

Richard Nelson-Jones

Human Relationship Skills



Coaching and Self-Coaching

4TH
EDITION

Human Relationship Skills

Human Relationship Skills: Coaching and Self-Coaching presents a practical 'how to' guide to relationship skills, showing how readers can improve and, where necessary, repair relationships. This thoroughly revised and updated 4th edition reflects the increased interest in coaching, showing how it can be applied to everyday life.

In this essential book, Richard Nelson-Jones takes a cognitive-behavioural approach to coaching people in relationship skills. These skills are viewed as sequences of choices that people can make well or poorly. Covering a range of skill areas the book assists readers to make affirming rather than destructive choices in their relationships. It begins by addressing the questions of 'What are relationship skills?' and 'What are coaching skills?', and follows with a series of chapters which thoroughly detail and illuminate various relationship skills including:

- Listening and showing understanding.
- Managing shyness.
- Intimacy and companionship.
- Assertiveness and managing anger.
- Managing relationship problems and ending relationships.

The book concludes with a chapter on how users can maintain and improve their skills by coaching themselves.

Accessibly written and using activities, the book is appropriate for those involved in 'life coaching' as well as general counselling and therapy. It will be essential reading for lecturers, coaches and trainers as well as students and anyone who wishes to improve their relationship skills.

Richard Nelson-Jones is a leading international author whose books have helped train many thousands of psychotherapists, counsellors and helpers worldwide. He has held university appointments in Britain and Australia, and is a Fellow of the British and Australian Psychological Societies and of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

‘Many people do not possess the needed skills for positive interpersonal relationships. This pragmatic handbook will allow you to help yourself and others to gain mental health and happiness. I highly recommend this book and hope that it is widely read.’

Jon Carlson, Distinguished Professor, Governors State University, Illinois

‘This excellent book comprehensively covers key human relationship skills. During my workshops and lectures often I would recommend the earlier version of this book as an aid to practitioners and their clients. This new revised 4th edition is even better, especially with its coaching and self-coaching approach.’

Stephen Palmer, Director of the Centre for Coaching

‘Richard Nelson-Jones’s 4th edition will be my recommended text in my roles as (tertiary education) lecturer, counsellor, and supervisor of mental health professionals. His comprehensive skills training enables mastery and self-reliance in this essential field.’

Meredith Fuller, Counselling Psychologist, Lecturer, and
Supervisor of Mental Health Professionals

‘Richard Nelson-Jones has produced another of his excellent skills manuals – this time inviting us to self-examine and self-improve on all the dimensions of relationships. Richard’s writing is enriched with significant breadth of knowledge of the wisdom of the field, but he offers his own special brand of invitation to think of skills, and to reflect and work on ways to improve those skills. With extraordinary attention to detail he uncovers many aspects of relationships – shyness, assertiveness, sexuality among others. The exercises for self-examination are demanding, intriguing, and enlightening. Very worthwhile for counsellors, life coaches, and indeed for anyone who would like to reflect on and improve their relationship skills.’

Ron Perry, Director, Institute of Counselling, Sydney

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Preface

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Human Relationship Skills: Coaching and Self-Coaching*. The following are answers to some questions you may have about the book.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK'S PURPOSE?

This is a practical 'how to' book on coaching relationship skills. Written for lecturers, trainers and coaches and those being lectured, trained and coached, the book aims to show you how to improve and, where necessary, to repair relationships. I aim to help you to gain greater relationship satisfaction and prevent unnecessary distress and pain. Relationship skills are viewed as sequences of choices in various skills areas that you can make well or poorly. You can either support or oppress yourself and one another by the choices you make. This book coaches you in how to make affirming rather than destructive choices in your relationships.

FOR WHOM IS THIS BOOK INTENDED?

This book is intended for the following audiences.

- Lecturers, trainers and coaches running relationship training and coaching courses in colleges and universities, schools, adult education centres and in non-educational settings. Such courses may be run in psychology departments – as an applied change from academic teaching – and in personnel work, social work, education, nursing, personnel work, pastoral care and as part of college general education programmes.
- Students training for the helping services: for instance, as psychologists, counsellors, social workers, nurses, personnel officers, teachers and pastoral care workers.
- Students in colleges, universities and adult education centres taking human relations and human communication courses.

- Staff and individual clients and groups of clients in college counselling centres. Many counselling centres run courses on aspects of human relationship skills.
- Trainers and participants on marriage preparation and relationship coaching courses run by voluntary and church-related agencies.
- Students in the final years of secondary school.
- Helping service professionals and voluntary agency counsellors for reference and for recommending to clients.
- Singles and couples interested in improving their relationship skills by means of self-help.

Though strongly supporting family values, I do not intend this book for those wishing to learn more about family and parenting skills. Nevertheless, I hope the book indirectly results in happier families and children.

WHAT ARE THIS BOOK'S CONTENTS?

The first chapter introduces the idea of people possessing a repertoire of relationship skills, each of which is composed of communication skills and mind skills. The second chapter is the only one in the book written mainly for those coaching and describes some central skills of being an effective coach. There then follow 11 chapters to support the coaching of various important relationship skills: listening, show understanding, manage shyness, choose a relationship, intimacy, companionship, sexual relationship, assertiveness, manage anger, manage relationship problems, and end a relationship skills. The final chapter addresses the issue of coaching yourself and getting assistance in so doing. I have put skills-building activities throughout the book.

WHAT FEATURES DOES THIS BOOK POSSESS?

- *Lifeskills emphasis.* Human relationship skills are important lifeskills that you can be coached in and learn well or poorly. Fortunately, you can keep improving your skills. Throughout the book, I use the term relationship skills rather than lifeskills.
- *Comprehensiveness.* I offer a comprehensive coverage of the skills you require for effective personal relationships. I break the sexual silence of most texts on relationship skills by devoting a chapter to this important topic.
- *Emphasis on mental cultivation.* The book emphasizes personal responsibility, courage and mental discipline. Nowhere do I encourage you to think that relating well is always easy.
- *Anglo-Australian emphasis.* Unlike most relationship coaching and education texts which are American, this book draws on British and Australian demographic data, books, articles and research findings.
- *Practical activities.* The book includes numerous practical activities to

help you as singles, partners or in groups develop your knowledge and skills.

- *User-friendly format.* Each chapter follows the same user-friendly format: chapter outcomes, text and activities.
- *Readability.* I have endeavoured to write the book in clear and simple English.

A FINAL WORD

I hope the book articulates a vision of how to relate that resonates with you. Good luck and, above all, good skills!

Richard Nelson-Jones

What are human relationship skills?

Chapter outcomes

By studying and doing the activities in this chapter you should:

- gain some knowledge into what are relationships
- understand more about changing patterns of relationships
- be introduced to a skills approach to relationships
- be introduced to communication skills
- be introduced to mind skills
- understand the role of feelings and physical reactions.

Human relationship skills are the skills involved in human connection. All human beings are biologically programmed to need other people, both for the acts of conception and birth and then throughout their lives. Relationships come with no guarantee of happiness and can be for good or ill, for pleasure or pain. However, the more skilled you are at relating, the greater the likelihood that you will maximize your own and others' happiness and contribute less to the sum of human misery and pain. We all like our relationships to be rewarding. The following are examples of people who relate in *rewarding* ways.

Whenever Jim and Tricia come home from work, they may rest for a short time, but then they always check with interest how each other's day has gone.

Chloe and Paul do not just enjoy their sexual relationship, they also enjoy the companionship that comes from regularly kissing, hugging, putting an arm over each other's shoulders and holding hands.

Though initially Lucy did not like visiting her partner Tony's parents regularly, she now goes over with him every other week-end and gets along well with them. Tony greatly appreciates the effort she has made.

The following are examples of people relating in *unrewarding* ways.

Tom gets jealous because his wife Emma is having an animated discussion with their friend Pete at a party. Later Tom angrily accuses Emma of flirting with Pete, despite this not being the case.

Often when Susan wants to make a point with Joe, she comes on very strong which has the effect of making him withdraw from any real discussion of situations.

Dave and Sophie rarely listen properly to each other any more, even when one of them is trying to say something important in a reasonable way.

In each of these examples, people used varying degrees of relationship skills. Those who were giving and getting rewards in their relationships used their relationship skills effectively to attain these ends. Those behaving in unrewarding ways failed to use good skills. In reality, people often use a mixture of good and poor skills, though in good relationships skilled behaviour predominates.

WHAT ARE RELATIONSHIPS?

Connection is the essential characteristic of relationships. People in relationships exist in some connection with one another, be it marriage, kinship, friendship or acquaintance. Isolation or being placed apart from others is very different from relationship, though even in isolation people can mentally relate to others. John Donne, the Elizabethan, wrote in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624: 17): 'No man is an Island, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main'. In short, humans are social animals who cannot avoid relationships. We are condemned not only to exist, but to relate. However, in an existential sense, humans are also condemned to isolation: for example, no one can die another's death for them. Out of their human separateness, humans strive to relate.

Though relationships can be very brief, the term can imply a broader time frame. Personal relationships are often long term and contain the expectation that they will continue into the future. Feelings of attachment, commitment and obligation, as well as of hatred and despair, can run very deep in such relationships.

Inevitably relationships involve change. Over time, all people change in varying

ways and degrees. For instance, they age and develop different interests. Furthermore, how partners relate can contribute to changes in each of them, such as greater or less self-confidence. In addition, change can be deliberately initiated in relationships, for example, getting married, buying a flat and having a baby. Sometimes external circumstances precipitate change, for instance, unemployment or an inheritance. Relationships need to accommodate changes. Given the imperative in life of change and challenge, relationships can grow and strengthen or wither and die.

Levels of relationships

When two people relate, they do so on differing levels. First, there is the *intrapersonal* level. Each individual is in a relationship with herself or himself. As a simple illustration, shut your eyes for 30 seconds and try to think of nothing. Most people will soon become aware that they are talking to themselves and possibly getting visual images as well. Your relationship to yourself can be of varying levels of psychological wellness. For instance, some people may be quite isolated from themselves. Such isolation may stem from a mixture of their biological make-up and unfortunate early learning experiences that psychologically they have not moved beyond. The results of this can include insufficient sense of identity and poor access to feelings and thoughts. You also relate to yourself not just in terms of your past, but also in terms of your present and future: for instance, you think and feel about current and future relationships with others. The inner game of relating is another expression for the intrapersonal level of relationships.

Second, there is the *interpersonal* level of relationships. This is the level of relationships alluded to in the previous discussion on connection. People outwardly relate to others in terms of their thoughts, feelings, physical reactions and how they communicate and act. In all relationships, people have roles, for instance, spouse, partner, parent and child. A distinction may be made between role relationships and person relationships. Role relationships tend to be heavily influenced by traditional expectations of behaviour for the role. Person relationships allow for spontaneity. Though a simplification, as relationships progress, people move beyond relating as they should be (their roles) to relating as they are and choose to become (as persons).

Third, there is the *social context* level of relationships. All relationships take place within social contexts. For instance, the social contexts of two people contemplating marriage include their families, friends, acquaintances, cultures, social class, race, religion, and so on. The arenas in which relationships take place provide important social contexts: for instance, homes, schools, workplaces and recreational facilities. An important aspect of such social contexts is that they provide rules and expectations about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

Relationships as perceptions

All individuals exist in the subjective world of their perceptions (Rogers, 1951, 1975). Your perceptions are your reality. A Chinese proverb states: 'Two-thirds of what we see is behind our eyes.' Relationships do not exist independent of people's perceptions of them. Two people in the same relationship perceive and experience it differently. Thus within a marital relationship, there are *her* and *his* relationships as well as *our* relationship. Your perceptions influence all aspects of your relationships: intrapersonal – for instance, not seeing some negative attribute you possess; interpersonal – seeing only good qualities in someone to whom you are attracted; and social context – the importance you attach to behaving in accordance with your culture.

Two of you in a relationship do not just relate to each other. Instead you relate to your perceptions of yourselves, each other and your relationship. These perceptions are of varying degrees of accuracy. Another way of stating this is that each of you develops a personification of yourself and the other (Sullivan, 1953). These personifications – literally making up or fabricating a person – are the mental maps that guide your relationship journeys. In distressed relationships, misunderstandings can begin and be maintained by partners developing and holding on to distorted pictures or personifications of each other and of themselves (Beck, 1988, 1999).

SOME FACTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Marriage and cohabitation

In 2002 the population of the United Kingdom was 59,229 people. Over the past 30 years or so there has been a distinct trend towards a decline in marriages and an increase in cohabitation. In 1976 there were 406,000 marriages in the United Kingdom, whereas in 2001 there were 286,100 marriages. Of the 2001 marriages, approximately 176,000 were first marriages. There is also a trend among those who do get married to marry later: for instance, the median (mid-point in a set of scores) ages for first marriages in 1976 were 25.1 for men and 22.8 for women respectively, whereas these figures in 2001 were 30.8 for men and 28.4 for women (Office for National Statistics, 2003a).

In the early 1990s, approximately 70 of first marriages were preceded by premarital cohabitation compared with approximately 10 per cent in the early 1970s. For those marrying in the 1990s and 1970s, the median duration of premarital cohabitation was about two years and one year respectively. In 1993, over 20 per cent of non-married men and women were cohabiting, compared with under 15 per cent in the mid-1980s (Haskey, 1995). This trend towards cohabitation appears not only to have continued but to have increased. In addition, growing proportions of men and women are living outside a partnership. The younger age groups, particularly those in their twenties, show the greatest changes in patterns of marriage and cohabitation.

In Australia, the population has been growing rapidly: 3.4 million in 1901,

6.6 million in 1942, 10.7 million in 1962 and 19.7 million in 2002 (Trewin, 2004). In 1971, the marriage rate was 9.3 per thousand, with the median age at first marriage for men being 23.8 years and the median age for women 21.4 years. By 2001 the marriage rate to 5.3 per thousand, with the median ages 30.6 and 28.6 for men and women, respectively. The crude marriage rate has been declining since 1970 and this can be mainly attributed to changes in attitudes to marriage and living arrangements that have occurred since then. In 2002, there were nearly one million people in *de facto* relationships. The rate of premarital cohabitation has risen from below 2 per cent in the 1950s to 71 per cent in 2001 (De Vaus *et al.*, 2003). There is some evidence from Australia that premarital cohabitation does not pose any greater risk of subsequent marriage breakdown than not living together.

Relationship distress

In the last 30 years in Australia, marriage 'rates have declined, there is less pressure to marry, it is easier to end a damaging relationship, fertility has sharply declined, women can more easily control their fertility, and the participation of women in the (part-time) workforce has steadily increased' (De Vaus, 2002). The same is true for Britain. Though the proportion of cohabiting people has been rising, most people still get married and expect it to be permanent. However, as Shakespeare wrote: 'The course of true love never does run smooth.' In both Britain and Australia the divorce rates are high. In England and Wales, in 1991, there were 306,800 marriages and 158,700 divorces. In 2002, there were 249,200 marriages and 143,800 divorces (Office for National Statistics, 2003b). For both 1991 and 2002, when examining the ratio between marriage and divorce, the falling marriage rate needs to be taken into account, thus making the proportion of divorces seem higher than was the case.

In Australia, the percentage of marriages ending in divorce has greatly increased since the Family Law Act of 1975. This Act stated that there was only one ground for divorce, namely the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage measured as separation of the spouses for at least one year. By 1991, about 40 per cent of Australian marriages ended in divorce (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1993) and this figure has probably risen to over 45 per cent since then.

The divorce figures underestimate the extent of marital distress and breakdown. If figures for the separated population were added to those of the divorced population to form a 'dissolution index', the statistics for marital breakdown would be considerably higher. Moreover, for numerous reasons – including concern for children, financial insecurity, fear of going it alone and religious beliefs – many couples remain unhappily married. Add these people to the 'dissolution index' and it could be that more marriages end up being unhappy than happy.

Frequently partners leaving marital relationships have numerous painful experiences. Some may end up wishing that they had never left (Litvinoff, 1993). Most will suffer a loss of confidence and self-esteem. Many will experience

financial hardship and loneliness. All are either building or will need to build new lives.

Divorce and relationship breakup also involve children. The vast majority of single-parent families are headed by lone mothers. Though divorce may be better than living with a high level of conflict, it can negatively affect children. However, the child's relationship with each parent may be a more critical factor in their adjustment than the parents' relationship to each other. Negative effects of divorce on children can show up in increased depression, self-blame for the parental split, conflicting loyalties and anxiety over their future (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1990, 2005). Children with divorced parents may need to make more adjustments than children from intact families: for example, to moving house, moving school, visiting a non-custodial parent, mother starting a new job and either or both parents remarrying.

Reasons for marital breakdown

The reasons for marital breakdown are both personal and social. Some American evidence exists that people whose parents were divorced are more likely to become divorced themselves than people whose parents stayed together (Segin *et al.*, 2005). Partner alcoholism and violence are mainly women's reasons for wanting to separate. Other reasons are more evenly divided among the sexes: for instance, relationship problems, infidelity, perceptions that 'things won't change', and growing apart through external pressures such as those caused by work and in-laws (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1993). In addition, poor relationship skills increase the chance of marital breakdown.

Social reasons for marital breakdown include the fact that obtaining a divorce is easier and less socially stigmatized than in the past. In addition, there has been a rise in expectations regarding marital happiness and these higher expectations have an increased chance of not being fulfilled. The greater participation of women in the workforce and the fact the modern marriages involve fewer children than in the past means that women may be less dependent on their husband's income and so freer to leave. Furthermore, the decline in the influence of the church lowers another psychological barrier to divorce.

A RELATIONSHIP SKILLS APPROACH

Universal human being skills

Are there universal human being skills that underlie and transcend cultural diversity? By universal human being skills I mean skills that characterize the good or effective person regardless of the culture or country in which they live (Nelson-Jones, 2002). The survival of the human species depends on the existence of sufficient good or skilled human beings to protect the interests of future generations.

A way of thinking of human being skills is in terms of level of functioning

or developing human potential. Here a distinction exists between possessing subnormal, normal and supranormal skills. For genetic, social learning and economic reasons, some humans function at below the norm for the human race. The vast majority of people possess a mixture of good and poor human being skills that place them within the range of normal functioning. However, some people develop their human being skills to the point where their level of functioning is clearly superior. Though not using the word skills, Maslow, in his study of self-actualizing people, tried to identify some of the characteristics of supranormalcy (Maslow, 1970).

What are some advantages of using a skills framework or skills language? First, attempts can be made to identify and define the skills human beings require if they are to function effectively. Second, the concept of skills provides a focus for training people in human being skills. Already much successful training takes place without using the concept of skills. For example, children reared in loving and nurturing environments are more likely to possess the skills of relating to other people warmly than those children who are emotionally abused or deprived. Nevertheless identifying, articulating and training people in what are desirable human being skills might lead to better child-rearing practices. Third, the concept of skills provides human beings with a self-help framework for monitoring, improving and, where necessary, self-correcting how well they use their mind skills and communication/action skills.

A starting point for discussing the issue of universality in human being skills is that of the biological basis of human nature. Over thousands of years, humans have evolved as a distinct species whose behaviour is influenced by their thoughts rather than solely determined by instinct. Nevertheless the role of instinct remains strong: for instance, in regard to meeting biological needs, reproducing the species, nurturing the young and caring for the sick.

Every individual has a biologically based inner nature comprised of elements that are common to the species and those that are unique to that individual. Charles Darwin referred to humans possessing an 'instinct of sympathy' and this would appear to be an important survival instinct for the species (Dalai Lama and Cutler, 1998). However, much of western thinking sees human nature as egoistic, selfish and destructive, summed up in one of Freud's favourite quotes, which came from the Roman writer Plautus: 'Man is a wolf to man.' This 'bad animal' view of humans might be seen as based on humans who are not at a high level rather than on the healthiest human beings (Maslow, 1971). Furthermore, it ignores the ample evidence that humans can be cooperative and caring as well as hostile and uncaring (Argyle, 1991; Beck, 1999). How people act appears to be largely a matter of training and of how much their animal nature is lovingly nourished or frustrated.

Much research points to the conclusion that humans across the world share many common or universal characteristics. For example, Ekman and Friesen (1971) have identified seven main facial expressions for emotion across cultures: happiness, interest, surprise, fear, sadness, anger and disgust or contempt. Another example is that of Schwartz (1992) who classified values into ten types: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security. Based on information from

20 countries in 6 continents, he confirmed that each of the 10 values was found in at least 90 per cent of the countries he surveyed, suggesting that his value types were near universal.

Alongside universality, there is also diversity. Humans across the world have had to face the tasks involved in human existence within the contexts of different physical environmental circumstances, such as climate, topography and natural resources. Throughout history, people in different locations have been in a constant process of evolving their cultures. Though some of the distinctiveness of individual cultures increasingly risks being eroded by globalization resulting from technological advances (Hermans and Kempen, 1998), a huge range of cultural diversity still exists.

Maslow was cautiously optimistic about the biological nature of human beings. However, he thought that positive instinctual aspects of human nature, such as altruistic concern for others, were frequently weak, needed a benign culture for their appearance, and could be inhibited or shattered by bad cultural conditions (1971). The noted anthropologist Ruth Benedict used the notion of *synergy* to describe the healthy interaction between individual and society (Benedict, 1942). Probably there is a reciprocal interaction between the development or lack of development of individuals and the cultures or societies to which they belong.

Viewing human functioning in skills terms is important. At present there are many different psychological theories about how human beings function, but they tend not to be couched in skills terms. Currently humans in their dealings with one another are not nearly as skilled as they should be to make the world a happier and safer place. Not to apply the concept of skills to human functioning leaves a huge gap in thinking about how to improve the human condition. Almost certainly there are universal human being skills. Furthermore, humans have the potential to develop such skills to a high level. Though family and social environments differ across cultures, certain characteristics or skills of the good person almost certainly transcend culture. One possible reason for this is that such skills are ultimately grounded in human biology and evolutionary requirement of survival of the species.

Diversity within universality is desirable. Positive cultural diversity, reflecting life-affirming variations of universal human being skills, requires nurturing and encouraging. Much more effort needs to be put into identifying what are universal human being skills before it is too late. This book, which is based on the work of numerous others such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, is an attempt to identify and to provide training material for some universal relationship skills, though they are approached within a western context.

Skills language

To talk about how to relate requires a common language in which to do so. Skills language provides such a framework.

What are skills?

One meaning of the word skills pertains to *areas* of skill. For instance, albeit overlapping, broad areas of skills include: work skills, study skills, leisure skills, health skills and relationship skills. As demonstrated in subsequent chapters, relationship skills can be further broken down into areas such as rewarding listening, overcoming shyness, caring, assertion, managing anger and solving relationship problems. A second meaning of the word skills refers to *level of competence* or expertise. For instance, in a specific skills area you can be skilled, unskilled or a mixture of the two.

The third meaning of the word skills is less common. This meaning relates to the knowledge and *sequence of choices* entailed in implementing a skill. The main way that I can help you to acquire, develop and maintain satisfactory levels of competence in specific skills areas is by training you in their required sequences of choices.

The concept of relating skills is best viewed not in either/or terms in which you either possess or do not possess a skill. Rather, in any skills area it is preferable to think of yourself as possessing *skills strengths* or *skills weaknesses*, or a mixture of the two. If you make good choices in a skills area, for instance, either in listening or in talking about yourself, this is a skills strength. If you make poor choices in a skills area, this is a skills weakness. In all relationship skills areas, in varying degrees you are likely to possess both strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in the skills area of listening, you may be good at understanding talkers but poor at showing them you actually have understood. The object of working on your relationship skills is, in one or more areas, to help you shift the balance of your strengths and weaknesses more in the direction of strengths. Put another way it is to help you affirm yourself and others more by becoming a *better chooser*.

What is skills language?

Skills language means consistently using the concept of skills to describe and analyse people's behaviour. In regard to relationships, skills language means, when necessary, thinking about how you relate in terms of skills strengths and weaknesses. A distinction exists between everyday or descriptive language and skills language. Below is an example of Tim who shows caring to his wife Anna by massaging her shoulders when she is stressed. Anna likes this very much.

Tim thinking in everyday language: 'When I notice that Anna is stressed I sometimes massage her shoulders.'

Tim thinking in skills language: 'I use my noticing when Anna is stressed skills and then, if she seems stressed, I sometimes use my massaging skills on her shoulders.'

The above is a simple example of the use of skills language. More sophisticated

uses of skills language involve identifying specific mind skills and communication skills strengths that help people deal with relationship problems. You may consider it artificial to translate how you relate into skills terms. Many people are brought up to think in skills language when learning how to drive a car or play a sport. However, probably you have not learned to apply skills language to how you relate.

Why, then, do I advocate thinking about relationships in skills language? First, skills language requires you to identify the specific skills you require for your relationships. Second, skills language provides you with a relatively simple way that you can analyse and work on problems. You now have the tools with which to break problems down into the skills weaknesses that contribute to maintaining them. Third, many of you may find it less threatening to look at your problems in terms of the skills you need to work on them rather than having to admit personal inadequacy or blame. Fourth, my assumption is that many of your relationship problems repeat themselves. Consequently you may need not only to deal with current problems, but to prevent future similar problems. Skills language lends itself to self-instructing not only now but in future. As such, it provides a practical language for continuing self-helping.

Learning and implementing specific relationship skills can involve three steps: public use of skills language between trainers and learners; aware private use of skills language self-talk on the part of learners; and automatic use of skills language self-talk as learners gain fluency in using the skill. An analogy is that of learning to drive a car. First the instructor tells you what to do, then you are aware of instructing yourself, and lastly your self-instructions become automatic. During this process, your use of driving skills moves from feeling awkward to feeling natural. The same feelings can occur as you learn and then gain fluency in implementing specific relationship skills. [Activity 1.1](#) gives you practice at translating everyday into skills language.

ACTIVITY 1.1

Translate everyday into skills language

This activity may be performed in relation to either a specific partner or another close relationship. Either way, first do the activity on your own. Then, if appropriate discuss your answers with your partner, another or others.

1. Using your usual everyday language, list ways that you show caring to your partner/close friend.
2. Using your usual everyday language, list ways that your partner/close friend shows caring to you.
3. From each of the above lists, translate at least one way of showing caring from everyday language to skills language:
 - (a) Me to my partner or close other
 - (b) My partner or close other to me.

As a guide, here is the example of Tim and Anna used in the text.

Tim's everyday language: 'When I notice that Anna is stressed I sometimes massage her shoulders.'

Tim's skills language: 'I use my noticing when Anna is stressed skills and then, if she seems stressed, I sometimes use my massaging skills on her shoulders.'

4. How positively or negatively do you react to the idea of using skills language? Provide reasons for your answer.
-

Repertoire of relationship skills

For your various relationships you require a *repertoire* of relationship skills. Sometimes you may not have a particular skill in your repertoire: for instance, the ability to say no to an unreasonable request. Other times you may want to strengthen a particular skill: for instance, expressing appreciation to a loved one. With some skills, you may also want to strike a more appropriate balance: for example, neither depending too much nor too little on others. Some relationship skills weaknesses you should eliminate altogether: for instance, physical or sexual abuse. Your repertoire of relationship skills comprises your strengths and weaknesses in each skills area.

A framework for relationship skills

If you are to control how you relate, you need to think and communicate effectively. A simple way to highlight the distinction is to talk about the inner and outer games of relating. The inner game refers to what goes on inside you, how you think and feel, or your mind skills and feelings. The outer game refers to what goes on outside you, how you communicate and act, or your communication/action skills. Thinking and feeling are covert, communicating and acting are overt.

Your communication and action skills

Communication and action skills involve observable behaviours. Communication skills refer to what you do and how you do it rather than what and how you feel and think. These skills vary by area of application: for instance, in personal relationships or at work. There are five main ways that you can send relationship skills, and indeed any other communication and action messages:

1. *Verbal messages.* Messages that you send with words: for example, saying 'I love you' or 'I hate you.'
2. *Vocal messages.* Messages that you send through your voice for instance, through your volume, articulation, pitch, emphasis and speech rate.
3. *Body messages.* Messages that you send with your body for instance, through your gaze, eye contact, facial expression, posture, gestures, physical proximity and clothes and grooming.
4. *Touch messages.* A special category of body messages that you send with your touch: for instance, through what part of the body you use, what part of another's body you touch, how gentle or firm you are, and whether or not you have permission.
5. *Taking action messages.* Messages that you send when you are not face to face with others: for example, sending flowers or a legal writ.

[Activity 1.2](#) helps you to understand the ideas in this section.

ACTIVITY 1.2

Send communication/action skills messages

This activity may be done in relation to either a specific partner or another close relationship. Either way, first do the activity on your own. Then, if appropriate, discuss your answers with your partner, another or others.

1. In each of the categories below, identify specific communication and action skills messages by means of which you show caring to your partner/close friend.
 - (a) Verbal messages
 - (b) Vocal messages
 - (c) Body messages
 - (d) Touch messages
 - (e) Taking action messages.
2. In each of the categories below, identify specific communication and action skills messages by means of which your partner/close friend shows caring to you. In particular, emphasize caring messages that are different to the messages you send.
 - (a) Verbal messages
 - (b) Vocal messages
 - (c) Body messages
 - (d) Touch messages
 - (e) Taking action messages.

3. Think of a communication and action skills message that you could send to improve the relationship with your partner/close friend and, if appropriate, enact it.
-

Your mind skills

You can use how you think to support yourself and others or to oppress yourself and others. Below are brief descriptions of six of the main mind skills areas derived from the work of leading psychiatrists and psychologists such as Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis. Rather than describe the skills in detail here, I illustrate their use throughout this book.

1. *Creating rules.* Your unrealistic rules make irrational demands on yourself, others and the environment: for instance, 'I must be liked by everyone', 'Others must not make mistakes', and 'Life must be fair'. Instead you can develop realistic rules: for instance, 'I prefer to be liked, but its unrealistic to expect this from everyone.'
2. *Creating perceptions.* You avoid perceiving yourself and others either too negatively or too positively. You distinguish between fact and inference and make your inferences as accurate as possible.
3. *Creating self-talk.* Instead of talking to your self negatively before, during and after specific situations, you can make coping self-statements that calm you down, coach you in what to do, and affirm the skills, strengths and support factors you possess.
4. *Creating visual images.* You use visual images in ways that calm you down, assist you in acting competently to attain your goals and help you to resist giving in to bad habits.
5. *Creating explanations.* You explain the causes of events accurately. You avoid assuming too much responsibility by internalizing, 'It's all my fault', or externalizing, 'It's all your fault'.
6. *Creating expectations.* You are realistic about the risks and rewards of future actions. You assess threats and dangers accurately. You avoid distorting relevant evidence with unwarranted optimism or pessimism. Your expectations about how well you can relate are accurate.

[Activity 1.3](#) gives you the chance to assess your mind skills.

ACTIVITY 1.3

Assess my mind skills

First do the exercise on your own. Then, if appropriate, discuss your answers with your partner, another or others. Using the rating scale below, assess how skilled you are at using each of the following mind skills in a relationship of particular importance to you.

- 5 Extremely skilled
- 4 Very skilled
- 3 Skilled
- 2 Moderately skilled
- 1 Slightly skilled
- 0 Unskilled.

Your rating

- _____ creating rules
- _____ creating perceptions
- _____ creating self-talk
- _____ creating visual images
- _____ creating explanations
- _____ creating expectations

Summarize your main mind skills strengths and weaknesses in this relationship. To what extent is how you think harming or helping you to relate effectively?

Your feelings and physical reactions

To relate effectively, you require the ability to experience, express and manage your feelings and physical reactions. Though fundamental to relationships, feelings represent your animal nature and are not skills in themselves. Dictionary definitions of feelings tend to use words like 'physical sensation', 'emotions' and 'awareness'. All three of these words illustrate a dimension of feelings. Feeling as *physical sensations or reactions* represent your underlying biological nature. People are animals first, persons second. As such you need to learn to value and live with your underlying biological nature and to get it working for rather than against you. The word *emotions* implies movement. Feelings are processes. You are subject to a continuous flow of biological experiencing. *Awareness* implies that you can be conscious of your feelings. Illustrative feelings are happiness, sadness and anger. Illustrative physical reactions, which accompany feelings, include tightness in the stomach, staring and smiling.

Three areas in relationships, albeit overlapping, where feelings are important are experiencing feelings, expressing feelings and managing feelings. Below I illustrate each area with a brief example.

Experiencing feelings

Robyn, 19, finds it very difficult to experience feelings of anger in her relationship with her boyfriend Russell.

Expressing feelings

Sandy, 39, is in a marriage heading for the rocks. He has always had great difficulty expressing his positive feelings towards his wife, Brittany. She sees him as far too negative and critical.

Managing feelings

Daphne, 28, is very jealous of her husband Geoff. She gets upset and angry when he talks to other women and afterwards picks fights with him. She has no evidence that Geoff has ever been unfaithful.

In the above examples, Robyn, Sandy and Daphne need to experience, express and manage their feelings more effectively. To do this, they need to identify the mind skills and communication skills that contribute to maintaining their feelings difficulties and work on them. For instance, Robyn may inhibit her angry feelings because of mind skills weaknesses such as: 'Women must never show anger' (unrealistic rule) or 'If I show anger, I will automatically be abandoned' (unrealistic expectation). She may also inhibit her feelings of anger because she lacks the communication skills to express her anger assertively and to cope with Russell if he returns her anger.

Sandy may have difficulty expressing positive feelings because of thinking skills deficits such as: 'Brittany should know that I love her' (unrealistic rule) and insufficiently acknowledging what Brittany does for him (perceiving inaccurately). Sandy may also need to develop the communication skills of how to show appreciation to Brittany with his verbal, vocal, body, touch and taking action messages.

Daphne may have difficulty managing her feelings of jealousy because of thinking skills weaknesses such as: 'I'm insufficiently lovable' (perceiving inaccurately) and 'If Jim talks to another woman, it means that he doesn't love me' (explaining cause inaccurately). She may need to develop the communication skills of sharing her self-doubts tactfully with Geoff and avoid coming on too strong.

Feelings are crucial to relationships. However, the way to influence feelings is by working on the appropriate mind skills and communication skills. In sound relationships, partners cooperate to build not only their own but one another's relationship skills. In the above examples, Robyn and Russell, Sandy and Brittany, and Daphne and Geoff could help with what the problems are not only for themselves but for their relationship together.

Many chapters in this book, like this one, end with a group activity relevant to the chapter's content ([Activity 1.4](#)).

ACTIVITY 1.4 Group discussion: a relationship skills approach

This is intended as a group exercise, though it may be done individually or in pairs.
For each part:

- 1. Spend 10–15 minutes answering the question in groups of three or four,
- 2. Each group shares its answers with the whole group.
- 3. The whole group ranks the three most important points in each category from the most important to the least important.

Part A Disadvantages of a relationship skills approach

List the three most important actual or potential disadvantages of viewing relationships and how you relate in relationship skills terms.

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Part B Advantages of a relationship skills approach

List the three most important advantages of viewing relationships and how you relate in relationship skills terms.

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2

What are coaching skills?

Chapter outcomes

By studying and doing the activities in this chapter you should:

- understand what are levels of wellbeing
- know about what is coaching
- know about coaching relationship skills
- know about speaking skills
- know about demonstration skills
- know about guided practice skills
- know about negotiating homework skills
- be introduced to self-coaching.

LEVELS OF WELLBEING

Leaving aside major areas of psychiatric disturbance, people can be viewed as possessing relationship skills on three main levels of wellbeing: remedial, normal and growth. Another way of stating this threefold distinction is subnormal, normal and supranormal. Coaching can also take place on each of these levels, though with variations. At the remedial level, people have either never learned or else are having difficulty enacting one or more relationship skills. For example, they may listen poorly, say little about themselves, get angry easily and be weak at solving relationship problems. Usually such people lack confidence, which partly results from their poor skills. This lack of confidence can also have the effect of adversely influencing how they perform many skills. In addition, it is still possible for a reasonably confident person to need remedial help in one or more skills areas: for instance, listening or managing conflict.

Some underconfident and even some reasonably confident people are best helped by undergoing supportive counselling prior to learning specific relationship skills by being coached in them. When they do receive coaching, this can be

part of either a counselling process or a process that more clearly emphasizes training, though the distinction may be unclear. For example, some counselling approaches, such as cognitive therapy and rational emotive behaviour therapy, have a heavy training or coaching component. Consequently, coaching takes place in counselling as well as in situations that are labelled as training.

The vast majority of people, who are not severely disturbed, possess both good and poor relationship skills. They require help in lessening their poor skills improving their good ones. At the moment, most people mainly learn their relationship skills in their home environments where they get exposed to people with varying levels of skills. People also learn skills at school and in the homes of friends. The fortunate mostly get exposed to skilled people, whereas others get models of varying degrees of unskilfulness. People also differ in how vulnerable they are to having their poor rather than their good skills brought out in their relationships, especially close ones. For instance, it is possible for a skilled partner to help a relatively unskilled one to become more skilled. Other relationships can be much more destructive. Arguably, this normal grouping of people acts considerably much of the time to those within their family, social and cultural group and probably even to those outside it, although less so. Nevertheless, such people could avoid much unhappiness and gain greater happiness if they received coaching in good relationship skills early in life. Normal people and their counsellors and coaches are the main audience of this book.

There is a small group of people who are functioning at a growth or supranormal level of wellbeing (Nelson-Jones, 2004). Such people's hearts are awakened in that they acknowledge that all humans belong to the same species and have an innate potential for goodness that provides the basis for developing humanistic consciences. These superior functioning people are largely able to curb anger and aversion. Instead they cultivate goodwill, sympathetic joy at others' good fortune, gratitude, compassion and equanimity. In addition, they are genuinely concerned with being generous and with helping and serving others. Those with remedial and normal skills possess the potential for and can show such superior qualities too, but not nearly to the same extent.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Defining life coaching

Dictionary definitions of coaching use words like instruct, train, teach and tutor. Life coaching is coaching that focuses on improving people's personal or working lives. Though a relatively recent phenomenon, it is undoubtedly here to stay. In the USA, since the 1990s, there has been a huge increase in attention to life coaching. In 1996, the International Coach Federation, founded in 1992, had its first US convention. Life coaching is spreading worldwide, including in Britain and Australia. For instance, in 2002 the Association for Coaching was established in Britain and in 2005 the British Psychological Society set up a Coaching Psychology Section. In 2002, the Interest Group Coaching Psychology (IGCP)