

Relationships and relationship problems

Feeling secure and close to the people who are important to you is a vital part of your physical and mental well-being. It provides you with security and resilience, and makes you receptive to new experiences. There is nothing more human than wanting to be liked, listened to, made to feel welcome, made to feel needed and to know that someone is there for you when you really need it.

Conflicts, arguments, rejection, unkind criticism with or from friends, house-mates, fellow-students or family often touch a raw nerve. You become unsure of yourself and the other person, lose confidence and feel vulnerable. This prompts a fight, flight or freeze reaction, often like the reaction you learned to have as a child. You start blaming the other person or become angry or aggressive (fight), you withdraw and avoid the other person and your own emotions (flight), or you clam up, go tense, close down, pretend you don't care (freeze). All these reactions are accompanied by feelings of helplessness, frustration, irritation, distress, anxiety, panic, shame and/or loneliness. It is an intense and tiring process, which makes you vulnerable and insecure.

Continuing in this vicious circle of blaming yourself and the other person, or keeping your distance, only serves to confirm your fear of becoming isolated (anxiety). You can only change the pattern once you are able to recognise it and acknowledge your own part in the process, as well as the wrong done by the other person. Taking responsibility for your own needs and feelings, communicating on the basis of what is important to you, responding openly, mildly, with respect and sympathy for yourself and the other person... that's helpful behaviour.

QuickScan

- Do relationships (or worrying about them) form a factor in your life that causes you problems in your study?
- Do you find it difficult to start or maintain relationships?
- Do you often find yourself in the vicious circle of laying blame? Or withdrawing?
- Do you find social contact difficult and are you often misunderstood by (or do you misunderstand) others?
- Do you often feel hurt, under attack or rejected in relationships?
- Do you find it difficult to pinpoint your part in a relationship or relationship problems?

Approach

What can you do yourself?

It takes two to form a relationship or a relationship problem. If you seem to encounter the same sort of problems in different relationships and you don't know why, it is worth looking into. Ask people close to you to name the positive things you bring to the relationship and ask if they can think of something that you could work on. This might help you to understand why you react as you do when someone touches your raw nerve.

What can we do for you?

Are you having relationship problems or do you suspect you may have personality problems? We offer both short-term individual consultation and courses (e.g. Assertion). We can also help you look for a suitable treatment outside of TU Delft. Visit <http://psychologists.tudelft.nl>.

More information

- How to be an adult in relationships: the five keys to mindful loving (David Richo), ISBN13: 9781570628122
- When the past is present: healing the emotional wounds that sabotage our relationships (David Richo), ISBN13: 9781590305713
- The relationship cure: a 5 step guide to strengthening your marriage, family and friendships (John Gottman), ISBN13: 9780609809532

- Communication skills: a practical guide to improving your social intelligence, presentation, persuasion and public speaking (Ian Tuhovsky), ISBN13: 9781515031918
 - The art of communicating (Thich Nhat Hanh), ISBN13: 9780062224668
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