

Relationships Self-Coaching Guide

PERMA states that **Relationships** contribute to our wellbeing and bring us happiness. [See SCG – ‘How can I improve my wellbeing?’ for more about PERMA.] People who have meaningful, positive relationships and active social lives are much happier than those who don’t. Also, they have better physical health and psychological wellbeing.





As ‘social beings’ we all have a natural desire to connect with others and be part of a group. This is why we have relationships with family, friends, and work colleagues; these groups give us emotional support when times are tough.

How can I build and maintain strong relationships?

It’s widely accepted that communication is really important in building and maintaining a good relationship. Our ability to keep talking constructively whilst managing negatives emotions is crucial. Behaviours such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness and obstructing can be extremely destructive.

Research suggests that our ability to respond enthusiastically to good news in a relationship is more important than how we communicate during the bad times. There are four main ways we can respond:

- 1) **Passive constructive**: we respond unenthusiastically, or delay our response
- 2) **Passive destructive**: we don’t respond, or just talk about ourselves
- 3) **Active destructive**: we respond negatively, actively quashing the good news
- 4) **Active constructive**: we respond with genuine enthusiasm, giving full attention, asking more about the good news

Constructive	Unenthusiastic Unenergetic Delayed  "... that's nice"	Enthusiastic Authentic Attentive  "That's great! Tell me more. What ...?"
	Ignored Avoided Changed topic  "Well, my day was ..."	Negative Quashed Dismissed  "That will cause a problem, because ..."
	Passive	Active

Active constructive is the only way we should respond to someone’s good news which will help them feel even better about it. In doing this, we’re supporting them and enabling our relationship to thrive.

For a healthy relationship there needs to be both positive and negative emotions. For it to flourish, there should be many (say, five times) more positive interactions happening than negative ones.

Building and maintaining a strong relationship requires us to invest time and effort, on an ongoing basis, irrespective of whether we have known someone for a short or long time. It’s important for us to keep in touch with them and ask significant questions, so we find out their thoughts, desires and needs.

Further information:

Here’s an example of applying [Active Constructive Responding](#) from the US Army’s Comprehensive Soldier & Family Fitness, Resilience Training Programme produced by the University of Pennsylvania.

“Communication to a relationship is like oxygen to life. Without it ... it dies.” Tony Gaskins

More Information

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