

## BUILDING A FRAMEWORK:

### 10 QUALITIES OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

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- 1) **COMMITMENT:** It all begins with this. Without commitment, there is nothing to grab onto when times get tough. It is inevitable that your relationship will provide you with challenges and your "issues" will surface. When the waters get murky, knowing that you have each made a firm commitment to your relationship provides a foundation to withstand the delicate time between airing a disturbance and resolution.

A great way to conceptualize the type of commitment a healthy relationship requires is through something called "The Master Commitment:" (from "The Conscious Heart" by Gay & Kathlyn Hendricks, pp. 40-41):

- *"I accept relationship itself as my primary teacher about myself, other people, and the mysteries of the universe. I open myself to letting every relationship interaction, no matter how seemingly trivial, deepen my connection with my essence and the essence of others. I invite all healing powers in myself and the universe to remove any obstacles to my relationships being a source of my joyful fulfillment to me in all my depths."*
- *"I commit to clearing up anything in me that keeps me from full loving unity with myself and my loved ones."*
- *"I make a commitment to intimacy that is greater than my commitment to being right and perpetuating my conditioned patterns."*

Using this commitment helps you to remember that your relationship is a teacher, and your partner is your classmate; someone you learn with, not one who is responsible for your happiness or for meeting all your needs. Keeping the depth of what marriage and committed relationships require of you at the forefront, will help to create more consciousness when entering in to such a union.

- 2) **WILLINGNESS:** A healthy sustainable relationship requires willingness. Willingness to forgive, to be vulnerable, to share, to talk, to listen, to be patient, to be kind, to be generous, to give, to receive, to tell the truth, to risk having your heart broken, to be yourself, to be seen, to see your partner in all their messiness, to risk disappointing your partner or upsetting him or her because you are not able to be everything they want or need, to explore and heal your dysfunctional childhood issues and patterns. In a conscious, healthy relationship, willingness is mutual. Both partners are willing to participate in creating a sustainable framework for your life together.
- 3) **HUMILITY:** There is not a lot of room for Ego in a healthy relationship. The simplest way to say this is that you must be willing to release the need to be right, to be better, or to be more or less than your partner, and to recognize that you don't know everything about relationships. Be open to learning new things about yourself, to acknowledging your imperfections, and to be fully seen by your partner (yes, even the messy, shameful parts). Humility also opens space to recognize how you can each continue to evolve and expand into the highest version of yourselves.

- 4) **TRANSPARENCY:** This quality is closely connected to honesty, but it goes deeper. This is a level of sharing that is raw, real and true. Transparency refers to your words, your thoughts, your actions, your feelings, your joys, your celebrations, your irritations, your neuroses, your past, your present, your dreams, your desires, your body, your accounts, your passwords, your money, and anything that shows up for you from outside of your relationship. Gone are the days of “not rocking the boat” with things that seem trivial and potentially not worth sharing. In a conscious, healthy, sustainable relationship, everything is shared. Nothing is off limits. Although you will both respect each other as separate, whole entities, you will also build intimacy through your willingness to reveal and share everything about your world, without withholding anything.
  
- 5) **CURIOSITY:** Seek understanding with your partner without assuming you already know the answer, even if you’ve been together for eternity. There is always more to learn as you and your partner are constantly evolving and growing as human beings. Life continues to unfold, experiences happen, and new perspectives develop. Curiosity enables the release of assumptions and taking your partner’s behavior so personally. The safest assumption to make, if you must, is that you don’t fully understand where your partner is coming from. Ask questions, be curious, and look forward to what you will discover.
  
- 6) **GRATITUDE:** Gratitude keeps your relationship grounded in the present moment. No matter what is happening in your lives, take time to acknowledge what you DO have, what you are grateful for, and the life that you and your partner are creating within this framework. Create a daily gratitude practice with your partner where you tell each other what he or she means to you, what it means to have them in your life, and what you are most grateful for that day. Even if it feels repetitive, each day is new and worthy of acknowledging your gratitude in the present moment. Hearing it never gets old, and sharing it will fill you with love, peace, and reminders of why you are in this relationship in the first place.
  
- 7) **APPRECIATION:** Appreciation fosters positivity in your relationship. It creates a cycle that supports and uplifts your union, rather than the destructive, negative forces of the four horsemen: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling (John Gottman, “Why Marriages Succeed or Fail”). Appreciation pairs well with gratitude and bodes well as a daily companion practice. Demonstrate appreciation with affirming words, acknowledgement for efforts you notice in your partner, and generally letting your partner know what you love about them or how your life has been positively impacted by their presence. When you feel appreciated in your relationship, you may be more motivated to go that extra step or to do something thoughtful or unprompted. This is a positive feedback loop. The more appreciation you give, the more you receive, and the more you allow yourself to receive, the more you are able to give.
  
- 8) **PLAY:** When it all comes down to it, your partner is also a wonderful playmate! Relationships, when sustained by the above framework, are fun! Go play, explore new things, go on adventures, discuss dreams, get lost in “being” together, allow the inner child in you to come out, now that you have a safe place to be yourself, and allow your creativity to flow. Create space to release seriousness for a while. Allow yourselves to just be silly and laugh and stretch beyond your comfort zone a bit! Let yourself be fully seen without inhibitions. Have fun!!!

9) **HUMOR:** Like play, humor is a way to take yourselves a bit less seriously. Especially when you are working on refining some of your dysfunctional patterns between you that may not always feel good, its important to infuse humor when appropriate. Allow yourselves to laugh at your imperfections. By taking yourself less seriously and laughing at your own shadows and messy parts, it opens a safe space for your partner to do the same. Ultimately, humor takes the sting out of growing and can make the process a bit more tolerable. Support each other, have compassion, and be willing to see the ridiculousness in some of your creative coping skills that so often get in your way. The less power you give those parts of yourself, the more space you will create to heal, grow, and expand your relationship.

10) **PATIENCE:** Last but probably the most important is patience. Have patience with yourself, patience with your partner, and patience with the process of creating a conscious, healthy relationship. When you are patient, you have more access to compassion, unconditional love, and forgiveness. All of these are required when you hit those inevitable bumps in the road. Remember that building the relationship that you want takes practice as many of these concepts are not taught in school, within our families of origin, or in our culture. So have patience that in time, living this framework gets a bit easier and more natural, the bumps are smaller, and recovery time is faster. Be patient and practice, practice, practice!

If this sounds like a relationship that you have always dreamed of, or want to create, counseling can be a great space to begin to cultivate these qualities and skills. With or without a partner, you can begin to learn what a healthy relationship looks like. As a couple, we can work on developing and strengthening these qualities so that your relationship can heal, grow, and thrive.

If your relationship already has many of these qualities but needs support to expand further, relationship counseling is a great container to explore that desire. In the meantime, feel free to print this out and refer to it often. Play a game with your spouse or partner to see how many qualities you can practice and notice each day. I look forward to supporting you further whenever you are ready!