



Relational Styles

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DIFFERENT STYLES

Like a plant, relationships need proper care and attention to produce long-lasting, growing connection and love. In many relationships, one partner desires increasingly more intimacy and closeness. For the sake of discussion, we'll consider this person the pursuer and the other the distancer. The distancer can be aloof, detached, and distant. Generally speaking, women are more likely to be pursuers and men the distancers, although this is not always the case.

So what happens to the relationship plant? A pursuer waters the plant, thinking more is better and it needs a drink. In contrast, the distancer thinks the plant is drowning and would be healthier left alone and watered less.

UNDERSTANDING THE PURSUER

Pursuers love close, personal, and intimate relationships and they spend a lot of time considering them. They may dream, think, and talk about the relationship with deep affection. Strong emotions, positive and negative, will cause the pursuer to come toward the relationship. For instance, if the pursuer is happy, they will talk about their happiness in the context of their relationship. And if they are

distressed, they may need a hug or to talk about the situation, what it meant to them, and how they are feeling.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISTANCER

The distancer can regard the relationship highly, but may think it is healthy and fine, needing little attention and time. Strong emotion may bring them out of the relationship, often using avoidance, distance, and solitude as primary means to navigate relational problems and stress in general. The distancer often feels attacked, badgered, and criticized. They build emotional walls higher and thicker in an awkward attempt to defend themselves. When someone wants more attention, they may feel overwhelmed and respond by pulling away. Severe problems in the relationship may be indicated by under-communicating in key situations or serious circumstances,

an inability to recognize or respond to the relational needs of others, or a strong, selfish preference to be alone.

THE PURSUER/DISTANCER DANCE

The pursuer and distancer begin their relationship dance with unity and connectedness, but as stress and tensions arise, the pursuer looks to their partner for more security though increased closeness. The distancer moves away, feeling confined and smothered. One takes a step forward, the other a step back. As this dance intensifies, strong emotions, such as feeling rejected or abandoned, create an intense, often angry and hurt, pursuit. As the desire for connection becomes demanding and critical, the distancer intensifies withdrawal and avoidance. Often, hurtful words are said by both partners, as one tries to connect and the other tries to



escape. Content of the argument will be forgotten and overshadowed by the painful words and actions. Those words and actions will be long remembered.

HELP FOR THE PURSUER

Pursuing regularly results in added distance and further strife. Instead, try the following ideas, keeping in mind that although these strategies are right and helpful, long-term change will come slowly and over time.

1. Acknowledge the distancing in your spouse as a personality trait or style. Don't take it personally each time your partner wants some time alone or engages in a solitary activity.
2. Resist the urge to label avoidance as unloving and uncaring.
3. Demands for closeness, attention, and conversation will often accomplish the opposite, as will harsh words condemning distance. Instead of creating closeness, these tactics may drive a wedge, and cause the distancer to avoid and separate from the situation. Stay clear of criticism and avoid complaining.
4. Avoid the urge to retaliate making statements such as: "I don't care either; I'm going to leave you."
5. When you want more closeness and connection with your partner, try, inviting, welcoming, and attracting them. These overlapping words are intended to help your spouse come toward you in a delightful, non-condemning style.
6. Invite and welcome your partner when they move toward you. When he moves away, let him go. Don't punish or criticize his slowness. Don't point out scenarios when he didn't do the right thing.

7. Avoid chasing, demanding, and commanding.
8. Lessen direct, intense, and one-sided conversations about the relationship.
9. Reduce dependence on your spouse. Develop additional same-sex relationships, hobbies, and interests.
10. Resist the urge to nag, scold, shame, criticize, or complain.

Remember: Distancers often feel smothered and controlled.

HELP FOR THE DISTANCER

1. In a peaceful moment, following your partner's cue, initiate a conversation that interests you.
2. When possible, attend to her with your eyes, hands, and words. Notice her and say it aloud.
3. Offer more emotionally. You are likely being accused of being stingy with emotional contributions.
4. Touch her. This simple, tender action communicates acceptance, interest, and attention.
5. Initiate conversation, time together, activities, and passionate moments. Do this in your time and style, not as a reluctant response to her complaints.
6. Resist avoidance and withdrawal as a first response to stress. State the stressor and your intention to "think about it alone."
7. For the sake of the relationship, resist the urge to under-communicate, under-contribute, and under-participate.

Remember: Pursuers often feel rejected and unloved.

STYLE AND STRESS

Stressful situations are challenging for pursuer/distancer relationships.

Pursuers need to process their stress out loud and need to talk it out until they find a place of resolution or rest. Their communication under stress tends to be heavy with emotion, and intense in nature. Distancers may feel attacked or overwhelmed when approached this way.

Distancers need to process their stress in isolation and need to think things through before they can verbalize what they are feeling. Once something is resolved in their mind, they can often move on without ever talking about it. Pursuers may perceive this withdrawal as disinterest or rejection.

Working through these differences takes patience, understanding, and sensitivity. With hard work and perseverance, two people with opposing relationship styles can learn how to communicate effectively and have a successful and satisfying relationship.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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This information in this publication is not intended as a substitute for professional help or to be used as a diagnostic tool. If you have serious difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, please seek professional help.