

Resilience in Relationships

The quality of our relationships has a significant impact on our confidence, self-worth, and psychological adjustment. As we mature and gain wisdom, many become more adept at determining the relationships that add worth to their lives. When we are younger, often hindered by insecurities and lack of clarity, we are frequently in unhealthy relationships. As we navigate ourselves to healthier relationships, we experience more safety, security, and contentment.

As a psychologist working with patients for more than 25 years, I have witnessed people reflect on relationships with honesty and, often, tremendous pain. It is hopeful when someone deciphers a maladaptive pattern within themselves in how they relate to others. An example would be an overly solicitous individual as she doesn't believe in her sense of adequacy. This individual would be too accepting of the poor behavior of the other and would most probably minimize their own needs. Another example would be an individual who, desiring to be needed, might set poor boundaries and be repeatedly taken advantage of. I have had patients speak to "weeding their garden" as they reflect on the people in their lives and who they can choose to remove from their lives. It is not easy work and can bring up a lot of uncomfortable emotions. Change is hard, and people will often minimize their experiences to avoid difficult decisions.

A typical thought process that accompanies insight is the inevitable lamenting why we have tolerated such behavior for as long as we have. Our minds can be unkind in their tendency to take newfound knowledge and turn it into regret. "How could I have allowed this to have happened?" "Why did I not recognize this before now?"

It is essential to consider what we are looking for in our friendships. While everyone can have a difficult day, the people in our lives should be interested in our challenges and successes. It is important to feel heard and understood, and friends should be trustworthy and "have your back."

If we utilize mindfulness and pay deliberate attention to our experience of being with the other person, we will be well guided. Be cautious of minimizing your experience or blaming yourself for the failure of connection.

As we learn more about ourselves, we become better at assessing the relationships in our lives. Although challenging, the changes we make culminate in more happiness in our lives. "Happy weeding."

Carolyn Morgan, PhD

