

Relationships

Summary:

1. ourselves – positive image
2. broken / whole relationships
3. good relationships have:
 - a. trust
 - b. empathy
 - c. respect
 - d. understanding
 - e. mutuality
 - f. boundaries
 - g. other
4. limits of relationships
5. common hindrances
 - a. control
 - b. selfishness
 - c. abuse
 - d. drug and alcohol
6. myths of relationships (12 items)
7. romantic relationships
 - a. what to look for before marriage (5 items)
 - b. warning signs before marriage (7 items)
 - c. female answers to men wanting sex (11 items)
 - d. physical boundaries (10 steps)
 - e. avoiding compromise (3 items)

We all have relationships. We cannot live without relationships. We have relationships with:

1. Ourselves
2. Others
 - a. Parents
 - b. Siblings (brothers and sisters)
 - c. Children
 - d. Other relatives
 - e. Peers (friends)
 - f. Authorities (boss, teacher, judge, etc.)
 - g. Romantic relationships
 - h. Work mates
 - i. Enemies
 - j. Others
3. God
4. Animals
5. Material things (money, etc.)

We all have relationships**Ourselves**

The most important relationship on which all others are based is the relationship we have with ourselves. It is very difficult to form a relationship with another person if we do not know who we are and what we want and need.

Some people have the idea that another person can “complete” us or “make us whole.” In fact many love songs convey this message. However, this is misleading. We are responsible for our own growth, our own development, and our own happiness. Other people can certainly help us to attain these. However, ultimately, each of us is responsible for ourselves.

I have to like myself before I can expect anyone to like me. Before you can have a meaningful relationship with another person, you must first believe in your own worth and that you are special. If I have to rely on others to affirm my sense of worth, then the relationship will not be between equals. One person will dominate the relationship.

This type of relationship may become abusive. Knowing and liking ourselves is important. We must know where we begin and end and where the other person begins and ends.

Liking ourselves does not mean being selfish or conceited (stuck up). Often this means just the opposite. People who have a low self-image often resort to selfishness, rudeness, aggression, or even abuse to make up for their feelings of low self-worth. A person who feels (s)he is worthy will be more able to open up and share with others.

Liking ourselves also does not mean that we are totally satisfied with ourselves. Again, a person who has a healthy self-image is open to learning, growing, and developing. (S)he is not afraid to risk and change.

People with a good self-image have boundaries. For example, healthy people do not allow others to abuse them, whether it be physically, emotionally, or verbally. Likewise healthy people will not want to abuse others.

People with good relationships gain feedback from their friends on how other people see them. If they are doing something good, then they are affirmed. If they are doing something that is not so good, then their friends will tactfully show them their errors.

The following diagram may help you to see how we view ourselves in relation to how others see us.

		Others	
		Known	Unknown
Self	Known	1	2
	Unknown	3	4

The above diagram shows four areas of ourselves. Quadrant one shows us what is known about ourselves by both us and others. Quadrant two is what is known by us about ourselves us but not by others. Quadrant three is what is others know about ourselves that we don't know. Quadrant four is what neither we nor others know about ourselves. As we develop good relationships with others quadrants three and four will grow smaller. We will know more about ourselves.

Here is another way of looking at ourselves.

1. I'm okay, you're okay.
2. I'm okay, you're not okay.
3. I'm not okay, you're okay.
4. I'm not okay, you're not okay.

Let's look at these and see how those holding such positions will behave.

Those holding to number one (I'm okay, you're okay) usually have good relationships with others. They see themselves as being basically good and others as the same. They are able to reach out to others in appropriate ways. This does not mean that such people are naïve. They wouldn't, for example, just give a stranger a large sum of money.

The second example - (I'm okay, you're not okay) - are people who often are a menace to society. Some of the people in prison have this attitude. These people think they are good but others aren't. Since they are good and others aren't, then whatever happens to others is somehow their own fault. Therefore, if I am stronger than you and can take your money, then you deserved to be stolen from because you are weak. Often these people have little regard for other people; they are bullies. These people have a reputation for being cruel to others. They often lack any love or compassion toward other people.

The third example - (I'm not okay, you're okay) - are people who are not fully developed. In fact, this is the position of small children; they see themselves as "not okay" but their parents as "okay." They act subservient toward others. They lack the confidence to do well. They often fail in school, can't keep a job, get pushed around, and are often abused. They somehow feel that anything bad happening to them is okay. They may engage in destructive behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse. They may become obese or get into abusive relationships in which they are continually hurt. They may not take care of basic hygiene, and may wear dirty clothing, and rarely bathe themselves.

The fourth group - (I'm not okay, you're not okay) - are often found in mental hospitals. They usually have given up on life. They are usually hopeless people. They feel they cannot do anything themselves nor can anyone else. They are both helpless and hopeless people.

Activity:

Roll playing: Get three people to do this. One will make the statements below, one will affirm while the other will tactfully correct him/her.

1. I got angry and told the policeman to get out of my face.
2. I told my mother to leave me alone. She is always asking me about where I am going.
3. I always get the best seat in the taxi no matter who else is riding or how crowded it is.
4. I want to go to technical school but I don't have the money right now.
5. (S)he loves me but I really don't love him/her. I know I need to tell him/her my true feelings.

If people have a good self-image about themselves then they will usually respond in a healthy way to others. Likewise, if people do not have a good self-image then they may behave in inappropriate ways. Here are some examples:

1. Alan spends lots of money on clothes, cars, and jewelry to impress others (he feels insecure).

2. Betty sleeps with lots of men (she feels unloved).
3. Charles is often picking fights with others (he feels others are always trying to take advantage of him and cheat him).
4. Delores steals things often (she feels deprived).
5. Errol never asks others to his home and has no close friends (he has been hurt many times by others).
6. Freda eats all day and won't clean her house (she tried once to go to school but failed and the students and teacher called her stupid so she just "gave up").
7. George abuses his wife and children (he thinks they may leave him because he sees himself as a liar and a cheat).

In short how we see ourselves is often the way we will treat others. If we see ourselves as okay and others as okay, then good relationships can root and grow.

Activity:

Divide into small groups (about four to five each) and discuss.

1. Do you feel it is your duty to make someone else happy? Do you feel it is someone else's duty to make you happy?
2. Do you see yourself as selfish, rude, aggressive, or abusive? If so, why? Do you know others who are this way? Why do you think they are this way?
3. Are you afraid of change? Of growing and developing? Why? Do you know anyone who is afraid to change? Why?
4. How do you keep others from abusing you? Do you feel you need better skills in this area?

Broken Relationships / Whole Relationships

One aspect of relationships is that sometimes they become broken. Sometimes the break is minor and can be easily repaired. Other times the break is so large that the relationship is permanently destroyed. In fact sometimes relationships get so bad that people will kill each other.

Why do relationships break down? What can we do to stop this breakage? What can we do to repair the breakage?

All relationships break down sometimes.

First, why do relationships break down? They break down because we get frustrated. We become frustrated when our expectations are not met. We expect something to happen and it does not happen. Almost always relationships break down because someone was dishonest. Someone treated the other person as though the other person were not a person but a thing.

Let's give an example. A fellow starts a friendship with a young lady. He is nice to her and buys her some things. He tells her how pretty she is and how much he cares for her. He asks her to "prove" her love to him. He asks her to have sex with him. Does he really care for her or is he using her? Well, it may be some of both but if he hurts her in any way, then he is using her. He is using her like a thing. He cares more for his needs than for hers. He cares more for his pleasure than for her well-being.

Can we hurt the ones we love? Yes. Can we use the ones we love? Yes, we can. It happens all the time.

First let's look at what makes up a good relationship. Having a relationship with another person takes no effort at all. Sometimes we are forced into a relationship that we may not want. However, in order to have a good relationship with another person, we must make an effort. We have a relationship with our parents. You will always be a child to your mother. However, if that relationship is to be a good one, then you have to work at it. What are some characteristics of a good relationship?

1. All good relationships have trust. There must be credibility. If someone cannot trust you, then the relationship will not be a good one. It may function as a relationship for a number of reasons. For example, let's say I become friends with someone who has lots of money. I may maintain that relationship even though my friend lies to me. I want his/her money so I maintain the relationship. But this is not a good relationship. Both are using the other person. You are staying in the relationship for the money. The other person is lying and using you.
2. All good relationships have empathy. Empathy is the ability to see what another person is seeing or to feel what another person is feeling. Would you want a friend who never cares or knows your opinion? Who never tries to find out what you feel? Who is never happy when you are happy or sad when you are sad? Of course not. That would not be a good relationship.
3. All good relationships have respect. There are several ways we may do this. First, all of us have a need for privacy. While friends may share many things with each other, there will always be some things that each will not share. Friends respect each other's privacy. Second, we do not take others for granted. What that means is that we are respectful of others' feelings. If our friend is upset over something that we think is silly, we still respect him/her and show understanding. Third, we treat our friends with dignity at all times. No one wants to be humiliated. That does not mean that friends may not tease each other, but the teasing does not hurt. Calling another person a hurtful name is not showing dignity to the other person.
4. All good relationships share understanding. This means that good friends communicate very easily. You may respect your teacher, but it is a lot easier to communicate with your friends than your teacher. In a good relationship, we often know what our friend is thinking or feeling before they tell us.
5. All good relationships have mutuality. This means that in a friendship both persons benefit. If only one benefits, then the relationship is somehow unequal. Often relationships do not become very deep because one person has power over the other. For example, a domestic worker may not share his/her true feelings about political matters because they differ with the employer.
6. All good relationships have boundaries. This is similar to respect. What does this mean? It means that you do not allow others to invade your privacy or space. For example, a person may not touch you in places you don't want. You do not allow people to call you harmful names. You do not allow others to abuse you physically. You do not allow others to force you to do things you know are wrong.
7. Other? Can you think of other characteristics? A good relationship does not merely mean that you share a hobby or some interest. For example, just because you and another person like the same food does not mean that you will establish a good relationship.

Activity:

List some characteristics of a good relationship. Why do you think you are close friends with some and not with others? (Hint: While having the same interests may help, it is not the “glue” that holds relationships together and makes them strong.)

There are some things you cannot do in a relationship. You cannot make a person:

1. be happy
2. love you, want you, need you, miss you, be glad to see you
3. trust you
4. see or feel or think a certain way
5. get some sense into their lives
6. lose or gain weight
7. save or spend money
8. want or not want sex
9. use or stop using drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol
10. use or stop using bad language

What are some of the more common hindrances that affect relationships?

1. Control – Sometimes in a marriage or romantic relationship one person will try to control the other person. This is not healthy. In a mature relationship neither person will control the other. Control can take many forms. Sometimes it may involve abuse, even physical abuse. Sometimes it may be psychological control. We try to make the other person feel guilty. One may act “needy” or “helpless.” Love and control cannot exist in the same relationship. Love appreciates another person’s freedom. Healthy people will constantly try not to be controlling of others and will avoid such situations.
2. Selfishness – When people are selfish, the relationships break down. Selfish people will usually “take” more than they “give.”
3. Abuse – Like control, abuse will ruin a relationship. If one person is afraid of another, then a deep relationship is impossible.
4. Drugs and alcohol – Countless relationships have been broken due to substance abuse. If a person is suffering from drugs or alcohol, then professional help is needed. This is true not only for the person addicted, but also for other family members.

Love and control cannot exist together.

Myths about relationships

There are some common myths about relationships. Some of these are:

1. Some controlling behavior (manipulation, intimidation or domination) is a necessary part of love. In fact, love and controlling behavior are incompatible.
2. Living together is the same as marriage since it is only a “piece of paper.” (Couples who live together before marriage have a higher divorce rate than those who don’t. Marriage brings different responsibilities from merely living together.)
3. A husband/wife should always know where the spouse is and what they are doing. (Trust does not have to know everything another person does.)

4. Marriage and having children will cause irresponsible adults to “grow up.” (You cannot force a person to accept responsibility.)
5. Once married, all parents-in-law should be kept at a distance. (A healthy relationship with parents-in-law is desirable. Healthy couples will set boundaries yet allow parents to be a part of their lives.)
6. If you love someone enough then that person will change into what you want him/her to be. (You cannot change another person into anything.)
7. All marriage problems are communication problems. (While communication problems do exist, many problems arise for other reasons. For example, other reasons may be selfishness, laziness, infidelity (unfaithfulness), etc.)
8. It is always good to stay in a bad marriage for the sake of the children. (Usually children will know when a marriage is bad and their parents have serious problems.)
9. Any partner is better than no partner. (An abusive, uncaring, irresponsible person is not desirable; it is better to be alone.)
10. Sex before marriage is important so you can tell if you are sexually compatible. (Sexually compatibility is not merely physical, but involves the emotions and the will to commit to another person.)
11. Men need sex more than women do, so it is normal for men to be unfaithful to their wives. (Marriage means that a commitment is made to another person exclusively. In other words, other women are no longer an option to a loving husband.)
12. Good sex will always keep a relationship from ending. (A relationship based only on “good sex” is rather shallow and will probably encounter problems sooner or later, usually sooner.)

Romantic relationships

Many people get married and find much happiness in that relationship. However, many find nothing but misery and pain. What can a person do before getting married as well as during the marriage to ensure that it becomes all that it can be?

Before marriage

Rod Smith, a columnist with The Mercury newspaper, says the following are things to look for in a partner:

1. (S)he has a life. (S)he has interests, hobbies, and friends.
2. (S)he reads and understands the world beyond the immediate.
3. (S)he has no debt. If a person has credit card debt, then when his/her money runs out (s)he will spend yours.
4. (S)he loves and honors his mother and father but is aware of the limits and boundaries of his/her relationship to them. Avoid those who have cut their parents out of their lives.
5. (S)he has long-lasting friendships with a diverse group of people. (S)he is loved by the elderly, by children, and by peers, and takes good care of a diverse set of relationships.

He goes on to point out some warning signs to look out for. Some of these are:

1. You feel totally loved and fully known by someone you only recently met.
2. You have compromised your standards, values and beliefs for this person.

3. You find yourself lying to friends and family to cover him/her and your times together.
4. When you bring up the past, (s)he says something like, "Let the past be the past. Let's live in the present."
5. You know little about this other person but you are having so much fun it doesn't seem to matter.
6. (S)he takes up most of your time so that your other normal activities are pushed aside. You neglect your other long-standing friendships.
7. You are doing too much too soon. Some examples are: (a) feeling very close very quickly, (b) telling everything to someone on a first date, (c) falling in love "overnight," (d) having sex because the other person felt like an instant soulmate.

What should a woman do if she feels pressured by a man to go to far physically, especially if his words are smooth? Here are some answers that may help.

1. Man: Everyone is doing it.
Woman: Then you shouldn't have any difficulty finding someone else. I'm special and unique.
2. Man: Prove you love me.
Woman: Why not prove you love me by not forcing me.
3. Man: Sex is natural.
Woman: So is death.
4. Man: No one will ever know.
Woman: You will know, I will know, and God will know.
5. Man: Don't worry, I'll use a condom.
Woman: I'm not worried because I not having sex with you.
6. Man: You can't get pregnant the first time.
Woman: I've reached puberty. Of course I can get pregnant the first time.
7. Man: Do I look like I have AIDS?
Woman: Do I look like a fool? A person can be HIV positive and only get AIDS later.
8. Man: How can we be sure we can have a baby?
Woman: Will you only love me if I can have children?
9. Man: I'll find someone else if you won't.
Woman: Okay, start looking.
10. Man: Let me show you how a great lover does it.
Woman: My great lover will be my husband.

11. Man: We'll get away with it just this once.

Woman: I may get away with it physically but I can't get away with it emotionally. I have to deal with my conscience.

Part of a good relationship is boundaries. When a man and a woman like each other, they will be physical attraction. Drawing a line is best done when physical passion is not strong. Often couples go "too far" physically and later regret it. Below is a wide spectrum from casual physical contact to full sexual intercourse. By drawing a line early on, couples avoid having to make decisions in the heat of passion.

1. Brief touch
2. Holding hands
3. Embrace
4. Touch to satisfy a desire for intimacy
5. Brief kissing
6. Prolonged kissing
7. Caressing (touching intimately for the other's pleasure)
8. Fondling (touching intimately for own pleasure)
9. Sexually stimulating another (touching the genitals)
10. Sexual intercourse

Where will you draw the line? Remember it is easier to draw the line before passions take over.

Here are some suggestions for avoiding compromising situations:

1. Stay busy. If you are busy (working, studying, participating in sports, etc.) then you will not be as likely to compromise.
2. Never be alone with your boy/girlfriend in private places. Stay with a crowd or group.
3. Ask a friend or trusted persons to hold you accountable to your standards.

A final word about relationships

All of us would like to have friends. All of us would like to have good relationships with others. Each relationship is different. Each relationship requires effort and work on our part if it is to help us grow.

Relationships will change over time. Sometimes friendship will last a very long time while other friendships will be rather brief. During our lives some relationships will fade and new ones will emerge.

All relationships require work.

Activity: Roll-playing: Have two people pretend they are strangers sit next to each other. Have them talk for about a minute.

1. How is this relationship different from one with a friend?
2. What difference does it make if the person is of a different gender? Different age? Different religion? Different culture? Different social class?
3. What if one person is known as an authority (police, teacher, pastor, politician, etc.)?
4. What are some "rules" for relationships?