

Behavior Guide for Respectful Relationships, Building Trust and Resolving Differences

By Paul J. Scoglio

Self-management promotes understanding and introduces self-respect and respect towards others in relationships. Methods for self-management include the following seventeen ideas.

1. **Grounding:** *Get yourself grounded * before you approach a conversation. Speaking calmly. Monitor your tone of voice and emotional state. If angry, avoid taking any action other than calling a “time out.” Avoid using angry solutions to problems. Avoid any disciplinary action while feeling anger, other than saying, “There will be a consequence”.*
2. **Reflective listening:** *Use reflective listening (or listening at Level Two*). Use “I Statements“ and ask others to engage in reflective listening as well. Reflect back what you have heard. Find a kind way to state your opinion. Speaking in terms of only yourself. Avoid using the word “you”.*
3. **Judgments:** *Do not make any judgments. Avoid criticism. Be curious first. Notice your assumptions. Clarify the your assumptions out-loud with others and evaluate the legitimacy of expectations. Then begin to speak about the personal facts relating to you and your assumptions and expectations without referencing any disappointment.*
4. **Time-out:** *Always call a time out when necessary, before things get heated. If you notice emotion rising in yourself or in the other, then take the time-out and agree on a time to resume the talking. It is customary for a time-out to have a beginning and an end. 15 to 90 minutes is often all that is needed. More time can be acceptable and waiting more than 24 hours to resume a conversation is probably too long.*
5. **Use of force:** *Never use force of any kind in a relationship. Force is involved when people make efforts to convince, manipulate or make others feel guilt or shame. If a conversation reflects a level of competition then subtle force is involved. Use of angry words or angry gestures is evidence of force. Pushing or “selling” an opinion is a forceful process. Expressing an opinion is not necessarily forceful. There are many points of view. Remember self-control will save the day.*
6. **Surprise & abandonment:** *Announce comings and goings. Avoid leaving loved ones with a sense of surprise or abandonment or wondering about your where you are. Call ahead if you are going to change the plan or be late.*
7. **Universal Statements:** *Avoid using universal statements like, “You always...” “You never...” “It is always about you...” “I am the only one who...” “ Why is it always me...?” This kind of statement serves only to change the subject and distract the listener for understanding the real point. As soon as you use a universal statement the listener will think of an exception and/or take offence.*

8. **Sarcasm:** Avoid using sarcasm. Sarcasm is the speedy conveyance of an emotionally charged message along with the implication that, "We do not have to talk about this!" The emotionally charged message often includes judgments, shaming put downs and or ridicule. If you hear someone say something that feels sarcastic, it is best to refuse to accept the message by saying, "That sounds sarcastic. Can you say that in another way?" Sarcasm in a relationship can seem to conserve time and emotional energy, however the saving is at the expense of the other. The alternative to sarcasm is often an intimate conversation.
9. **Mind reading:** Avoid the delusion of mind reading. Speak about your assumptions and expectations clearly and often. Be curious about your partner's assumptions and expectations. Clarify what you suspect is going on with the other person.
10. **Polarity of opinion:** When differences occur, agree to disagree. Marvel at the array of differences that are possible. Practice inclusive conversations as opposed to exclusive conversations. Do not say, "That's wrong." or "You are wrong." Instead say, "That is interesting." We have such different perspectives." "I never would have thought of that." "How did you arrive at that idea or action?" Be curious about the other opinion. Explain your opinion without attempting to convince in the process. Whenever there are two opposing opinions or perspectives there is always at least one other way that would be a creative win-win solution. Compromise is not generally a win-win solution.
11. **Feedback:** Giving feedback is a delicate process. The purpose here is for your insights to be able to be appreciated by the other person. If you want to give someone feedback, then first get permission. You might ask, "Will you give me permission to make you uncomfortable?" If they say yes, then you might want to request, "Will you promise not to get angry with me?" The reason you ask these questions is to help the person prepare for your feedback. No matter how carefully you are moving into sensitive territory you may create a problem if you are delivering a judgment along the way. It is important for the person at the receiving end be prepared. People often do this preparation easily when asked these questions, by getting themselves grounded and centered. If they say "No." it means that they can not find a way to get grounded or can not trust you enough to be with whatever you are about to say. Be patient with someone who agrees to receive feedback. The point is to tell the truth from your perspective. If you believe that you possess the ultimate truth then this process will probably not go very well. Only use "I statements" and do not refer to the other person by name or by using the pronoun "you". Begin by saying, "My perspective on this is..." Regardless of how right you think you are. You must be certain that the listener is not offended. If they are offended by your message, then the message will not be received even though they gave you permission. The purpose is for your insights to be able to be appreciated by the other person. Ideally they will say thank you. Also review the article, *Rebuilding Trust: The Loving Salve for Relational Betrayal or Other Relational Injury*.

12. **Boundaries:** *Be respectful of personal space and privacy issues. Respect the body, the possessions, the emotions and the words of others. Do not enter someone's personal space without permission. Do not touch someone when you are angry. Do not tell someone how he or she feels or should feel. Do not talk over another person's words while they are talking.*
13. **Comparisons:** *Avoid comparisons to others. Making comparisons to others is shaming and manipulative. Make no comparisons to other people. Compare yourself to yourself. Compare your loved one to that same loved one. Look at the progress or change in the individual over time. Comparisons to others generate the feeling of shame and/or envy.*
14. **Personal authority:** *Be your own authority. No name-dropping. Do not bring anyone else into the discussion as a way to validate yourself. Never say any thing like, "I have talked to other people about this and they agree with me." That would be gang up on the other person. Let your authority be your personal and powerful truth.*
15. **Family of origin loyalty:** *Do not bring up your significant other's family. Doing so will trigger a defensive response or will be perceived as a personal attack because of the bonds based on family of origin loyalty. The only exception would be to express a compliment or statement of gratitude. In some cases that might be a problem.*
16. **Parental loyalty:** *Do not talk to your child about the other parent. Doing so will trigger a defensive response or will be perceived as a personal attack. This makes children (young or old) very uncomfortable. Even if they might agree with you they will not like you bringing it up. The exception is a complement.*
17. **Overt uses of force are:** *Name-calling, yelling, pointing at another person, threats of violence, hitting, pushing, any angry statements or gestures, throwing or punching objects. When an overt use of force occurs in relationship then this is destructive and relationship counseling is probably over due.*

* Getting ground refers to self-embodiment, which is full awareness that you have a body and that you are in it, in the present moment. There are many ways to do this. Getting grounded is a fundamental element of most coaching processes.

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