



Heart & soul

Cate Mackenzie, our resident love coach, helps readers open their hearts to relationships they never thought possible

Express yourself to bring joy

Don't be afraid to say what you really want, need and feel to build happier relationships

Do you ever feel like you're walking on eggshells around certain people or not saying what you really think or feel, for fear of rocking the boat and causing a scene?

But what if you had the guts to face up to that person and tell them what you really thought about what was going on between you, and what you perceived to be the cause of the friction?

Well, now you can, without it causing terrible uproar and ruining relationships.

The key to this assertiveness lies in taking care of yourself.

By looking after your needs, truths and desires before focusing on anyone else's, you feel safe in the knowledge that your wishes have been met and are therefore more confident and prepared to

listen to other people and speak up about what you truly feel about a situation. This is because you are already in an emotionally stable place.

A good example of this is a friend of mine who told me that, for the first six years of their relationship, she and her partner both thought the other liked antique furniture and anything historical. Then she realised she was just choosing what he liked and that she in fact preferred modern, bright furniture.

They were both happy in their relationship and within themselves so she was able to voice her true feelings and they began to honour their differences and negotiate how to have a life together that incorporated their differences as well as their similarities.

Now they're 21 years married and have discovered that he loves

sightseeing holidays while she likes sitting by a pool with a book.

Again, whereas someone who isn't confident within themselves might follow their partner's lead and grudgingly agree to go on a sightseeing trip, my friend is happy and confident in herself so was able to say that she only wanted to do a little bit of sightseeing and mainly wanted to relax by the pool.

Differences within couples are normal and you wouldn't be attracted to someone who is exactly like you – differences are the magnetism between partners.

But the key to give and take and living harmoniously is to always be happy within yourself, this will give you the confidence to be open and talk things out with others so that you can work out the best ways to meet both your needs.

Here are some ways to take care of yourself in order to benefit your relationship with others:

Self-care in three easy steps

1 Find three ways every day to nurture yourself. Try ringing a friend for a chat, find a support group, pop on a face mask or take a day off to visit an exhibition.

2 Engage the 'eject button'. When you feel overwhelmed by a situation or someone's negative behaviour, just walk away.

3 Every three months, set aside time with your partner to write your vision of what you want your relationship to be. Write in the present tense then, as the months pass, read your past visions together to see how your relationship has grown. ■

'The key lies in taking care of yourself first'

You're more able to speak your truth if you're happy inside

PHOTOS SHUTTERSTOCK

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Cate Mackenzie is a love coach and couples counsellor with more than 20 years' experience. For more information about her work, visit catemackenzie.com