

Make Your Relationship Bonds The Best

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Do you remember the old expression, “The ties that bind?” We need ties that bind us together, but we don’t want chains. We need a little freedom to move, grow, separate. How can we improve our relationships so we feel supported, not lonely or smothered? Welcome to the closeness – distance relationship puzzle.

As humans we need others, but how much and who changes as we change, based on our individual life experiences and temperaments. Relationships ground us, give us structure, a context to weave our lives around. If we didn’t have them, we would be lost, alone.

Several times in our lives we may feel the need to break out of patterns that limit our personal freedom to create, explore, be our best selves. We leave our families and high school friends for college, military service, and marriage. We adapt, grow, and make new ties. We actively choose new adventures or decide home is where the heart is. Then comes retirement and we may feel bound again, this time by snow and cold, and venture forth again.

Sometimes, others break patterns for us. There’s that cross-country move for a career promotion, a work lay-off or a divorce. Again, we make new friends, but may change our criteria for closeness and distance. And how can we keep those we love in our lives, even across great distances, while building new? How can we maintain our marriages when desires for closeness and distance differ?

Relationships that are too binding for some may feel like warm nests to others. Some of us are more extroverted, like lots of friends; others are more introverted, may want fewer, but lifetime friends. Then in later life, the high school Mr. Loner becomes Mr. Gregarious and Ms. Popular in high school becomes Ms. Spiritual Solitude. Change is inevitable.

Here are some questions that might help us create our best relationship balance.

- Do we need more or fewer people in our lives?
- Are we receiving the love and support we want?
- More importantly, are we giving the love and support others want and need, and not what we think they should need or we want for ourselves?
- Do we need more freedom to explore or are we tired of change and want to nest?
- Do we need new friends who share similar interests?
- Do we need to build new experiences with our life partners?
- Do we take responsibility for our own happiness or give it away to others?
- Do we need more or less structure to be creative and successful?
- How can I please others and still respect my needs?
- Do I need more closeness or apartness at this stage of my life?

I think there are no correct answers to these questions. Non-the-less, even if we're unaware, we answer these questions and make relationship decisions daily through our thoughts and actions. I invite you to discuss them with your family and friends. Here's a simple decision-making guide to improve our bonds with others.

- If an answer feels good to both parties in a relationship, say yes. Otherwise, say no. If you get your way and your partner is unhappy, you lose.
- If you feel sad, angry or hurt around a person, limit your time with him or her. Let go of relationships that are not mutual in feeling and respect. Try not to judge, your goals may just not be compatible at this point in time.
- If you feel great around a person, spend more time with him or her.
- Identify and move toward people you want in your life, who also want you in their lives.

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