

RELATIONAL CAPACITIES

Relational capacities and skills promote deeper bonding in relationships. Relational capacities develop over time according to one's past and current experience. Continued development and expansion of relational capacities enable individuals to bring about positive connection and intimacy in their lives and relationships.

Empathy for one another

Empathy is the ability to understand how another person experiences life. For couples to be able to make empathic statements to one another requires the capacity to view and understand the partner as a separate person. Without individual capacities for empathy, relationships have severe limitations in how far they can evolve. Under stress and without empathy, one partner will usually blame the other for not responding emotionally and not meeting his or her needs at a particular moment.

With empathy, an individual can have compassion for his partner's emotional distress and periodic inability to be responsive. With empathy, a partner can put her needs "on hold" or pause until her partner is more willing or capable of responding. With empathy, soothing moments can occur within a relationship that provide healing and promote closeness. With empathy, individuals are able to search for and generate long-term solutions to complex emotional difficulties. And with empathy, individuals can develop committed, ongoing, flourishing relationships because there is a desire to discover what the partner wants and a willingness to help in its achievement.

Identify and express desires, thoughts, values, and feelings

This capacity requires a willingness to be vulnerable and the effort to take the time necessary for focusing inward. It also requires both partners to make an effort to overcome any long-held feelings of inadequacy in verbalizing what they are experiencing. With growing capacities to identify and express desires, thoughts, values, and feelings, it becomes possible to differentiate as individuals, and to generate a clear future focus for the relationship.

Complete interactions in a satisfying manner

This capacity requires a consistent perseverance in the face of strong regressive tendencies to walk out, slam doors, throw tantrums, or to be *right* while proving your partner is *wrong*. It also requires the capacity to tolerate the fear that may come up when differences surface and are acknowledged.

Willingness to give to the other person even when it is not convenient

This requires the capacity to put one's own impulses "on hold" in order to respond to your partner's needs. Once developed, this capacity forms a cornerstone of enduring trust and safety in the relationship.

Ongoing commitment to each other and the relationship

This is the most difficult level of maturation and usually does not emerge fully until latter stages in a relationship. Some people feel a commitment to a relationship early on, but are unable to commit themselves to enhancing their partner's lives. Development of this capacity involves practicing compromise, give-and-take, effective negotiation, an ongoing recognition of your partner's "growing edge," and a genuine willingness (not just "lip service") to help in its achievement.