

Section Three

Positive Relationships: The Ultimate Achievement

LOOKING AHEAD

After reading this section, you will be able to

- Explain why your own relationships are important.
- Describe loneliness and what the research shows.
- Give examples of how relationships can be beneficial.

Relationships with others lie at the very core of human existence.

—Ellen Berscheid and Letitia Anne Peplau

Understanding and love of self along with interpersonal communication skills are the foundation of positive relationships. Our exploration of interpersonal relations continues with a look at the benefits of relationships.

For what reasons do people relate to others? “I do not think hermits have much fun, and loners look sad,” a student said when asked this question in class. Another man mentioned that people need others to avoid loneliness, which he described as a “bummer.” His description was accurate. “Acute loneliness is a terrorizing pain” (Rokach, 1990, p. 41). **Loneliness**, as defined in one study, is “a feeling of being alone and disconnected or alienated from positive persons, places, or things” (Woodward, 1988, p.4). Besides a dreadful feeling, are there other reasons to be concerned about loneliness? The answer is a definite yes. The book *A Cry Unheard: New Insights into the Medical Consequences of Loneliness* (Lynch, 2000) describes numerous studies linking loneliness to premature death. The author describes loneliness as one of the most lethal risk factors in matters of life and death.

Who is lonely and why? An interesting study looked at both these questions. Loneliness was found in all age groups; however, young adults (19–30 years old) had the highest scores on each of the categories of perceived causes of loneliness. Women scored higher in loneliness than did men (Rokach, 2000). Young children are also lonely, and the causes stem from early family experiences and subsequent peer interactions (Solomon, 2000). The first year of college is a particularly vulnerable time, especially for those who live away from home. Coining a new term, *friendsickness*, which means preoccupation with and concern for the loss of or change in precollege friendships, researchers found that it was related to loneliness (Paul and Brier, 2001).

Can people be lonely in the presence of others? The answer is a resounding yes, and the feeling can be dreadful. Julie commented, “You can be in the center of a crowd and be dreadfully lonely.” Rita, whose husband had left her, said, “I have

periods of loneliness now, but it is nothing compared to how lonely I felt when he was sitting in the same room with me." In fact, **living together loneliness (LTL)**, the result of a perceived discrepancy between expected and achieved contact, has been identified. Dan Kiley first noted this phenomenon among his female patients in 1970. He began to realize that loneliness comes in two varieties. The first is the loneliness felt by single, shy people who have no friends. The second is more elusive because it involves the person in a relationship who nevertheless feels isolated and very much alone (Kiley, 1989).

The baby boom generation is headed for a crisis of loneliness. The reasons are simple: demographics and social isolation. More boomers are living alone than in previous generations, and those living with another person will still feel the nagging pangs of loneliness (Anderson, 2003). Compared with their parents, boomers are marrying less often, marrying later, and staying married for shorter periods of time. The most dramatic growth in single-person households is expected to occur among those aged 45 to 64, as baby boomers become middle-aged.

If you experience loneliness on a regular basis, do something about it. One suggestion is to strengthen your level of self-esteem. Finding someone to love is not the solution. Instead, learn to love yourself (Burns, 1985). Cognitive restructuring is useful because thoughts create reality. Behavior techniques also help. Engaging in enjoyable activities is one way of coping. Ways to create happiness, suggested in Chapter 4, can alleviate loneliness. Some suggestions that help prevent or end loneliness are to volunteer your time in the community, increase your personal interests, and join a support group. If getting involved does not interest you or if you lack the willpower to take the first step, seeking counseling may be a good next step. Lonely high school and college students may believe that they just need to get out and do things with large numbers of people. Instead, the time could be better spent deepening and enriching their relationships.

There is no complete escape from loneliness. It is part of being born, of being human, of living, of loving, of dying. Perhaps there should not be a complete escape. Why would anyone want to be deprived completely of an emotion? To experience the emotions of passion, happiness, grief, love, and loneliness is part of living, part of being human. (Woodward, 1988, p. 85)

Other reasons for having relationships are apparent. Pleasure is a prominent one: "We have fun together," and "We just like to be with each other." Jointly participating in activities and just being together are major benefits. Even brief encounters with people can be interesting and stimulating. We look to friends for favors, help, advice, and support. "My car did not start, so my neighbor gave me a ride to work," "My buddy loaned me money until payday," and "When I moved, I called everyone I knew to help" are some examples of how people rely on friends for help and support.

Support is a major benefit of relationships. Being able to share stress, emotional challenges, and problems with someone else decreases their impact. When interviewees were asked to describe their most important relationships, the word *there* was often used: "She is always *there* for me," "I can count on him to be *there*." Consistently, "being there" seemed to be the key element in the "why" of their relationships (Josselson, 1992).



Figure III-1 Positive relationships are important at an early age.

Just like a song says, “We all need somebody to lean on.” Do you remember a time when you had to call a friend for help? Having a **confidant**, a significantly close personal friend with whom you can safely share your deepest concerns and joys, is related to higher levels of well-being, health, satisfaction, and lowered distress (Ornish, 1998). One of the earliest studies on confidants found that older people who had a confidant lived longer than those who did not (Belsky, 1988). “Close relationships help people weather life’s slings and arrows and may even reduce our chances of getting physically ill” (p. 73). Several stud-

ies show an increased rate of disease, alcoholism, and premature death that is associated with a lack of social support. Both receiving and giving love and intimacy are healing (Ornish, 1998).

Your self-concept benefits from healthy relationships. When you feel affirmed, your self-esteem level increases. Even a friendly hello can lift your spirits and spark a feeling of “I matter.” Growth can occur as you interact with others. “I learned a lot from that relationship” and “I am a better person because of her” are statements of growth. “I may not have gone to college if it had not been for my friends’ influence” shows how relationships can motivate.

They also energize. Human contact has the power to increase your energy. Human beings need contact with other human beings the way a lamp needs electricity. Contact energizes people and can relieve stress. (Tubesing, 1981, p. 85)

We need human contact in both our personal and professional life lives. Being able to interact and get along with others are valuable skills for everyone. Learning everything possible about relationships is essential if you are to achieve success in your own life. The rest of this book focuses on positive relationships (Fig. III-1).

Joy comes to those who succeed in their human relationships.

—Sharon Hanna



BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

LOOKING AHEAD

After completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Define codependency and recognize that it is not healthy.
- Discuss positive behaviors in relationships and interactions.
- Discuss different types of relationships, including friendships.
- Trace a path from tolerance to appreciation of diversity.
- Define stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination and explain ways to rid yourself of each.
- Know what is required to approach others, tell how to look for approachability cues, and discuss ways to initiate and maintain a conversation.

Humans are conceived within relationships, born into relationships, and live their lives within relationships with others. All human society has a stake in the nature of people's close relationships. We all benefit from the existence of successful relationships and share, at least indirectly, the costs of relationship deficiencies.

—Ellen Berscheid and Letitia Anne Peplau

There is a science to our words. Learning how to apply that science is the key to effective communication skills: accurate and respectful ways of communicating that prevent costly miscommunication and time-consuming misunderstanding (York, 2006). Without self-knowledge, self-love, and positive communication skills, you will encounter difficulty and disappointment in interpersonal relations; with them, you are ready to become even more skilled in building positive relationships.

Creating Healthy Relationships

Review the description of a positive relationship in Section One of this book. The ability to recognize the difference between what are sometimes called healthy and unhealthy relationships is the first step in reducing the chance of becoming involved in those that are not positive.

Features of a Healthy Relationship

Have you ever been a part of what can be called an unhealthy relationship? Most unhealthy relationships are sources of frustration and pain. Inevitably, one or both of the participants are hurt. Building a positive relationship is in everyone's best interest.

High self-esteem. In order for a relationship to be satisfying and nourishing, the people involved must exhibit certain traits. Love for self is a primary one. Genuine self-esteem, as described in Chapter 1, is healthy and allows an individual to reach out positively to others. Both people in a relationship are committed to achieving an "I'm OK, you're OK" life position, and they accept and affirm each other.

Freedom from enabling behaviors and absence of codependency. When two people care about themselves and each other, the relationship tends to be balanced. **Enabling** occurs when someone's actions directly, yet unintentionally, allow irresponsible, dysfunctional, or destructive actions of another person to continue. Enabling behaviors often lead to *codependence*, a term that originally was related to substance abuse and is now used in describing various types of relationships. **Codependency** is often the result of an enabler focusing too much on the needs and behaviors of the other, and both suffer as a result. Codependents feel compelled to help others, they do for others what others could be doing for themselves, and they never think they have done enough. People often do not recognize the condition because it is second nature to them. Because nurturing and caring are typically the bedrocks of codependency, the person usually feels affirmed and justified for his or her sacrifices. In sum, codependents are responsive to the needs of the people around them to the exclusion of their own needs.

Joanna is one of the kindest individuals in the world. She remembers friends' and clients' birthdays and anniversaries, she is the first to visit someone in the hospital, and she does favors for people regularly. She used to dote on her two grown sons and grandchildren to the exclusion of her own best interests. She was always there for them as well as everyone else she knew. Stress-related symptoms led her to a therapist, who identified her as a codependent. After several therapy sessions, extensive reading, and soul-searching, she is psychologically healthy again.

Holly expressed codependency so well: "I am afraid to leave him because he is so dependent on me. I also think that I am dependent on his being dependent on me."

Codependency can be related to self-concept. Individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to take extra steps to please others. The stereotypic feminine gender role is often at fault. A nonassertive, appeasing person is more likely to become codependent.

What can be done about codependency? Identifying it and increasing one's level of self-esteem, if necessary, are key elements. One of the first to write about codependency was Melody Beattie (1987). In a later book (Beattie, 1989), she points out that because society provides many invitations to be codependent, maintaining a firm personal boundary is necessary. She also reminds a recovered codependent

that relapse is possible and describes how to get back on track. In many cases, individual or group counseling is extremely beneficial. It helps to remind yourself that you are not only making these changes for yourself; other people will also benefit. Then you can arrive at a place in which you can say, as did Jean: "I have been so many things to so many people. It is time to be someone for me."

Genuineness. Besides love for self and assertiveness, which help to eliminate codependency, Carl Rogers (1980) identified four features of a healthy therapist–client relationship, applicable for all types of relationships. One is **genuineness**, which means revealing your true self and striving to be honest. This creates trust in the relationship. Honesty between people is more than the absence of lying; openness and authenticity are significant facets. Participants in the relationship feel comfortable showing their true selves. Game playing is unnecessary, and individuals can express what they think and feel. This means that hurt is likely; however, healthy relationships can tolerate some pain.

Warmth. Another feature that Rogers (1980) calls **unconditional positive regard** is a warm acceptance of each other's personhood. Conditional regard means that conditions are attached to the relationship: "I like you when you do me favors" and "I expect you to be there every time I call" are examples. Unconditional positive regard means that two people appreciate each others' unique personalities.

Empathy. A key element in healthy relationships is **empathy**, or the ability to experience another person's perspective. This is the third ingredient identified by Rogers (1980). You are able to participate in another's feelings and ideas. Empathy is related to a high feeling preference on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, although those with a thinking preference can also empathize, as can both sexes.

Understanding others and being empathic are challenging. What can help is to accept differences in how people think and feel and not categorize them as right or wrong. Even though you may not have experienced a similar situation, you can still empathize.

Being empathic requires a person to comprehend underlying meanings. Bob talked incessantly to his coworkers about his hospital stay and the results of his laboratory tests. Dave realized that down deep Bob was scared that there was something seriously wrong. He recognized that the nervous chatter was a cover-up for some anxious feelings. He empathized and encouraged Bob to talk about his fear. After the feeling was released, Bob's discussions about his health occurred less frequently.

Self-disclosure. In order to build and enliven a relationship, individuals share information about themselves. Self-disclosure, according to Rogers (1980), is essential. As discussed in Chapter 9, all relationships require some level of disclosure. In order to develop closer ties, people express their emotion on deeper levels. As they reveal more of their hidden selves, a powerful basis for trust can be formed. In there may also be some cases in which self-disclosure will indicate that a relationship is not one you want to pursue.

Social exchange. One way to check the health of a relationship is to ask yourself, “Is it good for me?” If you believe that you are receiving a benefit that outweighs costs, then yes is the likely answer. **Social exchange theory** maintains that relationships can be assessed by their outcomes, or what the participants are receiving compared to what they are giving. A study suggested that friendships are more likely to be reciprocal, a give-and-take, and that those who felt either deprived or advantaged in their relationship reported much more loneliness (Buunk and Prins, 1998).

Think about your friendships. What do you receive and give? Did you once experience a friendship that you no longer have? Relationships can end because one or both people are no longer receiving enough from the other. Elizabeth and Courtney shared an apartment. Both were single and pursuing careers. Courtney received a job transfer to a nearby city. “We will still be close friends,” said Courtney. “Oh, yes, it is not that far,” agreed Elizabeth. Contact gradually decreased, and within two years, the relationship had essentially ended. Their relationship was based on enjoyable daily contact, so when this was no longer possible, neither received enough. The costs exceeded the benefits.

One of the basic principles of the behavior approach to psychology is that most people seek pleasure and avoid pain. Although relationships will have elements of displeasure, in those that are positive, rewards either outnumber or are more powerful than punishments. Evaluating a relationship on its rewards is practical and healthful.

Enjoyment. “I love movies,” said one woman, “and I will go to one alone. But it is so much more enjoyable to go with someone.” A healthy relationship will have times of unhappiness, yet the overall vibrations will be those of joy. People enjoy relationships that are encouraging, supportive, and affirming.

Dependability. In a positive relationship you can count on the other person to treat you with respect, and this is reciprocated. Dependability also means that each of you will do what you say unless circumstances prevent it. Trust develops between individuals who can rely on each other to be fair and dependable.

Energizing feelings. Being energized means that an interaction with another person makes you feel good. Do you have some relationships that drain your energy? In positive relationships, individuals feel fulfilled because each provides sparks of energy. “The most important thing you can ever do for other people is to leave them feeling better emotionally after being in your presence” (Ellsworth, 1988, p. 115). Be cautious if energy flows out of you and is not restored by the relationship.

Demonstrated mutual interest. Why do people sever certain relationships? One woman replied, “She just did not ever seem interested in me. I asked about her life; mine never seemed important to her.” You show interest by asking questions such as “What is new in your life?” “What plans do you have for the holidays?” “How are your children doing?” People who show little or no interest in others seem self-absorbed, whereas positive individuals enjoy



Figure 10-1 An ordinary interaction is more pleasant when individuals are friendly and positive.

sharing with others, and they love to be asked about their lives!

Positive Interactions

Think of those with whom you interact. What distinguishes one interaction from another? College students identified several characteristics of positive interactions (Fig. 10-1).

- Acknowledgment (e.g., calling me by my name when greeting)
 - Active interest and concern for my “feelings”
 - Willingness to offer help; often before being asked
 - Good sense of humor
 - Willingness to admit mistakes
 - Interesting conversation
 - Giving, but not overdoing it
 - Willingness to make decisions; doesn’t always depend on me to choose activities
 - Sharing; will pay his or her share and contribute in other ways
 - Listening skills; will listen openly
- Positive attitude
 - Trust; the other person will not put me down or embarrass me
 - Ability to keep confidences and secrets
 - Willingness to stand up for me, if necessary

How many of these do you demonstrate in your relationships? How about the other people involved? Can you add to the list?

As human beings rush through busy days, small positive actions can mean so much. Because these are not time-consuming favors or dramatic gestures, their impact may be overlooked. Check the list of “Little Acts of Kindness” in Figure 10-2. How many have you done or experienced? Did any brighten the day for you?

Making the world a better place by giving of yourself is a rewarding experience. Volunteers are greatly needed. Nursing homes are full of opportunities to reach out and help someone. Rewarding feelings and meaningful relationships are the likely results. Being a person who asks for and graciously receives kind deeds and favors helps a relationship. Because our society has come to regard dependency as negative, people often find it difficult to take from others; yet, by the act of taking, we solidify relationships. Understanding about healthy relationships and positive interactions can reveal what you have to offer and what you might want to develop. Unless people are aware, they may ruin potentially positive relationships or accept less than nourishing ones (TA Revisited).

Little Acts of Kindness

- When driving, if possible, stop and wait for another car to pull out onto a busy street ahead of you.
- In a checkout line, when you have several purchases, allow a person behind you with just a few items to go ahead.
- Offer to help someone who is having difficulty carrying a package or crossing the street; hold a door for another person.
- Send a note or card to someone who is not well. Send more than one if the illness is prolonged.
- Congratulate people either verbally or in writing.
- Use the words “thank you” and “please” with clerks, cashiers, cafeteria servers, and others.
- If you smoke, show courtesy to others around you.
- Offer your seat on a bus or in a waiting room to someone who looks as if he or she needs to sit more than you do.
- Smile and greet people, even those you do not know.

Figure 10-2

Examining Various Types of Relationships

Relationships vary from casual or informal to close and intimate. They also differ in their **interactions**, those exchanges that occur in face-to-face situations. You may pass a person on the street, exchange smiles and greetings, and continue on your way, possibly not realizing that you have just interacted. You may see someone on a daily basis for a period of time and then not again for months. Because of these variances, several types of relationships emerge.

Acquaintances

Social interactions give people a psychological sense of belonging. “Familiar strangers” are people whom you may not know by name but who have a regular place in your life, a waitress in a restaurant, the postal carrier, a cashier at the grocery store, or a neighbor you occasionally see. You and the other person may just

TA Revisited

The “child” ego state is the driving force within relationships. What would a relationship be without emotion? How could relationships continue without motivation?

The “parent” ego state is full of “do’s and don’ts” regarding relationships. Some are wise messages whereas others are in need of processing.

The “adult” ego state helps us assess relationships and can logically guide us through the building and enriching processes.

smile or chat briefly. Even though such interactions seem inconsequential, their contributions to positive feelings and self-esteem levels are measurable (Montgomery and Trower, 1988).

Friendships

What does friendship mean to you? You may be surprised to discover that the meaning of friendship varies from person to person. Obviously, some common themes exist. How many of these are part of your image of friendship?

- Fondness and liking
- Continuity over time
- Perceived support and dependability
- Compatibility and help
- Similarities in enjoyable activities, beliefs, and values
- Self-disclosure and sharing of information and stories
- Personal growth
- Understanding, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard

Friendship is almost always high on a person's list of values (Fig. 10-3). "I do not know what I would do if it were not for my friends. I would be lost," said a woman. This is probably because to live without friends is a lonely journey (Kasl, 1997). Good friendships provide depth and meaning to life. Friendships, in contrast to acquaintanceships, take time and effort to develop and maintain; yet, in most cases, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Take advantage of a chance to enrich a friendship by doing the activity in Reflections and Applications.

Steps in developing a friendship. You were born into a family, not into a friendship. How does one move a relationship with an acquaintance to a friendship? Following a first meeting, further encounters are positive and affirming. You enjoy each other's company as you plan and engage in mutually satisfying activities. Self-disclosure at deeper levels occurs, and trust is developed. "Progressive stages of increased openness can peel off layers of our outer selves, like the skins of an onion" (McCarthy, 1988, p. 169). As in all relationships, you may experience



Figure 10-3 Friendship has rewards throughout a lifetime.

conflict and have moments of doubt in the friendship; however, if the social exchange factors are strong enough, differences get resolved. As the relationship progresses, it is easily distinguishable from an acquaintanceship.

Cycles of importance. Friends are important during all stages of life, yet the extent of significance varies. Friendships become meaningful when an individual enters school and participates in activities outside the family. During junior high and high school, friends typically dominate most aspects of life. Parents are not far from wrong when they say, “Your friends are your whole world.”

As intimate love relationships are formed, individuals usually drift away from reliance on friendships. A common complaint is, “She does not have anything to do with me or her other friends any more since she is involved with him.” Significant other relationships and parenthood take precedence over friendships in most people’s lives, yet friends often remain important as social companions and confidants. If divorced or widowed, friends usually, again, take center stage.

Types and dilemmas. The word *friendship* indicates a wide range of closeness. A friend can be a best friend, a close friend, a friend, or just a buddy. How do you differentiate? Usually, this is based on an important gauge of friendship, closeness. A very good friend is often a **confidant**, a person with whom you can be totally open and self-disclose on all levels. Most people reserve this label for only a few.

Long-distance friends can be as close emotionally as ones whom you see regularly. When you connect, there is a feeling of comfort. “The cadence of friendship is measured in decade-long rhythms” (Keen, 1991, p. 174). It is a wonderful feeling to know that you can telephone or e-mail a number of precious, long-distance friends right now and feel connected and supported.

A dilemma related to friendship is enrichment. Even good friends can take each other for granted and not nourish the relationship. Most friendships can survive some neglect; however, investment of time and energy is wise. If you are thinking of a friend with whom you have not been in contact for some time, why not do something to change that? Another dilemma of suitable recognition is probable. At special events, best friends, “just friends,” and casual acquaintances are usually not distinguished from one another. A researcher recalled the death of a dear friend. At the funeral she sat in the back of a filled church. In the middle of her grief, she realized that even though she was one of the deceased’s closest friends, even closer than one of the siblings, she was being treated the same as a casual acquaintance (Rubin, 1985). The English language provides specific distinctions for family relationships, yet not for friendships.

Sex differences. Are same-sex friendships different for females than for males? The answer is not clear-cut. Men do tend to have more “active” friendships. They tend to talk about and engage in more mutually enjoyable activities, many of which are related to sports and outdoor activities, whereas women seem to want to talk more about relationships. Women’s friendships tend to be deeper. Although men may care as much for their male friends, they are less likely than women to verbally express or demonstrate their feelings (Wood, 2001). In a study, gender differences were found to be relatively small; both sexes rated equal-power friendships significantly higher than unequal-power ones (Veniegas and Peplau, 1997).

Stereotypic males are less likely to self-disclose and become close to other males. Sue and Marc had been married for 13 years and had several couple friends. When they decided to divorce, both were depressed. Sue suggested that Marc talk with a male friend. He replied. "I do not feel comfortable talking about my personal life with the guys I know." As gender roles become less stereotypic, the likelihood of being deprived of a same-sex confidant may no longer be a problem. We all share a need for connection. Because friendships offer connection and other significant benefits, both men and women are wise to cultivate them.

*A friend is one
to whom one can pour
out all the contents of one's heart,
chaff and grain together
knowing that the gentlest of hands
will take and sift it,
keep what is worth keeping
and with a breath of kindness
blow the rest away.*

—Arabian Proverb

Support Groups

Your primary support group is made up of "people in your life who help you realize the meaning of your existence. They know the 'real' you; they understand where we have been; and they help us grow" (Johnson, 1986, p. 68). They are your primary support system and contribute immeasurably to self-esteem.

A secondary support system is composed of groups at work, school, church, and within neighborhoods and organizations. Self-help groups are recommended as a way of dealing with challenges. During crises and tragedies, a self-help group can be invaluable as long as the focus is on resolving issues and the emphasis is positive. Being aware of your support systems and how each group affects your self-esteem is important. Any type of relationship that genuinely affirms you is precious.

Caregiving

The special support provided by a person in a caregiving role is of particular value. When individuals are unable to care for themselves, they are either placed in nursing homes or rehabilitation centers for long-term care or someone voluntarily assumes the responsibility. Often that someone is a significant other. Another common caregiving group consists of adult children who care for aging parents. The term *sandwich generation* applies to those who find themselves caring for both their parents and their own children. The average age of such a person is 46 (Emerson, 2000). The caregiver role is both challenging and rewarding. How to ease stress and maintain a positive relationship between a caregiver and the person for whom care is given deserves attention. One way is to make plans before circumstances demand absolute decisions. Another is to learn and use open communication and other techniques covered in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

Without a doubt, caregivers need help themselves. Those who tend toward codependency are particularly at risk. A study of caregivers found that those who

had more tasks, spent greater amounts of time in their caregiving role, and had lower self-efficacy about self-care and care of a spouse had a greater number of depressive symptoms and negative health behaviors (Gallant and Connell, 1997).

Solid recommendations are to try to maintain a balance, use stress-coping methods on a regular basis, and develop a broad plan with the help of professionals who specialize in caregiving issues. In recent years a number of resources have become available. Caregivers are not alone (see Resources at end of this chapter).

Initiating Interactions

Initiating interactions is a valuable interpersonal skill in which your personality will make a difference. If you have an extraverted preference, you are motivated to reach out to a new person. People who are introverts can be just as skillful but it may be more difficult. Whatever your preference, particular attitudes and behaviors are necessary skills for an individual to succeed at initiating interactions.

Open-Mindedness

First impressions, those immediate judgments that people make, cannot be avoided. Think of the aspects of a person you might consider when you first meet. Perhaps it has happened that you have been turned off immediately. If an individual appears too different from you, negative assumptions are often made. A way to overcome this effectively is to be open when you first meet someone and challenge any negative first impressions that form.

Ideas expressed by others also can influence your impression. In a classic experiment on expectations and first impressions (Kelley, 1950), students received short differing descriptions about a substitute instructor. Some sketches described the new instructor as “rather cold” whereas others used the words “very warm.” The substitute led the class, and someone else recorded the frequency of participation for each student. After class, the students were asked to write descriptions and ratings of the instructor. A clear difference was evident. Those who had read that the man was “very warm” participated more freely and gave him a higher rating than those who had been given the “rather cold” description.

Any time you form a first impression, analyze it. Whatever the judgment, allow time and involvement to determine how realistic the impression was. Expectations are powerful. Your expectations can influence your thoughts and attitudes about a person or situation. What you expect frequently becomes a reality.

Tolerance, Acceptance, and Appreciation

Tolerance of people who are different is a worthy, basic goal of interpersonal relations. **Tolerance** can be defined as putting up with something you do not like and not acting against people about whom you feel negatively (Vogt, 1997). Ideally, tolerance will evolve into acceptance, which is more positive. Then the development of

appreciation, which requires thought and action, is possible. The following brief coverage can help you examine your attitudes and commit to any necessary positive change. Try to approach this discussion with an open mind and be ready to challenge any preconceived ideas.

Classifying people into groups is a normal mental process called **social categorization**. Unfortunately, it is quite possible to overcategorize and then form a **stereotype**—a fixed belief about the entire category. Stereotyping is thinking in generalities. When you meet a person of a different race, do you have a generalized thought? Even though we may not like to admit that we have such automatic thoughts, awareness of their existence is the first step in eliminating stereotypes.

Stereotyping typically focuses on negative characteristics that are applied to an entire group when, in fact, all people within a group are not the same. Stereotyping of groups then leads to labeling of individuals. A loving individual, according to Leo Buscaglia (1982), does not label others. As a child, Buscaglia himself was bothered by the distancing effect of a label applied to him regarding his Italian ancestry.

They did not know who I was by calling me a “dago” and a “wop.” If you want to know me, you’ve got to get into my head, and if I want to know about you, I can’t say, “She is fat. She is thin. She is a Jew. She is a Catholic.” She is more than that. (p. 25)

When negative labels stick, they can damage self-esteem (Hyatt, 1991). Reducing an individual to a category is offensive and misleading (Tannen, 1990).

Actor and comedian Eddie Murphy, appearing on a television show, described a stereotyping experience.

I was walking out of a grocery store, and I had my head down. Some kids went by and said “Nigger!” They did not see it was me. That tripped me out because if my head had been up, they would have screamed, “Hey, Eddie!”

Labeling based on what the eye can see limits perceptions. The eye can be the “most inaccurate, most inconsistent, and the most prejudicial organ we have in the body. What is truly essential is invisible to the eye” (Buscaglia, 1982, p. 94). Assigning labels to family members is common: “That is my good-for-nothing brother.” “I have an old-fashioned dad.” “He is my lazy kid.” These ideas put human beings into boxes; then they usually act out the label.

Even positive stereotypes can be a problem when they are limiting or force unrealistic expectations on individuals. The field of sports psychology is well aware of stereotypes that label individuals and then become self-fulfilling prophecies (Horn, Lox, and Labrador, 1998).

Negative stereotyping and labeling usually lead to **prejudice**, an attitude that others are inferior or less than you in some way. What results is a feeling of dislike or hatred. Prejudice is learned either from others or by generalizing from experiences. Jodi discovered that prejudice has many targets as she acknowledged: “Prejudice is not limited to just race and sex. I have been judging people negatively on looks, clothing, body size, and age. I have now learned that what is inside a person is what’s important.”

Historically, American society has experienced myriad problems caused by prejudice. Countless numbers of individuals have suffered. A hope that prejudice would soon become a thing of the past abounded for some time after the civil rights movement in the 1960s. That hope has not become a reality, although there are some promising signs. Even though more than half of both white and black youth in a *Time/CNN* poll still consider racism “a big problem,” more than a third classified it as “a small problem.” A surprising 89 percent of black teens called it “a small problem” or “not a problem at all.” Most said that both on a personal level and as a socially divisive issue, race is less important to them than it is for adults (Farley, 1997). When Americans were asked in a Gallup poll to identify the most important problem facing the country today, only 4 percent named race relations (Newport, 2001). That does not mean that racial prejudice has disappeared; instead, it is merely more disguised.

Probably more extreme prejudice in recent years has been directed toward gay males and lesbians (Vogt, 1997). A significant number have been targets of verbal abuse, discrimination, and physical assault because of their sexual orientation (Herek, 1996). On a positive note, there has been a gradual improvement in attitudes. From 1992 to 2001 acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle has risen from 38 percent to 52 percent with 54 percent saying that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. Although over 80 percent of Americans believe that homosexuals should have equal opportunity protection in the workplace (Newport, 2001), many states do not have laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination. Although federal government workers are currently protected from such discrimination, there is no federal law that specifically outlaws workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the private sector. Currently 15 states and the District of Columbia have laws that prohibit sexual orientation discrimination in both public and private jobs. In addition, seven states have laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination in public workplaces only (NOLO, 2006).

To continue to harbor prejudices against those who are different is insensitive and illogical. In some cases, the stereotypes have a factual basis because a majority of a group exhibits a particular behavior. You can accept a fact and still not apply it to all members of a group. People who feel and act upon prejudice are limiting themselves in terms of relationships. Ira, an African American, volunteered her personal feelings about prejudice in a psychology class. She said, “Prejudice causes people to miss out on the spice of life. To be influenced by prejudice is hogwash. It keeps you from being free within.” I would add a challenging question: *Can anyone offer one good reason for the continuation of prejudice and hatred?* Everyone is eventually harmed. Each generation is more diverse than the one before, and by the year 2060 no one racial group will be numerically dominant in the United States (Fonow, 1998). Because of the continual increases in diversity, getting along harmoniously can be considered a necessity.

Discrimination is treating people unfairly. Because discrimination is usually observable behavior, a society can adopt laws against it; this has been the case in recent years. Covert discrimination, which is hidden or subtle, is still widespread and is commonly based on prejudice. Perceiving others to be evil or inferior often leads to treating them as such. Both prejudice and discrimination cause personal and societal problems (Fig. 10-4).



Figure 10-4

We can never achieve peace of mind as long as we attack others (Jampolsky and Cirincione, 1990).

Prejudice is learned or develops during one's life. Self-esteem seems to play a part. People with low self-esteem tend to be more critical of themselves and of others (Baumeister, 1997). Tolerance is related to high self-esteem and self-actualization (Vogt, 1997). This does not mean that self-esteem leads to or keeps one from prejudice; however, it can be a factor. Having an **authoritarian personality**, a belief that one's ideas are right and others are wrong, is related to prejudice and lack of tolerance (Vogt, 1997).

Authoritarians resist new ideas, tend to think in absolutes, and are dogmatic in their beliefs. **Heterosexism**, the belief that only heterosexuality is right, is a type of authoritarian thinking. A lack of education and experiences with those who are different are also important factors. Ignorance often leads to fear and fear to hatred.

Because prejudice is learned, it can be unlearned, and education is a strong foe of prejudice. Studies show that education increases tolerance and reduces prejudice and stereotyping by giving people new information, changing ways of thinking, altering personalities, and providing new social experiences (Vogt, 1997).

What can be done about prejudice? First, a person must decide to challenge the rigid thinking. Believing that your sex, race, and sexual orientation are the only way to be is a barrier to tolerance. Being open-minded is imperative.

Knowledge is the anecdote of fear.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Becoming more educated, building self-esteem, and ridding yourself of anger and an "always right" attitude are major contributors. Deciding that differences are not frightening or wrong is necessary and leads to feeling enlightened as you learn about multiculturalism and **minority groups**, defined as categories of people who lack power and who are disadvantaged in a society. You can challenge prejudice cognitively, emotionally, and socially by asking the questions in "How to Combat Prejudice" (Fig. 10-5).

How to Combat Prejudice

Honestly ask yourself these questions and then reflect on the recommendations that follow.

- *Is my thinking reasonable and rational?* If you take pride in your mental abilities, you will want to reject inaccurate and unreasonable stereotypes. Refuse to accept the idea that blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, old people and young people, and heterosexuals, gay males, and lesbians are all one way. "People who think and like to think are more likely to be tolerant" (Vogt, 1997, p. 137). In a compounding of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, a news program reported that a man yelled, "I hate all Arabs, and I always will!" Not only is this type of thinking unreasonable and irrational, but it also is counterproductive because hatred will never create a better world. Even if you have an initial negative opinion, you can change it.
- *Am I being fair? How would I feel if I were the victim of prejudice?* Most people are concerned with justice and fairness. Discrimination is unfair, and even the thinking that leads to it can be challenged as unjust. Empathy is a powerful enemy of prejudice and discrimination. A study revealed that feeling empathy for a member of a stigmatized group was found to improve attitudes toward the group as a whole (Batson et al., 1997).
- *Am I basing my impressions on a knowledge of an individual as a person or only as a representative of a group?* Labeling often keeps us from getting to know the real person. Moving from a collective analysis, which is a stereotype, to an individual assessment is the key. Being free of prejudice means that you may like or dislike, but your feelings will not be based on an external factor or label. I was delighted when Jennifer, a white student, said, "I have never been around African Americans before because I grew up in a small rural community. Glenn [another student in the class] is the first I've gotten to know. I'm so glad the experience was such a positive one!"

Figure 10-5

Research supports the value of getting to know individuals and to have pride in one's own group. Close friendships with whites seemed to change negative images and stereotypes held by blacks (Powers and Ellison, 1995). Increased ethnic identity among adolescents contributed to better feelings about their own group and to those who were members of different groups (Phinney, Ferguson, and Tate, 1997).

Besides ridding yourself of prejudices, you can help the victims of prejudice and society by asserting yourself in the face of demeaning words and behaviors. A study showed that hearing someone else express strong opinions against prejudice led students to have similar thoughts. The researchers concluded that a few outspoken people who are vigorously antiracist can establish a positive social climate that discourages prejudice (Goleman, 1991). As with any subject, silence is usually interpreted as agreement. Suggestions for responding to prejudicial comments were given in Chapter 9.

When anyone of us is demeaned, we are all diminished. (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 13)

Lack of prejudice does not mean blindness to differences; you simply do not let differences stop you from relating. A positive practice is to view differences as opportunities. Getting to know people who are different broadens your perspectives and enriches your life. This growth then allows you to appreciate human diversity. Sameness can be boring. Diversity provides opportunities for expansion of the self. Multiculturalism benefits individuals as well as societies.

Embrace the many-splendid colors; revel in the wisdom and the power of a different race and culture. Invite it to spill over us and know that, if our invitation is accepted, it is we who are recipients of an honor. (Schulz, 1988, p. 2)

How to Approach and Converse with Others

After a person gets beyond obstacles created by negative first impressions or intolerance, individual traits can block attempts to interact. Shyness is a significant disadvantage when it comes to interacting. People who demonstrate shy behaviors have difficulty initiating or inviting encounters. A book designed to help people defeat shyness, *Shyness: A Bold New Approach* (Carducci, 1999), lets shy people know that they are not alone. Shy people make up almost half the population, and between 75 and 95 percent of people have been shy at some time. What can you do? Stating that inaction is the most common feature of shyness, Zimbardo (1977), who conducted classic studies on the subject, suggests taking specific steps. Being realistic about what is possible to achieve is critical, and dividing a goal into smaller, manageable parts, as recommended in Chapter 3, is part of any sensible behavioral plan. Saying hello to a certain number of new people in a week's time might be a practical goal. Support groups are beneficial, and for severe cases of shyness, therapy is suggested.

"I overcame shyness by telling myself that I have so much to offer to others."

—Wanda, a college student

Even if you are not shy, you may, in some situations, hesitate to approach someone near because of fear of rejection or embarrassment. Realize that embarrassment is not the worst thing in the world; letting fears stop you from what could be a satisfying interaction is certainly worse! When you do initiate an exchange, you do not want to do so at an inappropriate time or in an undesirable manner. **Approachability** is a combination of circumstances when the initiation of contact is likely to be positively received.

Approachability cues. Being observant and looking for cues are helpful in initiating conversation. Can you think of times and situations when people would not be at all approachable or when approachability would probably be diminished? Consider individual moods, physical states, and activities. If you want to initiate contact and realize that the other person is in a hurry, involved, or preoccupied, simply wait for a more opportune time and circumstance. Approachable

situations exist when a person is not preoccupied or absorbed. Such situations are usually indicated by a person's body language. Sitting alone and looking open are good indicators. When people are in waiting situations, such as waiting for a bus, for a class to start, or in a line, they are likely to be approachable. Social occasions are opportunities for approachable situations.

Conversation. If you know a person, beginning a conversation is usually not difficult. But what about people whom you do not know and would like to meet? You may have no trouble thinking of just the right thing to say. For a number of people, however, thinking of that "something" can be mind-boggling. "I was tongue-tied," is how one young man described it. "I had wanted to meet her for months, and here she was sitting next to me the first day of class. I could not think of one intelligent thing to say, so I kept quiet." Either keeping quiet or saying something "off the wall" puts a damper on interactions.

To initiate conversation in difficult situations, you can use a technique called **search the situation for topics** (Glaser, 1986). Based on the idea that you and the other person share a common environment, you make a comment based on an awareness of what is going on around you. What could the young man in the preceding paragraph have said? The two students had in common the fact that they were sitting next to each other in a class on the first day. Here are some possibilities:

"Have you heard anything about this class?"

"I heard this instructor was a lot of fun."

"Have you ever taken a psychology class before?"

"What year of school are you in?"

"What are your career plans?"

Searching the situation is quite simple; in fact, you probably have already used this technique without realizing it.

Questions. Questioning is an excellent way to keep conversations going, to learn more about the people you meet, and to make people feel that you are truly interested in what they are saying as well as in them. Failing to ask questions could indicate self-centeredness or lack of interest. Ann recounts a lunch date.

We did not know each other well, and I was looking forward to an opportunity for us to get to know each other and then see if this might develop into a deeper relationship. We were together for two hours. Afterwards I thought, "I know almost everything about him, and he knows nothing about me except that I ask questions and am an excellent listener! I do not know if he is stuck on himself or just not interested in me, or both. I do not want to spend another two hours with him."

Self-absorption is a major obstacle in communication. Successful conversations are two-way, which means that both participants ask questions and provide information (Reflect and Apply). Different types of questions can be asked.

- Open-ended questions are ones that cannot be answered with one word. Instead of, "What is your major?" ask, "What are your career plans?"

REFLECT AND APPLY**Reflect**

- ◆ *Think of a friendship and the theory of social exchange. What do you receive from the relationship? Compare benefits to costs.*
- ◆ *Suppose you are trying to convince a family member to reject prejudice. What reasons would you give?*
- ◆ *Having just been introduced to a new person at a conference, think of two comments or questions you could use.*

Apply

- ◆ *Tell a friend the benefits you receive from your relationship.*
- ◆ *Make an effort to get to know a person who represents diversity to you.*
- ◆ *Use approachability checking the next time you telephone someone. Do not forget to use it in person when appropriate.*

- Focused questions are those that are not too broad to be answered. Instead of, “Tell me all about yourself,” ask, “How did you decide to go into teaching?”
- Specific questions are those that ask for additional details, specific examples, or particular impressions. Examples are: “What did you think of the psychology course?” or “When did you leave Denver?”

If you think about people you enjoy, chances are that their interest in you and what is going on in your life is a major factor. Very few people resent questions, and most appreciate them. As long as your questions are not too probing or inappropriately personal, your relationships can be enhanced by developing and using this skill.

Internet Dating

According to the Pew Research Center (2006), an estimated 16 million Americans have used a dating site or other sites to meet people. Pew found that 79 percent say online dating is a “good way to meet people” and 52 percent say the experience was mostly positive. But 29 percent say it was mostly negative.

Dating websites are just one of many online avenues that can facilitate a romantic connection. Three out of four Internet users who are single and looking for a romantic partner have done at least one dating-related activity online ranging from using dating websites, to searching for information about prospective dates, to flirting via e-mail and instant messaging, to browsing for information about the local singles scene. Although online dating is becoming more commonplace, there are still concerns in the wider public about the dangers of posting personal information on dating sites and about the honesty of those who pursue online dating.

Connecting with Others

After an interaction takes place, people can choose to build a closer relationship. Why does this happen in some cases and not in others?

Attraction and Liking

If you grow to like another person, you will feel affection or respect or both. These feelings are two fundamental dimensions of liking. **Affection** is based on the way another person relates to you personally and is a feeling of warmth and closeness. **Respect** is liking based on the person's admirable characteristics or actions and is cooler and more distant. (Rubin, 1973)

Why do you like some people and not others? **Attraction**, a force that draws people together or a positive attitude toward another, has been the focus of psychological research. Obviously, physical attractiveness plays a primary part in our impressions. As we get better acquainted, the individual becomes attractive for other reasons. Social psychologists have found that attraction and liking are closely linked to certain other factors. As you read about each, relate it to your relationships.

Proximity. How many friends are from your hometown? Do most of your friends live near you? **Proximity** is physical occupation of the same geographic area. Obviously, in order to meet face-to-face, two people must share proximity. In terms of attraction, physical sharing of space is the means by which you get to know a person. Becoming more familiar with someone could also lead to a dislike of the person. More often, though, getting to know someone leads to deeper understanding and liking. In recent years, as a result of the Internet, individuals have established relationships without proximity. Getting to know each other through e-mail communications has established itself as a way to meet new and interesting people. Obviously, safeguards are important if an actual meeting is arranged. Getting together in a public place is a common recommendation along with waiting until you know someone personally before you share addresses and other private information. If the relationship seems promising, eventually, there will be proximity!

Similarities. "Birds of a feather flock together" is an axiom with merit. Differences can be interesting and positive. For years, social psychologists have realized that similarities are strong predictors of attraction (Byrne, 1971) and that people with little in common can repel each other (Rosenbaum, 1986). **Similarities** or being alike in attitudes, interests, degree of intelligence, religion, age, and personality are generally bonding and promote liking. We feel attracted to those who by their attitudes and behaviors confirm our values and beliefs. For example, if equal rights are important, seeing a person actively participate in a rally increases positive feelings. People wanting to meet potential significant others should participate in causes and activities near and dear to their hearts. Agreement is a powerful force.

Complementarity. A characteristic that is lacking in you can be attractive in another person. This is **complementarity** and, for practical reasons, it can bene-

fit a relationship. Kent was outgoing and loved to tell jokes. His friend Pat was quiet, except when he was laughing loudly at Kent's stories. Complementing each other was a major factor in their relationship.

Reciprocity. Imagine that you have just met Sarah. You feel neutral toward her; you do not necessarily like or dislike her. As times goes by, Sarah demonstrates a genuine interest in and liking for you. The chances are that you will reciprocate; your feelings will become positive. **Reciprocity** is a tendency to like people who like you. As Rathus (1999) puts it, "If you like me, you must have excellent judgment." This may sound conceited; however, if you genuinely like yourself, you are likely to be attracted to others who share your feelings. When we are liked and admired, we are inclined to return those feelings and behaviors. Conversely, have you ever experienced the realization that another person does not like you? You probably tended to reciprocate and found yourself disliking that person.

The factors of attraction and liking contribute to the onset of a relationship and continue to enhance its growth. Wanting to approach someone and then beginning to like that person are not caused by a mysterious force. Rather, it is fairly easy to predict who will relate to whom and why.

Improving Relationships

You have a choice in the types and number of relationships you develop and maintain, and you influence their quality as well. Certain attitudes and behaviors deserve special attention.

Realistic Expectations of Relationships

Expecting a relationship to be 100 percent harmonious and believing that individuals will always act in certain ways are unrealistic.

Just as no human being is perfect, neither are relationships. None of us will ever be perfect husbands, wives, children, professionals, teachers, students, employees, employers, fathers, mothers, or friends. We are humanly limited in all these social human roles. (Rubin, 1975, p. 239)

Having unrealistic ideas leads to frustration and disappointment and usually ends a relationship. Even with acquaintances, having realistic expectations is helpful. If you are a renter, what is realistic to expect from the property owner? If you own property, are you expecting too much from your tenants?

In all types of relationships, open communication is helpful; in certain cases, written agreements about expectations are appropriate. A common tale of woe concerns roommates. Hannah describes her roommate as a slob, one who does not do her share and leaves the apartment a mess. Unfortunately, they had no agreement about task management before they became roommates. Discussing expectations and agreeing to policies, preferably in writing, are more likely to achieve desired objectives than simply expecting things to work out.

Sensitivity and Cooperation

Sensitivity is having an awareness or sense about the perceptions and perspectives of others. In a classroom setting, sensitivity is conducive to learning. When instructors and students understand each other's perspectives, and students are sensitive to one another, the atmosphere is positive. Two older students said that figuring out how to fit in was their biggest challenge. Younger students' sensitivity to their different perspectives was greatly appreciated.

Cooperation means working with others in a positive way toward a common goal. For example, a printing company had to deliver a large order within a week. The owner called the employees together to discuss how the objective could be accomplished. Because one employee's child was in the hospital awaiting surgery, others offered to work longer hours to compensate for the employee's time away from the job. The job was accomplished. Wise parents, teachers, and employers emphasize cooperation in the successful completion of tasks.

Assertiveness

Relationships thrive on **assertiveness**—maintaining one's legitimate rights and expressing thoughts and feelings in nonthreatening ways. The “you win and I lose” approach is a passive solution in which one individual gives up his or her rights to another. The “you lose and I win” approach is an aggressive solution in which one individual ignores the rights of another in order to get his or her way. The “you lose and I lose” approach is a totally passive solution in which both individuals give up their rights. A healthy resolution is impossible. The “you win and I win” approach is an assertive solution in which the rights of both parties are recognized, respected, and utilized in reaching a healthy compromise. Review the material on becoming assertive in Chapter 2 and realize the benefits extend not only to you but also to all those with whom you interact.

Negotiation Skills

Positive negotiation skills are well worth cultivating because conflict can occur in all relationships. **Conflict** means that disagreement or a difference in thinking exists. Most people have been taught that being right is essential. However, individuals who rate high in interpersonal relations skills are well aware that the need to be right can damage relationships. “You can insist on being right or have a relationship that works, but you cannot have both, and the addiction to being right about inaccurate beliefs will destroy any relationship” (Ellsworth, 1988, p. 19).

Once you realize that conflict is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong and that it is caused simply by differences of opinion, you are setting the stage for negotiation. Conflict management is an art like other interpersonal relations skills. Handling conflict in intimate relationships will be covered in Chapter 13; the negotiation skills described in this section are useful as well.

Not recommended in any relationship is a behavior described as **gunny-sacking**. When you “gunny-sack,” you keep your grievances suppressed or bottled up (Bach and Wyden, 1968). People who hide their grievances do so because of

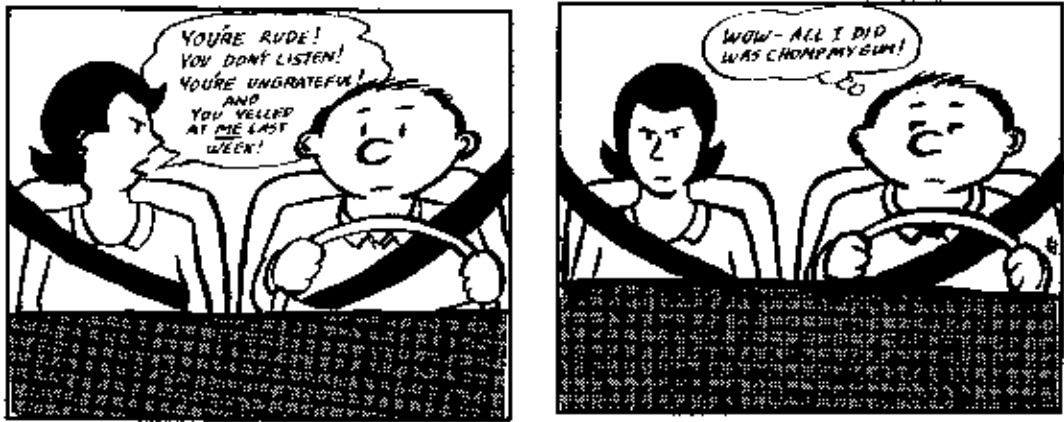


Figure 10-6

nonassertiveness, fear, and a desire to preserve peace at any cost. Because gunnysacking is often the result of a fear of criticizing anyone, the methods for delivering criticism suggested in Chapter 8 are worth learning and using. A gunnysack stuffed to its limits is potentially harmful for several reasons. Suppressing annoyances is stressful and can be damaging to health. Keeping quiet about grievances can diminish self-esteem, and relationships suffer terribly. “When complaints are toted along quietly in a gunnysack for any length of time they make a dreadful mess when the sack finally bursts” (Bach and Wyden, 1968, p. 19) (Fig. 10-6).

An aggressive style of conflict management is as damaging as gunnysacking. Closed communication is the norm. An aggressive person tries to dominate and control all issues and will use any steamrolling method available. He or she will turn conflicts into a competition and may win on the surface, but the relationship loses. In long-term relationships this is particularly dangerous.

Understanding Conflict

What is conflict?

Conflict is a normal, inevitable part of life. As long as we are alive and feeling, thinking, questioning, and making decisions, we will encounter conflict. (Office of Dispute Resolution) Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs. It can originate from past rivalries and personality differences.

The conflicts we face each day may be small and passing or long and drawn out. We are just as likely to have conflicts with people we like as with those we do not like, and we probably have as many conflicts with people who are like us as we do with those who are not like us. Some conflicts we can see coming; other conflicts come up seemingly without warning. Our ability to deal effectively with conflict is tested constantly throughout our lives, and the effects of conflict on our lives can be enormous.

The Ingredients of Conflict

Needs—Needs are physical or psychological requirements that are essential to our well-being. Conflict arises when we ignore others' needs, our own needs, or the group's needs. Be careful not to confuse needs with desires or "wants" (things we would like that are not essential).

Perceptions—People interpret reality differently. They perceive differences in the severity, causes, and consequences of problems. Misperceptions or differing perceptions may come from self-perceptions, others' perceptions, differing perceptions of situation, and perceptions of threat.

Power—How people define and use power is an important influence on the number and types of conflicts that occur. This influences how conflict is managed. Conflict can arise when people try to make others change their actions or try to gain an unfair advantage.

Values—Values are beliefs or principles we consider to be very important. Serious conflicts arise when people hold incompatible values or when values are not clear. Conflicts also arise when one party refuses to accept the fact that the other party holds something as a value rather than as a preference.

Feelings and Emotions—Many people let their feelings and emotions become a major influence over how they deal with conflict. Conflicts can also occur because people ignore their own or others' feelings and emotions. Other conflicts occur when feelings and emotions differ over a particular issue.

Why Learn Conflict Resolution Skills?

It makes sense that we would want to maximize our ability to resolve conflicts in a satisfying way. Yet few of us receive formal preparation for or education in resolving conflict effectively. The way we approach conflict or behave in a conflict is based on a lifetime of individual experiences, including what we have been taught; our environment; our (perceived) strengths, power, and vulnerability; the behavior of those around us and/or those we admire; and the successes and failures of different strategies we have seen or tried.

The way we deal with conflict is often an automatic reflex, an unconscious choice, a strategy based on fear (what will happen if I do not do the right thing?), confusion (what did she mean by that?), mistrust (I better look out for my interests because he is only looking out for himself), or survival (if I challenge the way things are, I would have to suffer the consequences). When conflict evokes strong feelings in us, we act in response to those feelings and may not apply the same thoughtfulness and skills to resolving a conflict as we would when listening to a close friend. (ODR)

Conflict is not always negative. In fact, it can be healthy when effectively managed. Healthy conflict can lead to:

- Growth and innovation
- New ways of thinking
- Additional management options

If the conflict is understood, it can be effectively managed by reaching a conclusion that meets both the individual's needs and society's needs. This results in mutual benefits and strengthens the relationship. The goal is for all to "win" by having at least some of their needs met.

Positive Steps to Conflict Resolution

When conflict is approached in a thoughtful, constructive way, the result hopefully will be satisfying and positive, not only for ourselves but also for those around us. This approach is effective, collaborative, and constructive conflict resolution. The following model can be used for personal, workplace and even community conflict resolution:

Step 1: Deal Effectively with Anger

- You cannot negotiate a good agreement if you and/or the other person are too angry to think straight or if you do not acknowledge your feelings.

Step 2: Do Your Homework (think before you approach)

- How does this conflict affect each of us?
- What interests or values are at stake here for each of us?
- What prejudices or assumptions do we have about the each other?

Step 3: Set a Positive Tone

- Invite the other person to negotiate. (“Could we talk?”)
- State positive intentions. (“I would like to make things better between us.”)
- Acknowledge and validate the other person. (“I can see this is difficult for you, too.” “Thank you for working with me on this.”)

Step 4: Use Ground Rules

- Talk one at a time.
- Work to improve the situation.
- Stay calm.

Step 5: Discuss and Define the Problem

- Share issues and feelings one at a time.
- Use effective listening and speaking techniques.
- Identify interests and needs.
- Discuss assumptions, suspicions, and values if necessary.
- Summarize new understandings.

Step 6: Brainstorm Possible Solutions

- Contribute ideas to satisfy interests and needs one at a time.
- Don’t criticize or evaluate ideas at this time.
- Be creative while working toward collaboration (“I can” or “We should”).

Step 7: Evaluate and Choose Solutions

- Consider solutions that are:
 - Mutually agreeable
 - Realistic
 - Specific

Step 8: Follow Up

- Check back with each other at an agreed-on time.
- If the agreement is not working, use the same process to revise it.

Categories of Difficult People

1. *Hostile-aggressives*: People who try to bully and overwhelm others.
2. *Complainers*: Individuals who gripe incessantly but do not act to improve the situation.
3. *Silent and unresponsives*: Those who respond very little and, therefore, are not helpful.
4. *Super-agreeables*: Reasonable people who either do not produce or who act differently when not in your presence.
5. *Negativists*: Pessimists whose favorite reaction is, "No, that won't work."
6. *Know-it-all experts*: Those who think that they know much more than anyone else.
7. *Indecisives*: People who do not seem to be able to make up their minds as well as perfectionists who do not complete tasks.

Figure 10-7

Difficult People

"No matter what I do or say, nothing makes any difference," "I work for the most difficult person in the world," and "Nobody can get along with her" are descriptions of difficult people. They may be hostile customers, irritable coworkers, passive-aggressive supervisors, or nitpicky neighbors. They could even be family members. Because he could not find another book on the subject, Bramson (1988) wrote *Coping with Difficult People*. After reading the list of patterns of difficult behavior (Fig. 10-7), do you recognize anyone? If you see yourself in any of the descriptions, realize that you are probably damaging your relationships.

Before you decide that someone's behaviors are difficult, be sure your expectations are realistic. A person with an introverted preference will probably be reserved. Labeling that person as difficult is unrealistic and unfair. However, if the problem is definitely because of a difficult individual, certain strategies outlined previously can help. Keep in mind that although your personality type may *explain* certain aspects of your behaviors, it does not *excuse* them. In other words, do not fall into a trap of thinking that your personality type locks you into certain behaviors.

When dealing with a difficult person, cognitive techniques can also be beneficial. Keeping in mind that other people do not control you and are not able to make you feel, think, or do anything, you can adjust your thinking in various ways. The thought that "just because she was short-tempered (and often is) does not mean it is going to ruin my day" changes your reality. Use your newfound knowledge of personality type to recognize and respect the differences among people. Learn to communicate effectively with them to better understand their needs.

Having an understanding of attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is quite helpful. Discussed in Chapter 5 regarding anger, you use attributions whenever you seek the "why" of behavior. Errors most definitely occur. Social psychologists are quite interested in the common biases we make. For example, if Tim tells a crude joke

that demeans women, we might think, “Tim is sexist and rude.” The tendency to believe that others’ behavior is caused by internal factors such as personality traits, attitude, mood, abilities, or effort is called the **fundamental attribution error** (Ross, 1977). We could have thought, “Tim is a new person who is possibly trying to make an impression on us, and he evidently does not understand that this is not the way to do it.” In this case, we are recognizing the situation or circumstances as the major factor. But more often, we are apt to attribute behavior to a facet of the other’s self. In our minds, the difficult person is simply difficult.

Why not try to see a situation from the other’s perspective? Most people have a reason for being nasty, and if you can figure out accurate underlying causes, your reaction will be less negative. Also be careful not to jump to a conclusion about another’s motivation. People are usually more complicated than what is apparent. Being patient, giving people more than one chance, and being empathic are recommended.

Sometimes changing your behavior and reactions toward a difficult person is most effective. Invariably, the interactions and relationship also change. Anna’s supervisor was, in her opinion, a difficult person. She began to compliment her supervisor and to thank her for advice. Within a few weeks, Anna said to a friend, “What a difference my behaviors have made! At least I can tolerate her now.” What Anna did is good medicine for a difficult person. She provided something that was needed by the supervisor. If you can figure out what a person wants and what may be a cause of his or her difficult behavior, you are helping both yourself and the other person.

Assertiveness, on your part, is most advisable. Difficult people honestly often do not realize how they are affecting others. A simple statement, such as “I did not like being blamed for missing the deadline when it was your part that came in late, and I would like to talk about how we can work together more effectively,” can help. A book designed to help you deal with people who make your life miserable is *Toxic People* (Glass, 1995). Several ways of identifying these individuals, plus ways to deal with them, are included. To help you assess your involvement with difficult people, as well as unload your “gunnysack,” use the Chapter 10 activity in Reflections and Applications. When confronted with a difficult person, use ideas suggested in this book.

Supportiveness

Picture a roomful of people. One individual is carrying a large, weighty pack on her back, so big and burdensome that it is difficult not to notice. Yet the others mingle about as if they do not see the pack. “How are you?” “Fine.” “What do you think of the weather?” Cliché conversation fills the room. People talk about their families and work. They speak of many things but not of the pack on the person’s back. Everyone knows that it is there, and it is on each person’s mind. Nobody says a thing. Even though the woman sags from the weight and looks as if she could fall, they ignore the heavy pack. We will not discuss it, they think. The woman thinks to herself.

Oh, please talk. Why will you not say his name? I want you to say “Paul.” I want for us to talk about his death and his life. Can I say “Paul” and not have you look away

and ignore it? For if we do not talk, you are leaving me alone with this dreadfully heavy pack on my back.

People we know will experience crises and tragedies, and they will carry a figurative pack on their backs. If you care, you will want to know how to react at these times. Consider these possibilities.

Marni, a coworker, is diagnosed with cancer.

Todd, a next-door neighbor, dies suddenly. His wife and children are the survivors.

Kari and Jason, a couple you know, are in an accident. She is badly injured.

Are you inclined to do nothing? Do you ignore the pack on the back? A strong recommendation is to show your concern. Completely ignoring another's tragedy sends the message that you do not care. On a rational level, this may be unfounded. "Of course I care," said one man, "I just do not know what to do." On an emotional level, saying and doing nothing is hurtful.

People seem to be afraid of a griever's feelings, so they try to ignore or change the subject, or they intellectualize and try to explain away the grief. Some just may not want to be bothered. The most commonly given reason for not being supportive: "I just do not know what to do." Closely related is the fear that what is done or said will be wrong. Giving support is another area in which little training is offered. Yet enough has been written on the subject that "I do not know what to say or do" can be seen as an excuse. Being effective in interpersonal relations means that you do respond to people and their needs. It is helpful to be aware of what research has identified as *not* helpful.

- Implied total awareness: "I understand exactly what you are going through." "I know just how you feel," or "I know" used over and over.
- Supplied solutions and reasons for acceptance: "It is better this way." "You will recover faster than you think." "It will be just fine." "Just give it time." "He lived a long life; he was ready to go." "Be grateful for . . ." "It was meant to be." "It was God's will."
- One-upping comments: "I know what it's like because my grandmother died last year." "You think you have got problems? Wait until you hear mine." "Not only did my sister's husband divorce her, but then. . ."

Surprisingly, in one study, slightly more than half of all unhelpful comments were made by relatives or friends (Wortman, Battle, and Lemkau, 1997).

Ideally in any situation, we can express caring feelings. Simplicity and sincerity are the key ingredients. Comments such as "I care" and "I am concerned" are fine. Other possibilities are "I want to do something" and "I remember . . .," recalling a fond memory of the deceased. If people would realize that they are not expected to explain the "why," solve the problem, take away the pain, or other such dramatic behaviors, they might be more inclined to express concern. Research indicates that the most helpful comments are expressions of personal willingness to help or listen; any behaviors that suppress grief or force too much disclosure are not recommended (Range, Walston, and Pollard, 1992). Verbal

expression can open a door of relief for a suffering person. Comfort can be found in just talking. You do not have to have the answers; just listening will help. Usually, people don't remain silent long enough for the griever to fully express his or her thoughts and feelings (James and Cherry, 1988). "I just needed someone to talk to and especially a person I believed was truly listening," said a bereaved parent. Empathic and receptive listening skills are especially advisable. A wise suggestion is to let the grieving person be the only one to make evaluative comments such as "It was a blessing."

Sometimes an honest expression of your perception of the situation is best. A comforting comment given to the writer Max Wylie after his daughter had been savagely murdered was, "This did not happen for the best; it happened for the worst."

One argument you may hear against talking about the "pack on the person's back" is "Maybe they are trying to forget the tragedy or not think about their situation. If I say something, it will just remind them of it." Ask yourself whether you believe that people in anguish have forgotten. If you are thinking about their tragedy or problem, they probably are too. In situations of anxiety, studies show that conversations do not create new fears. In fact, not talking about a fear makes it more pronounced (Buckman, 1988).

As was indicated in the scenario at the beginning of this section, usually one of the greatest gifts you can possibly give to a grieving person is to mention the name of the person's loved one and add some memory you have of him or her.

People who are grieving are likely to fluctuate between wanting some time to themselves and wanting time with others. They may want someone to talk to about their feelings. Showing concern and thoughtfulness shows that you care. It is better to feel nervous and awkward sitting with a grieving friend than to not sit there at all. (Sherer, 2002)

Writing a note or sending a card can replace verbal expression. Supportive acts are also greatly appreciated. Do not just say, "If you need anything, call." Often a person will not seek help; in many cases, you can either say what you want to do or just take action. Check the list of specific helping behaviors in Fig. 10-8. ("Support: What You Can Do"). Promising to help and then not following through is frustrating, so refrain from idle offers. Do not overlook the supportive impact of your presence.

Support: What You Can Do

- In the case of a death, address sympathy acknowledgement cards.
- In any crisis, do errands, such as shopping.
- Clean the person's house.
- Do laundry.
- Mow the person's yard or shovel snow.
- Take the person out for dinner or to a movie.
- Take care of the children, if any.
- Just come by for a visit.

Figure 10-8

“People do not have to say a word. If they are here, I know they care,” commented a widow. “Of course, I would love a little hug or squeeze on my arm if they could,” she added with a tear in her eye. Sharing your sad feelings can also be a comfort. Tears are a by-product of our love and compassion (Edwards, 1989).

When you show support, you help another human being. Acts of listening, talking, touching, and doing are what a grieving person probably needs (Donnelley, 1987). Genuine supportiveness strengthens relationships. A poem by Mary Bailey, described by Vail (1982) as “a lovely lady whose cherished teenage daughter was killed in an accident,” eloquently expresses what a person in pain wants.

A Plea from Someone Who Has Been There

Please dear friend
 Do not say to me the old clichés
 Time heals all wounds
 God only gives you as much as you can bear
 Life is for the living
 Just say the thoughts of your heart
 I am sorry, I love you, I am here, I care
 Hug me and squeeze my hand
 I need your warmth and strength
 Please do not drop your eyes when I am near
 I feel so rejected now by God and man
 Just look in my eyes and let me know that you are with me
 Do not think you must always be strong for me
 It is okay to cry
 It tells me how much you care
 Let me cry, too
 It is so lonely to always cry alone
 Please keep coming by even after many weeks have passed
 When the numbness wears off, the pain of grief is unbearable
 Don't ever expect me to be quite the same
 How can I be when part of my being is here no more?
 But please know, dear friend, with your love, support and understanding
 I will live and love again and be grateful every day that I have you; dear friend.

—Mary Bailey

Sincere Expression

Willingness to express all sincere emotions can greatly improve your relationships. Besides sorrow, other feelings can be hard to express.

Forgiveness. Are you one who has difficulty forgiving? Do you know people who bear grudges? Forgiveness, especially when you were truly wronged, is among the most difficult undertakings for a person, and most of us have no idea how or even if to forgive (Flanigan, 1992). The benefits of forgiving are worth the difficulties. Harboring grudges and other bitter feelings can be damaging to psychological and physical health.

Thinking about forgiveness as simply *letting go of the past* may make it more acceptable. To “forgive and forget” is not necessary; you can forgive without forgetting. Erasing a wrongdoing from memory is unrealistic and usually impossible. Neither is

forgiving the same as condoning or pardoning. Instead, forgiveness means letting go and moving on. You may not resume the relationship at all, or perhaps it will not be as it was before. However, you are free from the bitterness and pain of negativity.

Forgiveness is easier if you are able to forgive yourself. In considering that someone else has wronged you, ask, "Am I perfect? Have I ever hurt somebody else?" The answer to the latter question will likely be that you have. The next question is, "Have I forgiven myself?" If you forgive yourself and learn from the mistake, you will probably find yourself willing to extend your forgiveness to another.

To help you forgive, *Forgiveness Is a Choice* (Enright, 2001) and *Forgiving Yourself* (Flanigan, 1996) are excellent resources. Never to forgive means living a life of unending resentment. When you forgive, you decide to move forward with your life. The alternative is not desirable. "The deeply wounded can either change or slowly drown in a deep pool of hatred" (Flanigan, 1992, p. 68). The choice is yours.

Warmth and demonstrated affection. These particular feelings and behaviors deserve special attention. Touch is the first sense to develop; in order to develop normally, a baby needs to be warmly and lovingly touched. Adults deprived of physical stroking in childhood often develop compulsive, destructive habits such as nail biting, overeating, or smoking. Some speculate that violent behavior may be a result of touch deprivation (Karr, Morse, and Wiley, 1997). Unfortunately, as people age, touching generally declines. Yet the warmth of body contact and the sensation of strong arms holding us are fundamental. "From the first moments of our life to the last, we need to be held—or we fall" (Josselson, 1992, p. 29). Because touch is so critical, if you do not receive it regularly, self-massage or professional massage is recommended.

Reluctance to behave warmly and affectionately is apparent even in close relationships. Individuals who withhold affection can be filled with regret as evidenced by Matt who said:

A good friend called me one night and said he needed to talk. I lied and told him I was too busy and said I would get back to him later. The next day I "spaced" it. That night he shot himself. I feel so guilty.

A letter to Ann Landers told of a 13-year-old girl who wanted desperately to "belong" but had few friends. She tried to reach out and was rejected. She committed suicide, and the students from her school turned out in droves for her funeral. The letter ended: "Sally left this world believing she did not have a single friend. If just one of those kids who passed her casket had taken the time and trouble to show her a little kindness, that dear girl might be alive today." Ann Landers' response was to tell people to reach out. Do you know someone you could befriend? Don't put off expressing affection and warmth to a friend or loved one. Because life is tenuous, you can be too late to tell or show someone that you care. Awareness of this can provide the motivation you need. Consider calling or writing to someone for no other reason than just to say, "I love you."

Appropriateness is a key element in demonstrating any emotion. Within close relationships you have more leeway, and warmth and affection can be shown by hugging, kissing, and other physical acts. Among acquaintances, societal guidelines usually direct behaviors. Touch can be a gesture of warmth and

concern; however, it may also be perceived as seductive, impertinent, annoying, or degrading. As in other behaviors, being sensitive to individual differences is important. Touching is influenced by culture and gender-role socialization. In some situations, touching is even risky. Teachers are concerned that touching a student might be misinterpreted. Following court action against a male elementary school teacher, a parent in one of my classes expressed this thoughtful opinion.

I hope that we do not get to the point where people are afraid to touch each other. I have taught my son and daughter to express genuine affection with appropriate touches, pats on the shoulder or back, and hugs. I hate to think that they will go to school and model after human robots fearful of physical contact. Besides, a lot of kids need affirming touches.

Regardless of culture and gender, a study found that people who were comfortable with touching were more talkative, cheerful, socially dominant, and non-conforming; those discomforted by touch tended to be more emotionally unstable and socially withdrawn (Thayer, 1988). As people become more aware of the benefits of demonstrating feelings as described in Chapter 5, they may touch others more freely. "Without the social vocabulary of touch, life would be cold, mechanical, distant, rational, verbal. Deprived of those gestures and their meanings, the world would be far more frightening, hostile, and chilly" (Thayer, 1988, p. 36). Examining the ways in which you express warmth and affection and making an effort to show your feelings appropriately and genuinely will improve your relationships.

Answering the Challenge of Relationships

Are you willing to risk? All relationships involve risks. Besides the pleasures derived from connecting and interacting, you can expect disappointment and pain. When you exist only to avoid these displeasures, you forfeit all opportunities for the joys of relationships.

Are you committed to spending time, energy, and effort in building positive relationships? Wanting to relate means sacrificing time alone as well as solitary pursuit of your own pleasures. Giving up the extremes of independence and dependence for the nurturance of interdependence is healthy in all close relationships. **Interdependence** means that two people can stand alone, yet prefer to have a relationship with each other and strive to do what is best for both. Education in relationship skills can show people how to be interdependent.

Young people start out without the foggiest notion of how to live in human, personal interaction. I wonder if our educational system would be willing not only to believe, but to prove by their actions that one goal of education is to assist the young person to live as a person with other persons. (Rogers, 1972)

Those words are challenging. Although some strides have been made since they were written, most of us are left to seek out relationship training for ourselves. Learning from this book is a major step. Another good resource is the "Future Intentions" list in Reflections and Applications. You have the opportunity to learn and then act so that you can be enriched by interactions and relationships (Reflect and Apply).

REFLECT AND APPLY**Reflect**

- ◆ Give an example of a relationship that illustrates one of the attraction factors.
- ◆ Recall the last time you behaved assertively.
- ◆ Think of a difficult person. Which tactic could you try in order to deal with that person more positively?

Apply

- ◆ Perform a little act of kindness.
- ◆ Use the five negotiation steps to resolve a current or future issue.
- ◆ The next time you have a chance to provide support, please do so.

LOOKING BACK

- Because we are human, we relate to other humans. Social relationships are needed for self-development.
- Positive relationships are characterized by social exchange. Participants remain in relationships because they receive as well as give, and the benefits outweigh the costs.
- Features of a positive relationship include love for self, absence of codependency, genuineness, warmth with unconditional positive regard, empathy, self-disclosure, enjoyment, encouragement, fairness, dependability, energizing feelings, and mutual interests.
- Various types of relationships contribute to life satisfaction.
- Friendships can have both dilemmas and benefits. Although women and men generally differ in the nature of their friendships, the future holds the promise of deep, nourishing relationships for both. Besides friendships, a variety of support systems are available.
- Open-mindedness and tolerance promote a healthy beginning to interactions. Ideally, acceptance and appreciation of diversity will follow.
- Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are not beneficial to individuals or to societies. Because we learn intolerance, we can unlearn and relearn and live productively in a multicultural world.
- In order to connect with others, shyness needs to be overcome.
- When initiating an interaction, approachability is an important consideration. You can learn to check approachability and then in a positive way initiate and continue conversation.
- Factors related to attraction and liking are physical attraction, proximity, similarities, complementarity, and reciprocity.
- Relationships benefit when the participants have realistic and agreeable expectations for the relationship, along with sensitivity, a cooperative attitude, and assertiveness.
- Conflict will occur. “Gunnysacking” and aggressiveness are not recommended. Learning how to negotiate will help in all walks of life. Additional techniques may be needed in dealing with difficult people.

- It is often difficult to know the best way to offer your support to someone in pain. Although ignoring another person's crisis or tragedy is commonplace, it is not recommended. Showing that you care in verbal and nonverbal ways is important.
- Sincere expressions of forgiveness, warmth, and affection significantly improve relationships.
- All relationships involve risks and commitment. A major challenge in maintaining healthy relationships is based on the fact that human beings are rarely trained in relationship skills. If you want to have the joys and benefits that come from positive relationships, you must be willing to risk, commit, and learn.

The singular life experience I would wish every human being before they die is to feel love for, and be loved by, another. All human beings biologically need to be healthily attached, connected with others.

—Teresa Adams

RESOURCES

Codependents Anonymous.
(602) 277-7991.
<http://www.codependents.org>
Administration on Aging (for
health and care providers).
<http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov>
Southern Poverty Law Center.
<http://www.splcenter.org>
Anti-Defamation League.
<http://www.adl.org>
Simon Wiesenthal Center.
<http://www.wiesenthal.com>
Parents, Families and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).
(202) 638-4200.
<http://www.pflag.org>
Sources of information

You may also find these publica-
tions helpful. They should be
available through your local
bookstore.
Breaking the Impasse: Consensual
Approaches to Resolving Public
Disputes. Lawrence Susskind
and Jeffrey Cruikshank, 1987,
New York: Basic Books.
Creating the High Performance
Team. Steve Buchholz and
Thomas Roth, 1987, New York:
Wiley.
The Eight Essential Steps to
Conflict Resolution: Preserving
Relationships at Work, at Home,
and in the Community. Dudley
Weeks, 1992, New York:
St. Martin's Press.

Getting to Yes: Negotiating
Agreement without Giving In.
Robert Fisher, William Ury, and
Bruce Patton, 1991, New York:
Penguin Books.
Managing Public Disputes: A
Practical Guide to Handling
Conflict and Reaching
Agreements. Susan L. Carpenter
and W.J.D. Kennedy, 1988, San
Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
The Planner as Dispute Resolver:
Concepts and Teaching Materials.
A. Bruce Dotson, David
Godschalk, and Jerome Kaufman,
1989, Washington, DC: National
Institute for Dispute Resolution.