

Connections Inventory

Everyone has different needs when it comes to relationships. They can vary depending on your current circumstances, the type and depth of the relationship, and other factors. Use the guide below to identify relationships that might need some extra attention.

What do you need in a relationship?

1. Review the list of attributes on the right and mark the top 5 that are most important to you. Note that you may have different attributes that are important for different types of relationships (spouse/partner, friend, family member, colleague, etc.). For this exercise, select those that apply to **all** or **most** types of relationships.
2. List your top 5 attributes in the green spaces (horizontally) in the table on page 2. See examples in italics (Ex: *Gratitude*).

How do your relationships measure up?

3. List the names and types of important relationships in your life in the blue spaces (vertically) on page 2. You may not need all of the rows. See example in row 1 (Ex: *Sarah/Friend*).
4. Under each attribute, rate on a scale from 1-5 how well each relationship meets that need for you. You might jot down behaviors or examples to explain your rating. See examples in row 1.

Where are the gaps?

5. Review your ratings for each column and look for patterns in your ratings. Consider the following questions:
 - Are there certain attributes/columns with lower ratings? Which ones?
 - Which attributes/columns have high ratings across relationships?
 - Which relationships have high ratings across attributes?
 - Which relationships could use some “freshening up” (e.g., lower ratings)?
 - For attributes that have a low rating in a certain relationship, do you have any other relationships that compensate with a higher rating?

Attributes:

- Trust
- Affection
- Validation
- Independence
- Security
- Empathy
- Acceptance
- Intimacy
- Space
- Kindness
- Respect
- Concern
- Commitment
- Responsiveness
- Gratitude
- Support
- Reciprocity
- Reliability
- Consistency
- Positivity
- Interest
- Encouraging
- Openness
- Communication
- Honesty
- Authenticity
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Attribute:	1. _____ Ex: Gratitude	2. _____ Ex: Reliability	3. _____ Ex: Support	4. _____ Ex: Positivity	5. _____ Ex: Space
Name: Sarah Type: Friend	3 We don't often express it.	1 She cancels plans often.	2 She isn't someone I call in a crisis.	5 I can rely on her for a laugh!	5 We see each other just enough.
Name: Type:					
Name: Type:					
Name: Type:					
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Name: Type:					

- One relationship I can work on improving is: _____
- One relationship that is particularly strong is: _____
- One attribute my connections are strong in is: _____
- One attribute that needs improvement is: _____



Recipe for Connection

Relationships take time and effort to build and maintain. Consider the strategies below to help perfect your recipe for a meaningful connection. Choose one from each category to get started. You may use these with relationships you have already, or to make new ones!

Authenticity

- Practice giving honest feedback when asked.
- Make mindful decisions by first asking yourself: “What do I *really* want?”
- Express your opinion, even (or especially) when it differs from someone else’s.
- Share a new goal with others.
- Check in with yourself: “Did my words and actions honor my beliefs and values today?”
- Before going into an interaction, consider how you want to be perceived and what words or actions will help you do that.
- Share your experience using “I” statements: “I heard you say...” or “I interpret this to mean...”
- When you feel uncomfortable being open, ask yourself: “What’s behind this?”
- Share a personal disclosure with someone you don’t know well, such as a challenge you’ve faced or an experience you’ve had.
- Pursue a new goal, hobby, or interest that is meaningful to you. Share it with others if you like.
- Openly communicate what you want or need.
- Speak up if something makes you uncomfortable.
- Get in the habit of expressing emotions to provide context to your words and actions: “I felt hurt. That’s why I wanted to be alone.”
- Learn to soothe anxiety that comes with being vulnerable. Take deep breaths to initiate your body’s relaxation response.
- Talk back to fears: “People like me!”

Acceptance

- Extend an invitation to someone new: have a dinner party, coffee date, volunteering, etc.
- Include others in pursuits or social circles that are meaningful to you.
- Solicit opinions from others. Ask open-ended questions to learn why they feel that way.
- Ask for advice to show you accept and value others’ perspectives (you don’t have to take it!).
- Share something personal, like dreams or goals, to cultivate a sense of belonging.
- Express appreciation, and be specific: “You really helped me out when you ____.”
- When thoughts of how someone “should be” pop up, remind yourself of their strengths instead.
- Ask others for their perspective or experience to give context to their words or actions.
- Set small goals in areas of importance (e.g., arriving on time) to help adjust lofty expectations.
- Accept that some conflicts will not always have an ideal solution. Make an effort to come to a compromise to show you are willing to work on it.
- For ongoing conflicts, have a phrase that signals it is time to table the discussion temporarily: “Let’s agree to disagree for now.”
- Consider what could be behind behavior that you find rude or inconsiderate rather than assigning motive: “They just hate me!”
- When someone is fundamentally different from you, consider what you can learn from them.



Trust

Show you can be trusted:

- Don't keep secrets, conceal your true feelings, or lie. These can erode relationships over time.
- Be patient – don't expect too much too soon. We each have our own histories that influence our tendency to trust (or distrust) others.
- Acknowledge mistakes, don't just defend your position. Show you understand the impact.
- Manage your reactions when someone is honest with you (especially when it's not what you want to hear). Responding in anger makes others less likely to trust you with the truth. Count to 3 before responding when anger swells.
- Keep confidences when asked. Ask permission to share disclosures with someone else when needed.
- Think carefully before making decisions or commitments. Can you do it? Do you want to do it?
- Once you've committed, follow through. Do what you say you will do.
- Be consistent. It only takes one misstep to damage trust that is built.
- Remember their vulnerabilities and take care with your words and actions. Don't "use it against them."
- Have "question and answer" time on various topics with the expectation of honesty and transparency.

Show your trust in others:

- Build trust gradually, sharing small disclosures and engaging with others when they do the same.
- Be open. Invite others to help you process emotions out loud when you can't find the words.
- Give the benefit of the doubt, don't assume ill intent. Ask for context when someone does something hurtful or inconsiderate.
- Let others take the lead or make decisions sometimes to show you trust their judgment.



Support

- **Notice** when something feels "off:"
 - Body language (e.g., a frown, tears)
 - Verbal cues (e.g., sighs, snapping at others)
 - Changes to their regular behavior or mannerisms.
 - Share your observations: "You seem upset."
- **Ask**, don't just assume:
 - Don't accuse or assign emotions: "Why are you so cranky?"
 - Instead, keep it open-ended: "Is everything okay?"
 - Ask what they need from you: "Do you want me to just listen or are you looking for solutions right now?"
- **Listen** with your full attention:
 - Notice when your thoughts are wandering and gently bring your attention back to the other person.
 - Ask open-ended questions to learn more: "What happened next?" or "How did you respond?"
 - Repeat what you heard to ensure understanding.
- **Validate** their feelings:
 - Ignore the facts at first, just focus on what they're sharing: "That does sound hard!"
 - Show empathy: "I would feel that way too."
- **Take action** in a way that is meaningful to them:
 - Give comfort in a way that feels appropriate. It might be giving a hug or holding their hand. Simply listening and validating may be enough.
 - Do something thoughtful that shows kindness and compassion, such as doing something they enjoy together, or a task they aren't up to doing.

Understanding Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries are an important part of healthy, balanced relationships. Boundaries can be physical, emotional, and more. Use the guide below to learn more about your own boundaries and how to set and enforce them when needed.

What are healthy boundaries?

Personal boundaries are the separation between *self* and *other*. They are a reflection of what you feel comfortable with in multiple areas of your life (see sidebar for examples). They serve to:

- Maintain independence and autonomy.
- Separate your identity from someone else's.
- Set expectations for how to interact with others.
- Maximize physical and emotional comfort during the course of everyday interactions.
- Help you feel safe, secure, and respected in relationships.
- Separate your wants, needs, etc. from those of others.

What are unhealthy boundaries?

Boundaries that are considered to be “unhealthy” are often either too rigid (e.g., keeping others at a distance, never confiding in others) or too weak (e.g., having a hard time saying “no,” oversharing with people you don't know well, doing things you aren't comfortable with).

Most of us know what makes us comfortable or uncomfortable when it comes to boundaries, but we don't enforce them or communicate them to others. It can be challenging to enforce boundaries for a variety of reasons. What makes it hard for you? Check all that apply from the list to the right.

Types of boundaries

- **Physical:** Boundaries around your body, your space, and physical touch, activity, or intimacy.
Example: “I prefer handshakes instead of hugs.”
- **Emotional:** Maintaining separation between your thoughts and feelings and those of others.
Example: “I don't want to do this.”
- **Material/financial:** Limits surrounding your belongings or finances.
Example: “I can't loan you money right now.”
- **Time:** Ability to focus on your own priorities and tasks; preventing misuse of your time.
Example: “I need to see my friends that day.”
- **Intellectual:** Maintaining your own beliefs, values, and opinions as separate from others.
Example: “I have a different opinion on this issue.”

- I am afraid people will think I'm rude or uncaring.
- I don't want to seem “weird” or different.
- I might look too rigid/aggressive or too weak.
- I might be rejected if I express my true feelings.
- I'm not sure what my boundaries are.
- I don't know how to enforce boundaries; I never learned how.
- My needs and wants aren't that important.
- I like to help or fix others' problems.
- I feel selfish focusing on myself.

Identifying your boundaries

Everyone has different boundaries that feel right to them. Ask yourself a few questions to determine yours:

- What behaviors bother me?
- How and with whom do I most like to spend my time? Most dislike?
- What values and beliefs are most important to me? Do I express and/or live by them?
- What do I need to feel fulfilled, purposeful?
- What am I comfortable sharing with others (friends, coworkers, partners, family, etc.)?
- Do others make jokes or comments that make you feel disrespected? What are they?
- What behaviors make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable (e.g., raised voice, gestures)?
- Do you feel pressured to do things that don't align with your values? What are they?
- Do you feel like you can meet others' expectations of you?
- Do you feel like you have a sense of control over your day and how you spend your time?

Setting and enforcing boundaries

Setting boundaries comes down to communication, but it can be challenging when you aren't used to doing it. Here are some tips:

- **Set boundaries early.** It's harder to walk them back after you've set a precedent. Let them know what you expect: *"Please return this by Wednesday."*
- **Prepare ahead of time.** Write them down so you can communicate clearly what you want to say.
- **Be specific.** What behaviors are you uncomfortable with, and what would you like more of?
- **Avoid "you" statements:** *"You don't let me ____."* Use "I" statements instead: *"I need to ____."*
- **Be open to feedback and questions.** Help the other person understand your needs.
- **Choose timing carefully.** Discuss when all parties are calm; don't wait until you are in a disagreement.

Do you have healthy boundaries?

Read the following statements and mark how often they apply to you. Consider how you might grow your comfort level with behaviors you "rarely" or "sometimes" do.

	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
I openly communicate what I want and need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I speak up when something makes me uncomfortable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I follow through when I set a boundary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I say "no" when I can't or don't want to do something.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that I have a distinct identity from others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I determine how I will spend my time from day to day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I separate myself from others' reactions/feelings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I express my opinions and beliefs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I respect others' boundaries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I accept when others say "no."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- **Be patient.** You may need to repeat your boundaries several times.
- **Practice a kind and respectful "no" to requests.** Check in with yourself: Can you do it? Do you want to? What will you be sacrificing?
- **Be consistent with enforcing your boundary.** Consider whether to have consequences for violating the boundary: *If I don't hear from you by 5:00, I will cancel the reservation.* Only do this if you are willing to follow through.
- **Let go of responsibility for others' feelings.** You are not being selfish or unkind, you are doing what's best for you.

Keeping Connections Alive

Just as you take your car in for regular maintenance to keep it running smoothly, your relationships require nurturing to stay strong. Use the activity below to keep things fresh!

Instructions

1. Write the names and contact details for important connections in the boxes provided. Include anyone you would like to keep in contact with, not just close friends or family.
2. Cut each connection apart along the dotted line. Fold each one in half and put in a jar or bowl.
3. On page 2, cut out each activity along the dotted line. You can make your own in the blank slips. Fold each one in half and put in a second jar or bowl.
4. Choose one slip from each jar. Perform the chosen activity with the chosen connection. Repeat on a set schedule (weekly, monthly, etc.) as desired.

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Social media:

Name:

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Schedule a coffee/beverage date in the next month	Do a dinner trade: Both cook a favorite meal to enjoy together or drop off (for long distance, trade recipes)	Share a favorite memory via text, email, or social media
Call “just because” or schedule a video chat	Send a “thinking of you” card	Leave a note or gift in an unexpected place
Share a meaningful or humorous quote	Send an old photo or social media post with a caption	Plan a “bucket list” activity
Share a favorite song and why, and ask for one in return	Make a card and send (via email or regular mail)	Send a funny video or gif
Schedule a movie night with old favorites	Schedule a walk or a visit to a park or trail.	Try an activity you don’t normally do (e.g., bowling, mini golf, axe throwing, etc.)
Do something “touristy” (museum, city or Segway tour, etc.) (for long distance, virtual tour)	Take a closeup photo of an object and have them guess what it is. Trade back and forth.	Create and send a set of quiz questions (e.g., “What’s your favorite part of the day and why?”)
Plan a picnic (or lunch date in cold weather)	Bake a dessert or treat and deliver or send	Invite to play a board or video game
Trade book or podcast recommendations	Schedule a “watch party” of a TV show or movie, in person or virtually	Download a mobile game app and invite them to play