

Stable Inner Self-Connection: An Overview

Vibrant, loving relationship requires a **stable inner self-connection**, wherein nervous system regulation and differentiation are integrated. In this way, we can represent ourselves honestly, with the resilience to not only withstand but grow through anxieties and fears that inevitably arise in relationship.

Emotional intimacy imbues relationship with vitality and connection, while *the road* to intimacy lies in differentiation, and self-regulation is what makes this possible.

Differentiation, a self-developmental process, integrates impulses for bonded connection (togetherness/we) *and* autonomy (individuality/I). This process shifts us from exclusive *dependence* on others to validate, soothe, and manage our anxieties, to doing so for ourselves.

Dependence on external validation and approval in adulthood is painful, anxiety producing and limiting. It fosters resentment and quid-pro-quo accommodations.

As inner stability develops, we become less defensive while maintaining our values, self-respect, and integrity. Thus:

- Our sense of self doesn't *hinge* on what others think about us. Instead, we *represent* ourselves truthfully vs. *present* the self we think we need to be for others.
- We can hold onto to the reality or truth of our own experiences, especially when we're discounted or told to think otherwise.
- As an act of integrity, we explore rather than dodge the grain of truth in what others say about us.
- When pressured to conform, we can hold onto our principles and be clear about our limits and boundaries – our yes, no, or maybe.
- We recognize that others don't control us or stop us from being ourselves. *What we're controlled by is dependence on external validation to manage our anxieties*. Increased differentiation enables both self-validation our experiences and capacities for co-regulation (the nervous system state in which we're connected and engaged).
- We can accommodate *cleanly* (without resentment) when we choose to do so for the other's benefit, rather than accommodate to manage the anxiety of others' reactions.
- We become *more relational* – valuing mutuality, equity, and respect for self/others.
- We navigate differences without *losing it* (i.e., getting lost in defensive threat states: flight/fight or shutdown, which corrode connection and distort perception).

- We don't need to prove ourselves or convince others to change or agree with us; we can represent ourselves honestly without first scanning for consensus.
- We don't dismiss or criticize what we don't understand; we appreciate and welcome differing viewpoints without feeling threatened by them.

This brief overview is meant to highlight how self-respect and integrity are cornerstones of healthy relationship. Differentiation bestows upon us inner grounding and resilience that enables us to nourish connections with ourselves and others.

Anyone who is sincere and willing, and desires the freedom to love wholeheartedly, can undertake the journey. This is nothing less than the privilege of a lifetime.

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