

# Enhancing relationships at home

## Tips for getting the most out of your personal relationships



**L**iving in close personal relationships (partner, family, friend) is a part of everyday life and brings comfort, support and fun. However, at times relationships can also cause distress and frustration.

The state of your relationships has impact on work performance and productivity; if you are feeling stressed about your relationships, your ability to concentrate and perform at work will be negatively affected. Thus it is important to nurture and enhance the relationships you develop to ensure they are not inversely impacting on work performance.

Relationships fluctuate in enthusiasm and satisfaction and this can be influenced by the way we feel, communicate, solve problems, and manage stress. Relationship hurdles and problems are natural and can be managed effectively with good communication in order to bring people closer together.

The following skills can help enhance relationships by building and maintaining a feeling of trust, enjoyment, openness and caring in relationships.

### Self-awareness and flexibility

Over time (and with constructive feedback) we gain a greater understanding of our own needs, expectations and patterns within relationships. Knowing and accepting your own

Stresses such as partner relationships can have a major effect on your work performance.



**Murray Davis** reviews some of the essential skills in maintaining a healthy personal life.

personality style and how this affects a relationship can help you remain flexible to changing the way you approach situations in order to get the best results in times of change. Be mindful of your own patterns of doing things and the pros and cons of those patterns.

### Realistic and open expectations

We often have unrealistic expectations of others and the relationship – expecting by default that things will be the way we want them to be. We may also expect perfection from others, or that they should be able to read minds.

You must expect and realise that everyone is different and relationships require regular healthy compromise. Expect that at some time you and the other person will be misunder-

stood, doubtful, make a mistake, need to make a change or have to work on something to enhance a relationship and that this is normal. Check that your needs (and demands) in the relationship and of the other person are reasonable.

Some people prefer defined roles in relationships and others are more egalitarian. It's important to be open with or agree on your expectations, rules or guidelines for managing issues (for example, money, spare time, chores).

### Early conflict resolution and problem solving

The following steps should be undertaken to assist in conflict resolution and problem solving between two people:

1. Both people define their understanding of the problem, issue or need (it may be a difference of opinion).
2. Both people describe the impact of the issue on themselves as the other person listens.
3. Both brainstorm possible solutions (for example, compromise or change in behaviour) and positives and negatives of each idea.
4. Both decide on the best solution and implement it.
5. Monitor and review the solution to ascertain whether it is achieving desired results.

>>

# Senior counsellors

Senior counsellors are available to provide confidential advice to QLS members on any professional or ethical problem. Senior counsellors may act for a solicitor in any subsequent proceedings and are available to give career advice to junior practitioners.

<b>Brisbane</b>	<b>Sunshine Coast</b>
JR Byrne	GW Ferguson
3221 5722	5443 6600
PD Carne	MD Bray
3213 9288	5441 1400
MB Conroy	MO Richardson
3371 6244	5447 3122
PL Cooper	<b>Gympie</b>
3231 2444	GR Neilson
RV Forgione	5482 1933
3273 1700	<b>Maryborough</b>
GC Fox	TW Young
3160 7779	4122 2622
GJ Hutchinson	<b>Gladstone</b>
3284 9433	CA Trevor
JP Kelly	4972 8766
3228 9333	<b>Rockhampton</b>
MO Klug	AR Batts
3292 7000	4927 3988
A MacGillivray AM	VN Jackson
3846 6317	4936 9100
JG Mann AM	JL Shaw
3233 8888	4931 1888
MA Miller	<b>Mackay</b>
3223 6400	APF Ghuson
GA Murphy AM	4944 0333
3303 9800	GC Paterson
JA Nagel	4944 0333
3349 9311	JC Taylor
TA Nulty	4957 2944
3246 4000	<b>Cannonvale</b>
TP O'Gorman AM	JC Ryan
3236 1311	4948 7000
RG Perrett	<b>Ayr</b>
3292 7000	BJ Baxter
WT Purcell	4783 1733
3221 3683	<b>Townsville</b>
GJ Vickery AM	RC Barnes
3309 0888	PGB Mackey
<b>Gold Coast</b>	4772 6699
WG Jones	PRH Elliott
5591 5333	4772 3655
WM Potts	<b>Innisfail</b>
5532 3133	VJ Vandeleur
PEM McCafferty	4063 5900
RB Attwood	<b>Cairns</b>
5536 1395	RJ Beer
<b>Ipswich</b>	4030 0600
PM Fallu	AL English
3281 4999	4051 5388
R Zande	RJ Reaston
<b>Toowoomba</b>	4051 3933
TM Sullivan	GR Smith
4632 9822	4051 5611
KM Walker	<b>Atherton</b>
4632 7555	FJ Liston
JM Rees	4091 2655
4632 8484	
<b>Warwick</b>	
ND Maxwell	
4661 8822	

>>

If the other person usually responds with aggravation, withdrawal or sidetracking, you might need a rehearsed, consistent and persistent approach.

## Quality time and support

Talk regularly about your interests, ideas, plans, beliefs and be open to differences of opinion.

Make a list of pleasant activities you can do together and plan ahead to make time to do them (also try something spontaneous, fun, romantic or unexpected).

Remain appreciative and curious about the other person and how they see, do and want things. Consistently affirm your relationship. Give the other person compliments and discuss what you like about them and your relationship. Additionally, develop patience and tolerance for mistakes and vulnerability in others; no one is perfect.

## Enhancing communication

During signs and times of trouble it is easy to forget good communication skills and feel pulled into a win/lose position inadvertently. Trouble in relationships can produce strong emotions and obscure your best intentions to communicate and care for the other person.

Talk often, openly and freely about the important things so that talking becomes a good habit (for example, differences and similarities in your ways of doing things, interests, ideas and feelings).

Talk early about things that cause strain so that negative tension does not build up and spiral out of control. Additionally, be prepared to give honest feedback (constructive criticism) and ask for things you want or need to be changed.

Accept and listen for feedback about things that you could change for the better. Listening is perhaps the most important way to enhance relationships; it generates important information for solving problems and provides an atmosphere of understanding and support.

The “five VOW-els” for effective communication is an approach to relationship issues that can increase the likelihood of effective outcomes (win/win) by positioning you in a respectful and mindful approach to difficult or important conversations.

### A – Acknowledge

- Acknowledge that you are both different – needs, expectations, beliefs, preferences, ways of dealing with and doing things and that this is normal.
- Acknowledge that the normal road has bumps – there will be disagreements, mistakes, frustrations, doubts, changes and misunderstandings.

### E – Emotion

- Good relationships require appropriate expression of positive and negative emotions. If not expressed, negative emotion often builds up and may block communication.
- Emotion has a purpose of alerting us to important needs/issues. Dealing well with emotions can be done with your communication skills.
- Acknowledge emotions and work toward solutions underlying negative emotions.

### I – Intend

- Intend to communicate well and to aim for win/win (cooperation/compromise).
- Intend to listen first and to respond assertively.
- Intend to relax, take your time to think and do the best you can.
- Intend to act sooner than later and to work on joint problem solving.

### O – Openness

- Be open to talking further and prepared for important or difficult information.
- Be open to follow up on issues, to problem solve and to receive or give constructive feedback and to learn and use assertiveness skills.
- Be open to other ways of doing things or thinking about things.

### U – Understand

- Understand the key message behind feedback and emotional situations.
- Understand the key needs or expectations that you both have. You don't have to agree on everything.

If the above relationship enhancing skills are not used regularly and effectively and there are significant changes/differences/stressors in a given relationship, then you may notice signs of trouble including:

- Poor communication
- Lack of support
- Withdrawal/distancing
- Arguing versus talking
- Relationship uncertainty
- Lack of intimacy
- Lack of trust
- Increased feelings of frustration and not being listened to
- Vague criticism or sarcasm
- Emotional outbursts
- Clingy or needy behaviour
- Unrealistic expectations
- Repeating problems and past issues resurfacing.

If you find that, despite your efforts to enhance your relationships, things are not travelling well then you are encouraged to utilise LawCare (by yourself or as a pair) which coaches people in effective relationship/communications skills. ■

*Murray Davis is the Managing Director of Assure Programs.*