

The Relationship Challenge

**Practical Wisdom
to Improve the
Quality of Your
Relationships**

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How would your life improve if you could absorb the wisdom from 30 bestselling relationship books in just 30 days?

Guess what? You can!

The app [Blinkist](#) summarises thousands of non-fiction books into short audio and written “blinks”. The listening option makes it particularly easy to fit this challenge into your day!

We’ve handpicked the best book summaries with practical information to help you improve the quality of your relationships. [Research shows](#) the strength of your social connections is a key determinant of your happiness. Why not invest just 30 days to learn the most essential skills for mental wellbeing?

At the end of the challenge, you’ll have learned how to:

- Set effective boundaries
- Become more assertive
- Reduce relationship conflict by learning how to manage challenging emotions
- Understand your relationship needs and desires
- Adopt a healthy mindset towards relationships
- Understand the signs of abuse and how to deal with it

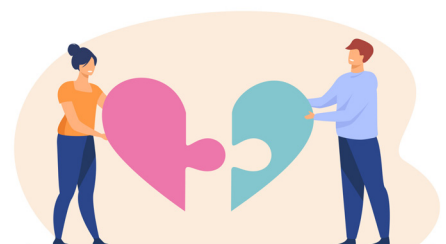
You’ll find detailed writing prompts for each book to encourage effective self-reflection and learning. There’s *a lot* of practical knowledge in here - you don’t need to complete the challenge in consecutive days. Take your time to process what you’ve learned and to reflect on any action steps you want to take.

The challenge is suitable for singles as well as people in relationships. To get started, you’ll need to download the [Blinkist app](#).

At the time of writing, Blinkist have a [2-for-1 offer](#) where you can share your subscription with a friend. We consider it really great value and we hope you’ll love the app as much as we do!

Rebecca and the team

The Wellness Society



PROGRESS CHECKLIST

- 1. Set Boundaries, Find Peace
- 2. How to Be An Adult in Relationships
- 3. 30 Lessons on Loving
- 4. What We Say Matters
- 5. The Four Noble Truths of Love
- 6. The High-Conflict Couple
- 7. You Are Not Your Brain
- 8. Getting the Love You Want
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- 29. Daring Greatly
- 30. Crucial Conversations





**SET BOUNDARIES,
FIND PEACE**

*a guide to
reclaiming yourself*

NEDRA GLOVER TAWWAB



Set Boundaries, Find Peace

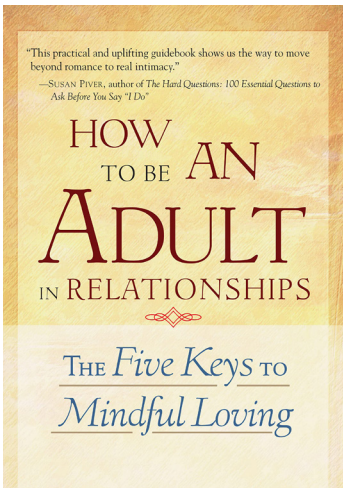
by Nedra Glover Tawwab

What are the signs of needing to set more boundaries? What are most relationship problems caused by? What first step should someone take if they suffer from porous boundaries? Which three things can you do to cultivate closer relationships? What do you need to combine to achieve healthy boundaries? Which three phrases do assertive boundary statements usually start with? What can you do if a person ignores your boundaries?

“If you avoid conflict to keep the peace, you start a war inside yourself.”

– Cheryl Robinson

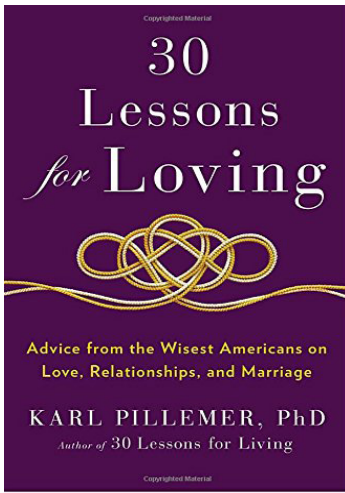




How to Be An Adult in Relationships by *David Richo*

What are the five fundamental relationship needs? In your last or present relationship, how much did you give and receive these needs? In what ways do you re-enact the past in your adult relationships? What are your relationship needs and wants? What are the three stages of relationships? What approach does the author suggest to manage relationship fears? What are the signs that a relationship is no longer working out? What can you do to end a relationship well?



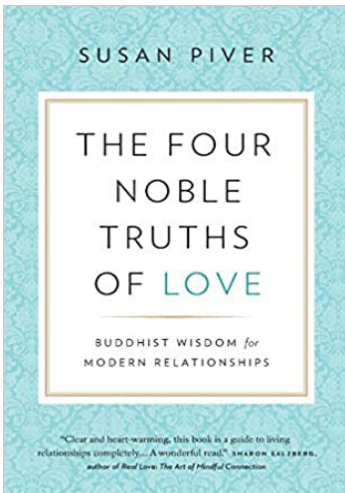


30 Lessons on Loving

by Karl Pillemer

What should you take into consideration when deciding whether or not a relationship is worth committing to? What was the most common piece of relationship advice older people offered? Mind reading is a very common unhelpful thinking pattern affecting relationships – what should you do instead? What can you do to cultivate romance in long-term relationships?



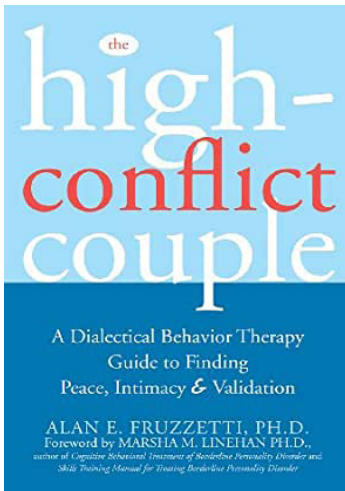


The Four Noble Truths of Love by Susan Piver

What is the First Noble Truth and where does it stem from? What are the Second, Third and Fourth Noble Truths? How much do you acknowledge and accept the inherently flawed nature of relationships - and people? Do you have any false expectations? What do you think are the key stages of romantic relationships? What does it mean to be unattached? Finish this sentence: "Love is..." What's an example of magical thinking in relationships?

"True love is embracing the instability of a relationship together."





The High-Conflict Couple

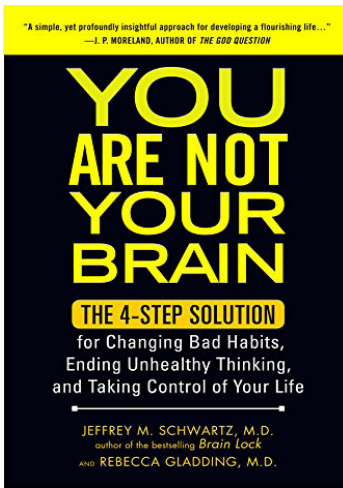
by Alan E. Fruzzetti

What can you do to avoid unnecessary arguments? What does the author mean by being passively vs. actively together, and why is this important? What is it important to be direct about in relationships? Validation builds trust and reduces negative feelings – what does this mean exactly in the context of relationships? How can you effectively approach unsolvable relationship issues? What list does the author recommend trying out?



“What we learned about love and relationships from our childhood feels normal. But just because something feels familiar doesn’t mean it’s healthy. Spend five minutes today quietly reflecting on one of your relationships. Does it enrich your life? If you find that it doesn’t, consider what changes you need to make so the relationship feeds you.”

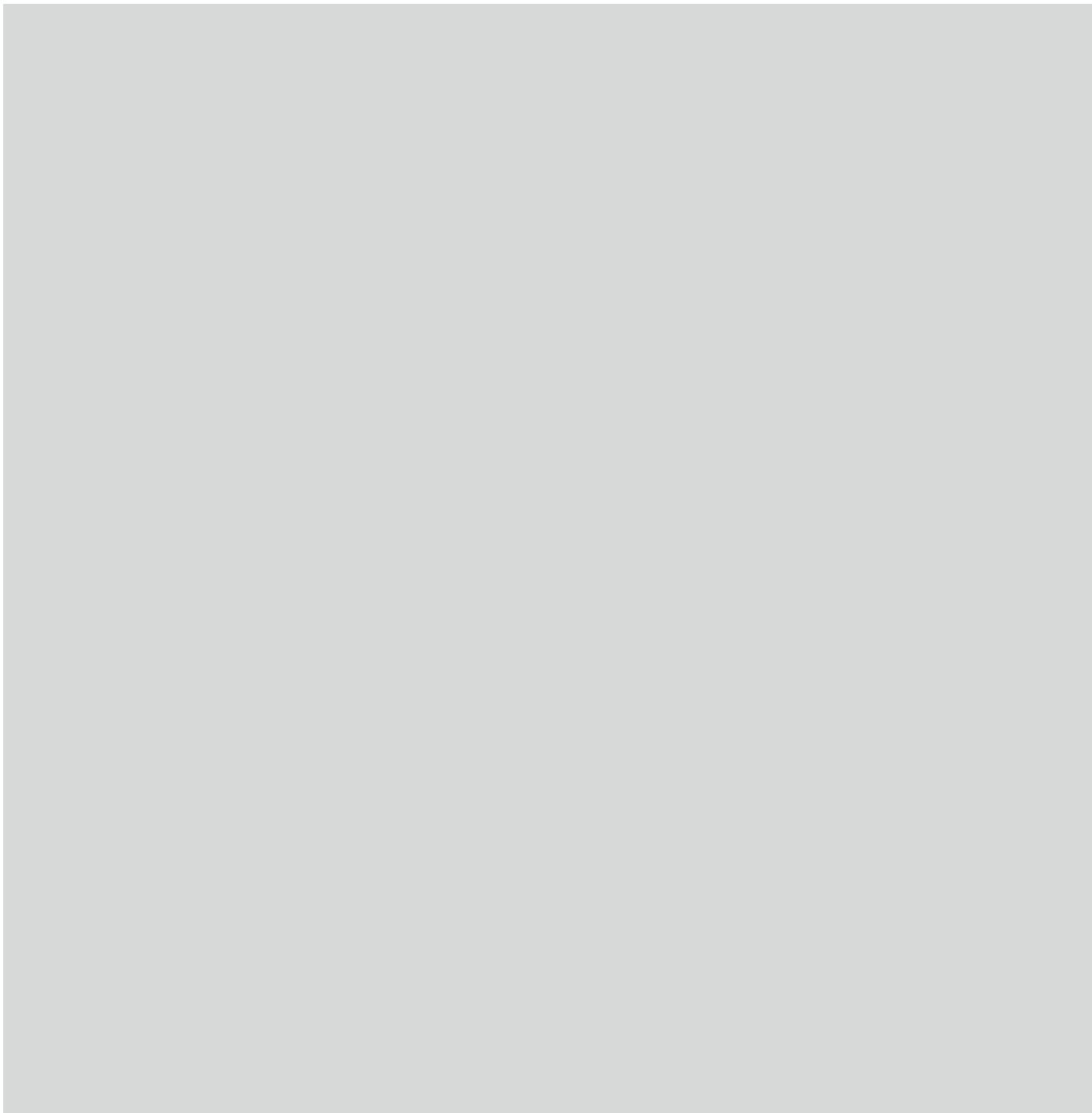
- Judith Hanson Lasater

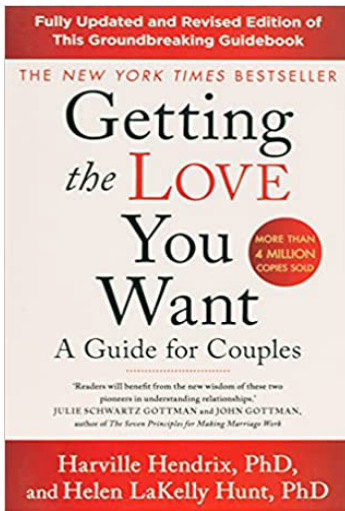


You Are Not Your Brain

by Jeffrey Schwartz

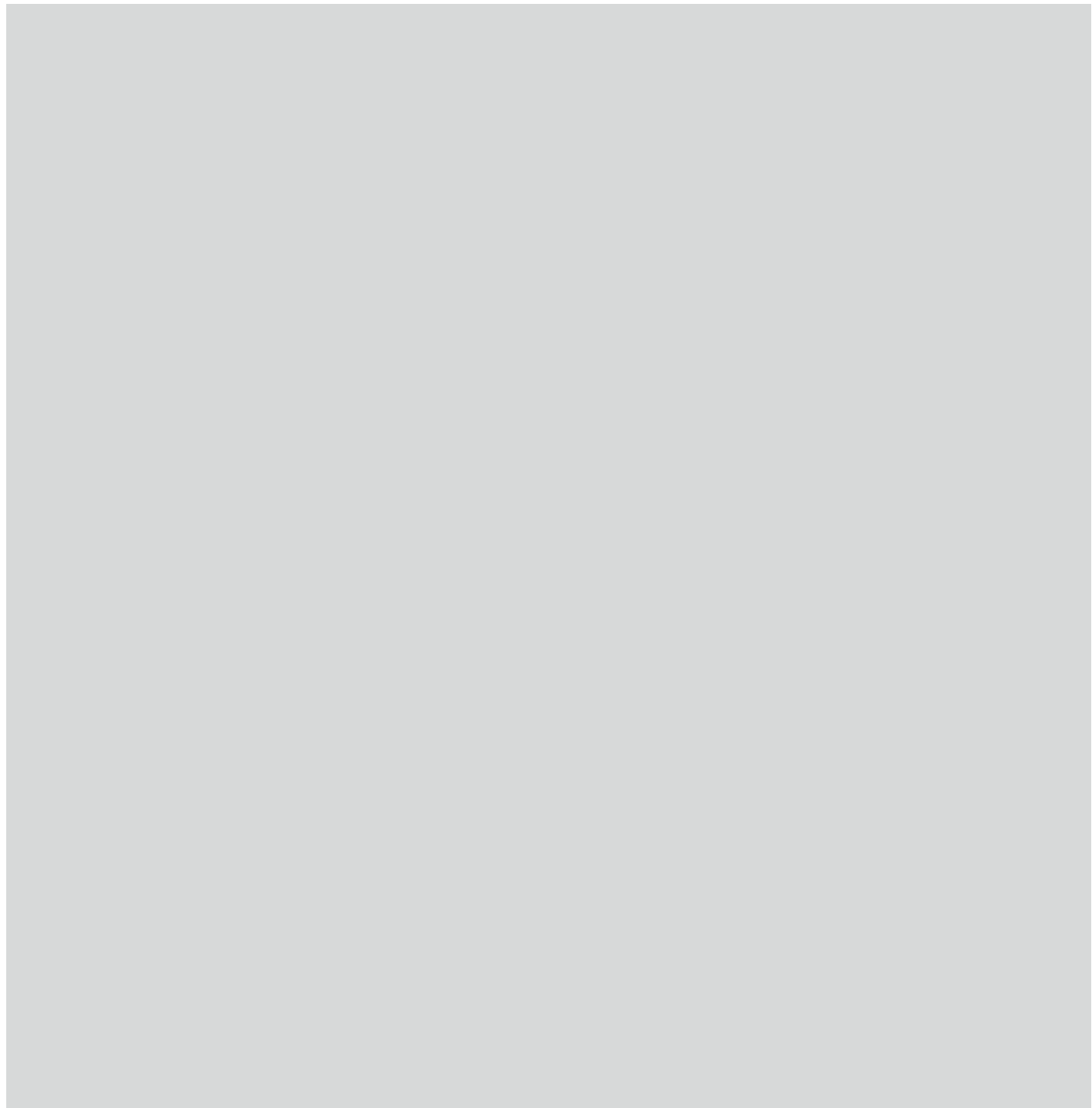
Why is reassurance seeking behaviour problematic? Are you mindful of your mental activity or do you get swept away by it? What is self-directed neuroplasticity? What are the four steps to dismantle the associations between unhealthy thoughts and habits? What is the ultimate aim of the steps? What is Hebb's law and the quantum Zeno effect? Is your mind prone to black-and-white thinking and catastrophizing in the context of relationships? If so, what can you do to handle this?

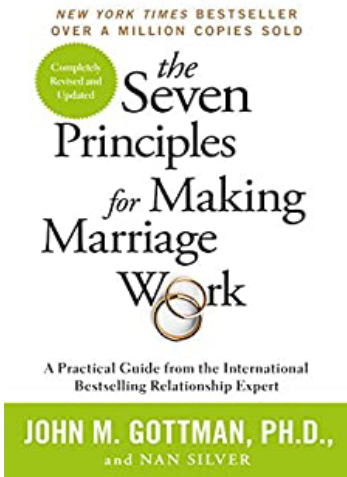




Getting the Love You Want by Harville Hendrix

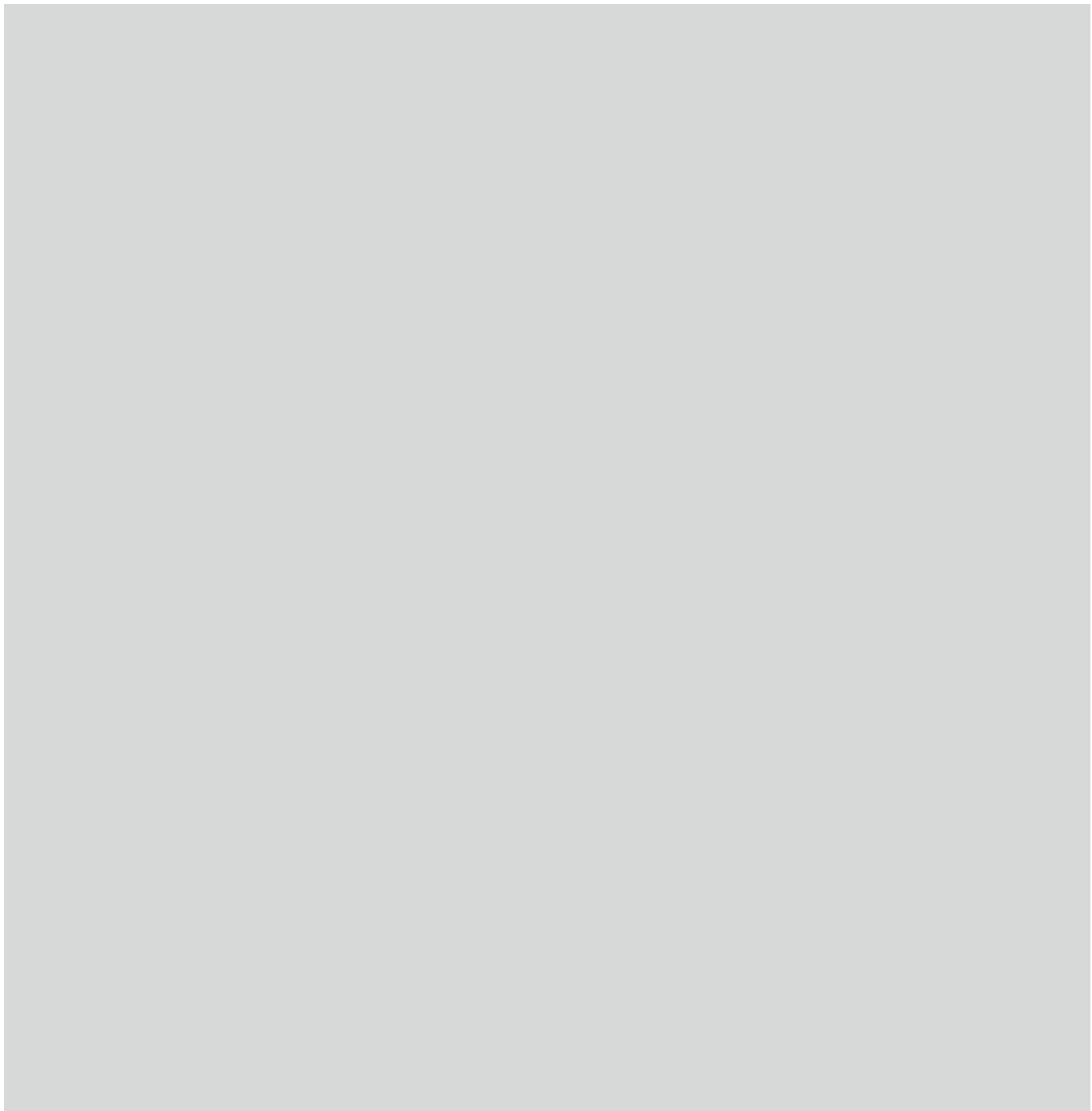
What is an Imago figure and how does it impact you? We see our partners as caregivers on an unconscious level – why is this unhelpful? What would be on your list as part of the caring days program? If you're in a relationship, are you interested in trying this with your partner? What are the three steps to improve communication in a relationship?

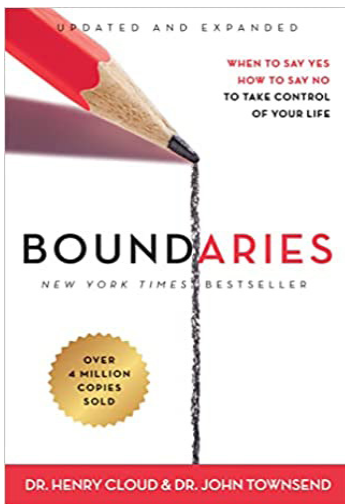




The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work by John Gottman

What is a love map and why is it important? Which system needs to be intact for a relationship to work? How can you assess this system? What is meant by “turning toward your partner”? What are the two kinds of relationship conflicts? What is emotional flooding and why is it important to understand? Which four behaviours suggest the end of a relationship is near?





Boundaries

by Henry Cloud and John Townsend

Which do you resonate with most: the compliant, avoidant, controller, or nonresponsive? What does it mean when boundaries cause harm in a relationship? What does the emotion of resentment indicate? What kind of boundaries did you see growing up? If you have boundary issues, what are the unmet needs associated with them? If you're in a romantic relationship, can you recognise any boundary issues? If you're single, can you identify any boundary problems in your last relationship?

“Short-term discomfort is a small price to pay for having functional, long-term relationships.”



When the People in Your Life
Use Fear, Obligation, and
Guilt to Manipulate You

Emotional Blackmail

Susan Forward, PhD

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling
Author of *Toxic Parents*

With Donna Frazier

Emotional Blackmail

by Susan Forward

What is emotional blackmail? What are the six key stages of emotional blackmail? What are some examples of FOG? Which traits make you susceptible to emotional blackmail? What steps can you take to avoid being emotionally blackmailed? Which emotions are associated with being emotionally blackmailed? Can you think of two examples where you've been the victim and/or perpetrator of emotional blackmail?



If "violent" means acting in ways that result in hurt or harm, then much of how we communicate could indeed be called "violent" communication.

Nonviolent COMMUNICATION

A Language of Life



Words and the way we think matters.
Find common ground with anyone, anywhere,
at any time, both personally and professionally.

MARSHALL B. ROSENBERG, PhD

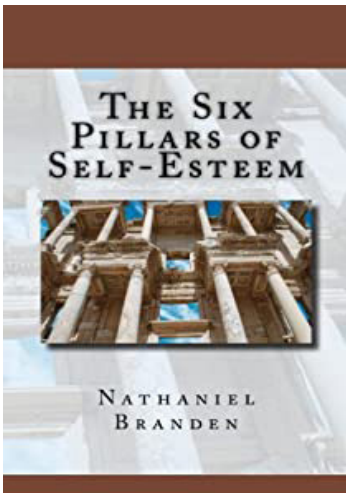
Foreword by Deepak Chopra

Endorsed by Sara Nadella, Arun Gandhi, Tony Robbins,
Marianne Williamson, John Gray, Jack Canfield, Dr. Thomas Gordon, and others

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg

Countries with more judgemental words have a higher number of what? What does it mean to separate observation from evaluation? What response to the phrase "You're the most selfish person I've ever met!" would be aligned with NVC? Are you guilty of not expressing your needs? What are the four stages of NVC? What is positive language? How would the NVC approach address judgmental self-talk? Instead of offering advice, solutions or reassurance, what would the NVC approach advocate doing – and how?

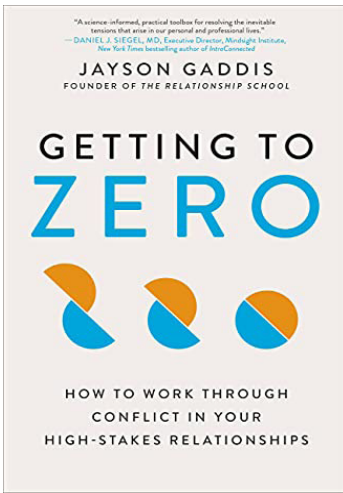




The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem *by Nathaniel Branden*

What is self-esteem really all about according to the author? If you have low self-esteem due to past trauma, what kind of behaviours serve to reinforce it? Which three facets of perception are important to distinguish between? What simple action can we take to increase our sense of self-acceptance? What are the six pillars of self-esteem?

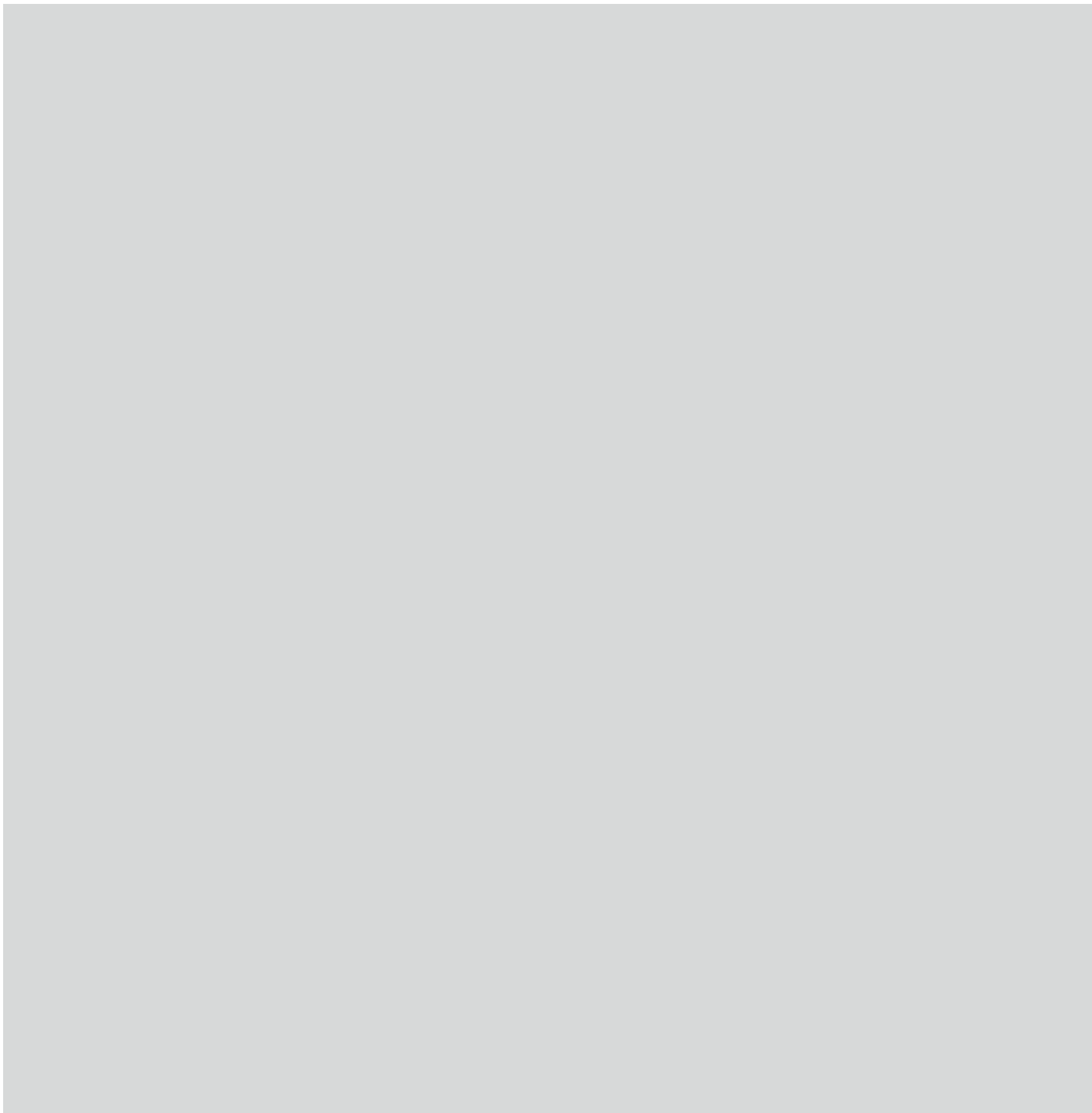


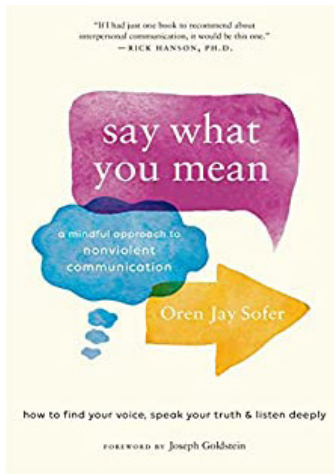


Getting to Zero

by Jayson Gaddis

What are two common causes of relationship conflict? Which four coping mechanisms or “disconnectors” does the author describe and which do you resonate with? What is the conflict box exercise? Which four relational needs give you a stable base for adulthood? What is the conflict repair cycle? What is the NESTR meditation for handling emotional distress? Which conflict behaviours did you witness growing up?





Say What You Mean

by Oren Jay Sofer

Which quality is central to successful communication and connection? What is a choice point? Which unhelpful conflict styles do you resonate with: conflict avoidance, competitive confrontation, passivity, and/or passive aggression? What would be a better approach? Which two Cs can you focus on to improve the quality of your relationships? How should we approach a difficult issue? How good are you at asking for what you need?

“All criticism is the tragic expression of unmet needs.”



You're half way through the challenge!

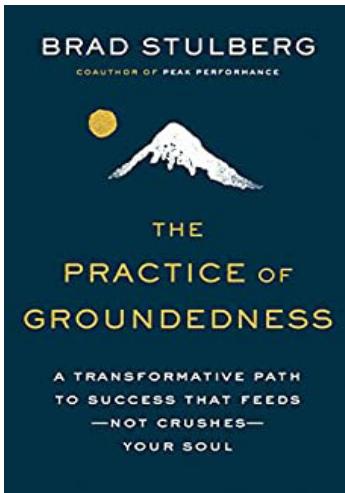
Congratulations!

You're half way through the challenge.

Take a moment to reflect.

What are your most significant insights so far?

A large white rectangular area, intended for the user to write their reflections on the challenge.



The Practice of Groundedness

by Brad Stulberg

How fixated are you on your external achievements and how does this impact your relationships? Which people, activities, and areas of life do you care about the most? How open are you with your feelings? What kind of things would you tell people if you could be completely honest? Are you interested in finding a community to be part of?

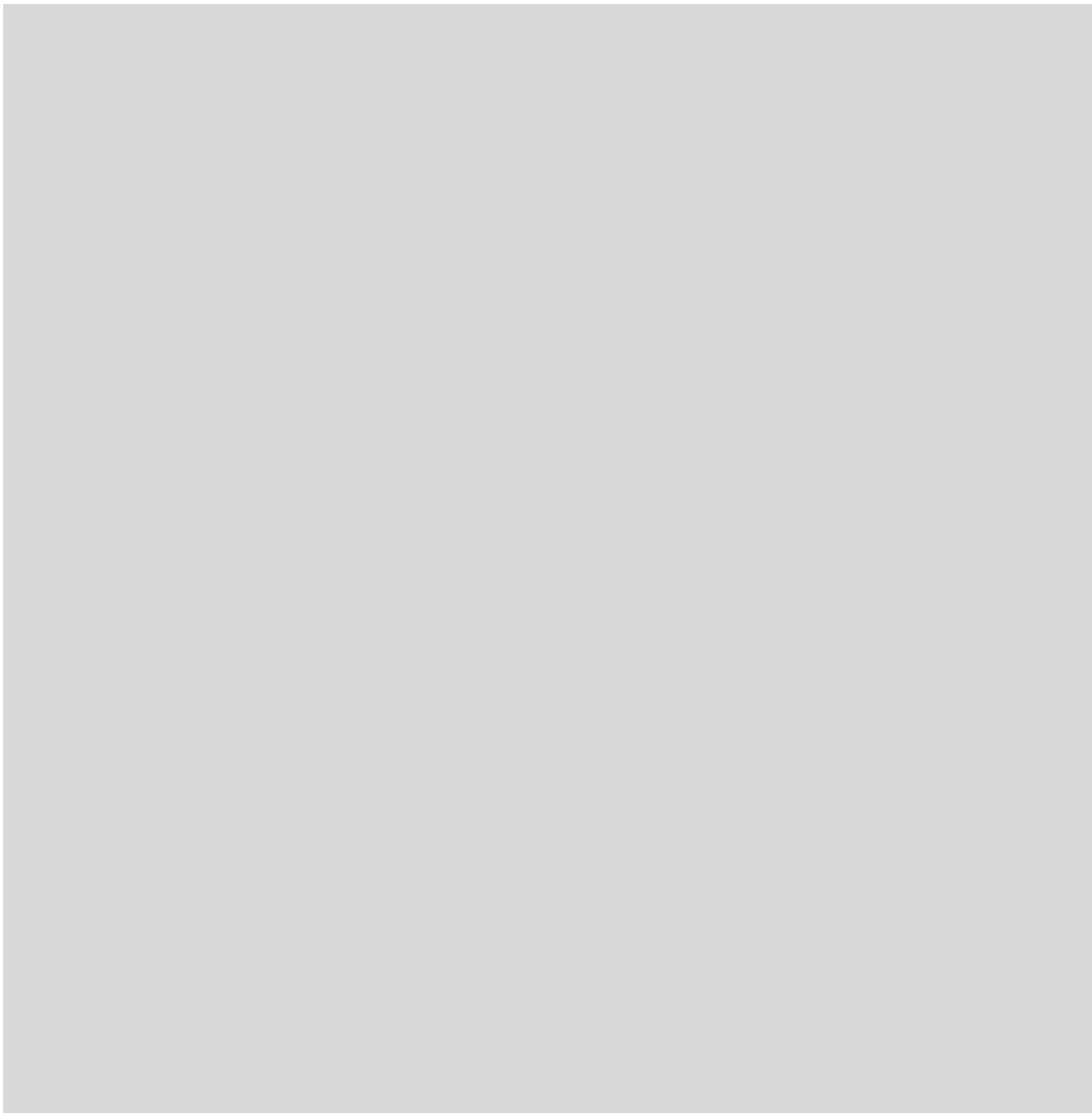


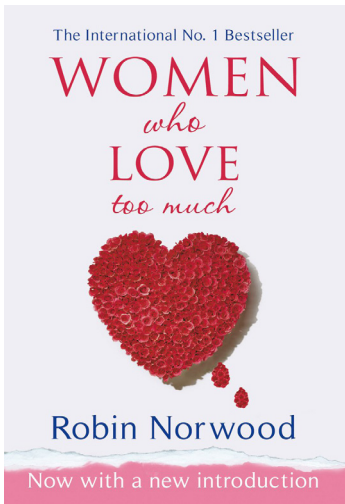


Words Can Change Your Brain

by Andrew Newberg and
Mark Robert Waldman

What exercises do the authors suggest you do to help calm your mind? What simple technique can you use to help quiet your inner speech? What's the fourth step to becoming a better communicator? How can you identify your inner values? What can you do to invoke a natural smile whilst communicating? What kind of tone leads to cooperation? What three things can we do to hear and be heard? Which 12 steps does the author give for effective communication?





Women Who Love Too Much *by Robin Norwood*

Note: This book is applicable to people of any gender. What can love be confused with? What do people who love too much tend to be drawn towards and why does this happen? What other addictions are commonly seen in people who love too much? What characterises people who successfully overcome these unhelpful patterns? What are meaningful connections grounded in?





Attached

Are you Anxious, Avoidant or Secure?
How the science of adult attachment
can help you find – and keep – love

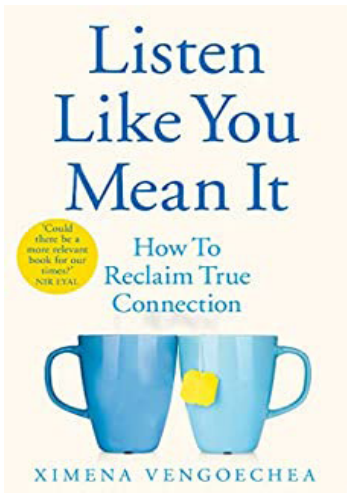
DR. AMIR LEVINE AND
RACHEL S.F. HELLER, M.A.

Attached by Amir Levine

What's typical of the anxious and avoidant attachment styles (note: people that identify with both spectrums are classified as "fearful avoidant/disorganised attachment")? What characterises those with a predominantly secure attachment style? How can you increase your chance of having a healthy relationship? What should you keep in mind during relationship conflict?

"The secret to effective communication is to be specific about your problem without assigning blame to your partner."

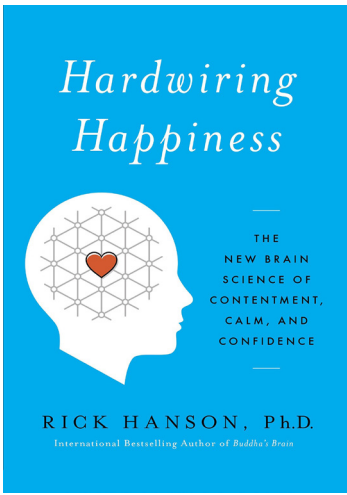




Listen Like You Mean It *by Ximena Vengoechea*

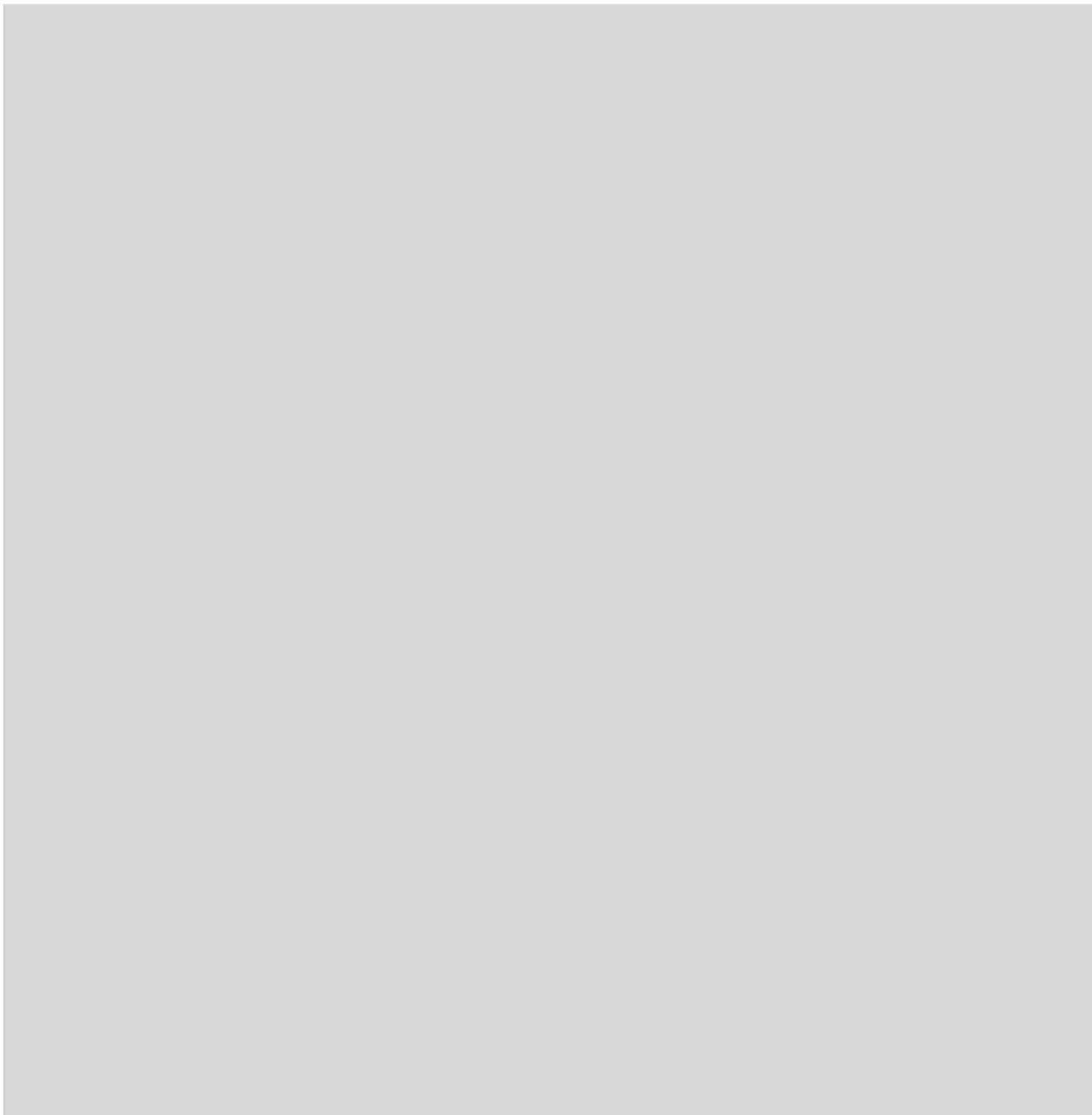
What's meant by surface listening vs empathetic listening? Which do you engage in more? What are the three qualities needed for empathetic listening? What's your listening style? Are you prone to listener's drain? How might you become more comfortable with exiting conversations where necessary?

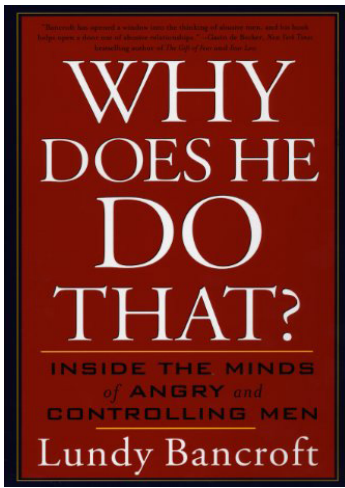




Hardwiring Happiness *by Rick Hanson*

The majority of people have a “sad amygdala” – how could this affect your relationships? What are your thoughts on Stanley Schachter’s research and imaginal nurturing? What could you do when you notice the negativity bias in action? Which new habits could you adopt to counteract the negativity bias?



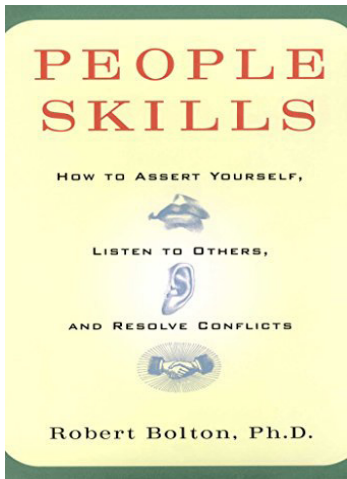


Why Does He Do That?

by *Lundy Bancroft*

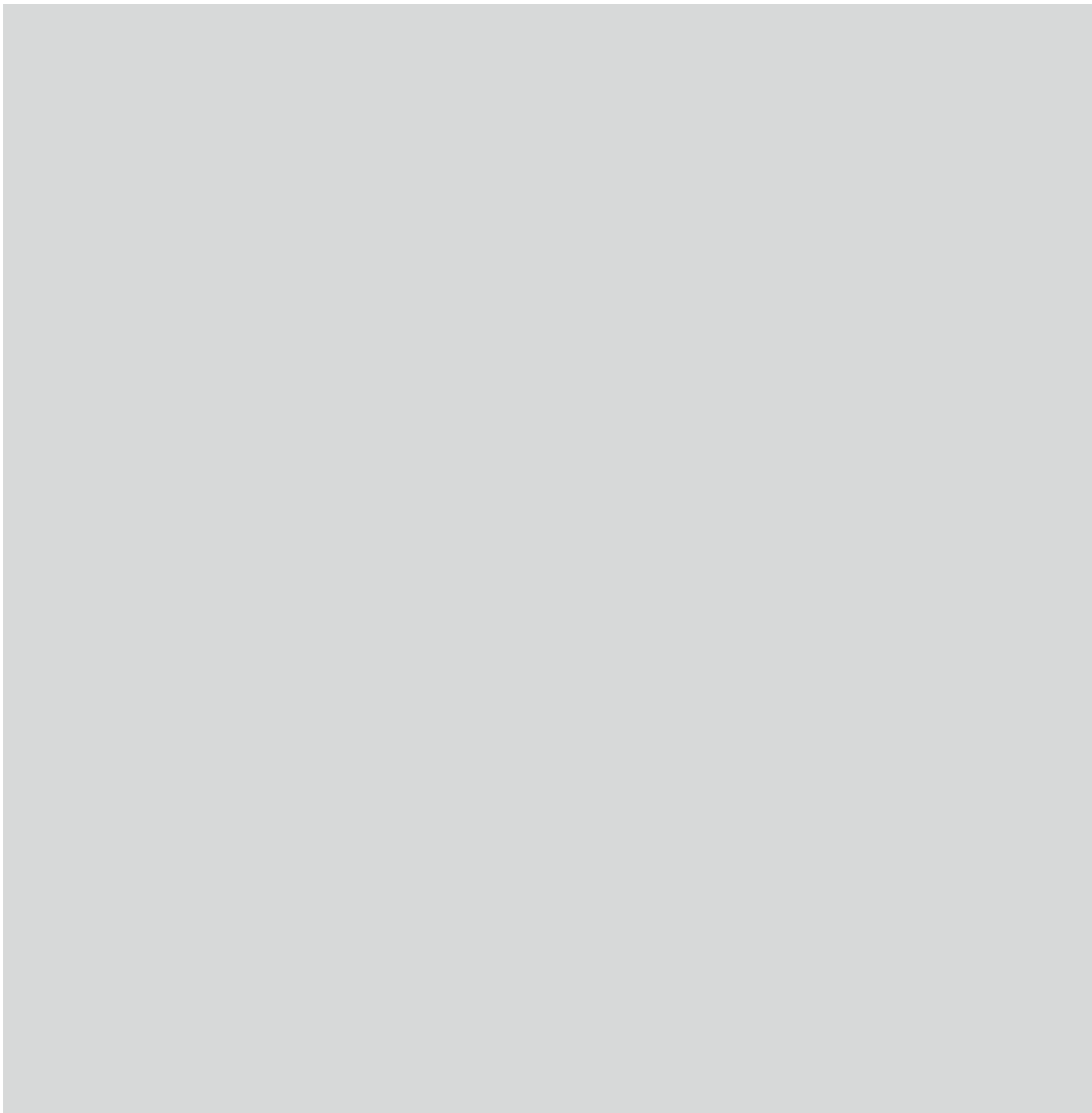
Note: This book is applicable to people of any gender with anger issues. What does the author believe abusive behaviours stem from? "Abusiveness is not a product of a [someone's] emotional injuries" - what is it a product of? How do abusers act early in relationships? How do abusers maintain their moral high ground? What are the signs of abuse to spot early on? Why is the "wait and see" attitude dangerous? What are two common precursors to physical violence? What's involved in a safety plan?





People Skills *by Robert Bolton*

What are your communication roadblocks? Reflective listening communicates acceptance and understanding - which listening skills can you develop to practice this? What can repressed emotions lead to? What is a three-part assertion message? What can you do when someone responds defensively to an assertion message? What can you do to help develop your conflict-resolution skills? What's the collaborative problem-solving method?



THE
POWER
OF THE
OTHER

The Startling Effect Other People
Have on You, from the Boardroom
to the Bedroom and Beyond—
and What to Do About It

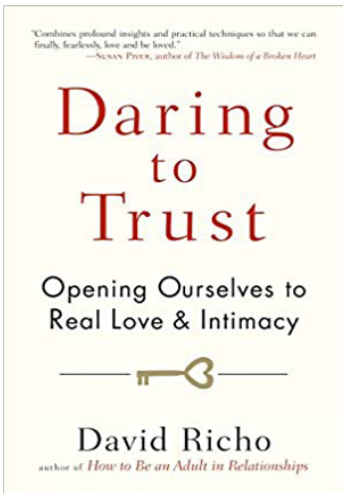
Dr. Henry Cloud

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

The Power of the Other by Henry Cloud

Why is understanding your mind a key element of living well? Which three kinds of relationship should you avoid? Corner three relationships may not appear harmful on the surface – what makes them unhealthy? What does a corner four relationship look like? What is internalization? What are the five criteria for assessing whether or not you can trust someone?

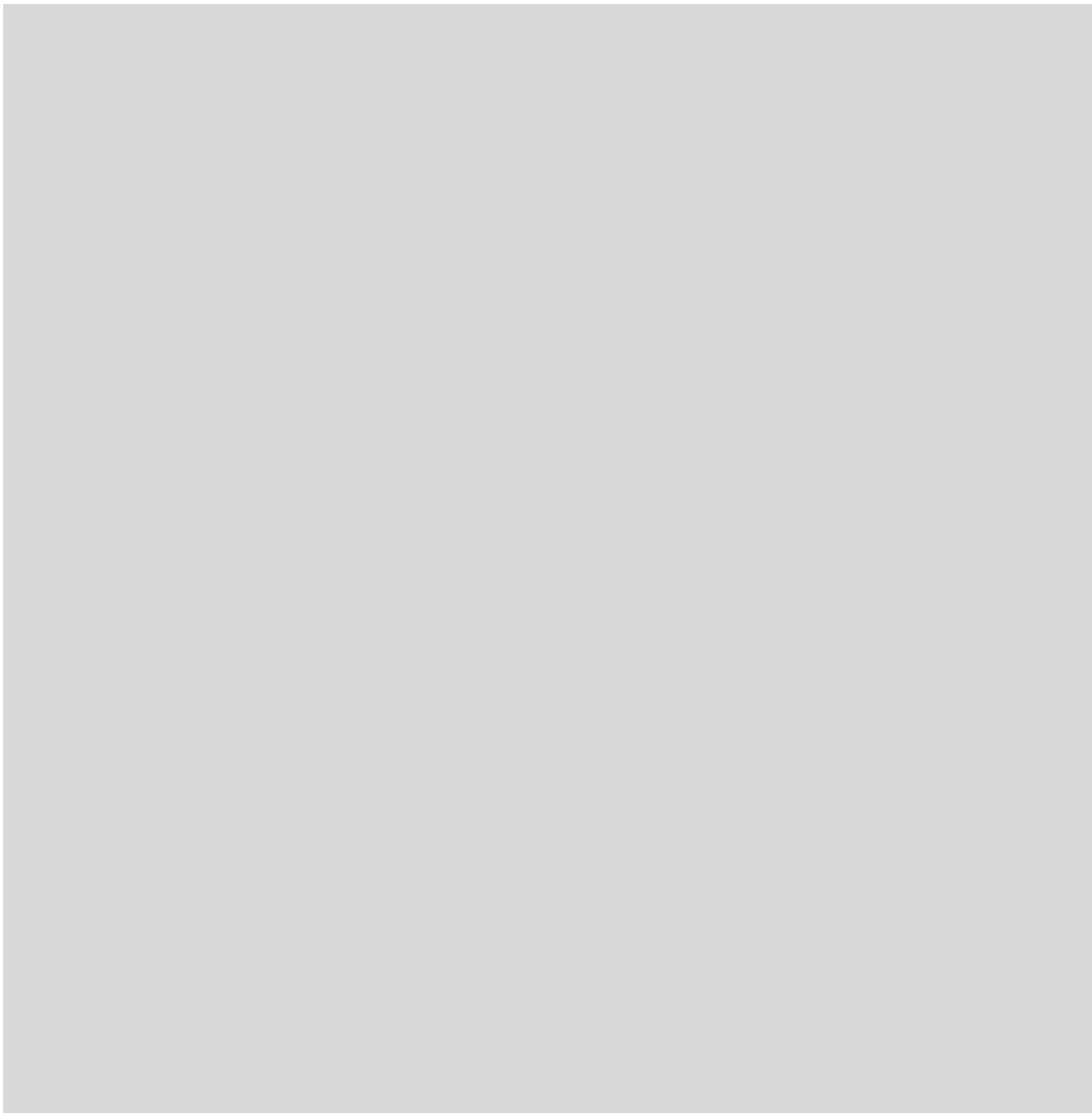


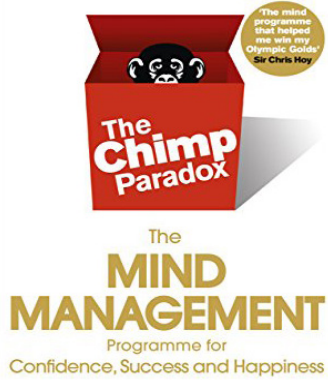


Daring to Trust

by David Richo

How much do you focus on assessing trustworthiness at the start of new relationships? In which ways does your childhood trauma influence your reactions to certain things in relationships? Are you prone to staying in unhealthy relationships? What do you think about core trust?



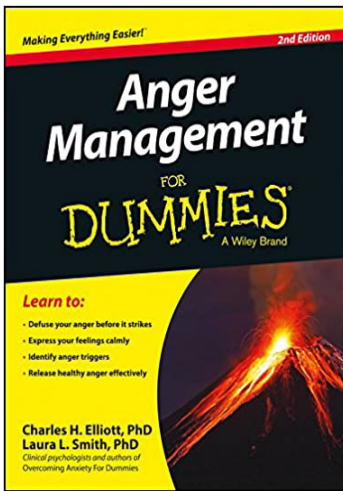


The Chimp Paradox

by Steve Peters

What can you do when you notice your chimp taking over? What's one of your goblins? What three points does the author give to help you understand others? What framework does the author suggest for assertive communication? What good things could you add to your life? How can you cultivate more appreciation for the good things in your life?

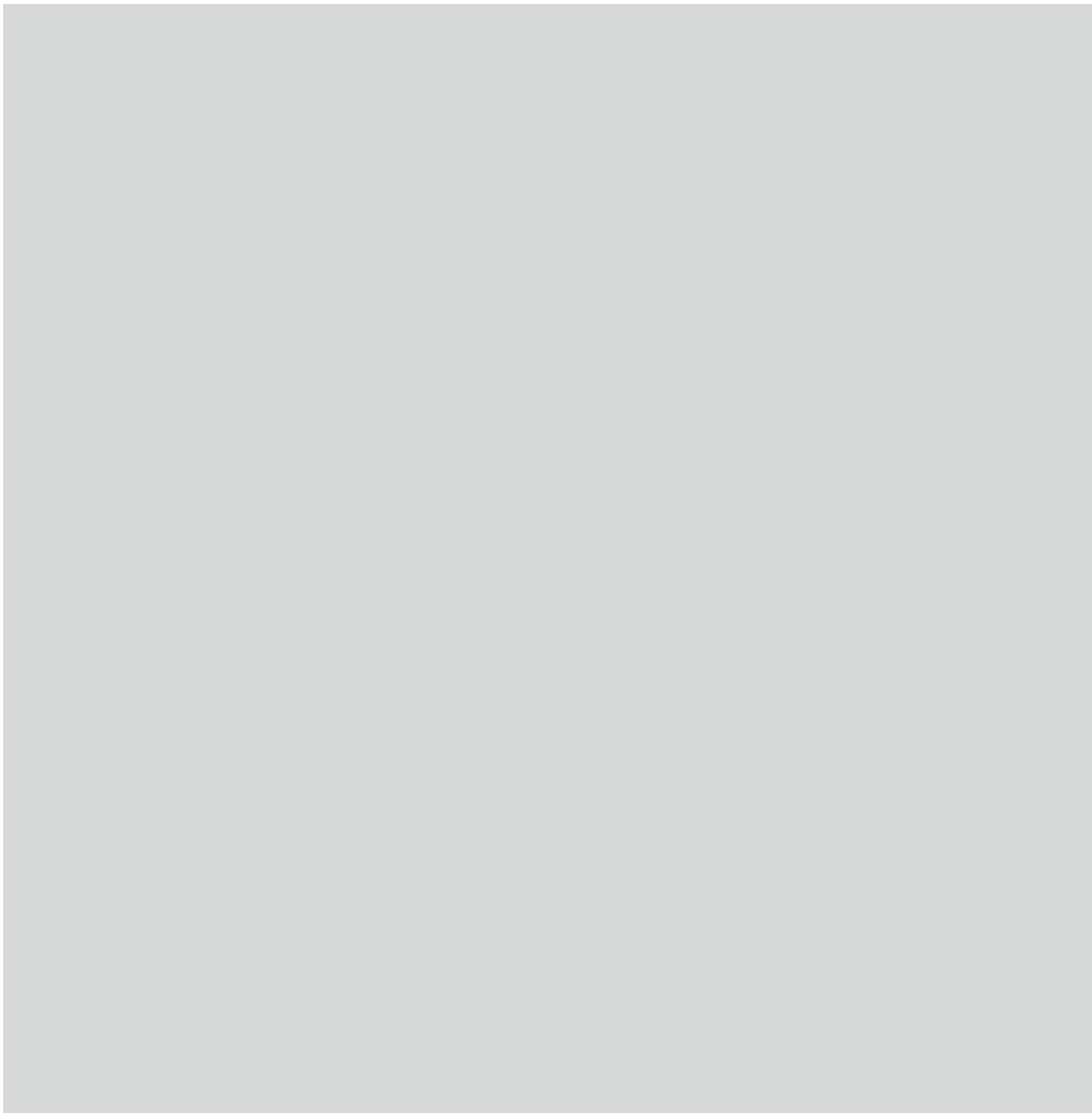


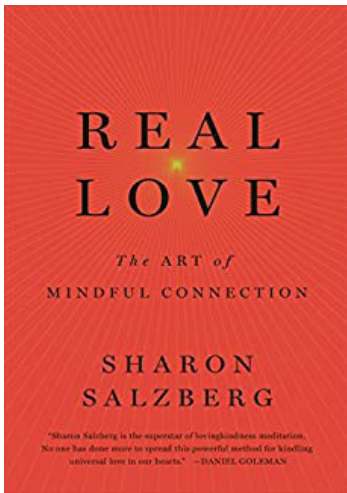


Anger Management for Dummies

by Charles Elliot and Laura Smith

What are the common early signs of anger? How can you manage your anger in the moment? Why is brooding problematic and what can you do to control it? What mindset helps you reduce stress? Which lifestyle habits can help you manage your anger? How might build a habit of slowing down into your life?

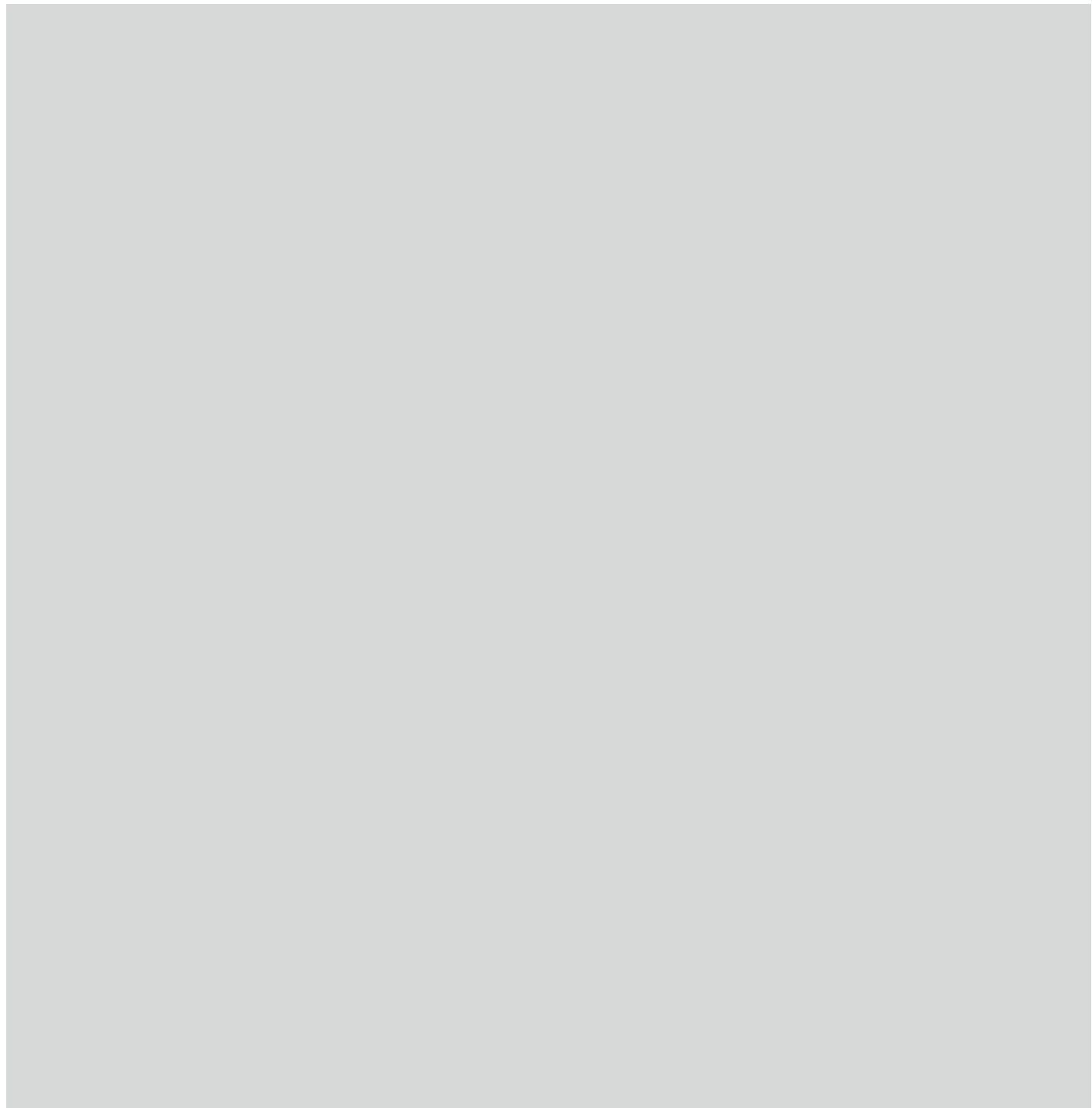


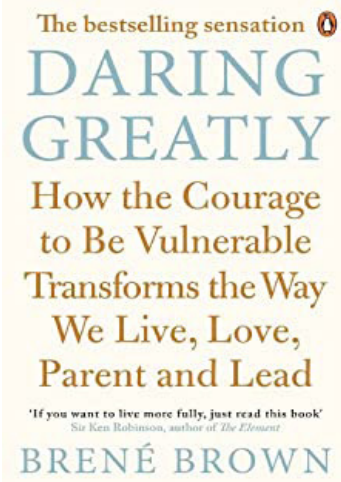


Real Love

by Sharon Salzberg

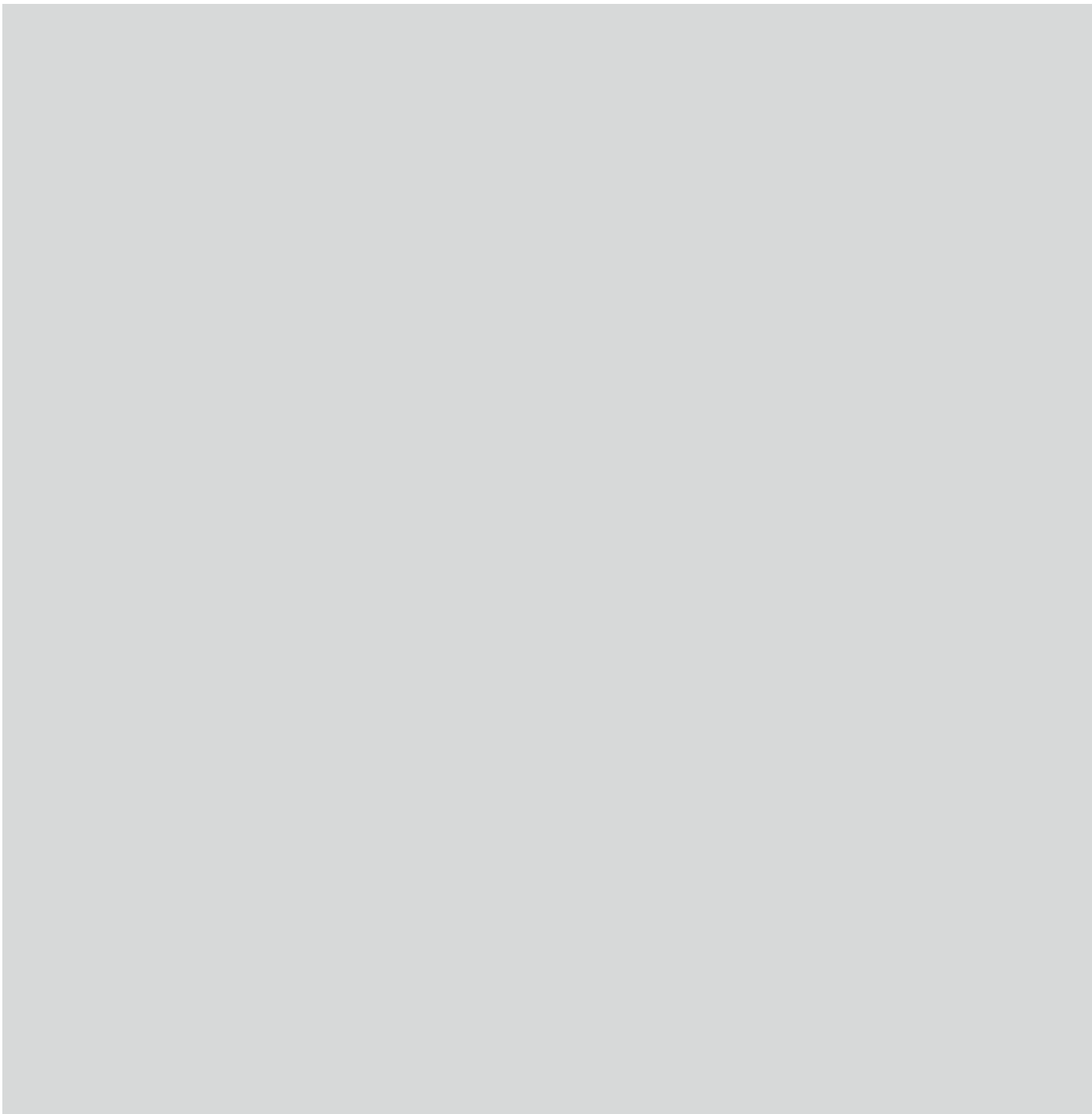
What's the best way to approach difficult emotions? Do you ever challenge mind-reading thoughts? Instead of attacking them, what could we do when we're angry with our partner? What did psychologists John and Julie Gottman discover criticism and defensiveness leads to? How do happy couples approach differences of opinion? Do you have a "Magical Other" fantasy? How strong are your judgemental tendencies? Do you value similarities over differences? What's the RAIN method?

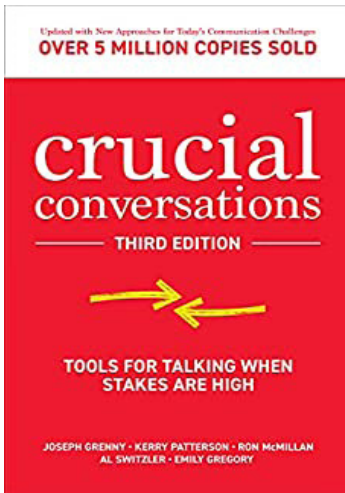




Daring Greatly *by Brené Brown*

What is behind feelings of shame? In what ways does the “never-enough” culture affect you personally? Which shame triggers could you eliminate from your life? How could you embrace more vulnerability? “Failing means that we’re learning something new” – do you have this mindset? What does the author suggest doing to become more shame-resilient?





Crucial Conversations

*by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny,
Ron McMillan & Al Switzler*

What can you do whenever you're "attacked" by opposing ideas? What causes someone to behave aggressively in conversations? What are the two key conditions of a safe conversation? When you notice challenging emotions arising, what can you do? What can you ask someone which might help you to calm down?



Key Points Summary

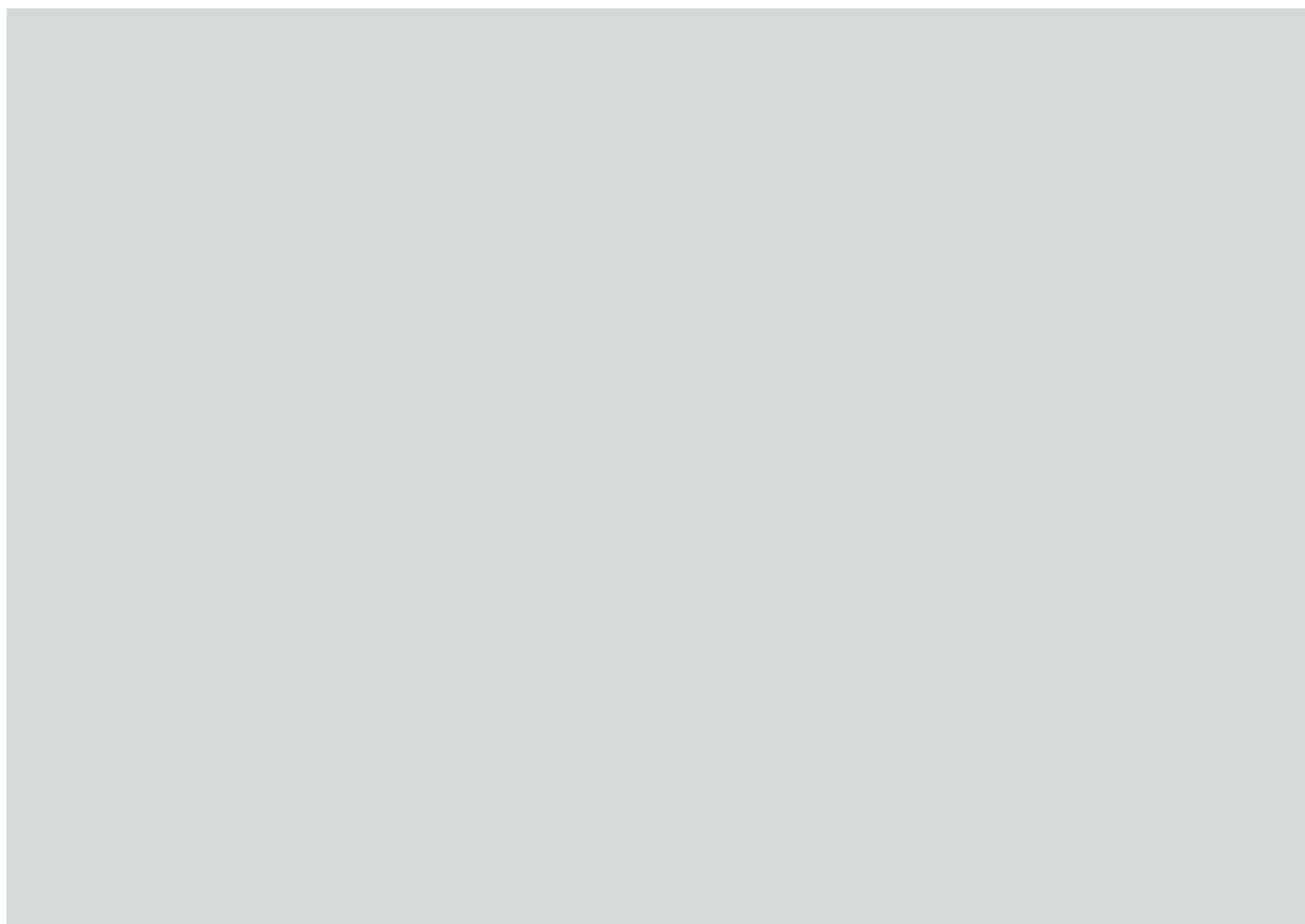
- Healthy relationships involve an ongoing [conflict repair cycle](#); problems are an integral part of all relationships.
- The key to successful long-term relationships is effective communication throughout this cycle. It's the ability to work through relationship issues in an open, respectful way, being direct about your feelings and needs.
- Never assume you know what someone is thinking or feeling – avoid “mind reading”.
- To improve your relationships, work on developing your listening skills, i.e., practice being fully present and use paraphrasing to check your understanding.
- LUFU – listen until they feel understood. Give people enough time and space to express themselves. Communicate understanding and acceptance while listening.
- In difficult conversations, it's important to watch for early warning signs of emotional flooding and strategically calm yourself down. Monitor yourself, noticing your gestures, facial expressions and vocal pitch.
- If you feel emotionally overwhelmed, return to the conversation when your emotions have subsided. (Remember, a chimp communicating with another chimp is never a good idea!)
- We all need to take responsibility for our emotions. Directly blaming someone for your feelings will only result in them feeling guilty and lead to defensiveness and a lack of co-operation.
- To take responsibility for your emotions, work on your distress tolerance skills. Being able to effectively manage your emotions allows you to avoid unnecessary arguments and aggressive communication (for a step-by-step guide to dealing with challenging emotions, see [The Thinking Slow Method](#)).
- Being able to name and lean into your emotions is an important step to defusing them.
- It's also important to be mindful of your unhelpful thinking patterns such as rumination, catastrophising, and [black-and-white thinking](#). Learn to distinguish facts, interpretations and emotions.
- Be mindful of your brain's negativity bias – consciously choose to see the positives.
- If you regularly feel stressed and uncomfortable, it's a sign [you need to set boundaries](#) and become more assertive. Doing this can be nerve-wracking, but it's nothing compared to having your boundaries violated on a long-term basis.
- Think of communicating your feelings and needs as a form of gift-giving – you're providing someone with the opportunity to meet your needs and give you a sense of fulfilment.
- Setting boundaries involves connecting your feelings to your needs and communicating in a clear, non-judgemental way. Want worksheets for this? See [The Mental Wellbeing Toolkit](#).
- A simple framework is: “When you _____, I feel _____, because I need _____. I'd really appreciate it if you could _____.” Remember: observations, feelings, needs and requests.
- When someone violates your boundaries, you can: 1) restate them; 2) issue consequences (i.e., ending the conversation); 3) re-evaluate the relationship.
- Traits that make you vulnerable to boundary violations and abuse include: the need for validation from others, difficulty with confrontation, low self-esteem and a desire to save others. These traits make you more likely to put other people's needs above your own.
- If this sounds like you, remember that you have the right to your own needs, desires, values and beliefs. Stand up for yourself. You are worthy of your own happiness.
- We all have five fundamental relationship needs: attention, acceptance, appreciation, affection, and allowing others to be who they are (the five A's).
- When dealing with relationship conflict or dissatisfaction, the five A's can be a useful framework for understanding what could be improved.
- Romance, passion and desire come and go. Keep the spark alive in long-term relationships through actions that address the five A's. This can range from big gestures such as thoughtful



gifts, to small gestures like responding to your partner in an attentive, caring way. We all make “bids” for each other’s attention and affection throughout the day – responding to these bids is key to cultivating a deeper connection.

- If your parents were [unable to meet your fundamental needs](#) growing up, you may settle for and/or create unhealthy relationships in adulthood.
- Breaking this pattern involves processing your past, [developing self-awareness](#) and communicating your feelings and needs.
- Do not confuse love with obsessive feelings which stem from emotional pain. Take time to assess someone’s trustworthiness and [emotional availability](#). Pay attention to red flags such as speaking badly of previous partners, getting serious too quickly, and putting on a show of generosity that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Signs of a healthy relationship include:
 - 1) Mutual respect between partners
 - 2) Shared meaning, goals and values
 - 3) An intuitive feeling that things are “just right”
 - 4) Addressing each other’s fundamental needs
 - 5) Thinking positively of your partner in their absence
- Signs that a relationship isn’t working include:
 - 1) Lacking a sense of respect and appreciation towards your partner
 - 2) Not trusting your partner and/or feeling unsafe around them
 - 3) A lack of positive feelings in each other’s company
 - 4) No longer desiring physical intimacy
 - 5) Criticism, contempt, defensiveness and/or stonewalling behaviours

My Key Points Summary



My Improving Relationships Action Plan

ACTION STEP	WHEN WILL I DO IT?	DONE ✓

