

What is a healthy relationship?

Like many things in life, relationships come in all shapes and sizes

There are many types of relationships - there is the relationship you have with a life partner, a treasured friend, your adorable pet, your boss or co-workers, your financial advisor, your doctor or therapist, your children, your parents or any other family member....the list is endless.

While the degree or intimacy that any one of your relationships may involve, there are many similarities in the things that make healthy, fulfilling, loving, successful or positive relationships.

Then there is the relationship you have with **yourself (very, very important!)** including your mind and your body.

What about your relationship with the physical world, with nature, with the environment?

Sadly, a lot of our relationships have problems - from small issues to high levels of dysfunction and/or dependence.

A committed relationship with another person - a marriage, a partnership, family member, friend or colleague.

Researchers estimate that only 10% of marriages/committed partnerships are in the are highly healthy and happy category.

Science tells us that 1 in 10 of mature couples (together an average of 21 years) exhibited the same neuro-chemical reactions when shown photographs of their loved ones as people commonly do in the early stages of a relationship.

These still passionate couples are called "swans."

What can we learn from these healthy relationships so that you can create one for yourself?

Even if you have had lots of challenges in relationships before.

What makes a relationship healthy?

- Research shows that healthy couples are tolerant of each other, have shared intimacy and humour, are affectionate and show appreciation of each other both in the little things they do for each other and verbally.
- Healthy couples tend to be polite to each other as well as caring, overlook the small irritations, and reward the things they like with gratitude and affection.
- Honesty and trust and also very big on the agenda.....if your partner says I want to go for a walk alone, a healthy partner does not question it and understands that we all need 'alone' time now and again. Or, sincerely explain why they need you here right now and suggest or ask if they could have their walk alone time another time.
- Perhaps you have a night out with your friends and it gets late, do you send a message to your partner to tell them you will be late? Doing so is considerate and unless there is a good reason why your partner says no, you must come home, they should accept you are enjoying yourself without them and that is no threat to the relationship - might even be good for it.
- Trust is also about shared and open communication about finances, about shared responsibilities, in managing the home, the children and your working lives.

- When in a committed relationship, and this certainly includes friendships, the ideal is that we trust that your partner is looking after your interests just as much their own - and you are doing the same for them.
- Healthy relationships rarely include jealousy, envy or spite.
- If you love and care for another person, you give them the respect they deserve and always give them the benefit of the doubt, don't try to control or blame them.
- Being able to talk to each other fairly and honestly, especially when disputes do arise, can go a long way to resolving any issues - and these talks should always be approached with goodwill and a desire that both people get the best outcome.

HEALTHY COUPLES, THOUGH, ARE NOT PERFECT PEOPLE.

They make mistakes just like we all do.

When you make a mistake - acknowledging that mistake, saying you are sorry and considering the effect your mistakes may have on your partner (friend or colleague, parent or child or anyone you are in, or wish to be in, a relationship with) can go a long way to improving your relationship and making it thrive.

What does a happy, committed, lasting and loving relationship look like for you?

It might be a good idea to really think about that - and if you have not had good role models in your life and truly don't know what a healthy relationship is, then now is a great time to starting looking and learning just how healthy, productive, thriving relationships work and what people do to develop them.

If your goal is being in a happy, committed, lasting intimate, friendship or business relationship, the first step is to understand and clearly visualize what that relationship would look like.

Unfortunately, a soul mate, great friend or successful family or work relationship does not just come to you 'on a plate'.

It takes effort - sometimes lots of it as you learn and grow in the way you manage yourself and your relationships.

It is likely that you have not had a lot of role models to show you what a really healthy relationship is.

The kind that makes you content, happy and considerate to your partner and all people in your world and those you meet along the way. The kind that even makes you healthier, happier and more at peace with yourself and the world. The kind of relationship where you are also rewarded with consideration, caring and love.

You might even be finding it hard to imagine that kind of relationship.

It might be hard to imagine how you can learn the skills that lead to these types of relationships.

Some things to do that make a difference - this applies to your life partner, friend, colleague or family member, or any relationship you have.

People in successful relationships understand that things can change, that the relationship can deteriorate, loss can happen.

Active appreciation and gratitude leads to greater personal and shared happiness.

12 ideas for a happier relationship, a happier life.

1. **Look for and focus on the positive qualities** and pay less attention to those you consider negative. We all have faults, flaws, habits that may not be ideal in the eyes of others.
2. **Appreciation and gratitude** (I repeat it here because it is so important).
How can you show appreciation and gratitude to others? A simple thank you and a smile can sometimes be enough.
Take the time to do things that make other people feel good, feel better about themselves (and you!!).
Appreciation is critically important. If you are in 'appreciation mode' about yourself, your partner, your friend, your life - you will be generally happier and more positive and optimistic and this will positively influence every area of your life.
3. **Look for the positive things in your life right now** - focus and concentrate on them - and share these positive thoughts, feelings and ideas with those you love and care about.
4. **Trust your loved ones intrinsically** - this means always giving them the benefit of the doubt when they might do something disappointing or even hurtful. See and believe that it was not intentional or directed at you. Learn not to react with criticism, rejection or attack - instead, find out what happened and why.
You have every right to express how you feel, but be open to their side of the story or explanation. React with love and openness, not with a mean spirit.
5. **Try not to hold on to negative feelings.**
In poor relationships the other person can often never win.
Even when they try to explain or be nice, they are greeted with negative responses - anger, suspicion, hurt and blame.
This type of response makes it almost impossible for relationships to flourish.
Even if you are feeling sad or upset with your partner or friend, if they try to offer you a loving gesture or a friendly word - take it, accept it and acknowledge it as meant with goodwill.
If you still need more time, tell them. But tell them with a loving gesture or friendly demeanour in return.
The rewards to you and your relationship will grow and flourish.
6. **Practice positive thoughts about yourself, what you have and the relationships you have.**
Actively looks for the good in everything. Write a list, add to it whenever you think of something positive and look at the list often. Pin it on the bathroom mirror if that helps.
The better you feel about yourself, the happier you are and the more you are likely to contribute to the happiness of your partner and your relationships in general.
When we are sad, depressed, angry, worried or seeing problems at every turn it is almost impossible to be happy or to create happy relationships. Positive thinking lays the foundation for having fun together - another important characteristic of healthy relationships.
An everyday practice of positivity, we do not concentrate on the flaws of others but instead value strengths.
7. **Are you often experiencing anger or anxiety?**
Anxiety and anger destroy relationships. Anger and anxiety come from sadness and fear.
When we are highly anxious and angry we forget that the things we think may not be true.
Our rational thoughts are impinged. These intense emotions can damage our health, stimulate our negative thoughts and make us unhappy with ourselves and those around us. Can you control these intense feelings?
If not, I urge you to consider getting professional help through online therapy or face to face counselling.
If counselling is not for you at this stage, try to learn all you can about these emotions and how you can control them. There is an enormous amount of good quality information available for free on the internet - just be careful to look for articles and education from qualified professionals. Go the library and find some good quality books on healthy relationships.

8. **Practice the things you learn and work hard at it.**

You will be well rewarded for your efforts to be a better person and make your world, and that of those you love and care for a better place. This is the environment where happiness and successful relationships flourish.

9. **Do something nice (loving, caring) for someone else.**

Tell someone you like their dress, notice a new haircut and compliment them, do the dishes without being asked.

Ask a colleague if they need some help with their work, give your elderly parent a hug (they might not have had one for a while), tell your child or partner you love them and that you are very proud of them - spontaneously and for no particular reason. Think of some examples of what you could do for someone who is important to you, without expecting anything in return.

10. **Suspicion and mistrust destroys relationships.**

If suspicion and mistrust are validated by the actions of the other person, perhaps you may need to consider the value of that relationship to you and by all means value yourself and your judgements - but please try very hard not to jump to suspicion and mistrust first, second or even third.

When these negative emotions are in the forefront, it makes it almost impossible for you to 'see' the positive alternative, to see or accept a gesture of love or friendship.

This response puts up enormous barriers to healthy, happy relationships.

11. **Give yourself a gift. Not a material gift.**

Give yourself the gift of letting go, just for a moment to start with, of feelings of resentment, rejection, loneliness, disappointment, abandonment or emptiness. No, not a material gift.

And you need to be appreciated. And you deserve to be appreciated. Maybe your partner has acted badly, has been mean, distant or just clueless. Right now, you may be struggling to see anything positive about your partner, you may be struggling to appreciate one or more of the relationships you have.

Your children may be driving you nuts, your co-worker might be full of whinges and 'all about them' and you are heartily sick of it, your best friend might not have called you for ages yet you know he has been in touch with others and you are feeling rejected. These are all valid feelings, feel them, then let them go. (easier said, I know, but give it a try). Activate positivity, banish blame, allow forgiveness, give the benefit of the doubt.

12. **Say it out loud.** Share how you are feeling with others. Hopefully before it becomes or causes a problem. It is OK to say, just out of the blue: "I am feeling grumpy today, "I think I need some time to myself", or "I am feeling grump today, I really need some quality time and support with you. Do you think you could do that for me? Very importantly, say the positive feelings out loud too. If you feel a sudden rush of love for your partner (or any other type of relationship), tell them – now. Phone that friend and tell them you miss them if that is what you are feeling. If you are feeling unappreciated, tell them. Not in anger or bitterness or in an anxious way – but in an honest, calm, clear way.

If you don't get the appreciation or even the acknowledgement of your feelings in a positive way from those you love and care about most of the time, then you may need to look deeper into the reasons why.

Professional counselling can be a valuable tool to dig deeper into what is going on for you and your relationships.

1. **It is OK to be wrong.** You don't always have to be right (really!)

You should accept that for others and they should accept that in you.

Feeling that you are always right is like pouring oil onto a flame..

It is you who suffers the most and can make quite simple situations turn into bigger problems.

2. **Appreciate yourself.**

List some of your best traits and characteristics. Develop an appreciation of who you are, what you believe you do well and how you can work on some areas you are not so happy with.

Create an environment where you are open to change, to learning, to appreciation and gratitude, to positive reinforcement, to acceptance.

What else can you learn to appreciate in yourself and those around you?

Have a think about that, make a habit of thinking about these things to improve your own positivity, love and growth.

3. **Take notice** - look for, notice and acknowledge the best in your partner and in all of the relationships in your life. Practice telling them.

Take note of how they respond when you show your love, your appreciation and gratitude.

Show thanks, be genuine.

4. **Look at how you can change the focus of your own outlook.**

When you don't get that positive comment when you think you should.

Be patient, and tell yourself you know they do appreciate what you have done, but it just hasn't occurred to them to say so this time. Be forgiving, be tolerant.

If this happens too often, then say how you feel. 'Sometimes it would be really nice if you could tell me when you think I have done well, I would really appreciate hearing it'. I hope I do the same for you. You can get wonderful rewards if you do these things and practice these skills.

I hope some of these ideas resonate with you and you can make the effort to work on improving your thoughts and actions, and your responses. On learning, growing and developing a more positive outlook. These ideas, implemented, can go a long way towards improving the quality of all of your relationships. It is very often worth the effort of working on yourself alone and together.

It is true however, that some relationships may not flourish no matter how hard you believe you have tried. This may be the time to seek professional counselling for yourself and/or with your loved one, and in some cases it may be time to re-evaluate a relationship.

While very many can grow and prosper, some relationships may not be lasting ones and if this is truly the case, it may be time to let go so that you can both be free to find a new relationship that makes you both happier and more fulfilled.

If you would like to consider discussing your issues in online relationship counselling or face to face counselling, I would be delighted to talk with you.

To find out more about counselling therapy, I offer a free 15 minute session to find out your concerns and to help you decide if counselling is right for you.

Call me, Jennifer Vince, on +61 425 742 394 - or go to **Contact** page on my website – www.counselling.com