

# Relationships Can Work



**S**ometimes relationships work exceptionally well; sometimes they don't. Of all factors that affect relationships, the biggest is communication. Here's a list of other factors that can benefit or damage your relationships.

**Do tell the truth.** Life is complicated when you don't. For example, if you think a friend is addicted to drugs, telling him so in a supportive, nonjudgmental way is a sign of friendship. Psychotherapist Sidney Jourard referred to such openness and honesty as transparency and wrote eloquently about how it can heal and deepen relationships.

**Do support others.** Encourage fellow students to reach their goals and be successful. Respect their study time. Helping them to stay on purpose can help you as well.

**Don't pry.** Being a good listener is invitation enough for fellow students to share their problems, feeling, and personal goals.

**Don't borrow...too much.** Borrowing a book or a tennis racket may seem like a small thing. Yet these requests can become a sore point in a relationship. Some people have difficulty saying no and resent lending things. Consider keeping borrowing to a minimum.

**Do divide chores.** Whether it's a class project or a household chore, do your part. Frustrations result when people fail to agree upon a fair division of work.

**Don't gripe.** There is a difference between griping and sharing problems. Grippers usually don't seek solutions. They just want everyone to know how unhappy they are. Sharing a problem is an appropriate way of starting the search for a solution.

**Do write a letter.** Sometimes it's not easy to express ourselves face-to-face, so write a letter. Even if you never send it, you're rehearsed what you want to say.

**Do get involved.** Being involved in extracurricular activities is a great way to meet people with common interests. If you commute and have little time for these activities, study at the library, eat at the cafeteria, or relax at the student lounge. You may be surprised at how many friends you make.

**Don't brag.** Other students are turned off by constant reference to how much money you have, how great your boyfriend is, your social successes, or your family's accomplishments. There is a difference between sharing excitement and being obnoxious.

**Do detach.** Allow others to accept responsibility for their problems. Pitying them, getting upset along with them, or assuming responsibility for solving the problem is not helpful.

**Do allow people to be upset.** Trying to joke people out of their anger, discounting their frustration, or minimizing their disappointment invalidates their feelings. You can best support them by allowing them to experience their emotions.

**Do ask for help.** One of the central messages of this book (see source below) is that you are not alone. You can draw on the talent, strength, and wisdom of other people. People often respond to a genuine request for help.

**Do share yourself.** When we brood on negative thoughts and refuse to speak them out loud, we lose perspective. And when we keep joys to ourselves, we diminish our satisfaction. A solution is to regularly share what we think and feel. Imagine a community where people freely and lovingly speak their minds – without fear or defensiveness. That can be your community.

**Don't preach.** This piece of advice might seem funny at the end of a sermon of do's and don'ts. Sometimes people ask for advice. It's OK to share your values and opinions. It's not OK to pretend you know what's best for someone else. Don't try to reform the world.

