

Developing Healthy Relationships

Based on the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie

Written By Roshanda Glenn

Behavior Solutions Academy

Building strong relationships is essential to our overall health, happiness, and well-being. People who have strong, supportive, and healthy relationships tend to have a strong sense of belonging, have an increased sense of self-worth, feel happier in their lives, and feel less alone.

However, sometimes we find it hard to put ourselves out there. We feel that revealing our true selves to others is risky because it will open us up to other people's judgments and possible rejection. In addition, character traits such as shyness, introversion, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem, as well as mental health issues such as social anxiety may also cause us to block efforts to connect. We instead engage in safety-seeking and avoidance behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, looking at our phones, hiding in the classroom, or refusing to engage in group activities.



While learning to connect with others may, at times, be nerve-racking, it can also be an extremely rewarding endeavor. Luckily, the art of connecting with others and building strong relationships can be taught. Knowing what to do and how to do it often provides us with just the level of support we need to begin the process of building lasting friendships.

Here are three strategies you can use to begin building strong, long-lasting relationships:

Don't criticize - How excited are you to hang out with someone that criticizes you? Not very excited, right? Criticizing others actively works against relationship building. In fact, criticizing others will only inspire them to want to criticize you in return. This is called the Law of Reciprocity - you will receive from others the same treatment that you give.

Another reason that criticizing is futile is because it puts people on the defensive. They will spend their energy trying to justify themselves and their reality, which damages their pride, diminishes their sense of importance, and creates resentment. This resentment can not only demoralize those you are trying to connect with, but it can also cause them to actively work against you.

Instead of criticizing people, work to understand them. Step outside of your opinions and beliefs and try to see the world from the other person's point of view. As much as you want others to understand your point of view, you must work to understand others.

Show honest and sincere appreciation - There is only one way to get someone to connect with you and that is to make them want to connect with you. Showing sincere and honest appreciation is a surefire way to make someone want to connect with you because it shows others that you honor, value, and respect them and their contributions. It also uplifts the other person and makes them feel like they are important to you.

Appreciation is a fundamental human need because it makes us feel like we are important and valued. Appreciation is vital nourishment for our self-esteem. It feeds our soul. But don't confuse flattery with appreciation. Flattery is selfish and insincere and will not work. Only sincere and honest appreciation works. When you show appreciation for someone else's ideas and efforts, you not only improve their life and their attitude, but you improve your life and your attitude as well.

Actively Listen - Listening to others creates strong relationships by showing that we value and respect the other person's thoughts and opinions. To truly listen, temporarily put your wants and needs aside and give the other person your undivided attention. Turn off and put away all distractions such as headphones, cell phones, and computers. Nonverbal cues such as maintaining eye contact, nodding or shaking your head, showing appropriate facial expressions such as smiling and frowning, and slightly leaning your body forward show the other person that you are actively listening to them and are genuinely trying to understand what they have to say.

Try not to interrupt the other person; and if you do, do so with the goal of either seeking clarity or gaining a deeper understanding of the other person's perspective. And Remember Rule #1! Do not criticize the other person's point of view; for doing so will only create resentment. Instead, show empathy while listening. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to understand what they want and how they feel. This builds trust and rapport.

As with many things in life nothing is guaranteed. While using the above strategies will not turn everyone you meet into your best friend for life, they will provide the blueprint you need to help you improve your current relationships as well as establish new ones.

The Golden Rule in relationship building is you should treat others how you want to be treated. This is called the reciprocity principle of relationships or the law of reciprocity. Simply put, if you want to be praised, appreciated, and heard, you must first do the same for others. (827)