



Relationship Contracting

A Therapeutic Model developed by Phillip Bass of Trinitas Services

Reflect. Healthy relationships require a balance of Nurture, Play, and Structure. Many who open their relationships begin with “the rules” or Structure. This leads to feelings of being caged, which in turn lead to destructive reactions (performative behaviors). A healthier model begins with exploration of Nurture, then Play, and then creates the “rules” or Structure to match partners’ needs and wants. This model encourages authenticity by taking productive actions on partners’ Nurture needs. Below is an exercise to begin self-exploration and/or a conversation with your partner(s) about contracting an open relationship. Unhealthy relationships seek to complete what feels incomplete for one or more partners. This can lead to enmeshment in a closed relationship or emotional drifting in an open relationship. Relationships are at their healthiest when they are complimentary, meaning partners compliment what is already celebrated in the relationship and support one another without seeking the other to fulfill something missing in themselves.

NURTURE

What do you need?

- To know you are loved.
- To know you are nourished.
- To know you are protected.
- To receive healthy touch.

Reflection Questions ~

- How may opening your relationship meet your Nurture needs?
- How may opening your relationship challenge your Nurture needs being met?

PLAY

What do you want?

- What brings you Joy?
Think of joy as being in a time and place where you are 1) your authentic self and 2) you would not choose to be anyone or anywhere else.

Reflection Questions ~

- How may opening your relationship bring you joy?
- How may opening your relationship challenge your experience of joy?

STRUCTURE

What are your boundaries?

- How do others know your rules of engagement?

Reflection Questions ~

- What can you offer?
- What can you not offer?

“We all want the freedom to be ourselves, yet we are most afraid of being ourselves.”

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Further Questions to Consider

- Does opening my relationship complete something unmet in my relationship?
- Does opening my relationship complement what is already good about my relationship?
- (Nurture) I will feel safe if? I will feel unsafe if?
- (Nurture) I will feel nourished if? I will not feel nourished if?
- (Nurture) I will feel loved if? I will not feel loved if?
- (Nurture) To me, healthy touch is? Healthy touch is not?

Bridging Discussion — Talking with My Partner

When we use the Bridge Model, we bring our self-reflections and vulnerability to the conversation. Remember, using the Bridge Model we talk of our own experience and not for our partner. After self-reflection, you can communicate the following:

- What do you need?
- What do you want?
- What can you offer?

Additional Guidance

- Open relationships require vulnerability, honesty, and intentional communication. If you are not prepared to share your true intimate desires, interests, and needs with your partner, you are not ready for an open relationship.
- If you are prepared to move forward, have an open and honest conversation to share what you have learned about your wants and needs. After listening to your partner and having “Bridged,” write down your agreement. This leaves no room for misinterpretation or misunderstanding.
- Remember, NPS balance requires reflection and rebalancing. Be sure to check in with yourself and your partner periodically to reflect on the health of your relationship.
- Both open and monogamous relationships have validity! Choose the relationship that is right for you!

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