

The Relationship Journal (Part 1): Understanding

What Is a Relationship Journal?

Conflicts are a natural part of relationships. Whether the relationship is with a partner, friend, coworker, parent, or family member, two people with different histories, needs, and expectations are bound to experience tension at times.

The Relationship Journal is a tool designed to help you better understand **your internal experience during conflict** - what you felt, what you thought, and how you responded. By increasing awareness of your own reactions, you create the foundation for meaningful change.

The TEAM approach to relationships is not about eliminating conflict. Conflict is inevitable whenever two people care about each other. Instead, the goal is to learn how to respond to conflict with greater sensitivity, honesty, and compassion so that moments of tension become opportunities for understanding and connection rather than distance.

In this way, the Relationship Journal isn't about fixing people or proving who's right. It's about learning how to move through inevitable disagreements in a loving and respectful way. You might think of it as making a better world one personal conflict at a time.

Interpersonal Decision-Making

When we're in conflict, it's easy to wish that the other person would change so we could feel better. Unfortunately, we don't have control over what others think, feel, or do. What we *can* control is how we respond.

When a relationship feels distressing, there are several valid paths forward:

1. **Keep the relationship exactly as it is**
 - No work required. This option is completely valid.
2. **Keep the relationship the same, but work on how you feel about it**
 - A *Daily Mood Log* can help reduce emotional distress without expecting the other person to change.
3. **Leave the relationship**

- This may involve grief, guilt, or fear, which can be addressed with tools like a *Daily Mood Log*.
- You may also use the Relationship Journal to end the relationship with empathy, assertiveness, and respect.
- If avoidance or procrastination is getting in the way, a *Habit and Addiction Log* may be helpful.

4. Work on improving the relationship

- This may include addressing painful thoughts and emotions with a *Daily Mood Log*.
- The *Relationship Journal* helps you better understand both yourself and the other person, and identify meaningful changes you can make.

There is no “right” choice. Only the choice that feels most workable for you right now.

For the remainder of this handout, we will assume you’ve chosen **Option 4: Working on Improving the Relationship**.

Why Understanding Comes First

Before trying to understand the other person, it’s essential to understand yourself.

When emotions are intense(anger, hurt, resentment, fear) it can be nearly impossible to truly listen or empathize. Trying to fix everything at once often feels overwhelming and unproductive.

Instead, the Relationship Journal helps you slow down and focus on **one specific interaction**. By examining a single moment in detail, you build mindfulness and emotional clarity. With practice, this process becomes easier and more natural over time.

How You Can Use This Technique (Part 1)

If possible, working through the Relationship Journal with a therapist can be especially helpful. You may also find the book *Feeling Good Together* by David D. Burns, M.D., to be a valuable companion resource.

Step 1. Identify the person you would like to improve your relationship with.

Step 2. Describe a specific event or moment where conflict occurred.

Step 3. Write down exactly what the other person did or said that upset you.

Step 4. Write down how you felt when they did or said those things (e.g., angry, sad, rejected, anxious, disappointed).

Step 5. Write down what you did or said in response.

Step 6. Write down how you felt after your response.

What Comes Next

This first part of the Relationship Journal focuses on **understanding**. The next step involves deciding whether you are willing to make changes. Particularly the difficult step of letting go of blame.

A helpful tool for this stage is the **Blame Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)**, which explores what you gain and lose by holding onto blame.

Important Things to Keep in Mind

- Understanding does **not** mean excusing harmful behavior.
- This process is about clarity, not self-criticism.
- You only need to work on **one moment at a time**.
- If strong emotions arise, pause and take care of yourself before continuing.

Final Note

The Relationship Journal is not about forcing forgiveness or fixing the other person. It is about increasing awareness, reducing emotional suffering, and empowering you to choose how you want to show up in your relationships.

Small insights, practiced consistently, can lead to meaningful change over time.