

Emotional Security

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All relationships are built on the foundation of emotional safety—part of this foundation includes the knowledge that your partner/friend has your best interests in mind, and that you'll remain a priority to one another even when there are unexpected twists and turns or challenges . Emotional security acts as a safety net, a buffer that allows you and the other person to be real and genuine with one another without the constant fear that things will fall apart.

A relationship devoid of a solid base of emotional security leads to heightened insecurity and, possibly, mistrust. You're not able to lean into the comforting arms of your relationship when emotional safety is lacking—in fact, your relationship ends up causing you pain rather than acting as a buffer against distress.

Emotional safety/security requires clear steps taken consistently to make a relationship strong.

Step 1: Commitment—you show commitment by the choices you make in your relationship; and central to this is the conscious decision to remain exclusive, dedicated and faithful to one another, even when the waters of the relationship get choppy and it starts to feel like your life would be easier without your partner. In friendship too the same rules apply with a slightly different sense of boundaries but the choices we make towards commitment remain the same.

Step 2: Emotional Availability and Presence help people involved in the relationship to grow personally and in the relationship. To feed the relationship foundation, we need to be emotionally engaged and available for one another (at least more often than not). We make ourselves known to one another by sharing who we are (our feelings, reactions, values, ideas, fears) and by being open and receptive to our each others sharing. When this is missing we feel the pain of being alone even when we are surrounded by people.

Step 3: Predictability and Consistency are crucial in any interaction and essential to the long term health of a relationship. Erratic and inconsistent behavior (even subtle forms of inconsistency) can weaken and ultimately destroy the foundation of emotional security. Follow through on your promises, keep your word, and demonstrate your love and support in a reliable and consistent way. Extravagant ways are never as secure as subtle but constant ways.

When emotional safety is repeatedly compromised in a relationship, we begin to disengage and close themselves off from each other. While disengagement may be a self-protective maneuver sometimes, in the long run, this pattern can lead to such a degree of separateness that before you know it, the relationship is no longer a relationship. Two lives that rarely intersect in meaningful ways cannot equate to a relationship—a relationship arises out of relatedness, a mutual emotional connection that can only grow out of the soil of emotional safety.

No matter how old or complex your relationship is, learning (and re-learning) about what makes you and the other person feel emotionally safe is essential in creating and maintaining a strong relationship foundation.