

How to have a great Relationship

By Abi Perryman



THE BLOOM ROOM MK
Counselling & EMDR Therapy

Introduction to Navigating the Waters of Modern Relationships

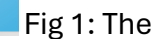
In today's world, the landscape of relationships has shifted dramatically. Gone are the days when meeting someone organically (through a chance encounter or a friend of a friend) was the most common way to form connections.

Instead, we live in an age where digital platforms dominate the way we meet and interact with people. While the internet has opened up new avenues for connection, it has also brought its own set of challenges. Navigating the sea of potential partners, friends, and acquaintances can sometimes feel like swimming in a vast, ever-changing fish tank, where every individual serves a specific purpose but few truly seem to offer a sense of depth.

This book is an exploration of modern relationships in three distinct phases: The Fish Tank, Coexisting Lanes, and Wonderland. Each phase represents a different stage in the evolution of a connection, from the initial meeting and exploration to the decision to truly build something lasting. Along the way, we will reflect on how relationships are formed, nurtured, and ultimately grown, all within the context of today's fast-paced, often virtual world.

In the Relationship Car, both drivers must be committed to the journey, and with each mile travelled, you're not just getting closer to your goal, you're deepening your connection, strengthening your bond, and growing together every step of the way.

pg. 37



Relationship Model.

Phase 1: The Fish Tank - Meeting and Fulfilling Core Needs

pg. 2

this stage, may seem functional and may not yet have the depth that traditional relationships once promised, but they are far from shallow.

Here, the people in our lives may serve different purposes. One "fish" might be the perfect movie buddy, someone with whom we share a passion for films and a love of late-night screenings. Another "fish" could be someone we engage with casually, perhaps a friends-with-benefits situation that meets emotional and physical needs without the expectation of a deeper commitment. In this phase, we are seeking fulfilment for particular parts of our lives, and the people we meet tend to fit neatly into these defined roles.

The beauty of the Fish Tank is that we can explore different types of relationships without the pressure of finding a "one-size-fits-all" person. However, the challenge lies in recognizing that these connections, while fulfilling in their own right, are still part of a larger search. They may offer comfort, distraction, or short-term satisfaction, but they often lack the deeper intimacy that comes from a more sustained connection. In this phase, it's about navigating the waters carefully, understanding that these interactions can be meaningful but may not yet be intended for long-term companionship.

Phase 2: Coexisting Lanes - The Shift Toward Deeper Intimacy

As we move through the Fish Tank, we often encounter individuals with whom we feel a unique pull, a connection that goes beyond the surface-level. These are the people we begin to "travel" with, but in a way that reflects a more independent and intentional journey. In the Coexisting Lanes phase, we begin to spend more time with

When life is easy, the road is smooth and both people are in sync, the journey toward Wonderland can feel effortless.

- When life throws challenges at you, whether it's small potholes or significant roadblocks, the health of the Relationship Car will depend on how you face these challenges together. The road may not always be straight, and the speed of progress may fluctuate, but the direction, toward your mutual goal of Wonderland, remains constant.

As life throws growth opportunities and unexpected changes into the mix, it's your role as partners to adapt and strengthen your commitment to one another. In the face of challenges, it's not about who gets to the destination first or who sacrifices the most. It's about the shared belief that you are both moving forward together, toward a future that is better because you're in it together. Neither one of you are left behind, ever.



Fig 4: The Relationship Car

Conclusion: Keep the Car Moving Toward Wonderland

Life events like a bereavement or a birth may require a temporary detour in the journey, but these times of emotional upheaval need special care. Grief can slow down the journey, and the birth of a child will introduce new responsibilities and demands. During these times, your responsibility is to help maintain the stability of the relationship and ensure that the relationship car doesn't veer off course. This may involve taking on more of the emotional or logistical load to give your partner space to heal or adjust. It's about balancing the need for compassion and care, ensuring the journey can continue with a sense of shared purpose.

3. Acknowledging Personal Needs During Growth

While one person may be growing or changing, it's important to remember that your own needs matter too. Growth doesn't have to mean neglecting the relationship. Just as you would help service the car when it's in need, it's important to check in with your own emotional needs and ensure that mutual care is happening. If one partner is undergoing significant personal change, the other person must feel free to communicate how they are feeling and what they may need to maintain the relationship's momentum.

The Collective Responsibility of the Relationship Car

Just as with the physical car, both partners share the responsibility of maintaining the vehicle, navigating obstacles, providing support during growth, and ensuring the car stays on track toward Wonderland. Each obstacle you encounter offers the opportunity to work together, either through tackling it head-on or helping each other adjust course when necessary.

someone, not necessarily in a traditional dating sense, but in a way that allows us to understand one another more deeply.

Imagine two people traveling down different roads, each with their own destinations, goals, and paths, but occasionally crossing over, sharing moments of connection, and creating a space where the lanes begin to overlap. There's no rush to merge, no pressure to commit immediately. Instead, this phase is about mutual discovery and coexistence. We begin to share more about our lives, our past experiences, and our dreams for the future, all while maintaining a sense of individuality and autonomy. It's a time of testing the waters, seeing if the initial spark can grow into something more, without the expectation that we need to travel the same road just yet.

The Coexisting Lanes phase is about depth, patience, and communication. We begin to learn how to navigate this new dynamic, where we can maintain our own sense of self while slowly allowing someone else to share our space. It's not always easy. There may be moments of doubt, of wondering if the connection is truly going somewhere, or if we're simply enjoying the ride without a clear destination. But this phase is essential for building a foundation of trust, understanding, and emotional intimacy. It's the bridge between the transient relationships of the Fish Tank and the more committed partnership that lies ahead.

Phase 3: Wonderland - Committing to a Shared Journey

The final phase, Wonderland, is where we make the collective decision to enter into something deeper, something that requires both of us to leave our individual lanes and get into the same car. This is where we consciously choose to embark on a journey

together, with a shared vision of the future. Wonderland represents the place where we stop traveling alone and begin working toward common goals, dreams, and aspirations.

In Wonderland, the journey becomes less about individual experiences and more about creating something collaborative and lasting. It's where you make the decision, as a couple, to invest time, energy, and love into building a life together. The relationship is no longer about meeting specific, isolated needs but about creating a shared narrative, a story that weaves your individual lives into a cohesive, long-term partnership. The goals of Wonderland are no longer short-term; they reflect a future you are building together, one step at a time.

This stage is about navigating the complexities of compromise, mutual growth, and emotional investment. It's where you face the challenges of creating a shared vision, setting goals, and aligning your futures in meaningful ways. Whether it's moving in together, traveling to new places, or taking on the responsibility of building a family, Wonderland is about creating a new world with someone else by your side, a world that combines the beauty of your individual journeys with the excitement of a joint adventure.

Each of these phases represents a natural progression, a way of evolving and deepening our connections in a world that often feels chaotic and unpredictable. The Fish Tank, Coexisting Lanes, and Wonderland are not fixed stages but fluid stages of growth. As we navigate our relationships, we will encounter people who help us fulfil different needs, learn to coexist in ways that deepen our emotional connection, and, ultimately, create a shared life with someone who is on the same path.

periods of growth or transition, your relationship needs a strong foundation of support to prevent strain.

The Role of Support During Periods of Growth

There will be times when one partner experiences a period of significant growth, a moment when their personal or professional life takes off, or when they're going through a major shift. This could look like a promotion at work, which requires a greater time commitment, or the birth of a child, which brings a host of responsibilities and changes. During these times, it's easy for the other person to feel left behind or disconnected if they're not careful.

However, the true strength of a relationship car lies in the ability of both partners to adapt and support each other during these periods of growth.

1. Supporting Personal Growth

When one person experiences growth, whether it's a promotion, a new career path, or a newfound passion, it's essential that the other person sees it as a win for both of you. This support is not about being passive or quiet; it's about being actively involved in helping your partner thrive while also making sure that your own needs aren't neglected. The person experiencing growth may need emotional, mental, or practical support, and this is where you, as the other partner, must be ready to underpin them. Whether that means being the sounding board during long nights of hard work or taking on extra responsibilities at home, your role is to help them keep moving forward, without losing sight of your shared goals.

2. Supporting During Life Events

Roadblocks are significant challenges, often unforeseen, that can stop your progress entirely. These could include life-changing events like a bereavement, a serious illness, a financial crisis, or a job loss. When these larger obstacles appear, they can feel like a road that's completely blocked. It's in these moments that your relationship may face the most pressure, and how you handle these events together will either reinforce or fracture your bond.

The key to navigating these roadblocks is mutual support and patience. Both partners must be willing to adapt their plans and expectations to accommodate the emotional weight of the situation. It's important to approach these challenges as a team, understanding that the road to recovery might be long and winding. While you may not be able to continue at the same speed or with the same momentum during these times, you can continue to move forward, even if that means slowing down for a while. A pause in the journey doesn't mean giving up on the goal.

3. Detours: Unexpected Life Events or Changes

Sometimes, life takes you on unexpected detours that temporarily change the direction of your journey. These can include major life events such as promotions at work, births of children or grandchildren, or even moving to a new city. While these are often positive events, they come with their own set of challenges and adjustments.

During such times, it's essential to remember that both of you are still "in this together", even if your individual paths diverge temporarily. A promotion at work might require long hours, a new city may bring unfamiliar surroundings, or the birth of a child can demand a lot of emotional and physical energy. During these

In the chapters to come, we will explore each phase in greater depth, uncovering the nuances of modern relationships, the challenges and joys of navigating them, and the steps needed to evolve from one stage to the next. In doing so, we hope to offer a roadmap to better understanding the dynamics of love, connection, and commitment in today's world, where relationships, like everything else, are always in motion, always growing, and always evolving.

The Wonderland Roadmap Game: Working towards understand your joint vision for your relationship and future together.

At the end of this book, you will find a game that is designed to explore together with your partner your ideas for your future relationship. The Wonderland Roadmap is a game designed to foster communication, empathy, and teamwork as couples collaboratively map out their future. By turning these crucial conversations into a playful and engaging experience, it helps partners define a shared vision for the relationship while also emphasizing the importance of mutual support, adaptability, and commitment. Ultimately, the game serves as a tool to create a more intentional, purposeful journey toward a shared Wonderland, a life designed with love, understanding, and mutual respect.

Chapter 2: The Fish Tank – Single life in today's world

In today's fast-paced, digitally driven world, meeting people organically, through casual encounters at social gatherings, coffee shops, or even on a walk in the park, has become increasingly rare. While these spontaneous interactions used to be a natural part of daily life, they're now often overshadowed by the growing reliance on online platforms to meet new people.

In the past, people would naturally cross paths in public spaces, their interactions unfolding without the need for apps, profiles, or digital interfaces. A glance, a shared moment, or a friendly conversation could spark a connection, and relationships often grew out of these unplanned encounters. However, as society becomes more digitally interconnected, the landscape of meeting new people has shifted dramatically.

Today, platforms like Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and even social media networks like Instagram or Facebook have revolutionized how we connect with others. Meeting someone online has become the norm, rather than the exception. These platforms offer convenience, allowing people to browse potential matches based on shared interests, location, or even specific preferences. Unlike the randomness of meeting someone in a physical setting, online platforms provide a more controlled environment where individuals can curate their profiles and engage in interactions at their own pace, often with an immediate sense of clarity about their intentions, whether casual or serious.

The shift toward online interactions is not without its benefits. For many, it's a more efficient way to meet people, particularly in a world where busy schedules and geographical constraints make organic encounters feel almost impossible. Online dating allows people to filter through potential partners quickly, focusing on compatibility factors that might otherwise take months to discover in person. It can also offer a sense of safety, as individuals can control how much they share about themselves before meeting in person.

during these times is essential for ensuring you both reach your mutual goal.

Navigating Life's Obstacles: Potholes, Roadblocks, and Detours

Just as potholes, roadblocks, and detours are inevitable on any long journey, so too are life's challenges, personal, professional, and relational. When these obstacles arise, they can feel jarring, like hitting a rough patch in the road. However, it's during these moments that your ability to work together as a team will really define the strength of your relationship and how well you're able to maintain the forward momentum.

1. Potholes: Unexpected Small Challenges

Potholes might seem like small, manageable bumps in the road, but they can be jarring nonetheless. These might include everyday stresses, disagreements, misunderstandings, or small setbacks. While they're not necessarily major crises, if they're not addressed properly, they can cause discomfort, frustration, and sometimes even emotional distance.

To keep your Relationship Car running smoothly during these smaller, more frequent obstacles, it's important to check in with each other, communicate effectively, and ensure that you're not letting small issues snowball into bigger problems. Routine maintenance, such as taking time to show affection, listening without judgment, and offering support during tough moments, can prevent potholes from throwing you off course.

2. Roadblocks: Major Setbacks or Crises

However, compromise can be appropriate in situations where a quick resolution is necessary, or when both parties have relatively equal and important needs that don't require creativity to resolve. It's also useful when the stakes are lower or when neither option is particularly "ideal."

Ultimately, collaboration tends to lead to better long-term outcomes in relationships because it fosters respect, creativity, and mutual understanding. Compromise, while useful, can sometimes lead to unresolved frustrations if it becomes the default method for solving disagreements. Both methods can coexist in a healthy relationship, but understanding the difference helps partners choose the right approach depending on the situation.

Chapter 4: The Relationship Car - Navigating Obstacles Together on the Road to Wonderland

In any long journey, the road ahead is rarely perfectly smooth. Just as you can expect to encounter potholes, roadblocks, and detours while driving, in relationships, you will face unexpected obstacles and challenges that may test the strength and resilience of your bond. The key to staying on course, and ensuring the Relationship Car continues moving toward your shared destination, Wonderland, is how you navigate these bumps along the road together.

In a healthy relationship, both people must be ready to adapt, support each other, and keep the vehicle of your shared life moving forward, even when the road becomes rough. Sometimes, the obstacles are external, like unforeseen life events; other times, they are internal, such as personal growth periods or emotional upheavals. Either way, maintaining the health of the relationship car

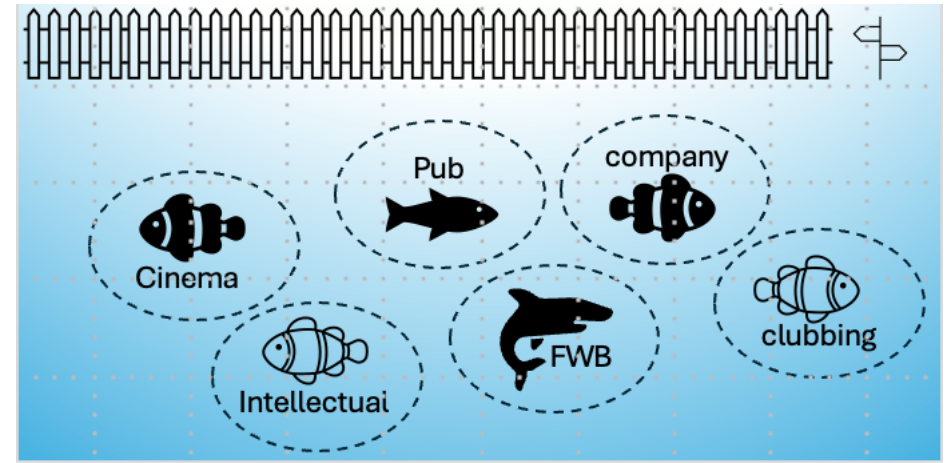


Fig2: The Fishtank.

But despite these advantages, the rise of online platforms has also introduced a sense of disconnection. With so much of the interaction happening through screens, the organic, face-to-face connection that often forms the basis of deeper relationships is being replaced by shallow digital exchanges. The ease of swiping left or right can make it harder to build genuine connections, as people may overlook potential partners based on superficial impressions, or they may become overwhelmed by the sheer number of options available. This leads to a paradox of choice, where the abundance of potential matches actually makes it harder to commit to one person, and the human element of dating feels diluted.

Moreover, as people increasingly meet online, there's a sense of detachment from the unpredictable beauty of real-life encounters. Meeting someone while running errands, at a friend's gathering, or even while traveling gives a relationship a kind of serendipitous energy that's difficult to replicate in the curated world of digital

profiles. Online platforms, by their very nature, are structured around the idea of preselection, narrowing down options before even making the first connection, whereas organic interactions allow for the surprise of meeting someone you wouldn't have expected, and the discovery of who they are, beyond just a profile picture and bio.

In some ways, this transition reflects broader societal changes. As work, social life, and even entertainment increasingly move into virtual spaces, face-to-face meetings have become less frequent. The pandemic only accelerated this shift, as social distancing and lockdowns pushed even more interactions into the digital realm. As a result, people have become more accustomed to initiating and sustaining relationships through screens rather than in person.

Yet, despite the rise of online dating, there is still a desire for real, organic connections. People may appreciate the convenience of online platforms, but there's often a sense of longing for the authenticity and depth that can come with meeting someone in person. The question now is how to bridge the gap between the virtual world and the real one, finding ways to meet people organically while still embracing the benefits of digital tools. The challenge is to restore the magic of those spontaneous moments while also acknowledging that, in today's world, digital platforms will likely remain a central way to meet new people.

Ultimately, while the ways we meet others have shifted, the fundamental human need for connection remains unchanged. Whether it's through a profile swipe or a chance encounter in a café, what matters most is how we nurture and sustain those connections once they're made.

3. Satisfaction:

- Collaboration often results in greater satisfaction because both individuals feel heard and valued, and the outcome is often more fulfilling.

- Compromise may leave both people feeling partially dissatisfied because neither gets exactly what they wanted.

4. Impact on Relationship:

- Collaboration strengthens the relationship by fostering trust, teamwork, and mutual respect.

- Compromise can create a sense of fairness and equality, but if one person always feels like they're sacrificing more, it could lead to resentment over time.

5. Long-Term Viability:

- Collaboration often leads to more sustainable solutions because it addresses the root needs and creates a balanced outcome.

- Compromise, if used too frequently, can lead to frustration and a sense of "settling" because neither person gets what they truly desire.

Which One Is Better?

The choice between collaboration and compromise depends on the situation. Collaboration is generally preferable when both parties are open to working together creatively to find a solution that benefits everyone. It's ideal for resolving issues that require innovation, understanding, and deeper engagement.

they've had to give up too much or if the compromise wasn't truly satisfying.

5. Equality of Sacrifice: In a fair compromise, both parties give up something of roughly equal importance, which creates a sense of fairness. However, it can still leave each person feeling like they didn't fully get what they wanted.

Example of Compromise:

In the same vacation scenario, the couple might decide to compromise by choosing a beach location that's close to a hiking trail, so they can split the time between lounging by the ocean and going for a hike. While neither of them gets their perfect vacation (one loves pure relaxation, and the other loves adventure), they both give up a little to meet in the middle.

Key Differences Between Collaboration and Compromise

1. Outcome:

- Collaboration leads to a solution that fully meets the needs of both parties (win-win).
- Compromise often results in both parties giving up something (win-lose or lose-lose).

2. Process:

- Collaboration is a creative process, where both parties actively engage in finding a solution that incorporates both perspectives.
- Compromise tends to be a more transactional process, where both people negotiate their wants and needs to reach a middle ground.

In today's interconnected, yet often fragmented world, the way we form and maintain relationships has evolved. The traditional idea of one person fulfilling all of our needs, emotional, intellectual, social, and physical, has become increasingly unrealistic. Instead, many people find themselves building a diverse "school of fish" in their lives, where each person plays a specific role, satisfying distinct needs and desires. This shift reflects how modern relationships are often more specialized, less hierarchical, and more tailored to our multifaceted lives.

For instance, one person in our circle might be the "cinema buddy", the friend who shares our love for movies, loves discussing plot twists and directors, and always seems to be available for a spontaneous trip to the theatre. This person isn't necessarily a deep emotional confidante or a romantic partner, but they fulfil a particular need: to enjoy and share an experience that is rooted in entertainment, culture, and mutual interests. The "cinema buddy" is a perfect example of how modern friendships can be purpose-driven, relationships that are built around specific shared activities and passions, rather than broad, all-encompassing emotional connection.

Then there's the person who satisfies our more emotional or physical needs, the one we might refer to as a "friends with benefits" (FWB) or even just a "casual connection." This is someone who provides companionship, intimacy, or even just a safe space to be ourselves in moments of vulnerability. The emotional need might be the sense of understanding and comfort that comes with a deeply empathetic friend, while the physical need could be fulfilled through someone with whom you share a sexual connection, without the expectations or responsibilities that come with a full-

blown romantic relationship. The beauty of this dynamic lies in its ability to meet specific desires, whether it's a no-strings-attached physical relationship or a comforting friend who listens when you're going through a tough time, without the pressure to meet every emotional or social requirement of each other's lives.

This specialized approach to relationships has become even more pronounced in an age of dating apps and social media, where we're constantly curating and seeking connections that align with our specific needs. Online platforms often encourage us to categorize ourselves, to present certain facets of our personality while seeking out others who match that particular vision. With these highly personalized filters, it's easy to meet people who are aligned with one specific part of our lives, but it can also mean we forget that, in reality, human connection is far more complex than we can capture on a profile.

But while each person in our "fish tank" might serve a particular purpose, the relationships themselves are rarely shallow or devoid of meaning. Often, the people who play these more specialized roles still bring a great deal of joy, comfort, and fulfilment into our lives, they just don't necessarily do it all. For example, you might have a friend who is perfect for late-night philosophical debates, but your romantic partner may be the one you go to when you're seeking comfort after a difficult day. Or, maybe your gym buddy serves as a consistent source of motivation, while your best friend is the one who can drop everything and come over for a movie marathon when you're feeling down. Each relationship plays a vital role, but it isn't expected to cover all the emotional, physical, and intellectual ground that a traditional "one-size-fits-all" relationship might once have been expected to.

one activity and part to the other. In this case, the solution is a new idea neither of them initially considered but satisfies both.

Compromise

Compromise involves each person giving up something to reach an agreement that is somewhat acceptable to both parties. The goal of compromise is to find a middle ground, where both individuals adjust their expectations or desires to settle on an outcome that is less than ideal for both, but still better than no agreement at all. In other words, with compromise, both people make sacrifices in order to reach a solution, but no one fully gets everything they want.

Key Features of Compromise:

1. **Sacrifices:** Both parties typically need to give up something important in order to meet halfway. This can sometimes lead to both people feeling somewhat dissatisfied with the outcome.
2. **Middle Ground:** The goal of compromise is to find a solution that is somewhere in the middle of both parties' desires, but this middle ground is often not the ideal solution for either person. It's about giving up something to gain something.
3. **Faster Resolution:** Compromise can be a quicker way to resolve a disagreement, as it often involves negotiating a solution where both sides make concessions. This can prevent conflict from escalating, but it may not always be the most creative or fulfilling option.
4. **Temporary Resolution:** Compromise often addresses the immediate need or conflict, but may not solve the underlying issues. Over time, this can create frustration if either person feels

1. Joint Problem Solving: Both individuals share their ideas, needs, and perspectives openly. The goal is to come up with a solution that benefits both people, often through brainstorming or combining ideas in new ways.

2. Win-Win Outcome: Collaboration aims for a solution where both parties feel like they've gained something meaningful, and no one feels "taken advantage of." It's about creating a result that leaves everyone satisfied and respected.

3. Open Communication: Collaboration thrives on clear, honest, and empathetic communication. Each person's thoughts, feelings, and concerns are expressed and actively listened to.

4. Flexibility and Creativity: Collaboration allows for creativity and exploration. It's about thinking outside the box and coming up with new ways to address the problem at hand, often blending both people's ideas in innovative ways.

5. Relationship-Focused: The collaborative process strengthens the relationship because it requires cooperation and a shared commitment to resolving issues. Both people are invested in maintaining trust and working together.

Example of Collaboration:

Imagine a couple who disagrees about how to spend their vacation time. One person wants a relaxing beach holiday, while the other wants an adventurous hiking trip. Instead of each person pushing for their preferred outcome, they collaborate by looking into destinations that offer both a beach and hiking activities. They might choose a location that offers a combination of both experiences or plan their vacation so that part of it is dedicated to

This segmentation of relationships isn't inherently bad; in fact, it can help individuals manage their expectations and avoid the unrealistic pressure of expecting a single person to meet every need. It allows us to celebrate the diversity of our connections and helps us avoid the risk of putting too much weight on one person. By spreading out our needs across different people, we can also create more well-rounded and fulfilling relationships.

However, the downside is that this model can sometimes lead to fragmentation or superficial connections. If we begin to rely too much on one person for only one role, whether it's the cinema buddy or the FWB, we may lose the depth that comes from having relationships that offer a more holistic experience. It's possible to find ourselves surrounded by people but still feel isolated, because the complexity of human connection requires more than just filling specific roles. For example, a "friends with benefits" dynamic can meet our physical and emotional needs temporarily, but it often lacks the deeper intimacy and long-term support that comes from a committed romantic relationship.

The key is balance. It's about recognizing the value in having people who fulfil different needs in our lives, whether for fun, physical intimacy, emotional support, or intellectual engagement, while also ensuring that some relationships transcend the transactional nature of role fulfilment. True connection often involves a combination of different qualities: shared experiences, mutual respect, emotional vulnerability, and the willingness to invest in each other's growth.

In this way, our "school of fish" is dynamic and diverse, filled with relationships that bring different flavours to our lives. Each one

serves its purpose, but the art lies in knowing when to lean into each connection and when to cultivate deeper, more complex relationships that can grow beyond these boundaries. Ultimately, while we might have a specific "fish" for each need, the goal is to ensure that the water in which all these fish swim, our broader social network, remains nurturing, meaningful, and alive with possibility.

Chapter 3: Coexisting Lanes - The Shift Toward Deeper Intimacy

Moving into Phase 2 of a relationship involves transitioning from casual connections to something more meaningful and intentional. In this phase, you've found a "fish" that you want to nurture into a deeper bond, and this often means setting clear boundaries to guide your interactions. This could look like deciding to be more exclusive, such as having the conversation about "coming off the dating apps" and focusing your energy on this one person. It's about mutual agreements on what the relationship is not yet, such as not rushing into the "relationship car" together. Instead, it's about spending quality time together, learning more about each other, and creating a foundation that goes beyond surface-level attraction. There is still room for growth, observation, and emotional exploration, but both partners are taking deliberate steps to build something more committed, without yet fully stepping into the long-term journey of a relationship. This phase is about intention, curiosity, and the cautious but hopeful transition toward deeper connection. On the Relationship model diagram, boundary setting conversations are displayed as fences.

Relationships, much like buildings, require a solid foundation if they are to withstand the test of time. And just like a building needs time,

boundaries, and an understanding that growth (both individually and as a couple) is a continuous, ongoing process.

As you continue to spend time in each other's lanes, remember that the goal is not perfection. It's about navigating the ups and downs together, learning how to coexist harmoniously, and creating a foundation that will support your relationship through whatever comes next.

Collaboration or Compromise?

Collaboration and compromise are two concepts often used in the context of relationships and decision-making, but they approach problem-solving in different ways. While both aim to address differing needs or desires, they do so with different underlying strategies and outcomes. Understanding the difference between them can help individuals navigate conflicts or disagreements in a way that fosters mutual respect and growth.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a process where both parties actively work together to find a solution that satisfies the needs and desires of both people. The goal is not to settle for a middle ground, but to co-create an outcome that is better than what either individual could have achieved alone. In a collaborative approach, both people bring their perspectives and resources to the table, aiming for a win-win scenario. The emphasis is on open communication, creativity, and mutual problem-solving.

Key Features of Collaboration:

relationship, what feels right, what doesn't, and how you both want to navigate the shared road ahead.

For instance, do you both expect honesty and transparency, no matter the circumstances? Do you value space and independence, or is closeness and frequent communication more important to you? Are there behaviours, such as dishonesty, disrespect, or emotional withdrawal, that you won't tolerate in the relationship? These non-negotiables are the cornerstone of your future connection. They are the values and principles that will guide your relationship and help you both create a healthy and balanced dynamic.

This "rulebook" isn't about rigid expectations or stifling each other's freedom, but about creating a shared understanding of what your individual and successful partnership looks like. It's about building a relationship that works for both of you, one where each person's needs and desires are honoured and respected.

The Foundation of Trust and Connection

The Coexisting Lanes phase is crucial in the journey toward deeper intimacy. It's the time when you get to truly understand who your partner is, when you test the foundations of your connection, and when you build the trust, communication, and shared understanding that will either solidify or break the relationship.

By taking the time to observe, communicate, and understand each other's needs and values, you are laying the groundwork for something real and lasting. You're not just building a relationship; you're building a partnership based on mutual respect, clear

effort, and careful planning to be constructed, so too does a relationship, especially when transitioning from a casual encounter to something deeper, more intimate, and potentially long-lasting. This stage, Coexisting Lanes, is the period when you start to build that foundation. It's a time of observation, discovery, and slow but steady connection.

When you first meet someone, there's often a sense of excitement, a rush to get to know each other. But as the relationship deepens, the initial thrill settles into a quieter, more reflective phase, where you begin to understand who the other person really is, beyond the surface-level introductions and staged moments of charm. The Coexisting Lanes phase isn't about rushing toward commitment, but about taking the time to really *see* each other.

Here's where the importance of spending time in each other's lanes becomes clear. It's no longer just about the hours spent together on date nights, or the moments shared during late-night conversations. It's about witnessing how they behave in different circumstances, how they respond when life isn't perfect. Just as a building needs to be tested under various conditions, wind, rain, and even earthquakes, so too does a relationship. The core of this phase is about getting to know your partner in a full cycle of their life, experiencing the highs and lows that inevitably come with being human.

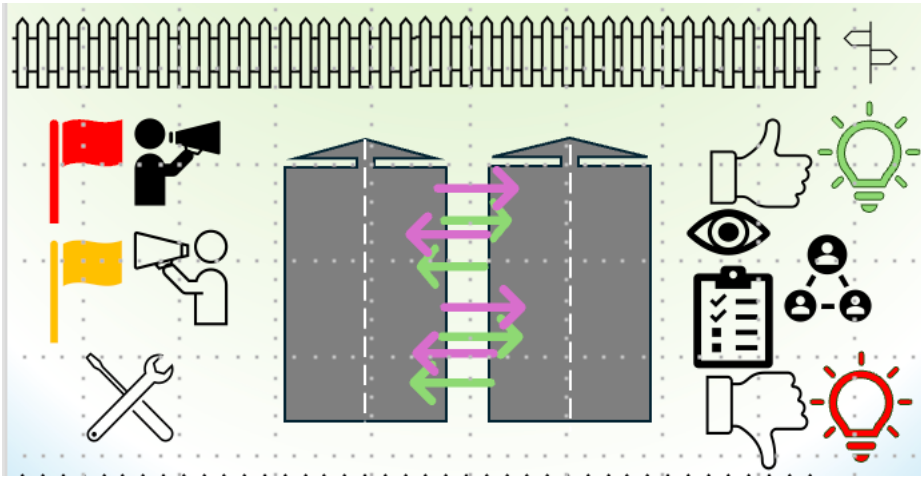


Fig 3: Phase 2 of Relationships: Spending time in each others lanes

The Full Cycle of Who They Are

You won't really know someone until you've seen them in all seasons of their life, the good, the bad, and everything in between. It's easy to connect with someone when life is easy and carefree, but what about when things get tough? Some examples of what this could entail are below:

What are they like when they have little to no money?

Financial stress is one of the most revealing aspects of a person's character. Do they get anxious, take it out on others, or retreat into themselves? Are they resourceful, finding creative ways to make ends meet? Or do they shut down, leaving you to pick up the pieces? Financial struggles reveal deep layers of a person's mindset, how they cope with stress, how they prioritize needs, and how they communicate about tough situations.

the relationship as a whole, while amber flags may require patience, negotiation, and ongoing dialogue to resolve.

At the end of the day, relationships thrive when both partners are committed to growing together, communicating openly, and respecting each other's needs. Recognizing and addressing flags, red or amber, early on can help prevent bigger issues down the line and create a healthier, more harmonious partnership.

In Coexisting Lanes, you have the opportunity to develop communication skills that are crucial for a long-lasting relationship. This is the time to practice **rupture and repair**, where misunderstandings or conflicts arise, but the way you handle them will lay the groundwork for future interactions. Will you be able to disagree respectfully, listen to each other's perspectives, and find common ground? Or will you spiral into patterns of blame and avoidance?

Rupture and repair doesn't mean that disagreements won't happen, but it does mean you're both committed to working through them, learning from them, and rebuilding trust each time a fracture occurs. The more you learn how to repair and reconnect, the stronger the foundation of your relationship becomes.

Developing Your Relationship Rulebook

As you navigate through Coexisting Lanes, you are also beginning to develop the "rulebook" for your relationship. What are your expectations? What are your non-negotiables? Are there things you need from each other that you simply cannot compromise on? This is the stage where you both need to define the parameters of your

sign of deeper attachment issues. It's one thing to respect personal space, but another to avoid ever relying on each other emotionally.

9. Inconsistent Actions and Words

If your partner's actions don't always match their words, or they make promises they don't keep, it can create confusion and instability in the relationship. Inconsistency in behaviour may reflect deeper personal issues or an inability to communicate effectively.

10. Flirting with Others

While it's normal to find other people attractive, flirting with others or crossing boundaries with people outside of the relationship can be a sign of disrespect or emotional disconnection. However, it's important to assess whether it's an isolated incident or part of a larger pattern.

Addressing Red and Amber Flags

While red flags often require immediate attention, sometimes even ending the relationship, amber flags don't necessarily mean the relationship is doomed. Instead, they provide opportunities to engage in open communication and problem-solving. If you notice amber flags, take the time to discuss your concerns with your partner, listen to their perspective, and determine if changes are necessary for the relationship to progress.

The key to dealing with both red and amber flags is self-awareness and open communication. Don't ignore your instincts. If something feels off, it's okay to ask questions, express concerns, and set boundaries. In some cases, red flags may require you to reevaluate

What are they like with their family or parents?

Family dynamics often play a significant role in shaping who we are. Do they get along with their family? Do they hold grudges, or do they maintain an open, loving relationship? Do they shy away from difficult conversations, or are they the first to address tension head-on? Observing how your partner interacts with their family members, especially during difficult moments, can reveal a lot about their boundaries, emotional maturity, and communication style.

What are they like when things aren't going well at work or in their personal life?

Work stress can bring out the best and the worst in people. Is your partner able to manage stress with grace and clarity, or do they lash out and withdraw? How do they speak about their job or the challenges they face? Are they open to discussing their frustrations, or do they keep things bottled up? Work is where many people's identities are tied up, and understanding how your partner handles setbacks in this area will give you insight into their resilience and their approach to problem-solving.

This is the part of the relationship where you step back and take on the role of the observer. The goal isn't to rush into fixing things or to judge your partner's behaviour, but to simply *witness* them. You are not yet fully emotionally entangled, but you are becoming more emotionally aware of who they are under different circumstances. The foundation of your relationship is built on this understanding,

not only of their behaviour but of their emotional responses, their vulnerabilities, and their coping mechanisms.

One Foot In, One Foot Out

As you spend more time together, it's essential to remember that you are still in the delicate phase of testing the waters, and keeping one foot in and one foot out of the relationship is necessary for your own emotional protection. This means maintaining a sense of emotional independence while you explore the connection.

It's natural to want to fully dive into a relationship, especially when the bond starts to feel meaningful, but you must proceed with caution. In Coexisting Lanes, you're still figuring out whether this person is someone who can build alongside you or whether they are just a passing figure in the current chapter of your life. You are testing the waters, allowing yourself to grow closer, but always being mindful of the boundaries you need to maintain to protect your own emotional well-being. It's about balance, being open enough to invest in the connection, but not so attached that you lose sight of your own needs and values.

By keeping one foot in, you're preserving the autonomy and space to make clear-headed decisions, to evaluate the relationship's potential. But keeping one foot out also allows you to protect your heart from investing too much too soon, especially if red flags begin to emerge.

Red/Amber Flags and the Opportunity for Growth

Early on in a relationship, you might not know if your goals are aligned, but if you start noticing significant differences (like one person wants kids and the other doesn't, or one wants to live in a different city), it's worth discussing. While this is not necessarily a deal-breaker, it's something that needs to be addressed before moving forward.

5. Difficulty Collaborating and Compromising

If your partner is consistently unwilling to compromise or sees every situation as a "win or lose" scenario, it can create friction. Healthy relationships require mutual give and take, and an inability to compromise could indicate an issue with flexibility or emotional maturity. I talk a little more to this later on.

6. Lack of Shared Interests

Having different interests isn't a red flag, but if you feel like you have little in common or struggle to find things to enjoy together, it could eventually lead to emotional disconnection. It's important to nurture shared activities or passions that allow for bonding.

7. Reluctance to Introduce You to Close Friends/Family

If your partner is hesitant to introduce you to important people in their life or keeps you at arm's length, it could be a sign of discomfort with intimacy, or it could indicate that they're not as serious about the relationship as you might hope.

8. Excessive Independence or Avoiding Dependence

While independence is important in any relationship, a complete avoidance of emotional closeness or interdependence can be a

Amber flags are more subtle or less urgent issues, but they still deserve attention and should not be ignored. These are areas of potential concern or patterns of behaviour that may escalate if not addressed. Amber flags can often be worked through with open communication and mutual understanding, but if left unchecked, they might evolve into more serious problems.

Examples of Amber Flags:

1. Lack of Emotional Availability

If your partner is emotionally distant or avoids being vulnerable, it can make it difficult to form a deeper emotional connection. However, this doesn't always indicate a red flag, it may be a sign of unresolved personal issues, trauma, or difficulty expressing emotions.

2. Frequent Arguments

Having disagreements is natural, but constant or escalating arguments can indicate communication issues, unresolved conflicts, or incompatibility. Assess whether arguments are healthy (hurtful, disrespectful, or unresolved).

3. Avoidance of Commitment

If your partner seems hesitant or unwilling to commit to the relationship or discuss the future, this might be an amber flag. It doesn't mean they're not interested, but it could signal fears of intimacy, past relationship baggage, or confusion about long-term goals.

4. Incompatible Life Goals

No relationship is perfect, and red flags, those little signals that something isn't quite right, will inevitably pop up. This phase of the relationship is an opportunity to address those red flags head-on, with open communication and mutual understanding. The presence of red flags is not a signal to run away immediately; it's a chance to address them, understand their origin, and decide how you both want to move forward.

For example, you might notice that your partner becomes defensive when you talk about certain topics. This is a red flag that speaks to potential issues with communication, vulnerability, or emotional availability. Rather than ignoring it or walking away, this is a moment for you both to engage in dialogue, to explore where the defensiveness comes from, and whether it's something you both are willing to work through.

Red and Amber Relationship Flags are warning signs that indicate potential issues in a relationship. These flags don't necessarily mean the relationship is doomed, but they serve as signals to pay closer attention, evaluate the situation, and take action where necessary. Understanding the difference between red and amber flags is important, as they can help you assess whether a relationship is healthy or if changes need to be made before things progress further.

Red Flags

Red flags are serious warning signs that something in the relationship is unhealthy, toxic, or fundamentally mismatched. These issues, if not addressed, can lead to serious problems in the future. Red flags often represent deal-breakers or behaviours that could be damaging in the long term.

Examples of Red Flags:

1. Abusive Behaviour

Physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, whether it's yelling, manipulation, gaslighting, or physical violence, is a huge red flag. Abuse in any form should never be tolerated.

2. Dishonesty and Lack of Transparency

If your partner consistently lies or hides things from you, it erodes trust, which is foundational to any relationship. This includes things like cheating, keeping secrets, or having a hidden agenda.

3. Controlling Behaviour

If a partner tries to control where you go, who you spend time with, or what you wear, it's a major red flag. Healthy relationships allow both partners to have autonomy and respect each other's personal boundaries.

4. Disrespect and Dismissive Attitudes

Regularly belittling, mocking, or dismissing each other's opinions or feelings is a major red flag. This includes not valuing or respecting your boundaries, making jokes at your expense, or showing contempt.

5. Excessive Jealousy or Possessiveness

While some level of jealousy can be natural in relationships, extreme jealousy or possessiveness can signal insecurity and lack of trust. If your partner becomes angry or controlling when you interact with others, it's a sign to pay attention to.

6. Inconsistent Communication

If your partner consistently avoids difficult conversations, shuts down emotionally, or refuses to communicate about important issues, this can create emotional distance and resentment.

7. Refusal to Take Responsibility

If your partner is unable to admit mistakes, apologize, or take responsibility for their actions, this indicates a lack of accountability, which can undermine the health of the relationship.

8. Substance Abuse or Addiction

While everyone has their struggles, substance abuse or addiction is a significant red flag if it's interfering with your partner's behaviour, emotions, or relationships with others. These issues often require professional help to resolve.

9. Unresolved Past Trauma

If your partner is unable or unwilling to address past emotional trauma, it can impact their emotional availability and behaviour within the relationship. While therapy can help, refusing to address deep-rooted issues may create emotional instability.

10. Excessive Need for Validation

If your partner constantly seeks validation from others, or relies too heavily on you to fulfil their emotional needs, this can indicate insecurity and a lack of emotional independence.

Amber Flags