

The **ABC**s of Healthy Relationships

I know, the title may sound oversimplified. It really *isn't* as easy as ABC, is it? Good relationships don't just happen, they take attention, maturity and a willingness to learn and grow.

The purpose of the ABCs is to go through a list of attributes to consider when pondering the concept of healthy relating. Relationships are incredible mirrors, so it is never about the other person, but about what they may be reflecting to you, from within you. And you can choose what you reflect, especially if what you're seeing is not what you'd ideally like to see.

As you read through the list, consider if you embody the things you'd most like in a partner, and if not, is it fair to expect them to meet those needs in you? Consider whether a person looking at you would find the things on the list you're most drawn to, and if not, see if you can begin to nurture them in you. Add your own to the list, drawing on your experiences.



Acceptance – what does it mean to be fully accepted as you are, right here, right now? Do you give that to yourself? It's not easy to give it to someone else (or ask for it) unless you're willing to first offer it to yourself. No matter what flaws you might imagine yourself to have that are keeping you from 'perfection,' just accept what is. Start from where you are.

Accountability – are you willing to not only take responsibility for your behaviour, choices and patterns, but also to be accountable for the effects they have on others?

Adventurous – life is a HUGE adventure, and relationships are incredible playgrounds for life. There is so much that can happen during the course of sharing a life (or part of one) with another, it pays to be open to seeing everything as part of an adventure.

Alignment – your first priority is your alignment with your truth, just as anyone you are in relationship with has their own alignment as *their* first priority. Be clear on your needs and how to meet them, and create space to connect with your inner knowing on a regular basis.

Appreciation – do you find yourself wanting more appreciation in your life? Start being appreciative, and see how it flows.

Attention – how well do you pay attention? Learn to be present with each and every task in your life, no matter how 'small' and you'll find your focussed attention grows stronger. Extend that to yourself and others, and feel it being returned to you.

Attraction – this may seem like a given, but attraction can fade over time. If you feel your attraction waning, ask yourself if *you* do everything you can to feel attractive in yourself. If you are taking care of yourself, not for the purpose of being attractive to others, but simply because it brings you joy and feels great, the added bonus is that you become more attractive to others.

Authenticity – to be fully seen, heard and loved takes courage, and requires authenticity. Give yourself the gift of showing up soul-level naked in the world, committing to yourself to be true to you. Sometimes this means *not* choosing certain relationships or making choices

that are contrary to your partner's. All of this is part of healthy relating. You can happily co-exist even when making different choices, as long as they are authentic to your inner knowing.

B **Balanced** – this is about finding balance in yourself first. It is not someone else's job to provide you with what is 'missing' in your life. When two balanced individuals come together, a state of greater balance is created from their union.

Beautiful – believe and trust in your own beauty. Express it honestly and authentically and it will be mirrored back to you. No one else can 'make' you feel beautiful if you don't believe it first.

Belonging – there is no greater feeling of belonging than when you feel a sense of it in yourself. As if the whole universe is conspiring in your favour (hint: it is). When you connect to that, you naturally enfold others in that energy, and receive it back.

Bliss – follow your heart to the bliss that exists in you, and share it with the world. Don't look for the world to provide you with it if you can't first connect to it within. Be your own bliss generator!

Blossoming – in a healthy relationship, you will feel yourself coming alive; blossoming, not constricting. If you feel diminished by the connection, as if you're struggling to express your truth and beauty, consider if it's the right one for you. Healthy relationships allow space for both partners to blossom into bigger, better versions of themselves.

Bold – be bold in your willingness to deepen your connection, with yourself and with another. Be bold in expressing your emotions, desires and needs, truthfully, even if they cause the other discomfort. Own your boldness!

Boundaries –the importance of boundaries cannot be stressed enough. All healthy relationships need boundaries. Only you know where yours are and how you choose to express and honour them. Allow them to be flexible enough to incorporate growth, but not to compromise them to invite abuse.



Caring – consider how you'd like to be cared for, and lavish some of that on yourself. Then begin to extend it outwards to others. When caring is an extension of healthy self-love it doesn't feel needy or manipulative, as it comes from a place of wholeness.

Change – this is HUGE in relationships. Life is not static, and humans are not meant to remain in one spot, whether physically or energetically. You must be willing to be changed by your relationships with others, and be open to the changes they undergo. When someone you love changes, try not to hold them to the story of the person they were *before*, just because it feels more comfortable, or familiar.

Clarity – begins within, like most things. Are you clear on your needs, desires and what you won't accept? It can be confusing for others in relationship with you if you're not able to pinpoint these things on your own. Get clear, and then express them clearly.

Commitment – this is an interesting one, because the commitment you seek is actually not to one another but to your own alignment. What if you entered into a relationship with the commitment to each honour your expansion, no matter what that meant? It could mean that you are together for some time and then you discover you've both grown beyond the bounds of that particular connection. If you are committed to your own alignment and expansion, you honour that above the container of the relationship (which is a construct). It is not unloving to end a relationship if it is established with this at its core. If you can remain true (committed) to your heart, you will understand that asking someone to commit to *you* is limiting the growth potential of all parties involved.

Communication – hands down one of the key attributes to a healthy relationship is healthy communication. Learn to express yourself in the moment, whatever it is that needs expressing. Don't be afraid to show anger, sadness, or fear. These are legitimate and honest feelings. The key is not to project blame or responsibility onto your partner, but to express yourself in ways that lead to conversation and growth. Solve problems together, creatively.

Compassion – true compassion has a certain detachment to it. Allow yourself to feel moved by others without diving in to rescue or soothe their wounds. If you can offer a compassionate viewpoint without being their saviour, you empower them to find creative ways out of challenges. Be sure to also extend compassion to yourself when you feel you've made mistakes or feel hurt by something.

Compromise – this is something that seems to cause concern for many people. Compromise doesn't require you to give up your values, dreams or desires, it simply means being willing to see different sides of a situation to find a mutually acceptable choice. If someone is asking you to compromise your safety, your boundaries or your deeply-held values/beliefs, that's coercion or control, and it's not healthy. Compromise on where to eat out or what type of toilet paper to buy; NOT on the stuff that impedes your ability to thrive.

Connection – your connection to your heart and inner knowing is the most important one to consider. If you focus your attention on connecting outside of yourself, you actually lose your inner connection, and the thing that brought you together in the first place. Connect to one another from a place of internal connection, and you will feel the bond strengthening as you meet from a place of self-love and self-knowledge.

Consciousness – this is another key attribute in healthy relationships. Staying conscious means not numbing out when challenges arise, or escaping into old patterns and behaviours that soothe your wounds without addressing them. It means being courageous and facing your crap when it arises, no matter what the outcome. It means accountability, responsibility and maturity of thought, belief and action. It's not easy, but it's *vital*.

Consideration – what does this mean to you? As ever, when you believe and act considerately, you'll find others respond in kind.

Cooperation – if you're not willing to cooperate with another person, it might be good to rethink entering into a relationship. It is beautiful to cooperate on projects and experiences with someone you love, and you often yield better results in the end by combining your energy.

Courage – it takes enormous courage to engage intimately with another human being. It may not appear courageous when you factor in stuff like skydiving or fighting fires, but to

open your heart to love, potential pain and to feel seen on every level is truly an act of courage. Vulnerability is an act of extreme bravery that is underrated in our adrenaline-fuelled world. Honour yourself for trying, and trying again, and for believing in love.

Creativity – problems cannot be solved by using tried and true methods, or by applying the same wisdom that created them. It requires the ability to create new ways of doing things or approaching challenges from a different perspective. It's also incredibly fun to create with someone you love.

D **Daring** – be prepared to take risks and drop your masks. Be prepared to get dirty with *all* the stuff life throws at you, good and bad. Dare to stay when you feel like running. Dare to admit you were wrong. It builds stronger foundations and opens you up to greater depths of love.

Delight – reconnect with your delight in the 'small' things. Be enchanted by life and all the beautiful, daily things that make life easier and more enjoyable. Express your delight to others, in the way they make your morning coffee or remember you like chocolate with nuts. It can be easy to take daily things for granted, if they begin to feel insignificant (in the grand scheme of things). Nothing is insignificant, so take note and celebrate everything that delights you.

Desire – it makes sense to feel desire for your partner. Some people complain that their desire wanes after some time, but if you both commit to staying healthy and are passionate about your own interests and needs, you can keep desire burning for many years. Be spontaneous, invite surprise and mystery into your life, and stay connected to your own heart and soul. Take personal time if you need it, and give one another the space to pursue your individual passions, coming together to celebrate and share when you've filled your own cups.

Detachment – this may sound counterintuitive, but it is important to remain somewhat detached in a healthy relationship. Taking on the other person's wounds or needs as your own is a sure way to lose yourself in a connection. Trust that if you are each connected to your own higher wisdom, the connection you share will remain strong. Trust each other enough to ask for help when you need it, and to work through some things on your own.

Devotion – do you devote time to your relationship? Do you devote time to feeling devoted to one another? It may sound like it contradicts the idea of detachment, but the two can coexist. Devote time to being together and sharing your hearts, and be devoted to that time. Devote time to your own development and connection to your higher wisdom. It's all the same in the end.

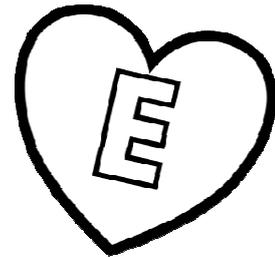
Discipline – if you have a tendency to go unconscious or numb out when challenges arise, it requires discipline to stay present and return your focus to what arises. It also requires discipline to not fall into old patterns of relating that are deeply ingrained and are pointing you to wounds asking to be addressed. Face what comes up and trust it will improve your relationship.

Dreams – it's important to dream. Make your dreams as big and as bold as you can. Dreaming together opens you up to deeper intimacy, as you share your desires and wishes and then create ways to make them happen. You can work towards them together, creating

an action plan and designing fun, collaborative ways to complete each step. Your dreams don't have to mesh with your partner; they are the whispers of your soul. That doesn't mean you can't share the joy of exploring and celebrating them with someone you love.

Dynamic – this speaks to the nature of life as fluid. Allow for the container of your relationship to change, for you to change, for your partner to change. Transformation comes in so many forms, and if you leave things open and embrace the flow of life, you will enjoy the dynamism of it. Don't try to contain or limit yourself within a preconceived structure or way of being because it's all you've ever known. Allow for yourself, your partner and your relationship to be expansive and teach you the beauty of fluidity.

Ease – while good relationships aren't easy, they're not meant to be a struggle. There's a certain ease that comes of a healthy relationship, in that it has the capacity to take in stride all the ups and downs and roll with the shifting tides. There is an ease to approaching challenges knowing you have created a safe, nurturing space to explore different perspectives.



Ecstasy – in the sense of self-transcendence, and a connection with the divine. Again, this comes from within. Can you find ecstatic joy and happiness on your own? Are you hoping someone else will connect you with those feelings? It is possible to share your energy with another and each feel ecstasy, but no one is responsible for it in another.

Ego – what role does ego play in a relationship? Healthy ego is a filter that provides your unique perspective on life. Unhealthy ego hijacks your inner knowing and tries to impose its desires (often rooted in fear) on everyone around you. Learn to work *with* your ego as an aspect of your whole being, not *for* your ego. You'll find it easier to surrender to the flow of life and the beautiful surprises it presents.

Elevation – in a healthy relationship, each partner feels elevated by the connection, knowing that they can express their truth in a safe and nurturing environment. As each develops and maintains their connection to their inner wisdom, they come together to share their energy in a way that enhances that wholeness. Their union also elevates those around them as their joy and truth is expressed in uplifting ways.

Emotion – if you can't feel, or are unwilling to, you will definitely find relationships challenging. Opening yourself up to your own and others' emotions is the way to connect with them on a deep and honest level. Emotions are the pathway to the soul. They point the way to things that both promote and block intimacy, and by engaging with them, you gift yourself with the opportunity to be real, which is vital in a healthy relationship.

Empathy – what is empathy? It's the capacity to put yourself in another's shoes, or feel what they might be feeling for a moment. It's a great benefit in relationships, because it allows for you to step out of your own stuff and meet another where they are. It doesn't mean you lose yourself, because it can be easily accomplished while maintaining healthy boundaries. What it does is offer you an opportunity to see the others' perspective from a place detached from your ego. You can disengage from any need to be 'right' and co-create solutions from a mutually-understood platform.

Empowerment – the key here is the 'em-' which means 'in.' To always approach relating from an empowered state is to be deeply connected to your core, knowing who you are and

how to meet your needs. Power is not an external mechanism or feeling, it is a sense of alignment and union with your inner wisdom.

Enchantment – view the world with the eyes of a child, filled with enchantment at the sight of a flower or a butterfly. If you can find yourself enjoying the wonder of life, everything becomes enchanting. It certainly keeps your relationship fresh if you can bring this energy to your interactions.

Encouragement – it is wonderful to feel encouraged. Do you actively encourage yourself and others? What you give, you will find yourself receiving.

Equality – this simply means two wholes coming together in wholeness. It is not equality in the sense of perfectly reciprocal investment or absolutes of give and take. Over the course of a relationship, things balance out. If each partner is whole and contributes in accordance with their own heart's wisdom, then you have equality.

Excitement – does the thought of spending time with your partner excite you? Do you still feel excitement when they enter the room? Do you feel exciting? Are you connecting with activities and pursuits that contribute to that?

F Fascination – it's up to you to find things to be fascinated by. As you engage with your sense of fascination in the world, others will meet you there. It also keeps life exciting!

Fairness – define this as it pertains to you personally. It will vary from one person to another – does fairness apply to an equitable sharing of household chores, or is it more about seeing each others' sides of challenges as they arise? Does it encompass financial contributions? Decide what it means for you, and be clear on your parameters.

Fidelity – this will also vary from person to person, and within relationships. If you feel this is your top priority, be clear right from the start. You and your partner(s) may have different understandings of what the word means, so talk about it to decide what constitutes *infidelity*, if it's important to you. Open and honest conversation is the place to start.

Flexibility – this goes along with compromise and openness. It helps to be willing to see and discuss different sides of every situation, and often contributes to enormous growth.

Flow – life is so much easier when you relinquish the need to control the flow. Relationships are the same – treat them as living entities that shift and change like everything else.

Forgiveness – this is a great tool to get comfortable with in relationships. Forgiveness is *not* about condoning bad behaviour, or sticking around when someone is abusive or consistently ignores your boundaries. It *is* about learning to let go of anger over past slights and grievances so that you can embrace trust again. It frees you from holding on and makes space for new experiences.

Freedom – this is one of the key elements of healthy relating. It means knowing that both you and your partner are free. It is about trusting your partner to honor and respect that freedom in a way that enhances and uplifts all involved.

Friendship – at the heart of most good relationships is a deep friendship. What kind of friend are you? How would you like to be treated? Are you a friend to yourself? Be your own best friend first.



Genuine – this is another key point. Are you courageous enough to be genuine? If you try to hide aspects of yourself from someone else, eventually the cracks will begin to show and it will cause distrust to grow. People can feel misalignments between words and actions, even if they're not consciously aware of them.

Giving – it helps to be generous with giving your time and attention in a relationship. Love encompasses giving without expectations, with an open-heart and a desire to offer support.

And it feels great!

Goals – sharing goals is another way to deepen your connection with a partner. This doesn't mean you have to have the same goals; if you discuss your individual goals and co-create interesting ways to meet them, it can lead to fun conversations and activities.

Gratitude – this is not just for relationships; in all things, an attitude of gratitude goes a long way towards enhancing your life. Celebrate the beauty of your connection; be thankful for your home, your family and all the things you share. Think about times when you wished for such things. Express your gratitude freely, no matter how small something may seem.

Grievances – how do you feel about discussing the challenging stuff? How would you prefer to air grievances? This is important to clarify in a relationship. Do you feel safe expressing anger, and can you do it in a healthy way (without blame, shame or guilt)?

Grounded – try to keep it as 'real' as possible. It can be intoxicating, especially in the early stages of a relationship, and you may be tempted to fantasize about the future and all the incredible potential you feel. That's okay, but don't project, and keep it grounded. What practicalities do you need to consider (do one or both of you have children or pets that would impact a move into co-habitation, etc)?

Growth – expect to grow. Allow yourself to relinquish control to make room for the growth. Consider if there are any structures that exist in the container of your relationship that are inhibiting growth (as individuals and as a couple).

H Happiness – this begins within. If you learn to make yourself happy, you can bring that to the party, and your chances of a healthy relationship increase. If you're looking for someone else to fulfil your needs or ease your pain, you'll find the happiness fleeting and empty. It is a huge benefit for your whole life to do the work you need to do to find happiness in you.

Harmonious – when two people come together in wholeness, there's a certain harmony that emerges. It's like two power plants standing next to each other, doing their thing and lighting up more territory. How harmonious do you feel in yourself? Do you crave chaos? It will be challenging to find harmony with another if you can't first feel it in you.

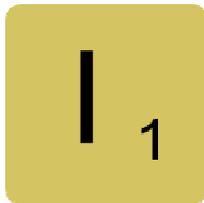
Heart-centered – if you can stay with your heart's wisdom, you'll find it easier to solve problems, face challenges and relate in a healthy way. When you come from ego and rational mind, stories are created that exacerbate whatever situations arise.

Helpful – one way of expressing your feelings for another is to offer them help when they're struggling. This is not about self-sacrifice or acting as a rescuer, but about supporting them through their own challenges and processes. Offer help in small ways that will ease their daily routine, and see how you feel as you connect with them.

Honesty – this may be the number 1 key attribute to healthy relating. This means radical honesty, even when you fear hurting your partner; it means honesty to yourself first. If you can't be vulnerable enough to express your heart's truth, you may be denying a deep need in you to make changes that will enhance your well-being.

Humour – it definitely helps to have a sense of humor, not only in the sense that it's fun to laugh together, but also in the sense of seeing things from a perspective of lightness. If you take things too seriously, they escalate into drama more easily. Laughing triggers the potential to create solutions and reminds you that we're all human and fallible.

Humility – true humility is empowering. It involves having the good grace to admit when you're wrong; to ask for help when you need it; to self-reflect and grow through failures and challenges; and to trust in your capacity to learn from others. It is *not* subservience or meekness, but a strength akin to vulnerability or honesty.



Imperfection – embrace it, love it, own it! There is no such thing as a perfect partner, a perfect romance or a perfect life. There will *always* be things that come up to test or challenge you; things you dislike (like the snoring, or the way they eat); and ways things could be better. Accept your own imperfections and love that someone else loves you in spite of them (or because of them).

Independence – this is vital in a healthy relationship. Personal space helps you get familiar with your needs and energy levels and what you can do to nurture yourself. You will not likely find someone who shares every single one of your interests and goals, and that doesn't mean giving up the things you don't share. Allow one another space to explore your own interests and you'll grow closer as you share the stories of your adventures.

Innovative – try to keep in mind that there are many sides to every story. If you always need to be 'right' you'll find it challenging to find solutions as challenges arise. Instead be open to innovative ideas that arise from looking at all the perspectives available. It also helps to be innovative in romantic gestures, chores and anything that can become mundane. Be creative and bring fun into every day.

Integrity – this ties in with alignment, honesty and authenticity. Do your actions reflect your words? Do you live in the way you portray your life and beliefs? You are the best measure of your own integrity, and when others feel that alignment, trust comes easily.

Interdependence – this goes beautifully hand-in-hand with independence. Interdependence is different from codependence, which tends towards neediness and insecurity. Interdependence is about knowing your partner is there for you when you really need them,

but not relying on them to fulfil your every need. Be there to support one another through decisions, challenges, celebrations and change, while allowing one another space to be.

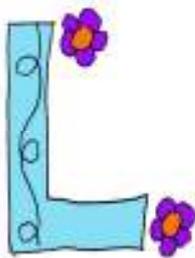
Interesting – boredom can be a relationship dampener, for sure. What makes you interesting? Have you maintained your interests since being with your partner, or have you allowed their interests to become yours? What do you find interesting about them? Think about what interests you in another and ask yourself if you would also be interested in you. If not, find things that light you up and go do them. As you keep generating new stories and adventures, you become more and more interesting.

Intimacy – of course, intimacy. What does this mean, exactly? Some people think immediately of physical intimacy, which is a nice benefit in relationships. If you want a healthy relationship, look deeper. Intimacy in the sense of ‘into-me-see’ is what you’re striving for. To be truly seen, heard and accepted for *all* of who you are. That means even on the sobby, puking-your-guts-out or screaming banshee days. That means even on the crazy bouts of insecurity or pouty selfish days. If you’re not allowing those days to be seen, you’re hiding the truth from yourself and your partner. Intimacy means letting down your guard and allowing someone else to see your fallibility, and holding space for your partner to do the same, in *every* aspect of your relationship.

J **Joyful** – always follow your joy. The best relationships come from the meeting of two (or more) people who come together in connection with their joy. Remember that the joy doesn’t come from without, but is generated within you. If you are joyful, you will attract others who are in touch with their own joy. Together, you create more joy in the world.

K **Kindness** – the seemingly small, simple acts of kindness that take place on a day-to-day basis increase intimacy and connection in a relationship. Think about things that to you feel loving and do them for another person. See how it feels, and invite it into your life.

Kissing – a delightful benefit of relationships and something in life that is difficult, if not impossible, to do by yourself.



Leader – this is about allowing for leadership to be fluid. There is not one leader and one obedient follower; there are two leaders who are aware enough to know when to step up and when to step back. Each partner has unique strengths and talents which will contribute in different ways to the relationship over time.

Learn – hopefully, you will learn a lot in every relationship you’re in. If not, you might want to look at how willing you are to be self-reflective. This is not about judging yourself harshly for mistakes; it is about taking what you can from each situation and allowing yourself to see where you might have contributed to certain patterns or habits, and exploring new perspectives if necessary.

Listen – when you listen, do you truly *hear*? How do you begin to listen, and hear? With your heart. Pay attention, and release distractions. Allow yourself to receive the words being spoken. Drop any judgements. Feel into the situation – does your partner require a response or are they just needing space to express? Ask if you’re uncertain.

Love – one of the foundation stones of a healthy relationship. It is vital to love yourself first, in all your messy glory. When you invite another into your inner world, the unhealed wounds are exposed, and without a strong grounding in self-love, it can turn quickly into a mud-slinging match. Generate love outwards from your full well of healthy self-love and self-respect.

M **Maturity** – this one can be challenging, especially if wounds are triggered that cause you revert into childhood patterning. Being mature encompasses being accountable, honest and present. It means allowing yourself to parent and be parented when situations arise that send you spinning into denial or habitual soothing rituals. It means being willing to grow and learn and change consistently as life unfolds around you.

Mischievous – it never hurts to be a little mischievous. Try incorporating games into your everyday activities or playing harmless pranks on your partner when they least expect it.

Mystery – this may be an under-rated attribute. Maintaining some degree of mystery is definitely important. If things become routine, mundane or too familiar, apathy can set in. Keep some things a mystery, and introduce mystery consciously. This is not the same as keeping secrets or hiding your activities from your partner; it is knowing when to share and how.

N **Needs** – what are yours? Are you clear on how to meet them? Do you actively work towards meeting them? Revisit this regularly and communicate your needs clearly.

No – get comfortable with this word and using it without guilt. This is a major part of establishing clear and healthy boundaries. Self-sacrifice can lead to resentment and feeling drained. Accept and respect your partner's no's as their boundaries.

Nourish – how do you nourish yourself? Your soul? Your body? Do you consciously nourish your relationship? Think about things that would contribute to enhancing your life and your partner's. Set time aside for the two of you to just be, together. Visit places that uplift you. Engage in activities and practices that add to your joy. Cook healthy food for one another.

Nurture – how do you nurture yourself? Do you have self-care or health rituals that are non-negotiable? Do you ensure you take time to yourself when you need it? Can you respect your partner's needs for self-care as well? How do you nurture one another? Do you have goals or plans for the relationship that require nurturing?

Oneness – this may not mean exactly what it sounds like. Oneness is wholeness, the deep knowing that we are all aspects of the same Source. Oneness in relationship doesn't mean a melting of two people into one; more a meeting of two wholes that results in expansion and unity. As you come together and surrender your ego desires and control, you find you meet others heart-to-heart.



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Openness – this is harder than it sounds. Can you remain open after the deep pain associated with situations like grief, betrayal, infidelity or divorce? Human nature is to close down, to wall off your heart to the tricky stuff. It doesn't really work that

way. If you wall off the bad, you also keep out the good. Openness is a sure way to growth and expansion within a relationship, and it takes consciousness and presence.

Optimism – it never hurts to look on the bright side. This isn't about being falsely positive as you watch your house burn down around you; it's the kind that grows out of trusting your ability to respond creatively to whatever challenges arise. It's a natural state that arises when you've lived enough of life to know that there are gifts in every situation and that every challenge has a solution.

Originality – don't try to solve problems in *this* relationship using methods you used in your last one. Be original. Bring awareness to what's at hand and remember who your partner is. They are not your ex. They are not your mother, or father, or sister....

P Passion – the essence of passion encompasses connecting to the fullness of life with your whole *being*. It goes way beyond sexual, and connects you to the deep yearnings of your soul. What turns you on (in every aspect of life)? What moves you to tears? What awakens your rage? All of this is passion, and it can be harnessed to create beautiful things, including within relationships. Live into the fullness of you, and connect to others from that aliveness.

Patience – consider how you feel when you're going through challenges or trapped in your own mental machinations. Extend patience to others when they're having difficulties and find compassionate ways to support them. Have patience if a relationship doesn't follow a preconceived idea of what you had hoped or wanted. Give your partner the gift of patience, allowing them to expand and grow in their own time.

Playfulness – this is so key! Keep things young, fresh and FUN! Remember how many hours you could spend with a friend when you were young, completely immersed in whatever game was at hand? Bring that into your relationships. Lose yourself in something enjoyable together, forgetting all serious, adult responsibilities for a while.

Pleasure – get to know yourself really well. What brings you pleasure? Do you regularly give yourself time to do things just for pleasure? Start leaning into the pleasure of a delicious meal, an incredible sunset, or how you feel after a great conversation.

Presence – how present are you with yourself and with others? Do you find yourself easily distracted or even craving distraction when someone else is connecting with you? It can feel disrespectful and frustrating when someone you're with is not present with you. Consider how present you are in your daily interactions and ask what you could do to be more present.

Priority – your alignment is your top priority, followed by your connection with your partner. Does that sound selfish? That's the whole idea. As you look after your own needs and care for your self, you are better able to share your energy and resources with another. Maintain your own well-being to the point that your cup is overflowing.



Question – don't be afraid to question yourself if something doesn't feel right. Ask questions to get clearer on others needs or desires. Question any patterns that show up to see if they're inhibiting intimacy. Trust the questions that arise as indicators of resistance or discordance. Then find creative ways to learn the answers. (Hint: seeking together builds stronger bonds).

R Reflection – keep in mind that everyone and everything is a reflection of you. If you're not happy with the reflections you're seeing, or the experiences you're having, ask yourself if you could change your perspective to shift the externals. As you begin to reflect a new story, you'll find a whole new cast of characters that support the changes in you.

Relax – this is great advice in every situation, not just relationships. Drop the need to control outcomes or people. Drop the worry and self-judgement. Allow yourself to be real and vulnerable and see how connections deepen.

Reliable – can you rely on you during an emergency? Are you able to respond to all situations in a way that supports everyone involved? Does your partner know you are unequivocally there for them in times of need?

Respect – this is another key element in healthy relationships, and it begins with you. If you don't respect yourself, you'll find relationships that reflect and perpetuate that lack of respect. Show your self respect by setting and honouring your own boundaries, meeting your own needs, taking care of your self and home, and engaging in activities that inspire and excite you.

Responsibility – this differs from accountability in that it can be shared. Responsibility means being willing to take ownership of your part in challenges, successes and everything in between. Be courageous enough to accept your role in disagreements, and be mature enough to face your feelings. Shifting responsibility results in blame, shame and guilt, which quickly undermine the foundations of a relationship.

Risk – ultimately, all relationships involve some risk. You *will* experience pain when you open yourself to being intimate with someone else. Most people (bar psychopaths and sociopaths) don't hurt one another purposely or consciously, but it happens. We are human, and are susceptible to a whole range of emotional potential. We also carry patterning and often unhealed wounds that emerge in relationships. Great healing and growth can result in any relationship, so it is definitely a risk worth taking.

Romantic – it doesn't hurt to be romantic. One way to really connect with your partner is to understand their particular love language and offer them romantic gestures that are aligned with that. Do they prefer receiving gifts? Do they prefer being touched and complimented on a regular basis? Find out what they love and surprise them. Make your own romantic needs clear so they can do the same for you.



Sacrifice – do you have to make sacrifices in a relationship? Chances are there will be some. Usually when it comes to the point of making them, they don't feel like sacrifices. It's up to you to decide if what you're considering giving up is worth the risk to you. You will have to sacrifice singledom for couplehood. You will have to sacrifice coupledom for parenthood. It's a progression, and you choose as you go. If you're not ready to make a particular sacrifice, don't force yourself. It can create resentment or bitterness, which isn't so healthy.

Safe – define this in the way that feels right for you. Do you feel safest with three months' rent and grocery money in savings? Do you feel safest in your own home as opposed to a rental? Do you feel safe expressing your emotions? All of these things are within your power, without a partner. Design your own safety bubble so that it supports you on every level of your being. This is not designed to stir up fear, but to ensure your peace of mind so that you can give and receive in a state of expansion. When your safety feels compromised, relationships can feel constricting and dysfunctional.

Selfishness/Selflessness – this requires balance. Healthy selfishness is caring for your own needs so that you can be of service in a more selfless way. If you give all of your resources and energy away, you will become depleted and may find yourself acting in passive aggressive ways to get your needs met.

Sex – another wonderful benefit of relationships. As intimacy on all levels deepens, the sexual connection grows more powerful and beautiful. It is so much more than a physical exchange; it is energetic, spiritual and emotional. Allow yourself to be vulnerable and creative and you'll find it just keeps getting better.

Sharing – how did you do in kindergarten with this exercise? It is a joyful experience to share yourself with someone you love. Coming home at the end of the day to talk about the day you've had or sharing secret nicknames; it's all part of the fun. Learn to share your whole self.

Space – know when you need space, and learn to honour your partner's need for space. It's not natural to spend every moment together, and it begins to erode the mystery. Create ways to spend time apart so that the coming together is a happy reunion – it doesn't have to be long stretches of time, just enough to remember who you are, individually.

Spontaneity – shaking things up is a fabulous way to keep things fresh. Sometimes after a while together, things fall into a predictable routine. The mundanity of the day-to-day can blur the memories of what brought you together. Spontaneity allows you to remember the hearts at the root of your connection, and re-connect to the joy in your lives.

Strength – at the heart of good relationships is a sense of strength. This comes from the strength each partner has in knowing themselves and what they want. The union of two strong wholes makes an even stronger unit. Hold onto the things you love about you that make you strong, and celebrate the same in your partner.

Surrender – this word frightens some people, because it feels like it means giving up. What it truly means is giving over and releasing your ego's grip on control. Let your heart and soul lead. Surrender to the potential that exists in the unknown and the uncharted. Surrender

your need for a specific outcome or expectation. Allow the combined energy of your hearts to lead you instead.

T **Tenderness** – the band General Public sang ‘*where is it? ...it seems like without tenderness there’s something missing,*’ in 1984. Good advice, and pretty self-explanatory.

Thriving – as opposed to existing. To thrive is to live in bold, full colour; to flourish and expand and embrace the beauty of every moment. As you learn to remain open, you gain an inner strength and a joy rooted in self-love and self-respect. You know that you can respond to anything that arises and integrate it into your arsenal of tools to navigate life. Thriving is living whole-heartedly, with every fibre of your being.

Time – a good relationship takes time. There is often a ‘honeymoon period’ at the beginning, where you feel overwhelmed by chemistry and serotonin and all kinds of lovely things, but to sustain a lasting and healthy relationship takes time. If you rush things, you might find after a while that you don’t have much in common with your partner, or that their initially cute habits are actually a source of frustration for you. It’s natural to take time to develop true intimacy, revealing pieces of yourself over time as trust deepens, not all in one intense afternoon.

Touch – this speaks to both physical touch and being touched on an emotional level. It is moving to be invited into someone’s inner world, as they open themselves to you and reveal their vulnerability. It’s touching to be extended trust and to feel your own trust being rewarded with gifts of deeper connection.

Transparency – this means the willingness to be seen and heard. We all have secrets, but if you feel guilt or shame around something you’re keeping from a partner, it’s probably indicating that you feel the truth would hurt them. If you’re doing things you are aware would hurt your partner and are keeping them from them, consider the why – what are you getting out of it? Put yourself in their position and how you might feel if the tables were turned.

Trust – this is a tricky one. Can you truly trust another, or is it more a matter of trusting your own inner knowing so much that anything not resonant will trigger red flags for you? If you are in alignment with your knowing, it will be obvious to you what and who you can trust. Once you surrender to that trust, it grows and is rewarded by evidence of your faith in it.

Truth – it’s important to keep in mind that there is *no* one Universal truth. It is a completely subjective thing. Siblings growing up in the same family under the same circumstances can have very different experiences. None of them are NOT true. Consider this when approaching disagreements or challenges with your partner – you may not have the same starting point. As you grow and shift, what you found to be true five years ago can completely change as well.

Unconditionality – this means to incorporate the wholeness of an experience as aspects of it. In other words, unconditional love allows for you and others to show up as they are and to mess up, fall down and be human. It means that even in moments where you feel like you hate your partner, love exists in the same breath. This understanding opens up space for all the ups and downs that are inevitable as your life together continues.



Understood/understand – if you want to be understood, extend understanding. Be understandable. Find ways to bridge the gap, keeping channels of communication clear and leaving out judgement. Whenever there is a misunderstanding, remember that communication is a two-way street. Have the patience to find a way to clarity.

Union – all relationships are a union of souls, meeting to share a few steps or a lifetime. The union is more than a sum of its parts; it has a life and purpose of its own. Use your time together to discover what your union is designed to bring to the world.

V Values – are you clear on what you value and why? Do you and your partner share the same values? It's an added bonus if you do, but not necessary, as long as you can respect one another's choices and reasoning. Be clear and firm on where you are flexible and what is non-negotiable.

Variety – the spice of life! A little variety never hurt anyone. Think of ways to incorporate healthy variety into different areas of your life. Routine can dull even the strongest connection. Be creative; brainstorm with your partner to find ways to vary your habitual ways of relating.

Vulnerability – this is a challenging one for many people because it sounds like weakness. It is the opposite – showing your vulnerability is a great strength. It has the capacity to awaken and connect with compassion in others, and create a safe space for their own vulnerability. It is the core of who we are as humans, and a common thread we all share. Someone has to go first, and it may as well be you.

W Warmth – how does it feel to be loved? When you tap into that energy of feeling love, does it warm you from the depths of your belly to the tip of your toes, and the top of your head? Do you glow with that warmth when you think about someone you love? Feelings of warmth, both physical and emotional, are a delightful benefit of loving. Bask in it and spread it around.

Welcoming – are you ready to welcome someone into your world? Have you made space for them in your life? Are the ways you treat yourself welcoming to another? Do you have ways to make others feel at ease and comfortable in your home and your energy?

Wholeness – do you feel whole in yourself, or are you hoping for someone to 'fill the holes?' Being compatible is not about completing someone else, it's about finding an energetic match to your wholeness. If a relationship ends, does your life fall apart, or do you move on in your wholeness knowing you have the resources to start over, again and again, if need be?

Feeling neediness or desperation in another is unattractive, and leads to all kinds of co-dependency and dysfunction. Find your wholeness first, and learn to refill your own cup.

Wildness – this is vital in healthy relationships. We all have an inner wild creature that lusts after freedom and fearless vulnerability and wants to be enticed out to play. Can you handle the wildness in your partner or are you intimidated by it? Get comfortable with your own wild side, whatever it entails, and allow it the opportunity to express itself. Do you get a kick out of skinny-dipping in mountain pools or ecstatic dance? Does your wild creature need to sleep under the stars or howl at the moon? Let it out to play and see how it enhances your connections with others.

Worthiness – there is nothing in the world outside of you that will cause you to feel worthy if you cannot access that in you. If you are starting from a place of unworthiness, you are reflecting that outwards and whatever comes into your experience will have the same underlying feeling attached. Your relationships will be rooted in a need to fill the gaping hole of your unworthiness, and not in a desire to uplift one another. You will also hold your partner in the same esteem as you: unworthy. Find your self-worth first, and meet others from there.

X



Yes – do you feel it with your whole heart and soul? Trust that, and follow it. If you feel red flags, or a part of you doesn't feel right in some way, trust that, too. It's not fair to either partner to be in a relationship that isn't a yes on every level.

Young at heart – this is a very helpful attribute in *all* relationships. Don't let life jade you. Stay optimistic, maintain your innocence and look at all situations as if they're new and exciting. Let life teach you and change you. Be moved by the 'small' things and awed by the beauty you experience. Surf life's waves like a pro, and love every minute of it.

Z

Zest – are you filled with zest for life, and enthusiasm at discovering new and exciting things? Can you generate that in yourself? It adds a lot to a relationship to feel excitement over mutual discoveries and celebrations. Find ways to encourage one another's explorations and adventures, and create amazing joint ventures.

Have fun!

Big Love,
~ Jenny