

BUILDING OTHERS UP, OR NOT...

The 5:1 Ratio For Relationship Health

The ratio of speaking in an encouraging versus discouraging way is a great indicator of family emotional health. If the ratio in your home is 5:1, you are developing a pattern to promote healthy, functioning relationships for generations. Unfortunately, a four to one ratio or lower adds dysfunction in the family. Words need to be wholesome, positive, warm, and caring. While correction and discipline are important, gossip, criticism, and putting each other down can be emotionally damaging.

Core Conditions for Relating Positively to Others

While the following traits seem simple, they are often what is missing in encouraging relationships.

Genuineness (being the real thing)

To be genuine is to be honest with yourself and others. It requires us to examine our own heart frankly to discern the shadows that lurk within. Genuineness requires work, but there are so many positive payoffs that the cost is worth the effort. Honest reflections about personal struggles enable us to better understand the human condition of others and assist others in their journey toward wholeness. An honest examination about our need to change brings growth in authentic compassion.

Genuineness communicates acceptance without license, reality without self-pity, and openness without pride. Fake Christianity enables us to judge harshly, act prideful, and condemn easily.

Respect (respecting others with words & deeds)

Respect, like warmth and empathy, is necessary to build trust. Respectful interactions clearly show a belief in the other person, an acceptance of his or her personhood, and affirmation that he can be trustworthy and responsible for his own life. In marriage, respect is necessary for intimacy and essential for the healthy resolution of conflicts.

Respect is vital to build a great marriage relationship. However, research indicates that spouses often tend to show more respect to others than to their mates. Frances Klagsbrun, before writing *Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce*, interviewed 87 couples who had been married for 15 years or more. She wanted to identify the main factors that enabled their marriage to survive. An overwhelming majority named respect as a key factor in building a long lasting marriage.

Not only is disrespect threatening to a marriage, it undermines a spouse's self-esteem and regard for their partner. In a healthy marriage, partners nurture and build up each other's esteem. There's an absence of contempt and criticism, which are weapons of disrespect. In essence,

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respect is an appreciation of the personhood of one's partner, and willingness to honor and live with what is unique and best in each other.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to imaginatively and accurately tune in to the mind and heart of another person and respond to let them know they are understood.

Empathy is sometimes confused with sympathy, but they are quite different. Sympathy is feeling the same feelings of another person. When you feel joy, sorrow, or fear, I would actually have the same feelings. Empathy, on the other hand, is accurately understanding their feelings even if I don't have the same inner experience. Taking on another's feelings, could prevent us from being objective and really helpful. The Good Samaritan had empathy for the wounded man and took objective action to help him get relief. A close identity of his feelings can actually be too overwhelming for us to be objective enough to take proper action. Emergency workers sent to a car crash or another crisis are trained to stay calm and watch carefully for ways to assist the injured. They are trained to understand their pain, but not feel it.

In marriage and family life, partners who know how to empathize will understand each other, solve problems easier, and encounter fewer toxic conflicts. They can risk expressing ideas, concerns, and deep feelings in an open manner. Empathy helps us understand our family's changing hopes, fears, dreams, and expectations.

Warmth (being open, accepting, sensitive and encouraging through nonverbal communication)

Some 50% to 70%, of our messages are communicated by nonverbal expressions that surround our words. Body movements, facial expressions, and tone inflections determine to a large extent whether a message builds others up or tears them down. How I appear to the speaker when I'm listening may be as important to him or her as the words I actually say. Conversely, how I look as I send a message can be as important as the words to the reception of the message.

If I talk unenthusiastically and use other 'door closers' my body is saying to my partner, "I'm not really interested in what you're saying or feeling." Few things build a caring relationship more than a warm smile, twinkling eyes, and reassuring touches. So the core condition of warmth, which is being open, accepting, sensitive, and encouraging, is expressed almost entirely through one's nonverbals.

The Bible gives us specific instructions for ensuring positive relationships with others, and research confirms that positive interactions do build others up and increase happiness and joy.

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) tells us, Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.