

Starting New Relationships or Restarting Current Relationships: Safety First

A sense of emotional safety is a prerequisite for emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy is a prerequisite for the possibility of mutually satisfying, gratifying partner relationships. The progression is generally like this:

Safety > Attunement > Connection > Vulnerability > Intimacy > Relationship

Individuals can increase the likelihood of creating intimacy with potential partners, or of deepening intimacy with current partners, by looking at ways they contribute to creating a sense of safety for others.

What can help create a sense of safety?	What can harm a sense of safety?
Self-control as evidenced by courtesy, politeness, and moderation in speaking and manner.	Unregulated volume and content. Involuntary blurting. <i>Non sequiturs</i> in speaking and manner that jar social norms or conversations. ("What an interesting conversationalist! But can I count on this person to be stable when the going gets tough?")
Self-acceptance as evidenced by statements indicative of self-fairness.	Self-judgment belied by self-shaming statements disguised as modesty. ("Uh-oh! When will it be my turn to be humiliated by that 'humility'?")
Self-responsibility for 1) managing one's own reactions/responses to situations and life events, and 2) following through on one's own plans.	Focusing on what others are doing or not doing; managing anxiety by managing others; expecting others to meet behavior or performance standards, and judging them when they do not. ("Do you see me and appreciate me? Do you understand that I am not you, or about you?")
Humor that joins.	Humor that separates by criticizing self, others, or institutions. ("Yikes! If they make fun of themselves/others/society, when will it be my turn to be the butt of the joke?!")
Transparency, authenticity, clarity.	Secretiveness, evasiveness, cleverness. ("Uh-oh! What problems are they hiding that might end up causing me pain?!")
Present, mutual, lateral, reciprocal communication.	Distractedness vs. attentiveness; "one-up" or "one-down" postures; leaning too far in or too far back; over-use or under-use of conversation time. ("Am I just your audience?")
"I-statements"	"You-statements" advise and define the other person. "We-statements" include the other person without permission.
Ability to read "closeness" cues to dial intensity up or down on congeniality and assertiveness.	Insistence on making a point. Choosing "right" on the continuum of "Do you want to be right or do you want to be close?"
Physical self-care as evidenced by grooming and body morphology.	Persistence in unhealthy behavior that endangers the self. ("Wow, they don't seem to be taking very good care of themselves. I'm pretty independent, but I need help sometimes. Will they be able to care for me when I need a turn?")

Which of these safety-creating strengths do you already have in place? List three in rank order.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

With the third strength you named, what is one small change you could make to shift it to tie for second place?
