



# 6 Interpersonal Relationships

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## Activity 1: Content and Relational Messages

### Purpose

To examine relational messages

### Instructions

For each situation below, describe the types of relational messages you think are conveyed: affinity, respect, immediacy, or control.

**Example:** Your out-of-town friends call and say, “We’ll be passing through the night of the 22nd. We’d like to see you. Would it be convenient for us to visit, or stay, or would it be better if we stopped by another time?”

What relational messages do you perceive?

*The message seems high in respect because they care enough to call ahead, which shows respect for your schedule and life. It seems low in control because they aren’t insisting on staying, thereby controlling your time. There is affinity and immediacy (attraction and interest) because they express an interest in seeing each other. Assuming one could stay might send a more controlling message. I think there is affinity and caring for the others’ schedule. Really close friends and family might have unspoken agreements and assumptions about always staying with each other that imply a higher level of affection.*

1. A couple is discussing where to take their children and friends for pizza. The setting is loud and noisy. One parent says, “Okay, listen up. We’re going to Pizza Hut. Jump in the car.”

What relational messages do you perceive?

2. A new employee is on the job for the first day. As the lunch hour approaches, she says to the other employees in the area, “Well, where do we go for lunch?”

What relational messages do you perceive?

3. Your sister calls and starts telling you about a family reunion she’s planning next summer. Before you’ve indicated whether or not you’ll be able to attend, she says, “Everyone will be so glad to see you. And we can do some humorous decorations and you’re always good with games for the kids. This will be so much fun.”

What relational messages do you perceive?

4. A co-worker says she's noticed how well you relate to everyone at work and asks if you'd consider running for local union steward.

What relational messages do you perceive?

5. Your roommate leaves you a note that says, "I was hoping you'd be home before I had to go to class. I borrowed your blue sweatshirt for the evening. All my clothes were still wet. I hope you don't mind."

What relational messages do you perceive?

## Activity 2: Stages of Relationships

### Purpose

To understand the stages of relationships and correlate specific behaviours and words to stages of relationships

### Instructions

1. Choose a relationship that has ended. Can you identify behaviours that fit the characteristics of each stage?
2. For each stage, list some behaviours that “prove” you were in that stage.
  - a) initiating
  - b) experimenting
  - c) intensifying
  - d) integrating
  - e) bonding
  - f) differentiating
  - g) circumscribing
  - h) stagnating
  - i) avoiding
  - j) terminating

If a relationship is in the stagnating stage and you don’t want it to terminate, what would you recommend so that it moves into a “coming together” stage rather than a “coming apart” stage? (Pick a new activity that neither of you has tried like line dancing, cross-country skiing, or bridge and learn it together and see how you like it.) If you tried these suggestions, what stage would you be moving into?

3. Many song lyrics describe stages of relationships. Find lyrics that describe each of the stages of relationships. Some titles are deceiving. For instance, *I Said I Loved You But I Lied* may sound like terminating, but the lyrics make clear that it is “more than love” that is felt, making it a better candidate as a description of bonding. You may find this easier to do in a small group brainstorming session, especially when it comes to recalling lyrics. Starters: *Dance with My Father*, *Infatuation*, *My Prerogative*, *Fly Away with Me*.
  - a) initiating
  - b) experimenting
  - c) intensifying
  - d) integrating
  - e) bonding
  - f) differentiating
  - g) circumscribing
  - h) stagnating
  - i) avoiding
  - j) terminating

4. Share your answers with classmates. Do you think that any particular types of music (rap, R&B, hard rock, jazz, hip hop, Latin, rock, show tunes) tend to have greater numbers of songs that reflect particular stages of relationships? For instance, do rock songs tend to speak more of initiating or bonding? Do country songs tend to speak more of bonding or terminating? Do certain types of music tend to emphasize initiating? Experimenting? Are there plenty of songs about all stages in all types of music? Speculate on these questions. (Scholarly journals have articles that look systematically at themes from music. You might enjoy reporting on this now, or as part of a speech later in the course.)

## Activity 3: Intimacy and Distance

### Purpose

To explore the relationship between intimacy and autonomy in relationships

### Instructions

Read the following quotations and respond to each with your own thoughts and reactions.

1. “Each of us needs to establish our autonomy, or independence, and at the same time each of us desires intimacy with other people. We wish to be self-governing and independent individuals, but we also have a need to be a part of a group, to belong, to be needed by others, and to need them. We desire relational development and increased intimacy, but we are sometimes afraid of relationships developing too quickly. These seemingly conflicting goals exist in each of us.” — Judy Pearson, *Communication in the Family*, p. 237.
  - a) What is your first response to this quotation?
  - b) In your own words, what is this quotation saying about everyone’s needs? About time and intimacy?
  - c) Do you agree or disagree with what is expressed here? Why?
  - d) What words in the text lead you to believe the authors would agree or disagree with this quotation?
  
2. “For her, intimacy without words is small comfort most of the time. It’s not that she needs always to talk, but it’s important to her to know what’s going on inside him if she’s to feel close. And it’s equally important for her to believe he cares about what’s going on inside her.” — Lillian B. Rubin, *Intimate Strangers*, p. 75.
  - a) What is your first response to this quotation?
  - b) In your own words, what is this quotation saying about gender differences regarding verbal and non-verbal expression of intimacy?
  - c) Do you agree or disagree with what is expressed here? Why?
  - d) What words in the text lead you to believe the authors would agree or disagree with this quotation?
  
3. “Wife: I say that foreplay begins in the morning.  
Husband: It seems to me being sexual would make us closer, but she says it works the other way—if she felt closer, there’d be more sex.” — Lillian B. Rubin, *Intimate Strangers*, p. 98.
  - a) What is your first response to this quotation?
  - b) In your own words, what is this quotation saying about the difference between talking and doing as paths to intimacy?
  - c) Do you agree or disagree with what is expressed here? Why?
  - d) What words in the text lead you to believe the authors would agree or disagree with this quotation?
  
4. “Being vulnerable in the presence of others—which we call intimacy—is closely related to maintaining commitment among family members. Family members reveal their vulnerabilities to one another, often with a sense of trust and usually with the hope that their vulnerabilities will not be used against them. For a family to live in the presence of each others’ vulnerabilities and to stay

intact, all members make an agreement (implicit or explicit) to maintain the family unit, at least at some minimum level.” — Janet Yerby, *Understanding Family Communication*, p. 21.

- a) What is your first response to this quotation?
  - b) In your own words, what is this quotation saying about intimacy in families?
  - c) Do you agree or disagree with what is expressed here? Why?
  - d) What words in the text lead you to believe the authors would agree or disagree with this quotation?
5. “Most mothers receive more self-disclosure than fathers (Waterman 1979). Parents perceived as nurturing and supportive elicit more disclosure from children who find those encounters rewarding. College students are more likely to disclose more information more honestly to same-sex best friends than to either parent (Tardy, Hosman, and Bradac 1981).” — Kathleen M. Galvin and Bernard J. Brommel, *Family Communication*, 4th ed., p. 124.
- a) What is your first response to this quotation?
  - b) In your own words, what is this quotation saying about intimacy in families and changes over time?
  - c) In what ways does this quotation reflect or not reflect your experiences?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 4: Applying the Knapp Diagram

### Purpose

To apply the Knapp diagram to one's own personal experiences

### Instructions

Using the Knapp approach, map out a relationship you have had in the past. It can be a friend, relative, or even a pet. Give examples of each stage and some context for each



## Activity 5: Relational Climates

### Purpose

To investigate communication behaviours that can help create supportive climates

### Instructions

1. For each situation, write down in the middle column specific ways (verbal and nonverbal) that the person could behave to establish a confirming climate.
2. For each, tell why that would create a positive climate for you. Write this in the right column.

Situation	Describe several behaviours that, if engaged in by the person in <b>blue</b> , would create a confirming climate for you.	Explain why you think these behaviours would create a supportive climate for you.
You have done poorly on a test and wish to talk to the <b>instructor</b> about it after class.	The instructor could make eye contact with me and listen to my concerns. He or she could refrain from looking at the clock, and appearing hurried. Praise my effort and my taking time to come to the office.	By looking at and acknowledging me, I'd feel valued. By being praised for taking time to come to the office, rather than hurried away, I'd feel appreciated.
You have just walked into a large room for a wedding reception. You know very few <b>people</b> .		
A new <b>supervisor</b> is taking over your work group and will meet employees for the first time.		
You are a patient at a new dental office and have arrived for your first visit. ( <b>staff</b> , <b>hygienist</b> , <b>dentist</b> )		

<p>You stop by to pick up a new classmate who isn't ready. The <b>roommates</b> answer the door.</p>		
<p>You have volunteered in a group home for at-risk teens and have arrived to meet the <b>director</b>, tour the home, and have an orientation.</p>		

## Activity 6: Defensive/Supportive Climates (Gibb)

### Purpose

To apply Gibb's categories to situations in order to analyze and improve communication

### Instructions

For each item listed below, complete the forms as if you are the person speaking. Refer to the section in your text on Creating Positive Communication Climates (page 243).

- 1. Situation:** You and your brother both have two-year-old children. You were at the park watching them play (your child was barefoot), and your brother said to you, "I never let my son go barefoot. It's really a health hazard for children and there are so many risks. I always take time to put shoes on him before we play outside."

I would become defensive because I would perceive \_\_\_\_\_  
(choose one or more Gibb category) on the part of my brother. Explain.

Alternative behaviour based on Gibb categories: What could my brother have said or done differently?

- 2. Situation:** A classmate looks over at your desk and says, "You still using spiral notebooks? I used those in high school."

I would become defensive because I would perceive \_\_\_\_\_  
(choose one or more Gibb category) on the part of my classmate. Explain.

Alternative behaviour based on Gibb categories: What could my classmate have said or done differently?

- 3. Situation:** You've been invited to a party by a co-worker. You arrive and the co-worker looks at you and says, "Oh, hi. I didn't know if you'd come." He then goes over to other guests. You know no one there.

I would become defensive because I would perceive \_\_\_\_\_  
(choose one or more Gibb category) on the part of my coworker. Explain.

Alternative behaviour based on Gibb categories: What could my coworker have said or done differently?

- 4. Situation:** You are at work and helping a client while two others wait for your help. Your supervisor comes out and says, "I'll see you in my office right now. We need to discuss your problems working with clients."

I would become defensive because I would perceive \_\_\_\_\_  
(choose one or more Gibb category) on the part of my supervisor. Explain.

Alternative behaviour based on Gibb categories: What could my supervisor have said or done differently?

## Activity 7: Problem Solving

### Purpose

To apply win–win problem solving

### Instructions

1. Choose a conflict that you are comfortable addressing with someone. As a first practice, it is advisable to take neither the biggest nor the most emotional conflict in your life. First try working out a more manageable conflict.
2. Plan how you would accomplish each step, then think carefully about your goals and the other person involved as you consider how to work through these steps.

**Identify your problem and unmet needs.** This stage involves much intrapersonal communication. Thinking about your needs necessitates giving a lot of thought to your underlying relational needs. Write out what you believe is the problem and what your unmet needs are.

**Make a date.** Consider timing. Is this a morning or an evening person? Are you watching non-verbals carefully? Has the other had time to think about this as you have? Will you suggest a time and a place free of distractions? What is your plan for making a date?

**Describe your problem and needs.** Write out some ways you could verbally describe your problem and needs in a way that does not create defensiveness.

**Partner checks back.** What could you say or do to encourage your partner's understanding of you?

**Solicit partner's needs.** What could you say or do to encourage your partner to express his/her needs?

**Check your understanding.** After your partner has spoken, how could you check if you've understood his or her needs correctly? (Although you can't write out exact words without hearing your partner, write out some guidelines for yourself.)

**Negotiate a solution.** Again, without specifics, you cannot do this in advance. List the four guidelines for negotiating that the text advises you to keep in mind.

**Follow up the solution.** Remember to build in a follow-up so that neither of you feels this is unchangeable or locked in. What could you say or do to encourage follow up?

3. As you look over your plan, what parts will be important for a successful solution? What potential pitfalls do you see?

Will you likely approach this person about this conflict? Why or why not?

## Activity 8: Win–Win Problem Solving

### Purpose

To apply win–win problem solving

### Instructions

1. For each step of the win–win problem solving method, some possible statements to achieve that step are given. Read each one.
2. Which ones are keeping with the spirit of win–win? Which statements might sabotage the process? Which ones create defensiveness? A disconfirming climate? Which ones are better than others in the group? Why? Rate each statement and be prepared to tell why.
  - 1 = excellent communication to achieve that goal
  - 2 = not the best, but it could work
  - 3 = poor communication, likely to create defensiveness or disconfirming climate.

#### Identify your problem and unmet needs.

A parent wanting a teen at home by curfew.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I need to have you home at midnight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I need to know you respect my authority.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I need to know that I can control you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't sleep until I know you are safe, and I need to get up early.

A roommate who frequently ends up cleaning up after others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I need to feel valued and appreciated when I do clean up after you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I need a clean room to bring my guests into.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to be able to go to the refrigerator and find the food that belongs there and not have to look all around the house for it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't want to be taken for granted.

#### Make a date.

A couple is planning when to discuss whether or not their relationship will be exclusive.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's talk it over on the way to the party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Can we talk about it Monday night?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's go for a walk on the beach sometime.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's talk Sunday at my mom's party.

#### Describe your problem and needs.

- \_\_\_\_\_ You make me mad when you won't ask your friends to be quiet while I'm studying.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'd like to have a time set each night that I know your friends will be gone or at least be quiet. When I come home from the library to study and it's noisy here, I don't get anything done.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You're always leaving books around and you're always asking to borrow my computer. Just show some respect.

**Partner checks back.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I've told you how it is for me, now you have to do the same.
- \_\_\_\_\_ You'll ruin our chances of solving this if you don't put as much time and effort into this as I do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Can't you just quickly say what you need?

**Solicit partner's needs.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ So what do you want, anyway?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have to have everything your way?
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'd like to hear how you see the situation and what you need.

**Check your understanding.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I think you're telling me that . . . but I'm not sure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't see why you think like that. That's not the way it is.
- \_\_\_\_\_ So you're saying that you'd rather . . . than . . . ?

**Negotiate a solution.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's think of as many ways as we can to solve this to both of our satisfactions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Can't we come up with something fast because this discussing is driving me nuts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's just do SOMETHING. If it doesn't work, we can try again.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm sick and tired of talking about it. Let's agree to something and be out of here.

**Follow up on the solution.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Okay, if this doesn't work let me know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If you're unhappy with this after six weeks, say something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Let's set a date for two weeks from now to see how this is working for us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Would you like to save our list of ideas, so if this doesn't work we can try another solution?

3. **Summary** What do the items marked with a "1" have in common? Identify at least four characteristics these responses have in common.

## Activity 9: Conflict Styles

### Purpose

1. To become aware of the choices of response styles in any conflict situation.
2. To consider the various consequences of different response styles.

### Instructions

1. Assume you are the person in the situations given. Look at the possible response styles and FIRST fill in the response style for the way you would be most likely to handle that conflict (or the way you actually did handle a similar one). Put an asterisk (\*) in front of that response style and write down the results or probable results for you and for the other(s) involved.
2. Then look at the list of other possible response styles. Think of an option you have for each style. Write down a response that is an example of that style and note the probable results for you and others. Do the same for each item.

1. **Situation:** You just bought a new backpack at a well-known sporting goods store. It was expensive and you anticipated it would last through your college years. The first day you used it the zipper broke.

#### Nonassertive response:

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

#### Directly aggressive response:

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):



**Passive aggressive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Indirect communication response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Assertive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

2. **Situation:** A classmate doesn't have a working car. A few weeks ago you gave him a ride on your way home. You casually said, "If you need a ride sometime, call me." You were thinking of occasionally, maybe a few times in the semester. Now, the classmate has called three or four times a week to ask for rides to different places.

**Nonassertive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Directly aggressive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Passive aggressive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Indirect communication response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Assertive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

3. **Situation:** An instructor continually places her hand on the back of your shirt as you work at the computer in class. You are uncomfortable with this. **OR** Describe a conflict situation that you or others have encountered:

**Nonassertive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Directly aggressive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Passive aggressive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Indirect communication response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

**Assertive response:**

Probable results for you:

Probable results for other(s):

## Activity 10: Conflict in Comedy

### Purpose

1. To examine representations of conflict in popular culture
2. To reflect on influences on one's own conflict style

### Instructions

1. Awkward communication is a standard trope of comedy, but it may also reveal some of the dominant views of our culture. In this activity, you will reflect on models of conflict communication and how they may influence viewers.
2. Choose a clip or pair of clips from a recent comedy series such as *Modern Family* or *The Big Bang Theory*. The clip(s) you choose should present the characters engaged in some sort of conflict. Watch and listen carefully: what conflict styles do you perceive being represented in the dialogue and acting?
3. Write a brief analysis (250 to 300 words) of the characters' conflict styles—assertive, non-assertive, aggressive, passive-aggressive—and support your claims with examples from the clip(s). Is the conflict successfully resolved, or is it avoided? Who “wins” and how? Using what strategies? What features or patterns do you notice in this representation? From these observations, reflect on your own primary conflict style and the various elements of your background that have influenced it.
4. Share your analysis with members of your study group, with classmates, or with your instructor.

## Activity 11: Distancing Tactics

### Purpose

1. To recognize distancing tactics in relational communication
2. To represent distancing tactics in a dramatic setting

### Instructions

1. Review Table 6.1 (page 242), which presents a number of tactics for creating relational distance. Choose three of the tactics to highlight in a dramatic scenario.
2. Write a short scene in which you and another person engage in social communication (e.g., getting to know a new person, trying to pick up a person in a nightclub, approaching a colleague for assistance, etc.). As dialogue or as stage business, have the other person in the scene use the three distancing tactics you've chosen, building their effect as the action of the scene advances. Bring the scene to an end with appropriate words, actions, and emotional tone.
3. Share your written scene with your study group or classmates—or, even better, roleplay the scene. Then discuss how your audience feels about the characters, the distancing tactics, and the end of the scene. What have you learned from developing this scenario?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 12: Thinking Like a Social Scientist

### Purpose

To use characteristics drawn from this chapter to think analytically

### Instructions

Think about your closest friends. Thinking like a social scientist, how would you demonstrate that these are, in fact, your closest friends? Using terms and concepts from this chapter, make a list of the features of your friendships (e.g., emotional intimacy, use of confirming messages) that prove your friends are your friends. Remember that the characteristics may differ from person to person, particularly for people from different cultural backgrounds. Perhaps this is a topic you'll want to discuss with those friends, too!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 13: Parents and Kids

### Purpose

1. To apply the concept of dialectical tension to the parent–child relationship
2. To use reflection as a tool to improve interpersonal relationships

### Instructions

Although the dialectical model of relationships is often used to describe romantic relationships, it can also describe the dynamics between parents and children. Reflect on your relationship with your parents or your child(ren). Sketch out some notable dialectical tensions you have observed in this relationship. Which strategies are used in this relationship to manage tensions?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 14: Managing Conflict Dynamics in Fiction

### Purpose

1. To represent concepts from this chapter through a creative application
2. To examine messages that contribute to confirming and disconfirming communication climates

### Instructions

Write a short scene between two characters who obviously have an important history. Using the box on page 245 (“A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate”) for background, walk your characters through a difficult conversation that begins as debate, moves into dialogue, and arrives at resolution. Perhaps this scene could become part of your current work-in-progress—or perhaps it could be the first step in a new creative project!



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Activity 15: Real-Life Relationships Dynamics

### Purpose

1. To use listening skills to learn about interpersonal relationships
2. To analyze how relationship dynamics are lived in real-life examples

### Instructions

Older people often have hard-won lessons to share about relationships with friends, romantic partners, family members, and work colleagues. Make time to sit with a family friend or relative who is much older than you are, and talk with that person about the dynamics of some of her/his relationships. (You do the listening!) What does that person regret? What did she/he learn over time? What does she/he still struggle with? Reflect on what you've learned from the conversation: what can you apply to your own relationships?