



## RELATIONSHIP WELLNESS

### How can narrative therapy help relationships?

The practices of narrative therapy often challenge simple explanations of objective truth. Our lives are seen as multi-storied, rich with details and diverse experiences. In narrative therapy, we seek the neglected aspects of our stories that have been given less power and visibility. In my work with couples, externalization allows for the excavation of affirmative stories that are hidden beneath problems such as blame, conflict, and disconnection.

On arriving in therapy, couples often see problems as part of their relational identities. These problems have frequently been internalized, embedded in the accounts that couples tell about themselves. When problems disguise themselves as truth they prevent alternatives, exceptions, and possibilities. The problem's existence is perceived as a given, as if it were determined and immutable.

### Goal-setting

Our general goal in therapy is to collaborate with people in living out moment-by-moment, choice-by-choice life stories that they prefer, that are more just, and that make their worlds more satisfying.

We are more interested in opening up possibilities than we are in closing them down. This makes us wary of 'goal-setting' as it is usually defined and practiced. We think that goals, unless they are very tentatively set and rigorously updated, can set single, specific trajectories for people's lives. This can all too easily close down possibilities.

The narrative metaphor biases us toward thinking about possibilities that unfold in living out a story, rather than about goals, which are usually set in advance and pursued more-or-less single-mindedly. Instead of goals, we tend to speak of 'projects' or 'directions in life'.

The process of identifying projects is fluid, shifting as new distinctions are made and as alternative stories unfold. Problems can be thought of as plots and projects as counterplots. Partners in a couple may name joint projects for the relationship, individual projects, or both. For some couples, the collaborative negotiation of shared or complementary directions in life can be a very significant – sometimes even an inspirational – part of the therapy.

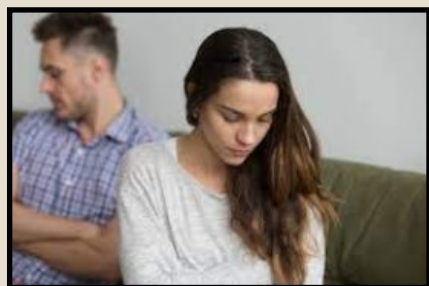
It is possible that you did marry the “wrong person! However, if you treat the “wrong person” like the right person, you could well end up having married the right person after all. On the other hand, if you marry the right person, and treat that person wrong, you certainly will have ended up marrying the wrong person. It is far more important to be the right kind of person than it is to marry the right person.

There are 4 Relationship-habits :

1. Emotional-connection habits (that is your “live-able-with-ness”)
2. Healthy Conflict habits
3. Friendship-habits
4. Commitment-habits

And then there is the Green/Red Language-habit as a special...

In a relationship there is usually one of the following :



**Emotional Dismissiveness** : Bring a sort of distrust ("You are not there for me"). **Being ignored; dismissing behaviours or accomplishments as insignificant.** This often leads to dismissing or denying individual feelings and needs. There is a deep feeling of longing for love and attention, yet these individuals begin to believe they are unworthy of attention. Emotional invalidation is when someone's feelings are denied, rejected, or dismissed. Invalidation makes someone feel as though their emotional experience is wrong. They may feel that their emotions are unacceptable, insignificant, or inaccurate. This can lead

to **considerable confusion and self-doubt.** Emotional Dismissiveness sounds like : "How dare you feel that way?" "You will feel better tomorrow". "Please just go sort yourself out." "Just get over it." "Ah, there we go again..." "Just give me my space." "Stop Moaning the whole time." "You are over reacting as usual."



**Emotional Connection** : Brings a feeling of being safe with that individual, a feeling of knowing that this individual will be "there" for you). An emotional connection is a **bundle of subjective feelings that come together to create a bond between two people.** The word emotional means to arouse strong feelings. The feelings may be anger, sorrow, joy, love or any of thousands of emotions that humans experience. **If you feel seen and heard by**

**the other person,** it's a sign you're experiencing a deeper connection. You're able to communicate easily and things flow effortlessly. Being with the other person feels nurturing and like they understand you on another level . **A feeling of intimacy that goes beyond physical attraction.** The ability to connect with the other person on a deeper level. The ability to feel secure while connecting emotionally with the other person.

- You care about each other's needs and desires.
- You share openly, you don't just hear each other; you really listen.
- You know each other deeply.
- You're interested in each other's hobbies, even if you don't "get" it.
- It's all about the little details.
- It's a judgment-free zone.

That brings me to the **GREEN** and **RED** Language in relationships! This is a very, very important concept to understand and apply to all your relationships.

As I believe you already know that **RED** is being a sign to warn or stop and **GREEN** being the opposite. This have a huge effect on relationships. This is all about the way you say something, politeness, tone of voice, attitude as well as the choice of words. Yet when we also relax our standards for treating our partner with care and respect, we end up sabotaging the very haven we crave.

People are always more responsive when you treat them with consideration. Think about how natural it felt to be kind to your partner when you first met. Have you slid into bad habits without even noticing? We can all hear the difference between saying "Could you please finish the dishes?" and "Couldn't you at least do the dishes?" but we often give in to the impulse to be agitated in the moment. Just as skipping your workout one day makes it easier to give up on your exercise plan, casual rude comments can become "gateways" to larger ones. Treat respectful communication as a personal goal, and put in the effort to achieve it.

One benefit of choosing your words thoughtfully is that it will help you address any underlying problems more effectively. And when you focus on kindness, your partner is likely to do the same. You'll end up being less stressed overall and feel even more at ease at home.

That brings us to **Attunement** as relationship habit, attunement is **the reactivity we have to another person**. It is the process by which we form relationships. Dr. Dan Siegel says, "When we attune with others we allow our own internal state to shift, to come to resonate with the inner world of another. Attunement = Love

- A Awareness
- T Turning towards others
- T Tolerance
- U Understanding
- N Non-defensive/judgemental listening
- E Empathy

**So how do you get better attuned?** *Self-care*. You have to understand yourself before you can understand the other person. If you cannot identify your own emotions, how are you supposed to understand them or process them or communicate about them with others? How can you expect your partner to be a source of comfort and support?

If you feel frustrated in your inability to have intimate conversations about your deepest feelings with your partner, you are not alone. Here's a brief exercise to help you deepen the connection with yourself and with your loved ones:

- **Ask Open-Ended Questions** : If you ask questions that require only a yes or no answer, you are destroying conversations before they even have a chance to begin. You are accidentally slamming the door that you are trying to open. This door is labelled "Intimacy." Instead of "*Did you watch that movie?*" ask, "*What was your favourite part?*" Instead of "*Are you upset?*" ask, "*You seem upset. What's going on?*"
- **Relax and take your time**. If you are bothered by your inability to label your emotions, stop and meditate for a moment. Clear your mind. Search for a word. When a word comes to mind and your body relaxes, you have hit the spot. Here are a few examples you can use in this activity as a starting point:

**Positive Emotions** : Amused, Appreciated, Lucky, Satisfied, Silly, Turned On, Joyful, Safe, Proud, Powerful, Playful, Fascinated...

**Negative Emotions** : Alienated, Tense, Misunderstood, Powerless, Ignored, Inferior, Criticized, Ashamed, Betrayed, Numb, Unsafe...

Happy friends, happy families and happy couples do the following **5** things on and daily basis :

1. **They do things together!** It does not need to be big things, cook together, talk the dogs for a walk, go shopping, watch your favourite television show together.
2. **They build admiration and affection daily** by giving your partner a genuine compliment, catch your partner doing something "right" and thank them, share a fun or favourite memory from the past together, tell your partner how proud you are of them or how proud you are of your relationship, tell your partner you love them... easy as that.
3. **They turn towards each other**. How do you turn towards instead of away? In order to understand turning, you have to first understand bids. A bid is any attempt from one partner to another for attention, affirmation, affection, or any other positive connection. Bids show up in simple ways, a smile or wink, and more complex ways, like a request for advice or help. In general, women make more bids than men, but in the healthiest relationships, both partners are comfortable making all kinds of bids.

## ABOUT BIDS...

Bids can get tricky, however, and admittedly I sometimes miss more bids than I don't. Indeed many men struggle in this regard, so it's important to pay attention. Bids usually have a secondary layer. Call it the difference between text and subtext. A few examples to get your brain going:

It is important that you learn to recognize bids and that you commit to making them to one another. Make the word "bids" part of your conversation and perhaps name your bids toward one another. It's okay to say, "I'm making a bid for attention now" as you get to know each other in this early phase of your relationship. You can also practice discerning subtext together. Pick a show that is new to you both and watch it on mute. See if you can interpret the bids that the characters make based only on non-verbal's. Once you start to get intentional about your bids, you can concentrate on "turning towards."

To "miss" a bid is to "turn away." Turning away can be devastating. It's even more devastating than "turning against" or rejecting the bid. Rejecting a bid at least provides the opportunity for continued engagement and repair. Missing the bid results in diminished bids, or worse, making bids for attention, enjoyment, and affection somewhere else.

How to turn towards? Start by paying attention to your partner. Your work on bids will come in handy here. Simply recognizing that a bid was made opens the door to the response. If you pay attention, you'll respond. How can I get better at turning towards?

4. **Rituals** can be an important way for you and your partner to prioritise each other and build a sense of meaning in your relationship. "Relationship rituals are powerful commitment devices," Garcia-Rada says. "They help people establish a sense of who they are as a couple. Couples are protective of the special moments they share because of what the activity represents. And that translates into higher relationship satisfaction." Three main types of relationship rituals are **patterned family interactions, family traditions, and family celebrations.**
5. **We all love differently.** Looking at the 5 basic love languages (not even mentioning the combinations) it is already a definite huge thing, and then love languages have two sides - Giving and Receiving. How you instinctively give love may not be the same as how you receive love. These factors usually align, but not always. For instance, you may enjoy giving gifts to others, but you do not enjoy receiving them. But this is one for another day... if you are interested do the online quiz or get the book. It is extremely important and interesting.

So, earlier I mentioned "**Live-able-with-ness**", what is that? It is the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...** how strong is your "Live-able-with-ness"?

The higher the better your relationships.



The 'fruits of the spirit' kind of love in a marriage is a **transcendent love that flows from a decision that is based on a covenant commitment.** It is the unconditional love that we show to our spouse, and it is unselfish and serving.

**Fruit of the Spirit**  
is **love** **JOY**  
**peace** **patience**  
**KINDNESS**  
**GOODNESS**  
**faithfulness**  
**GENTLENESS**  
& **self-control**  
Galatians 5: 22-23



## 4 Adult Attachment Styles & Their Role in Relationships

The characteristic way people relate to others in the context of intimate relationships, which is heavily influenced by self-worth and interpersonal trust. Theoretically, the degree of attachment security in adults is related directly to how well they bonded to others as children.

### 1. Anxious (also referred to as Preoccupied)

For adults with an anxious attachment style, the partner is often the 'better half.' The thought of living without the partner (or being alone in general) causes high levels of anxiety. People with this type of attachment typically have a negative self-image, while having a positive view of others.

The anxious adult often seeks approval, support, and responsiveness from their partner. People with this attachment style value their relationships highly, but are often anxious and worried that their loved one is not as invested in the relationship as they are.

A strong fear of abandonment is present, and safety is a priority. The attention, care, and responsiveness of the partner appears to be the 'remedy' for anxiety.

On the other hand, the absence of support and intimacy can lead the anxious / preoccupied type to become more clinging and demanding, preoccupied with the relationship, and desperate for love.

### 2. Avoidant (also referred to as Dismissive)

The dismissing / avoidant type would often perceive themselves as 'lone wolves': strong, independent, and self-sufficient; not necessarily in terms of physical contact, but rather on an emotional level. These people have high self-esteem and a positive view of themselves.

The dismissing / avoidant type tend to believe that they don't have to be in a relationship to feel complete. They do not want to depend on others, have others depend on them, or seek support and approval in social bonds.

Adults with this attachment style generally avoid emotional closeness. They also tend to hide or suppress their feelings when faced with a potentially emotion-dense situation.

### 3. Disorganized (also referred to as Fearful-Avoidant)

The disorganized type tends to show unstable and ambiguous behaviours in their social bonds. For adults with this style of attachment, the partner and the relationship themselves are often the source of both desire and fear.

Fearful-avoidant people do want intimacy and closeness, but at the same time, experience troubles trusting and depending on others.

They don't regulate emotions well, avoid strong emotional attachment, due to fear of getting hurt.

### 4. Secure

The three attachment styles covered so far are insecure attachment styles. They are characterized by difficulties with cultivating and maintaining healthy relationships. In contrast, the secure attachment style implies that a person is comfortable expressing emotions openly.

Adults with a secure attachment style can depend on their partners and in turn, let their partners rely on them. Relationships are based on honesty, tolerance, and emotional closeness. The secure attachment type thrive in their relationships, but also don't fear being on their own.

They do not depend on the responsiveness or approval of their partners, and tend to have a positive view of themselves and others.

## Adult Attachment Styles

### SECURE

- **INTIMACY:** Comfortable with intimacy and closeness; can depend on others and also have others depend on them
- **CONFLICT:** Engage in conflict without aiming to hurt partner and forgive quickly
- **COMMUNICATION:** Communicate emotions, needs, and wishes openly; is attuned and responsive to partner's needs as well
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Has positive expectations for the relationship

### ANXIOUS

- **INTIMACY:** Want to be as emotionally close as possible
- **CONFLICT:** Argumentative due to hypersensitivity to changes in partner's actions and mood
- **COMMUNICATION:** Often not collaborative- tend to communicate through protest behaviour (i.e. making partner jealous)
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Need ongoing reassurance from partner, constantly worried about rejection and abandonment

### AVOIDANT

- **INTIMACY:** Equate intimacy with loss of independence and prefer to be 'together but alone'
- **CONFLICT:** Avoid serious relationship conflicts and important conversations (i.e. commitment)
- **COMMUNICATION:** Not comfortable discussing emotions; feel overwhelmed when partner communicates their needs
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Independence is a priority; partner often has to accommodate their relationship style

### FEARFUL

- **INTIMACY:** Desire intimacy *and* also tend to be fearful of it: 'come here, go away' pattern emerges
- **CONFLICT:** Often lash out emotionally at attempts to get closer
- **COMMUNICATION:** Can be inconsistent and confusing; want to communicate needs but struggle with vulnerability
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Trauma is an active force in this attachment style, creating general distrust and unclear expectations in the relationship

## Characteristics of Attachment

There are four distinguishing characteristics of attachment :

- **Proximity maintenance** : The desire to be near the people we are attached to.
- **Safe haven** : Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of a fear or threat.
- **Secure base** : The attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.
- **Separation distress** : Anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.

Gottman has found that nearly 1/3 of all conflicts can be resolved with the right approach. The popular approach to conflict resolution, advocated by many marriage therapists, is to **put yourself in your partner's shoes, listen to what they say, and communicate with empathy that you understand their perspective.**

**SIDE  
NOTE**