

10 Ways to Create Your Best Relationships

Many studies have shown that the quality of your relationships sets the stage for finding success, happiness, joy and fulfillment in your life. If your relationships, whether romantic or with family and friends, are healthy and thriving than you have a solid foundation for taking on the world.

Creating your best relationships is an art, and requires some thoughtful exploration on your part. So, let's dive in, here are my top 10 tips for creating your best relationships!

1.

Happy relationships are not always happy. Let's first set up some realistic expectations! A happy, healthy relationship will still have conflict, annoyances and times that you doubt it – that's normal. The key is that you are able to work through those times without losing sight of the bigger picture. If you view conflicts as just a moment in time, versus a sign that everything is doomed, you can address them in a calmer and more open way. Expect a roller-coaster ride, but one without all the dramatic twists and turns and upside downs.

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2. Your inner world sets the tone for your outer world. In my work with clients, I help them see that they actually have a lot of power in their relationships, just by focusing on their own thoughts and feelings. The more you understand and know yourself, the more authentic you will be in your relationships, and the less defensive and guarded you will feel. This creates a more open and accepting environment for you and those around you. The goal is to come from a place of calm, rather than anxiety and worry. I love using the metaphor of a palm tree – you are firmly grounded, but can bend and sway with the wind, without breaking.

3. Boundaries are key. Many people find satisfaction and good feelings in taking care of others' needs, often at the expense of their own. However, this can create a dangerous dynamic with feelings of resentment on your part, and feelings of guilt in the other. Having good boundaries in place means that everyone is responsible for meeting their own needs, and can clearly communicate when they'd like help or guidance. This allows for mutual support in a way that does not feel intrusive, controlling or suffocating, but rather like genuine caring.

4. Self-care is of the utmost importance. Creating a healthy relationship with yourself is the first step in creating your best relationships with others. Many people often unconsciously treat themselves as unimportant and overlook their own needs, which means they are more likely to accept that from others. Practicing good self-care means that you are aware of what you want and need at any given moment. If your shoulders feel tense, you notice that and gently massage them or check in about what might be stressing you in that moment. Self-care can run the gamut, but some common forms are taking a walk, having a cool drink, meditation, breathing exercises, getting a good night's sleep. Make a list of your go-to ways to care for yourself and make it a priority.

5. Take social media with a grain of salt. Social media can be an interesting glimpse into the lives of our friends and family and a wonderful way to stay connected. However, it can also cross lines in relationships that lead to competitiveness, hurt feelings, jealousy and false information. It's important to check in with yourself regarding the effect social media has on you. If you notice a negative impact, it may be a good idea to cut down on how much you are exposed to. Relationships in real life are challenging enough, there's no need to make them harder by being pulled into the "smoke and mirrors" often presented to us on social media.

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6. The key to communication. The way you talk with your loved ones is key to the quality of the relationship. The goal is to communicate with vulnerability, but that is often a very tricky requirement because it can feel scary to reveal your deeper feelings and fears. In my work with couples, I help them develop some important keys to communication. Put simply, communicate what you are feeling and be curious about the other person's experience. This means you do not accuse, blame, use the words "you always", "you never" or shut down the other's response. This takes a little work and practice, but is so important in making sure the relationship feels safe and secure.

7. View your relationship realistically. Many times a relationship can feel like being on a pendulum, swinging from feeling really good to the other extreme of feeling like it's full of conflict and stress. It's an exhausting process of highs and lows, affecting our sense of security in the relationship. My advice is to get off of the pendulum, as mentioned above, all relationships have highs and lows and good times and bad. The key is to not lose touch of either. So, when there is conflict, don't lose sight of the good qualities this person also has. And, when times are good, don't idealize them and turn them into a "perfect" person that could never disappoint you. This is viewing a relationship realistically, looking at all parts of the person you love at once.

8. The Venn Diagram of Relationships. It surprises many of the clients I work with to know that a healthy relationship requires that each member has a very well developed individual life. If we think of a Venn Diagram and each person as a circle, the overlap of those circles, representing your shared interests, would be less than half of each circle. If your individual lives overlap too much, the dynamic tends to be more co-dependent and can prevent growth and feel suffocating. If your lives don't overlap enough, then there is disconnection and avoidance. I always say if I could re-write the famous line from the movie Jerry McGuire, it would say, "I'm complete and so are you, let's do this!"

9. Be aware of ghosts from the past. Our past relationships and experiences have an impact on our current relationships. Sometimes, things that trigger us have nothing to do with the other person, but rather hurts from the past. One of the most important things you can do to create your best relationships is to know yourself inside and out, with understanding of what triggers you and why. This information is so powerful because it gives you more control over your interactions with others and how they impact you.

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10. Do a status-check on your current relationships. Think about your current relationships based on the tips discussed in this article. Are there healthy boundaries? Do any drain your energy? Are there some you'd like to grow or distance yourself from? I love the saying that people come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. This is very accurate, not everyone is meant to be in our lives forever, but sometimes we feel that pressure. You have every right to choose those in your inner circle, as well as those that are better off as acquaintances.

Warm wishes and encouragement, Stephanie



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