



KeySolutions

Employee Assistance Program

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Healthy Relationships Lead to Better Lives

By *Teddi Dineley Johnson*

Unless you're shipwrecked on a deserted island, you probably enjoy a handful of close relationships. From spouses to children to friends, parents, siblings and significant others, healthy relationships build self-esteem, improve mental and emotional health and help you live a fuller life.

"Relationships are — not surprisingly — enormously important for health, and there are lots of studies on the biological processes that account for the link between relationships and health," says psychology professor Arthur Aron, PhD, director of the Interpersonal Relationships Laboratory at New York's Stony Brook University.

The quality of our personal relationships also has an enormous impact on our physical health, as evidenced by a hefty number of research studies.

Mind your mental health: Without question, the mental health of all parties is the most important element of a good relationship. If you suffer from depression, anxiety, insecurity or low self-esteem, seek help from a health professional right away, because it's not just you, but also your relationship, that will suffer.

Keep the lines open: "We just don't communicate!" is a common refrain in relationships — too common in fact, because after mental health, effective communication is the second most important ingredient in a healthy relationship.

Watch for unhealthy relationships: Not all relationships are going to be perfect all the time, but for the most part, a good relationship makes you feel secure, happy, loved, respected and free to be yourself. If you are in a relationship that makes you feel fearful, humiliated or controlled, or are a victim of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, call 911 or contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233.

Build a bridge of support: Support from family and friends are an ingredient that repeatedly surfaces in good relationships. You might need someone to take the kids for the night, or help with carpooling. If you have a support system in place, or live near friends and family, don't be afraid to ask them for a helping hand, a sympathetic ear or advice. "All relationships require effort and attention," Aron says.

6 Ways You Can Have a Healthy Relationship With Yourself

By *Margarita Tartkovsky*

There's an assortment of articles about helping us build healthy relationships with our partners and loved ones. But we don't hear nearly as much about the most important relationship in our lives: the one with ourselves.

"A healthy self-relationship is the ability to value yourself as a person, and embrace your strengths and weaknesses," said Julie Hanks, LCSW, a therapist and blogger at Psych Central. She's realized that her strengths and weaknesses are two sides of the same coin. "I am a passionate and creative person and with those strengths comes the tendency to be disorganized and emotionally overwhelmed," she said.

"It means simply considering yourself, every day," Duffy said. That consideration includes self-care, self-respect, goodwill and self-love.

A healthy relationship looks like kindness, said Conway, also an e-course creator and author of *This I Know: Notes on Unraveling the Heart*. "We have unconditional love for our family and loved ones — we need to extend that to ourselves, too," she said.

Regardless of whether you're used to extending love and kindness your way, you can build and bolster that healthy bond. These are six ideas on cultivating a good relationship with yourself.

1. Care for your needs. According to Hanks, "A great place to start cultivating a healthy relationship with yourself is by caring for your basic physical needs." That includes getting enough sleep and rest, eating nutrients and exercising.

Conway agreed. She stressed the importance of giving yourself the space to discover and connect to "what feeds you in mind, body and spirit."

2. Joy is important. "Prioritize the activities that bring you joy and fill your emotional reserves," Hanks said. Conway suggested giving yourself treats every day, such as "a walk in the park, a small bar of chocolate, a long bath [or] a yoga class."

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Healthy Recipe: Carne Asada Tacos



INGREDIENTS:

1 pound skirt steak
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 lime
8 corn tortillas
Salsa fresca, optional
Guacamole, optional
Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

- Sprinkle the steak with salt and pepper
- Place cast-iron skillet or pan over high heat and lightly coat with oil. Sear steak about 2 minutes per side and place on cutting board to rest for 5 minutes.
- Cut the lime in half and pierce the juicy side with a fork. Twist to release juices over the cooked meat.
- Cut steak into thin slices and cut slices into bite-sized pieces.
- Warm tortillas by dipping in water and placing in a dry pan over low heat. Use tongs to remove and wrap in towel to keep warm.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

Number of servings: 4
Calories per serving: 341
Fat: 16 g.
Protein: 26 g.
Sodium: 303 mg.
Carbohydrates: 26 g.
Fiber: 3 g.
Saturated Fat: 4 g.
*Serving Size: 2 Tacos

3. Focus on your inner world. According to Hanks, a healthy relationship with yourself also includes being aware of your internal processes. She suggested simply asking yourself these questions on a regular basis: "What am I feeling? What am I thinking?"

Also, consider the why behind your behavior, thoughts and feelings. For instance, Hanks suggested asking: "I wonder why that's bothering me? I wonder why I'm feeling more lonely lately?"

Journaling and therapy are other vehicles for becoming more self-aware.

4. Regularly make time for yourself. For instance, "Sit quietly for 10 minutes in the morning with your first cup of coffee," Conway said. "Find books that speak to your soul and steal moments to dig into them every day," she said.

5. Meditate. "I find the most useful method to be the gift, to oneself, of a daily meditation," Duffy said. "In those moments between the thoughts, we allow ourselves peace of mind that can carry us through even the most stressful days."

6. Be your own best friend. "Any time you hear the negative put-downs swirling around your head, think about what you'd say to your best friend or sister or daughter, and then rewrite the script with love," Conway said.

Again, cultivating a positive relationship with yourself is the building block for your whole world. As Hanks said, "It's crucial to have a great relationship with ourselves because it's the only relationship that you are guaranteed to have every day of your life!"

Ask the Right Questions!

Q: I read that an estimated 83% of divorces would not take place if couples asked each other the right questions. Is that true? What does that mean?

A: The gist of the matter, according to Michael Webb, author of *1000 Questions for Couples*, is that couples too often ask each other the easy questions and not the probing ones that go beyond the small talk and simply making conversation.

Regardless of whether this statistic is true, it's not hard to see that getting to know each other better would undoubtedly prevent more divorces from occurring.

Webb *does* include some fun "getting to know you" questions, but he **also** includes important questions that most people don't even think about asking but are absolutely necessary if you want to have a happy relationship. Some of these can prove difficult, but it's better to bring hard subjects out into the open than address them awkwardly later.

To find out more check out:
www.theromantic.com/questions.htm.

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