



Assessing Relationship Strengths and Challenges

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Relationship strengths are behaviors and attitudes promoting safety, mutual acceptance and intimacy. Relationship challenges are behaviors and attitudes that interfere with intimacy and closeness. Each of us have relationship strengths and challenges. The key is to maximize healthy styles and discontinue patterns which negatively impact relationships. The following exercise can help affirm the traits that make you a good partner and clarify areas needing change.

Exercise: Assessing Strengths and Challenges

★ **Step 1:** Put a check beside each of the items below that apply to you. Give some thought as to how each item has negatively or positively affected current and previous relationships.

I...

- enjoy having people around me most of the time.
- am forgiving of others.
- can show affection to persons of the same sex.
- am able to express anger in appropriate ways (no yelling, violent behavior, sarcasm or put downs).
- am able to affirm others, give positive feedback and offer support.
- can initiate conversation about a variety of topics.
- can express feelings appropriately.
- am able to listen to others and hear what they have to say.
- am able to discuss sexual issues with a dating partner.
- am open to counseling if I feel the need.
- believe people are more important than material things.
- have a good sense of humor.
- am honest in the workplace and in relationships.
- believe monogamy is important in a committed relationship.
- have a history of stable employment (No more than four jobs in the past five years, worked at most jobs more than two years, did not leave one job before obtaining another).
- avoid casual sexual relationships.
- have a positive self image.
- can respect the needs and boundaries of others.
- care about how others perceive my actions.

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- believe my income is adequate for most of my needs and wants.
- do not spend or live beyond my means.
- enjoy having time to myself.
- try to look my best most of the time.
- do not put things off until the last minute.
- have good decision making skills.
- have specific goals for the future.
- am trustworthy and dependable.
- am a well organized person.
- maintain appropriate boundaries and assert myself when necessary.
- am a happy person most of the time.
- know how to play and have fun.
- have not been in trouble with the law or on the job due to drinking, sexual misconduct, violent behavior or other impulsive behaviors.
- deal with conflict when necessary and do not avoid it.
- am physically fit and exercise regularly.
- consider myself to be intelligent and competent.
- am a calm and relaxed person.
- assert myself but do not retaliate when someone treats me unfairly.
- feel good about my physical appearance.
- am a reasonable, logical person most of the time.
- am a good loser.
- do not consistently blame others when things go wrong.
- do not consistently blame myself when things go wrong.
- am a patient person.
- make friends easily.
- laugh easily.
- am not easily discouraged.
- am not defensive when someone makes a critical comment about me.
- am quick to help others who are in need.
- believe people like to be around me.

★ **Step 2:** After checking the traits that apply to you, mark with an “S” the items you consider to be relationship strengths. Note the items that you did not mark as strengths. Have a partner or a friend mark a blank checklist so you’ll have an idea of how others perceive you.

★ **Step 3:** Answer the following questions:

List below the five traits you believe are your greatest relationship strengths.

How have your relationship strengths positively affected your relationships?

If you consider the items you did not mark with an “S” to be relationship challenges, list the ones you would like to change.

What have been the negative effects of each of these challenges on your relationships?

★ **Step 4:** Make yourself a plan for the future!

What can you do now to change your relationship challenges into strengths?

If you're not sure how to transform your relationship challenges into strengths, ask a friend who knows you well or discuss this with a qualified counselor. Input from someone else is particularly important if you find yourself repeatedly choosing unhealthy partners or experiencing the same relationship problems over and over again.

Always approach relationships from the perspective that you have plenty to offer a relationship. Remind yourself daily that you are lovable and have plenty of wonderful traits and qualities to share with the right person.

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