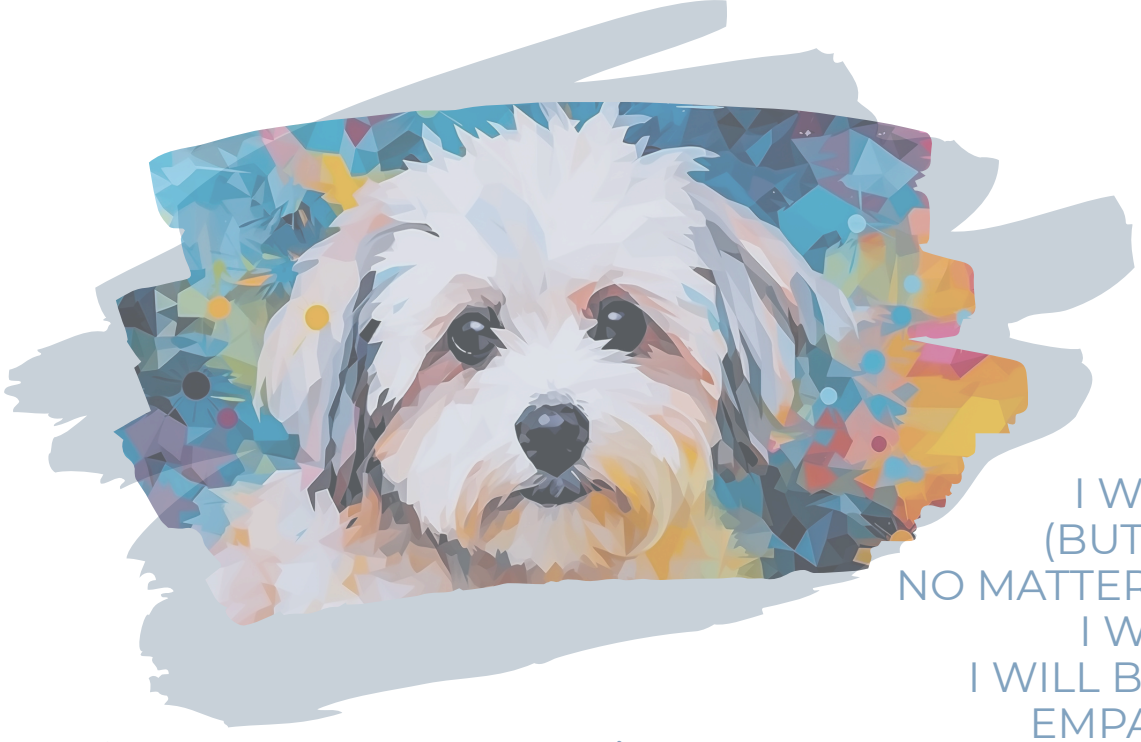


Session 4

LOVING

I WILL BE FIRM
(BUT NOT HARSH)
NO MATTER HOW YOU BEHAVE
I WILL BE FAIR
I WILL BE CURIOUS HAVE
EMPATHY & GRACE
I WILL DO THE HARD THINGS
FOR BOTH OF US

Relationship Goals

Most of us want relationships where we feel comfortable, safe, loved, accepted, and valued. We all have relationships—whether with family members, friends, or partners—and we all experience questions, challenges, and problems in one or more of those relationships. In this section, we are going to look at the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. We'll explore what to do when there is conflict or hurt and how to recognize and work through our own heart issues when relationships become difficult.

Healthy and unhealthy relationships can often start in very similar ways. Learning to recognize the differences can help us build stronger, healthier relationships and make better choices when problems arise.

OPENNESS

When we first meet someone, we take time to get to know each other. We begin to open up and share things about ourselves, and they do the same. If this goes well, the relationship begins to move forward.

EXPOSURE

Over time, we become more comfortable and relaxed with each other. As we do, we begin to notice things about the other person that we may not be sure about. We may also discover things within ourselves that this relationship seems to bring to the surface.

CONFLICT

This exposure can lead to conflict. Conflict does not always have to be external—an argument or fight between two people. It can also be internal—thoughts, feelings, fears, or hurts that we struggle with but may not want to say out loud.

SEPARATION

When we are hurt and unsure of what to do, we may begin to pull away or separate from the relationship. And when we are in pain, it can be easy to place all the blame on the other person instead of looking at the whole situation and what may be happening within us as well.

ONE-WAY OR ANOTHER

All relationships include conflict. Conflict is not only normal—it can be an important part of how we grow. How each person responds to conflict can help reveal the health of the relationship. Working through conflict in a healthy way helps us mature. It gives us an opportunity to better understand our thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as how they affect others. Conflict can also bring important issues to the surface and reveal red flags that need to be recognized and addressed.

HEALTHY

After the conflict we can take some time to work through what happened and what it revealed. We may discover thoughts we were having or ways we were acting that were not consistent with who we are or who we want to be. We may also be surprised by the other person—by how they think, how they respond, or how they acted. We may begin to recognize things within the relationship that are not healthy.

What we do with what we discover can make the difference between simply moving on and truly growing through the experience. We can begin with three steps toward healthy conflict resolution:

UN-HEALTHY

After the conflict, we may ignore the things that came up—both with the other person and within ourselves. We go back to "normal" and may even believe the relationship is good and strong because we "made it through the conflict."

But making it through conflict is not the same as working through it.

Over time, unresolved issues can build up, creating a deeper and wider separation between us. If they continue to go unaddressed, we may even begin to develop rotten reasoning—unhealthy beliefs about other people, relationships, and even ourselves.

Choose a trusted adult to help you go through these steps with you.

Relationship Resolution

1 **Examine My Heart**

Look honestly at what is happening within me. What were my thoughts, actions, and words? What were my motives? Call them what they are, and take responsibility for my own words, choices, and actions. Consider other options for the future. This examination is between me and God.

2 **"I Was Wrong."**

The next step in resolving conflict is honestly considering how you may have hurt the other person. A genuine apology takes responsibility without excuses or blame and simply says, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" Give the other person time to process and respond in their own way.

3 **"Me Forgive Them?"**

Choosing to forgive. True forgiveness does not ignore the hurt or excuse the behavior; it honestly acknowledges the offense, the pain it caused, and your response to it. Forgiveness requires empathy, grace, and respect. It allows you to release bitterness and move forward in a healthy way.

LOOKING AT YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Once you have worked through the conflict, and resolved it the best you can, it is time to evaluate the relationship. As you grow as a person and in your relationships, you may need to adjust your goals, boundaries, and personal guardrails to protect both yourself and the relationship.

Some situations are clear STOP signs, including abuse, repeated boundary violations, and any immoral or illegal behavior. When a relationship continues to cause harm, it may be necessary to say goodbye—with the support of a trusted adult if needed.

Have you ever wondered about the health of a relationship you are in? There are signs that may indicate areas of concern.
Read through the following questions and mark the ones that describe how the other person has behaved toward you in the relationship. As you answer, think about patterns of behavior rather than just one difficult moment.

____Did this person ask me to do things I was not comfortable with?
____Did this person speak to other people about me negatively?
____Did this person call me names or tease me?
____Did this person touch me in any way that made me feel uncomfortable or fearful?
____Did this person choose to ignore something that I told them was important to me and turn around and say or do that very thing?
____Did this person tell me that I "just didn't understand" or use other words to make me think/feel like I misunderstood their bad behavior?
____Did this person use an excuse to make their bad behavior/choices seem ok? This may include blaming you for making them angry.



If you answered "YES" to any of these questions, this is most likely not going to be a healthy relationship for you. That does not mean that the person is a bad person. It means they may not right for you. Now is the time to seek some wise counsel. You need people in your life who will tell you the truth, not just what you want to hear.

Let's flip this around, and ask you these same questions. How did you handle yourself in the relationship?

____Did you ask them to do things they were not comfortable with?
____Did you speak to other people about them negatively?
____Did you call them names or tease them?
____Did you touch them in any way that made them feel uncomfortable or fearful?
____Did you choose to ignore something that they told you was important to them and turn around and say or do that very thing?
____Did you tell them that they "just didn't understand" or use other words to make them think/feel like they misunderstood their bad behavior?
____Did you use an excuse to make your bad behavior/choices seem ok? This may include blaming them for making you angry.

If you answered "YES" to any of these questions, this may not be a healthy relationship for either of you. It's time to deal with some things before you go forward in any relationships. Again-Seek WISE COUNSEL

Next Steps

If your conflict revealed some serious issues, the next step may be to evaluate the relationship. This could mean adjusting your goals, boundaries, or guardrails—or putting new ones in place. It may also mean recognizing that this relationship is not right for you and that it is time to say "goodbye."

GUARDRAILS

When I identify things within myself that may be harmful to me or others, I put guardrails in place to help keep me from "going there." Guardrails help protect us when we become distracted, lose focus, or begin to get off track. They remind us where there may be a potential problem or danger ahead. Guardrails are what YOU put in place to protect yourself and help you stay on track.

BOUNDARIES

When I identify behaviors in another person that are harmful to me or others, I put clear boundaries in place for protection. Boundaries are not about controlling another person or telling them what to do. They clearly communicate what I will and will not accept and what I will do to protect myself when a boundary is crossed.

Sadly, there are times when we have to say goodbye to people in our lives. Sometimes our lives simply move in different directions. Other times, we may need to step away because someone continues to be hurtful or refuses to respect us or our boundaries.

It is NEVER okay for someone to intentionally cause you harm. An apology or excuse does not make continued harmful behavior acceptable. If someone repeatedly crosses your boundaries or continues to hurt you, it may be time to end the relationship. You do not have to navigate this alone. Talk with a trusted adult who can help you think through the situation, make wise decisions, and safely take the next steps.

REMINDER: You can love someone and still choose not to be in a relationship with them.

Deal Maker & Deal Breakers

A helpful tool for evaluating a relationship is to make a list of the things that are important to you—the qualities you know you want and need in a healthy relationship, as well as the things that are an absolute "no."

Deal Makers: Qualities that help build a healthy relationship, such as respect, kindness, honesty, trust, and genuine love—love that can be firm and fair while also being gentle and caring.

Deal Breakers: Behaviors that are harmful to you or the relationship, such as disregarding another person's feelings or boundaries, dishonesty, manipulation, or being intentionally mean or hurtful through words or actions.

Knowing your deal makers and deal breakers can help you recognize what you value, set healthy boundaries, and make wiser decisions about your relationships.

Training Skills

STAY
WAIT
RECALL/TOUCH



DOGS 101

ABUSE &
NEGLECT

Notes & Review

