

How to have a Positive Relationship?

Positive emotions seem to have some almost magical properties. They are, for example, contagious. Emotions also seem to be linked to memory and can be called forth by triggers such as old photographs. It turns out that feelings play an enormous but often overlooked part in our daily lives. In fact, emotions are useful, powerful and beneficial. In short, it is worth understanding emotions and especially the power of positive emotions because they can be harnessed for success in relationships. Relationships are one of the most powerful driving forces in our lives. They have the ability to inspire greatness and they have the ability to bring us to our knees when they languish and fail.

Heartfelt positive emotions like joy, hope, inspiration and gratitude bring people closer and are necessary for forming and maintaining relationships. Feeling heartfelt positive emotions activates the dopaminergic system in brain areas responsible for executive control and flexible thinking. When people are engaged in open and substantive interpersonal interactions, positive emotions will prime positive memories, interactions and interpretations which in turn produce pro-social behaviour. When people feel positive emotions, over time, these positive emotions become associated with greater feelings of self-other overlap and oneness and this broadened sense of self may predict a more complex understanding of others. So how does happens?

Positive emotions broaden a person's thought action repertoire beyond typical patterns of thinking whereas negative emotions induce specific action tendencies, the 'flight or fight' response. In the context of modern day relationships, positive emotions broaden people's sense of self to include others, which over time produce greater feelings of self-other overlap and oneness. These feelings of self-other overlap predict a more complex understanding of others. Having a more complex understanding of others will smooth the progress of the relationship, allowing each person to better appreciate the other and continue to become closer.

In other words positive emotions broaden people's sense of self to include others. The idea that people perceive another person as a part of the self, thereby allowing communal allocation of resources as well as the other's characteristics becoming one's own. As people grow closer, the line between self and others gets blurred and harder to delineate, leading to increased self-other overlap and relationship satisfaction. So heartfelt positive emotions lead to self-expansion. In the very early stages of a romantic relationship, couples experience lots of many positive emotions such as joy, love and interest. These rewarding positive emotions then fuel people's desire to experience the process of self-expansion further. For example, couples who par-

anticipated in novel and arousing activities together reported increased relationship satisfaction and closeness. These feelings of oneness become prominent marker of increased relationship satisfaction and closeness.

Did you know that your relationship could continue to blossom if there is a ratio of 5 positive emotions to 1 negative emotion? Research has found that when there is a high level of positivity, these relationships or marriages are flourishing as both partners were happy and satisfied. Whereas relationships that exist in miserable or disheartening conditions had positivity ratios lower than 1 to 1.

However the findings that support the notion that heartfelt positive emotions increase self-other overlap and build relationships challenges existing findings that stress can bring people together. According to the latest research on the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, negative emotions do not lead to better relationships and positive emotions are of primary importance in the formation of a new social relationship as well as maintaining a flourishing relationship over time. During positive emotions, self-boundaries expand and become more permeable, at such moments people might more readily see their oneness with others and think in terms of “we” instead of “me” versus “you”. So do not under-estimate the power of frequent fleeting feelings of positivity in your relationship!

It is just as important to seek out others when good things happen to you. It has been shown that actually communicating personal positive events with others is associated with increased daily positive affect and well-being, above and beyond the impact of the positive event itself and other daily events. This process of seeking out others when good things happen is known as capitalization. So improved well-being is an outcome of capitalization. But how can capitalization help in relationships? Well it all depends on how your other half responds to your capitalization. If your partner or spouse responds actively and constructively (and not passively or destructively) to your capitalization attempts, then the benefits will be further enhanced. Research has found that close relationships in which one’s partner or spouse typically responds to capitalization attempts enthusiastically were associated with higher relationship well-being such intimacy and daily marital satisfaction.

How does this capitalization work? Well sharing a positive event with others requires retelling the event, which creates an opportunity for reliving and re-expressing the event. Also, sharing good news initiates an interaction that may allow individuals to perceive that others are pleased for them, a process likely to boost self-esteem and more generally to facilitate positive reflected appraisals – perceiving oneself positively in the eyes of the other. This latter effect requires, of course, that the listener’s response to be experienced as positive, that is, recognizing and validating the good news. More destructive responses (for example, pointing out the downside of a positive even or minimizing its importance) may well dampen or even reverse the positive effect produced by one’s good fortune.

So think about how you typically respond to hearing your partner’s or spouse’s good news, which category do you fall into?

ACTIVE – CONSTRUCTIVE

I usually react to my partner's good fortune enthusiastically.

My partner gets the sense that I am even more happy and excited than them.

PASSIVE – CONSTRUCTIVE

I try not to make a good deal out of the good news, but I am happy for my partner.

I am usually silently supportive of the good things that occur to them.

ACTIVE – DESTRUCTIVE

I remind my partner that most good things have their bad aspects as well.

I often find a problem with it.

PASSIVE – DESTRUCTIVE

I am not that interested.

I think, why should I pay attention, it's not my news'.

Finally relationships can be developed by how people interact with one another under every day circumstances. It has been discovered that emotional bids for connection happen at a very high rate between partners. So what is an emotional bid? It is a conversation that is fundamentally about emotional connection. Bids can be verbal or non-verbal. They can be highly physical or come totally from the intellect. They can be sexual or non-sexual. The key is that a bid for connection is an attempt to create connection between two people. Its function is to keep the relationship going forward and in a positive direction.

All of these bids are needs that are expressed by an individual's emotional command system, a concept found that there are at least seven specific systems in the brains of all mammals that coordinate the emotional, behavioral and physical responses needed for functions related to survival, such as rest, self-defense and procreation. A typical happy couple may make 100 bids over the course of the dinner hour. Bids also can be as ordinary as an encounter in the grocery store. In a close relationship these bids and responses are critical because they build the relationship. A relationship is about these small moments, these bids and responses. It is the way intimacy and trusts are built.

Bids are the fundamental element of emotional connection. The brief quiz below helps you to assess your style of bidding. To take this test, think of a person who is important to you. Complete each item by indicating how much you agree or disagree with the statement.



1. I sometimes get ignored when I need attention the most.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

2. This person usually doesn't have a clue as to what I am feeling.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

3. I often have difficulty getting a meaningful conversation going with this person.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

4. I get mad when I don't get the attention I need from this person.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

5. I often find myself becoming irritable with this person.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

6. I often feel irritated that this person isn't on my side.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

7. I have trouble getting this person to listen to me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

8. I find it difficult to get this person to open up to me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

9. I have trouble getting this person to talk to me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Scoring system:

Strongly disagree: 0

Disagree: 1

Neutral: 2

Agree: 3

Strongly agree: 4

Your score for questions 1-3:

Scores below 8 mean that you are direct in your relationship. This is great news for your relationship, because you have the ability to state clearly what you need from this person. If your score is 8 or higher, you may be too reticent in bidding. The other person in your relationship may feel as if they have to be a mind reader to understand what you need.

Your score for questions 4-6:

Scores below 8 mean that you are not overly forceful in expressing what you need from this person. Your relationship benefits from this quality of yours because it's easier for the other person to hear and understand what you need. If your score is 8 or higher, you may be expressing so much anger in your bidding that you are turning this person away. Maybe this is because of past frustrations, or maybe it is the way your personality is.

Your score for questions 7-9:

If your score is below 8, this means you have a high level of trust in your relationship. If your score is 8 or higher, this reflects a problem with the level of trust in your relationship. You may need to do more to win this person's trust. Some people accomplish this by concentrating more on responding to the other person's bids, rather than trying to get the other person to respond to you.