



UK Extension's
**Universe of
Possibilities™**

SKILLS FOR CREATING HAPPINESS AND BLESSING OTHERS

Healthy Relationships

Friendship is the basis of all healthy relationships. To befriend another is to see worth and beauty in that person. In friendship we nourish and, in turn, are nourished. In a very real way, the kindness we give to others we also give to ourselves.

Friendship thrives on respect, heartfelt caring, and open, honest sharing of dreams, concerns, and values. With a trustworthy friend, there's no need to hide any part of who you are. You can be your true self and say what's on your mind and in your heart. You are free to share happy times as well as moments of sadness and confusion.

Remember, friendship is always an adventure, for each person is a marvelous, unfolding mystery. Even in the closest of relationships, respect the mystery and maintain a degree of reverence. Give those dear to you space to breathe and change and make mistakes.

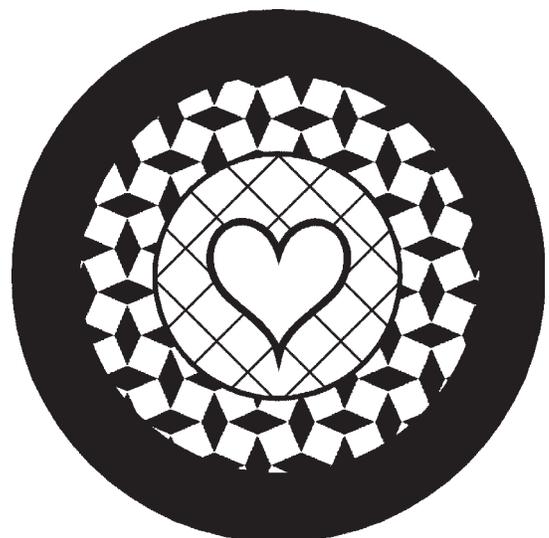
If a relationship drags you down or frequently leaves you feeling hurt, angry, or unappreciated, it's probably not based on real friendship. If you can't heal the relationship, you might need to back away. Never cooperate in allowing another person to mistreat you.

We can, of course, also enjoy a special type of friendship with animals, birds, trees, and nature in its many other forms—a kinship with all of life. We are interconnected by the web of life so that the health of each small part of the web benefits the well-being of us all.

7 Core Principles

- 1 Be thoughtful of others and take good care of yourself because the more balanced, healthy, and mature you are as an individual, the more richly you can give to all those around you.
- 2 Particularly in close relationships, do not assume you know a person's current thoughts, feelings, needs, and dreams; ask, and then listen closely with a fresh mind and an open heart.
- 3 Conflict, which is inevitable, can be a wonderful and healthy opportunity to stretch yourself, to see the wisdom and value of other viewpoints, and to open up to new and potential-filled possibilities.
- 4 Since we all make mistakes and have regrets about the past, the willingness to forgive intelligently and wholeheartedly is a basic part of thriving, happy relationships.
- 5 Like radar, learn to zero in on specific actions and qualities that you like in those around you, and be creative in regularly expressing your genuine appreciation.
- 6 Lightheartedness, playfulness, humor, and the sharing of spontaneous pleasures add sparkle and depth to relationships.
- 7 Remember, the more centered you are on the Target of Life, the greater your well-being, the wiser your choices, and the more effective you are in everything you do.

Put yourself in the center of the heart of the Target of Life. Notice that the heart of the Target is clear, unobstructed, full of light. From there, you see clearly and make choices that are good for you and those around you. You are attuned to your inner guidance and best judgment. You feel at peace, strong, compassionate, joyful, energetic, and creative. Your reflexes are sharp, your immune system strong. You stumble and fall less often, and you handle life's inevitable challenges with more confidence and skill. Your ability to endure prolonged hardship increases. You are naturally more sensitive to others—more patient, generous, and understanding. You more easily express the richness of your authentic self. The more deeply centered you are in the heart of the Target of Life, the more love you feel and share. **You are at your best—physically, mentally, and spiritually.**



Target of Life

Although you undoubtedly have experienced being relatively centered, often little and big things happen that go against your desires and expectations, and you are likely to find yourself thrown off center and pulled out of your heart's wisdom into the surrounding web of minor frustrations and energy-drainers. Your vitality, peace, and sensitivity begin to fade, and little tensions, doubts, and fears start to emerge. Stress creeps in and things bother you more easily. You are more critical of yourself and edgier with the people in your life. Your effectiveness, spiritual attunement, and physical health start to slip.

All of this can pull you even further away from the center of the Target of Life into the area of increased darkness and sharp edges. When you are in this portion of the Target, you have strayed still further away from your center—your heart of hearts, your home of love, wisdom, and joy. Stress levels are high, and it's much more difficult to sense your inner guidance. You're far more likely to become irritable with co-workers and friends, to yell at family members, and to make poor decisions in every area of life. Tension, disharmony, and fatigue take their toll on your creativity and physical well-being. You and everyone around you are affected negatively.

Beyond this portion of the Target of Life is the outer darkness. Here you can't see well at all; it's a terrible place to be. Insecurity, doubt, confusion, and selfishness are rampant. Stress soars to dangerous levels, and good judgment plummets to an all-time low. You feel heavy and burdened and make decisions that hurt yourself and others. You are driven by fear, blindness, and anger. In this outer darkness your health suffers tremendously, and all kinds of abuse, destruction, and violence flourish. Despite your inherent goodness, you may find yourself saying and doing horrendous things. Truly, it's a living hell.

Every individual has a Target of Life as does every relationship, organization, city, and nation. Even the world as a whole has a Target of Life, and when the world moves too far from its center of love, an array of major problems erupt, including disease, poverty, environmental disasters, international strife, and war.

It is our individual and collective choices that move us away from our intuitive wisdom at the center of the Target of Life into varying degrees of stress, confusion, frustration, and conflict. **Fortunately, by making wise choices at any time, we can move back toward the center of the Target into greater levels of peace, vitality, kindness, and opportunity.**

In the gift of choice lies our greatest power—a power that can be used to uplift or destroy. The Target of Life is a helpful way to understand our individual and collective well-being. **With awareness and practice, we can become highly skilled at detecting and creatively responding to the early signs of harmful stress.** We can gradually learn to stay more deeply centered with increasing frequency, saving ourselves all kinds of trouble and our society billions of dollars in unnecessary health care costs.

If you have a strong spiritual orientation, you may find it helpful to think of being centered as being in the heart of the Divine Presence—the source of all goodness, harmony, abundance, and creativity. As temptations confront you and you allow yourself to be lured into making less than optimal decisions, you stray from the center of Divine Love into varying degrees of fear, pain, and self-defeating behaviors. To move toward the center of Divine Presence or toward a self-created hell of outer darkness, to go more deeply into love and joy or to separate yourself from the Divine and become lost in fear and confusion—these are decisions that you face each day. By staying centered and honoring your intuitive guidance, by remaining alert and choosing wisely, you can be at your best more frequently and help to create a world of marvelous possibilities.



Friendship is the magnetic attraction of one heart to another. One of the deepest cravings and greatest joys a person can experience, friendship is the core of every healthy relationship, whether it is between husband and wife, parent and child, life partners, teacher and student, brothers and sisters, close friends, co-workers, or any other association, including the many casual involvements of daily life.

We are not suggesting, for example, that a parent should abdicate his or her role in raising a child and become the child's friend in the popular sense of the word. In addition to applying wisely the principles of true friendship, being a parent also includes acting as a protector, teacher, and loving authority figure. Likewise, the role of spouse also involves a profound level of commitment and sharing. Still, regardless of the particulars of a given relationship, it can be immeasurably enriched by intelligently practicing the core skills of true friendship.

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

The research is clear: Healthy relationships are firmly linked with happiness, success, and physical well-being. Even relationships with pets and plants can nourish our well-being. The quality of relationships is more important than their number or frequency.

Physician Dean Ornish, speaking of the healing power of loving relationships, said, "I am not aware of any other factor in medicine—not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery—that has a greater impact on our quality of life, incidence of illness, and premature death from all causes." To thrive, not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, we need supportive relationships.

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

Leo Buscaglia

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

Surveys tell us that the vast majority of Americans lie regularly both at home and at work. Our culture is troubled because so much of it is built around deception and the need to look good. A personal commitment to authenticity is a great way to help turn around this epidemic of dishonesty.

To be authentic means to be real, genuine, honest, and without pretense. What you do matches what you say, and what you say matches what you think and feel. To help us move toward greater authenticity, workshop leader and counselor Patricia Sun offers this powerful nugget of advice: "***From this moment on, imagine that everyone you meet can instantly read your mind.***" Try doing this; it's a tremendously empowering way to live.

*Let your best be for your friend.
In the sweetness of friendship let
there be laughter, and sharing of
pleasures. For in the dew of little
things the heart finds its morning
and is refreshed.*

Kahlil Gibran

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

Therapist and author Roberto Assagioli wisely noted, "Without forgiveness, life is governed by an endless cycle of resentment and retaliation."

Forgiveness is a decision to give up resentment. It is a gift we give to ourselves as well as to others. It neither condones the behavior of those who caused suffering, nor does it keep us from preventing future abuse. It's not a way to avoid pain that must be faced.

Jesus admonished his followers to forgive "Seventy times seven." Ancient Hindu scriptures proclaim, "By forgiveness, the universe is held together." Modern research is confirming that heartfelt forgiveness bestows an impressive array of benefits.

Among the advantages of forgiveness, staying centered on the Target of Life becomes easier. You become a healthier, more alive person; wounded relationships begin to heal; fear decreases; you feel a deeper connection with others; and you experience the joy of living in the flow of the present moment.

The Path of Friendship

The following 12 guidelines universally nourish healthy relationships and thriving societies.

Judge Not. If we knew the past experiences of those around us, if we knew their hurts and fears, their hopes and dreams, we would be far more compassionate. Whether your friend is a newborn baby, your spouse of 30 years, or a difficult co-worker, try your best to understand what life is like from his or her perspective.

Listen Wholeheartedly. Temporarily put aside your own concerns and listen with total receptivity to your friend, knowing that he or she is a person of incredible worth and capability.

Show Appreciation. A sincere compliment, often requiring no more than a few well-timed and honest words, can do wonders in lifting the spirit of another. As Mark Twain put it, "I can live for two months on one good compliment." Focus on the positive qualities of those around you, and freely express your appreciation.

Have Fun. Bring a gentle joy to all your relationships—a warmth that comes from your heart, sparkles in your eyes, and lights your face with pleasantness. As appropriate, play, laugh, share good times, and enjoy adventures together. Celebrate life's blessings.

Be Authentic. Don't pretend—to yourself or others—to be any different from who you really are. Don't hide any part of yourself. Simply be the beautifully unique and wonderful soul you are. Never lie, but do use good judgment and sensitivity in telling the truth.

Give Love. The giving and receiving of love is at the very heart of all healthy relationships. In a casual interaction, an expression of love may simply consist of a warm smile in passing. The possibilities for showing affection and thoughtfulness in deeper friendships are endless. Love is a boomerang; the more you give it away, the more it comes back to you.

Embrace Growth Opportunities. When a disagreement arises, when your patience is tried, or when you find yourself or your friend feeling hurt, angry, or fearful, welcome these events as opportunities to learn and grow. Strictly avoid blaming; focus instead on changing yourself in positive and creative ways. Of course, don't allow yourself to be mistreated, and know when to ask for a helping hand.

Forgive. We all make mistakes; it's part of learning. Be quick to forgive those around you and to forgive yourself. Forgiveness doesn't condone wrong behavior; it simply allows for fresh starts. Through the gift of forgiveness, you free yourself from resentment and negativity.

Follow Your Heart. Healthy friendships thrive on a keen sensitivity and fresh spontaneity that comes from trusting your heart's intuitive wisdom. Follow your heart's intelligence and lovingly encourage your friends to do the same.

Respect the Mystery. Every individual is an unfolding mystery, rich with magnificent possibilities. Don't box people in with limited expectations. Stand in awe of their potential, and welcome new growth and positive changes. Always maintain a degree of reverence.

Care for Yourself. Make it a priority to richly nourish your body, mind, and spirit. Your example will bless your friends, and you will have a much greater abundance of energy, kindness, creativity, and love to share.

Feel the Oneness. As modern science has confirmed, we are not separate from one another. We are intimately connected in a single web of life. What we give to others we give to ourselves. First, feel your oneness with dear ones, then gradually learn to include all souls in your circle of compassion and love.

EXPANDING YOUR CIRCLE OF LOVE

Each relationship, however brief or in-depth, is part of a lifelong curriculum in the science of unconditional love. At first, we learn to return love for love. Then we advance to giving love to dear ones when they are irritable or fearful. Next, we respond to ill will with good will. Eventually, we stretch ourselves to the max, feeling deeply for all people and learning to return love for hatred.

*Do you not see that you and I are
as the branches of one tree? With
your rejoicing comes my laughter,
with your sadness come my tears.*

Tsu-Yeh

Love also awakens a kinship with all life. To paraphrase words attributed to Chief Seattle:
“Every part of this earth is sacred to my people—
every shining pine needle, each sparkling stream,
the perfumed flowers, the deer, the great eagle. We
love this earth as a newborn loves its mother’s
heartbeat. Preserve the land for all children and
love it, as the Great Spirit loves us all.”



QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

One good question can be worth a shelf full of books. *Think about the broad topic of healthy relationships, then write down several related questions.* Ponder your questions and discuss your responses with a friend or with a small group. Here are a few starter items:

- ✧ What do you believe are some of the key barriers to developing healthy friendships? How might we overcome these barriers?
- ✧ Accepting certain behaviors in others can be difficult when those behaviors mirror parts of ourselves that we have not yet acknowledged and come to terms with. Does this statement ring true to you? Can you give an example?
- ✧ What suggestions do you have for dealing with difficult people?
- ✧ Recall a friendship between a human being and an animal that particularly touched you. What might we learn from such relationships?



A New Dawn



*With his students gathered around him, a rabbi
asked, “How can you tell when night has ended and day has begun?”
A student spoke up, “You can tell when that has happened if you can look at
a tree on the horizon and can determine if it is a peach tree or a fig tree.”*



*“No,” said the rabbi. A second student ventured a reply.
“When you see the sheep on the hilltop and the doves fly
overhead to the east, then you know that dawn has begun.”*



Slowly the rabbi shook his head side to side and said no.

*After several others offered insufficient answers, the oldest student spoke respectfully,
“Dear teacher, please tell us how we can know for certain that dawn has begun.”*

*“When you can look with pure love into the faces of all people, knowing that they
are eternally your brothers and sisters, then the light of day has risen.*

Until you have this experience, it is still night.”



SKILL BUILDERS

Skill builders help you exercise your creative muscles to give you the strength you need for success. *In addition to the two skill builders below, create some of your own on the topic of healthy relationships.* As with physical workouts, benefits come from actually *doing* the exercises.

- ◆ Write and mail a short note of appreciation, or lend a helping hand to someone in need. Think of a friend or family member whom you've not been in touch with in a long time and stop by for a visit. Or make an "I've been thinking about you" phone call.
- ◆ Bring to mind someone who has hurt you—a hurt that you still find troubling. Are you ready to forgive that person? If so, extend heartfelt forgiveness in a way that feels good to you.

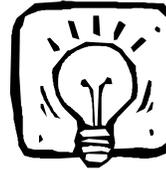


A NEW POSSIBILITY

Bringing a dream to life is a journey. It begins and continues one step at a time. Think about all that you have learned from this publication and how you might put it into practice. Then choose one small goal that you want to accomplish in the next few days. Move toward a new possibility that is really important to you—one that you are enthusiastic about and are confident you can achieve.

Take a card or a piece of paper and, at the top, write "A New Possibility." Under this heading, briefly state what you will do and by when. Sign this action plan and put it where you will see it often. Tell a supportive friend or family member about your goal, and frequently visualize yourself following through. Be prepared just in case doubts or roadblocks crop up. Know that you can always draw upon faith, firm resolve, and creativity to overcome any obstacles that may arise.

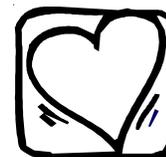
When you put the deepest desires of your heart into action, it naturally benefits others, either directly or indirectly. Have fun with your action plan. Dare to envision new possibilities, and then create your dreams one step at a time.



POSITIVE THOUGHTS

You may find the following brief thoughts (or similar ones that you create) to be simple yet powerful inspirational tools. You might, for example, memorize and, with deep feeling and concentration, mentally repeat one of these seed thoughts or write it on a card and place it where you'll see it often.

- ♥ When with another, my spirit says: "You are a beautiful soul, and your feelings and thoughts are important to me. I am listening with my ears and my heart."
- ♥ More and more, I find myself unconditionally accepting and loving everyone who crosses my path. In the gift of my silent love, people grow and bloom.
- ♥ I face problems squarely and deal with them creatively, but I strictly avoid thinking or speaking negatively about anyone. I encourage the best in all people and all nations by placing my attention on their strengths.



LOVE MADE VISIBLE

Together, let us envision and build a world where all people enjoy optimal well-being. Let us strive to awaken fresh thinking, new enthusiasm, and abundant love. Let us create a world of unimagined possibilities. It can be done!

10 Educational Modules

UK Extension's Universe of Possibilities™: Skills for Creating Happiness and Blessing Others is an educational series containing 10 modules. Each module is accompanied by a Macromedia Flash® movie, a PowerPoint® presentation, and other teaching tools. All these resources, along with a Facilitator's Guide, are available free-of-charge in camera-ready format at the following website: www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/possibilities.

1. **Your Vision Map**

2. **Making the Growth Choice**

3. **The Way of Peace**

4. **Heart Intelligence**

5. **The Freedom of Self-Discipline**



6. **Embracing This Present Moment**

7. **Accepting and Loving Your Body**

8. **Healthy Relationships**

9. **Unleashing Your Creativity**

10. **Gifts of Gratitude and Blessing**

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