

The Positive Potential of Our Relationships

BY DR. DAVIDICUS WONG

burnabydivision.ca

WHY RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

1. Social support from friends, family and partners are key to your emotional health and resilience.
2. Harmony in the home is essential to your wellbeing.
3. Loving friends and family support your health. They are your **safe haven** in this world
4. Conflicts at home, work or school are major sources of stress and contribute to anxiety and mood disorders.
 - EFT (emotion-focused therapy) works on our emotions in typical interactions and strengthens our attachments (Reference: Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love by Dr. Sue Johnson)

THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT

1. **Incompatibility** (religion, culture, language, introversion/extraversion, values and beliefs.)
 - **Game changers:** incompatible values (core beliefs about right and wrong) abuse (physical, emotional or sexual).
2. **Cognitive Distortions:** when we start seeing each other differently.
 - **Mind reading:** making negative assumptions about the other's intentions without checking them out.
 - **Excessive blaming:** when something goes wrong (or is left undone), it's the other's fault.
 - **All or nothing thinking:** seeing all of the BAD (and none of the good) in the other, in your relationship and your situation.
3. **Neglect and loss of intimacy:** too often we can let the rest of our lives take over our life together.

4. **Feelings change:** we mistake the inevitable fading of infatuation and romantic love with not being in love. With attention and commitment, we can transition into enduring love, from passion to compassion. Our children grow up, we become engaged in new interests and activities, and we may stop doing enjoyable things together.

The quirks that endear us when we fall in love eventually irritate us when the honeymoon is over, but they are the things we'll miss when our loved ones are gone.

THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES (GARY CHAPMAN)

1. Words of Affirmation
2. Quality Time
3. Receiving Gifts
4. Acts of Service
5. Physical Touch

THE QUALITIES OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

1. **Mutual respect** for our individuality, our feelings and our ideas
2. **Commitment to one another and to our relationship.** We express our commitment with time, thought, patience, effort and a willingness to work together.
3. **Acceptance and management of the differences that make us unique:** personality, passions, preferences, spirituality, customs. Extraverts are energized by people and parties; introverts need solitude to recharge. Extraverts need to speak to think; introverts think before they'll speak. With acceptance and understanding, we complement one another.
4. **Unconditional love:** mutual positive regard, compassion and good will.

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NURTURING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

1. **Foster emotional intimacy.** Agree on a habit of checking in with one another each day. How are you feeling? How was your day?
2. **Show your affection.** Express your positive feelings. Remember the 5 languages of love and the human brain's **negativity bias**: *you need to see and say 5 positives for every negative.*
3. **Schedule regular dates, family time and time with good friends.** Commit your time to *who* matters most. Don't wait 'til there's time; make time!
4. **Communicate in a healthy way.** Take a breath and let anger cool before you react. Acknowledge the other's feelings and point of view. Express how you feel without blame.
5. **Right Speech:** Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it kind?

THE FOUR THINGS THAT MATTER MOST (DR. IRA BYOCK)

1. "Please forgive me."
2. "I forgive you."
3. "Thank you."
4. "I love you."

THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-CARE

- What you eat (What you put into your body)
- What you do (physical activity and rest)
- How you feel (emotional wellbeing)
- How you connect (healthy relationships)

FROM LOST CONNECTIONS BY JOHANN HARI

Nine Causes for Depression and Anxiety:

- **Disconnection from:** meaningful work, other people, meaningful values, childhood trauma, status and respect, the natural world, a hopeful and secure future, genes, brain changes
- **Reconnections – or a Different Kind of Antidepressant:** Reconnection to other people, social prescribing, meaningful work, meaningful values, sympathetic joy and overcoming the addiction to the self, acknowledging and overcoming childhood trauma, restoring the future

CREATING CONNECTIONS OF A HAPPIER WORLD

1. Recognize the feelings and experiences of others are just like yours
2. Recognize our connection and interdependency.
3. Recognize our shared challenges. **The great problems of our world can only be solved with collective creativity and care.**
4. Build bridges and strengthen our connections. This requires the support of our institutions *but it begins with us.*

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LISTENING STYLES

1. Not listening
2. Listening to respond
3. Listen to understand

WHO ARE YOU?

You are a part of a greater whole:
a member of a family,
supported by a network of friends and family,
neighbours and peers.

You are a member of our community,
a citizen of this nation, part of humankind,
connected to all living things:
an inseparable part of nature and this planet.

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THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR MAKING MARRIAGE WORK (JOHN M. GOTTMAN)

1. Enhance your Love Maps reflecting a deep, detailed understanding of one another
2. Nurture fondness and admiration
3. Turn toward each other instead of away – even in brief interactions and small talk
4. Partners let the other influence their decisions by taking the other's ideas and feelings into account
5. Solvable problems are minor short-term issues that we can squabble over and turn into major arguments. Perpetual problems come up repeatedly over time. Both can be major sources of conflict but we can find ways to talking about them without distressing one another.
6. When we feel trapped in a gridlock – stuck in the same recurrent problems, we each have to accept our own responsibility with productive dialogue
7. Create shared meaning. Though we may differ greatly in our values and preferences, as a couple we need to develop a shared agreement on our roles in the relationship.

POSITIVE SENSITIVE OVERRIDE (JOHN AND JULIE GOTTMAN)

Where a partner's positive overall view of the relationship and the other overrides occasional negative behaviours.

This can be nurtured:

- 5:1 ratio: maintain at least 5 positive interactions for every negative one
- Nurturing friendship by turning towards the other instead of away
- Appreciation: recognizing the other's strengths and expressing gratitude

WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

If you're struggling with relationships or difficult emotions, speak with your family doctor. They can support you and connect you with local resources.

Burnaby Family Life

Counselling for women who have experienced abuse or violence, and for children and youth who have witnessed violence.

- Website: burnabyfamilylife.org
- Phone: 604-659-2200

Cameray Child & Family Services

Community counselling, education, outreach, and advocacy for individuals and families.

- Address: 5623 Imperial St, Burnaby
- Website: cameray.ca
- Phone: 604-436-9449

Burnaby Neighbourhood House

Community programs and support for all ages.

South Burnaby

- 4460 Beresford St (beside Metrotown SkyTrain)
- Phone: 604-431-0400
- Email: info@burnabynh.ca

North Burnaby

- 4908 Hastings St
- Phone: 604-294-5444
- Email: simoneb@burnabynh.ca

RECOMMENDED READING

No Bad Parts — Richard C. Schwartz (2021)

You Are the One You've Been Waiting For — Richard C. Schwartz (2023)

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work — John Gottman & Nan Silver (2015)

Love by Design — Sara Nasserzadeh (2025)

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