



THE RELATIONSHIP GUIDE

WHAT WE NEEDED

Our understanding of relationships and how to participate in them is founded on the patterns we grew up with and how we were taught to interact with others. As children develop we need to be affirmed, nurtured and have limits placed on us. When we get anything less than this, it will show in our development and most definitely show in our relationships. To be clear, parents usually have good intentions, but we as little people have to deal with the impact of how we were raised. The number one thing people are after, once our survival needs are met, is acceptance.

THE SET-UP

In homes where the parents don't have a healthy sense of their own value, the level of criticism, neglect and indulgence of the children will rise. This leads to the particular struggles we are going to face in relationships. One of the primary missteps in this less than nurturing environment is that the child's value is not separated from their behavior. If you made a mistake you became the mistake. When the child experiences this they take on a feeling of being "less-than." This sense of self, of not measuring up, is called toxic shame. It is a burden that will drive our behavior and we begin to see relationships through this lens of subtle apprehension that we will not be enough just from being ourselves. And the dance is on as we try to get our value acknowledged by others in our relationships.

HOW WE ADAPT

There is nothing wrong with our healthy emotions. They exist to guide us and help us engage in the world in a healthy way. They each have gifts if we learn to listen for them.

The gift of fear for example, is survival. The gift of pain is growth. And the gift of healthy shame is the awareness that we are human and it helps keep us grounded. When we make a mistake we have a slight sense of embarrassment and are given the opportunity to learn from it.

Not so with toxic shame. Toxic shame drills down to our core because it did not originate from within us. We see ourselves only as another values us and is imposed on us. Our value (or lack of it) comes from outside of ourselves, as others tell us how they value us (or how they don't – and we learn we don't really matter). We take this on. If Dad only notices the son when he hits a home run, the child learns quickly that value is around performance. If Mom only compliments the child for doing chores, the attention becomes conditional. And if we only matter when we gain the acceptance or approval of another we do not develop our own sense of value. In its place is toxic shame, the sense that I do not truly matter or have value.

We look outside of ourselves and we begin to try different behaviors to gain that payoff. Add in that we will pattern the parents before us who have usually finely tuned these maladaptive behaviors that fall into 3 general patterns.

Please note that this is not how we always show up, it is usually in all three and we move from position to position, moment to moment.

Victim – The only true victims are children and animals. Outside of a car-jacking, we have choice about where we find ourselves. To place responsibility on others for ourselves puts us into a one-down position where we gain a moment of power blaming the other for our circumstance. If they would just do it my way....

Bully – When we are in the bully position we tell others they need to do it our way. Our focus gets pretty narrow as we manipulate, cajole and power over other people to get our way and prove we are ok.

Rescuer – The rescuer usually thinks of themselves as a helper, but this is the most offensive role we can take. Not only do we think we know what others should do, we tell them!

Usually we start out in one of the above positions and then as we engage others we will move around to try to get our way. This is called the Karpman triangle after the clinician who identified the dynamic and it is a useful model to begin to see how you are stuck in a relationship.

To move out of the drama and into a healthier relationship, we must step into compassion. To do this the *Bully* needs to learn the skill of empathy, to learn the skill of assertion and to begin to challenge. The *Rescuer* needs to learn to say 'NO', to listen and to affirm and the *Victim* needs to learn problem solving skills, and to identify and ask for what they want.

GROWING FORWARD

There are some general principles that, when engaged, will help us lead a healthier, authentic life. We need to reclaim our power, rather than giving it away and quit expecting people to be any different than they are- it is offensive, and we violate their boundaries if we try.

- A. *Learn better boundaries, they are loving actions.*** There are only two boundaries, containment and protection. Containing ourselves is about loving others enough to be respectful in how we engage them. Just because we think it, does not mean we should say it. Our containment boundary keeps us from stepping on other people's toes. The other boundary is the protection boundary and it is the one we use that to keep us safe. It is self-love to care enough ourselves to keep us safe. We do not have to take personally what someone else says to us or about us. With both boundaries, we escalate the consequences to maintain and secure the boundary. If we don't like how someone is treating us, the healthy way through is with boundaries not blame.
- B. *Be responsible for your own feelings.*** If we lead an authentic life, we lose the right to say you make me feel.... We need to reclaim our power and recognize that we choose whom to be, not someone else.
- C. *It is ok to ask for help.*** And it is ok for others to say yes or no.
- D. *When asked for help learn to say yes or no!*** If you have never said no, then you have never really said yes.
- E. *When asked for help, only say yes if 2 things are true:***
 - 1. It is not enabling the other to help them.
 - 2. You can do it without resentment. If either is not true, just say no.

INTIMACY AND HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS

True emotional intimacy is about sharing who we are with someone, without trying to make them be different. It is also about listening with curiosity to find out who the other is, without defensiveness. While it sounds simple, it is quite difficult until we do our work to growth through our own limitations around relationships. Progress can be swift however and we help people change quickly.

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