Relationships: What I Hope For vs What I'm Experiencing

HOPE, REALITY & WELLBEING

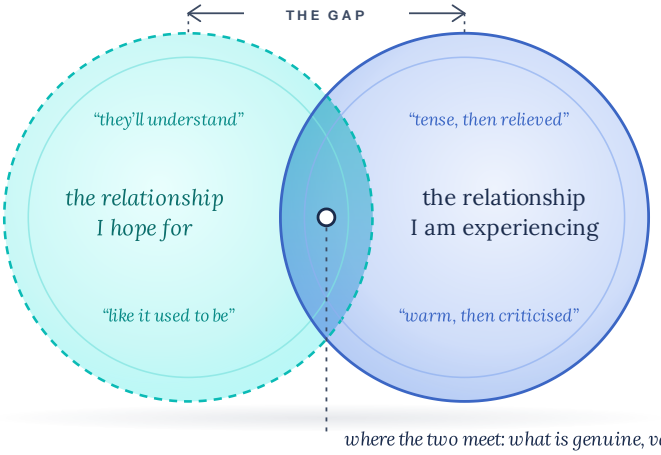
At home, at work and among friends: seeing the gap clearly, and deciding what you need

When you care about someone, it can be hard to see clearly what the relationship is costing you. This might be a family member, partner, friend, colleague or manager. You may value them, or depend on the relationship, while feeling hurt, anxious, exhausted or uncertain around them. Perhaps you keep hoping things will change, or periods of warmth and closeness make the painful times harder to understand. You may feel responsible for keeping the peace, or guilty for considering more distance.

You do not have to stop caring about someone to acknowledge that a relationship is hurting you.

This form helps you look at the relationship as it is now, notice recurring patterns, clarify what you can and cannot control, and consider what you need to protect your wellbeing. The aim is not to judge, diagnose or blame anyone. Answer only what feels useful, skip anything overwhelming, and come back when you are ready.

HOPE
what I wish would happen, what I remember, what I keep waiting for



where the two meet: what is genuine, valued and worth keeping

EXPERIENCE
what actually happens, how I feel around them, and what it costs me

01 What is happening?

start with your experience, not an explanation

Understanding why someone behaves as they do can be useful, but an explanation does not erase the impact, and you don't need to establish "why" before deciding what you need.

What tends to happen between us?

recurring disagreements, criticism, broken agreements, withdrawal, pressure, or closeness followed by renewed conflict

When does the relationship feel more positive, and what is different then?

periods of warmth matter too, and can make the painful times harder to understand

Before contact, I feel

During contact

After contact

e.g. relaxed, hopeful, tense, confused, guilty, frightened, depleted, relieved, unsettled

What has this relationship been costing me?

peace of mind, confidence, sleep, health, other relationships, time, money

What have I stopped doing, expressing or enjoying?

A REMINDER

Your emotional response is important information, but on its own it is not proof of another person's intentions. Consider your feelings alongside observable behaviour and its repeated impact.

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02 The pattern, not just the incident

look at what repeats

A single difficult interaction may have many explanations. Repeated behaviour, especially when the same problem continues despite attempts to address it, offers different information.

When something goes wrong between us, what usually happens next?
tick any that fit

SIGNS OF REPAIR

- ☐ We can discuss what happened respectfully
- ☐ They can acknowledge their part
- ☐ I can disagree without feeling unsafe
- ☐ We both try to resolve the problem
- ☐ An apology is followed by real change

SIGNS OF A STUCK PATTERN

- ☐ The issue is minimised, dismissed or denied
- ☐ I end up defending myself or doubting my judgement
- ☐ I feel pressured to forgive or move on quickly
- ☐ I am blamed for raising the problem
- ☐ The behaviour returns after a period of improvement
- ☐ I avoid subjects or change myself to prevent a reaction
- ☐ I feel responsible for restoring peace, even when hurt

One recurring pattern: what tends to happen?	What do I usually do in response?	What happens afterwards?

What does this pattern suggest about the relationship at present?

A USEFUL DISTINCTION

There is a difference between a relationship that has conflict and one in which the same harmful pattern continues without meaningful resolution. The question is not whether difficulties ever occur, but whether there is a realistic capacity to recognise harm, take responsibility, respect boundaries and make lasting changes. Focus on what the pattern means for your wellbeing, not on judging their character.

03 Hope versus evidence

what am I waiting for?

Hope is a natural part of caring about someone. It can become painful when your decisions depend mainly on a change that has not yet happened. This section is not about taking hope away, but about separating what you wish for from what you have reason to expect.

What do I most wish would change?

What have I been telling myself might happen?
"Things will improve when the stress passes." "Perhaps this time will be different."

What evidence have I seen of genuine change?
specific behaviour, not promises alone

- ☐ They acknowledge the impact without blaming me
- ☐ They take responsibility without needing me to comfort them
- ☐ Improvements last over time, without my reminding or monitoring
- ☐ I have seen little sustained change
- ☐ They respect my boundaries, even when disappointed
- ☐ They make practical efforts to address the problem
- ☐ They tolerate disagreement without punishing or intimidating me
- ☐ I am uncertain

What has actually changed, and for how long?

Am I responding mainly to the relationship I have, the one I remember, or the one I hope for?

○ the one I have ○ the one I remember ○ the one I hope for

If things stayed broadly as they are for another year, what would I need to consider?

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04 What is mine to carry?

care is not the same as responsibility

Compassion matters. So do your own needs. You can recognise someone's difficulties and still not be responsible for managing their behaviour.

Which of these responsibilities have I been carrying?

- ☐ Making them understand my feelings
- ☐ Managing their emotions or calming them
- ☐ Repairing conflict I did not cause alone
- ☐ Sacrificing my needs to avoid disappointing others
- ☐ Finding words to prevent a reaction
- ☐ Defending reasonable decisions again and again
- ☐ Making excuses for behaviour that hurts me
- ☐ Believing that stepping back means I have failed

Genuinely mine

Taken on, but not mine to fulfil

What might change if I stopped treating their response as something I must control?

A GROUNDING PRINCIPLE

You can communicate respectfully, reflect on your own behaviour, offer appropriate support and take responsibility for your part. You cannot make another person acknowledge your perspective, regulate their emotions or choose to change. Their response is not entirely yours to manage; your choices remain yours to consider.

05 The cost of keeping things the same

what is this relationship asking of me?

To keep the relationship as it is, I often feel I must

What has become normal that would concern me if it happened to someone I care about?

The needs I most often put aside

○ emotional safety ○ rest ○ privacy ○ financial security ○ time for myself ○ other relationships ○ freedom to disagree ○ my own decisions ○ trust in my judgement

What I fear if I stop accommodating the pattern

What I fear if nothing changes

Both fears may be real. They can help you identify what support, preparation and choices you need.

06 What would a healthier relationship require?

the conditions I need, not the person I need them to become

- ☐ Being able to disagree without intimidation or retaliation
- ☐ Being able to say no
- ☐ Responsibility shown through sustained behaviour
- ☐ Having my privacy and decisions respected
- ☐ Not being insulted, humiliated or threatened
- ☐ Time and space without punishment or pressure

Which conditions are currently present?

Which are repeatedly absent?

What do I need to stop assuming will happen automatically?

that an apology will resolve it, that time alone will change the pattern, that caring about someone means staying equally available

What would I need to see, consistently, before trusting that real change is happening?

You are allowed to have relationship requirements. Another person does not have to agree with your boundaries for you to decide what contact you can manage.

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07 Choosing my level of contact

options to reflect on, not a ranking

It can feel as though there are only two choices: tolerate everything or cut contact completely. In reality there is more than one way forward, and you do not have to make a permanent decision today. At work, some contact may be unavoidable; options might include keeping interactions brief and professional, putting things in writing, or involving a manager, HR or a union representative.

OPTION A

Continue contact with clearer boundaries

when contact is reasonably safe and you want to keep the relationship, while changing what you take part in

"If the conversation becomes insulting, I will end the call and we can try again another time."

My possible boundary

OPTION B

Reduce or structure contact

when frequent or unpredictable contact is wearing you down, but some contact still matters

Shorter conversations, times that suit you, written contact for practical matters, space between difficult interactions.

A level of contact I could manage

OPTION C

Take a temporary step back

when you need room to recover, think clearly and get support

Consider practical arrangements, whether telling them is helpful and safe, and how you'll manage guilt or pressure.

What I would need during this time

OPTION D

Consider longer-term or no contact

when you have decided very limited or no contact may be needed for your wellbeing or safety

Consider what harm you are preventing, what you've already tried, the practical and caregiving implications, and the support you'd need.

What I would need to consider first

IMPORTANT

If you are experiencing threats, stalking, intimidation, violence, coercive control or fear of retaliation, announcing a boundary or ending contact directly may not be the safest approach. Consider confidential, specialist support and an individual safety plan first. If your devices may be monitored, think about whether keeping this form could add risk.

The option I feel most drawn to exploring

○ clearer boundaries ○ reduced contact ○ a temporary step back ○ longer-term or no contact ○ not ready to choose

What still worries me about it?

08 Guilt, grief and when boundaries are tested

difficult decisions can hurt even when they are right

What do I fear this decision would say about me?
"I'm selfish." "I'm letting people down."

What would I say to a friend in the same pattern?

WORDS I COULD USE IF MY LIMIT IS TESTED

"I understand that you disagree. My decision stays the same."
"I'm not going to continue while we're speaking this way."
"I need some time before I respond."
"I've explained my position, and I won't keep debating it."

Guilt can signal something to reconsider, or simply that you have changed a familiar role. Ask what it is telling you, whether that fits the facts, and what fits your values. Safety always comes before having the final word.

09 My reality statement and next two weeks

small, realistic and safe steps

I care about this person, and I also recognise that

I cannot decide whether they will change, but I can

For my wellbeing, I need

One step I can take without needing them to agree

Support I will reach out to

I will review how things are going on

I can acknowledge another person's difficulties without denying my own experience. I can remain open to change without making my wellbeing depend on it. I can choose compassion without accepting repeated harm.

This form is for personal reflection and decision support. It is not a diagnostic tool, a risk assessment or a substitute for individual psychological, legal or safety advice. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, contact local emergency services. If a child, older person or other dependant may be at risk, seek safeguarding advice.

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