

Growing Healthy Relationships

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Dr. Lin Ewing

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If you have questions of a more personal nature about information presented, please feel free to email me at ewinglj@upmc.edu, or speak with me.



Growing Healthy Relationships Part 2

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*Skills and Behaviors that Promote
Healthy Relationships*

The descriptions of healthy relationships are very important! The next step is to zoom in a little more closely to look at some of the **KEY SKILLS** that actually are the ingredients necessary to create the healthy relationships with others whether they are friends, children, partners, other family members.



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Key Relationship Skills

- *Personal Boundaries
- *Effective Communication
- *Validation
- *Empathic responding
- *Conflict resolution
- *Emotion regulation

Key Relational Skill 1: Personal Boundaries

- Guidelines, rules or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable, safe and permissible ways for other people to behave towards them and how they will respond when someone 'crosses' those limits.
- They are developed from a combination of beliefs, opinions, attitudes, past experiences and social learning. They include physical, mental, psychological and spiritual boundaries.



Unhealthy Boundaries in Relationships

- **RIGID BOUNDARIES**

- Avoids intimacy and close relationships
- Unlikely to ask for help
- Has few close relationships
- Very protective of personal information
- May seem detached, even with romantic partners
- Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of rejection

- **POROUS BOUNDARIES**

- Overshares personal information
- Difficulty saying 'no' to the requests of others
- Overinvolved with other's problems
- Dependent on the opinions of others
- Accepting of abuse or disrespect
- Fears rejection if they do not comply with others

Unhealthy Boundaries: Examples in Daily Life

- Individual can't say no due to fear of rejection or abandonment;
- Identity, sense of self, is based on what you think others want you to be;
- Individual shares personal information too soon before establishing mutual trust/sharing;
- Individual has high tolerance for abuse and being treated with disrespect;
- Wants, needs and feelings are secondary to those of others and are sometimes determined by others;
- Individual ignores 'inner voice' and allows other's expectations or desires to define potential;
- Individual feels responsible for other's happiness and sometimes relies on relationships to create that for him/her;
- Individual relies on others' opinions, feelings, and ideas more than they do their own;
- Individual allows others to define his/her limits;
- Individual compromises his/her values and beliefs in order to please others and/or avoid conflict.



Healthy Boundaries in Relationships

FLEXIBLE BOUNDARIES

- Values own opinions
- Doesn't compromise values for others
- Shares personal information in an appropriate way (does not over or under share)
- Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them
- Accepting when others say 'no' to them
- Able to decide what to 'let in' and what to 'keep out;' has a healthy resistance to psychological manipulation and exploitation by others.



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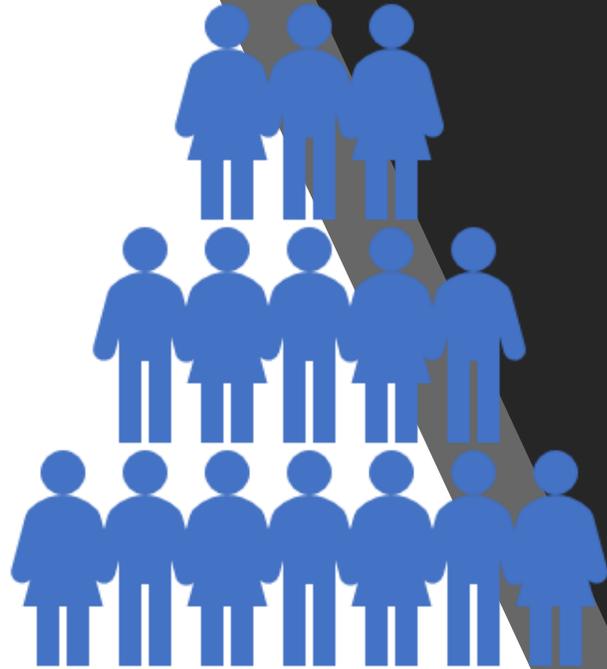
Healthy Boundaries: Examples in Daily Life

- Saying 'no' without guilt
- Asking for what you want or need
- Saying 'yes' because you want to not out of obligation or to please others
- Behaving according to your own values and beliefs
- Feeling safe to express difficult emotions or have disagreements
- Feeling supported to pursue your own goals
- Being treated as an equal
- Not feeling responsible for someone else
- Knowing who you are, what you believe, what you like

Key Relational Skill 2: Communication Effectiveness

- Communication is simply defined as the act of transferring information from one place to another with the desired goal of understanding.
- The ability to convey information to another effectively and efficiently. Good verbal, non-verbal and written communication skills help facilitate the sharing of information between people.
- Effective communication is more than just our words, and also includes:
 - How (the tone of voice)
 - Why (the intention of the message)
 - When (during an argument, the time of day)
 - What you don't say
 - Nonverbal/body language (posture, facial expressions, gestures)

Barriers to Effective Communication



- Judging, disrespecting the other person
- Not paying attention to the person you are speaking with
- Using technical language
- Giving solutions or unwanted advice
- Avoiding the concerns of others

Effective Communication Skills

Active Listening

Non-verbal competency

Asking questions

Being clear and succinct

Clarifying and summarizing

Being empathetic

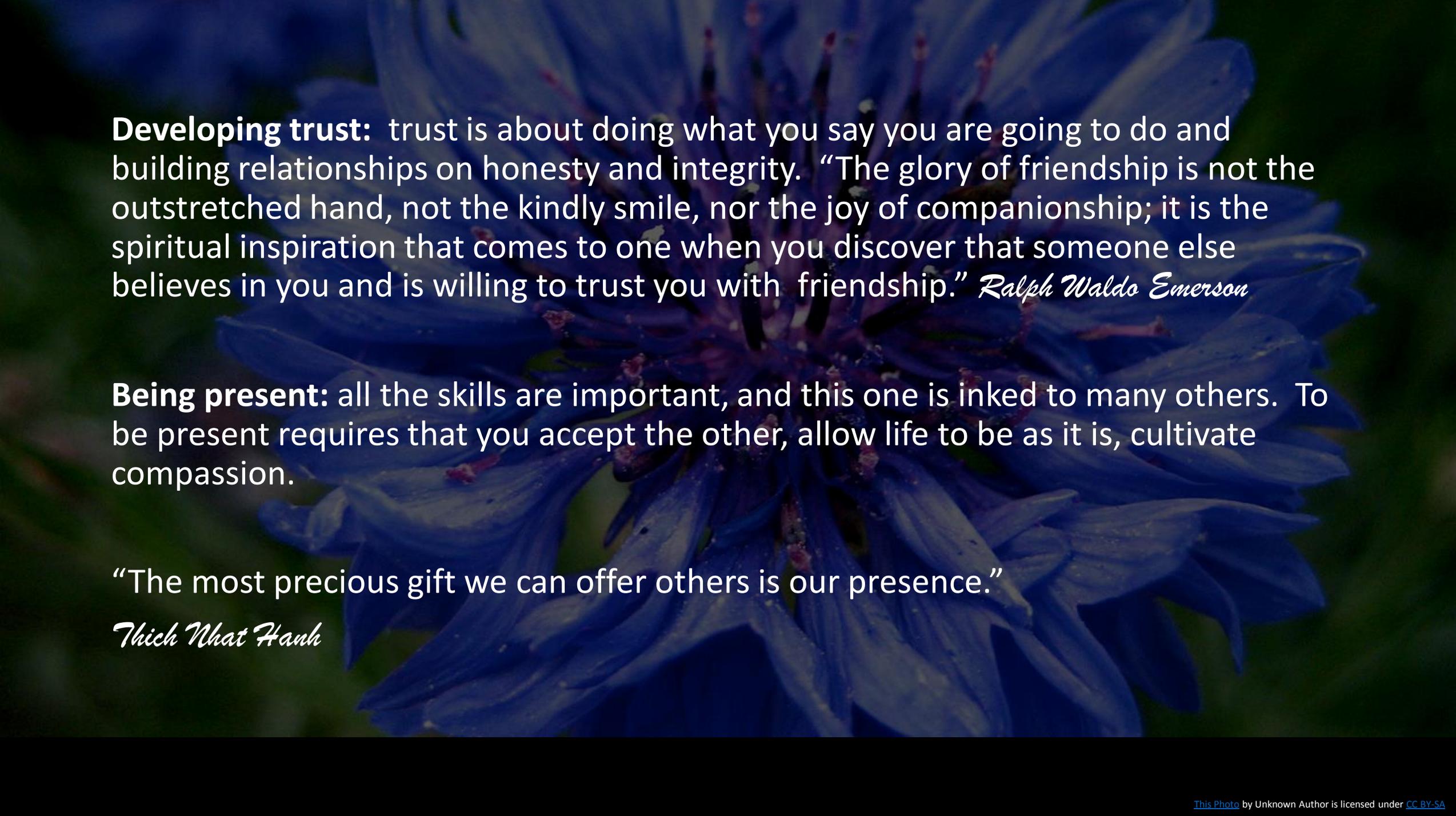
Providing feedback

Developing trust and rapport

Being present



- **Active listening:** “The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.” Listen twice as much as you speak, be alert and interested, refrain from interrupting.
- **Non-Verbal communicating:** About 85% of communication occurs non-verbally; non-verbal or para-verbal messages include tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, silence, posture. Increasing awareness/attentiveness to non-verbal communication is crucial.
- **Asking questions:** When you ask a question, it shows interest; many types of question including open-ended (how, what, when, etc.), closed (will, would, could, where, which, etc.).
- **Being clear and succinct:** Be clear, articulate, concise.
- **Clarifying and summarizing:** to ensure you are hearing correctly, it is good to reflect back to clarify what you have heard and then summarize what you’ve heard. This shows you’ve been listening, and also can avert an unintended misunderstanding.
- **Being empathetic:** having empathy for another person is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.
- **Providing feedback:** Giving and receiving feedback places an individual in a vulnerable place; recognize that reality when you are the giver or the receiver.



Developing trust: trust is about doing what you say you are going to do and building relationships on honesty and integrity. “The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, not the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with friendship.” *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Being present: all the skills are important, and this one is inked to many others. To be present requires that you accept the other, allow life to be as it is, cultivate compassion.

“The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence.”

Thich Nhat Hanh

Key Relational Skill 3: Validation

- **Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors as understandable. Consistent thoughtful validation of your partner's thoughts and feelings is the best thing you can do for any relationship that you value.**
- **Validation is critical. Its importance cannot be overstated. It is one of the most important things a parent can do to foster healthy psychological development in children.**
- For example: when your partner tells you about his or her day, or shares feelings, you stay present with them in the moment, hearing about and honoring their experience. **You focus on working to see things from their point of view...getting behind their eyeballs, so to speak.**
- While the concept of validation may seem simple, it can sometimes be a little tricky to execute. So, how do you effectively listen to and validate your partner. There are a few key components to help guide your conversations

HOW to Validate!!!

1. Mindful listening: Really pay attention to what the other is saying.

Suspend judgments and reactions; temporarily let go of need to advise, change, help or fix; show you are listening...non-verbal behavior

2. Acknowledge and accept

Acknowledge what the other has said or what the expressed feeling: "I can see you are upset by this."

3. Validating does not equal agreeing

Ex: You go to a movie together and afterward discuss thoughts; your partner found it entertaining and you found it boring. You might validate their point of view by: "It sounds like you really enjoyed the film. It wasn't my favorite, but I can tell you had fun watching it."

4. Ask questions

When your partner presents a problem, try to find out more about how they are feeling and what they want by asking open-ended questions. "What did you wish would happen?" "What was your reaching to that?"

Emotional and verbal invalidation

*Emotional **invalidation** is one of the most damaging forms of emotional abuse and is often present in dysfunctional relationships. It occurs when a person's thoughts and feeling are rejected, ignored, or judged. Denying someone's feeling and emotional experience can make them feel like they're going crazy.

*Invalidation disrupts relationships and creates emotional and relational distance from another.

*Most people do not intentionally invalidate the internal experience of others. But, well-intentioned people may be uncomfortable with intense emotions or believe that they are helping when they are actually invalidating.

Examples of Invalidating Statements

- “At least it’s not...”-or—“It could be worse.” Suffering of another can elicit strong discomfort and, for compassionate people; the urge is to fix the situation or make it better.
- “I’m sorry you feel that way.” (merely a socially acceptable way of saying, “I don’t care how you feel, your reality is wrong.”)
- “You shouldn’t feel that way.” Communicates that a person’s emotional experience isn’t valid. Denying a person’s perspective can make them feel crazy.
- “Don’t think about it, just get on with it.” Sadly, people tell themselves and others frequently to dismiss feeling and ‘get on with it.’ Actually, encouraging emotion dismissal leads to greater psychological distress. When we trivialize, minimize or disavow feelings, emotions grow.
- “I’m not having this discussion.” We’ve all been victim or perpetrator of ‘The silent treatment.’ Ignoring phone calls/text messages, **rolling our eyes**, literally ending a conversation because it is uncomfortable...these are all invalidating behaviors.

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Part 3
to follow



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