

**"If we change within,
our outer life will change also."**

—Jean Shinoda Bolen
(20th-century American writer)

Healthy Relationships

★ Put a check mark (✓) next to any statement that you believe.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

1. Seek understanding and solutions, not blame.
2. In a healthy close relationship, *anything* can be talked about.
3. The best way to change a relationship is by changing *my* behavior.
4. Creating good relationships is a skill to learn, just like playing a sport.
5. While losing a relationship may be painful, I can mourn and move on.
6. It is better to be alone than in a bad relationship.
7. A good relationship requires effort but is worth it.
8. I need relationships in which both people's needs are respected.
9. I need to cultivate relationships with a few people who really matter.
10. With recovery, I can respect myself more and others will too.
11. Acceptance is the basis of healthy relationships.

UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

1. I am always wrong; the other person is always right.
2. I should hide what I really think and feel.
3. The other person has to change.
4. Bad relationships are all I can get.
5. I cannot exist without _____.
6. It is better to be with someone destructive than to be alone.
7. Good relationships are easy.
8. I must take care of everyone else first; my needs come last.
9. I must be liked by everyone.
10. I have no value to other people.
11. I am not _____ enough for a relationship.

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Changing Unhealthy Relationship Beliefs

1

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I am always wrong; the other person is always right."

⇒ **Exploration.** A common relationship problem for trauma survivors is the belief that all relationship problems are their fault (or vice versa—that all relationship problems are the other person's fault). There are two ways out of this destructive view. First, try to view relationship problems between adults as having a 50–50 balance: Each person is responsible for half. If you have a conflict with someone, ask yourself, "What are we each contributing to creating a problem?" A second way out is to seek understanding and solutions, rather than focusing on "who is right and who is wrong." Each person has limitations, wants, and needs, however irrational these may seem to the other. In healthy relationships, both people need to arrive at a solution together.

* **A healthier view.** "Seek understanding and solutions—not blame."

2

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I should hide what I really think and feel."

⇒ **Exploration.** Honesty and communication are the core of a healthy relationship. This includes conflicts as well as the full range of positive and negative feelings. A disagreement does not mean the end of a relationship. In fact, resolving conflicts is a normal part of healthy relationships. When conflicts are out in the open, there is a chance to resolve them. If you are hiding your reactions or isolating, there may be very good reasons for this based on your past, but the goal now is to learn how to be honest with safe people. In a strong close relationship, *anything* can be talked about, including vulnerable feelings, criticism, loving feelings, sex, and money.

* **A healthier view.** "In a healthy close relationship, *anything* can be talked about."

3

◆ **Relationship belief.** "The other person has to change."

⇒ **Exploration.** When a relationship is not working, it is human nature to try to change the other person. But this rarely works. What you can control is *your* part of the relationship. That means that you have choices. You can, for example, accept the other person's behavior, discontinue the relationship, change how you relate, or say what you want (but without necessarily expecting the other person to give it to you). It is very freeing to let go of trying to change other people and to turn your attention to what you can control, which is yourself.

* **A healthier view.** "The best way to change a relationship is by changing *my* behavior."

4

◆ **Relationship belief.** "Bad relationships are all I can get."

⇒ **Exploration.** If you have PTSD and substance abuse you may have difficulty finding healthy relationships. You may find yourself getting drawn over and over into relationships with people who have substance abuse or are destructive. But developing good relationships is a skill to learn, just like learning to play a sport. One good way to start is to take the same approach as you would for any other skill: Read some books on the topic, take a class if you can, and watch how others do it. Working on it in therapy is also helpful. Just as in learning tennis you would need to learn how to serve the ball, how to hit a backhand, a forehand, and how to score the game, with relationships you may need to learn how to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships, how to converse, how to negotiate conflicts, how to assert yourself, how to give and accept compliments, and how to start and end relationships.

* **A healthier view.** "Creating good relationships is a skill to learn, just like playing a sport."

(cont.)

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5

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I cannot exist without _____."

⇒ **Exploration.** While it is natural to be upset if you lose someone, loss and mourning are part of life. If you stay in an unhealthy relationship because it is hard to face loss, you are paying a very high price for the relationship. Ways to mourn the loss of a relationship include talking about it to others, crying about it, writing about it, recognizing that time heals, and getting involved in activities to make the loss less prominent in your life.

* **A healthier view.** "While losing a relationship may be painful, I can mourn and move on."

6

◆ **Relationship belief.** "It is better to be with someone destructive than to be alone."

⇒ **Exploration.** Destructive relationships damage your emotional health and your self-esteem. It may be difficult to find healthy people, but it is worth the search. The more time spent in destructive relationships, the less likely you are to find better ones. For some people in early recovery, their only trustworthy relationships are with treaters such as therapists or counselors, and that is okay for now. Over time, you can build a safe support network.

* **A healthier view.** "It is better to be alone than in a bad relationship."

7

◆ **Relationship belief.** "Good relationships are easy."

⇒ **Exploration.** All relationships require effort: to begin them, maintain them, resolve conflicts, be responsible to each other, be supportive of each other, and end them if need be. It is realistic to expect a relationship to take work at times.

* **A healthier view.** "A good relationship requires effort but is worth it."

8

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I must take care of everyone else first; my needs come last."

⇒ **Exploration.** While taking care of others is admirable, if it is at your expense, it is an unhealthy pattern. Some people make great efforts to take care of others, but no one takes care of them. If you are not feeling supported or helped in return, you are likely to resent it over time and may compensate by "feeding" yourself through excesses of alcohol, drugs, food, or other addictions. In good relationships, caring goes both ways.

* **A healthier view.** "I need relationships in which both people's needs are respected."

9

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I must be liked by everyone."

⇒ **Exploration.** If you have felt isolated, rejected, or neglected, it is understandable that you may want to compensate by seeking everyone's approval. But in trying to please others too much, you can lose yourself. A healthier approach is to cultivate a few good relationships with safe people whom you genuinely like. A more selective approach allows you to focus your energy on strengthening who you are and caring for a small number of relationships that truly matter. No one can be liked by everyone anyway!

* **A healthier view.** "I need to cultivate relationships with a few people who really matter."

(cont.)

10

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I have no value to other people."

∞ **Exploration.** If you have been stuck in PTSD and substance abuse, you may view yourself as not worth very much. Developing a sense of yourself as desirable and valuable may take time. The best strategy is to keep progressing in your recovery. Both PTSD and substance abuse lower your self-esteem; recovery improves it. You can come to respect who you are, and, almost like magic, you will find that other people do too.

* **A healthier view.** "With recovery, I can respect myself more, and others will too."

11

◆ **Relationship belief.** "I am not _____ enough for a relationship."

∞ **Exploration.** Some people believe they are not good enough for a relationship because they need to be more attractive, thin, smart, funny, confident, clean and sober, recovered from PTSD . . . and so forth. But *acceptance* is the key to good relationships—acceptance of who you are right now, and acceptance of the other person. Acceptance in a relationship is like sunlight to a plant; it allows it to grow.

* **A healthier view.** "Acceptance is the basis of healthy relationships."

Ideas for a Commitment

Commit to one action that will move your life forward!

It can be anything you feel will help you, or you can try one of the ideas below.

Keeping your commitment is a way of respecting, honoring, and caring for yourself.

- ✦ Option 1: Identify one way in which *you* can be different in a current relationship. Try being that new way this week and observe what happens.
- ✦ Option 2: Your relationship with yourself is the basis of your relationships with others. Go through Handout 1 and circle any healthy beliefs that could help improve your relationship with yourself. For example, could you learn to seek understanding and solutions rather than blaming yourself? If you want, you could also write a paragraph on this topic.
- ✦ Option 3: *Change the script*. Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side, write a script of current conflict with someone in your life (what you say, what the other person says). On the right side, write how *you* could respond differently.
- ✦ Option 4: Fill out the Safe Coping Sheet. (See below for an example applied to this topic.)

EXAMPLE OF THE SAFE COPING SHEET APPLIED TO THIS TOPIC

	Old Way	New Way
Situation	Every time I try to be honest with my father, he criticizes me.	Every time I try to be honest with my father, he criticizes me.
★ Your Coping ★	I get scared and shut up. I want to be able to be honest with him without getting criticized. This makes me want to get high.	I need to remember that he is who he is. I've told him many times what I want, and he has not changed. It is probably healthier for me to not talk to him honestly at this point, as he can't handle that. I need to focus on other people.
Consequence	I feel stuck and depressed.	I would feel less depressed, and wouldn't feel like I need to get high.

How safe is your old way of coping? _____ How safe is your new way of coping? _____

Rate from 0 (not at all safe) to 10 (totally safe)

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