



External Control and Internal Control. Deadly Habits and Caring Habits

External Control can be anything from a disapproving glance, criticism, mocking, to a forceful threat. Whatever it is, it attempts to force others to do what they might not want to do. External control can look like this: punish the 'wrong-doer' then reward him/her for changing behaviour. This coercing, forcing, controlling behaviour (i) is widespread throughout society, (ii) convinces that the 'controllers' make us feel the way we do, and (iii) destroys relationships because it destroys personal freedom.

Internal Control is the opposite of external control. The focus is on oneself and one's behaviour responsibility. It can promote choosing effective and constructive behaviours to improve relationships with others and with oneself. Internal control can look like this: I accept my behaviour and do not blame others for my choice in doing what I did/do. When considering how to behave ask yourself will my next behaviour (i) bring me closer to who I want to be? and/or (ii) bring me closer or further away from other people (or person)?

Insisting on controlling others will bring unnecessary suffering into our and others lives. Regardless of the relationship, virtually all of our behaviour is motivated to satisfy either of our basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. In a loving relationship, love and belonging is perhaps the most important need. There are 7 things we can do to promote or destroy relationships: the caring habits will meet our needs for the long term and in a more healthy way.

Seven Caring Habits

1. Supporting
2. Encouraging
3. Listening
4. Accepting
5. Trusting
6. Respecting
7. Negotiating differences

Seven Deadly Habits

1. Criticizing
2. Blaming
3. Complaining
4. Nagging
5. Threatening
6. Punishing
7. Bribing, rewarding to control



Seven Caring Habits

(1) Supporting

People thrive in relationships where they feel supported for their true selves and in the pursuit of their dreams, goals, and aspirations. Support means being there physically, mentally, and emotionally for the other person as well as taking on a greater share of responsibilities when they are suffering or in need.

(2) Encouraging

We all benefit from encouragement in our close relationships. This can take the form of reminding your partner of their strengths, past successes, or positive qualities. Remember that encouragement is most effective when it is authentic (i.e., not based in exaggerations).

(3) Listening

To provide your partner with your total presence through fully hearing them and receiving their messages is extremely valuable. Practicing mindfulness can allow you to become more present with your partner and actively engaged in listening.

(4) Accepting

When we feel completely accepted by another person, it provides an invaluable sense of validation. This is often a cornerstone of many therapeutic approaches as well (e.g., unconditional positive regard). When we offer the gift of acceptance to our partners, we are telling them that we “see” them for who they are and choose to accept them completely. This does not mean accepting behaviours that we do not approve of, but rather accepting the individual as loved and worthy of that love.

(5) Trusting

Trust goes both ways in relationships, and part of building a strong and healthy relationship involves opening yourself up to fully trusting your partner. It also involves modifying and shaping your own behaviours so that you are a trustworthy partner.

(6) Respecting

Healthy relationships need to be built on a foundation of mutual respect. This means treating loved ones with dignity, affirming their worth, and respecting their boundaries and limitations.

(7) Negotiating Differences

Relationships must have compromise. Relationships where neither partner has to make “any” compromises are few and far between. Mature relationships mean that both partners cannot have all of their needs met all of the time. Think about that. You must be willing to openly discuss what you are and aren’t willing to compromise for the sake of the relationship. Through compromise, you are able to build stability, trust, and strength in your relationship.



Seven Deadly Habits

(1) Criticizing

When we criticize someone else, we are telling them that we are somehow superior to them or that they are unworthy in some way. Criticism comes from a place of wanting to control another person through the hope that making them feel insecure or bad about themselves will result in them “changing” for the better—it is counterproductive for healthy relationships.

(2) Blaming

This involves placing the responsibility for some sort of outcome on another person. Of course, there can be instances where our partner is to blame for something unpleasant. However, how we choose to express our displeasure is important. Through honest and loving communication—not blaming—we can let our partner know that they need to accept responsibility for their behaviour.

(3) Complaining

No one “likes” complaining... except the person doing it. When we choose to complain about something we are also saying that we refuse to take responsibility for it. Complaining often results in the other person feeling as if they should somehow “fix” the problem or void the complainer. Whatever the outcome, it puts distance between us and those we love.

(4) Nagging

Total external control. When we nag, we are trying to get someone to change behaviour through negative reinforcement (e.g., I’ll stop nagging when you change behaviour). People don’t like to be coerced into doing things they don’t want to do. Real change occurs through one’s own efforts; however, an open and loving discussion about compromise is helpful in relationships.

(5) Threatening

When we wield threatening power over someone, we are hoping that they will essentially be “scared” into complying with our demands. It destroys relationships. When we threaten others (directly or passively), we become a source of fear and control.

(6) Punishing

The concept of punishment means that something negative is used as the consequence of behaviour that you want your partner to cease, e.g., yelling at your partner for not doing a task. Sure, short-term gain can be had, but relationships are wrecked. With punishment you become a source of fear, control, and general unpleasantness.

(7) Bribing / Rewarding to Control

Although it seems “nicer” than punishing or threatening, rewards, is still a form of wielding external control over your partner as you attempt to control his/her behaviour (even if it seems loving or altruistic). It is always best to allow your partner to come to their own conclusions about what behaviours they wish to change. This can certainly result from an open discussion about final decision to change behaviours needs to come from within.