

How to Create Balanced Relationships

“I love you. You...you complete me.” From the film *Jerry Maguire*.

Whether this quote melts your heart at the thought of such commitment or makes you cringe at the idea of a power imbalance, the fact is, we all relate to people in different ways.

Most people would say they want (or have) a balanced relationship with their significant other. But what does a balanced relationship look like and how do you maintain it?

First, people tend to relate to one another in one of three ways: **Dependently** (or codependently), **Independently** and **Interdependently**.

Dependent/codependent: In these relationships one person sets aside his or her personal welfare to maintain the relationship. This dynamic implies that the codependent person in the relationship can't survive independently of the other person.

Independent: In this configuration, the couple lives mostly separate lives. For example, they have different friends, are rarely together and make decisions autonomously. They may live separately as well and they are fine with that arrangement.

Interdependent: In this type of relationship, two people are intimate with one another but don't compromise or sacrifice themselves or their values. This dynamic is about collaboration and cooperation. Each person is self-reliant (physically, emotionally, financially, etc.) and, simultaneously, responsible to the other.

While it's possible to find happiness, at least temporarily, in all three types of relationships, the Interdependent relationship is generally considered the model for a balanced relationship.

What do you do if you don't consider your relationship to be balanced? Take heart. With a little

information and effort it's possible to attain a balanced relationship. Try starting with this approach:

1. Find Inner Balance by:

- Focusing on what you can control (your thoughts, feelings and actions) not what you can't (others' thoughts, feelings and actions).
- Noticing how you feel and, as clearly as you can, communicating those feelings.
- Recognizing and owning your issues, which will help you recognize your partner's as well. You can be empathic and supportive without having to “fix” everything.

2. Create and Maintain a Balanced Relationship by:

- Staying present and empathic even when your partner is upset.
- Stepping back from conflicts to avoid escalation, assess the problem and make positive changes.
- Reframing the actions/reactions of your partner. For example, seeing a loved one as anxious and fearful, instead of cruel and controlling, paves the way for a more sympathetic, less confrontational approach.
- Being a good listener and focusing on the only person you can change—yourself.

Keep in mind that balance, like a relationship, is dynamic not static. It's impossible to keep balance 100% of the time in every situation. Even a balanced relationship can, at times, feel like more work than play.

Remember, sometimes the focus will be more on you, other times more on your partner, and still other times when what's best for “us” needs the focus rather than either individual.

Like a wave, there is an ebb and flow to relationships. But once we are aware of what balanced relationships look like we can better manage that dynamic. *

10 Ways Anxiety Presents Itself

Common symptoms of anxiety include racing heartbeat and butterflies in your stomach. However, anxiety can present itself in numerous ways.

- 1. Constant worries/dread.** You feel anxious nearly all the time, although you may not know why. To help reduce anxiety and stress, aim for 30 minutes of aerobic exercise on most days.
- 2. Impaired thinking.** You have difficulty forming thoughts, concentrating or learning new things.
- 3. Fatigue.** Heightened stress hormones can leave you exhausted. Adequate nutrition, hydration and sleep can boost energy.
- 4. Irritability/anger.** Coping with anxiety can be overwhelming, so you may overreact to situations.
- 5. Fear/Terror.** You may have irrational fears or an impending sense of doom or danger.
- 6. Panic Attacks.** These spikes of terror can feel like a heart attack. A few deep breaths can calm you.
- 7. Controlling behavior.** You try to control situations and people to keep anxiety at bay.
- 8. Stomach/digestive upsets.** These may include nausea, vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, gas and Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).
- 9. Sleep issues.** Insomnia, nightmares and night terrors can occur.
- 10. Phobia.** An exaggerated fear of an object or situation, such as heights, flying or spiders.

*If your anxiety interferes with normal life functions, it's important to seek professional help. **

A Letter From



Most of us would say that we want (or have) a balanced relationship with our significant other, but what does that really mean? While a “balanced relationship” may be in the eye of the beholder, interdependence is widely regarded as its model. The article on page 1 explores the three general types of relationships and how to create more interdependence in yours.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, OCD, is an anxiety disorder that is often oversimplified, made fun of and self-diagnosed. Many people with quirks, such as needing to double-check that the stove is off, may worry they have it. The page 3 article examines the symptoms of OCD, how it impacts people’s lives and how to get help.

Coping with challenging children also takes a toll on people’s lives. These kids may throw tantrums, pick fights at school and generally misbehave. Too often parents medicate their children before looking into possible root causes of their behavior. As the article on page 4 reveals, it is possible to help your child—and yourself.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how well you take care of yourself during difficult times, and the Top 10 explores some of the myriad ways anxiety may present itself.

If you have questions about the articles or would like more copies, please don’t hesitate to call us at 899-8800.

May this season bring you more satisfying relationships with everyone in your life.

How Well Do You Care for Yourself During Difficult Times?

We all go through challenging times at various points in life—whether it’s a health crisis, the end of a relationship, job loss, financial difficulties or the death of a loved one. To cope with such difficult times, self-care is vital but, too often, we are hard on ourselves instead. Answer these true/false questions to discover how well you support yourself during difficult times.



True False

Set 1

- 1. Although it doesn’t really help, when I’m facing something difficult, I often self-soothe by over-indulging in food and alcohol.
- 2. During tough times, I get caught up in “putting out fires,” and self-care goes out the window.
- 3. It’s easy for me to mentally spin out of control with worry and worst-case scenario thinking.
- 4. I can’t face my friends and family when things aren’t going well; I tend to isolate.
- 5. Shame and blame take over when I’m facing a difficult situation; I either feel it’s my fault or someone else’s.
- 6. During hard times, I get scared and feel immobilized and depressed.
- 7. I can’t understand why bad things happen to good people; it’s not fair.
- 8. In the midst of bad times, I lose perspective and have a hard time trusting that things will get better.

Set 2

- 1. No matter what’s going on, I’m committed to staying on track with my self-care routines.
- 2. Caring for myself includes asking for and receiving support from people who love and care about me.
- 3. I share my feelings and what’s going on with people I trust.
- 4. I have tools to help keep myself positively focused.
- 5. No matter how intense the situation, I take the time to do things that make me feel better, such as working out, getting a massage, spending time in nature.
- 6. I surround myself with supportive people and uplifting materials.
- 7. When times are tough, I look for any deeper or broader meaning behind the outer circumstances. That helps me keep the situation in perspective and even use it for my own psychological growth.
- 8. I trust myself to be able to handle whatever comes my way.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to get more support around caring for yourself. Please call if you’d like assistance in exploring this further. *

OCD: Do your Quirks Rise to the Level of this Disorder?

Mary felt like a prisoner to her fear of burning her house down.

Despite having never left the stove on, Mary was convinced that if she left the house without checking the stove three times, her house would catch fire. If she left the house and forgot to check, or couldn't remember if she had, she would turn the car around and come back.

One day, Mary had had enough. She just stopped going back, telling herself, "Well, I guess the house is going to burn down then. I'm not turning back."

At first she was terrified, convinced her house wouldn't survive, but after a couple of times of confronting her fear, she now feels free of it.

Is Mary quirky or does she have OCD?

Used in everything from creating eccentric TV characters to being the punch line on late night TV talk shows, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is often oversimplified and misused. But for those who suffer from OCD it's no joke.

What Is It?

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder where people experience obsessions and/or compulsions.

Obsessions are unwanted, persistent thoughts, such as about germs or intruders, or images of doing—or actual impulses to do—something destructive.

Compulsions are deliberate behaviors (washing, checking, organizing, hoarding) or mental rituals (praying, counting, repetitive statements) typically performed to reduce the anxiety triggered by the obsessions.

For instance, people with an obsessive fear of uncleanness and infection may wash their hands repeatedly or refuse to shake hands or touch things that they believe are "contaminated."

People who have an obsessive desire for exactness and need everything to be "just so" and "in its place" may be compelled to organize food cans by size and with the labels facing in the same direction.

How Does OCD Impact People's Lives?

Left unchecked, OCD can rule a person's life by taking up significant amounts of time and energy and leaving sufferers feeling anxious and exhausted. This can interfere with one's ability

at work, impeding professional development and advancement. It can also prevent some people from forming intimate relationships.

So how do you know if your quirk rises to the level of OCD?

The Thought/Behavior May Be OCD If It:

- Is constant, recurring and intrusive.
- Interferes with a person's ability to function in daily life.
- Is out of control.
- Is compulsive or highly ritualistic.
- Causes the person to feel anxious and nervous most of the time.

What Can You Do?

If you or someone you know has OCD there are ways to help.



- **Insight.** Educating oneself about the symptoms and treatment is a critical first step.
- **Redirect attention.** When obsessive thoughts or compulsive urges surface, try diverting your attention to other, healthier thoughts or activities. Do something you enjoy, such as walking, listening to music or visiting with a friend.
- **Self-care.** Eat healthfully, exercise, get enough sleep, and avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine. (The latter two are powerful stimulants.)
- **Find healthy outlets.** Focus your energies on hobbies, exercise and recreational activities.
- **Structure your time.** Daily time management helps you stay organized and can help reduce anxiety and stress.
- **Therapy.** A therapist can help you learn to respond to (or even curtail) obsessive thoughts without resorting to compulsive behavior.
- **Support groups.** Interacting with others who can relate can decrease feelings of isolation.
- **Medication.** This may be warranted for severe symptoms.

It's not unusual for people to repeat behaviors, such as checking to see if they turned off the stove or not, or to have thoughts that are upsetting or out of character. It doesn't mean a person has OCD.

But when these thoughts and behaviors impede daily functioning by becoming frequent, intrusive, time consuming, debilitating and out of control it may be time to consult a doctor or mental health provider. *

How to Cope with Challenging Kids

Joyce always expects the unexpected when it comes to her 8-year old son Milo. Within seconds, he can go from sweet-tempered and happy into a vicious tantrum. She's grown overwhelmed by phone calls from teachers, relaying how Milo hit another child in class or got into a fight on the playground.

After almost spanking her son when he threw a fit in a grocery store, Joyce realized she needed help.

She reached out to a friend who had dealt with similar challenging behaviors from her own child—yelling, punching and talking back—typical acting-out that didn't necessarily constitute a psychological disorder.

Joyce's friend recommended *The Difficult Child* by Dr. Stanley Turecki. According to Dr. Turecki, while some children suffer from psychological ailments that respond to medications like Ritalin, too many parents turn to drugs without examining the root causes of their child's behavior.



Those causes may be as simple as temperament. For instance, Joyce was making Milo play soccer because his brother did. When she asked him what he preferred to do, to her surprise, he said he wanted to visit the library. Once they started going a few days a week, his behavior at school began to improve.

The library seemed to allow Milo the downtime he needed to gather emotional resources.

In addition to allowing your child's temperament to guide activities, here are some other tips for coping with emotional and behavioral issues in children.

1. Set specific and clear expectations for your child. Parents who are disorganized or without clear boundaries tend to create more of a struggle for themselves. Be reliable and loving, while maintaining consistent rules and expectations.

2. Apply the "Positive Parenting" approach. Psychologist Georgia

DeGangi, author of *Effective Parenting for the Hard-to-Manage Child*, recommends that parents "catch" their kids being good, and then reward them through acknowledgement and actions. She advises against rewarding bad behavior with attention.

3. Recognize your stress signals and take care of your own well-being. Finding appropriate ways to cope with the behaviors of a challenging child is essential. Take time out to relax in healthy ways whenever possible. Be sure to process any feelings of guilt before they become toxic.

4. Seek professional help if needed. Do not be ashamed of reaching out for help if the behaviors continue to seem unmanageable, especially if they are having a negative effect on the family or on your child's successful development.

With a few other parenting "tweaks" (and a couple of "Mommy" spa afternoons), Joyce began to see a distinct difference in Milo's interactions with the world, and in her own ability to work with his more challenging behaviors. *

Family Solutions is a private counseling agency serving our community since 2002 that is committed to providing comprehensive outpatient mental health services to the Triad region using only licensed clinical staff. Family Solutions provides an array of mental health services to individuals, children, and families in both Guilford and Randolph County. Services are offered in the home, school and office, depending upon the family's needs. As an agency, we are becoming well-versed in evidence-based practices that have proven effective with children and families because we have personally seen the impact these specific models have had on individuals, families and communities. Having measurable, research-based approaches available to children and families is a core belief in our agency's culture. For services call 899-8800.

Family Solutions
 Greensboro Office:
 234-C E. Washington St.
 Greensboro, NC 27401
 High Point Office:
 148 Baker Road
 Archdale, NC 27263
 Ph: 336.899.8800
 Fax: 336.899.8811
 www.familysolutions.org