

Building Stability

Relationship

Relationship dynamics such as D/s and poly are additional layers atop “vanilla” relationships, demanding skills that often go above and beyond the fundamentals issues found in basic relationships. In fact they often create far more problems than many believe they will solve because there are more complexities involved. This is why, regardless of your specific dynamic or lifestyle, there needs to be a foundational set of skills that allows you to give priority to relationship stability first.

Here are some fundamentals everyone should learn to grasp...

Practicing Active Listening

Giving whole attention without trying to plan on how to respond, defending yourself, or trying to solve problems. In a relationship so much is based on the feelings of being supported and accepted by being heard by your partner. As your partner speaks, any questions by the listener should attempt to engage their partner further – to continue or invite a deeper connection and understanding. A speaker is taking much risk by being vulnerable to open up and share their voice, the listener has the responsibility of fostering intimacy by seeking to understand, relate, or show support. Without this, we often feel isolated and unaccepted, even in

long-term relationships.



Avoid Closing Connections

The only thing consistent in the vast array of alternative lifestyles is the focus on Connection. However, there is much that people do in a relationships which can turn a connection off, distance it, or reduce it. Pay special attention to avoid creating the kinds of messages that create distance or limit connections such as closed body posture, rolling eyes, being absolutely silent, walking/driving away, using sarcasm, etc. The whole point is to connect, to feel connected – why sacrifice the very thing that drives us to a relationship in the first place?

Conversation Has a Request Implied

Sometimes it's exceedingly difficult to ask someone for help or support, even more so when we care deeply about someone in a relationship. Something to bear in mind is that just about any conversation has some kind of request to it, even if it's just to impart information. Unspoken requests behind each discussion includes but is not limited to: I want you to hear me, or know me, or understand me; I need comfort, a hug, or show of emotional support; I need your help & assistance, but not sure how to ask; I need a certain action or behavior stop as I find it hurtful; I need you to listen so I can inform

you of something I believe is important.

Set Expectations for Success

Setting expectations is a key part of creating a good conversation, and that's not always easy in a relationship. If you've ever heard the words "we need to sit down and talk..." that will almost certainly send a person into anxiety because it provides no other information and the mind will spin wildly to fill in the scenario (usually worst case scenarios). Similarly, trying to have an important conversation when you headed out the door or just coming home to the kids is also unproductive. They're too busy, fragmented, and trying to switch gears to really focus. A successful outcome is one where connection is furthered, and the need is able to be satisfied in some way. You need to set expectations with "just enough" information. To that end, bear the following in mind...

- **What's the purpose** – set the expectation with a request for time and purpose (from your perspective). Since every conversation has an implied request, make it explicit instead of implied, such as "I need 30min of your time to discuss some scheduling conflicts", or "I would like to spend about an hour to discuss some distance I've been feeling between us".
- **Ensure both have the resources** – ask when is a good time so all involved can reserve an appropriate amount of undisturbed time and personal energy to focus. Sometimes that means taking a break for long or complex things, so you can recharge or regain composure or clarity. Conversations shouldn't have to be an exercise in predator/prey and chased down and killed.
- **We are different** – Avoid the trap of projecting our expectations or responses on to the other person. None of us may identify, react, or make the same choices to the same matters at hand – and that's okay. Just

listening and acknowledging someone's opening and sharing is a form of showing support.

- **State the need** – at the end of a conversation, try to state the need you have in its most basic of term; such as feeling loved and accepted, being supported, resolving a problem, or just needing someone to listen, etc. This let's people know what they might need to do or consider.

Radical Acceptance

Humans are multifaceted and complex beings with individual histories, inclinations, and perspectives that may be both shared and unique. We cannot pick and choose from these in a person with whom we are in a relationship. People are not a Chinese menu nor a car buying experience with various packages and options to choose from. We must accept the whole of the person, their benefits, their strengths, their weaknesses, and their shortcomings all. This often means seeing the individual and appreciating them for who they are, the whole of them, not just the parts you like best. Consider for yourself if you are fully prepared to accept them as they are without trying to pick and choose the parts you like and the parts you don't.

Focus on Contentment vs Happiness

Building a lasting relationship requires our goals and values are in accord so we can live a life in relative harmony. This is often what is meant by contentment – a meaningful and fulfilling life with our partners rather than one that looks to build a fairy tale fantasy or constantly seeking elation. This moves us from focusing on potential and possibilities, wishes and dreams, and disappointment or frustration. It is not that dreams or wishes or unhealthy in and of themselves, as much of that is what provides some of our goals, but they can become toxic when they preclude reality. When they become dysfunctional, our fantasies and dreams become a block to a

more satisfying life and relationship because it focuses on our failings versus our successes. Instead, focus on seeing the contentment and learning to accept our partner in a more genuine and authentic way.

-Sir Vice

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