

GROWING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

One way of understanding relationships is to think of people having different relational needs. Whenever we meet one of their needs, we strengthen the relationship between us. Whenever we neglect to meet one of their needs, we damage the relationship between us.

One definition of love is meeting the other person's needs before they are even aware that they have a need! We need to know each other quite well before we can do this easily. But we can learn to listen for other people's needs and recognize them.

The top ten needs that most people have are:

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| 1. Comfort | 6. Respect |
| 2. Acceptance – whatever you have done | 7. Encouragement |
| 3. Affection | 8. Security/Safety |
| 4. Appreciation/being thanked | 9. Specialness/being valued |
| 5. Attention/focused time and listening | 10. Support/help |

Comfort, Acceptance, Affection, Appreciation, Attention, Respect, Encouragement, Security, Specialness, and Support – CAAAARESSS (Cares or Caress!)

Barriers to meeting each other's needs

The main three things that stop us giving each other these relational gifts are selfishness (my needs are more important than yours), self-reliance (I can meet all my needs by myself and I don't need other people) and self-condemnation (I don't deserve to be treated well, and if you are kind to me then I will just feel guilty).

What are your top 3 needs?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are the top three needs of a special person in your life? (spouse, child, friend)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When people's needs are not met: (or have not been met when they were younger) they are more likely to have:

- unhealthy thoughts (I am not loveable, I am not special to anyone, I am not valuable, I deserve to be treated badly, etc.)
- unhealthy feelings (overwhelming or persistent sadness, anger, fear, etc.)
- unhealthy relationships (possessive, abusive, neglectful, etc.)
- and unhealthy behaviours (addictions, obsessions, hurtful behaviours, etc.)

When people's needs are met: we help them to have:

- healthy thoughts (I am loved, special, valued, etc.)
- healthy feelings (happy, loved, peaceful, grateful, hopeful, worthy, etc.)
- healthy relationships (empathic, caring, unselfish relationships, etc.)
- and healthy behaviours (helping others, striving for excellence, etc.)

COMFORT: being given strength and hope, having all my grief and pain soothed, and my heart cheered.

- The God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble. 2 Corinthians 1:3,4
- Mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15
- Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy. Adventist Home 107

Comfort in practice:

- Saying: "I'm so sad for you." "I'm sorry you are going through this." "I know how disappointed you are. I hurt with you." "What's the best thing I can do to comfort you right now?"
- Showing appropriate comforting affection, such as a hug, or touching a person's hand.
- Crying with your spouse/friend/child.
- Sitting with your friend and just being there when life is hard. Sometimes words are inadequate and being quiet with a person is all they need.
- Listening to their painful stories and hurt feelings without trying to 'fix' them.
- Making your friend a cup of hot tea or a bowl of soothing soup.

Thinking about comfort:

- What is your spouse/friend/child most distressed or sad about, and how do they most like to be comforted?
- What makes you feel sad, and how do you most like to be comforted?

ACCEPTANCE: being welcomed unconditionally, just as I am, even when I've made a big mistake. Not feeling rejected.

- Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you. Romans 15:7
- Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude, the atmosphere surrounding ourselves, which determines what will be revealed to us in another. Adventist Home 105

Acceptance in practice

- Welcoming another imperfect person with open arms.
- "I'll always love you/be there for you, no matter what you do."
- Not comparing people negatively with others or being critical of them when they have made a mistake.
- Being warm, comforting and supportive when things go wrong, rather than being judgemental or trying to "fix" the other person.
- Showing respectful forgiveness and not bringing up the mistakes of the past.

Thinking about acceptance

- When might my family members, friends and colleagues most need my acceptance?
- How can I show other people how freely and warmly I accept them, in spite of their imperfections?
- What do I find difficult to accept in myself? How might this affect those I love?

AFFECTION: showing care and closeness with kindness, gentle touch and caring words. Not causing physical pain and hurt.

- Greet one another with a holy kiss. Romans 16:16
- The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven. Adventist Home 106

- Love cannot long exist without expression. Adventist Home 107

Affection in practice:

- Affection is not just about warm physical contact – it is also about showing kindness. Kindness shows that we care. Ask yourself what you could do to show kindness to this person, in this situation, and then do it. Jesus was continually looking for ways to show kindness to others.
- Saying things like: “You’re so special to me!” Or, if appropriate, “I love you!”
- Sending caring texts, cards and emails etc.
- Giving appropriate affection such as hugs, pats on the back, warm smiles and eye contact, etc.

Thinking about affection:

- How do I like to be shown affection? How do I not like to be shown affection?
- How does my spouse/friend/child like to be shown affection?
- List ten ways you could show appropriate affection and kindness to your spouse/friend/child ...Then put your ideas into practice.

APPRECIATION: being thanked or praised for what I have done, or the effort I have put into things.

- I praise you...1 Corinthians 11:2
- Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness. Adventist Home 16

Appreciation in practice:

- Saying: “That looks lovely! I really enjoyed that meal! Thanks for ironing my shirt/cleaning my car/helping me fix my computer, etc.”
- Sending thank you cards, SMS/texts, and notes, or giving flowers, etc.
- Telling others how much you appreciate someone else.
- The more you appreciate and thank others, the happier you will both be, and the less likely you will be to argue with each other.

Thinking about appreciation:

- What do you appreciate most about your spouse/friend/child? Tell them as often as you can how much you appreciate them.
- and how does your spouse/friend/child most like to be appreciated?
- What effect does it have on other people when you express your appreciation for the small things they do?

ATTENTION: having a thoughtful interest shown in my world, knowing I have your full attention even when we talk about everyday things.

- But that the members (of the body) should have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25
- Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. Adventist Home 106

Attention in practice:

- Saying: “Tell me about your day.”
- Saying: “What you would like us to do together right now?”
- Cheerfully doing things your friend wants to do, even if you are not that keen!
- Putting the other person first.
- Responding positively to the small comments and observations the other person makes.

Thinking about attention:

- What are the special interests of your spouse/friend/child, and what can you do to share in their interests and hobbies?
- How can you show true concern and understanding for the things that are happening in the life of your spouse/friend/child?
- How would your spouse/friend/child like you to pray for their concerns?

RESPECT: being treated as an equal or higher, having my ideas valued as equal to yours.

- Honour one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10
- Do not try to compel each other to do as you wish. AH 107

Respect in action:

- "I'd like to hear your ideas." "What would you prefer?" "I was wrong, please forgive me."
- Speaking in a respectful voice, saying sorry.
- Checking before making plans that involve the other person in some way.
- Not putting the other person down, laughing at them, or teasing them.
- Honouring your friend in special and thoughtful ways.
- Treating the other person as if they are a little bit higher than yourself – this will lift you both up. When we put others down, we are both dragged down.

Thinking about respect:

- How do you like people to show you respect?
- How do you show respect to others?
- What do you do that other people might find disrespectful?
- What effect does this have on your relationships, and what could you do differently?

ENCOURAGEMENT: being helped towards my goals.

- Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. AH 106

Encouragement in practice:

- Saying: "I know you can do it! Don't give up now! I believe in you!"
- Sending a card with encouraging words.
- Doing one of their chores so they can find extra time for the things they need to do.
- Finding useful articles, books ideas, etc. that may help them with their project.
- Being their 'cheerleader', especially when it gets tough.
- Reminding them of their past successes.

Thinking about encouragement:

- What are the top three life-goals of your spouse/friend/child and how can you encourage them as they strive to reach these goals?
- What might you do or say that could discourage your spouse/friend/child? And what might you do or say instead, to encourage them, and help them to keep going?

SECURITY: being free from harm and being protected from my fears.

- Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:16
- If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18

- Perfect love casts out fear. 1 John 4:18
- Anything that would mar the peace and unity...should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. Adventist Home 120

Security in action:

- Saying “I’m here for you. Let’s work this out. I’m committed to our friendship.”
- Not walking away from arguments and problems. Staying and talking about things. Working through conflicts to reach a mutually-beneficial conclusion.
- Not causing pain or harm, and not frightening the other person in any way.
- Staying calm and not losing your temper.
- Keeping promises, being on time, or giving plenty of warning if plans change.

Thinking about security:

- What might you do or say that might cause your spouse/friend/child to be afraid? (driving too fast, changing plans suddenly, being unpredictable, spending too much money, etc.)
- How can you be supportive and respectful when your spouse/friend/child feels insecure and afraid?
- What is your spouse/friend/child most afraid of, and what can you do, if anything, to soothe them, or to diminish their fear?

SPECIALNESS: valuing the other person, and your friendship/relationship in a special way.

- Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29
- Let your pleasant, cheerful words ever be like sunbeams. Adventist Home 442.

Specialness and valuing in practice:

- When we let other people know that they are special to us – it blesses them.
- Saying: “I’m so glad you’re my spouse/friend/child!” “You really brighten up my life!”
- Telling other people good things about your friend.
- Celebrating your friends’ special days in creative, generous and fun ways.

Thinking about specialness

- How can you show your spouse/friend/child how much they mean to you as a person and for who they are – not just appreciating what they have done for you?
- What can you do to show your spouse/friend/child how much you value your relationship with them?

SUPPORT: Having someone come alongside me to help me face a challenge.

- Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2
- Amidst the world’s eager rush for wealth and power, let him learn to stay his steps, to comfort and support the one who is called to walk by his side. Adventist Home 218
- Let him help her bear her burdens. Adventist Home 35
- Let the wife feel that she can lean upon the large affections of her husband – that his arms will strengthen and uphold her through all her toils and cares, that his influence will sustain hers – and her burden will lose half its weight. Adventist Home 216

Support in action:

- Saying: “I’ll be glad to help you! Just let me know what I can do.”

- Asking: “What can I do today that would help you the most?”
- Helping with a big project that your friend finds overwhelming, difficult or miserable.
- Teaching each other practical skills, like changing a wheel, ironing a shirt etc.
- Being aware when your friend may be tired and offering to help without being asked.

Thinking about support

- When might my spouse/friend/child most need my support?
- When do I most need support, and how could I ask someone to help me?

Listening for the needs

Think about these comments and try to guess the relational need that may need to be met. There may be more than one need expressed in each phrase.

1. I’ve had such a terrible day! I wish I could give up my job!
2. Why am I the only one around here who ever does the cleaning?
3. I don’t like walking home on my own at night.
4. I need a hug!
5. I’ll never pass my driving test!
6. No one ever listens to what I have to say!
7. My laptop was stolen from my bag.

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(THE CONCEPT OF THESE TOP TEN RELATIONAL NEEDS WAS INSPIRED BY DAVID AND TERESA FERGUSON OF GREAT COMMANDMENT MINISTRIES)