

Help for women to relate so that men will love them

Couples are drawn into relationship with each other because of differences in personality types, and then those same characteristics can lead to seemingly endless conflict and disagreements. What can each partner do to address these differences? What can we do to get on with a person whose behaviours bother us so much that we now question whether or not to stay with them? Is there any hope we could ever get on? Couples therapist Jeff Saunders works in this minefield daily, and knows that you too can learn how to turn your relationship around.

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy recognises that reactive emotions and behaviours signal differences originating long before the current relationship began – childhood. Here I discuss some features of common personality types that come into relation-ship conflict regularly, to the distress and mystery of the couples involved. I will describe the common characteristics of the most common styles in terms of their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to successfully relating. If about 80% of each style I describe is typical of you, then you can safely assume you are a variant of what I am describing. Be aware that it is possible to have a combination of styles, although this is the exception rather than the rule. I will also provide tips about what you can do to overcome disharmony caused by these patterns.

‘Anxious Insecure’ Personality Type

“My strength is my ability to connect with others whom I love and care for.”

You will know your style is ‘anxious’ by the fact that a lack of connection or harmony with those that you love leaves you feeling desperate to restore that connection and harmony as soon as possible. More likely a woman than a man, you will get very upset during conflict if you are not listened to, taken seriously, and really heard at an emotional level. You will feel hurt easily and often, especially if your need to be listened to is not met, and may get frustrated or even angry when your partner continues to fail to ‘get you’ and may even pursue him in order to reconnect. Eventually, if you feel hurt or fearful of rejection enough, you may put up a wall, or just back off. If you’ve done this, you’ve evolved into an **Anxious-Avoidant Insecure Personality Type**.

1. **Your strength of being connected to your feelings will not be seen as a strength by many others.** Your personality type risks being ‘over the top’ emotionally because your feelings are so strong. When these feelings reach screaming pitch, there may not be much understanding from others. Feelings of hurt, sadness, despair and fear are all asking you to act on your own behalf to work out a solution. If this doesn’t happen, there will most likely be a sharp rise in your emotional temperature. See your strong feelings as a strength, and learn to express them in a way which does not overwhelm others. This is most successfully achieved by voicing hurt and sadness without letting your feelings head off into resentment and anger. Don’t allow hurt and upset to evolve into resentment and have this then undermine the love you would prefer to feel.
2. **You may be possessed by a desire to pursue your partner in order to get resolution, only to see him/her head off into the sunset.** Notice that when you get more worked up, you inadvertently distance yourself from others, and reduce the likelihood of either harmony or connection. Instead of pursuing, invite your partner to agree to a way of both sitting down to talk through your differences once you’ve both had time to settle down. It is a strength to want to connect and work things out, but only if you don’t frighten your partner off first.
3. **You might need to explain that if your feelings are listened to, you can better connect to your own needs and knowing.** Your partner is unlikely to know this, and may even have to be helped to learn how to reflect your feelings, thus enabling you to reflect on what you are needing and wanting to ask for. Explain also that for you it is essential to have your feelings heard and validated, and that this then allows you to come to your own conclusions about what you are wanting for yourself. You can come to your own decisions, but only after your emotions are settled and the emotional static is cleared from your thinking.

4. **Notice that logical argument, especially during conflict, doesn't work well for you.** It is feeling that makes sense, and reasoned debate can leave you confused, exhausted and at odds with yourself. What matters most to you is how you and others feel towards each other, not what makes rational sense, is right, better or correct. However, because some issues do require rational discussion, you will be best able to participate in that once your emotions are settled and you have felt heard.
5. **You may well feel inadequate or wrong when you're emotional, because you may have grown up with people who criticised your emotional style.** Thus, you can very easily give up on yourself when in an argument, feeling as though no one cares or understands. You can overcome this pattern by taking time out and supporting your feelings and yourself, knowing that they are both OK and also very functional. Never give up on yourself, no matter how inadequate, wrong or frustrated you may feel.
6. **You may have to explain to your partner, that s/he is most lovable and helpful to you when s/he is connecting with you at a heart level.** The only time a relationship feels good to you is when your partner feels warm towards you, and cares about how you feel. No matter what the debate or conflict is about, it is this quality connection that cements the relationship for you. Help your partner to know that this quality connection is what you most seek, and that you can discuss matters logically once emotional connection has been prioritized.
7. **Although you have a high need for relationship time (with partner or kids), know that for balanced mental health you must prioritize 'alone' time.** While you love relating, you can easily get overwhelmed looking after others at your own expense. Support yourself to have time doing what you love, just for you. Overcome any 'selfish' feelings that might get in the way and bring balance into your life. Once you learn to put yourself first, you will become more empowered to express your needs in general.
8. **One of your prime needs is to spend quality time with your partner.** It may surprise you that not everyone thinks this way, but often anxious types become strung out if they get insufficient time with their beloved. Don't expect him/her to know this. Ask for your need to be met – before your frustration builds to resentment or anger. Your partner will hear you better when you are cool calm and collected, and can express your need clearly.
9. **Learn your preferred style of feeling loved and ask for it.** You may prefer to be given things, told how much you are loved, given touch such as hugs or a held hand, have things done for you, quality time with you made a priority, or a combination of these. Express your needs to your partner, and certainly don't assume they 'should know.' Feeling loved is a priority for you, because it is what you most seek from life. However, if your partner expresses love to you in the way they would most like it given to them, there may be a mismatch occurring.
10. **Undertake an activity that will help you settle your emotions.** Notice that your urgent desire to communicate, even if to do so whilst screamingly angry, destroys the relationship. Instead, take time out and act in ways which soothe you and care for your feelings. This could include unwinding by talking to a friend, or writing down on paper something to later hand to your partner.
11. **When both you and your partner are in a settled resourceful state, talk.** You will want to discuss your needs and wants and be heard by your partner. Let them know how you can best support yourself to meet your needs, and how they might be able to support you doing so also. Ensure you both discuss how conflict arises, and what you can both do to circumvent it in future.
12. **Avoidant insecure personality types may be difficult for you to understand or get on with.** That is until you appreciate and work with each others' personality styles. While neither you nor the avoidant person can change their underlying behavioural type, you can choose new ways of behaving that bridges and works with the differences. It is essential for you that your partner hears how you tick, and can support you.

Anxious-Avoidant Insecure Personality Type

“I like connection, but it feels too scary for me to engage.”

This style is a variation of the Anxious Insecure type, but may not feel like it. Mostly a female style, it develops when connection feels too scary, too hard, or too risky. Some with this style know they've pulled back from their partner or put up walls. However, others will only recognise that they fit the 'avoidant' description more than the 'anxious' style, and may have learned as youngster not to get too close to people. However, a strong desire for connection and closeness hints that your preference is not to remain avoidant.

1. **Your natural style is the 'anxious insecure' style described above.** However, you will notice a lot of fear about relating closely. You may also notice that when conflict occurs, you pull away or close down very quickly.
2. **The feeling of fear is a big part of your life.** So practised are you at avoiding close connection, you may fail to notice that fear of closeness is dominating any relating you do. It is essential that you recognise the fear of rejection, and your readiness to reject and be critical of yourself. You must learn to support yourself no matter what, so that if you do get rejected, you don't take it personally, but know that this sometimes happens when people don't understand one another.
3. **You will feel incomplete and alone a lot.** Inevitably, aloneness will be a consequence of this pattern. Know though that these feelings are asking you to support yourself by connecting with others. Be choosy who you connect with, and be sure that they have relational skills to talk things through, rather than push people away when conflict arises.
4. **Practice getting closer to others in safe situations.** Choose friends who demonstrate functional relating, so that you can risk connection with what appear to be people with sound relationship skills. Practice talking about yourself, and learn to embrace and support that part of self that gets fearful being vulnerable. Once you practice and succeed at supporting yourself, you will become aware that you have the capacity to do this no matter what others throw at you.
5. **Take steps to communicate the impact aggressive people have on you.** If you are avoiding closeness with a partner for fear of reprisals, let them know that you've pulled back because of behaviours of theirs that you find difficult to work with. Let them know your struggle to connect with them, and the fear their style of relating brings up in you. This doesn't mean that either their style or yours is wrong. It's simply the interactive dynamic that causes you to close down and limit closeness.
6. **Avoidant insecure personality types may be difficult for you to understand or get on with.** That is until you appreciate and work with each others' personality styles. While neither you nor the avoidant person can change their underlying behavioural type, you can choose new ways of behaving that bridges and works with the differences. It is essential for you that your partner hears how you tick, and can support you. Without this, you will not feel safe to come out of your shell and engage with them.

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Jeff Saunders has taught personal development and trained others in this field for over twenty years. In addition to being an author, he's a couples therapist, counsellor, and life coach in private practice, and has trained counsellors, teachers and business people in the fields of communication, personal or professional development, and couples relationships.