

Chapter 1

Introduction and Self- Assessments

I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such a moment there is a voice inside which speaks and says:
"This is the real me!"

William James ... letter to his wife, 1878

Human relationships are a reservoir of great joy on one hand and deepest pain on the other. Love begins with both dreams and fantasy: the hope of being understood, known, and truly accepted; the hope of being safe and making another safe, of belonging; the hope of deep passion; the hope of a lasting and transforming bond. But hope collides with the realities of love. Because any two partners are going to have different needs, anger eventually results. Judgments erode away the once flowing acceptance, and loneliness seeps into increasingly distant lives.

Partners who make a *real relationship* work have certain skills. Couples who know and practice core interpersonal skills form relationships that endure, deepen, and grow. That's the good news, because you can decide to learn new skills by learning and practicing.

This book will help you develop and hone the skills you need to create and maintain a real relationship and to keep love alive. The focus is on action and change by using skills and concepts for overcoming the underlying dynamics of *difference* and *shame*. This means that you can't just passively sit and read. You'll need to get involved by risking new behaviors and trying new responses. It will take patience and persistence, and sometimes courage. But your hopes and dreams are worth the effort. A real relationship will not happen by chance or because you understand more, or your partner undergoes some surprise change, but because you and your partner have worked to become more skillful at being a couple.

More good news is that you do not need to read the entire book. Partners need to concentrate on different skills. Each chapter in Part Two contains the essentials of what you will need to learn for a particular skill. You may choose the specific skills you want to learn and skip the rest. The result is that you can start right now to relate differently to your partner.

The most unique feature of this book is its focus on the dynamics of difference and shame underlying what goes wrong—or what can go very right—with relationships. The dynamics of difference and shame have the power to set up the development of a *false self*. The false self defensively refuses to assert the *real self*. A dominant false self is a prescription for chronic *low self-esteem*, with a belief that the self is too impaired, weak or ineffective to merit esteem. This “essential phoniness” leads to a hollowness of life where blame of other or of life in general may ensue. Overcoming the power of these dynamics is the source of transforming unhealthy wounded relationships into healthy and healing real relationships.

Who Is Creating Real Relationships For?

Creating Real Relationships is for partners: married or unmarried, heterosexual, lesbian, or gay. It is for new lovers in the initial phases of a relationship. It is for people who have been together for many years and need to improve specific skills in their relationship. It is for those somewhere in the middle who find themselves unsatisfied with the realities of their relationship.

This book is for people who continue to be committed to each other and who still are willing to work toward a more satisfying life together. You will need the patience and persistence to keep working on a real relationship over time, because the skills and concepts required will not always result in instant gratification. It is more like a hard-work miracle. It won't happen by itself, or overnight—you and preferably your partner will have to work hard for it—but false, destructive relationships *can* be transformed into real ones that heal and nurture both partners, and in which love can thrive.

The new responses and behaviors you are about to try each require a number of weeks, sometimes months, to take hold. Significant change will require you to make several shifts in your response behaviors, and this will also take some time. You may try something new and it will seem like a disaster. It may not fit your style of being in the world or your particular needs. Taking risks means opening yourself up to possible failure. You will need to risk failure in order to reap fulfillment. If something doesn't work, try again or pick yourself up and move to the next skill.

Creating Real Relationships is *not* for partners who are *now* experiencing the threat of violence within their relationship. Physical threats or abuse requires specialized

professional help, and it is recommended that you seek assistance at once. The breach of trust that battering causes to individuals goes beyond the scope of this book.

Creating Real Relationships is also *not* for people who are dealing with *active* drug or alcohol abuse. Substance abuse also requires specialized professional help, and it is recommended that you seek assistance at once.

However, *Creating Real Relationships* will be significantly helpful to people recovering from domestic violence and substance abuse, as well as to those in their families.

What Is the Self?

The *self* is the sum total of one's inner experience. The self is the individual personality structure. It has affective (feeling) and cognitive (thought) elements, which function at both a conscious (aware) and unconscious (unaware) level. The self attempts to evolve toward wholeness and maturity. However, it requires support in order to do so. If essential emotional needs are not adequately met or there is trauma, growth and development of the self will be impeded around the particular trauma or emotional-need deficit.

Basic Assumptions About Human Development

The skills and concepts in this book make certain basic assumptions about human development:

1. The development of the self proceeds in an orderly and rather predictable pattern. The rates of development may vary from individual to individual.
2. The development of the self passes through a series of hierarchically ordered and sequenced phases.

3. These phases each contain developmental skills and dynamics that must be resolved if the individual is to proceed successfully to the next level of development. (The developmental skills and dynamics are included sequentially in the chapters of this book.)
4. The developmental skills and dynamics occur within the context of the individuals' early interpersonal relationships.
5. The developmental skills and dynamics also occur within the individuals' process of separation and individuation.

What Is a Real Relationship?

A *real relationship* supports, encourages, and nurtures both partners' real self. It is composed of two emotionally healthy partners who seriously and mutually consider each other's basic needs. Each partner is aware of his or her needs and is able to express these to the other freely. The couple has the skills to understand and accept these needs and to negotiate and resolve conflicts of needs as they arise. Specifically, both individuals in a real relationship have the capacity to:

1. Experience a wide range of feelings deeply. Accept a wide range of feelings in proportion to the situation, without fearing the expression of feelings. (However, not let guilt and disappointment run wild.) Don't block appropriate expression of feelings or erect barriers against them.
2. Expect appropriate need satisfaction. Expect that life can be mastered and good things can be achieved. Discover the physical and emotional conditions that contribute to pleasurable living, and act accordingly.

3. Be assertive and self-activate. Identify the things that make up their individuality. Be responsible for planning and taking action that will improve situations. Pursue their own goals autonomously without prodding from other people.
4. Acknowledge self-esteem. Have confidence in one's own judgment, ability, power, and decisions. Maintain respect for, or a favorable impression of, oneself. Know when a problem or crisis has been resolved, and recognize one's self-reliance. Maintain a sense of self-worth through healthy ways of thinking.
5. Soothe painful feelings. Don't wallow in misery, but find means to experience comfort and hope. Confront distortions in thinking that lead to extreme feelings. Know that pain is not necessarily deserved, but simply *is* at times and can lead one somewhere they would not have gone otherwise.
6. Make and stick to commitments. Make personal commitments to relationships and career goals. Persist in the face of obstacles, utilizing the support of others to assist them when needed.
7. Express creativity. Develop the ability to replace old, familiar patterns of living and problem solving with new, more successful ones. Devising ways to cope with loss or misfortune and improvise ways to achieve security. Find and express passions and interests.
8. Experience intimacy. Express the real self fully in a close relationship. Don't allow fear of abandonment to prevent intimacy from emerging at the beginning of a new relationship. Sustain intimacy through difficult times or when other goals must be pursued. Keeping healthy boundaries in relationships.

9. Accommodate and enjoy being alone. Be alone without feeling abandoned. Sense that the ability to find meaning in life comes from within, even if it ultimately involves others. When alone, enjoy being preoccupied with worthwhile pursuits. Don't confuse feeling alone with the loneliness and despair that leads to depression. When feeling despair, confront it rather than filling time with meaningless or ineffective activity.
10. Find the unified real self that is you in the midst of all of your conflicting parts. Recognize and sustain an awareness of the inner core of feelings, perceptions, values, and beliefs that persists and is the same as a person grows and develops, in good times and in bad times.

Relationships are more or less real. There are varying degrees of realness, and the degree of realness may fluctuate over time even within the same relationship. Couples who want a real relationship continually strive for the optimal in mutual respect, honesty, and emotional authenticity while at the same time seeking to resolve differences. A real relationship is a maturing relationship that accepts, encourages, and nurtures the growth and realness of the partners. A real relationship supports the movement from false self to real self. Look at the false self versus real self comparison table on the next page.

Real Self / False Self Criteria

False Self	Real Self
Extreme anxiety and/or no anxiety	Healthy level of anxiety
Extremely passive and/or rigidly aggressive	Assertive
Critical, judgmental, self-righteous, envious	Accepting and encourageing of self/ others
Masked, camouflaged	Authentic, genuine
Distrusting and/or overly trusting	Healthy level of trust
Plans according to rigid schedules	Spontaneous while maintaining reasonable schedule
Withholding	Giving
Withdraws from communication	Communicative
Fearful, contracting	Expansive, loving
Always a responsible parent	Ability to be childlike
Pretense of invulnerability	Vulnerable when appropriate
Suspicious "What do they want from me?"	Accepting of people at face value
Desires isolation and shelter	Desires freedom and growth
Repeats old patterns	Can learn, adapt, and change
Denial of the unconscious	Open to the unconscious
"All or nothing" thinking	Balanced thinking
Split-off body, mind, emotions	Integration of body, mind, emotions

The movement from false self to real self is a process that takes time, but it can be significantly speeded up in the context and support of a real relationship. The goal of this book is to help develop this context and support.

Working Individually or Together

Many of the chapters in *Creating Real Relationship* are designed for making one-sided changes in your relationship. These skill chapters will show you how to alter your patterns of interaction. This is of value because of the nature of relationship dynamics. When you change, your partner must change in response. If you take a new action or response, your partner will have to respond in kind. Even the simplest shift in the pattern can cause a major change in the dynamics.

Given human nature, your partner will more than likely resist your new actions or responses. Many people find change, even when it is good for them personally and/or for the relationship, a bit unnerving. This is when you need courage and persistence. If you keep trying and hanging in there with the new action or response, your partner can shift in a more effective direction as well.

Individual work can be quite effective, but working together as a partnership will be more efficient and satisfying. Both of you will be concentrating on the same objectives, and you will be able to encourage and complement each other with your efforts.

Assessing Your Emotional Needs

Take some time for each partner to fill out the Emotional Needs Assessment individually. Complete the following and determine on a scale between 1 to 10, with 10 being “completely” (fulfilled), 1 being “not at all” (deficit).

Emotional Needs Assessment

As a preschool-age child	
I felt admired	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt loved	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt protected	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt safe	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt trusting	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
As a school-age child	
I felt secure	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt competent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt needed	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt treated fairly	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I felt valued	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
As an adolescent	
I feel appreciated	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel confident	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel fulfilled	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel important	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel independent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel optimistic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel productive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel recognized	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel respected	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I feel worthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Record your respective Emotional Needs Assessment scores in the Partner's Emotional Needs Record Table on the next page.

Partner's Emotional Needs Record

EMOTIONAL NEEDS	PARTNER A	PARTNER B
I felt admired		
I felt loved		
I felt protected		
I felt safe		
I felt trusting		
I felt secure		
I felt competent		
I felt needed		
I felt treated fairly		
I felt valued		
I felt accepted		
I experienced privacy		
I felt supported		
I felt heard		
I felt understood		
I felt appreciated		
I felt confident		
I felt fulfilled		
I felt important		
I felt independent		
I felt optimistic		
I felt productive		
I felt recognized		
I felt respected		
I felt worthy		

Circle all scores below a 5. These are the emotional need deficits that will considerably affect your relationship.

Discuss them with your partner, because the emotional need deficits that each partner brings to the relationship will require attention. Let's now take an assessment of any problems you can identify in your relationship.

Assessing Your Relationship Problems

Each partner is to fill out the Relationship Problems Assessment. Complete the following and determine on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = no problem, 10 = a major problem).

Relationship Problems	
Arguing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Anger	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Anxiety/panic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Conflicting needs in relationship	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Depression, discouragement	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Disenchantment	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Emotional distance, low intimacy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
False assumptions about partner	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Feeling deprived	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Feeling hurt	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Feelings of inequity, unfairness	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Guilt	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Lack of time together	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Misunderstanding	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Name calling, blaming, threats	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Negativity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not feeling listened to	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Problems with in-laws	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Unexpressed feelings	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Record your relationship problems in the Table below placing scores above 5 in the appropriate box. If either partner has a problem above 5, it will be considered a relationship problem.

Partner's Relationship Problem Record

PROBLEM	PARTNER A	PARTNER B
Arguing		
Anger		
Anxiety/panic		
Conflicting needs from relationship		
Depression, discouragement		
Disenchantment		
Emotional distance, low intimacy		
False assumptions about partner		
Feeling deprived		
Feeling hurt		
Feelings of inequity, unfairness		
Guilt		
Lack of time together		
Misunderstanding		
Name calling, blaming, threats		
Negativity		
Not feeling listened to		
Problems with in-laws		
Unexpressed feelings		

Circle the Relationship Problems and discuss them with your partner. You may want to come back later to help determine the key skills for creating Real Relationships needed in Part Two of this book.

Getting Started Building Your Skills

Having completed the Assessments, you can determine which *skill* you want to work on first. If you can see that work on several skills will be needed, it is best to work on one at a time. You have a lot to cover in this book. You're going to have some fun, but you're also going to have to work pretty hard. You can learn several things:

1. New strategies and skills for being in a real relationship.
2. Healthy concepts that will enhance your self-esteem.
3. The role of shame in your life, and how to overcome it.

There will be some work to do, and you will begin practicing what you've learned in real situations. Most of your time will be spent learning new skills and then practicing them. So roll up your sleeves and let's get started.

Clarifying Expectations

Take a little time here at the beginning of your work to think about some of the things you're hoping to get out of this book. There are no right or wrong answers to this. Please try not to leave out anything, even if you think it might be unreasonable. If they're your ideas, they are of value.

It's natural to come to *Creating Real Relationships* feeling either hopeful or hopeless. Relationship issues develop over a long period of time, and you may have been disappointed for many years. Your problems are unlikely to disappear overnight. What you will do in later chapters is work to develop realistic and manageable short-term goals that may or may not be symptom-related. For example, you may have a goal of "feeling less anxious alone at home when Charlie has to work late." Or you might have a broader goal like "learning to control my temper and not

snap at people—including Charlie and also my colleagues at work.”

You may frequently find yourself setting unrealistic goals and standards, and then being hard on yourself when you cannot meet them quickly. For example, “blowing up at Cindy only if several attempts at rational discussion of the problem don’t work” is a much more realistic goal than “never raising my voice to anyone again, no matter how much the other person provokes me.” Also, “learning ways to feel less anxious and enjoy myself when Peter is away on a business trip” is more realistic than “always feeling totally relaxed no matter what is going on in my life.” Certainly willingness to tackle ambitious goals is a positive, promising quality, but change and growth are *not* about “all or nothing.” The reality of life reflects *some* change and *some* growth taking place over a period of *some* time. It is important to remind yourself frequently to be patient with yourself. You are doing something challenging that takes persistence and courage! The recovery process you are about to begin as you work with *Creating Real Relationships* will continue long after you finish this book.

