

Healing relationships with love

Dr. Brenda Davies

Relationships are what life is all about.

We relate in some way or another to everyone and everything around us and, to a large extent, we can choose to make those relationships joyful, meaningful and loving, or to struggle along, never quite feeling at ease with those around us or with life in general.

Changing the way we view life and relationships may not be easy, but is very worthwhile. How we relate has much to do with where we come from, what was modelled to us as children and messages given us by authority figures, culture and society.

Life events have shaped us and our hearts have had to survive many knocks on the way to adulthood through childhood and adolescence. Though our capacity to love and form healthy emotional bonds continues to develop throughout our lives, early experience can, to a great extent, predict whether we enjoy the wonders of intimacy, or find its essential elements – trusting, talking and feeling – simply too painful and difficult. Traumatic events may have left us feeling bitter and cold, suspicious of others' intentions, needy or afraid and unable to feel tenderness, experiencing the world as a minefield where games are played and people get hurt. We may swing from feeling distant and cut off to trying to bond so tightly that we deny others space and freedom to grow and therefore alienate them. Healing our early wounds is therefore essential if we're going to find peace, harmony and happiness in relationships, whether these are with lovers, colleagues, family members or even our own children, to say nothing of the rest of humanity. Learning to cope with loss is a painful necessity. Grief is the other side of love and is the pain we suffer as bonds we have developed, not only with people, but with homes, places, pets and work are ruptured. But every ending, when properly grieved, opens a space for a new beginning when we are ready to see that. Be gentle with yourself and let your heart heal.

Love is our major relationship tool. It is that fundamental vibration that stirs us to write poetry and sing songs, that leads us to try to make sense of the universe and each other, that drives us to extend ourselves to become the best we can be and do things we never thought possible; an affinity that draws us to each other and unites us in such a way that we feel complete and fulfilled.

Love may present as the sexual passion of lovers or that deep companionship that holds us together long after passion may have burned out; the instinctual attachment of parents and children; the loyalty that binds social groups or prompts us to die for our country or our beliefs; divine love that binds us in one consciousness – not only human but cosmic. Love is the energy that helps us heal our relationships and bring us to a place of inner peace.

Healing relationships needs to start with healing our relationship with ourselves, though often we neglect this and focus outside, expecting others to give us for solace and comfort and make us happy and complete. But, if we don't love ourselves, it's a bit hard for us to love anyone else, or for anyone else to love us. Taking the responsibility for loving ourselves no matter what we do opens us to love and be loved. So spend a moment looking at who and what you are. Like the rest of us, you have a perfect blend of qualities that not only makes you unique, but also ensures that you have a unique contribution to make to the universe. No one else can give to the world exactly what you can. Whether you're a mother bringing up children, a farmer ploughing a field, a therapist or a brain surgeon, you are playing your part in this amazing fabric of consciousness. In fact, like

each of us, you are a powerful, spiritual being who had the courage to come and live the human life. You've survived all sorts of issues on our journey to here. As a courageous child you managed to bounce back again and again as life beset you with difficulty, prompting you to learn coping skills, prompting you to grow. Now as an adult you can do the same even though your wounding may have left deep scars. The fact is that you are an amazing creature, and though I'm not suggesting that you become a narcissist so wrapped up in your own brilliance that you lose touch with the world around you, you have to admit, you're pretty wonderful!

Your life is your life, your choices are your choices, and your relationships are your relationships, therefore only you who can make lasting changes. It's a fact that every positive change you make within yourself will create a positive shift in your relationships too. Learning to set good boundaries and defend them if necessary, doing some self assertion training and improving our communication skills will make a huge difference. Making it a habit to be open and look at things from the other person's point of view will help you to resolve conflict as you gain new insights, integrate new truths and, if you have enough courage, up-date your integrity and therefore change your behaviour.

Learning to forgive may be hard but is essential if we want to heal ourselves and our relationships. No one has the right to tell you that you should forgive or that you should even be ready to start the process of forgiveness. However, your life and your relationships will benefit enormously when you do. Maybe you could start by looking at the fact that all of us have stumbled through life without a map, and all of us have got it wrong from time to time. Understanding this often opens up a sense of love and compassion for others (and ourselves and the mistakes we have made!) and helps us forgive. We can also positively reframe whatever has happened. Looking at what we learned from events that were painful can help us see others as teachers rather than aggressors, allowing us to release ourselves from carrying old pain that has immobilised us. Of course we can still exercise our right not to invite the perpetrator into our lives again. These two things are not mutually exclusive.

Life will never be static and often we need to modify our responses again and again until we learn to ride the waves and finally become content with what is. We are blessed (or cursed) however with divine discontent – that force that prompts us to continue to search and grow, refine, define and heal in a constant state of becoming the best that we can be. There will always be challenges to prompt us, and many of those will come from relationships which will continue to help us discover more about ourselves and the nature of life. So, be gentle with yourself and don't give up in your empowering and worthwhile quest to heal relationships with love. As you do so, you will open to your full capacity to love unconditionally and with compassion, empathy, respect and trust. Your openness, generosity and loving kindness will be rewarded with the joy of true intimacy with yourself and others.

I wish you a positive outlook, joy in the simple and mundane, as you move out into the world radiating love and peace. Have fun!

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