

Strengthening Your Personal and Professional Relationships

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Humans are a social bunch. Even if you're a classic introvert, you probably have several relationships that add extra value or meaning to your life.

It is important to ensure that your relationships at work and at home, are healthy and supportive.

Ways to improve relationships at work



You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family or your colleagues.

It's natural to want to spend time with people most like you, but being accepting of different people will enhance the way you see the world. We all do things differently and this can be great to get new perspectives and ideas on things and maybe even improve methods.

To ease conflict in the workplace try some of these key strategies from Reach Out¹

- **Walk away:** if you can feel the anger building, remove yourself from the situation.
- **Use positive self-talk:** to overcome negative thinking patterns. Often self-talk is a repetitive loop of unhelpful thoughts. Train yourself to make yours helpful.
- **Consider the big picture:** ask yourself "How important is this argument?" "Will it still be relevant a year from now?" If your answer is 'no', it probably isn't worth worrying about.
- **Hone your communication skills:** communicating well can prevent conflict from escalating and can help resolve issues quickly.
- **Practice gratitude:** identifying three things you're grateful for each day can help shift your focus to be more positive.

What can you change?

The one thing you've more control over than anything else is yourself.

According to the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) model, thoughts, feelings and behaviours interact to influence your quality of life². So when someone or something is frustrating you, the solution might be closer to home than you think.

For example, if you feel nervous in meetings because you don't believe you have much to contribute, you can change that. Maybe you stammer or struggle to communicate succinctly. This feeds back into your belief that you have nothing of value to contribute.

CBT aims to break this cycle by challenging automatic beliefs and teaching strategies to modify behaviour. The result is more positive feelings, leading to more positive thoughts and behaviours.

Changing the way you see yourself and how you respond to situations will invariably improve the way others view you.

Communication is key

Unfortunately, no-one can read your mind. Or maybe that's a good thing. Either way, it's important to communicate well to manage conflict with people around you, at work and at home.

How to manage stress and conflict at work from Relationships Australia³

- Focus on the problem, not the person.
- Be constructive and avoid blaming or arguing about being right.
- Think about what you want and what the other person may want.
- Identify common ground and potential compromises.
- Seek personal support by speaking to someone you trust.
- Look after yourself by regularly exercising, eating well and enjoying your free time.

For everyday relationship challenges, remember that differences are normal. If we were all the same, the world would be a lot less colourful. So keep on communicating and appreciate that different interests and opinions can improve a relationship, rather than damage it.

¹Reach Out.com. Better Coping Skills viewed 6 March 2016 <http://au.reachout.com/building-better-coping-skills>

²Better Health Channel. Cognitive behaviour therapy, viewed: 6 March 2017 <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/cognitive-behaviour-therapy>

³Relationships Australia, Workplace relationships for employees, viewed 6 March 2017 <https://www.relationships.org.au/relationship-advice/relationship-advice-sheets/relationships-and-the-workplace-1/workplace-relationships-for-employees>
