how to improve your relationship

Relationship Improvement Quick Book
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprinkle yeses throughout your interactions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give and receive feedback affectionately</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take the RDQ relationship assessment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide broad areas for improvement</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree relationship improvement activities</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and continually improve</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship skills framework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship improvement plan</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Managing a relationship requires skills that come more easily to some couples than others. This book is for couples who know that their relationship is not as good as they want it to be and they want to improve it. If you are such a couple, and you follow the program, you will see a radical improvement in the quality of your relationship. That’s a guarantee!

This 6-step relationship improvement program is based on the science of relationships.

Step 1 gives you a very simple measure for assessing the quality of your relationship and improving it based on the work of Dr John Gottman from the Gottman Relationship Institute. Dr Gottman has written numerous best-selling books on improving relationships.

Step 2 goes into some principles about how couples who have very successful relationships manage their conversations and interactions and give each other feedback. It also describes the behaviors that Dr Gottman finds cause people to get into fights and prevent them for resolving differences. He calls these The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Step 3 gives you access to RelateBetter.com’s relationship assessment health check which has been taken by over 150,000 people across the world. This health check provides an objective and scientific assessment of twelve dimensions of your relationship covering how well your relationship is working in two important areas—interaction and support, and sex and romance.

Step 4 shows you how to use your relationship checkup report to identify, discuss and agree the main problem areas in your relationship, and come to a shared understanding of what to focus on to improve things.
Step 5 shows you how to translate broad areas for improvement into concrete actions that will make a real difference to the quality of your relationship and to your health and well-being.

Step 6 encourages you to reward yourself for doing the program and making improvements, and encourages you to set yourselves new improvement goals and challenges.

The book also contains suggestions for simple visualization exercises, and practical suggestions, tips and advice about things you can do and skills you can learn to improve different aspects of your relationship.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

STEP 1

Sprinkle yeses throughout your interactions

Picture a cocktail shaker. The ingredients that are being shaken are the things that make a successful relationship. You are looking at the liquid pouring into the glass from the shaker and you see that the crystals of crushed ice hold the word “yes” inside.

Asked to sum up what he had learned about successful relationships, Dr John Gottman, who has been studying marriage and divorce for the past 35 years, said that a successful relationship has lots of interactions filled with yeses¹. Successful couples look for ways to accentuate the positive, and they try to say “yes” as often as possible.

That doesn't mean that people in good relationships don’t have disagreements and arguments. Nor does it mean that you have to give up your dreams and aspirations, or give into to someone who is being unreasonable, or seeks to control your every move.

Examples of yeses in a conversation.

Yes, I would love a cup of coffee

Yes, I will pick up some food on my way home.

Yes, I would like to go to the gym this evening.

Yes, I will go with you to the hospital.

Yes, let’s go and see the new Woody Allen movie at the weekend.

Yes, and I think we should go to Barcelona for Easter.

Yes, you should go for the promotion.

Good relationships with your partner, friends and family are about a continuing flow of small moments of observation, positive thinking, attachment, intimacy, and give and take.

At work, relationships with bosses, colleagues, customers and suppliers will only really flourish if you listen to and acknowledge each other's views and ideas, feelings and concerns. The same rule applies to relationships with classmates and friends. Your interactions must have more yeses in them than nos.

**Give and take**

According to John Gottman, a man’s ability to accept influence by saying yes is one of the most important issues in a relationship. Marriages where the man says to his partner, “You are right about that” or “Yes, let’s do that” are much more likely to succeed. When a man is not willing to share power and decision making with his wife, Gottman’s research shows that there is an eighty percent chance that the marriage will self-destruct.

**VISUALIZATION EXERCISE**

**Spend 5-10 minutes doing this once or twice a day to develop your visualization skills.**

Create a movie in your mind of you having an animated discussion with your partner filled with all the ways you can say yes.

You see yourself and your partner asking each other questions and responding positively and enthusiastically to each other’s answers. You make each other laugh and enjoy each other’s company the way you did in happier times.

Visualize different mental scenes such as the place, the time of day, the temperature, colours and sounds, what you and your partner are wearing, and imagine what you are saying and how you are feeling.

Give the movie a structure and allow it to play out in your mind just as you want it to.
In violent relationships, Gottman says that you find “men responding to their wives’ requests by saying, “No way,” “It’s just not going to happen,” “You’re not going to control me,” or simply “Shut up.”

Inevitably, when exchanges between people are filled with nos, both partners will be dissatisfied with the relationship.

**Building exchanges full of yeses**

If your exchanges and interactions are full of nos, you may find it hard to switch overnight to ones full of yeses.

What is important is that you and your partner recognize that exchanges populated mainly with nos have a negative impact on one or both partners’ emotions and feelings, and they often lead to big arguments, or one or both partners withdrawing.

Monitor your interactions and discussions and give yourselves time to improve your communication and interaction. Rate your exchanges on a scale of 1 to 10 at the beginning of the week, set yourself an improvement goal, rate things again at the end of the week, and review where you have got to.

Repeat the process until you both think that things have got much better.

A man’s ability to accept influence by saying yes is one of the most important issues in a relationship.
STEP 2

Give and receive feedback affectionately

The way two people give each other feedback and the way they handle differences of opinion, problems and difficulties are critical in a couple’s relationship. They are also critical in family relationships, work relationships, and relationships between friends.

People in successful relationships have high standards and expectations of each other and they do not put up with poor behavior. When they have a problem, they try to solve it by throwing it around in a good-natured manner like two people playing beach ball.

Successful couples give and receive feedback and manage disagreements and differences of opinion with respect, tenderness, humor and affection.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

According to John Gottman, there are four things that you must avoid doing when giving feedback, communicating dissatisfaction, or having an argument or disagreement. John Gottman calls these the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

**Criticism**
First, when you are unhappy about some aspect of your partner’s behavior, don’t express it as a criticism of your partner’s personality. You are unlikely to resolve a problem by telling your partner that they are, for example, selfish, uncommunicative, unsociable, lazy etc.

**Contempt**
Second, don’t say things that indicate that you feel better or superior to your partner. Showing contempt and condescension by saying things like “You’re so stupid.” will lead you to separate and divorce. Contempt is bad for a relationship because it communicates dislike for your partner.

When you are unhappy about some aspect of your partner’s behavior, don’t express it as a criticism of your partner’s personality.
Research also shows that people who are contemptuous of each other are more likely to suffer from infectious illnesses such as flu and colds than other people.

**Defensiveness**
Third, avoid being defensive and over-reacting when your partner complains or says they are unhappy about something. Try to see things from their perspective and find constructive feedback in what they are saying even if the feedback has not been delivered very tactfully.

When a person thinks that their partner is always getting at them, they miss useful feedback and it then becomes very hard to learn and improve. It is also hard to be around someone who is highly defensive as people feel they have to tread on eggshells the whole time so as not to upset them.

**Stonewalling**
Fourth, avoid stonewalling – for example, rolling your eyes, turning away and saying little or nothing at all. When you are receiving feedback, show your partner that you are listening. Don’t withdraw emotionally from the conversation. Individuals in thriving relationships embrace feedback and criticism in order to work through their differences and improve their relationship.

**RUBBER BAND SNAP EXERCISE**
Use this technique when you find yourself or your partner exhibiting criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling.

Wear a rubber band on one of your wrists and suggest to your partner that they do the same.

Whenever one of you displays one of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse behaviors, you should snap your band and try to rephrase what you want to say in a different way.

You can also use this technique to snap yourself out of negative thinking about your relationship. Whenever you have a negative thought, snap the rubber band and replace the negative thought straightaway with a positive one.

Sportspeople use this mental skills technique to counter anxiety and negative thinking about their performance.
Resolving differences

You can't resolve differences and disagreements with your partner by criticizing their personality, behaving as if you were superior, being defensive, or stonewalling. Each of these behaviors tends to lead to more conflict and negativity so that what might start off as a mild disagreement ends up as a full-blown argument.

They key to resolving differences and preventing fights is to be able to listen to and accept some of your partner's feedback and suggestions and to be prepared to give a little and compromise. These behaviors appear to come more easily to women than men, which is why a guy’s ability to accept influence, compromise and change is critical in a successful marriage.

In a successful relationship, you find the guy saying something like:

"I can see where you are coming from but I don't accept everything you are saying. Let's discuss it."

That guy is different from the guy who says: "I disagree with everything you've said."

In couples who are heading for divorce, you find the partners attacking each other and blaming their problems on each other’s character and behaviors saying things like: "It's your fault, your perfectionism, your personality. You're the problem. There's nothing wrong with me."

So be prepared to compromise a little, but do not give up on your dreams, ideals, and expectations of the relationship.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are strong predictors of early divorcing.
STEP 3

Take the RDQ relationship assessment

Now that you understand some key principles about how to manage a successful relationship, it is time to take a closer look at the quality of your relationship by completing the RelateBetter relationship screening.

The relationship health assessment will provide you with a clear and detailed picture of how you and your partner rate the relationship and reveal whether you each have the same view and level of satisfaction with of the relationship. Use the screening to get to know your partner better—for example, their likes, dislikes, wishes, hopes and dreams.

Critical areas of the relationship

We look at two key areas in every relationship/marriage - interaction and support, and romance and sex.

Interaction and support

Interaction and support covers eight aspects of how you interact with, communicate, and support each other.

Autonomy
In successful relationships, you find that each partner gives the other freedom. The partners try to help each other to achieve their respective goals in life. Neither partner tries to impose their will on the other nor tries to change the other’s personality.

Control
In unequal partnerships, one partner wants to run the show in the relationship. That partner bosses the other around and has to be right about everything. The controlling partner makes decisions alone and ignores their partner’s views and opinions. Control freaks make their partners unhappy because they prevent their partners developing and make them feel inconsequential.
We look at two key areas in every relationship--interaction and support, and romance and sex.

**Commitment**
The signs of commitment are being willing to work hard at the relationship, doing things to make your partner happy, and being prepared to compromise to make the relationship work. Telling your partner regularly that you love him/her is a good signal of commitment. In successful relationships, the partners have high expectations of each other and do not tolerate poor behavior from one another.

**Friendship**
The signs of friendship are the partners sensing each other’s feelings and emotions, enjoying spending time together and making each other laugh. The partners act like best friends. Where there is a lack of friendship and closeness, the partners get easily irritated with each other, they have totally different interests, and they are preoccupied with themselves rather than each other.

**Responsibilities**
In a successful relationship, the partners discuss and agree their respective roles and responsibilities and they share household work activities such as shopping, cooking, and cleaning. This also applies to childrearing if the partners have children. Sharing means accepting influence and being prepared to adapt and change. In marriage, a husband's willingness to accept influence from his wife is crucial because women adapt for men.

**Communication**
Communication is the glue of a successful relationship. Good communication is apparent when the partners talk to each other regularly, they feel able to express their feelings and emotions, they listen to each other’s problems and they give each other reassurance and positive feedback. Where communication is poor, you find the partners ignoring each other’s need for attention or bickering, criticizing each other, holding back or venting their feelings.

**Disagreements**
In every relationship, people have disagreements, but in a relationship that is struggling, you will find the partners disagreeing regularly about a range of things--for example, money, friends, in-laws, childrearing, and sex. Successful couples reduce disagreements by avoiding making provocative remarks when discussing difficult topics. They also know how to prevent a minor disagreement escalating into a row.
Conflict Resolution
An important skill in having a stable long-term relationship is the ability to resolve conflict effectively. People in successful relationships learn how to recognize and manage each other’s different emotional states. They know when to back off, they know how to recover things before they get out of control and they forgive each other quickly. The indicators of poor conflict resolution skills are the partners escalating arguments, lashing out, letting disagreements continue for days or refusing to talk to each other afterwards.

Romance and sex
Romance and sex covers four aspects of the relationship.

Attraction
Physical attraction often brings people together initially but it is also important in keeping them together. Signs of mutual attraction are the partners feeling good in each other’s company, fancying each other and admiring each other’s positive qualities. If one partner does not find the other sexy, recoils at the sight of the other in the nude or makes them feel inadequate, then there is an attraction failure.

The signs of friendship are the partners sensing each other’s feelings and emotions, enjoying spending time together and making each other laugh.

Affection
People demonstrate affection for each other by being thoughtful and considerate, and displaying non-verbal behaviors like holding hands and hugging and kissing. Where affection is absent, you find the partners being unkind to each other and maintaining a distance between each other. In a happy relationship, the partners make many positive statements to and about each other and their relationship. Relationships do best in rich positive climates.

Romance
Is there romance in the relationship? If there is, the partners will be doing things like buying each other presents, talking about their love for each other and remembering and celebrating important events like birthdays and anniversaries. Making regular deposits into the romance account is important in sustaining a lifelong relationship.
Sex
If the sexual side of the relationship is strong, you will find the partners know how to turn each other on and satisfy each other’s desires. They will have discussed their sexual preferences and they will make each other feel fulfilled and loved in bed.

Do the test

To take your personalized health assessment, go to:

http://www.relatebetter.com/relationships_test_instructions.html

and take the RDQ relationship assessment. This is a free scientific screening that has been taken by over 150,000 people.

You can take this on your own but it is better if both partners complete the assessment.

Then on the basis of this, you can set yourself specific relationship improvement goals, and we can provide you with practical ideas and suggestions about how to achieve these goals.
STEP 4

Decide broad areas for improvement

The key findings from your online relationship health assessment are shown on pages 5--8 of the RDQ relationship improvement report.

Page 5 of the report provides a snapshot of how effectively your relationship is working at present. The scorecards on pages 6—7 contain detailed information to help you decide where and how to improve your relationship.

Page 8 concludes by highlighting the things that are not working well at all and that you need to really work on, the things that are working moderately well and you should aim to strengthen, and the things that are working well that you should celebrate.

Relationship scorecard approach

In your relationship scorecards on pages 6--7, the scores of different aspects of the relationship are generated by comparing your responses with those of over 150,000 people who have completed the questionnaire.

Scores are color-coded using the Red Amber Green (RAG) traffic light assessment system.

- Green area scores indicate that this is a strong feature of the relationship.
- An amber green score indicates that this is a fairly strong feature of the relationship.
- Amber scores indicate that this area of the relationship is working moderately well--but there is room for improvement.
- An amber red score indicates that this is becoming a problem in the relationship. You and your partner should tackle it before it becomes a real difficulty.
- Red area scores indicate that this is a major weakness and possibly fatal flaw in the relationship. You and your partner need to discuss it and find a way of improving things.

In order to decide where you should focus your efforts, enter your scores and the scores of your partner on the summary scorecard below.
Once you have entered both sets of scores, you will be able to see and discuss what you each think about the relationship and where the problem areas are—if there are any.

Look at the profiles in the round. Note any green area scores which indicate that these aspects of the relationship are working really well, and any amber area scores which show that things are functioning as well as in the average couple’s relationship.

Then look for any areas where your score or your partner’s score is in the red or amber red area. Establish whether you and your partner both have the same view of problem areas, or whether there are significant disparities between your assessment of how things are working and your partner’s assessment of how things are working.²

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² Ignore differences of one or two points between your score and your partner’s score on any area. A difference of three or more on any area indicates that you have different perspectives on a problem.
Case Study: David and Sally

David and Sally’s assessments of their relationship are shown in the scorecards below. In the scorecards, S indicates how Sally feels about David’s behavior and performance in the relationship, and D indicates how David feels about Sally’s behavior and performance.

David and Sally’s profiles illustrate that the sexual and romantic aspect of their relationship is working reasonably well but the interaction and support side is causing problems. Although both partners have the same reasonably positive assessment of the sexual and romantic side of the relationship, they have quite different views about the way they communicate, support each other, and resolve conflict and disagreements.

David and Sally’s relationship profiles

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Sally is particularly unhappy with four areas—autonomy, control, responsibilities, and conflict resolution. Although she sees that David is committed to their relationship, she feels that she does not have enough autonomy and freedom in the relationship, and she feels that David is a bit of a control-freak. She is very dissatisfied with the way household chores are divided, and she is unhappy with the number of disagreements and fights they have been having.

David, on the other hand, is either moderately or more than satisfied with all aspects of the way they interact and support each other. David and Sally’s case nicely illustrates a fairly common problem of the woman in a relationship shouldering most of the household chores and feeling hemmed in by a controlling man and how this inevitably leads to tension, disagreement, and arguments. David is going to have to compromise and change some of his behaviors if the relationship is to improve.

**Agree where your relationship needs to be improved**

Discuss your combined relationship scorecard and try to agree on some broad areas you want to improve. Focus on the areas which are causing most friction in the relationship and explore what you can each do to make things better. Remember to use the rules of positive conversation in your feedback discussions.

**RULES OF POSITIVE DIALOGUE**

*Use these techniques in your feedback discussions*

Avoid criticizing your partner’s personality, acting as if you are superior, being defensive, or stonewalling.

Use “yeses” as much as you can and build on your partner’s ideas and suggestions—for example, “yes and” instead of “no but”. Look for the positive in each other.

Be open to feedback and communicate your views and feelings sensitively and affectionately.

Show that you care by looking at and really listening to your partner and acknowledging their feelings and concerns.
STEP 5

Agree relationship improvement activities

You have agreed some broad areas about how you want to improve your relationship. The challenge now is coming to an understanding about how you are going to do this. You need to decide together what you are going to do differently that will have an impact on your relationship. This can be hard because it means one or both partners have to change the way they think and behave.

Brainstorming practical ideas and suggestions

Questions beginning with “How” are a great way of generating practical ideas and suggestions about what you are going to do differently to improve the relationship. For example, you might ask your partner:

“How should we divide the chores?”

“How would you like me to do more around the house?”

“How can we find more time to spend together?”

“How can I help you fulfill your dreams?”

“How can I help more with the kids?”

“How can I help you get on in your career?”

“How can I help lessen the stress you are feeling?”

Relationship skills

Another approach to thinking about what you might do differently is to look at what people who are really good at relationships do. It takes energy and skills to hold down a successful personal relationship just as it takes energy and skills to hold down a demanding job. In the world of work, there are skill frameworks and competency frameworks to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively and continually improve.
When people get together, especially when they get together very young, they have to learn these skills through trial and error. You may get some advice—for example, from your parents, friends or a priest—but no-one tells you about the things that keep couples together and those that cause couples to drift apart.

We have developed a 12-factor relationship skills framework to help couples improve their relationship skills. The framework was developed after carrying out an extensive review of research on personal relationships. The framework which is contained in Annex 1 underpins the relationship screening at relatebetter.com. It is designed to help you understand some of the things that successful couples do—for example, their attitudes, behaviors and relationship style.

The table below shows an extract of the framework covering the area of control in relationships.

### SKILL AREA: CONTROL

**TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS**

- Show respect for your partner’s needs, feelings, preferences, and opinions.

- Aim to create a relationship where you and your partner both feel empowered and in control of decisions, and what happens in the relationship and in your lives.

- Consult your partner before taking decisions that will affect them, and try to reach joint decisions.

- Don’t try to micro-manage your partner’s behavior—allow them to decide what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

- Encourage your partner to pursue their goals and realize their ambitions.

- Do not attempt to change a controlling partner by trying to placate or please them as this will reinforce their controlling behavior and make you angry and resentful.
SMART relationship improvement activities

When you have kicked the problem around for a while, you should agree on a range of specific things that you are going to do differently as a couple that you both agree will make a real difference. In the world of work and sport, people are encouraged to define their performance improvement activities or objectives to meet what are called SMART criteria. Try this approach.

SMART stands for:

S—Specific. Committing to help more with the chores is not specific. Committing to doing the online ordering and unpacking of the weekly groceries is specific.

M—Measurable. Saying you will try to help more with the kids is tricky to measure. Saying you will read to the kids every night is easy to measure.

A—Achievable. Promising to share all your thoughts and feelings with your partner is unachievable. Promising to tell him or her when you have had a difficult day at work and are feeling stressed is achievable.

R—Relevant. Saying you will give up your annual golfing weekend with your friends is probably irrelevant. Committing to going to the gym together on Sundays mornings is relevant.

T—Time-bound. Committing to trying to find more time to be together is not time-bound. Committing to arranging a city break for the Easter holiday is time-bound.

The SMART approach is effective because it makes you think about specific changes you are going to make in your relationship within a time-frame. It prevents people making vague promises and undertakings about behavioral changes that they then fail to make.

**VISUALIZATION EXERCISE**

Spend 5 minutes a day visualizing yourself performing some of the behavioural changes you have committed to.

Imagine yourself carrying out the improvement task/activity. Create a strong mental image which includes the visualized scene and the people in it.

Play it like a short movie with a start, middle, and end. Run the movie several times in your mind zooming in on different aspects of the scene each time.

Run it from start to finish and then try running it in reverse.
If you each come up with some SMART activities/behavioral changes and you both deliver on them, you will see a rapid improvement in the problem areas in your relationship. It is a good discipline to write down what you are committing to do, and Annex 2 contains a template for doing this.
STEP 6

Review and continually improve

If you have both followed the program and done the exercises, you should already be seeing a significant improvement in things. You should celebrate your improved relationship because it takes time and effort and commitment to change behaviors and turn around a relationship.

You should not get off the program at this point, however, because if your relationship has got better, it is certain that it could be even better than it is now. Improving relationship skills is like improving any other skill in life—it has no end-point and you should get into a cycle of acquiring new knowledge and skills and continually improving your relationship.

You can do this in a more informal and leisurely way than we have done in this program. Periodically, find a little time as a couple to exchange views about your relationship and whether it is going in the direction you hoped. The psychology of elite performance in business, public service, politics, sport, and the arts teaches us that people who are the best performers continually set themselves new goals and challenges. So if you as a couple want to enjoy the best possible relationship, you should do the same.
ANNEX 1

Relationship skills framework

Take your relationship check up at www.relatebetter.com

SKILL AREA 1: AUTONOMY

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Talk to your partner about their career and life goals, and how you can help them develop and reach their potential.

- Discuss and agree areas of autonomy and togetherness in your relationship.

- Discuss what you each think is the right balance of time spent together and apart.

- Try to find a balance where you are neither too separate from one another, nor exceptionally involved with one another.

- Aim to spend a minimum of at least 12 hours of non-sleep, non-TV time together each week.

- Bear in mind that women tend to rely on friends and relatives, in addition to their partner, for emotional support, whereas men tend to rely more on their partner for most of their support.
TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Show respect for your partner’s needs, feelings, preferences, and opinions.

- Aim to create a relationship where you and your partner both feel empowered and in control of decisions, and what happens in the relationship and in your lives.

- Consult your partner before taking decisions that will affect them, and try to reach joint decisions.

- Don’t try to micro-manage your partner’s behavior—allow them to decide what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

- Encourage your partner to pursue their goals and realize their ambitions.

- Do not attempt to change a controlling partner by trying to placate or please them as this will reinforce their controlling behavior and make you angry and resentful.
SKILL AREA 3: COMMITMENT

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Develop a long-term, big picture view of what you want to achieve as a couple.

- Make time for and put effort into creating and maintaining a good relationship.

- Express your commitment by showing initiative, putting in extra effort when required, and demonstrating a sense of urgency etc.

- Celebrate individual and joint accomplishments and milestones.

- Maintain a work life balance and continually experiment in and improve all dimensions of your life—for example, work, home, community, and leisure.

- Step back regularly and ask yourself how you are contributing to the relationship, and what you may need to do differently.
SKILL AREA 4: FRIENDSHIP

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Explore with your partner your individual and joint dreams and goals.

- Focus on your partner’s positive attributes rather than trying to change them.

- Look for ways to bring out the positive in your interactions, and try to say “yes” as often as possible to your partner.

- Develop emotional closeness by reading and responding to your partner’s feelings and emotions.

- Increase your own and your partner’s sense of well-being by expressing positive feelings and emotions to your partner.

- Although it is important to tell your partner when you are unhappy, try to avoid replaying negative thoughts about your partner.
SKILL AREA 5: RESPONSIBILITIES

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Discuss how to share responsibilities in order to make life less difficult for each other and function as an effective team.

- Review what you each have on at the start of the week and what this means for who does what.

- Use lists and post it notes to remind your partner what needs to be done.

- Allow your partner to carry out their share of the work in their own way.

- If you see something that needs to be done, do it yourself rather than waiting for your partner to do it.

- Invite feedback on whether you are doing your fair share, and what additional things you could be doing to support your partner.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

SKILL AREA 6: COMMUNICATION

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Initiate interactions and communications with your partner rather than waiting for them to come to you.

- Set aside time to discuss the things you will be doing separately and together in the week.

- In conversations, show that you are listening and care about what your partner is saying by turning towards your partner and giving them your full attention.

- When you face problems or major decisions, give your partner the opportunity to express their views and feelings, and really listen to what they have to say.

- Aim to be moderately assertive in the relationship pushing your views and ideas at times, and backing off at other times.

- Maintain your level of interaction with your partner when you feel stressed rather than cutting yourself off.

Take your relationship check up at www.relatebetter.com
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Take your relationship check up at www.relatebetter.com

SKILL AREA 7: DISAGREEMENTS

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Accept that it is normal for two people to have different views, ideas, and positions on certain things in any relationship.

- Try to see the world from your partner’s perspective to understand where they are coming from.

- Don’t dig yourself into a hole in arguments--be prepared to compromise and change to reach common ground and make things better.

- Prevent disagreements turning into full blown arguments by avoiding the “four Horseman of the Apocalypse” behaviors--criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

- Use anger and frustration to help understand and tackle what needs to be improved in the relationship.

- Ask your partner to tell you when you are being inconsiderate and insensitive.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

SKILL AREA 8: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Recognize that you can thrash out differences and disagreements without harming the relationship.

- Show humour, affection, and respect for each other when you disagree.

- Let your partner know that you understand their worries and concerns.

- Stop arguments escalating by consciously avoiding the “four Horseman of the Apocalypse” behaviors--criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

- Don’t continually sidestep differences, problems, and conflict as this leads to emotional distance.

- Show a sense of humour and perspective to help you get through the difficult periods.

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SKILL AREA 9: ATTRACTION

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Show an interest in your partner and be nice to them.

- Focus on the things in your partner that you find attractive and comment on them.

- Make an effort to keep in shape and look good.

- Tell your partner that you find them attractive/fancy them.

- Say nice things about your partner’s looks when they have dressed up.

- Demonstrate a sense of humour and try to make your partner laugh.
SKILL AREA 10: AFFECTION

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Make time to have fun with, show interest in, and care for your partner

- Be kind, thoughtful, loving, and demonstrative.

- Express spontaneously your fondness and admiration for the things you like about your partner.

- Use nonsexual touch and display other signs of affection to strengthen your relationship.

- Be willing to express deep feelings candidly and honestly.

- When your partner shows you affection, respond with positive reinforcement.
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Take your relationship check up at www.relatebetter.com

SKILL AREA 11: ROMANCE

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Set aside time to be together on your own each week.

- Express your love for your partner in words and in writing.

- Give your partner flowers and chocolates.

- Surprise your partner with unexpected treats and gifts.

- Sit close to one another, kiss, cuddle, walk arm in arm etc.

- Remember Valentine’s day, birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions.
SKILL AREA 12: SEX

TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- Make time in your relationship for sex and don’t be afraid to ask for it.

- Find out about your partner’s sexual needs and desires and express your own ones.

- Relax and have fun trying new things.

- If you have a television in your bedroom, get rid of it.

- Seek help early from a qualified professional for physical problems.

- Keep fit through physical activity, maintaining a good diet, and drinking alcohol in moderation.
## Relationship improvement plan

Use this to record what you and your partner are going to each do to improve the relationship.

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<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
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