

A close-up photograph of two men's faces in profile, facing each other. The man on the left is white with light brown hair, and the man on the right is Black with short black hair and a small earring. The background is a plain, light grey color. The text is overlaid on the image.

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

IN FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

A PACE workbook for gay and bisexual men

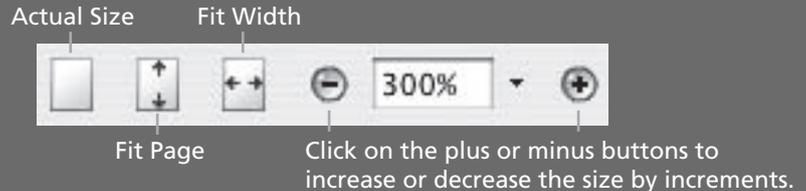
WELCOME

Welcome to the web version of Getting What You Want (GWYW).

PACE and Camden Primary Care Trust's Good Sexual Health Team jointly published GWYW in 2006, in printed form, for gay and bi men in London. It was funded by the health services in London as part of the London Gay Men's HIV Prevention Partnership.

We have now made this web version to enable it to be used by a wider audience.

You can adjust the size of the document on your screen by clicking on these buttons in the top menu bar.



For the exercises that involve writing, we suggest you print off the relevant pages or make notes on paper or in a journal. There is more advice about how to use the workbook in the introduction on the next page.

We welcome any feedback you have about this version of GWYW. Please email us at: groupwork@pace.dircon.co.uk



Welcome to *Getting What You Want*, the second personal development workbook from PACE for gay and bisexual men. The first, *Getting Ready*, focused on developing self-esteem and getting ready for relationships.

This one should really be called *Getting **More of What You Want***, because in a healthy relationship you rarely get everything you want, whenever you want it. However, many of us get less from our friendships and relationships than we would like.

Getting What You Want aims to help you develop the skills and strategies you need to make your friendships and relationships deeper, longer-lasting, more fulfilling and more fun.

It begins with a quick introductory exercise that uses the characters Cinderella, the Wicked Stepmother and the Fairy Godmother to give you an insight into how you tend to relate to other people.

Part One of the workbook aims to help you develop your relationship with yourself. Learning to listen to yourself and understand your feelings

and preferences is a crucial step to knowing what you want — and knowing what you want is the first step towards getting it!

Part Two aims to help you develop your relationships with others. It focuses on listening skills, talking skills and the perils of making assumptions.

Part Three introduces ways to manage differences and conflict in friendships and relationships. As sure as night follows day, differences will arise. If the relationships are to survive, conflict needs to be dealt with carefully.

Part Four contains information about putting what you have learned into practice.

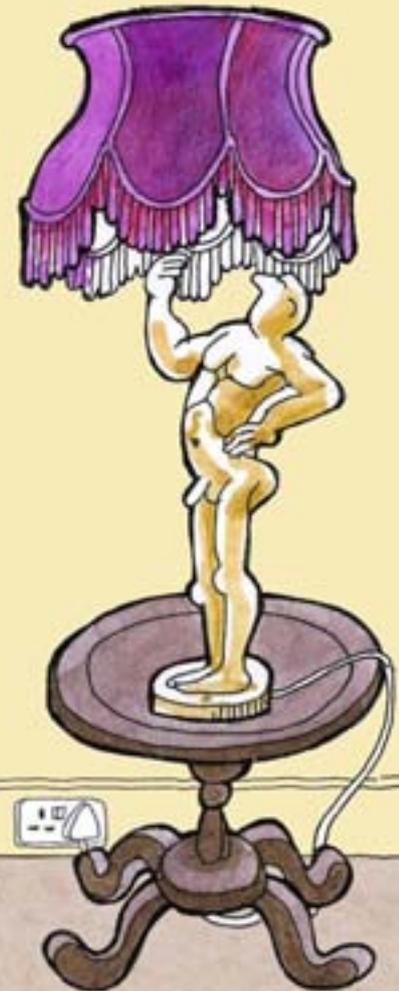
You can work through the book from start to finish or just dip into it, doing the exercises that seem most useful. You can work on your own, or with a friend or small group of friends. Some of the exercises may seem a bit odd to you — and often, when things are unfamiliar, we resist them. Why not give them a try and stretch your comfort zone a bit? You'll get much more out of the workbook if you do.



It doesn't mean that

STRETCHIN'
MY
COMFORT
NONE

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GETTING STARTED

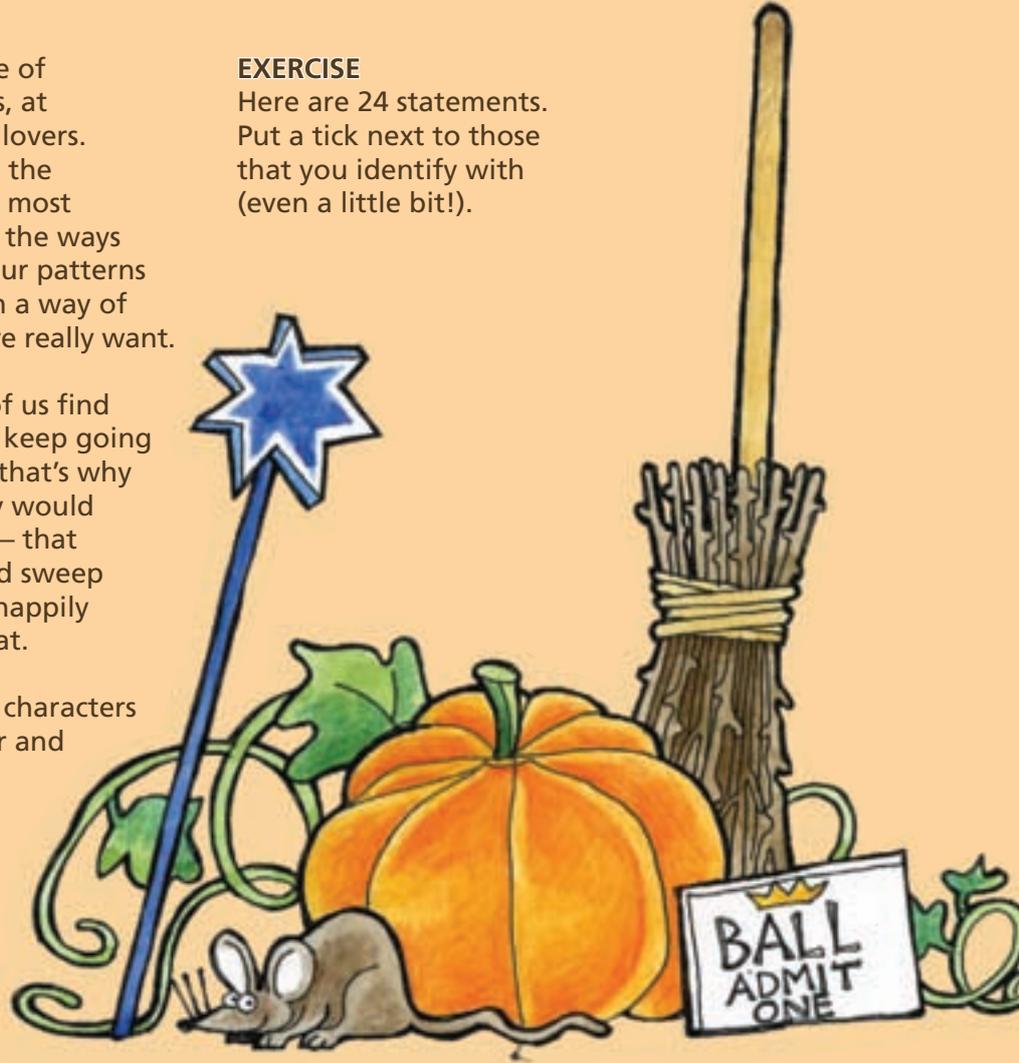
All of us have had some experience of relationships — within our families, at school and work, with friends and lovers. Every relationship is unique, as are the two people who form it. However, most of us develop habits or patterns in the ways we relate to others. These behaviour patterns can, without us realising, trap us in a way of relating that doesn't get us what we really want.

As for sexual relationships, many of us find them difficult — either to start, to keep going or to feel comfortable in. Perhaps that's why we can find ourselves wishing they would happen like they do in fairy tales — that Prince Charming would ride up and sweep us off our feet and we would live happily ever after. But real life isn't like that.

This introductory exercise uses the characters Cinderella, the Wicked Stepmother and the Fairy Godmother to represent three distinct styles of relating. You can begin to explore your own patterns of relating to others by discovering which of these styles you tend to use.

EXERCISE

Here are 24 statements. Put a tick next to those that you identify with (even a little bit!).



- 1. I have bad luck in life.
- 2. I find people irritating.
- 3. I find it difficult to ask for help from others.
- 4. I am always helping other people out.
- 5. I don't like being the centre of attention.
- 6. In arguments, I'm usually right.
- 7. I feel misunderstood by other people.
- 8. I never say no to my friends.
- 9. I feel guilty that I have a better life than other people.
- 10. People have to prove themselves before I trust them.
- 11. I have little time for wimps.
- 12. I prefer my boyfriend to sense what I want in bed, without having to tell him.
- 13. I can feel taken for granted.
- 14. People who nag are annoying.
- 15. If I'm upset, I think my boyfriend should ask me what the matter is.
- 16. I find it difficult to motivate myself.
- 17. I quite like an argument.
- 18. I find it difficult to say no to requests.
- 19. It annoys me when people try to help me.
- 20. I think people should be more supportive.
- 21. I don't like disappointing other people.
- 22. I'm more of a leader than a follower.
- 23. I get more out of giving to others than taking for myself.
- 24. I rarely change my mind in a discussion.

TURN OVER TO DISCOVER YOUR MAIN RELATING STYLES.

In the table below, circle the numbers of the answers you've ticked:

Cinderella	Wicked Stepmother	Fairy Godmother
1	2	4
3	6	5
7	10	8
12	11	9
15	14	13
16	17	18
19	22	21
20	24	23

Whichever column has the most circles represents your main relating style. If you didn't tick many statements, you may be a person who has relatively balanced relationships — a real Prince Charming, perhaps.

Read the following descriptions and see if they ring any bells for you.

Poor Cinders — she's had a bum deal in life, hasn't she? It's easy to feel sorry for her. But let's look at her in a different light. Why does she bow to her stepmother's tyranny? Why doesn't she stand up for herself? Doesn't she think she deserves to be happy?



If you're a Cinderella type, you probably see the glass half empty, rather than half full. You tend to wait passively for others to fix things, and don't recognise your own power in relationships. You probably look up to the other person and put yourself down.



As for the Wicked Stepmother — what a mean, hard-faced piece of work. But what has made her so uncaring? Does her way of relating make her happy? Is she wary of getting close to others in case she gets hurt?



Finally, let's look at the Fairy Godmother. She spends her whole life helping others — but what does she get out of it? A warm, self-satisfied glow? Perhaps she's frightened of conflict, and that's why she's so people-pleasing.



If you're a Wicked Stepmother type, you probably tend to behave in a critical and superior way in most relationships. The satisfaction you get from putting other people down is only fleeting, however, and inside, you can feel frustrated and dissatisfied. Maybe you long for other people to feel close to you, but you keep everyone at such a distance that it's unlikely anyone will.

If you're a Fairy Godmother type you probably only value yourself when you're helping others, so you're usually drawn to people who need help. But, deep down, you probably want more equal relationships with real give and take. Since you have trouble revealing your own needs and prefer to appear completely 'sorted' all the time, it's difficult for others to know how to give to you.

Discovering your habitual relationship style can be quite challenging — but it's not a life sentence! If you find yourself stuck in a particular role, and it isn't getting you what you want or need, then you could think about changing the way you relate. The rest of this booklet contains lots of exercises to help you make changes. Though all of the exercises will be useful to everybody, Cinderellas should pay particular attention to the exercises in Part One, Wicked Stepmothers to those in Part Two, and Fairy Godmothers to those in Part Three. Now read on...

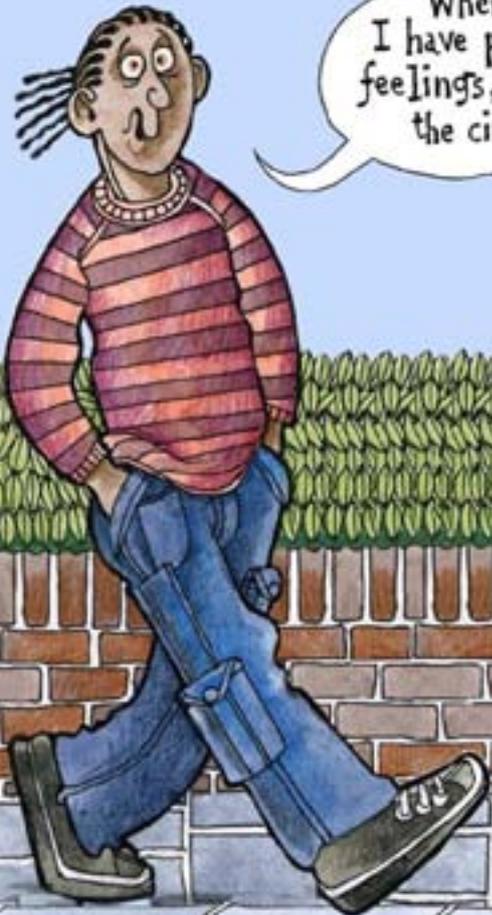


It may seem a strange idea, but being able to relate successfully to others starts with having a good relationship with yourself. This means becoming more aware of who you are, what you feel and what you want.

This section helps you learn to name your feelings, listen to yourself and identify your preferences. All of these will help you develop your relationship with yourself.

RELATING TO YOURSELF

HOW DO YOU FEEL?



Whenever I have painful feelings, I go to the cinema.

One of the best ways to deepen a relationship is to talk about your feelings. When you do this, your partner or friends will understand you better, and will usually feel more comfortable about telling you what's going on for them. This will help you feel closer to each other.

Unfortunately, for many men, talking about our feelings is precisely the opposite of what we've been encouraged to do. Being a man, in the conventional sense, is all about suppressing feelings or holding them in — it's certainly not about expressing them! So for gay men to form intimate relationships with each other, we often have to go against a lot of social conditioning.

And then, even when we want to reveal more of ourselves, many of us come unstuck because we don't know the words for what we are feeling inside.

This exercise helps you develop your emotional vocabulary. There are hundreds of words to describe feelings, and most of them are related to one of these five primary emotions:

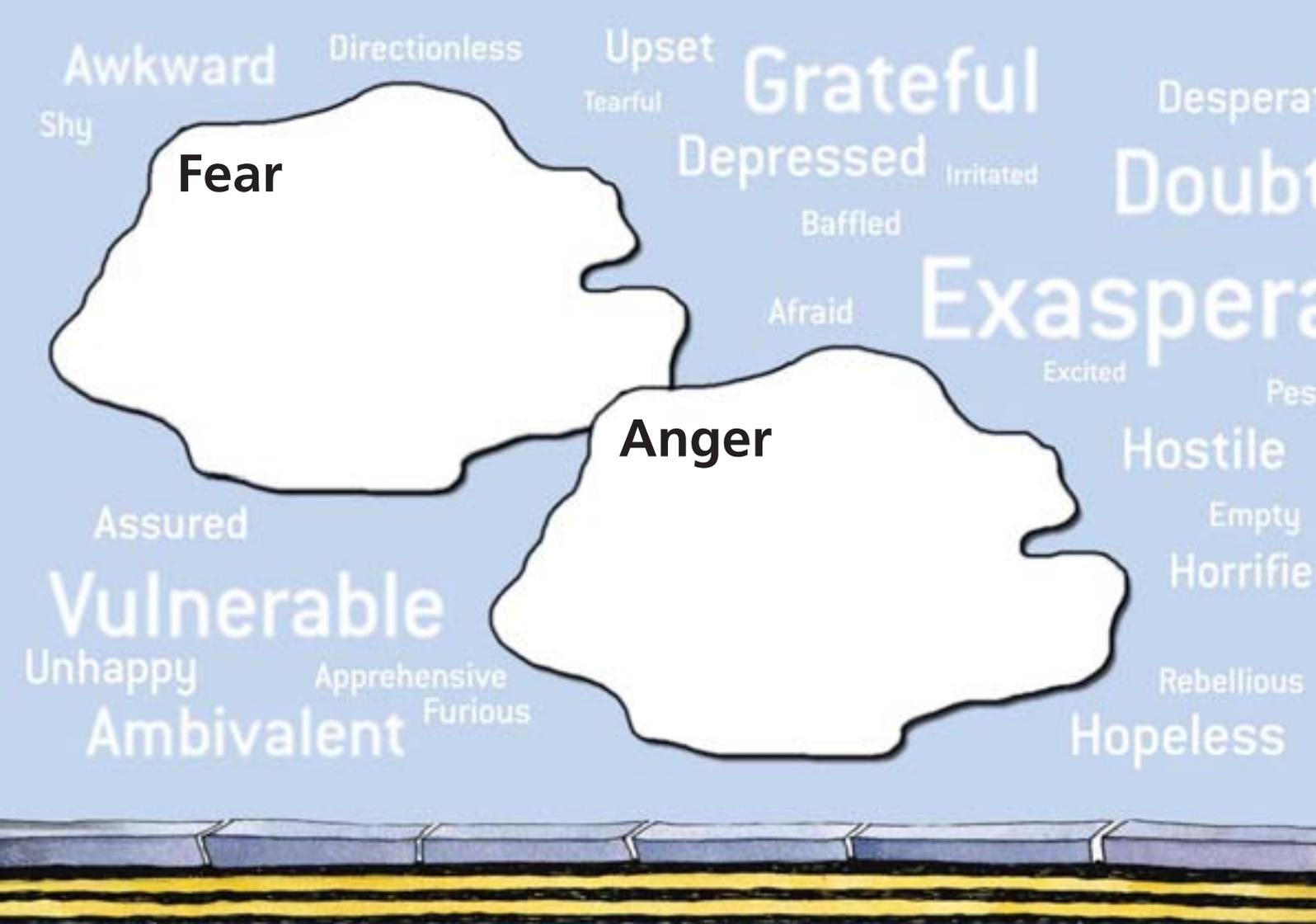
- Fear
- Anger
- Sadness
- Happiness
- Confusion

EXERCISE

In each of the shapes overleaf, there is a primary emotion. Look back at some of your life experiences and think of words to describe the feelings you remember having. Find as many different words as you can, and write them in the shape you feel they belong in.

If you think a word belongs in more than one shape, put it in both. Keep going until you can't think of any more words to describe the feelings you have experienced.





Fear

Anger

Awkward

Directionless

Upset

Grateful

Desperate

Shy

Tearful

Depressed

Irritated

Doubt

Baffled

Exasperated

Afraid

Excited

Pesky

Hostile

Assured

Empty

Vulnerable

Horrible

Unhappy

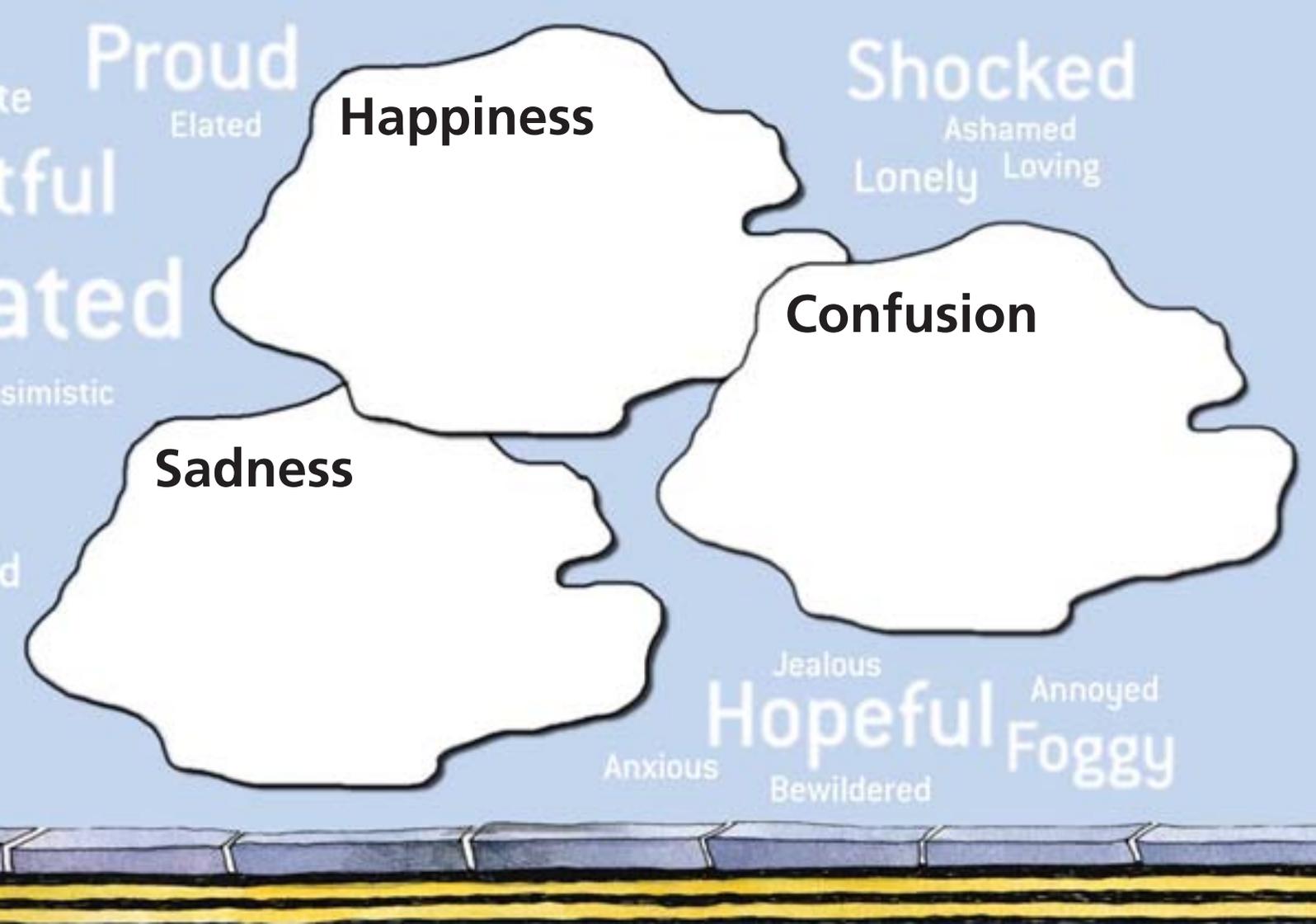
Apprehensive

Furious

Rebellious

Ambivalent

Hopeless



Proud

Elated

Happiness

Shocked

Ashamed

Lonely Loving

Confusion

Sadness

Jealous

Annoyed

Hopeful

Foggy

Anxious

Bewildered

Now think about these questions:

- Are some of your shapes more full than others?
- Are there emotions you are very used to feeling?
- Are there any you rarely feel?

If there's a shape you have very few words in, it's worth thinking about why that might be. What happens for you when this emotion crops up in relationships?

How do you feel about how you feel? This isn't as daft a question as it may seem. Most of us experience feelings we find acceptable in ourselves — as well as feelings that make us uncomfortable or even ashamed.

Accepting yourself means being able to feel OK about yourself no matter what emotion you're feeling. It's bad enough to be feeling some strong or painful emotion — but then we often make it worse by thinking that we shouldn't be feeling this feeling, that it's just plain wrong.

Look through the feeling words you've written down, and see which ones you feel OK about experiencing and which ones you are

uncomfortable with. People seem to respond in one of two ways when they experience painful or uncomfortable feelings. They either find ways to avoid or distract themselves from the feelings or they find ways to feel and express them. There's a time and place for both sorts of response — neither of them is wrong.

Here are some examples of these two different responses:

AVOID OR DISTRACT:

- Get drunk/stoned
- Go shopping
- Comfort eat
- Go to the cinema
- Storm off in a huff
- Go out looking for sex

FEEL AND EXPRESS:

- Talk to a friend
- Have a good cry
- Write it all down
- See a counsellor
- Have a (constructive) row
- Let off steam on a punch bag or pillow

EXERCISE

Look again at your shapes and choose a few feelings that you don't enjoy experiencing. Using the lists above, think about how you usually respond to these feelings. Write the feelings and your responses in the box opposite.

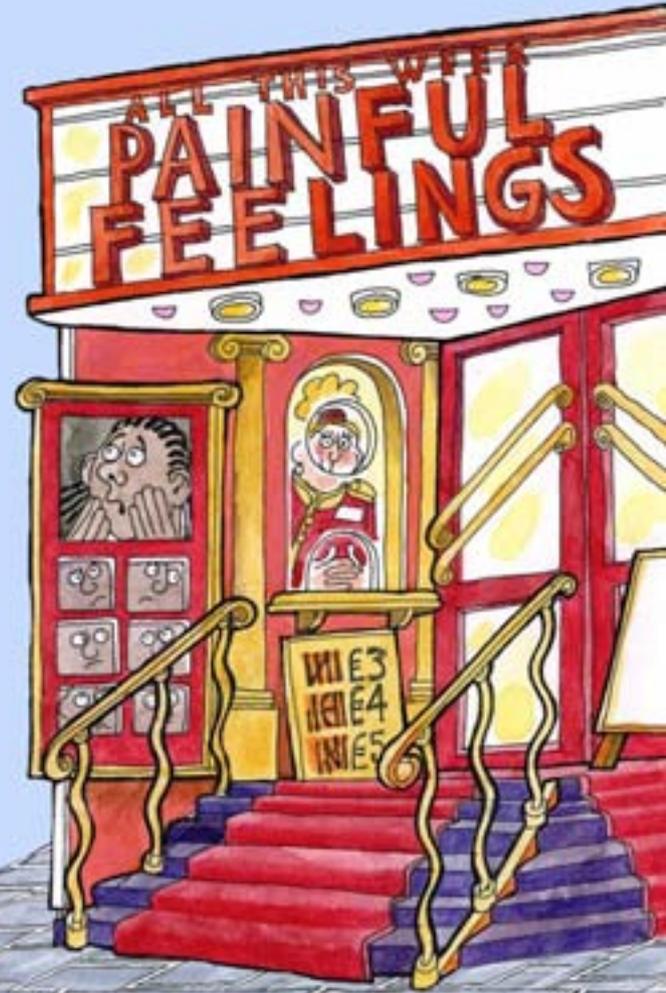


PAINFUL FEELINGS	MY RESPONSE

If you find that you have a tendency to use avoidance or distraction in response to difficult or painful feelings, the chances are that those feelings often hang around. Once your avoidance strategy is over, you are right back feeling what you were feeling to start with. If this happens to you, it's worth considering how you can express the feelings. Some feelings will simply not be resolved until you do.

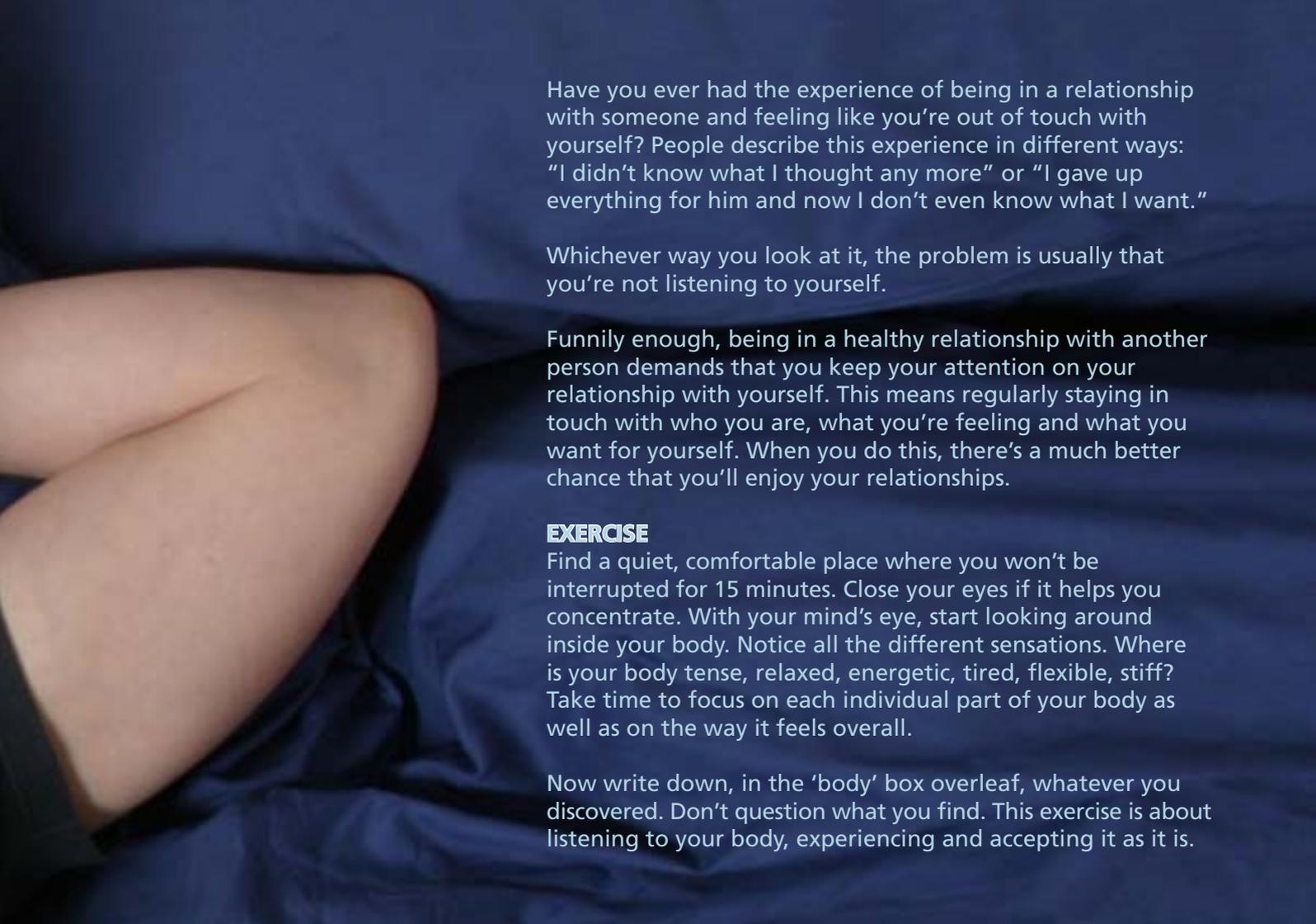
SUCK IT & SEE

Next time you're feeling something uncomfortable and you notice that you're beginning to distract yourself, stop! Instead, try something from the Feel and Express column — and see what happens.



LISTEN TO YOURSELF





Have you ever had the experience of being in a relationship with someone and feeling like you're out of touch with yourself? People describe this experience in different ways: "I didn't know what I thought any more" or "I gave up everything for him and now I don't even know what I want."

Whichever way you look at it, the problem is usually that you're not listening to yourself.

Funnily enough, being in a healthy relationship with another person demands that you keep your attention on your relationship with yourself. This means regularly staying in touch with who you are, what you're feeling and what you want for yourself. When you do this, there's a much better chance that you'll enjoy your relationships.

EXERCISE

Find a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be interrupted for 15 minutes. Close your eyes if it helps you concentrate. With your mind's eye, start looking around inside your body. Notice all the different sensations. Where is your body tense, relaxed, energetic, tired, flexible, stiff? Take time to focus on each individual part of your body as well as on the way it feels overall.

Now write down, in the 'body' box overleaf, whatever you discovered. Don't question what you find. This exercise is about listening to your body, experiencing and accepting it as it is.



BODY

Now relax again and concentrate on your heart. Spend a few minutes quietly noticing how you are feeling emotionally right now. Again, don't question. Your task is to listen to what's going on in your heart and to accept the feelings you find. There may be one dominant feeling, or several different layers of more subtle feelings going on at the same time. Whatever they are, write them in the 'heart' box.



HEART

Relax again and move on to your mind. Notice your thoughts, without getting caught up in them. For example, is your mind calm or busy, lethargic, speedy, relaxed, clear or complicated today? Whatever you find, just accept it. No need to judge or try to change it. When you're ready, write whatever you found in the 'mind' box.



MIND

Finally, take some deep breaths and relax once more. This time, focus on the question 'what do I want for myself?' Don't think too hard and don't censor your ideas, just let them bubble up, from your body and heart as well as your mind. When you're ready, write your ideas in the 'for myself' box.

FOR MYSELF

Well done. You've taken a step towards deepening your relationship with yourself. You can share what you've learned with your partner or a friend, and together develop a relationship that gives you more of what you want.

SUCK IT AND SEE

Do this exercise once a week for a while. Notice how it can help you feel clearer about what you are thinking, feeling and wanting.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LOVING



How do you like to be loved? This may seem a strange question, but there are lots of different ways to give and receive love and affection. This exercise helps you identify the ways that work best for you.

EXERCISE

Think back through your life and try to remember the times when someone made you feel loved or cared for. Think about what they did that made you feel that way. Include even the small things. Now write five things that make you feel loved or cared for in the lines below. If you can't remember feeling loved or cared for by anyone, jot down things you *would like* others to do that would feel caring or loving to you.

I feel loved or cared for when someone:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

In his book *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman identifies five different ways that people give and receive affection. These are:

- Spending quality time
- Giving and receiving gifts
- Loving words
- Physical affection
- Practical help

Which of Chapman's categories do your examples fit into? Do you have more in one category than the others, or is there an even spread? Have you invented a whole new category?

Most people have preferences for how they like to be loved or cared for. Some people like physical affection, while others prefer sharing quality time or loving conversations. It's useful to find out how you like to be loved and then let people close to you know.

This is particularly true because most of us tend to show our love for others in the ways we like to be loved ourselves, not realising that there are other ways of loving that they might prefer.

EXERCISE

Compare your answers with those of your partner or a close friend and then think about the ways you show care and affection to each other. Do they generally fit with each of your preferred styles, or are you giving him flowers when he'd prefer you to fix his bike?

It's OK to be different. In fact, it's inevitable that you'll have different likes and dislikes — it's all

part of being in a relationship with someone. But to get the best out of a relationship, you need to tell him what you want — what you really, really want. Most of us don't let other people know how we like to be loved. Those old romantic myths say that a 'true love' should just 'know'. How? By reading your mind?

Therapist Stanley Keleman defines love as the willingness to educate someone about all of who you are and what you want. Sharing this exercise with a friend or partner is the beginning of letting them know what works for you. Once they have this information, they're in a better position to show affection to you in a way that you'll really appreciate. And vice versa, of course.

Take the information you get from this exercise as a guide and experiment with it. Make a note of the main ways your partner or friend likes to be loved and see what you can do to love or show affection to him in those ways.

SUCK IT & SEE

Look back at the five ways of loving. If there are any that you rarely or never use, try showing some affection to your friends or partner in these ways. Afterwards, check out how it was for them.





**GETTING
PERSONAL**



Someone once said that intimacy should be written 'into-me-see', because that's what it's really about — letting someone see inside you.

Friendships and relationships can function at different levels. Some can happen mostly on the surface — you have a laugh together, but don't get very personal with each other. In others, you might have a deeper connection and share your innermost thoughts.

Some people find it easy to relate on these different levels, while others can find the more intimate level unfamiliar and challenging. It depends on what you have been used to in your family and in your relationships and friendships.

Getting personal with others can be particularly challenging for gay men. Many of us learned to hide what we were feeling inside when we were growing up, because it was dangerous to let people know about our sexuality. Yet many of us want to develop intimate relationships with other men, and feel close to them. This means going against what might feel instinctive. It means opening up when we may be more used to closing off.

This section introduces ways to deepen how you listen and talk to the people you want to be close to.

LISTEN TO HIM

Just as there are different levels of relating, so there are different levels of listening. We use 'social' listening when we're out with mates in a pub, for instance. In this type of situation, we are often more concerned with what our own next comment is going to be than with really listening. 'Active' listening, on the other hand, is concentrated listening that is used to enable a deeper level of communication. It requires more effort, is not always easy or natural at first and takes practice to develop.

So what are the differences in a conversation when social or active listening is used?

In a social situation:

- Conversation is a free-for-all — topics may change quickly
- Pauses are filled quickly
- Attention is not focused on one person
- People often say 'the same thing happened to me' and move the conversation onto themselves
- Deeper emotions or feelings are rarely revealed.

By contrast, when people are using active listening:

- The listener concentrates on the speaker, taking in what is being said

- The listener shows that he is keeping the focus on the other person, through warm and encouraging facial expressions and body language
- The listener doesn't interrupt the speaker
- The listener asks open questions such as "how did you feel about that?" or "what happened next?" to enable the speaker to expand on their thoughts
- The listener only offers advice if the speaker asks for it.

EXERCISE

Ask your partner or a friend to practise active listening with you. Sit down facing each other. One of you starts a conversation, with just a few sentences. The other listens without commenting, and then summarises what he has just heard. The speaker corrects anything the listener got wrong or left out. Then you swap roles — the first listener becomes the speaker and makes his contribution to the conversation while the other listens and then summarises, and so on.

Notice how it feels to really listen carefully to someone. How accurate were you in your summarising? Did you miss things out? What can you learn from this?

SUCK IT AND SEE

Over the next week, try active listening in a few different situations. Remember to really focus on the speaker and what they're saying for a few minutes before you respond. Try not to judge what they're saying as 'right' or 'wrong'. When you do respond, keep the focus on them and what they just said. Notice how this affects your conversations.



TALK TO HIM



Have you ever spent an evening with a friend or partner, nattering away — only to go home feeling a bit unsatisfied or uncomfortable? This can happen when there's something that you want to talk about, but find difficult to bring up. Until it's talked about, the relationship probably won't feel relaxed or easy. You might want to tell him you fancy him, for example, or that you're pissed off about something.

Finding a way to talk about your feelings can be really difficult, so things often get left unsaid, and this can lead to the relationship drifting apart. But if you can manage to share your feelings in a way that doesn't make the other person feel either defensive or overwhelmed, it can actually lead to greater closeness and intimacy between you.

Assertive communication is a useful tool for raising subjects that don't flow naturally. Some people think being assertive means being loud, bullying and demanding — but they're confusing assertiveness with aggression. In fact, assertive communication simply means stating clearly what you mean, what you feel and what you would like. Communicating in this way doesn't necessarily mean you will get what you want, but it does encourage an open response and is not likely to provoke defensiveness in the other person.

The following formula for assertive communication uses three phrases to help you reveal your feelings and preferences clearly.

1. WHEN YOU...

Use this phrase to begin your sentence. Be specific and describe what happened that triggered your need to talk (e.g. something they did or said).

2. I FEEL (OR FELT)...

Now say how you feel about what happened, e.g. sad, happy, irritated. If you need to, look back at your feeling words on page 14. Sharing your feelings isn't always easy; you may feel vulnerable. It's this vulnerability that makes the difference — it means the other person is more likely to be able to hear what you're saying and makes the conversation into a more meaningful exchange.

3. I WOULD LIKE...

Now make a clear, specific request. If you make a general or non-specific request, you risk either being misunderstood or scaring or overwhelming the person you are talking to. For instance, the statement "I'd really like you to make more of a commitment to our relationship" doesn't give any real information about what it is that you actually want.

Using this structure might feel contrived at first, but if you practise and find your own way of using the formula, it can become part of your everyday way of communicating.

Look at the following examples of the assertive communication formula in action, contrasted with examples of unassertive communication. Try to imagine how it would feel to hear each of the comments. Which would you find easier to hear and respond openly to?

ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION	UNASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION
When you start eating my chips, I feel irritated. I'd like you to buy your own chips, or at least ask me before you start on mine.	Oi! Get off, you greedy pig! Buy your own bleeding chips!
When you told me that you were HIV-positive, I felt shocked and scared, to be honest. I'd like some time to understand what it means for us.	You could have told me this when we first started seeing each other!
When we went away together last weekend, I felt happy and excited at the idea that we might be getting more serious. I'd like to know how you're feeling about our relationship.	So — are we an item now, or what?

When you want to bring something up with someone, choose your moment to let him or her know there's something you'd like to talk about. Suggest a time and place and see if that fits with them. If it doesn't, ask them to suggest a good time and see if you can go with that. You might have to wait a bit longer, but you'll probably have a more productive conversation.

Assertive communication won't solve all your relationship problems, but it can make a big difference. As you can see from the examples, you don't have to keep to the formula rigidly. Remember, the most important thing is that you reveal your feelings.

EXERCISE

Think of an issue that you would like to bring up in a current friendship or relationship. To prepare for the conversation, use the formula to complete the three sentences below. Try to keep each sentence short and to the point.

1. WHEN YOU:

2. I FEEL (OR FELT)*:

3. I WOULD LIKE:

Now you have your plan. Try the formula out a few times, and then practise with a friend if you want to build up your confidence beforehand.

SUCK IT AND SEE

Practise the When you... I feel... I would like... formula in everyday conversation, with your friends, at work or college, in the dry cleaners etc. Experiment with different ways of using it, until it becomes a natural part of your way of talking.

*Note: Don't put the word 'that' or 'you' after 'I feel' in your sentence. If you do, you steer yourself away from expressing a feeling and towards expressing a view or belief about the other person.

FACT FROM FICTION



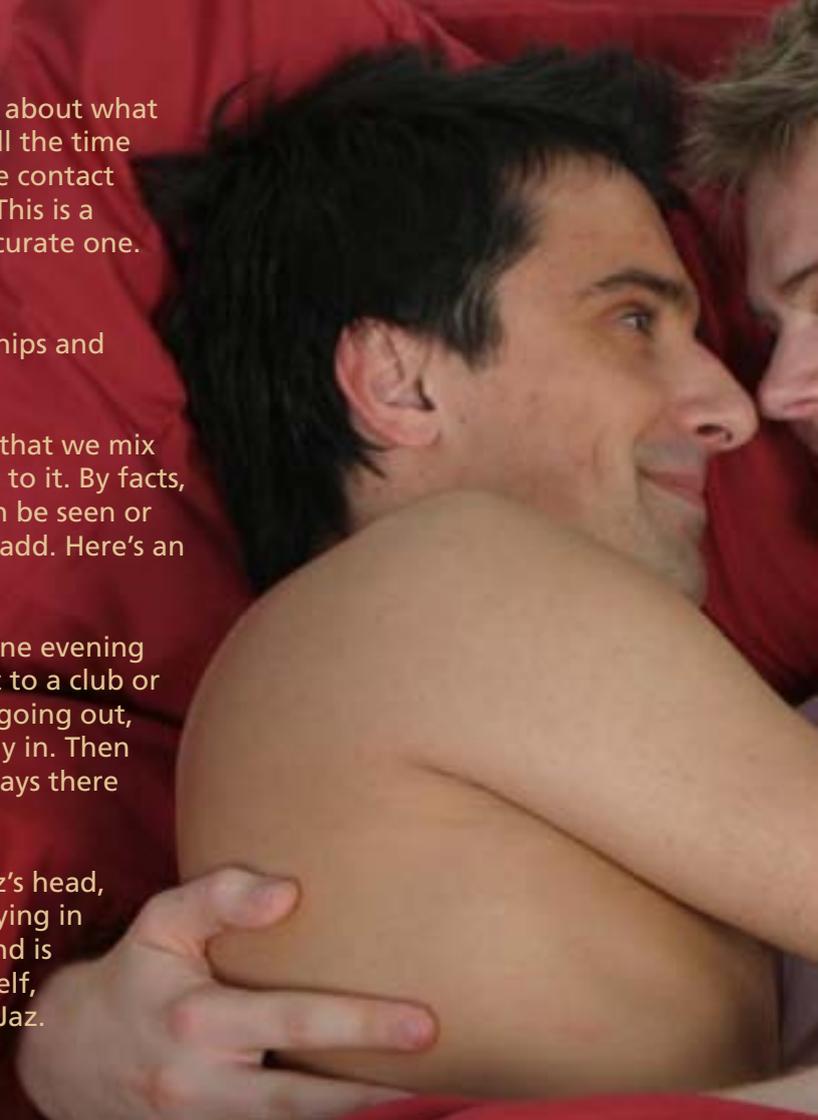
It's very common for people to make assumptions about what another person's behaviour means. We all do it, all the time — for example, if someone fails to return your eye contact in a bar, you might assume he doesn't fancy you. This is a reasonable assumption, but it might not be an accurate one. He might just be shy, for instance.

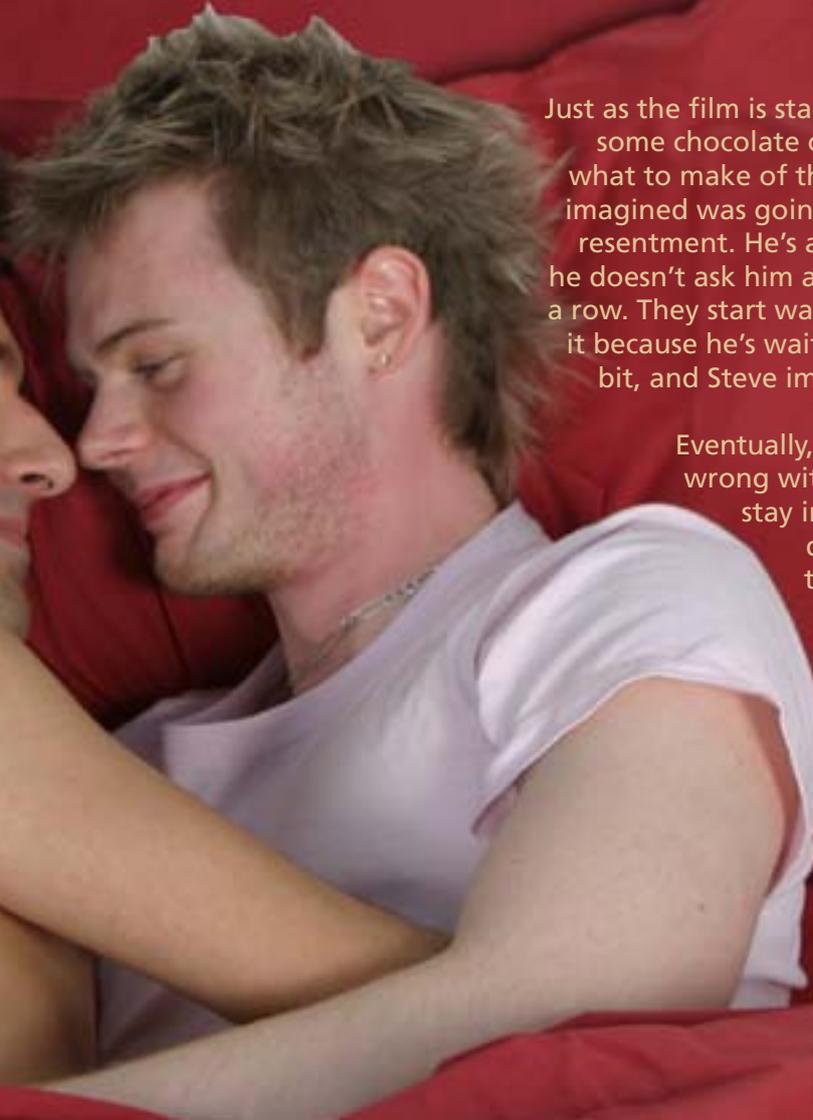
A lot of misunderstandings can happen in friendships and relationships when we make assumptions.

One way of describing how this happens is to say that we mix up the *facts* of a situation with the *fiction* we add to it. By facts, we mean what actually happens — that which can be seen or heard. By fiction, we mean the interpretation we add. Here's an example of how this can happen:

Jaz and Steve have been together about a year. One evening they have a minor tussle about whether to go out to a club or stay in and watch a film. Jaz, who had suggested going out, gives in without much of a fight and agrees to stay in. Then he goes to the kitchen without saying why, and stays there for what seems to Steve a puzzlingly long time.

Steve starts to imagine what is going on inside Jaz's head, based on his actions. He thinks Jaz is probably staying in the kitchen because he really wanted to go out and is now pissed off. And somewhere deep inside himself, Steve feels guilty for forcing what he wants onto Jaz.





Just as the film is starting, Jaz comes back in with two cups of tea and some chocolate cake, and sits down to watch. Steve doesn't know what to make of this at first — it doesn't seem to fit with what he'd imagined was going on. He decides that Jaz must be covering up his resentment. He's absolutely sure that Jaz is pissed off with him, but he doesn't ask him about it outright because he doesn't want to start a row. They start watching the film, but Steve never really settles into it because he's waiting for Jaz to have a go at him. Jaz is fidgeting a bit, and Steve imagines this to mean that he's smouldering inside.

Eventually, he can't stand it any more. He blurts out, "What is wrong with you? Are you just punishing me for wanting to stay in?" Jaz is astonished. He's already forgotten their disagreement. His surprise is so obviously genuine that Steve realises he's been wrong. In sorting out the misunderstanding, Steve reveals his fears and his guilty feeling, and Jaz explains to Steve that he really didn't mind, on this occasion.

Sharing their feelings in this way results in them feeling closer than they have for a while. They end up having a good laugh — and then enjoying the best sex they've had in ages.

It's natural for us to make assumptions, to make sense of what we experience. The trouble is that our assumptions can seem like facts to us, and then we can feel hurt, angry or uncomfortable.



I bet
I know what
you'd like tonight ...

Below are a couple of events — and three possible assumptions to explain them.

Your boyfriend turns over in bed, and his back is facing you, because...

- a) He is annoyed with you.
- b) He sleeps better that way.
- c) He wants a cuddle and this is his favourite position.

Your boss congratulates you on a job well done, because...

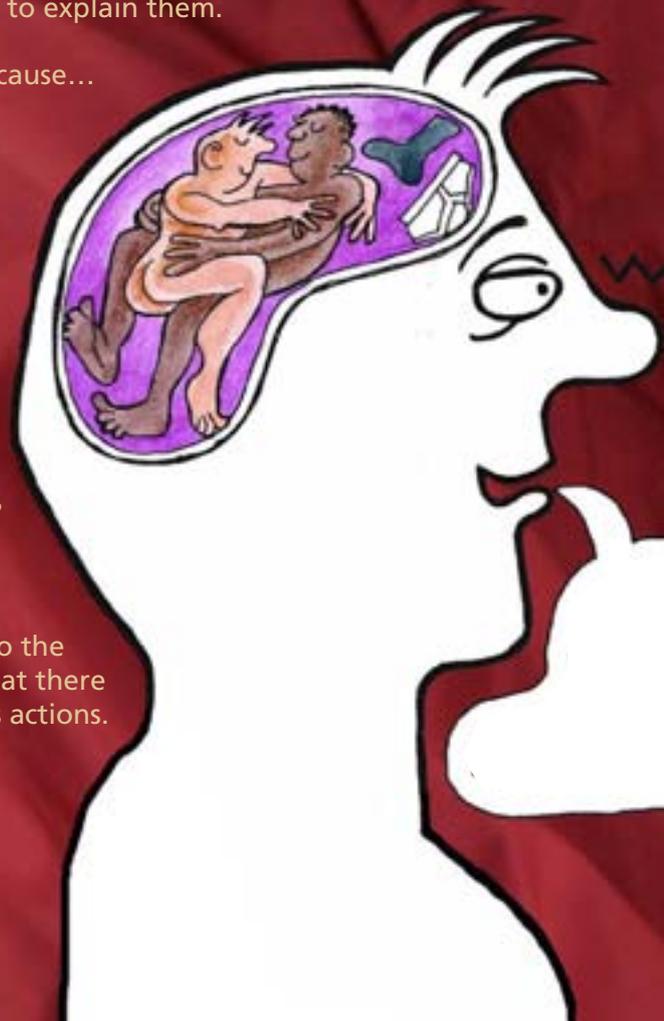
- a) She thinks you've done a good job.
- b) She's been on a management training course recently.
- c) She wants you to change your holiday to suit her better.

Which of these assumptions do you think you would go for in these situations? Your choices might tell you something about yourself in relationships. Are you most likely to opt for a positive or a negative interpretation of someone's behaviour? Do you come from a more trusting or more suspicious starting point in relationships?

Whatever your natural tendencies, you can make a difference to the way you make assumptions — just by being open to the idea that there are always a number of possible explanations for other people's actions.

EXERCISE

Opposite are two more events that are open to interpretation (and misinterpretation!). Think of three possible explanations for each event, and try to stretch your instinctive way of thinking, so you have a broad range of possibilities.





Your friend doesn't return your call for three days, because...

a)

b)

c)

You overhear colleagues arranging to meet up later and you haven't been invited, because...

a)

b)

c)

SUCK IT AND SEE

Next time you make an assumption about your partner or a friend that makes you feel bad, don't go off in a huff — check it out. Tell them what you noticed happen and what you thought it meant, and ask them what was going on for them. The worst that could happen is that you discover you were right — and then at least you can talk about it with them. More likely, you'll discover you were way off the mark, like Steve did with Jaz.



MANAGING DIFFERENCE



Many of us hold the idea that true love or deep friendship will mean a perfect fit with our lover or close friends. But human relationships are a bit more complicated than that.

Relationships tend to go well when you both want the same things. When differences start to emerge, it can cause stress and anxiety. Even if it's just about what to do on Saturday night, it's surprising how tense it can sometimes get.

Practising managing differences over smaller things in a relationship helps you learn how to deal with the bigger differences when they come along — for example, living together or not, monogamy or non-monogamy, how much time you spend with each other's relatives.

This section provides some ideas about how to understand and manage differences and conflict in relationships.

TIGGERS & TORTOISES

One common dynamic in relationships concerns how much time you spend together as a couple and how much time you spend apart. Generally, one partner in a relationship wants more contact, while the other wants more time apart.

The partner who generally wants contact can be called a Tigger, after the bouncy, fun-loving, extrovert character in *Winnie the Pooh*. Tiggers are usually up for contact, talking, sex, going out together, staying in together...

The other partner can be called a Tortoise — his instincts are more towards withdrawal. Tortoises relish time on their own. They feel comfortable deep inside their shells, and while they can enjoy coming out to play, sometimes it can feel like an ordeal for these more introverted types.

In some relationships there's a clear divide — one person is more of a Tigger and the other more of a Tortoise. In other relationships, the partners move between the two roles at different times, and around different types of contact, e.g. sex, socialising, intimate conversations etc.

- Are you more like a Tortoise or a Tigger in your current relationships?

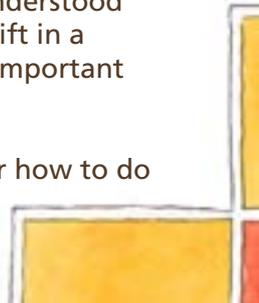
- Do you tend to have a fixed role or do you move between them at different times, around different activities, or with different partners?
- Do you recognise this dynamic in the relationships of your friends or your family?

Even when two people have both been Tiggers in their previous relationships, when they get together, one of them will inevitably shift to become more of a Tortoise.

The constructive way to handle these differences in rhythm is to learn how to manage your feelings when your partner doesn't want what you want — and how to build a dialogue with him. This means talking openly and constructively about your feelings and what you want, and being willing to hear the same from your partner.

When you find ways to talk about your differences, you often feel closer to your partner — even when you don't get your own way. Feeling understood and accepted by each other is a great gift in a relationship, and often becomes more important than trying to get your own way.

Overleaf are some more suggestions for how to do the Tigger-Tortoise dance successfully.

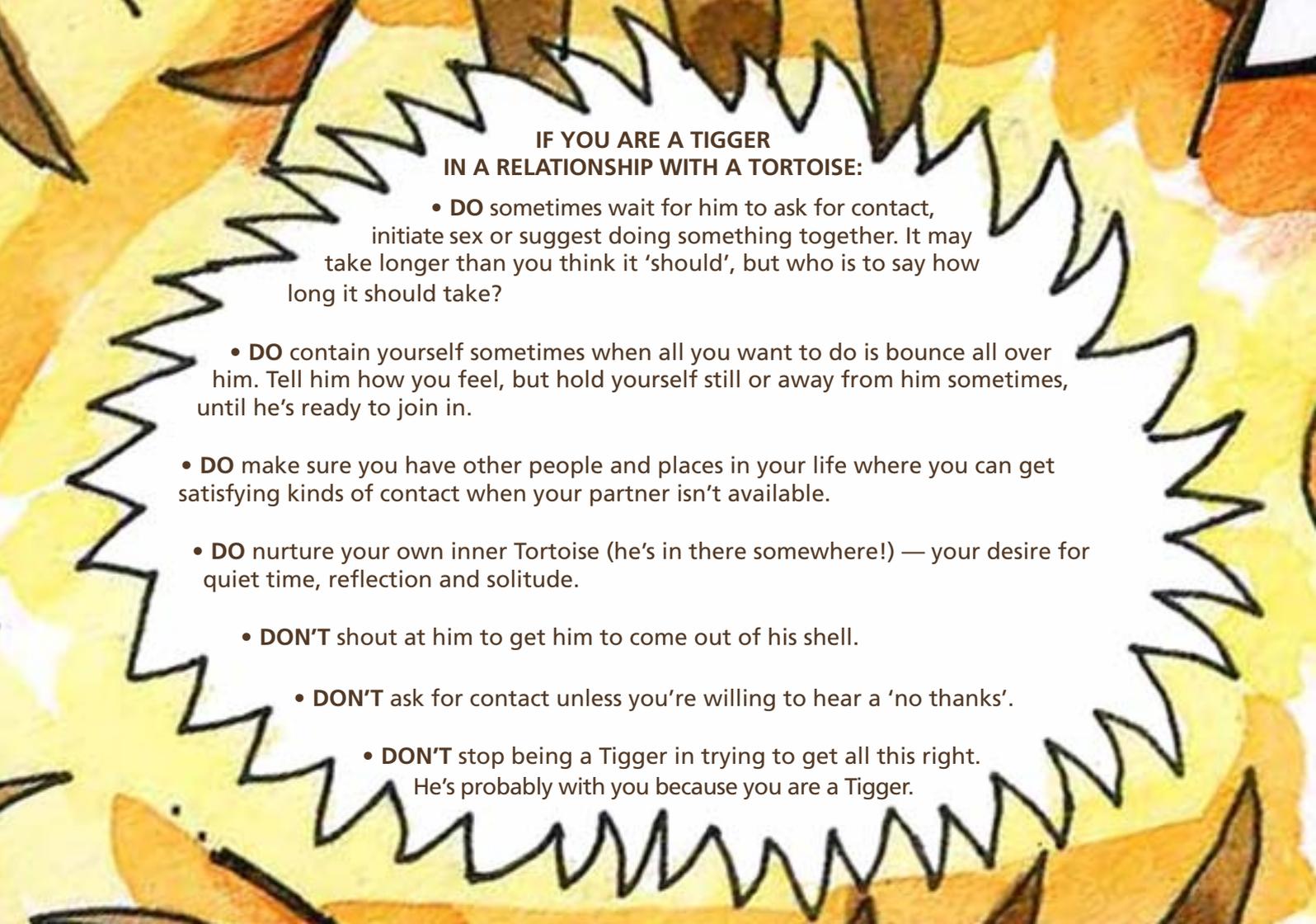


ANIMAL BALL



AMAZING!
DIFFERENT
RHYTHMS, BUT
DANCING TO THE
SAME TUNE





**IF YOU ARE A TIGGER
IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH A TORTOISE:**

- **DO** sometimes wait for him to ask for contact, initiate sex or suggest doing something together. It may take longer than you think it 'should', but who is to say how long it should take?
- **DO** contain yourself sometimes when all you want to do is bounce all over him. Tell him how you feel, but hold yourself still or away from him sometimes, until he's ready to join in.
- **DO** make sure you have other people and places in your life where you can get satisfying kinds of contact when your partner isn't available.
- **DO** nurture your own inner Tortoise (he's in there somewhere!) — your desire for quiet time, reflection and solitude.
- **DON'T** shout at him to get him to come out of his shell.
- **DON'T** ask for contact unless you're willing to hear a 'no thanks'.
- **DON'T** stop being a Tigger in trying to get all this right. He's probably with you because you are a Tigger.

IF YOU ARE A TORTOISE IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH A TIGGER:

- **DO** work out what time and space you need for yourself and make sure you get it — then you will enjoy, rather than resent, spending time with your partner.
- **DO** take the initiative and suggest doing things that *you* would like to do together.
- **DO** let him know when you're feeling loving and appreciative towards him — he's probably not a mind reader.
- **DO** nurture your own inner Tigger (he's in there somewhere!) — your desire for play and feisty contact.
- **DON'T** agree to things you don't want to do — you'll only become resentful.
- **DON'T** say no to contact with him just out of habit.
- **DON'T** stop being a Tortoise in trying to get all this right. He's probably with you because you are a Tortoise.

SUCK IT & SEE

Without saying anything, swap roles for a day with your boyfriend or a close friend. If you're a Tigger, become a Tortoise for the day, and vice versa. Notice the difference it makes to your interactions.

MANAGING CONFLICT



When more serious differences emerge in friendships and relationships, we need to know how to tackle them in a way that is constructive, rather than destructive.

Fritz Perls, the famous psychologist, said that wherever there is life there will be conflict. He recognised that conflict is an inevitable part of living relationships, and was more concerned about relationships that had no conflict — he questioned how alive these relationships actually were!

So instead of asking, “Why is there conflict in my relationship?” it’s more useful to focus your energy on “How can I deal with conflict in my relationship constructively?”

EXERCISE

We learn a lot of our relationship skills as we’re growing up, particularly from our own family. Spend five minutes jotting down some of your memories about how your family dealt with conflict and difference when you were growing up.

Use these questions to help you remember:

- Were differences discussed openly and decisions generally made fairly?
- Were there a lot of angry arguments and shouting?
- Did one person generally get their way? If so, how did they achieve this?
- Did your family avoid talking about difficult issues, so as not to upset anyone?
- Was it possible for you to say how you felt about things, or did you have to keep your feelings to yourself?

HOW PEOPLE IN MY FAMILY DEALT WITH CONFLICT

Now look at these three styles for managing conflict and see if any of them describe what happened in your family.

FIGHT

This style involves strong and sometimes aggressive ways of dealing with conflict. It is characterised by arguments and lots of drama, and sometimes includes threats of violence or actual violence. As the word 'fight' suggests, when someone manages conflict in this way it can feel a bit like going to war. Using this style can leave other people feeling frightened and bullied.

FLIGHT

This style involves avoidance of conflict. People who use this style tend to suppress what they want in order to "keep the peace" and "not rock the boat". The result is usually that a powerful person gets their way, without much argument. This style can also include compromising, but often the compromise arrived at doesn't really give everyone what they want. People who use this style are often left feeling angry and resentful, but afraid to express this.

ENGAGE

This is the assertive style. When people engage, they listen to each other and try to reach agreement. Everyone involved is able to say how they feel about a situation and what they'd like to happen. The aim is to find a win/win solution to the conflict, where everyone feels heard and involved by the end of it.

At its best, this style results in the different parties working out a solution to the conflict that responds to everyone's needs and wants. It can take time, and it's not always possible to arrive at a perfect solution. But when you put the time and energy in, it can help you feel understood by and emotionally close to the other people involved — even when you don't get your own way.

EXERCISE

Read the statements opposite and then decide which of the styles for managing conflict each one represents. Mark each one either Fight, Flight or Engage.

How dare you ignore me in the bar! I'm never going out with you again.

When you walked past me in the bar without saying hello, I felt really confused. What was going on for you?

You're an arrogant pig — blanking me in the bar!

You can shut your mouth — I don't care what you think, I've made my decision.

Don't speak to me like that — I'm leaving.

I feel really unhappy about that — it doesn't work for me. I want to find another solution.

I know we haven't had sex for a while. I don't really understand it myself, but I have been feeling guilty about it.

Oh, don't ask me about sex, please — just leave it.

You're addicted to sex, you never stop talking about it — you should see a doctor.

Now think of a conflict you've been involved in recently. In this box, briefly describe the conflict.

In the boxes below, express your point of view in the conflict — using each of the three styles.

FIGHT STATEMENT

FLIGHT STATEMENT

ENGAGE STATEMENT

Learning how to engage with conflict and be creative in finding ways to manage differences is helpful for deepening relationships. When you do this, the result will usually be something that all parties can agree to, even if it was not what they originally wanted.

For many of us, learning to engage in this way can be difficult, as it's often quite different from how conflict and disagreement were dealt with by our parents and other people who have influenced us. Some of the skills you've been introduced to here can help you engage effectively — for example, active listening (see page 28) and assertive communication (see page 31).

SUCK IT AND SEE

Instead of taking a win-lose mindset into conflicts or differences and treating them like a battle that you're either going to win or lose, try switching to a win-win mindset. This means starting from the assumption that even though there's a difference or a conflict, there's also a solution that all parties could be happy with. This involves using your creativity and thinking outside the box sometimes, but a win-win solution is out there somewhere!



DAILY TEMPERATURE
READING



OI!
I really think we
need to talk

Family therapist Virginia Satir devised the Daily Temperature Reading (DTR). It's a great tool for sharing information and building closer relationships with your friends or lover. It helps you raise issues before they develop into major problems, and can prevent minor disagreements escalating into full-blown rows. The main aim of the DTR is to develop open communication and keep information flowing.

Although it's called a Daily Temperature Reading, you don't have to do it every day for it to be useful. But it is worth doing a DTR on a regular basis for a while, to see the impact it has on your relationship. It can be reassuring to know that there is a time and place to air issues when either of you needs to.

HOW TO USE THE DTR:

Set aside some time (20-30 minutes) with your friend or partner. Make sure you won't be interrupted. Taking it in turns, work through the five topics below, with both of you speaking on each one before moving on to the next.

APPRECIATIONS

We all need to be recognised and to know what's good about us. Hearing what people like and value about us is an important part of maintaining self-esteem. And many of us need to practise receiving appreciations gladly and gracefully instead of dismissing or ignoring them. The appreciation should be just received, and not discussed.

"I really appreciate the way you bother to remember all the goings-on in my family."

NEW INFORMATION

Often, problems in relationships arise because we don't have enough information to understand what's going on. This leaves room for assumptions to be made. This topic represents an opportunity to keep your friend or partner up to date with your life, from seemingly trivial matters to more important concerns. The new information should not be discussed during the DTR, just revealed.

"My mum rang. She wants to come and stay this weekend."



PUZZLES

Lack of information, misunderstandings and assumptions don't help relationships. This is an opportunity to ask for clarification about things you are curious or confused about. In this section, short responses can be given by the listener, but longer dialogue should be avoided; it can continue afterwards if need be. "You keep referring to the presentation you're doing tomorrow — are you worried about it?"

COMPLAINTS WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

There will always be some differences and areas of conflict in a relationship. Some of these probably can't be changed. But others might be solvable if you are willing to bring them up and discuss them. This is a chance to raise something that bothers you and to suggest a way of resolving it. This should be communicated in an assertive manner, without blame or judgement.

You can use this format: "You did this thing that bothered me, and I'd prefer it if you would do this other thing instead". Or you can use the

"When You... I feel... I would like..." formula on Page 31. There is no guarantee that your recommendation will be accepted, but it's a first step towards airing and dealing with something that bothers you.

Being on the receiving end of Complaints with Recommendations can be very difficult, especially if you think loving someone means never telling them what gets up your nose! But the truth is that intimacy and closeness are enhanced when you sensitively let someone know what's bothering you. "I feel railroaded when you accept invitations for both of us. I'd really like you to ask me first."

WISHES, HOPES AND DREAMS

Our wishes, hopes and dreams are important aspects of who we are, and our quality of life is enhanced when we can share them and work towards their realisation. When we share them with people close to us, there's more chance that, together, we can make them a reality. 'I'd like to spend Christmas with you and some of our friends this year.'



DTR GROUND RULES:

- One person speaks at a time. When you are speaking, try to be as clear and specific as possible, rather than being vague or talking in generalisations.
- The purpose of the DTR is to share information, not sort it all out. You can pick up issues later. It can be difficult to just listen and not respond, especially if you don't agree with what's being said. But the payoffs of simply listening to your partner can be very significant.
- Summon goodwill, respect and care for your friend or partner. If they raise something difficult for you in one section, don't automatically try to get them back in another section.

SUCK IT AND SEE

Do a sexual DTR with your lover. Work through the five topics, but only say things that relate to your sex life. This might open up avenues you've never thought of — and improve your sex life no end!





**PUTTING
IT INTO
PRACTICE**



To get the most from this workbook, you need to do the exercises and then practise what you've learned, in your friendships and relationships.

After all, you don't learn how to ride a bike by reading books about it. You learn how to ride a bike by getting on one and having a go. Likewise, the real learning about relationships happens in relationships — with family, friends, work colleagues and lovers.

This section contains some tips for putting what you've learned into practice. It also contains information about organisations and resources that you might find helpful.

GO FOR IT

Children can teach us a lot about learning new things. They learn through playing, experimenting, wondering about, and trying things out...

Practising different ways of relating doesn't have to be a serious and solemn affair. Have fun experimenting, and bear these points in mind:

- **HABITS ARE HARD TO BREAK**
We all develop habitual ways of relating to people, as a result of our life experiences. These relating habits can become deeply ingrained, and changing them isn't usually something you can do overnight. It generally takes a concerted effort to recognise the habit, try something different and then try, try again!
- **USE EVERY MOMENT**
Luckily, there are so many opportunities to try something different that you'll never get stuck in a rut unless you choose to. Every moment you are relating to another person you have the option to break out of a routine or habit and say or do something new.
- **PEOPLE MAY RESIST YOU**
People are used to you being a certain way. Your friends, family or lover may have some investment in you staying the same as you always have been. In any social network, when one person changes how they behave, the network will usually resist that change and apply pressure on the person to return to the status quo. If you really want something to change, you will probably have to ride the uncomfortable period while people learn how to interact with the new you.
- **PERSEVERE**
Trust that your partner, friends and family are capable of relating to you in a different way. Stay open, warm, clear and assertive. That may need a little time, patience and perseverance from you. Think about any feedback you get, it could be useful to you. But it could just be pressure to go back to your 'old self'. If it is, then gently but firmly stick to your guns.
- **IT WILL GET EASIER**
As with any new skill, at first you may feel clumsy and incapable. Slowly but surely you can master these skills and strategies, until there comes a day when you do them naturally without even thinking about them, just like riding a bike.

- **GET SOME ASSISTANCE**

You might be able to sort a lot of this out on your own, but you don't have to. There's lots of help and assistance available from friends, family, counsellors, couples therapists, workshop leaders, life coaches, etc. Think about what your objectives are, and then what would help you achieve them. See the next section, on counselling and therapy.



COUNSELLING
& THERAPY



You can do a lot of useful personal development work on your own, with a partner or with your friends. Many people, however, find it helpful to work with a trained counsellor or therapist when they really want to get to grips with relationship issues. These days, there's much less of a taboo about getting support. After all, it's just like using a fitness trainer or sports coach, but for your personal and emotional life.

We use the words counselling and therapy interchangeably here, because there is no simple way of defining the difference. The words come from different approaches, but mean fairly similar things.

WORKING AS AN INDIVIDUAL

You can work as an individual in one-to-one counselling, or by joining a group or doing a weekend workshop. Any of these will give you an opportunity to reflect on yourself and your behaviour in relationships in a safe and respectful environment, away from your boyfriend or friends.

WORKING AS A COUPLE

Alternatively, if you're in a relationship, you can work together with a couples counsellor. The advantage of this is that a counsellor can help you with your interactions while they are actually

happening. S/he can help you understand the dynamics of your relationship, give you homework assignments and help you practise new ways of relating to each other.

SEXUAL HEALTH COUNSELLING

For free, short-term, individual or couple counselling on sex and relationships issues, contact PACE, HGLC, Naz or THT, each of which offers services at different sites across London (see Listings for contact details).

LOW-COST GENERAL COUNSELLING

PACE and a number of other agencies in London offer free or low-cost general individual and couple counselling for LGBT people on low incomes.

PRIVATE COUNSELLING OR THERAPY

There are many private counsellors and therapists in London. If you are unsure how to choose one, try meeting a few practitioners. Ask them about how they work, and check that they have a gay-friendly approach. For more advice on finding a therapist, visit:

www.pinktherapy.com (got to Resources/Choosing a Therapist)

www.bacp.co.uk/information/expect.html

BOOKS

LGB RELATIONSHIP BOOKS

Permanent Partners: Building Gay and Lesbian Relationships That Last,
Betty Berzon, Plume/Penguin Books

The Intimacy Dance: A Guide to Long-Term Success in Gay and Lesbian Relationships,
Betty Berzon, Plume Books

Mr. Right Is Out There: The Gay Man's Guide to Finding and Maintaining Love,
Kenneth George, Alyson Publications

Boyfriend 101: A Gay Guy's Guide to Dating, Romance, and Finding True Love,
Jim Sullivan, Villard Books

Affirmative Gay Relationships: Key Steps in Finding a Life Partner,
Neil Kaminsky, Harrington Park Press

Moving on: The Gay Man's Guide for Coping When a Relationship Ends,
Dann Hazel, Kensington Books

GENERAL RELATIONSHIP BOOKS

Passionate Marriage,
David Schnarch, Owl Books

Resurrecting Sex: Solving Sexual Problems and Revolutionizing Your Relationship,
David Schnarch, Quill

The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate,
Gary Chapman, Northfield Publishing

The Universal Heart,
Stephanie Dowrick, Penguin Books

The Relationship Rescue Workbook: Exercises and Self-Tests to Help You Reconnect with Your Partner,
Phillip C McGraw, Hyperion

The Sexual Male: Problems and Solutions,
Richard Milsten, Julian Slowinski, WW Norton

BOOKSHOP

Gay's the Word, 66 Marchmont Street, London WC1.
(www.gaystheword.co.uk) 020 7278 7654

COUNSELLING AND THERAPY AGENCIES

PACE
www.pacehealth.org.uk
020 7700 1323

Pink Therapy
www.pinktherapy.com
020 7291 4480

Kairos
www.kairosinsoho.org.uk
020 7437 6063

Spectrum
www.spectrumtherapy.co.uk
020 8341 2277

THT Counselling
www.tht.org.uk
020 7835 1495

Naz Project London
www.naz.org.uk
020 8741 1879 / 07834 328 239

Albany Trust
www.albanytrust.org.uk
020 8767 1827

HGL Counselling
020 7835 1495

London Friend
www.londonfriend.org.uk
020 7837 3337 (7:30 - 10pm)

Metanoia
www.metanoia.ac.uk
020 8571 2400

Gestalt Centre
www.gestaltcentre.co.uk
020 7613 4480

WORKSHOPS AND GROUPS

PACE
www.pacehealth.org.uk/workshops
020 7700 1323

GMFA
www.metromate.org.uk
(go to 'workshops & courses')
020 7738 6872
East London Out Project (ELOP)
020 8509 3898

Edward Carpenter Community
www.edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk
0870 321 5121



The Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education (PACE) was established in 1985 in response to a need within the lesbian and gay communities for a counselling and training agency that was genuinely responsive to the needs of lesbians and gay men. Since then, PACE has grown in size and now provides the following range of services:

- Groups and workshops for gay men
- Sexual health counselling for gay men
- General counselling for lesbians, gay men and bisexual people
- Family Support Service
- Mental health advocacy
- LGBT youthwork
- Training for staff and organisations on HIV, sexuality and diversity

GROUPS & WORKSHOPS

PACE has provided workshops and groups for gay men since 1989. These workshops address psychological and emotional factors contributing to gay men's sexual health, and are facilitated in a relaxed, friendly and participative style. The workshops explore self-esteem, communication, assertiveness, relationships, sex and HIV.

SEXUAL HEALTH COUNSELLING

The gay men's sexual health counselling service is for individuals and couples who want to explore sexual health concerns over six sessions.

For information about any of these services, ring 020 7700 1323 or email: info@pace.dircon.co.uk or visit www.pacehealth.org.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tim Foscett is the Groupwork and Training Manager at PACE and a practising counsellor, psychotherapist and group psychotherapist (www.timfoscetttherapy.co.uk). Alfred Hurst is a group and family therapist and freelance consultant. Tim and Alfred have developed the PACE Groupwork Programme together since 1995. We would welcome feedback about this workbook. Contact us at: groupwork@pace.dircon.co.uk

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- Designer Rachel Black for the inspired and passionate way she has brought the workbook to life, and the rest of Camden & Islington Gay Men's Team for their help and support.
- David Shenton for his wise and witty cartoons, and his flexible, intelligent and good-natured approach to making them for us.
- The London NHS Primary Care Trusts, which fund the London Gay Men's HIV Prevention Partnership (LGMHPP), of which the Camden and Islington Gay Men's Team and the PACE Groupwork Programme for gay and bisexual men are part. This funding has enabled PACE to develop a considerable body of therapeutic work and deliver it to gay and bisexual men in London.
- Our trainers and supervisors, our colleagues at PACE and in LGMHPP and the sexual health field generally, for their wisdom, encouragement, feedback and support for bringing these ideas to a wider audience.
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GETTING WHAT YOU WANT in Friendships and Relationships

Published by PACE and the Camden and Islington Gay Men's Team, 2006



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LONDON GAY MEN'S
HIV Prevention Partnership



Camden **NHS**
Primary Care Trust

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DISCLAIMER:

The information and exercises in this workbook are not tailored to your individual circumstances and do not constitute psychological advice to you as an individual.

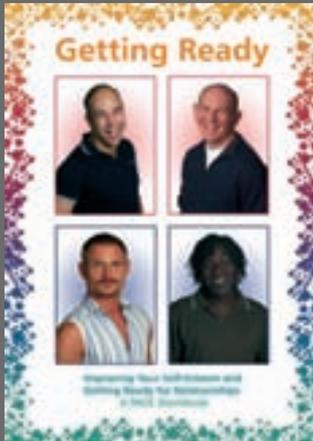
If you are in doubt about the suitability for you of an exercise or suggestion, we recommend that you seek professional advice.

MODELS:

All photographs posed by models. All models are aged 18 or over. Thanks to all who took part.

For more copies of this booklet or *Getting Ready*, contact:
gaymensteam@camdenpct.nhs.uk
or call 020 7530 3945

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Getting What You Want is the second personal development workbook for gay and bisexual men produced by PACE in collaboration with the Camden and Islington Gay Men's Team. The first, *Getting Ready*, is still available, and the exercises it contains are a good grounding for the exercises here (download a pdf version at: www.pacehealth.org.uk/publications). To get printed copies of either workbook, contact gaymensteam@camdenpct.nhs.uk or ring 020 7530 3945.

Praise for *Getting Ready*:

"...really excellent. The content is great — by far the best I've read in a long time."
Dr Séan Cummings, Freedomhealth

"...a really useful workbook. The text is accessible... and your warm tone encourages the reader to try different ways of thinking and relating."
Dominic Davies, Pink Therapy

COUNSELLING

Talk to a counsellor for up to 12 sessions on any aspect of sex or sexuality — whether you're brand new to it all or have been around the block more times than you care to remember, talking things through with someone can help. All these agencies provide professional counselling around sexual health.

PACE 020 7700 1323
NAZ 020 8741 1879
THT 020 7835 1495
HGCL 020 7407 3550

WORKSHOPS AND COURSES

PACE and GMFA offer a programme of workshops and courses on self-esteem, relationships, assertiveness and sex. Talking to other gay men in a group helps you realise that you're not the only one dealing with a particular issue or problem. The workshops are relaxed, fun, informative and run by experienced facilitators.

PACE 020 7700 1323
GMFA 020 7738 6872/3712

LONDON GAY MEN'S
HIV Prevention Partnership



Camden **NHS**
Promoting Gay Men's Health

