

TWU Counseling Center

Building Better Relationships

People who successfully build intimate relationships with friends and/or a significant other know of the benefits a good relationship can provide in an individual's life:

- Mortality rates for people with strong supportive ties are **two** to **five** times lower than people with limited or no relationships.
- The incidence of terminal cancer is **higher** among isolated people than those with close emotional ties.
- The rates of mental hospitalizations are **five** to **ten** times greater for patients who report few or no relationships compared to other patients.

Practicing some of the following skills can foster closeness with others:

1. **BE YOURSELF**. -Don't try to relate to others by acting like you think they would want/expect you to. Being real from the start gives each person a chance to see if they can be comfortable with each other's beliefs, interests, looks, and lifestyle.
2. **COMMUNICATE BETTER**. -This is an essential skill in a good relationship of any type.
 - Use "I" statements when talking to others about your thoughts or feelings. This promotes ownership of what you are saying, which establishes a strong, direct position.
 - Self disclose at a slow, but steady rate. This is the art of sharing your private thoughts and feelings with people you trust. Revealing too much too soon can cause the speaker to feel overly vulnerable and the listener to feel uncomfortable and obligated to reciprocate. Take your time. You can increase your rate of sharing as you get to know the person better.
 - Ask for what you need/want. Others can not read your mind, so limit your expectation that the other person should be able to guess what you prefer out of their affection for you. The best chance of receiving what you want is to speak up and ask for it!
 - Check out your assumptions. You are no mind reader either. Misunderstandings can arise from acting on what you guess your friend/partner wants.
 - Give both of you permission to peacefully refuse each other's requests at times.
3. **RESOLVE CONFLICTS**-Take the relationship from **MY WAY/YOUR WAY** to **OUR WAY** through negotiation and compromise. Start the problem solving by listening to and respecting each other's point of view. Conflicts are more easily addressed when both people participate in the solution, instead of one person dominating the decision making process. Aim for a balance of power.
4. **RECIPROCATE** -Give equal importance to the feelings, interests, and needs of each person in the relationship. Develop the skill of both giving and receiving emotional support.
5. **ENJOY EACH OTHER!**- Let good humor and fun together be a part of your regular schedule.

Information provided by the University of Texas at Dallas Student Counseling Center
www.utdallas.edu/student/slife/counseling/relation.html

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