

THE FOUR PILLARS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships with others are part of total health. And not just romantic relationships. I'm talking about family and work relationships as well. When we are authentic with our self and others, we are energized, free and ALIVE.

My mission is to help people transcend old conditioning in order to connect with others in a deep, honest way. The purpose of greater authenticity and connection is, I believe, part of a larger global movement of expanding consciousness that is occurring right now. More and more, we are able to see and feel our connection with the rest of humanity. By being our authentic selves, we are literally freeing others to do the same.

Everyone wants to feel loved, and to give love freely without fear. When we are able to do this, we feel connected in a way that promotes personal growth, physical health, and spiritual expansion.

Sounds great, right? Too bad it's not always easy.

The truth is there are real barriers that get in the way of authentic connections with others. These barriers are the result of conditioning and societal factors that promote division (such as a mechanistic, individualistic, and materialistic world view).

The four main outcomes of this are:

1. *Limited self-knowledge,*
2. *Poor communication skills,*
3. *Lack of receptivity, and*
4. *Difficulty obtaining unity.*

In this report, I will share with you how to overcome these barriers and how to create solid relationships that includes 1) a strong foundation of self-knowledge, 2) the ability to communicate with integrity, 3) receptiveness to your partner as they truly are, and 4) a deep sense of unity with your partner.

My focus in this report is on intimate relationships, but these skills work to promote healthy, authentic relationships with family members, friends and even co-workers.

First Pillar of Healthy Authentic Relationships: Getting Real with Yourself

Many of us struggle to be authentic with others, because we haven't yet made peace with ourselves.

Until we truly see what is going on within us, we can't be our full selves in front of others.

But what does this mean, "be yourself?" This overused phrase "Just be yourself" suggests the expression of some fixed identity, like turning on a switch. Instead, I see it as the process of accepting what is real in any given moment. It requires valuing our feelings, needs, life-dreams, joys and vulnerabilities on a daily basis. It means embracing our struggles and truly loving ourselves.

It is such a cliché, but a good relationship with our self is a pre-requisite for good relationships with others.

So if you are having relationship challenges, the very first step is to learn to be who you are in front of yourself.

If you've done this already, you are one step ahead of most.

But for many, there are things that block a good relationship with our true self:

1. Failure to notice the stories we tell ourselves and the roles we play.
2. Fear of being discovered as unworthy (to our subconscious mind, this is akin to death.)
3. Lack of awareness of our boundaries and needs. If we don't know what they are, we can't share them with others.
4. Fear of losing control of others' perceptions of us.

4 Steps to Getting Real with Yourself

1. Own your emotions and let them guide you.
 - Feelings are a sign of where you've been, or a map showing you where you need to go. Face your feelings and listen to what they are telling you. For example, are you having an automatic reaction from the past, or getting a message from your deeper self about your current situation?
 - Accept all emotions without judgment. If you feel afraid to ask for something, just observe it: "Oh look, there is my fear cropping up again..." You may have feelings, but they don't have to have you.
 - Feel your feelings without thinking the thoughts. This is key! Especially if you are having distressing emotions, avoid making meaning with your automatic thoughts. Rather, enter fully into the feeling so it will morph or dissipate. You can think about it later.
2. Take off your masks.
 - Notice the personas you create. What role do you tend to play in your relationships? What unmet need are you trying to meet? Couples who get stuck in predictable arguments can try switching roles as an exercise. This allows a glimpse of freedom from the mask, and reminds us that we can step out of roles at will.

- To help illuminate the masks we wear, try to go a whole week asking this question: “Am I talking about myself?” If you react strongly to another, you may be judging disowned parts of yourself. For example, if your partner is “selfish,” is it because you actually wish you could just take some time off, or do whatever you want?
3. Get to know and respect your boundaries.
- Our limits literally define where we end and others begin. To have a good self-concept, you must:
- Admit where your personal lines are. Maybe you second guess your boundaries by comparing them to others’. If you feel something is too much for you, it just is. Embrace what you need.
 - Practice limit-setting on small things. Rehearse how you will say “no.” And if you get caught off guard, it’s ok to ask for time: “You know, there are some variables I need to consider—can I get back to you?”
 - Start spending time with people who support your efforts to make these changes, and take a break from those who don’t.
4. Trust your intuition
- Releasing old programming allows us to respond in the present. Intuition comes from the present, not the past.
 - Pay attention to your gut feelings without explanations or second-guessing. Release the “reasons” behind an impulse, and just feel the pull of your deeper self.
 - In order to tell the difference between the fear based on old programming, and fear from following our intuition, pay attention to the quality of the feeling. For example, if you are starting to make positive changes in your life, you will be afraid. But if you are following your deeper self, it will feel more like an expansion rather than a constriction.
 - Listen to your body. Meditation, yoga or other mind-body practices help immensely with getting in touch with intuition.

These four steps are the beginning of an authentic relationship with yourself. You will start to see and love what is real within you.

Only then can you share your true self with others to sustain healthy, joyful relationships.

Second Pillar of Healthy, Authentic Relationships: Integrated Self-Expression

Expressing your true self is required for an honest, close relationship.

Once you are in full awareness of your real feelings and desires, the next step towards healthy relationships is integrated self-expression, or the process of communicating outwardly what is really true internally.

Have you ever been talking to somebody and it seems like they are saying one thing, but really they are saying another? It is hard to know what they are getting at because they have not been honest with how they feel.

A couple I worked with provides a great example of this (names have been changed):

Eleanor: *From now on, I would like it if you would be more proactive in seeing the things that need to be done around the house. It feels unfair right now. (Authentic)*

Ben: *Why don't you just tell me what you need me to do? (Authentic)*

Eleanor: *Well, I guess I assume that if you take ownership over tasks, you are more invested and more likely to complete them. I guess the real issue is my fear that things won't get done even if you agree to. (Authentic)*

Ben: *If I proactively offer to get it done, you don't really have any more of a guarantee that it will get done than if you just ask. (Inauthentic)*

At this point they could start a debate on whether or not initiating the “to-do list” really does create more reliability. But that would miss the point, which is that Eleanor is worried and has made a request.

Ben avoids being honest about his feelings by providing a logical argument to deconstruct the basis of Eleanor’s fear. Based on what he shared later, an accurate statement would have been: “I feel defensive. Plus I wonder if your fears are 100% about me, or if they are about something else.”

Without integrity, we end up building relationships based on only parts of ourselves. We fight about unrelated topics, and never really get to the bottom of recurring arguments.

Below are some great tools that will help you express yourself from the inside out.

6 Ways to Communicate with Integrity

1. Use the “I statement”

Dr. Jonathon Ross adapts the traditional “I statement” into a simple two step formula: “I feel/I want.” It seems overly simple, but is often hard to do. This formula allows you to say how you feel AND ask for what you want.

When bringing something up with your partner, follow this script:

“When you (briefly describe, only the facts), I feel (sad, hurt, afraid, or impatient) because I (explain the need you have that leads to this feeling). What I would like is: (describe the precise action you would like from your partner).”

A good example of an “I statement” would be: “When you came home late last night, I felt afraid because if I don’t hear from you I worry that something bad has happened. Please call me in the future to let me know when you will be home.

Stay away from triggering words like “devastated” or “enraged” if you can. And make sure you don’t slip in an inadvertent “you statement,” such as: “I feel hurt because you are so insensitive.”

2. Bring things up gently.

Dr. John Gottman calls this “soft start-up.” How you begin expressing yourself will set the tone.

For example, if you come home with a headache after a bad day at work to fighting kids and a husband who asks “what’s for dinner?” then soft start-up sounds like this, “I don’t know, and I don’t feel very well. It would be great if you’d take care of dinner,” rather than “How should I know? Why do I always have to cook?”

3. Make statements instead of asking questions.

As Dr. Gay Hendricks points out, many people habitually use questions as veiled statements. It is important to look beneath the surface of questions to find hidden statements. Your goal is to reveal, not conceal. So verbalize what you really want.

For example, instead of saying: “Haven’t we talked about this enough for one night?” instead say, “I am feeling tired and would like to finish this conversation tomorrow.”

4. Learn healthy complaining.

Complaining can be constructive. In fact, constantly stifling complaints will only cause resentment; your negative thoughts about your partner will overwhelm the positive ones.

In the service of honesty and preventing resentments, it is ok to complain if it is respectful, clear, specific, and immediate. For example, it’s ok to say “You said you would cook dinner tonight but you are still watching TV.” But don’t say: “You didn’t cook one meal the whole time I put you through medical school.”

5. Find the life dreams behind the conflict:

In conflict, there is usually a life dream that is being threatened. To be fully seen by your partner, identify and express what your life dream is, and how that impacts on your current request, issue, problem.

For example: “The reason why I argue with you about taking the kids to McDonald’s is because one of my life dreams is to have a healthy life together.” Put this way, it is easier for your partner to see where you are coming from, rather than feeling defensive which stalls further understanding.

6. Avoid negatives unless they are true:

Dr. Gay Hendricks points out that false-negatives such as “I can’t” and “never” are seriously overused. “I can’t” is usually just another way of saying “I don’t want to” or “I have not yet learned how.”

Also, using “never” is almost always untruthful—for example “You never help me with anything.” Take responsibility for your own limit setting, and stay truthful when expressing frustrations.

Third Pillar of Healthy Authentic Relationships: Commitment to Receptivity

Once we have been honest with ourselves and our partners, we are ready to deepen our intimacy with the Third Pillar: Commitment to Receptivity.

Receptivity means being able to see, hear and receive our partners as they truly are. To be receptive, we must stay in the moment, drop our filters, and take them in with full acceptance.

This does not mean we don’t have feelings about what we hear, or that we agree with everything they say.

It just means hearing our partners into full expression. This involves staying present without interpreting, positioning ourselves, or analyzing.

For most of us, this is extremely challenging! But with practice, it becomes a revelation you will not regret.

Here are three ways to fully receive your partner and take your relationship to a higher plane:

3 Steps to Receiving Your Partner

1. Have a “Beginner’s Mind”

In her amazing book *If the Buddha Married*, Dr. Charlotte Kasl encourages couples to experience each other as if for the first time, with a mind that is empty of old meanings and labels. This means doing your best to let go of any past transgressions, assumptions, and expectations.

For example, if your partner expresses a desire to spend more time alone, you take this at face value without making meaning, or thinking about how this will impact you. Start with this attitude: “It is what it is.”

Just listen, ask questions and acknowledge your partner’s feelings. You might say something like, “I can see this is really important to you.” Less is more.

2. Be Open to Influence

According to Dr. John Gottman's controlled longitudinal research, being open to influence from your partner (especially if you are male) is a significant predictor of a lasting relationship. Try avoiding deadlock and fall in line beside your partner instead. Try asking your partner questions about their point of view and express willingness to look at the problem from a new perspective.

You might say: "Explain your thinking to me," "Tell me why this is so important to you?" "How would you solve this problem if you were going to solve it alone?" Or, "What are you afraid of in this situation?"

If you stay open, you will create a sense of being on the same team, which keeps the barriers down and the connection strong.

3. Hold the Space

One of the most important things you can do for your partner is to stay still and allow them to express their feelings to completion. Your job in this case is to give them your full attention, keep an open mind, listen and receive. Try not to interrupt the process.

For example, if your partner begins to express feeling overwhelmed, resist the urge to jump in and problem solve. Or if they cry, avoid saying: "Please don't cry," even if your intention is to make them feel better. By preventing others from feeling their feelings to completion, we are cheating them and ultimately missing a real opportunity for intimacy and growth. We all need to know it is okay to be who we are.

This intention holds the safety of a non-judgmental and non-interfering space, in which your partner can come into full self-expression. The return on this is HUGE. Your partner will feel acknowledged and relieved they were able to be honest.

If you follow these three steps outlined above, you will take your relationship to the next level.

Receptivity breeds trust, emotional connection, and honesty. If you are ready for truly healthy relationships, make the commitment to try these approaches. They work not only for romantic relationships, but for all relationships that matter to us.

Fourth Pillar of Healthy Authentic Relationship: Unity

Entering into unity with your partner—what Dr. Charlotte Kasl calls "the usness place"—is the 4th and most evolved stage of healthy relationships.

Only after we have achieved honesty with ourselves, expressed ourselves with integrity, and fully received our partner, are we able to easily maintain a sense of unity.

What is unity?

Unity is a closeness between two fully integrated people who are separate yet engaged in a shared enterprise. It's kind of like mixing two separate substances into something new, but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each partner is true to their own life dreams while also taking on board their partners' dreams.

In unity, there is no longer a sense of "me vs. you" during conflicts. Instead, each partner joins together and steps back from conflict with both partners' needs in mind: "I see you want x and I want z. How can we navigate this together? Is there a way we can both get what we want?"

Even if an issue isn't solved right away, the questions are lived from a sense of being on the same team.

If we are in unity with our partner, we are acutely interested in, and aware of, what helps the other thrive. In unity, we know if each partner is able to fulfill their life path, then the rewards for both are exponential.

Below are a few things you can do to support unity in your relationship.

How to Stay in Unity:

1. Always speak non-defensively. Speaking defensively creates an automatic "Me vs. You" mentality. (See if you are using any of the common defensive tactics here).
2. Validate each other. This means letting your partner know that you understand them. Put yourself in your partner's shoes, imagine how it must look or feel coming from where they have been. This requires empathy.
3. Commit to co-creativity: Dr. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks define this as the process in which two people access more of their creativity as a result of their loving interaction with each other. When the relationship is in harmony, each person benefits from an enhanced energy that allows each to make a greater contribution than either one could have made alone.
4. Learn to NOT deflect positive energy. Notice the ways in which you may not allow positive energy to remain in between you. The ultimate goal of all healthy relationships is to keep good energy flowing at all times.
5. Distinguishing thoughts from feelings. Talk about your feelings in reaction to something, as opposed to making meaning or positioning yourself logically. Instead of saying: "But that is not true!" you could instead say, "I feel scared when you say that."
6. Learn the mindset of "Us." From this mindset, you think about what you want while at the same time automatically considering any possible impact you have on your partner. Has she been home alone with a young child all day? Does he need some time alone with you?
7. Never take your partner for granted. This means tending to your relationship on a regular basis. Not because we should, but because we like bringing joy to our partner. And we know we reap the benefits of this as well.
8. Repeatedly ask yourself this question: Am I creating separateness or closeness? Our relationship is an ecosystem in which everything affects everything else. Notice the effect you have. If you are feeling critical, look into your partner's eyes, see the reaction, and be aware of what you are afraid of.

9. Avoid unilateral announcements or decisions. These types of decisions trap your partner into the double bind of compliance or defiance. This applies to minor decisions as well as major decisions. For example, you walk into the room where your partner is reading and turn on a show. Your partner is put in the position of either putting up with it or saying “I really don’t want the television on,” which could be the start of conflict, however small.
10. Look for the positive intention in your partner. In most conflict there is a positive intention. What is your partner seeking? Is it understanding? Are they fighting for a life dream? If you look, you will find it.

Takeaways

If you incorporate these four pillars into your life, you most certainly will reap the rewards!

Start with the first pillar, and begin building the steps into your life one by one. Habituating these skills is nothing short of radically transforming!

I am so excited for you and the changes you are making in your relationships! There is nothing more healing, rewarding, and energizing than healthy, authentic relationships!

If you have any questions about how these pillars can be applied to your personal situation, please schedule a free Relationship Audit with me here, or from my website www.monikahoyt.com

Authentically Yours,

Monika