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e-book

Practical Mantras to

Better Communication & Relationships

Relationships

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Introduction

“Strange is our situation here up on earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men.”

Albert Einstein

Fun, but painstaking to build, challenging, but a pleasure to maintain... often the very core of our lives, ongoing relationships need to be nurtured.

Life in the fast lane, however, is not conducive to building bonds. Caught up in the challenges of a pressure-driven society, most people seem to have little time to catch their breath. Lasting relationships and friendships require time and energy – two commodities most people are unwilling or unable to spare.

There seems to be considerable distance between people in our society. But this does not change the truth.

Close relationships foster healing and promote survival. People who are supported by loved ones, spouse, children, grand children, friends and communities, are more motivated and successful in adapting and living beyond challenges.

We thrive on compassion, caring and nurturing. We need each other. And this need must be communicated.

Section I

The hues and shades of communication

Inward Communication

“IT’S SURPRISING HOW many people go through life without ever recognizing that their feelings toward other people are largely determined by their feelings toward themselves, and if you are not comfortable within yourself, you can’t be comfortable with others”

Sydney J. Harris

In Sync?

“Who are you?” “What are you here for?” “What are you doing?” “Where are you going?”

Primal queries. Have you the answers? We thought not – simply because , most of us don’t. We blunder along merrily, foot loose and fancy free, accepting and rebelling in terms at what life throws at us. Never questioning, never wondering.

Merely meandering. That’s us

IN THE PROCESS, we are out of touch. Out of sync and out of step. With life, the world, and most importantly, with ourselves.

What happens when a safety pin has slipped open, is digging deep into you and you can’t fix it – because you need to watch an opera and be nice to the little old lady chattering next to you? You do what most of us do. Snap at the most vulnerable one available at the moment.

Life gets rather like that sometimes. Inner discomfort. Losing touch with who you really are can often be more uncomfortable than a open safety pin hurting you.

Inward communication is basic. It’s a need, not a luxury.

Get back in step

IT’S AS EASY as ‘left, right, left, right’ ‘with a stand at ease’ Some ‘attention’ and an occasional ‘about turn’.

First, march forward, keeping time. It’s when we race against time, fight our biological clocks and run the rat race that we get thrown out of gear and lose touch with our inner selves. The key then, is to forge ahead, while staying in touch with our true selves.

To be the way you think you are meant to be. To live the way you think you ought to live – governed by a little other than a clear conscience and lots of compassion for all humanity.

Then stand at ease.... With yourself. If you are able to look at the face in the mirror without a qualm, to lay your head down at night and sleep like a baby, sit alone in solitude, disturbed or uneasy – you are a lucky person.

To be comfortable with oneself is to be comfortable with the world. Inner equilibrium is a gift. If you have it, hold on to it. If you don't, seek the truth... look inward and find your balance. Having found it, yes, hold on. Tight.

Attention. Pay attention to yourself. There is a still small voice that whispers to you whenever you are in need of answers. Shut out the commotion that clouds your thought and judgement. Communicate with yourself. Visualize the emergence of your inner self. Pay attention.

About turn? When the path that you follow cause inner disturbance, it's time to think about your sense of direction. Take an about turn by all means. Change is not wrong. It's simply staying in step with your real self.

2. The sounds of silence

“SILENCE CANNOT BE put together, nor does it come with the action of the will.”

J KRISHNAMURTHY

When words do not matter

SILENCE, THE MOST, profound and deep of human experiences.

Silence is creative; Silence is dynamic; silence speaks when all words fail.

Experience your inner peace, stillness and emotional equilibrium. Be aware of it. Convey it. See how this silence ‘speaks’ to other minds at a ‘deeper’ level. Silence impacts the psyche as no spoken word can.

So learn to build up silent energy within yourself. It is not the silence of being ‘shut up’. It is not that silence with which you come home angry and say, “I am not going to talk to anybody.” It is not the silence that bangs the door shut in anger and retorts, “But I never said anything.”

It is not the silence of mutiny, rage or withdrawal. That is not real silence.

It is another kind of silence The kind that happens when someone else has banged the door on you and you stand there, calm and strong, silent, serene and composed. So serene, in fact, that the irate other become shamefacedly serene!

This is the silence of saints and sages.

But is quite feasible.

Experience that stillness again and again.

The hushed heart and the unuttered sound

SILENCE IS THAT form of communication that hushes a crying baby that is laid against a mother’s bosom.

Silence is what reaches out across the room when two pairs of eyes meet in love.

Silence is the unshed tears that reaches out and touches when another’s spirit is sinking low.

Silence is the strength that grips and leads when feeble feet stagger and falter.

Silence stretches across a full auditorium and tells a child “I am proud of you.”

Silence is the drip that flows softly into a sick person’s hand, oozing comfort and easing aches.

Silence is the prop that bears the burden of grief and terminal pain.

Silence cries in joy at a wedding and smiles bravely through a trial.

Silence is serenity. It is strength. It is the subtlest of all communication.

3. Hark !

“LISTENING IS A magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. When we really listen to people there is an alternating current, and this recharges us so that we never get tired of each other.”

BRENDA UELAND

Two ears, one mouth

Expressing our wants, feelings, thoughts and opinions clearly and effectively, is only half the communication process needed for interpersonal relationships. The other half – perhaps the more important half in some ways, is listening to and understanding what others communicate to us.

Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets and understands the sender's message in the same way the sender intended it.

The easiest road to misunderstandings and lost relationships has a few luminous milestones looming menacingly on the way. Here they are –

- Being preoccupied and not listening
- Being so interested in what you have to say that you ‘pretend’ to listen, primarily to find an opening to get the floor. And start talking !
- Listening to your own personal beliefs about what is being said.
- Evaluating and making judgments about the speaker or the message.

There is a real distinction between merely ‘hearing’ and really ‘listening’. When we listen effectively, we understand what the person is thinking and feeling from the other person's own perspective. It is as if we were standing in the other person's shoes, seeing through their eyes and listening through their ears.

We may not necessarily agree with the person, but as we listen, we understand from the other's perspective.

To listen effectively, we must be ‘active’ listeners in this communication process. Passive listening isn't quite good enough.

It pays.... to listen

SOMETIMES A PERSON just needs to be heard and acknowledged before he or she is willing to consider an alternative.

It is often easier for a person to listen to and consider the other's position when she knows that she will be heard out too.

It helps people to spot the flaws in their reasoning when they hear it played back without criticism.

It also helps to identify areas of agreement, so that the areas of disagreement are put in perspective and are diminished rather than magnified.

“A wise old owl sat on an oak; The more he saw the less he spoke; The less he spoke the more he heard; Why aren't we like the wise old bird?”

Edward Hersey Richards

Hearing Aids !

DON'T RESPOND to just the meaning of the words. Look for the feelings of intent beyond the words.

Inhibit your impulse to answer questions immediately.

Sometimes people ask questions when they really want to express themselves and are not really looking for answers.

If you are confused and do not understand, tell the person that you don't understand and ask her to repeat what she said.

Active listening is a very effective response when the other person is angry, hurt, or expressing difficult feelings.

Be emphatic and non-judgmental. You can accept and be respectful of the person, his feeling and beliefs, without invalidating or giving up your own position.

You can always agree to differ, but first, lend a ear. No. Both ears. It's two receptive ears and one sensible mouth, remember?

4. BODY TALK

“I CAN NEVER bring you to realize the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumbnails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot lace.

Sherlock Holmes to Watson (‘A Case of Identity’)

Sing Language

‘KEEP YOUR NOSE to the grindstone’, ‘Shoulder the responsibility’, ‘Be all ears when you are spoken to’, to have someone ‘wrapped around your little finger’.....

Don’t look ‘down your nose’ at these idioms – they really do make a lot of sense.

Body language is clearly central to good communication and is particularly important when one is attempting to communicate across cultural and language barriers.

In fact, in most cultures, the way words are spoken – along with the gestures, posture and facial expressions that accompany those words – are of great significance.

Body language becomes still more important when there is a verbal language barrier. With the verbal message missing, the listener naturally relies on what is available.
Body Talk.

Body talk can contradict the spoken word. This is because the body is more articulate than words in communicating emotion.

Think about how much more convinced you are, when a group of excited children jump up and down, than if they simply say, “We are very excited.”

The tricky thing about Body language is that we are often unaware of how we are reaching to it. We may, for example, form a negative judgment about someone because she slouches, won’t look us in the eye, or ‘talks with her hands.’ Because we are unaware of why we made the judgment, we are unable to filter out our biases about what body language means and what it tells us about an individual.

By being thus unaware, we can learn to recognize the subtle differences that may inappropriately influence our judgment and interfere with good communication.

Codes of Conduct?

INTERPRETING BODY LANGUAGE is very often based on instinct and common sense. However, here are few broad guidelines to help you along a voyage of discovery.

“I am receptive”

- leaning forward
- open body
- open arms
- open hands

“I am listening”

- head tilted
- lots of eye contact
- nodding
- high blink rate

“I am bored”

- staring into space
- slumped posture
- doodling
- foot tapping

“I want to say something”

- finger tapping
- foot tapping
- staring

“I am eager”

- feet under chair
- on toes
- leaning forward

“I am thinking”

- Fidgets with glasses / pencil
- Stroked chin
- Looks up and right
- Legs crossed over

“I want to leave”

- Feet towards door
- Looking around
- Buttoning up jacket

“I am angry”

- Leaning forward
- Finger pointing
- Fists clenched

“I agree”

- Closes papers
- Pen down
- Hands flat on table

“I am interested”

- Arms behind back
- Smile
- Open feet

“I object”

- Moving back
- Arms folded
- Legs crossed
- Head down
- Frown

“I am lying”

- Touches face
- Hands over mouth
- Pulls ear
- Eyes down
- Shifts in seat
- Looks down and left

Happy decoding! But a word of caution – don’t get carried away by imagination! When in doubt... do give the ‘benefit of the doubt’ to the other.

Yes. Save your face – literally!

5. Tone it down

“IN THE HIGHER dimensions, words and thoughts are replaced by clear, unbroken tones.

If one picture is worth a thousand words, one tone is worth a million pictures.

Those who can hear these tones, high above all the other sounds will never be deceived.

Words can be misleading, ideas can be obscured, but in unbroken tones – there is no place to hide.”

‘THE RECONNECTIONS’

Overtones?

IT’S NOT SO much what you say, as the manner in which you say it. Your tone conveys volumes... literally.

Your message depends not so much on the language you use, as the tone in which you convey it.

Words may be mild and fair, but the tone may pierce like a dart. Words may be soft as the summer air, but the tone may break your heart.

Words spring from the mind. They can be manipulated and contrived. They may be delicate by design.

But tones rise from the inner self, pure in their intention, revealing the truth.

Whether you know it or not, whether you mean it or care about it, all emotions are conveyed by you tone. Latent or blatant. It’s all there.

Gentleness, kindness, love, hate, envy, anger.....

All emotions surface in the tone.

Keep negativity not only out of your words, but keep it out of your voice too. Need we say more? Tone down. Nice and mellow says it all.

Undertones

TONE IS AN important factor in any communication, and striking the right tone can be particularly challenging in electronic communication – such a e-mail or instant messengers – where there is an absence of inflections, facial expressions, or body language.

Using ‘emoticons’ can help to soften the tone of a message, or make it clear when you are joking. Your choice of words, length of message, spelling, emotion, etc. will also affect the tone of your communication. You will need to find the tone that is right for you and for what you are trying to communicate. Your ‘tone repertoire’ normally includes some of the following:

- inquiring
- warm, inviting
- humorous
- thoughtful, analytical, serious, reflective
- friendly and supportive, nurturing
- challenging, proactive, stimulating
- informal, musingblunt, honest
- sharing

6. Expressions

“OF ALL THE things you wear, your expression is the most important.”

Janet Lane

Let's face facts

WHEN YOU TALK with someone, your eyes, posture, gestures and other non-verbal cues may say more than your words.

Words can be used orety much as you please, but vocal tone and gestures are much harder to control. Gestures and expressions give vividness and energy to our spoken words.

Are 'facial expressions' and 'emotions' synonyms?

Facial expressions usually communicate the quality and nature of emotions, while body cues reveal more about the intensity of emotions.

The face is a primary non-verbal communicator of feelings and emotions.

Our faces, together with hand gestures and language, are social tools that help us navigate our lives.

Control any distracting movements or sounds that can undermine your credibility such as twisting a ring or frequently touching your hair, If you aren't aware of your habits, as someone who knows you well to point them out to you.

Just gestures

GESTURES COMMUNICATE AS effectively as words – maybe, even more effectively. We use gestures everyday, almost instinctively, from beckoning a waiter to teaching a child.

Gestures are woven inextricably into our social lives. But no two people will use similar gestures. Not will people of the same culture act in a predictable, uniform fashion. This pattern becomes definitely more distinct and different across cultural barriers. This is simply because gestures are spontaneous. Not premeditated or contrived.

Therefore, to be absolutely safe and sure in the world of gestures, the best piece of advice is to 'ask' and be 'aware'. Not 'guess' and 'misunderstand'.

The universal gesture

THIS 'ULTIMATE GESTURE' is known every where in the world. It is universal. Seldom, if ever, is it misunderstood.

According to Roger E Axtell, scientists believe this gesture actually releases into the system, endorphins that create a feeling of mild euphoria.

No matter where you are and where you go, at home or the world over, this gesture can get you out of the trickiest of situations. In a pleasant manner.

“What is the singular signal, this miracle mien, this giant of all gestures? It is quite simply, the smile. Use it freely, use it often.”

Roger E Axtell

(The Dos and Taboos of Body Language around the world)

7. The thrill of touch

“The pressure of the hands causes the springs of life to flow”

TOKUJIRO NAMIKOSHI

Touched?

HOW IMPORTANT IS ‘touch’ as a form of communication? Literally, vital. Without appropriate touch, people cannot grow and develop.

Touch is powerful

”THE GREATEST SENSE in our body is our touch sense. It is probably the chief sense in the processes of sleeping and waking... we feel, we love and hate, are touchy and are touched....”

J LIONEL TAYLER “THE STAGES OF HUMAN LIFE”

Touch is instinct

WHEN A BABY cries, it is instinctive to pick up the baby, rock, pat and soothe.

When you bang your elbow, it is instinctive to rub it.

Touch is an unthinking part of your everyday life.

We say... ‘to rub the wrong way’, ‘out of touch’, ‘thick skinned or thin skinned’, ‘the personal touch’... And so on.

May be most telling of all is, when someone is moving away, we say, “Keep in touch”, even when what we mean is , write or phone.

Though touch is not in itself an emotion, its sensory elements induce those feelings we describe as emotions.

A comforting hand on the shoulder of someone who is distressed produces a very different emotional reaction compared to an apprehending touch on the shoulder of a miscreant.

The touch of someone’s hand, the closeness of an embrace, and the connection of personal contact, signify caring and comforting.

Feelings of security, safety and ease increase when there is communication through touch.

Touching builds closeness, fosters communication, and nurtures intimacy.

Touching gives the person the sense of being cared about and cared for.

Being touched or held, makes a person psychologically feel worthy and physically, feel soothed.

Touch is contact, a relationship with that which lies outside our own periphery. It tells us we are not alone.

As infants, it's primarily through touch that we explore and make sense of the world; the loving touch of our caregivers is essential to growth.

When we feel loved, as a result of an abundance of appropriate touch and affection in our lives, we have an inbuilt sense of safety and an inner stability that does not depend upon how other people respond to us.

We wake up feeling loved and go to sleep feeling loved – no matter what slings and arrows get hurled at us on any given day.

Touch me not?

MANY SOCIETIES IN the modern times are 'touch-starved'. It is socially unacceptable to touch. There is an unwritten rule that says, the less you know someone, the further away you must be.

However, touch deprivation is in itself harmful. It leads to sleeplessness, violence, depression, sexual aberrations, crimes and so on.

Patients who are nursed in isolation and denied contact, find this experience even more depressing than the actual symptoms of the illness itself.

'Solitary confinement' is the ultimate punishment.

Touch is much more than a physical interaction. It has to do with the acknowledgement of our shared humanness. It is an intense wish for contact, and communion that is present in each of us.

8. Pure Emotion

“THERE CAN BE no knowledge without emotion. We may be aware of a truth, yet until we have felt its force, it is not ours. To the cognition of the brain must be added the experience of the soul”

ARNOLD BENNETT

To say what you feel

IN THE RECENT past, science has discovered facts that prove the amazing role emotions play in our lives. We now believe that EQ may be even more important than IQ – your emotional awareness and ability to handle feelings may determine your success and happiness in all walks of life, including family relationships. Learning to love and accept ourselves and to use the language of emotion in a positive way is basic to healthy human relationships.

Sharing emotions through words and behavior is essential for improving any significant relationship. This includes bonding with our kids, our siblings, our friends, our co-workers... society at large. However, even our best efforts to connect can be jeopardized as a result of our failure to communicate emotions correctly.

Dam those emotions !

YES. BUILD EMOTIONAL reservoirs.

Communication positively when the ‘going is good’ sets the stage for all the changes that are likely to surface. The good times, bad times and the ugly ones too. Positive interactions, the tendency to see the better side of every situation, an attitude of benign balance – all have very rich dividends. Particularly in times of trouble.

This pattern of positive communication comes into its own in amazing ways. People, who are used to reacting positively to one another as a way of life, maintain and use expressions of humor and affection even during arguments and times of stress and trauma. It’s almost as if all the good feelings they’ve accumulated by responding respectfully and lovingly to one another in the past, form an emotional savings – a ‘security deposit’.

So, when conflicts arise, they can draw on this reservoir of good feeling. It is as if a voice inside is saying, “ I may be mad as hell as him right now, but he is the person who listens so attentively when I complain about my work. He is a good sort. He deserves a break.” And so on.

Having access to humor and affection during a conflict is invaluable.

It helps to deflate bad feelings and leads to better understanding. Rather than shutting down communication in the midst of an argument, people who can stay ‘with’ one another, have a better chance of resolving conflicts and repairing hurt feelings.

To be able to ‘stand’ each other in the midst of turbulence, no matter what the relationship, the good work must begin long before the conflict starts. It needs a strong foundation that has been built upon everyday interactions. Small exchanges or large. Important, insignificant or ‘in-between’.

Taking the clouds with the sun

MANY PEOPLE DESCRIBE their lives as lonely. They feel lonely despite their proximity to many significant people in their lives – spouses, friends, children, siblings, and co-workers.

Such people are those who have trouble with the communication process. They are also prone to conflicts – conflicts that could have been avoided if they had simply acknowledged another’s emotional needs.

When these vital ‘conversations’ are avoided, arguments arise. Such conflicts can lead to marital discords, parenting problems, and family feuds. Friendships fade away. Adult sibling relationships wither and die.

However, with just a little awareness and a conscious attempt to communicate clearly from the heat, most troubles can be nipped in the bud.

9. Grey Zones

“THEY MAY FORGET what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

CARL W. BUECHNER

Thoughts and feelings

FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS are different, but very similar. They are often the two sides of one coin. Feelings are emotions and sensations, and they are different from thoughts, beliefs, interpretations and convictions.

When difficult feelings are expressed, the person feels the lighter for it. The hurt or discomfort is dulled. It is a form of release. On the other hand, if we express only our beliefs or opinions about the event and not our feelings, the bad feelings linger on.

When expressing yourself, try to be specific rather than general about how you feel. Specify the degree of the feelings and you will reduce your chances of being misunderstood. For example, when you say, “I am angry”, some may think you are extremely angry when you actually mean a ‘little irritated’.

If you have mixed feelings, say so, and express each feeling. For example, “I am glad and thankful that you helped me, but I didn’t like the comment about my stupidity.”

Reading between the lines

JUST AS IT is possible to read a message wrong, it is quite possible to overlook messages. Hidden messages that are aching to be understood.

A child that says “Who cares if I don’t do my homework?” and heard “The teacher does” from the mothers, is a sad child indeed.

The mother has missed the implied longing in the rebellious retort. Her flippant answer has not humored the child who wants to connect. Had implied messages been deciphered, the mother would have answered “I do” to “Who cares?”. It would have been ‘round-one’ to mom!. The trophy? A happy, co-operative child.

Situations like this arise all the time. You get up to leave your ailing father-in-law’s bedside. “Is it that late?” he asks. “No. It’s just 5.30” you reply.

The ‘time of the day’ was not what the old man had wanted. It was an extension of your time by his side. But you missed the message. Learn to read between the lines. Listen for tones and undertones. The heart hears unspoken messages.

10. Black and white

“PEOPLE HAVE IMPORTANT things to communicate. Speaking from your heart allows the emotionally difficult , the ordinary, and the wonderful things in our lives to be communicated and received

DAVID MCARTHUR AND BRUCE MC ARTHUR, THE INTELLIGENT HEART

The power of being nice

BEING ‘NICE’ IS simple. Yet, it can make all the difference to a friend, a family, a life... It is so simple that we often forget it, and treat people who are close to us in ways which we would never dream of treating strangers.

The power of being nice to others is something we all possess, all the time. When we use it, its power is felt by all of those around us – whether or not they acknowledge it at the time.

Communication doesn’t mean just talking. It covers the whole scope of interaction and situations that may be ordinary... or extraordinary. Bleak or light. Black or white.

A matter of doing

GOOD INTERACTIONS WITH those around you don’t just happen by accident. And they don’t just happen by themselves. Involvement is the central element, the key to happier, more personally fulfilling relationships.

Involvement doesn’t mean just talking, as important as that is. It means actively doing things that makes others feel better about themselves and about you , which also make you feel better about yourself.

Take for example, two different situations:

You arrive home after work and a bout of shopping, with a carload of groceries –

1. Your teen, who is at home, stays on the sofa watching TV and gets up only after being asked to help... that too after a lot of complaining.
2. The young person hears the car, meets you at the door and without being asked, helps to unload and put away the groceries , chatting pleasantly all the while....

Or this scenario:

Your hear your teen arrive home –

1. You call out a greeting, continue reading the paper or cooking, then complain about some job that the child had left undone.
2. Stop a moment to say hello, ask about the day and engage in a casual conversation, avoiding for the moment any mention of undone jobs or homework.

Each of the above scenarios creates an entirely different range of feelings.

Which is better? The heart knows.

Sometimes the best and strongest people find themselves at their wits' end in relationships. It is not enough to 'know' how to communicate well with those close to you' you must actually 'do' it.

It is important to communicate with clarity. Relationships thrive on healthy communication. Clarity in connecting with people is the key to successful bonding.

**SECTION-II
RELATING TO REALITY**

BETWEEN YOU AND YOU

“YOU ARE IN charge of your feelings, beliefs, and actions. And you teach others how to behave toward you. While you cannot change other people, you can influence them through your own behaviours and actions. By being a living role model of what you want to receive from others, you create more of what you want in your life.”

ERIC ALLENBAUGH

It's only you

THE UNIVERSE IS a mirror through which you can see yourself. Everything you perceive, externally, is a reflection of some internal part of you.

It is a matter of looking at your exterior reality to see what you like and dislike about it. Then, you look inward to see where those aspects reside within you. The ones you like, you keep. The ones you dislike, you discard. The ones you desire, you add on.

Remember!. To change the exterior you must first change the interior. So, do just that!

You hold the key

WHAT IS THE key to good relationships?

You... and how you feel inside yourself. All relationships are based on giving. Just think for a minute about what can be ‘given’ in a relationship: respect, affection, appreciation, compassion, kindness, trust...

And where do all these good qualities come from? They come from inside you – your own inner happiness and fulfillment, your confidence and comfort in yourself. Like a cup that overflows when it is full to the brim – only when you are full inside do you truly have something to ‘overflow’ and give to others.

So, let's start at the very beginning. With ‘you’. To help you connect with your world by improving your personal communication patterns.

Do away with these busters...

- Giving unsolicited lectures or advice
- Attacking, name calling
- Blaming
- Always trying to appease or please the other person
- Getting defensive
- Trying to justify your position
- Implying that you know better

And then there are some relationship boosters...

- Taking emotional risks
- Balancing giving and receiving
- Taking responsibility by using “I” statements to express feelings
- Honestly expressing a range of feelings, needs and wishes
- Being assertive rather than passive or aggressive
- Giving each person plenty of room to be himself without passing judgment
- Balancing power
- Facing and resolving conflict

LOOKING UP

“ We all live in the hope of pleasing somebody; and the pleasure of pleasing ought to be greatest, and always will be greatest, when our endeavours are exerted in consequence of our duty.”

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Growing old with parents

RESPECT IS PRIMARY – particularly in an ‘upward-unequal-relationship’. But this respect is not unidirectional. Without mutual respect, any relationship will be an unhappy one. People who respect each other will always value each other’s opinions, listen to each others and disagree without hurting or insulting each other.

Communication is vital. Your parents, no matter how grown up you are, will want to know what’s going on in your life. Share your thoughts and feelings with them, and seek their advice for your problems – even if you just ask for their opinion but make your own decisions. Communication builds closeness.

Trust is the life-breath of a relationship. Trust is your key to freedom. The way to build trust is through honesty and responsibility. Honesty means you don’t lie or manipulate. Responsibility means you are reliable and can e counted upon to use good judgement. Building this trust starts young.

These issues are essential to both parents and offspring. If, on occasions, your parents do not fall in with our thought pattern, talk to them about it. Pick a time when you are calm – never when either of you is angry. Then, explain to them what they did, how it makes you feel, and what you’d like them to do instead.

Take a realistic and empathetic view of parents and their opinions – remember that they have had a head start and you can never catch up with their life’s experiences and lessons. This is the key to smooth transactions. With parents and other elders.

3. Just equals

“THE FINEST QUALITIES of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves not one another thus tenderly.”

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Sibling or squabbling

FOR MOST PEOPLE, their first opportunity for learning how to get along is with brothers and sisters. Family life offers a wonderful training ground for developing values of co-operation, honesty, kindness, and tolerance of others.

Learning important social skills takes time. Living with brothers and sisters can give a person – starting from childhood – a lot of practice in learning how to share and resolve conflicts. It also helps in learning to be co-operative, supportive, and nurturing to others.

Ground rules to grow up with

THERE ARE SOME childhood rules that we need never outgrow. Applied in adulthood, these rules help build better understanding and communications – not just among adult siblings, but in all equal relationships.

- Know that it is never okay to hurt each other. Hurting does not mean physical hurt. In fact physical hurt causes the least possible pain. Intolerance, sarcasm, superiority and inferiority complexes, harsh words, dominating, interfering, condescending, patronizing attitudes... worst of all, indifference – these kill communication, and therefore, relationships in adulthood.
- Help each other – that is what family’ is all about. Ask if you need help. Don’t expect people to read your mind. Very often, lack of proper communication can destroy relationships quicker than ‘bad’ communication. We need our folks to lean on... but we are too proud to ask. They are often too busy to notice... we assume that they don’t care. One thing leads to another and before you know it, it’s cold war.
- Use words to talk about problems. Tantrums and sulks communicate nothing. Remember, this is a mature relationship. Anything can be resolved when there is dialogue. Sulks and silence will fan the flames of fury or bitterness. Think of all the good times you have shared and look at the person in a new light. The light of affection. Now communicate. You will get somewhere.

- Always ask to use something that belongs to someone else. Never take for granted – anything or anybody. Very often we take our people for granted. “She will always have time for me, let me drop in whenever I please” or “ He will be there for me . He is my brother. He will come running to my aid the minute I call” and so on. Not true.
- We are all individuals, each of us caught up in our own special drama called life. And we have our priorities. We can be available for each other... but cannot be taken for granted. Just as you would think twice about walking in and reaching into your sister’s purse, think twice about helping yourself to her time without warning. Things or just sweet nothings.... Ask before you assume they are yours.
- Think co-operation instead of competition. Are you trying to prove a point with your kith and kin? What a crazy rat race! Imitation, ‘hero-worship’ and following footsteps may be fine – but rivalry? Rivalry is the toxic waste that stems from envy. It will not pass in any relationship. It is unthinkable between siblings.

4. Spread the glow

“WE HAVE NO more right to put our discordant states of mind into the lives of those around us and rob them of their sunshine and brightness than we have to enter their houses and steal their silverware.”

- JULIA SETON

Whose fault is it, anyway?

IT'S IMMATERIAL WHOM we need to communicate or interact with. Friend or family, equal or unequal, we really have no right to allow our behaviour patterns and tantrums or shortsightedness to ruin the joy in others' lives.

The clue to this state of harmonious living lies in an honest appraisal of oneself. And then, a conscious effort to take responsibility for thoughts and actions and to communicate with the popular concept of “I” statements.

“I am upset because...” and not “You have upset me...”

“ I think that...” and not “ You should have.....”

And so on.

But to get into this mindset, it is important to get rid of certain die-hard habits and communication patterns. Most of all, tendency to blame.

Most destructive communication patterns emerge under pressure. Emotionally tense situations, stress from outside or within, pressure of various kinds... all these give rise to self-defeating behaviour.

We find ourselves acting differently from the way we wanted to act or behave!.

Strategies for self help

IF YOU USUALLY withdraw from an uncomfortable or heated discussion by walking out of the room rather than expressing yourself, try these:

- Take a deep breath, count up to ten and stay in the room rather than going off the highpoint. A deep puff of fresh air is better than walking out in a huff!
- Remind yourself that you are entitled to share your opinion, as long as you remain cool. Calmly express what you feel!

- If you do walk out in a huff, cool down quickly and return to the conversation or discussion as soon as possible. Now have another go at 'balanced' dialogue.
- If you cannot bring yourself to return right away, convince yourself that you will after you have had time to calm down.
- Communicate this... "I am too upset to talk right now. I need to discuss this with you when I am calmer."
- Apologise when you have behaved or communicates in any of the ways that are destructive to healthy harmonious relationships.
- Keep it simple...."I am sorry for...."

Remember

Apologies help you to change yourself. And hey can make you feel good too. A sense of self-esteem will replace self-defeating patterns of "I am always right". Try it. The results may be a pleasant surprise.

Being accountable and accepting responsibility actually gives you the feeling of being 'in control' rather than 'out of control' of the situation.

5. Spouse in the house

“OH, THE COMFORT, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor to measure words but to pour them all out, just as it is, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keeping what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.”

GEORGE ELIOT

To make or break

COMMUNICATION IS A key factor in creating a successful marriage, or repairing one that has deteriorated. Communication is, in fact, the root of marital success. Non-communication is a trap that ensnares.

A fairly disturbing number of marriages end in divorce. And a countless others are unhappy, frustrated relationships. Lack of communication seems to be one of the prime causes of marriage breakdown. Of course it always takes two to make or break a relationship.

One of the universal symptoms of the breaking-down of a relationship is when we no longer care enough to listen. We refuse to make an effort to understand. The walls are up. We are not willing to grant each other the time or priority that listening requires. We have ears that do not hear. We have closed the channels for communication. The relationship suffocates..... it may or may not survive the trauma.

Words worth

JUST AS LISTENING is an important skill in a loving relationship, it's equally important to infuse our speech with love. As we communicate with one another, we need to pay particular attention to the words we use.

While love without words is almost impossible, words without love abound. What we say to each other makes a difference. We have the power to hurt and to heal. And we can do it with words. It's an awesome power.

The most damaging words we can speak, usually in frustration and anger are, “When are you going to stop being ‘different’ and start doing things my way?”. These words devalue the other person. A difference has been transformed into a defect. Why would anyone want to be close to this other who thinks we're stupid, wrong or crazy – or just plain ‘defective’?

Don't put off telling those you love that you love them. Don't leave for tomorrow the words you should say today. Don't postpone reconciliation. Don't be afraid to speak your heart to those you hold in your heart.

Whenever something within nudges you toward loving communication, simply act on it right away.

Stand-by

COMMUNICATION REACHES BEYOND words spoken or words received. Sometimes we just need each other's presence. Being there may be the most powerful and important communication ever. "I'm here" is best acted out, not spoken. It can be a tremendous comfort sometimes, just to know that others are there.

Lost touch

SOMETIMES WORDS CAN'T quite express the feelings we have. We often forget how comforting it can be to hold hands, just to touch or hold each other. For some of us, it's only when we are forced to – as in grief or joy – that we let down our inhibitions, and allow ourselves to comfort and be comforted by touch as well as by words.

Sometimes communication breaks down when one realizes nothing is confidential with one's mate. Being able to keep a secret is an important quality in keeping the doors of communication open.

Communication must be worked at. It doesn't just happen and it doesn't remain without effort. But the ground rules are fairly simple.... Talk, listen, touch and respect 'family loyalty'.

6. In-laws, outlaws

“THE HAPPINESS OF life is made up of minute fractions – the little, soon-forgotten charities of a kiss or smile, a kind look, a heart-felt compliment, and the countless infinitesimals of pleasurable and genial feeling.”

- SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Play ‘Happy families’

WHETHER YOU LIVE ‘in’ with your in-laws, or live far away, in-laws are always ‘in’ – never ‘out’ of your life. If you set aside all myths about in-laws being outlaws, it is quite possible to enjoy this precious relationship in very special way. The starting point is, to think of yourselves as one unit – ‘The happy family’.

- The happy family makes a very clear commitment to make their relationship not just work, but work well. They place quality time together and healthy communication at the top of their list of priorities.
- A good and healthy relationship can thrive only when there is time for it. Families put off conversation and time spent together, while they “get things done”. Happy families seize upon expected and unexpected times and opportunities. They make time, take time, and enjoy their time together.
- Happy families are quick to recover from arguments and hurt feelings. They do not bear grudges. They are often able to temporarily put aside relationship problems, and experience something enjoyable together. They go to a concert, out to dinner or shopping. After having a good time together, they use these good feelings to resolve differences rather than spend a lifetime, fighting.
- Happy families ‘work’ at their relationships and take them seriously, but not somberly. They understand the extremely high value of humor and laughter. They can tease, play the fool and laugh at themselves in a good-natured way.

Sharing and caring

- As an important part of their communication, these contented families share their dreams and fears. They tell each other the stories of their lives, sharing their experiences.
- Families who deal with disagreements by withdrawing, ignoring and escalating the intensity of the arguments are heading towards trouble. It is important to resolve conflicts and issues as soon as possible, forget all bitterness and get on with life.

When you really think about all these ‘tips’, you may notice that the big secret to happy long-term relationships is no big secret at all. These things are generally plain common sense. It’s just that very often, we find common sense is not quite so common after all!

7. **Condescending**

“THERE IS A fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of the people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will have truly defeated age.”

SOPHIA LOREN

The folly of talking down

WHEN CHILDREN COME to us with a problem, our first response is to offer a solution. But then, instead of being grateful, our children get angry and resent being told how to solve their problems. Our solutions are never any good and our motives are always suspect! Generation gap? Not really. Just a question of communication. Everyone has problems and everyone resents unsolicited advice, even when it is in their ‘best interest’. Even adults. So why not children? Here then is the path of least resistance.

Just listen. Don’t say, “I’ll tell you what you should do...”

For parents, this is especially hard, but worth the effort.

When it comes to watching a child learn the lessons of life, patience is necessary.

Mum’s the word

IF A CHILD comes to a parent with a problem that is causing difficulty, the child is asking for a sounding board, not an answer. If the parent asks questions and gives advice, the child will be resentful and the conversation will end in tears and anger. The solution is so simple. Don’t ask anything.

Avoid questions and interrogations.

Listen. Try to identify with the child’s feelings.

Express confidence in the child’s ability to think for herself.

If a child says, :What should I do? Respond with , “What choices do you see? Tell me about your options.”

When the child works through the problem, her solution may be exactly what you would have suggested, or, it may even be better.

Open up

THERE ARE TIMES when children will listen to your advice – but these are certainly not times when they are upset. Talk to your children when things are going well. Watch television with them and comment when something comes to mind. Read the newspaper together and discuss the articles.

Listen to ‘their’ kind of music and discuss the lyrics. Read their magazines.

Opportunities will arise when you can tell them what you have learned and also how you learned it.

But of course, talking isn’t necessary.

Children watch what we do all the time. Our primary communication with our children is through how we live our lives. The old adage is true, it’s not what we say that counts, it’s what we do. Communicate values by living them. Enrich one of your most cherished relationships without mishap.

8. Choice and chance

“THERE WAS A definite process by which one made people into friends, and it involved talking to them and listening to them for hours at a time.”

REBECCA WEST

Relationships happen in strange ways – by choice or by chance. We choose our friends. Neighbours and colleagues often ‘happen’ by chance. We are born into a family, we acquire a new family, we raise yet another and create various other relationships right through life.

Healthy relationships bring happiness and health to our lives. There are basic ways to make relationships healthy, even though each one is different.... Parents, siblings, friends, boy-friends, girlfriends, professors, roommates, and classmates.

Keep expectations realistic. No one can be everything we might want him or her to be. Sometime people disappoint us. Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are and not trying to change them!. Tell your friends and folks that they mean a lot to you, no matter who they are or what they do. Be flexible. Most of us try to keep people and situations just the way we want them to be. Healthy relationships allow for change and growth!. Healthy relationships allow for change and growth! Never communicate displeasure when things do not go your way.

Be dependable. If you take on a responsibility, complete it. Healthy relationships are trustworthy! Communicate through word and deed that you can be relied on.

Most relationships have some conflict. It only means that you disagree about something, not that you don't like each other.

When you have a problem, negotiate a time to talk about it. Don't have difficult conversations when you are very angry or tired.

Don't criticize. Attack the problem, not the other person. Healthy relationships don't blame. Don't assign feelings or motives. Let others speak for themselves.

Don't assume things. When we feel close to someone, it's easy to think we know how he or she thinks and feels. We can be very wrong!

Healthy relationships don't demand conformity. You don't have to accept anything and everything, but don't hold grudges.

Healthy relationships don't hold on to past hurts and misunderstandings.

9. Commune

“THE MOST IMPORTANT single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people”

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

LOVE ‘EM HATE ‘EM

FRIENDS AND FAMILY – even though you love them, there are times you are really angry with them. At times you may feel on top of the world and at other times you may not. Your feelings about your friends and family can change from day-to-day, even minute-to-minute. But these are the most important people in your life. You need their support and encouragement.

A successful relationship with friends and family really is based on how well you communicate.

Do-it-for-yourself

- Want a friend?. Be a friend
- Be a mentor. Mentoring is a legacy of giving, it enriches individuals and society.
- Forgive people when they make mistakes. Mend relationships, never let them die out. Remember that we all make mistakes. If someone does something that causes problems for you, remember that they may not have done so out of spite.
- Invite friends over. When friends visit, we share our home and open our lives to them. Our hospitality is an expression of our need to connect and communicate.
- Return phone and email messages. It is frustrating to leave a message on an answering service or to email someone without them getting back to you. It is important to return contact as soon as is convenient, so a person knows that the message was received.
- Greet your neighbours. When you see your neighbour on the road give a little wave, smile, and say “Hello”
- Work to maintain long-term friendships. Distance and time can separate old friends. Making contact once in a while keeps the friendship alive.

10. It's a small world after all

“IF A MAN does not make new acquaintances as he advance through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man should keep his friendships in constant repair... To let friendship die away by negligence and silence is certainly not wise. It is voluntarily to throw away one of the greatest comforts of this weary pilgrimage.”

SAMUEL JOHNSON

SO FAR AND YET SO DEAR

LET'S FACE IT, our lives are fuller with friends !

Even if they live far away.

Whether you'd like to rekindle an old friendship, or need creative and fun ways to keep in touch with current friends, the first step is to commit to keeping the friendship alive, forever!

Everybody is just 'a phone call away.' – Although you may not have the time to pick up the phone every evening to call one or all your friends, try to make a commitment to call each of them at least once a month.

Be sure to keep your address book always updated. A quick call will show your friends that, although you can't be there in person, you are thinking of them and care about what is happening in their lives. You'll soon find that they will return the gesture just as often!

Mail Magic

Take advantage of e-mail – it is a great way to keep in touch with friends. Send e-cards and e-notes too.

Even with this great new technology at your disposal, don't forget that the handwritten word is still the best, and most personal way to show that you care.

This is a great way to keep in touch with those friends who don't have access to e-mail, but still care about you and want to hear from you! Be sure to include family photos for added interest.

It's also very important to remember birthdays and important holidays, so be sure to mark these dates on your calendar and send out notes and cards for those special days. Your friends will be touched that you remembered.

Keeping in touch with friends isn't such a chore. Friendships are rewarding. It is up to us to keep them alive and thriving. So, just stay in touch! Over hills and dales, and across the seven seas too.

Bridge the gap

"I EXPECT TO pass through the world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness or abilities that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

WILLIAM PENN

Strengthen the bond

WE CONSTANTLY GO through life saying things we don't mean to and unwittingly hurting people. At times our problem is that we don't say what we ought to, to the people who need to hear it the most.

Mending relationships or strengthening the existing ones is most important. Very often, out of convenience or ego, most apologies are overlooked and frequently postponed. It's a pity, the kind of trouble we take in order to stay aloof. It only denies us the warmth of a friend, the love of a spouse and the comfort of a family.

Make amends

TAKE CHARGE OF your life. Anytime is a good time to start the process of repair. Start afresh... to say you care.

It is very important to repair relationships and keep them in good shape. It is good to put the past behind and make up. Sit down and talk problems through. Then do something together to ease and help the situation.

Take some time off to thank those you've taken for granted – family and close friends and others who've made your life more fulfilling and worthwhile.

Life is centered round relationships. And relationships thrive on healthy communication.

Here's to happy communion with all those that matter.