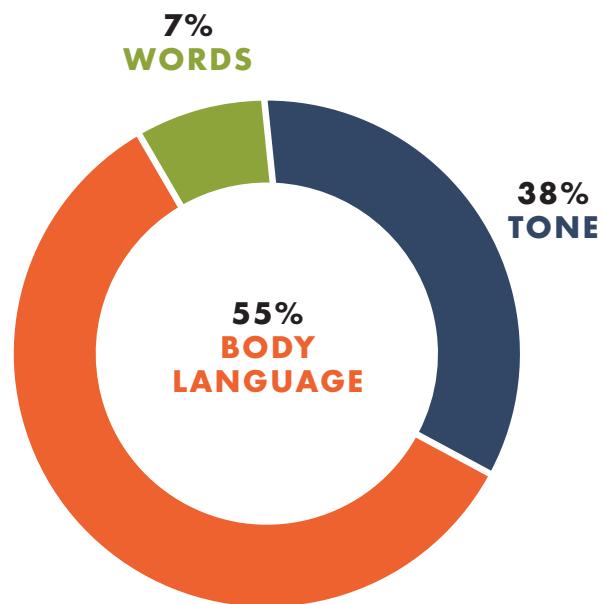
**U**NDERSTANDING: Seeking to understand before being understood, understanding if someone wants advice or just a listening ear, asking questions to clarify what you are hearing.

**N**ON-DEFENSIVE LISTENING: Looking like you're listening, not being distracted by things like your phone, having a positive listening posture—not crossing your arms and glaring or having your hands on your hips, adopting an "open" posture—physically and verbally.

**E**MPATHY: Putting yourself in the speaker's shoes and actively trying to see things from their perspective or point of view, focusing on how they feel and think, actively listening by asking things like, "How did that make you feel... what did that look like from your perspective... what were you thinking when that happened?" Get outside yourself.

# HOW WE COMMUNICATE

It's not always *what* you say, but *how* you say it that makes all the difference in the world. Sometimes it's easy to send a mixed message when the actual words don't match the tone of our voice or our body language. Your words themselves may be positive, but if the tone is sarcastic and your arms are crossed and you aren't making eye contact—those words won't be "heard" the way you intended. When the words, tone, and body language all match up—**now you're communicating!**



## WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT?

Nobody is going to agree on everything! Differences are what make life and relationships interesting! It's what you do with those differences that can make or break a relationship. So many times we don't actually even disagree with someone, or it's just a minor disagreement, **but they voiced their opinion in a tone that put us off** and now a conversation has escalated into an argument.

**THIS COMMUNICATION THING—YOU CAN GET BETTER AT IT, AND ALL YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WILL BENEFIT FROM IT.**



Imagine that one person and you having healthy, clear, consistent, two-way communication. How much would that alone improve your relationship? Think about how good communication could help you identify and address whatever the "static" is between you. It can happen.



## STEP #3

# YOUR APPROACH TO CONFLICT

“

*Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.*

RONALD REAGAN

“

*We don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note.  
Only notes that are different can harmonize.  
The same is true with people.*

STEVE GOODIER

# DO YOU SEE **CONFLICT** AS SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO **ALWAYS BE AVOIDED** OR **EMBRACED AS AN OPPORTUNITY** TO DIVE DEEPER INTO RELATIONSHIPS?

Conflict, approached in a healthy way, can bring people closer together. In fact, researchers have found five main ways that people approach conflict: Competing, Accommodating, Avoiding, Compromising or Collaborating. It would be super helpful to identify which of these five approaches is your “default” conflict approach. Start tuning in to how other people handle conflict. You could argue that there is a time and place for each of these five approaches if approached in a healthy way with kindness and compassion. **Collaborating is the approach that truly brings two people the closest together.**

## HOW DO YOU APPROACH CONFLICT?



Remember that one person you really wish you had a better relationship with? The person that in your quiet moments you ache inside over the state of how you relate? On some level you probably think that there is some conflict that you just can't get past that is keeping you from having that healthy relationship. You might be mistaken. **You can ache or you can collaborate.**

# OVERCOME OBSTACLES

To have healthier relationships, there will always be something to overcome. Remember, healthy relationships don't just happen. But healthy relationships are worth fighting for. They are worth digging deep so you can face those conflicts. You can be an Overcomer.

In healthy relationships conflict is approached in a way that drives you toward deeper understanding and deeper connections through compassionate collaborating. Instead of working against each other, you work with each other to find solutions and build solidarity.

## SELF-CARE, SELF-MANAGEMENT & SELF-AWARENESS

- ARE YOU WORKING TO BECOME SOMEONE WORTH FIGHTING FOR?
- ARE YOU FIGHTING TO BE YOUR BEST SELF AND REACH YOUR GOALS?
- ARE YOU AWARE WHEN A RELATIONSHIP OR PERSON ISN'T HEALTHY FOR YOU TO FIGHT FOR?

## COMMUNICATION

- ARE YOU ABLE TO FIGHT YOUR URGE TO TALK SO YOU CAN REALLY HEAR SOMEONE?
- ARE YOU ABLE TO FIGHT BACK EMOTIONS TO KEEP A CALM TONE AND LOWER YOUR VOICE?
- ARE YOU ABLE TO FIGHT YOUR NATURAL SELF-CENTERED VIEW TO EMPATHIZE WITH SOMEONE?

## CONFLICT

- DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW STEPS #1 & #2 CAN STOP FIGHTS BEFORE THEY START?
- DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CAN WIN THE FIGHT BUT LOSE THE RELATIONSHIP?
- DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT HEALTHY CONFLICT IS AN OPPORTUNITY, NOT AN OBSTACLE?

Being your best self and using clear two-way communication are great ways to avoid unnecessary conflict. Another way to avoid conflict is to live your life intentionally with a clear purpose. *The next step in developing healthy relationships is to be intentional.* When you know where you are going in a relationship, you can side-step the things that could get you off-track.



To be clear, for our purposes, "conflict" and "fighting" mean relationship tensions, arguments, disagreements, differences in opinions, and different approaches to problem-solving and communication—NOT physical, emotional, verbal, or other forms of abuse. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship, contact the National Hotline for Domestic Abuse. At this link, you can access a private chat with someone who can help you 24/7. If you fear your computer or device is being monitored, call the hotline 24/7 at: 1-800-799-7233. For a clear understanding of what defines an abusive relationship, [click here](#).



## STEP #4

# BEING INTENTIONAL

“

The key is not to prioritize your schedule  
but to schedule your priorities.

STEVEN COVEY

“

I began to realize how important it was to  
be an enthusiast in life. If you are interested in  
something, no matter what it is, go at it full speed.  
Embrace it with both arms, hug it, love it,  
and above all, become passionate about it.  
Lukewarm is no good.

ROALD DAHL

# WOULD THE PEOPLE WHO YOU SAY ARE A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE SAY THEY'RE A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE?

A big part of healthy relationships is **showing up**. Being available and dependable. It's showing someone that they are an important part of your life. As busy as you are, that's not going to happen automatically and it certainly won't happen by accident—you are going to have to be **intentional**.

There's a saying that captures this: "**People won't always tell you how they feel about you, but they will always show you.**" Pause. Take a second to think about that. The reality is that we do devote our time, energy, resources, and availability to the things that we value and are important to us. That doesn't always match up with what we claim is important to us.

We can say all day that we love someone, we care, we value our relationship with them, we value their friendship, but if we don't put the time and effort into the relationship, all those words sound hollow. That's kinda harsh. That hits hard. You're super busy with everything that life throws at you, but you have to be deliberate in investing in the people you care about and want to cultivate a healthy relationship with.

Showing that you care doesn't always have to be a grand gesture; often it is the little things that mean the most. **Sometimes you have to get creative.**

## WAYS TO SHOW YOU **TRULY CARE**



SHOW CURIOSITY ABOUT THEIR DAY & ABOUT THEM IN GENERAL



WRITE THEM A NOTE OR SEND THEM A CARD



ACKNOWLEDGE BIRTHDAYS, HOLIDAYS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS



SHOW INTEREST IN THE THINGS THAT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN



MAKE SMALL SACRIFICES OF YOUR TIME & RESOURCES



BE RELIABLE: DON'T FLAKE OUT ON PLANS OR GHOST THEM



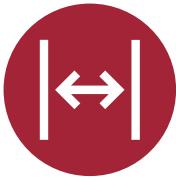
DO LITTLE THOUGHTFUL,  
HELPFUL THINGS FOR THEM



FACETIME INSTEAD OF CALLING,  
OR SEND A TEXT, JUST BECAUSE



DON'T JUST TALK ABOUT SPENDING  
TIME TOGETHER: SET A DATE



KNOW & RESPECT THEIR  
PERSONAL BOUNDARIES



SURPRISE THEM WITH THEIR  
FAVORITE DRINK OR DESSERT



REMIND THEM WHY YOU  
APPRECIATE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

**You get it.** Whether it's your spouse, child, significant other, or friend—put in the time, put in the effort. Don't get so busy that there is no margin in your life to do the things that build trust, show you care, and keep you connected.

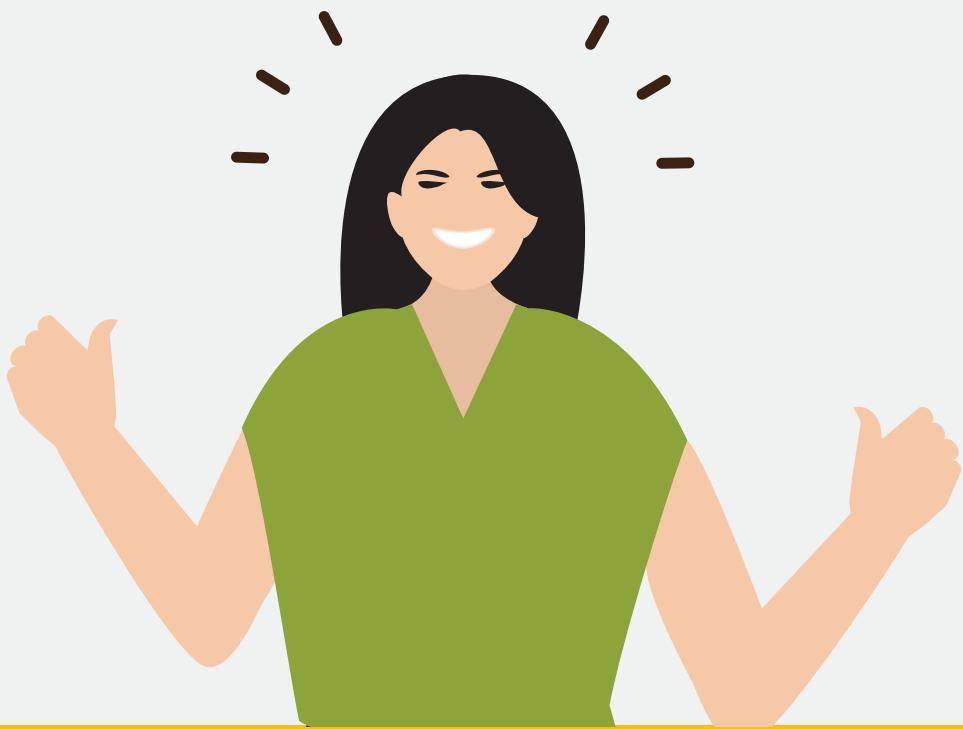
“

I don't have to chase  
extraordinary moments  
to find happiness –  
it's right in front of me  
if I'm paying attention and  
practicing gratitude.

BRENÉ BROWN



**Gut-check time.** This person that you want a healthier relationship with—what are you going to do about it? Seriously think about it. **What. Are. You. Going. To. Do?**



## STEP #5

# GRATITUDE

“

*Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more.  
It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order,  
confusion into clarity... it makes sense of our past,  
brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.*

MELODY BEATTIE

“

*We must find time to stop and thank  
the people who make a difference in our lives.*

JOHN F. KENNEDY

# HOW DO YOU PRACTICE **GRATITUDE** IN WAYS THAT TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS?

**Some have called gratitude the most powerful of all human emotions.** Philosophers and poets have praised gratitude as the most desirable attitude. Now, it's practically become a lost art. Practicing gratitude fundamentally changes you. So you have come full circle now—essentially back to Step #1—being the best version of yourself for improving your relationships. This is a fitting final step for your study of healthy relationships.

Research has shown that just taking time each day to think of five things you are grateful for helps you feel happier. It's really hard to feel thankful and unhappy at the same time. Whatever your definition of success, we all want more of it. That desire for more can blind us to what we already have—and should be grateful for.

**Gratitude is choosing how to see your life.** You can complain that roses have thorns or be grateful that thorns have roses. Gratitude cultivates an optimistic view of the world that, frankly, actually will make you more fun at parties. Misery loves company. Gratitude attracts company.

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE TO OTHERS IS ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL PARTS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP.

It's telling that "please" and "thank you" are usually the first words parents teach their children for social interaction. These words reveal an understanding of your place in the universe. You are dependent. You need other people. Gratitude breaks through our built-in preoccupation with ourselves and acknowledges that someone has done something that has helped, encouraged, or inspired us.

In healthy relationships, expressing gratitude for an action, a character quality, an ability, or an attitude communicates that you value that individual. Notice and acknowledge the big and little things and find creative ways to show your appreciation. Expressing gratitude strengthens the bonds that connect and hold us together.



# 5 SIMPLE WAYS TO BECOME A MORE GRATEFUL PERSON

1

## KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL

Each day, write down five things you are grateful for.

2

## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Learn to be in the moment and focus on the positives.

3

## VOLUNTEER/HELP OTHERS

It's hard to focus on yourself and other people and their problems at the same time.

4

## WRITE THANK YOU NOTES

This says so much!

5

## TRAIN YOUR BRAIN NOT TO COMPLAIN

You'll naturally find yourself seeing the positives in life and complaining a lot less if you make a habit out of the four ways mentioned above.

### DID YOU KNOW?

It only takes **eight weeks of gratitude practice** for people to start showing changed brain patterns that lead to greater empathy and happiness. **That sounds like you becoming your best self.**



When is the last time you told that person a heartfelt “thank you” or demonstrated your gratitude to them for something they have done or just for being who they are?

# THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

If everyone followed this step-by-step guide, the world would be a better place. But obviously, not everyone is working on the common goal of having the healthiest relationships possible. So, sometimes you might feel like you are doing these things on your own. Remember, you are half of every relationship you are in. You can only control your half, but you'll be becoming the best possible version of you. Don't underestimate the impact you can have by simply setting a good example for the people around you. And don't forget that one person. That's where you start. **Developing and improving relationships takes time and skills, but healthy relationships can:**



## IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

Healthy relationships can elevate your mood and brighten your outlook on life.



## HELP YOU TO REACH YOUR GOALS

Whether you're trying to get fit, give up smoking, or otherwise improve your life, encouragement from others can really boost your willpower and increase your chances of success.



## REDUCE YOUR STRESS AND DEPRESSION

Having healthy relationships can reduce stress and boost your immune system, and help reduce isolation and loneliness, both major contributing factors to depression.



## HELP YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS

Even if it's just having someone to share your problems with or someone to work together with to solve personal issues, healthy relationships can help you cope with serious illness, the loss of a job or loved one, or any other challenges in life.



## BOOST YOUR SELF-WORTH

Relationships are a two-way street, and the "give" side of the give-and-take contributes to your own sense of self-worth. Being there for the people in your life makes you feel needed and adds purpose to your life.

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**BOTTOM LINE:** You need healthy relationships. People you care about need you to be able to relate to them in the healthiest ways possible. They need you. They depend on you. We were never meant to do life alone.

# RESOURCES

## STEP #1: SELF-CARE, SELF-MANAGEMENT & SELF-AWARENESS

Self Care: Cherishing Yourself And Your Relationship

Hardwiring Your Happiness

12 Rules For Self-Management

Building Your Self-Management Skills

Self-Management Skills: List, Definition, Tips & Techniques

What Is Self-Awareness? And How Can You Cultivate It?

5 Habits of Highly Self-Aware People

What Is Self-Awareness?

What Is Self-Awareness, and How Do You Get It?

Top 11 Benefits Of Self-Awareness According To Science

Why Relationships Will Always be Challenging Without Self-Awareness

3 Signs You Are Ready For A (Proper) Relationship

## STEP #2: COMMUNICATION

Emotional Attunement

4 Types Of Silence That Are Bad For Your Relationship

Making Good Friends

The Top 5 Skills For A Happy Relationship

Communication Mistakes To Avoid At All Costs

15 Communication Mistakes That You Might Be Making But You Don't Even Know

## STEP #3: YOUR APPROACH TO CONFLICT

Five Approaches To Conflict Resolution

Five Approaches To Dealing With Conflict

Healthy Relationships

## STEP #4: BEING INTENTIONAL

7 Ways to Improve Connection In Your Relationship

What Does a Healthy Relationship Look Like?

The 7 Steps To A Happy, Long-Lasting Relationship

Happiness

## KEY #5: GRATITUDE

8 Ways To Have More Gratitude Every Day

10 Ways to Express Gratitude

5 Ways To Practice Gratitude

5 Simple Ways to Express Gratitude Every Day

Hardwiring Your Happiness

The How Of Happiness

## THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Where Americans Find Meaning In Life

5 Skills for Making Friends As An Adult



FIRST  
*things*  
FIRST®

WANT EVEN MORE  
RELATIONSHIP RESOURCES?

**FIRSTTHINGS.ORG**

