



# BUILDING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

by Hal Baumchen, PsyD, LP, LADC

*Relationships are not always easy to navigate, even under the best of circumstances. Every relationship takes work. Mental health disorders may make relationship issues more intense and difficult to manage. It is possible, with commitment and work, to make adjustments, correct serious difficulties, and build the relational closeness you desire. This lesson includes eight of the most common problems, along with encouragement and suggestions for change. Consider your relationship as a whole while you work through these pages. Some problems may relate to you and your partner, and some may not. Some may fit only you, and others may fit your partner. Explore the core issues and how you can work together to improve your relationship.*

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## BUILDING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- *Identify common relational problems*
- *Evaluate your relationship in light of the common problem areas*
- *Describe new ways of relating to and connecting with your partner*

Relationships are not always easy to navigate, even under the best of circumstances. Every relationship takes work. Mental health disorders may make relationship issues more intense and difficult to manage. It is possible, with commitment and work, to make adjustments, correct serious difficulties, and build the relational closeness you desire.

Even within a long-term relationship, relational issues vary widely and can change over time. Following are eight of the most common challenges, along with encouragement and suggestions for change. Consider your relationship as a whole while you work through these pages. Some problems may relate to you and your partner, and some may not. Some may fit only you, and others may fit your partner. Explore the core issues and how you can work together to improve your relationship.

### CREATING LASTING CONNECTION

#### **1** Encourage independence.

At first glance, being over-protective might be thought of as a positive trait, but it can come across as possessive, overly helpful, shielding, and stifling. Instead of a relationship of two equals, one partner becomes dominant and parental over the other. To correct this, independence must be encouraged and the dominated partner should be allowed and encouraged to try new things, even if it means uncertainty, doubt, and potential failure. Communicate encouragement and unconditional, positive affirmations.

## NOTES

Are you both considered equal within your relationship? How have your actions and words been possessive, shielding, or over-protective?

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What changes need to be made so words and actions communicate encouragement and positive affirmations?

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## 2 Increase consistent commitment.

A casual and superficial posture does little to foster long-term feelings of love and commitment. This style may be on-again/off-again and the level of commitment to the relationship may rise and fall based on situations, circumstances, and shallow, insincere feelings. The relationship bond feels weak and is not strong enough to hold the couple together when trouble comes, which can lead to doubt and insecurity. In contrast, seek to provide steadiness and commitment to the relationship, especially when affection seems based on trivial matters and circumstances. Look for ways to demonstrate sincere, consistent affection and assurance of your long-term commitment.

How has inconsistency in your words, actions, and affection been harmful to your partner and relationship?

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How will you communicate affection and the depth of your commitment?

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## 3 Become relationally generous.

Nothing kills a relationship like being self-centered and self-focused. The inability to sense what another person needs, and the unwillingness to give it, can create an emotional drought for your partner that can be difficult for them to bear. The self-focused partner thinks about their own needs and wants, what seems good for themselves, and, from their own perspective, only about what is convenient. This self-centered posture can produce feelings of despair, bitterness, resentment, inadequacy, and inferiority in a partner. Out of these very painful emotions arise

withdrawal and avoidance, or anger and aggression. Be willing to do the hard work and to let go of your “me-first” attitude. Instead, regularly put other people first, paying attention to their needs, diminishing your own sense of self-importance, walking in humility, and seeing others as more important than yourself.

How have your self-focused actions harmed your relationship?

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How can you start putting your partner’s needs before your own?

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List two things you can do to be proactive and help meet his or her needs this week:

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**4 Be trustworthy.**

When we deny the truth, we increase distrust. It is almost impossible to live in an intimate, close, and loving relationship with someone you cannot trust. Lying to others, minimizing problems, having good intentions but no follow-through, refusing to take responsibility, and keeping things secret all wear away trust. Another way to view trust is seeing it as your track record. Many people with emotional problems may have an inconsistent or poor track record. In order to become trustworthy, this track record has to improve and be consistent. Trust equals behavior over time, meaning trust is built as you demonstrate changed behavior over a significant period of time. You strengthen and rebuild your relationship as you openly and honestly disclose important information. The way we live, with steadiness and dependability, creates stability in relationships. Living without secrets, deception, or dishonesty will rapidly build security and trust.



Where have you been untrustworthy? List some examples.

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How you will start to build trust and rebuild your relationship?

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### **5** Be affirming and encouraging.

Being controlling and critical of others often produces serious problems in a relationship and is one of the main factors contributing to divorce in our culture. People want to feel encouraged, supported, affirmed, and uplifted. Most people become increasingly more resistant and uncooperative when they feel criticized. Angry and anxious people are often very controlling. If you find yourself being critical, intentionally look for ways to ignore other people's mistakes and highlight their successes. Watch for improvement, positive character traits, and minor successes instead. Point these things out, while overlooking faults and failures. Keep an eye on your attitude toward yourself, and take care to not be overly critical. You cannot be gracious in an intimate relationship if you continually criticize yourself. Make a personal commitment to celebrate minor improvements and successes of your loved one, as much as you acknowledge their major accomplishments.

How has pointing out faults and mistakes impacted your relationship?

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What positive character traits can you identify in your partner? In yourself?

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### **6** Manage your insecurities.

Intimate relationships are built on mutual trust and cooperation. To achieve a deep level of connection, there must be a belief that both partners are on the same team, and are working together. This cooperative mindset can easily be damaged if one partner begins hunting for signs of betrayal, disloyalty, and lack of commitment. At first, the accused partner may increase efforts of reassurance. Unfortunately, as the suspicious partner seeks confirmation of disloyalty, the second

partner may retreat and withdraw, which only heightens the suspicion and mistrust of the first partner. This very complex dance has, at its heart, a twisted premise: "I can only feel secure if I am absolutely convinced of your complete, total, and unending loyalty to me." The suspicious person may believe their partner will cheat or leave. Anxiety about the relationship is not eliminated by making demands of the other, but instead, the anxious and insecure person must reduce and manage their own anxiety, and not expect the partner to provide constant reassurance through perfectly consistent and proven behavior. Develop confidence and self-assurance. Ignore subtle cues that elevate suspicion and instead look for clues that support relational trust and loyalty.

Have you damaged your relationship by voicing your insecurity, mistrust, or suspicion? How have you done so?

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How can you better manage your own insecurities?

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## 7 Become generous and helpful.

There may be an unequal level of contribution coming from one member of the couple. One person may under-contribute in almost every area of life, financially, intellectually, socially, intimately, relationally, and spiritually. They may not help raise or nurture children or may be unavailable to help manage household maintenance and chores. They may appear unconcerned about the safety and welfare of family members. Perhaps they are taking more than they are providing. This can lead to a general dissatisfaction in the relationship. One partner may feel as though they are over-contributing and always trying to make up for the one who does very little. Growing resentment may provoke a flood of behavior changes designed to get the under-contributing partner to step up and do more. It may seem as though no amount of direct communication, begging, insisting, or threatening makes a difference. Work toward giving freely and generously to your partner. Don't wait to be asked or forced to give. This is a process, so be willing to get help and commit to it long enough to determine lifestyle changes have occurred.

Name areas of your life where you are under-contributing to your relationship.

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Name three ways you can step in and help more this week?

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### **8** Create harmony and peace.

Anger is a naturally occurring feeling. Aggression is the action coming from angry and hostile feelings. The angry person frequently blames other people and circumstances for their irritation and hostility. They might say: "I wouldn't have to yell at you, if you weren't so dog-gone lazy." An angry partner is often irritated and easily upset. He or she keeps a mental list of offenses, becomes resentful and bitter, and often tries to get something from the other by being angry. They are often looking for increased respect, connection, and affection. Their tactics, however, often produce the opposite. When the angry person complains and finds fault with their partner, the partner may retreat and become less available. Seek to create unity and harmony, pointing out similarities, not differences. Find ways to identify what you like, not what you do not. Also, review what is going right, not what is going wrong. Anger is often filled with selfishness and it can be reduced by paying attention to the needs of others, without being overly focused on your own.

In what ways has your anger harmed your relationship? Have any acts of aggression been frightening for your partner?

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How can you handle your frustration in a more positive way?

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### **MAKE INTIMACY THE GOAL**

Many things can reduce or destroy intimacy; creating intimacy is possible through changing and focusing on your own character, mood, attitude, and disposition. Continue to improve yourself, rather than insist on the improvement of others. Making these changes takes time and effort. Do not be discouraged if you see little progress at first. Be consistent in your efforts and honest in your evaluation the changes you have made. Although you cannot control others, you can influence your relationship by being kind, understanding, patient, and compassionate. Don't grow weary in doing the next right thing. It is worth the attention and work.