

Web-Based Radio Show

Building Healthy Personalities and Healthy Relationships:

How healthy relationships embrace the full range of the human dramas as part of that Relationship and how that characterizes a healthy individual and a healthy relationship


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Good morning. This is Dr. Greenspan coming to you via our Web-Based Radio Show. Thank you for joining us. Today we are going to talk about how to build healthy personalities and healthy relationships.

Healthy personalities and healthy relationships really come from the same basic fabric. Let's start with healthy personalities. To feel and be healthy in terms of your own personality and your own inner feeling states and your own inner psychology, you need to have a number of basic abilities or basic capacities. First is to feel secure. This means also feeling regulated, being able to regulate, or modulate, or control your moods, and being in charge of your body – being able to take in sights and sounds and smells and coordinate your actions to get what you want, and do so while feeling calm and collected, organized, focused, and attentive. So this ability for both being calm, attentive, and regulated, we call “building the fundamental sense of security.” Now obviously, that is an important foundation, but if we picture a pyramid for a healthy person, and there are relationships that favor this, that help this along, and relationships that don't. We'll come to that in a few minutes. But certainly, this is a foundation for healthy relationships in a healthy person.

The second component, or what might be the second tier of our pyramid, is the ability to engage with others with warmth, intimacy, and trust. In other words, the ability to form relationships. Human beings are made for relationships. They weren't made for relating to computers (although they do) or just telephones or just automobiles. They are made to relate with one another. That is the gift of mother nature to human beings, the gift of being able to form relationships. It is built into the wiring of our brain, it is fundamental in our evolution of our species, and without it we




wouldn't be able to build families and communities and have advanced civilizations. So our ability to love, to be intimate, to care about others comes from the second ability – to form relationships. Certainly an important feature of relationships is to make them such that both parties can experience this sense of intimacy. Now, relationships are not as simple as they may appear. It isn't just the ability to form intimacy or closeness with someone else, it's the ability to experience that across a broad range of human feelings, good relationships or healthy relationships are ones that have the capacity for love, intimacy, and warmth, but also for assertiveness and curiosity, for expressions of sadness and disappointment, for experiencing anger and even outrage. Healthy relationships can really embrace all of the human dramas and all the feelings that characterize human functioning. In other words, a full relationship is one that is rich and broad and flexible so that you can be insistent and assertive when you need to be, and warm, cuddly, cozy, and relaxed when you need to be, curious when the situation calls for it, and even angry at times when life demands it.

So, healthy relationships embrace the full range of the human dramas as part of that relationship. Again that characterizes the individual and that characterizes a healthy individual and a healthy relationship.


The third tier of our pyramid; the third level, begins the capacity to go beyond simply forming relationships and feeling secure. It is the ability to interact and communicate. Now this starts off with the most fundamental level – communicating with the simplest of gestures: head nods, smiles, little emotional expressions like a frown, or an expression of anger, or an expression of happiness, joy, or glee, a sparkle in the eye, a tilt of the head, a movement of the hips. All of these communicate different feelings. In healthy development, we have the ability to experience a wide range of affects or feelings or emotions at this basic level, and express them through our gestures. Even before babies can find words, they can use gestures, and we can see a wide range of emotional expressions in an 8-month old baby.

All of us have this capacity, and in fact we trust it more and more in one another when we see someone looking happy than what they say. If they say, "I'm happy" and they look sad, we say, "Oh, you look kind of sad." So it is that ability to experience it, and express it without even thinking about it characterizes healthy development. It is also the ability to read it in others. Usually we can't read it unless we can express it ourselves. If we don't know what true caring or empathy feels like, it is hard to experience it from others or if we don't know what anger feels like or assertiveness or



curiosity. So we have to experience all of the emotions, be able to communicate them at this most gut level without even using words, and to be able to read the nonverbal cues and the emotions of others. So we are always having an emotional dialogue with others: babies with their caregivers, married partners with each other, good friends with one another, students with teachers, workers with their bosses. We are always looking for cues in someone. Do they like me? Don't they like me? We always look to this nonverbal system and the ability to have it and express it and read it in others is fundamental to our healthy development; to our ability to communicate. It is the first rung of human communication.


It also serves another purpose. It helps us differentiate ourselves or define ourselves, and define ourselves as distinct entities or little persons or big persons as separate from others. It gives definition as to who we are. So this ability for back-and-forth communication with others through, let's say, emotional expressions, I think a little baby, let's say a 7 or 8-month old who smiles and gets a smile back and their eyes glisten and they flash an even bigger smile back and get a little sound back from mommy and so forth and so on, what is that little baby experiencing? They are experiencing, gee my joy, pleasure, and happiness gets happiness from mommy. So it goes more than just affirming what you are feeling to see it in the eyes of the other person, it helps you, in a sense, feel who you are. You are a happy person because you are receiving a happy response back. In other words, if you got no response back, there would be nothing on the outside to separate you from or to distinguish you from. If you just smiled and nothing came back, or someone simultaneously did the same thing you were doing like a mirror image, you wouldn't experience very much in terms of a distinct sense of who you are. But if you do something intentional with will, flash a smile or flash a frown or flash a curious look, you get something distinct back – you get a curious look back or a no-no back as you are looking over at that favorite China of mommy's and her head shakes no, you get something back. Then you are defining and further defining who you are, that you wanted to touch that China and that answer was no or that you wanted to touch mommy's nose and the answer was a big nodding yes with a big smile and a gleam in her eye that made her happy. So you are beginning to define yourself in terms of the response of the other person and to the degree that they respond to each of your emotional expressions and each of your gestures differently, you have a very sensitive and what we call "differentiated" or subtle self definition – it has many parts to it. Whereas if your partner just gives you the same response each time, "oh that's nice" and gives you a happy smile, there is no difference. You then



don't define in yourself the differences between anger, happiness, curiosity or sadness quite to the same degree because there is no different responses back. So it's that ability for back-and-forth communication with different responses coming back to you for each of your responses that gives you a differentiated or a highly defined sense of who you are. So that contributes to an emerging sense of yourself as a person; as a distinct person. And it's your beginning with appreciating the reality of the external world because it is, again, different from you, it isn't a mirror image of you, it gives you different responses, so you are experiencing the external world in a special way, and you are experiencing it as something outside yourself which helps you experience the subjective inner you with what you are experiencing and the objective outer you – the part that comes from outside yourself. That helps you later establish or maintain your reality testing. Again, if we are in relationships with people who don't respond to us at all or don't give us any feedback that is different than our different feelings, we get a little shaky with what's real and not real, what is our own fantasy and what is subjective and what is objective.


This signaling system that we all have serves many, many important purposes in a healthy personality, and again it is the ability to read, experience, and respond to the emotional signals in ourselves, and in others. Healthy relationships have this in terms of back-and-forth communication.

Now, the fourth level on the next level of our pyramid, is to take the same ability, but make it more complex – use this complex signaling system for problem solving. We see this when a toddler takes daddy by the hand, points to the toy, gets daddy to pick them up, gives daddy a big pat on the head, vocalizations, daddy points to the toy, the toddler points further to show daddy exactly the toy they want, gives daddy another big smile, makes an excited sound, and daddy helps the toddler reach for the toy. This could keep up for another 10-20 back-and-forth interactions until the toy is down on the floor being played with by both toddler and daddy. So this example of shared problem solving is how this system gets used. What is interesting here is that all healthy people have this capacity to put together many of these back-and-forth interactions to solve problems, and this helps them form a more complex sense of who they are as a person. It helps them see the world in terms of patterns rather than recognizing this person as nice all the time or this person tends to be mean spirited most of the time or this person is nice half the time and mean spirited half the time. So now we have the ability to read and respond to not just emotional signals, but read and



respond to whole patterns. We can sense whether we are safe or in danger, whether we are in a trusting situation or a situation that is not to be trusted. We can determine whether we are about to be approved of or disapproved of. So safety, danger, approval, disapproval, feelings like pride and a sense of accomplishment that comes from a pattern of how the other person treats us; a sense of mastery – again from a pattern of how the other person treats us, are all patterns of feelings that we are now beginning to experience because our ability for many interactions in a row that help us solve problems and operate in the world in terms of patterns - a very important part of healthy development and healthy relationships.


Now we get to the next level in our pyramid where we begin relying on these earlier steps of a healthy personality, to more advanced steps that have to do with ideas and images. Now ideas are images that have to do with our emotions and all of our senses. When we form a picture of our mothers, for example, or our boyfriends or our husbands or our children, it is a multi-sensory picture. We can visualize that person, we can hear their voice, and we experience them emotionally – there is a feeling tone about that person. If anyone closes their eyes and experiences another person, there is a real feeling tone about that person. Every person has a distinct feeling tone and distinct sounds and sights and movement patterns that contribute to that feeling tone. So it is a rich, multi sensory image of the person or the thing. This is what we mean by ideas. So this allows us to, as children, to do pretend play, and it allows us as adults to think and to picture our worlds. Now we can picture the world from the inside. We can have been in a situation and then picture that situation later and we can change it around. We can take a cocktail party that we are at and redo what we said and picture a different outcome instead of tell a joke in an off color way, we retell it in a better way. Instead of being quiet and passive when the person insulted us, we tell them off and we can even feel good about imagining how we are going to do that. We can also think of new ideas; new ways to solve problems; new solutions to problems, all through our ability to think. This all comes from combining ideas together, manipulating ideas, creating new ideas, and so forth. We now experience ourselves in terms of ideas but no longer just a person of different patterns or a person of different relationships or a person of a certain level of security. Now we are a person with different images we have associated with ourselves. We are a curious, assertive, kind person, or we are a jealous, mean-spirited person. We have lots of ways of experiencing, now, the world through ideas. Obviously, relationships that use a lot of exchange of ideas and share feelings and thoughts together – foster this. Because here too, just like when we are



talking about the basic emotions, you can have ideas that embrace all the themes of life – happiness, intimacy, sadness, disappointment, loss, assertiveness, anger, curiosity, excitement – or some that are narrow where you only feel depressed or only feel angry or only feel sad or only feel superficially happy. So here, the breadth of the feelings you encounter in relationships will broaden the way in which you experience your own internal world, particularly during your formative relationships growing up and the ones that sustain you in adult life can either further broaden you or further restrict you.

Then we get to the next level of our pyramid where we are combining ideas together. We see this in children when they answer a questions such as “why” you are happy, “Well, because mommy you gave me a present” or “you gave me a hug” or “it’s so much fun to play with you.” So the child is combining their ideas with your ideas. We see this with adults too where they explore problems together and combine ideas where they respond to one another. So the married couple that explores together of why they feel a certain way, why they are having a good day or a bad day and bounces ideas off one another is furthering this capacity to connect ideas together; they aren’t beating to their own drummer or they aren’t living in their own fantasy lives; they live in the reality of shared problem solving. This further establishes the ability for appreciating reality and for thinking because you have to combine ideas together to be able to solve problems, like they want to know why something happened, why your child is being upset today, why your husband might be ignoring you, or may be paying more attention than usual.

Then, this ability for combining ideas together undergoes many more advance stages where we get into what we call multi-causal thinking, where you can give many reasons for things, or gray area thinking where you can look at the subtleties and the shades of gray in your thoughts, rather than being locked into all-or-nothing thinking where you only see the world in terms of red or white, or only in terms of extremes. So this enables you to appreciate the subtleties of the world and the subtlety of relationships. And that paves a pathway for reflective thinking where you can both individually and then together with others take a step away from yourself and think reflectively and you can say things like, “Gee, I’m angrier than I usually am in this situation” or “I’m happier than I typically am, I wonder what happened today?” You can be curious about yourself and see yourself from the perspective of your own self-observation, and that is a wonderful ability for a healthy personality pattern. Healthy relationships help each other do that.




Now here too, at the level of more advanced thinking, we also can distinguish those who embrace a breath of ideas, those relationships that have all the ideas from happiness, sadness, intimacy, sorrow, disappointment, anger, curiosity, to joy and excitement, to those that are only able to do this for a narrow group of feelings. There are those who can do it under stress, even when you are feeling extreme feelings – you still maintain your ability to think and use gray area thinking and live in the gray zone, so to speak, rather than having all-or-nothing patterns, which are very different from those who fall into the trap of all-or-nothing thinking whenever they get stressed or the problem is difficult or whenever they are tired.

So here too, a healthy personality embraces a broad range of thinking abilities, and even one that can be used in stressful times or even in difficult circumstances.

So here we see how healthy personalities and healthy relationships need to embrace certain basic fundamentals that we can picture in our pyramid. When we started in the beginning, we talked about how, for most of them, how the relationship and the personality are two sides of the same coin, except for the first one where we talked about security, coming out of being able to regulate yourself and pay attention to all the sights and sounds in the world in a calm, organized, and attentive way. Obviously, relationships that foster interest in the world and do so without overwhelming you and underwhelming you, that help you regulate, be calm, and enjoy all the experiences in the world and all the sights and sounds in the world foster this capacity for regulation and those that overwhelm you or underwhelm you don't.

So this is a quick tour, then, of both the components of our healthy pyramid - our healthy development – it can be thought of kind of like a food pyramid, just like you need proteins and carbohydrates and minerals, here you need regulating experiences, relationship experiences, experiences that build your emotional range, and ability to read and respond to emotional signals, your ability to problem solve with those emotional signals, and your ability to use ideas creatively and logically, and then do that across a full range of the human drama. So all experiences that do that build healthy personalities and healthy relationships, whether it is in a child or in an adult relationship.

What we have been able to do is distill these components of a healthy person in a healthy relationship into a series of suggestions that capture the essence of what people need to do to foster these healthy patterns, this healthy pyramid. I'm going to




mention these very, very briefly and then we'll be going into it in more depth at a later point. What I want to emphasize here is that each of these that we will cover in some depth, are sort of windows in to an important feature of our healthy pyramid. When practiced, they have a wide girth of application. In other words, it's a simple principle, but it does a lot. I'll exemplify this with the first one.

The first one is *give more and expect more*. So often in relationships, we say, "Why should I have to give all the time? Why can't I be the one getting?" But giving more means knowing the other person; knowing what their needs are, knowing what they like. That helps you tune in to them, it helps them be regulated and calm. It helps them form that relationship with you and trust you and form intimacy and give intimacy back. But then the "expecting more" part helps them become reciprocal. It helps them return the favor to you, to be intimate with you, to get to know you, to get to know how to foster your security and your relationship capacity. Now obviously you don't necessarily give indefinitely, one of our later principles will be "you can't get milk from a stone." You may have to come a point where you recognize that giving more and expecting more doesn't do the trick. For most people not standing on ceremonies, if they have that capacity for intimacy somewhere down deep in them, giving more and expecting more sets up these first two levels of our foundation.

Our second principle is *always try to bring out the confidence in others*. Bring out the best in others. Here, we see that by focusing that you really have to know them. You really have to know the other person to bring out the best in them. Undermining them and making them feel insecure will only bring out the worst in them. So when undermining people, they either withdraw, get angry, or get undermining back. When we help them feel confident, we help them bring out the best. We help them become more giving and more intimate and warmer and more interactive with us.

So we help those first two levels again by bringing out the confidence in others and we get into the third level by helping them communicate because they feel more assertive; they feel that they can communicate now. We get that in nonverbal and then again at the verbal level. They will be more open emotionally so there will be a richer, more emotional drama that we will be able to embrace with them as we bring out the best in others.


Now a third principle is *embrace differences*. Look for the differences in others. This is fundamental to getting to know the other person and this is fundamental to our



third and fourth levels which are communication, because in order to respond to people's different emotional expressions or different needs, we have to know how they are different from us. If we expect they are the same as us, when they are giving us a funny look, we'll think it means one thing when it really means another. So to read people accurately, we have to respect differences – cultural differences, for example, that being formal doesn't mean they are not loving because they come from a different culture. Or being a little more cautious may not mean that they are any less emotionally feeling person, or they may be a more deeply feeling person. Valuing differences and knowing differences helps you read and respond to their different communications and to who they are as a unique person. It helps you define them, and in turn helps them define you. So it helps with our third level and it is critical for our third level, and our fourth level of problem solving together.

Our fourth principle is *it is not always about you, even when it feels like it*. Here we all tend to personalize. We all tend to think, gee, when so-and-so was aloof or cool it's because they don't like me, not because they had a bad day. Again, this is essential to reading the other person - showing them empathy when they need it, showing them some limit-setting when they need that, or showing them support for their ambition and curiosity when they need that. To read them, and to accurately respond to their emotional signals and their problem solving patterns, we need to not always interpret it in our own terms. We can't personalize; it is not always about us. It helps us tune in to them and especially the subtlety of the communication system and define them. And in turn, we define ourselves because as we define them the relationship becomes more complex in terms of how they respond to us and the signaling system becomes more complex and more accurate. That is very, very important.

Now our next principle is to *balance the other person's mood*. In other words, don't try to match it, don't fall into the trap of "well, why should I treat him like he treats me?" Balance the other person's mood. This gets back to the beginning of our pyramid of fostering regulation and security and comfort. Because we are always, so to speak in a technical term, "counter regulating." If the person is overly excited, we are calm. If the person is overly subdued, we are kind of excited and trying to bring them out of it. Now we can't always do this, we aren't always in the mood to do this, but we do the best we can. We are balancing. So if the other person is starting a fire and getting angry, we don't want to throw fuel on the fire. We want to balance with calmness; help them get calm, collected, and regulated so they can get back into a good




mood. This helps them with their fundamental sense of security, their sense of regulation, and then, their ability to do all the other things that we are talking about.

Our next principle is *you can't get milk from a stone*. Here we are getting more into the world of feelings and here we are getting more into the world of ideas. Recognizing that you can't get milk from a stone helps you recognize that not all things are possible with all people and there are feelings like disappointment and accepting loss. It really strengthens your ability to do many of the other principles we were talking about because you can only give more and expect more from a person who is eventually capable of also giving more and expecting more. You can only bring out the best in others from a person who is ultimately capable of bringing out the best in you. You can only value differences if the person can value differences in you. And, you can only balance with another person if a person is capable of creating balance for you. If you are going to get to really know the other person and not personalize, a healthy relationship will mean that that person recognizes you and doesn't personalize so much. You can get it started. What this is about is don't be shy. Give more and expect more. Get it started. Get the healthy relationship cooking and then let it unfold. Don't preclude the other person growing in the relationship.

But sometimes, you just can't get milk from a stone. That means there is disappointment, there is loss, we all see relationships where people keep trying, keep trying, and we say that is masochistic, that this boyfriend or girlfriend will never love you the way you want them to or doesn't have the capacity for that. Or, they may need 10 or 20 years of therapy and unless you have that time to wait, it's not going to happen. That has to do with another part of the human drama – accepting loss and disappointment and accepting mistakes. That is among the most difficult emotions to deal with when we get to the world of ideas – loss, disappointment, disillusionment, the sadness that goes along with it – and often that blocks our access to other emotions when we can't accept that; the experience of that. It is like we are a child who says, "I refuse to accept loss, I refuse to accept that I will never have my magic dream or my magic kingdom." So it's a childhood fantasy that we all have to relinquish at some point because life has its disappointments. So to summarize, you can't get milk from a stone, it has to do with the breadth of human feelings that we can experience, and the level of ideas.

Our next principle is to *live life in the gray zone – move beyond all-or-nothing thinking*. To do that, we really need to have all our levels of using ideas and this



promotes that. So when we see the world in subtle shades of gray as opposed to all-or-nothing patterns, when we look for subtlety in our partners and their feelings, when we explore with them the subtlety of their feelings – the shades of their happiness, the shades of their anger, the shades of their curiosity. In doing that, we are building up the ability to use ideas to experience the world of feelings and the world of images, and we are building up our ability to think because it means we have to be able to think creatively, logically, and then move on to advanced levels like gray area thinking. So it really means working at the level of feelings quite a bit and not falling into the trap of all-or-nothing thinking where we just think it is all one way or another way or all good or all bad, which we all do under stress. It means doing this even when we are under stress, so this principle really builds up all the levels of thinking – living life in the gray zone.

What we are seeing is that these principles that we are talking about are practical translations of healthy relationships that produce healthy individuals, whether it is healthy children or healthy partners in the relationship, healthy other family members, and each of the principles will be gone into in some detail. But the principles are very practical, down-to-earth, day-to-day formula for healthy and successful relationships. We call them THE NEW GOLDEN RULE because The Golden Rule was “Do Unto Others as You Would Have Others Do Unto You.” But clearly, to really implement that in a modern sense, you have to really know yourself and know the others because you could implement that in a way that is constructive or builds health or destructive. If you don’t feel very good about yourself, for example, you might not do a very good job for another person doing unto others as you would do unto yourself if you are in a destructive pattern. On the other hand, if you know yourself well and know the other person well, the general Golden Rule would translate into the Specific Golden Rule which we call The New Golden Rule. This kind of breaks it down for us into what The Golden Rule in relationships is really about.

Let me just say, this is the end of our Web-Based show for today, and we will pick up next time with a related theme.