

Assess one of your key relationships

Focus on one particular relationship, either at work, home, or socially — circle 1, 2 or 3.

	Rarely	Sometimes	Never
Conflict escalates into major battles with blaming, criticisms, or bringing up the past	1	2	3
The other person criticises or belittles my thoughts and beliefs	1	2	3
The other person seems to view my words or actions as criticism	1	2	3
When we have to work together, it's like we're on opposite teams	1	2	3
I hold back from telling him/her what I really think and feel	1	2	3
I think seriously about ending this relationship	1	2	3
It's not safe to tell the truth in this relationship	1	2	3
When there is a disagreement, we end up avoiding the subject and hope that 'it goes away'	1	2	3

8 to 12 "Clear Sailing"

The relationship seems in pretty good shape with rare or occasional swells to throw you off course.

13 to 17 "Light Swell"

Quite a few large waves, although you seem to stay on course. Caution and some relationship building required. Use the 5 Keys.

18 to 24 "Storm Warning"

If you are not already in it, there is likely to be trouble ahead. Major relationship building is needed before you both sink! Or, if this relationship is not important, think about giving it away!

This quiz is only a rough guide — if you have any concerns about your important relationships, use the 5 Keys or contact your EAP.

The ideas and strategies outlined in this brochure are often beneficial, but are not comprehensive. Assistance from a professional counsellor may help you to make quicker progress. Remember to use your workplace EAP as a resource.

Call your EAP on 1800 056 076

Gryphon Psychology provide a free professional, independent and confidential counselling and consulting service. This service assists employees in both the private and public sectors to find solutions to any work or personal/family problems that are affecting their quality of life and which may be impacting on their effectiveness at work. If needed, our counsellors can make referrals to specialist agencies for particular problems, or for ongoing support.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is completely confidential, and provided by your employer at no cost to you.



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Very few people live or work in isolation. Most of us have many different types of relationships — acquaintances, work colleagues, friendships, family ties, and intimate personal relationships. Each type of relationship needs slightly different skills to maintain and grow. Yet there are some basic keys that can be adapted to suit the various different relationships in your life.

Key #1: Attending and listening

These are the most basic communication skills, yet also the most important. Most of us think that we are good listeners but, in reality, much of the time we're reacting, judging, filtering, advising, rehearsing replies, or just plain distracted. It gets even worse if we are emotionally caught up in the situation.

The goal is to be an active listener. This means actively trying to hear what the other person is really saying — with their words, tone of voice, body movements, and facial expressions.

If we have listened actively, we can then paraphrase — reflect back what we think we heard, but using our own words. This will either confirm that we got it right, or clarify and correct the message if we misheard or misread the communication. Either way, we win because the other person feels listened to.

Key #2: Expressing needs and feelings

A second key to maintaining good communication in relationships is being able to tell the other person how we think or feel about an issue. Of course, the more clearly and non-defensively we do this the better.

Most people can get a sense of whether we are upset or happy. They can vaguely sense agitation, anger, joy, calmness, etc. If our words match what they sense, they will feel comfortable with us.

If, however, they sense frustration, and we say, "I feel fine", they may feel ill at ease and untrusting of us. This is true for business relationships and personal relationships alike. People will have no choice but to guess our true state, and research shows that they usually get it wrong. No wonder we feel misunderstood!

Beware when the relationship is emotionally charged. When negative feelings arise in a relationship, we need to be careful not to judge or blame the other person under the guise of saying what is really going on for us. It's one thing to say "I feel angry when you leave work early because there's so much work to do", compared with "You're a slacker and don't pull your own weight!" Describe your feelings rather than attack with them.

Key #3: Reciprocity

Reciprocity simply means a balanced exchange of energy — whether it be words, labour, money, or affection. Workers will go 'beyond the call of duty' for a manager who gives them respect and reinforcement for their efforts. A spouse may forgo many personal wishes in return for an affectionate and loving companion. A person may sacrifice a much-anticipated social event to support a friend in crisis, knowing that the friend would be there for him/her if the situation were reversed.

In fact, human beings have a deep need to reciprocate. We will even reluctantly do favours for someone because we feel obliged. Alternatively, have you ever felt 'used' in a relationship — when you've done all the giving of effort, favours, or affection?

Key #4: Validation

Everybody needs to feel validated. That is, we all need others to let us know that we're OK as a person. We can do this in relationships simply by accepting others feelings and thoughts as true for them.

Even when others are being critical of us, we can reply with something like "I understand, and I accept that's how you see it". This doesn't mean that you are giving in, or agreeing with them — you are simply allowing others the right to their opinions and feelings.

Every interaction in every relationship is an opportunity to validate. The people and relationships that are particularly important to you — whether work, social or personal — need validation. This is especially important when conflict arises.

Rather than give in to the natural tendency to be defensive or critical, try validating what is true for the other person. You may be surprised by the response you get!

Key #5: Conflict in relationships

Conflict is natural — neither good nor bad — it just is. It's not whether you have conflict in your relationships — it's what you do with that conflict. Many people treat conflict as a contest to be won or lost, which means that someone has to end up being wrong.

Next time you have conflict with someone, rather than seeing it as a battle to be won, try seeing it simply as a point of difference. Try even listening to and validating that difference, without either of you being wrong. Then look for a solution that works for both of you. It may surprise you to discover that conflict can lead to learning, co-operation, and better relationships!