Tab 1

# Week

5

# Day

1

# Day Title

Autonomy vs. Enmeshment

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Autonomy and enmeshment represent two ends of a spectrum in relationships. Autonomy honors individuality and self-expression, while enmeshment blurs boundaries and erodes authenticity. The healthiest connections allow for both freedom and intimacy, creating space for each person to remain whole while staying deeply connected.

# Daily Passage

Every meaningful relationship asks us to balance two essential human needs: the need to belong and the need to be free. Autonomy and connection are not opposites, but they often feel like they are pulling us in different directions. When we lean too far into autonomy, we may isolate ourselves, holding back from intimacy and support. When we lean too far into connection, we may lose touch with our individuality, slipping into enmeshment. The art of healthy relating is learning to honor both freedom and closeness without sacrificing either.

**Autonomy** means the ability to know ourselves, make choices, and express individuality. It is the confidence to stand in our own truth, even when it differs from those around us. In relationships, autonomy shows up when we can say, “I need some time for myself today,” or “This is how I feel, even if you see it differently.” Autonomy is not selfishness: it is self-respect. It allows us to show up authentically, rather than molding ourselves into what we think others want.

**Enmeshment**, on the other hand, blurs boundaries between people. In enmeshed relationships, one person’s feelings, choices, or identity become overly tied to the other’s. Instead of two individuals relating, the connection begins to feel like a fusion where individuality is lost. Enmeshment might look like always needing the other’s approval before making decisions, absorbing their moods as if they were our own, or avoiding conflict to keep the peace at the cost of our own truth. On the surface, enmeshment can feel like closeness, but it erodes authenticity and creates dependence.

Autonomy fosters vitality in relationships because it keeps us growing as individuals. Without autonomy, relationships risk becoming stagnant. We stop bringing new energy, perspectives, and experiences into the connection. Enmeshment, by contrast, may feel safe in the short term, but over time it breeds resentment, lack of clarity, and even burnout. True connection requires two whole people choosing each other freely, not two half-selves bound together out of fear.

It helps to remember that autonomy is not distance. We can be deeply connected while also standing firmly in who we are. Autonomy creates space for honesty, creativity, and difference, which enriches connection rather than threatening it. The healthiest relationships are not those without independence, but those where independence is honored as part of intimacy.

In practice, finding balance often means learning to notice when we are sliding toward enmeshment. Are we saying yes when we really mean no? Are we holding back our needs or desires because we fear disapproval? Are we defining our worth based on how the other feels? These are signs we may be losing autonomy in the relationship. Bringing awareness to these patterns allows us to realign.

Building autonomy requires courage, especially if we grew up in families or cultures where self-expression was discouraged. It asks us to voice our truth, set boundaries, and risk disappointment. At the same time, we need to remember that autonomy is not about rejecting closeness. It is about creating a foundation where closeness can thrive without erasing individuality.

Healthy relationships hold both: autonomy and connection, individuality and togetherness. The tension between them is not a problem to be solved, but a rhythm to be embraced. At times, we may lean more into autonomy: pursuing personal growth, exploring individual interests, or setting boundaries. At other times, we lean more into connection: seeking support, sharing intimacy, or creating shared rituals. The dance between the two is what keeps relationships alive and balanced.

# Alternative View

There are times when autonomy naturally gives way to greater togetherness. Illness, crisis, or major life transitions may require more closeness and less independence. In these seasons, leaning into connection is not enmeshment—it is care. The key is returning to balance once stability is restored.

# Activity

Where do you experience the most autonomy in your relationships, and how does this impact your sense of connection?

When do you recognize yourself becoming overly enmeshed, and what emotions accompany that feeling?

What practices help you maintain your individuality while also fostering closeness?

How can you actively honor both freedom and belonging in a significant relationship in your life right now?

# Sources

David Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 1997  
 Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002

# Domain

Relational and Community

# Modality

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Tab 2

# Week

5

# Day

2

# Day Title

Losing Ourselves in Relationships

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Losing ourselves in relationships happens when our sense of self becomes overly tied to another person. It shows up as people-pleasing, self-abandonment, or emotional fusion. While these patterns often arise from fear of loss, they ultimately erode authenticity and intimacy. Reclaiming ourselves means practicing awareness, expressing needs, and honoring individuality while staying connected.

# Daily Passage

Healthy relationships allow us to bring our full selves into connection while also making space for the other person. Yet many of us have experienced the opposite: instead of becoming more whole in relationship, we begin to lose touch with who we are. This pattern, often described in the past as “codependency,” is now better understood as losing ourselves in relationships. It is a dynamic where our sense of identity, worth, or emotional stability becomes overly tied to another person.

Losing ourselves in relationships can take many forms. Sometimes it looks like prioritizing the other person’s needs so consistently that we neglect our own. We may feel responsible for their happiness, regulate our mood based on theirs, or adjust our choices to avoid conflict. Other times, it shows up as people-pleasing—saying yes when we want to say no, hiding our true feelings, or reshaping our identity to match what we think the other wants. Over time, this creates a subtle erosion of authenticity.

This dynamic is often rooted in fear. We may fear abandonment, rejection, or conflict, so we trade authenticity for closeness. Ironically, while these patterns are meant to preserve connection, they tend to create the opposite. When we suppress our needs, ignore our boundaries, or silence our voices, resentment builds, intimacy fades, and the relationship becomes less real. Connection thrives on authenticity, not performance.

One common sign of losing ourselves in relationship is the inability to separate our emotions from the other person’s. If they are sad, we feel responsible for cheering them up. If they are angry, we feel like it is our fault. While empathy is healthy, absorbing another’s emotional state as our own crosses into enmeshment. It blurs the line between where we end and the other begins.

Another sign is an ongoing pattern of self-abandonment. We might give up hobbies, friendships, or personal goals to keep the relationship intact. We may silence our opinions or avoid expressing needs because we fear rocking the boat. This creates a version of ourselves that is smaller and less authentic. Over time, the relationship may feel heavy or draining because it requires constant self-suppression.

Losing ourselves is not always obvious at first. In the early stages of connection, closeness can feel intoxicating, and it is natural to spend more time and energy with someone new. The risk arises when this closeness becomes our default, and individuality is consistently sacrificed. What begins as devotion can slide into dependence if we do not remain attentive to our own wholeness.

The path back to wholeness begins with awareness. We can ask: Am I expressing my needs openly, or am I holding back? Am I making choices from my own values, or from fear of rejection? Do I still recognize myself in this relationship, or have I become unrecognizable to myself? These questions help us notice when we have drifted from autonomy into unhealthy fusion.

Reclaiming ourselves in relationships does not mean pulling away or becoming distant. It means practicing balance—staying connected while also staying true to who we are. This can look like re-engaging with personal passions, reconnecting with friends, or practicing saying no with kindness. It can also mean expressing feelings honestly, even when it feels risky. Every small step toward authenticity strengthens both autonomy and intimacy.

It is also important to recognize that losing ourselves in relationships is a common and often learned pattern. Many of us grew up in families where boundaries were blurred or where love felt conditional. These early dynamics can shape how we show up as adults. Awareness allows us to see these patterns with compassion rather than shame. They are not signs of failure, but invitations to grow.

# Alternative View

There are times when setting aside our own needs temporarily is healthy and necessary, such as caring for a sick loved one or supporting a partner in crisis. Sacrifice and flexibility are part of love. The difference is whether these moments are balanced by a consistent return to authenticity and whether they arise from choice rather than fear.

# Activity

When have you noticed yourself losing parts of who you are in a relationship?

What fears drive you to silence your needs, feelings, or boundaries?

How can you begin to reclaim space for your individuality while staying connected?

What small practices help you feel whole and authentic in your relationships?

# Sources

David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002  
 Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*, 1986

# Domain

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# Modality

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Tab 3

# Week

5

# Day

3

# Day Title

Differentiation: Staying True to Ourselves While in Connection

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Differentiation is the ability to stay rooted in our own values, feelings, and needs while remaining open to connection. Without it, relationships often slip into enmeshment, avoidance, or conflict. With it, relationships become more authentic, resilient, and capable of supporting both individuality and intimacy.

# Daily Passage

In every relationship, two powerful forces pull at us. One is the pull toward attachment and togetherness, the deep human longing to belong, be loved, and feel safe. The other is the pull toward autonomy and individuality, the drive to be fully ourselves, with our own thoughts, feelings, and values. When we are poorly differentiated, these forces feel like an either/or choice: either we stay close and lose ourselves, or we stay true to ourselves and risk distance. Differentiation is what allows us to live in the both/and. It is the ability to be fully ourselves while also remaining deeply connected to another.

Differentiation in relationships is the ability to maintain a strong sense of self while fostering emotional closeness. It is the capacity to define and express our own needs, feelings, and values, even when they differ from the other, without collapsing into fear or reactivity. A differentiated person can say, “I feel strongly about this, even if you see it differently,” and still remain connected. This balance creates the conditions for authenticity, intimacy, and growth.

Poor differentiation often shows up as emotional fusion, where one partner’s feelings spill over and trigger the other, creating a sense of responsibility for each other’s emotions. Intimacy can then feel overwhelming, leading couples to either avoid closeness or engage in constant conflict. In some cases, people resort to cutoffs, pulling away from family or loved ones for months or years, as a desperate attempt to reclaim autonomy. In others, we see symbiosis, where partners avoid conflict at all costs, or the symbiotic-hostile dynamic, where constant fighting becomes a way to maintain distance. In all of these patterns, the core issue is the inability to stay ourselves while also staying close.

Healthy differentiation, on the other hand, allows us to stay grounded even when the relationship is under stress. Instead of absorbing another’s emotional flooding, we can listen, regulate, and respond with clarity. Instead of avoiding conflict or escalating it, we can engage in constructive dialogue, staying present without losing our balance. This requires a solid sense of self, emotional regulation, and clear boundaries.

The key components of differentiation include:

* **Individuality and autonomy**: the ability to know and express our own thoughts, feelings, and needs, even when they differ from our partner’s.
* **Connection and togetherness**: the ability to remain emotionally present and engaged, rather than withdrawing or shutting down.
* **Emotional regulation**: the ability to stay calm and grounded, even when the other is triggered or distressed.
* **Boundaries**: the ability to set and honor limits while respecting those of the other.

When these components are in place, relationships thrive. Differentiation enhances individuality by encouraging us to pursue passions, friendships, and personal growth, all of which enrich the relationship. It improves communication because we can express ourselves honestly without fear of rejection. It promotes healthier conflict because we can engage in difficult conversations without either avoiding or escalating them. It also fosters mutual support, allowing us to celebrate one another’s independence rather than feeling threatened by it. Ultimately, differentiation sustains long-term intimacy by creating a relationship that evolves as each person continues to grow.

Differentiation is not something we master in isolation. It is forged in the heat of real relationships, where our buttons get pushed and our edges get revealed. When we practice differentiation, we are not striving for perfection but strengthening our ability to remain authentic even in the midst of intensity. Four practices can help us grow in this capacity:

Differentiation begins with knowing ourselves. This means recognizing both our strengths and our shadows, and being willing to own our flaws rather than hide or deny them. When we can hold the fullness of who we are with honesty, we are less likely to abandon ourselves in relationships. Standing steady allows us to bring our whole selves forward without apology.

Staying grounded in the face of another’s strong emotions is one of the hardest parts of connection. Instead of becoming defensive or shutting down, differentiation invites us to listen and absorb without collapsing. When a loved one shares criticism or hurt, we can practice hearing and internalizing what they are communicating by receiving their words with openness, pausing before reacting, and considering their perspective without losing our own. This steadiness creates space for dialogue rather than escalation.

Differentiation requires the ability to regulate our own emotional world. Practices like mindfulness, breathwork, journaling, or simply naming our feelings aloud help us keep a quiet mind and calm heart. When we can soothe ourselves rather than relying solely on others to do it, we free our relationships from the burden of carrying our every storm. Inner calm allows us to remain connected without being overwhelmed.

Relationships are not meant to be easy; they are meant to grow us. Differentiation calls us to embrace relationships as crucibles for transformation, where ruptures and repairs are part of the journey. Choosing the long road of love means staying present through conflict, misunderstanding, and the messy moments of being human together. Rather than seeing these as signs of failure, we can view them as opportunities to deepen authenticity and resilience.

Differentiation is not about being distant or stubborn. It is not the refusal to compromise. Rather, it is about being able to hold onto our truth without diminishing our capacity for intimacy. It allows us to remain in dialogue even when differences emerge, and to trust that connection is strengthened, not weakened, by authenticity.

# Alternative View

Differentiation is an ongoing process, not a final achievement. There will be times when we lean too far into autonomy or too far into togetherness. The goal is not perfect balance at all times but a willingness to return to authenticity and connection again and again.

# Activity

When do you struggle most to maintain your individuality while staying connected to others?

What is your typical reaction to conflict—do you withdraw, evade, or push people away?

What practices help you remain true to yourself while also being present with others?

Where in your life can you practice being both assertive and composed?

# Sources

David Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 1997  
 Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Connection*, 2001  
 Brene Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*, 2021

Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002

# Domain

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Tab 4

# Week

5

# Day

4

# Day Title

The Myth of “Losing Ourselves in Love”

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

The idea of “losing yourself in love” is a cultural myth that romanticizes fusion at the cost of authenticity. While it may seem appealing, it leads to dependency, self-abandonment, and imbalance. True love expands rather than erases the self. Healthy relationships support interdependence, where individuality and intimacy coexist in balance.

# Daily Passage

Popular culture often romanticizes the idea of losing ourselves in love. Movies, songs, and stories tell us that real love means being swept away, becoming one, or making the other person our entire world. While this imagery may feel passionate and alluring, it can be misleading and even harmful. Love that requires us to abandon ourselves is not love that sustains us.

The myth of losing ourselves in love suggests that the highest form of connection is total fusion. In this story, our individuality dissolves into the relationship, and our partner becomes the source of our identity, purpose, and joy. While this may feel intoxicating in the beginning, it eventually leads to imbalance. When we rely entirely on another for fulfillment, we place an impossible burden on them and disconnect from our own inner resources.

True love does not erase the self. It expands it. Healthy relationships allow us to remain whole and authentic while also sharing life deeply with another. In fact, when we stay grounded in who we are, love becomes richer and more resilient. We can offer presence, support, and intimacy without fear of losing ourselves.

This myth often takes root in early experiences. Many of us grew up hearing phrases like “my other half” or “you complete me.” While sweet on the surface, these expressions imply that we are incomplete on our own. If we internalize this belief, we may enter relationships expecting another person to fill our emptiness or fix our pain. Instead of bringing our wholeness into connection, we look for someone else to provide it, which creates dependency rather than intimacy.

Another way the myth shows up is in the belief that sacrifice equals love. Of course, compromise and generosity are part of any relationship, but when sacrifice becomes chronic self-abandonment, the relationship suffers. Love that requires us to silence our needs, shrink our dreams, or betray our values is not love that honors us. Over time, this erodes authenticity and can lead to resentment.

The power of this myth is reinforced daily by cultural conditioning. Stories that glorify grand sacrifice, music that equates longing with love, and films that end with “happily ever after” when two people finally come together all send us the same message: real love means merging completely. Without questioning it, we may carry these images into our own lives, believing that losing ourselves is both normal and noble. Yet when we begin to unlearn these cultural scripts, we can write a different story—one where love honors individuality as much as togetherness.

Letting go of this myth means redefining what love truly is. Love is not losing ourselves; it is finding more of ourselves in connection. Healthy relationships act as mirrors, reflecting back our strengths and growth edges. They encourage us to expand, heal, and evolve. When two whole people choose each other freely, the relationship becomes a space of vitality rather than a refuge from incompleteness.

It also means embracing interdependence rather than dependence. Interdependence honors both connection and individuality. It allows us to rely on one another while still maintaining autonomy. In practice, this looks like sharing joys and burdens while also nurturing our personal passions. It is saying, “I love you, and I still need time for myself,” or, “I value our bond, and I also value my friendships and goals.” Interdependence balances closeness with freedom, weaving love into the fabric of a larger, more whole life.

Ultimately, love is not about losing ourselves but about co-creating something new together. When we stay rooted in who we are, we bring our authenticity into the relationship, and from that place, a partnership can grow that is honest, resilient, and nourishing. Instead of seeking completion in another, we discover the joy of walking alongside someone who celebrates our wholeness as much as their own.

The myth of losing ourselves in love may seem romantic, but it actually diminishes both love and selfhood. True love calls us to stay grounded in who we are while opening our hearts to another. It asks us to show up fully, not as half-selves seeking completion, but as whole beings creating something new together.

# Alternative View

There are moments when being swept away in love can feel beautiful and transformative. In the early stages of connection, immersion can deepen bonding. The key is not to reject passion or intensity, but to anchor it in authenticity. We can savor the experience of closeness while still honoring individuality.

# Activity

What messages about love did you grow up with, and how have they shaped your expectations in relationships?

Have you ever felt pressure to lose parts of yourself to keep a relationship alive?

What does it feel like when you are both authentic and connected in love?

How can you redefine love in a way that honors both intimacy and individuality?

# Sources

David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002  
 Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 bell hooks, *All About Love*, 2000

# Domain

Relational and Community

# Modality

Group and Relational

Tab 5

# Week

5

# Day

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# Day Title

Interdependence

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Interdependence is the balance of autonomy and intimacy. It allows us to be whole individuals while also deeply connected. With mutuality, boundaries, and healthy dependence, interdependence creates resilience, growth, and enduring intimacy in relationships.

# Daily Passage

In healthy relationships, neither autonomy nor togetherness takes the lead at the expense of the other. Instead, both exist in a dynamic balance called interdependence. Interdependence allows us to remain whole as individuals while also sharing life deeply with others. It is the sweet spot between isolation and fusion, where authenticity and intimacy reinforce each other rather than compete.

Interdependence begins with the understanding that we are already whole on our own. From this foundation, we can connect freely, rather than from need or fear. A truly interdependent relationship is not about completing one another, but about choosing one another while remaining complete. This creates a bond rooted in freedom and respect. We are not trapped in the relationship, nor are we so detached that closeness feels threatening. Instead, we stand side by side, enriched by our connection while still firmly grounded in ourselves.

At the heart of interdependence is mutuality. Mutuality means both people matter equally in the relationship. Each person’s needs, feelings, and perspectives are honored, even when they differ. Mutuality prevents one person from becoming dominant while the other disappears, and it prevents relationships from devolving into scorekeeping or control. Instead, both are engaged in giving and receiving, supporting and being supported.

Interdependence also allows for healthy dependence. Every human being relies on others at times. We need encouragement, care, and help, and it is natural to lean on those we love. The difference between healthy dependence and unhealthy dependence is balance. In interdependent relationships, we can lean on one another without collapsing into neediness or losing our own agency. We can say, “I need your support right now,” without making the other responsible for our entire emotional world.

Boundaries play a crucial role in interdependence. Clear boundaries allow us to stay close without becoming fused. They help us say yes from a place of authenticity and no from a place of self-respect. Boundaries are not barriers; they are bridges that clarify where one person ends and the other begins, making authentic connection possible.

One of the gifts of interdependence is that it makes conflict less threatening. When we are secure in both our individuality and our bond, disagreements become opportunities to understand and grow. Instead of withdrawing to protect our independence or fusing to keep the peace, we can stay present, curious, and engaged. Conflict then becomes part of the natural rhythm of intimacy rather than a threat to it.

Interdependence also fosters growth over stagnation. In enmeshed relationships, growth is stifled because change threatens the fragile balance. In disconnected relationships, growth is lonely and unsupported. But in interdependent relationships, growth is celebrated. Each person can pursue passions, explore new horizons, and expand their sense of self, knowing that the relationship provides a foundation of support and encouragement. This creates a dynamic bond that evolves rather than grows stale.

Cultivating interdependence requires ongoing practice. It asks us to be aware of when we are slipping too far into independence, avoiding closeness, or too far into dependence, losing ourselves in the bond. It invites us to strengthen self-awareness, practice honest communication, and nurture emotional regulation. Interdependence is not a fixed state but a living balance, shifting with seasons of life, challenges, and changes.

Ultimately, interdependence is love in its most mature form. It honors freedom and belonging, individuality and intimacy, selfhood and connection. It is a dance of two whole people who choose, again and again, to walk together while remaining themselves.

# Alternative View

Interdependence is an ideal, but it may not always be attainable. Some relationships may go through seasons where closeness or independence takes precedence, such as in caregiving, crises, or long-distance dynamics. What matters most is not achieving perfect balance at all times, but remaining flexible and returning to the dance of interdependence when possible.

# Activity

Where in my life do you experience interdependence? How does it feel different from dependence or independence alone?  
 What role do boundaries play in helping you feel both close and authentic in your relationships?  
 When do you notice yourself pulling too far toward independence or too far toward dependence?  
 What practices can you use to cultivate greater interdependence in your relationships?

# Sources

David Schnarch, *Passionate Marriage*, 1997  
 Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002

# Domain

Relational and Community

# Modality

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Tab 6

# Week

5

# Day

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# Day Title

Interdependence in Practice

# Lesson Name

The Dance of Freedom and Belonging

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Interdependence comes alive in the everyday choices we make in friendship, romance, family, work, community, and even in our relationship with nature. It is not dependence or independence but a balance of both. When we honor our own needs while also respecting the needs of others, we create relationships that are resilient, supportive, and alive with mutual growth.

# Daily Passage

Interdependence can feel like an abstract idea until we see how it shows up in daily life. At its core, interdependence is the practice of remaining whole in ourselves while staying deeply connected to others. It is not something we achieve once and for all, but a way of living that expresses itself in the small and ordinary moments of relationship. Looking at real-life examples helps us understand what this balance looks like across different contexts.

**Friendship** Healthy friendships thrive on interdependence. Imagine two friends, one going through a stressful time at work and the other providing support. Interdependence means the friend who is struggling first asks, “Do you have space to hear something hard right now?” This question respects the other’s capacity and gives them the chance to say yes or no. The listener may respond with care but also honesty, “I want to be here for you, but tonight I do not have the energy. Can we talk tomorrow?” In this way, both friends honor their needs. The bond deepens because permission, respect, and balance are present.

**Romantic Partnership**

Romantic relationships often reveal the dance between autonomy and closeness most vividly. A helpful way to picture this is with the image of two overlapping circles. Each partner has their own circle that represents their individuality: their interests, friendships, passions, and personal growth. The overlapping space represents the relationship itself, the time, resources, and experiences they share. Interdependence means tending to both circles. Each partner keeps nurturing their own life while also caring for the shared space. The couple negotiates this overlap by asking, “What do we both enjoy? Where do we want to give our energy together?” This prevents one partner from giving up essential parts of themselves in order to belong. Over time, this balance of individuality and shared life strengthens trust and intimacy.

**Family** Family dynamics can easily slip into dependence or detachment, especially in parent–child relationships. A parent who is overly involved may unintentionally foster dependence, while one who is distant may push for premature independence. Interdependence means supporting growth while maintaining connection. For example, when a teenager wants to make a big decision, a parent practicing interdependence might say, “I trust you to make this choice, and I am here to talk it through if you would like.” The young person feels both empowered and supported, learning that relationships can provide safety without control.

**Work and Collaboration** In teams, interdependence makes the difference between dysfunction and synergy. A dependent team may wait passively for direction, while an overly independent team may fragment into silos. Interdependence looks like each person taking ownership of their tasks while also collaborating openly. One member might say, “I will handle this part of the project, but I will need your input by Thursday to keep moving.” Responsibility and communication flow in both directions. Everyone remains accountable to their individual role and to the shared vision, creating trust and efficiency.

**Community** Interdependence also extends into how we engage with community. Consider a neighborhood facing a local challenge, such as organizing support after a natural disaster. Dependence might look like waiting for authorities to act, while independence could lead to individuals fending for themselves without cooperation. Interdependence emerges when neighbors coordinate by sharing food, checking on elders, and pooling resources while still honoring their own family’s needs. This creates resilience not only for individuals but for the whole community.

**Relationship with Nature** Our bond with nature is another space where interdependence can be practiced. Dependence might show up as over-reliance on resources without stewardship. Independence might show up as disconnecting entirely, forgetting we are part of the natural world. Interdependence means enjoying nature’s gifts while also giving back through care for the land, reducing waste, or planting to replenish what we take. It is a reminder that interdependence is not only between people but also between humans and the more-than-human world.

These examples show that interdependence is not about perfection or constant balance. Instead, it is about the willingness to keep returning to honesty, respect, and flexibility. We listen for when we are leaning too heavily on others or retreating too far into isolation, and we adjust. Interdependence thrives when both connection and individuality are valued, and when boundaries are used to create clarity rather than division.

# Alternative View

Not every relationship is ready for interdependence. Some may still be healing from past harm, or one person may not have the capacity to engage in mutuality. In these cases, boundaries and discernment are essential. Interdependence is possible only when both parties are willing to participate in the dance of freedom and connection.

# Activity

How do you experience interdependence in your closest friendships?

Where in your family do you notice more dependence or more independence?

What practices help you bring balance into your work or community relationships?

How can you nurture interdependence in your relationship with the natural world?

# Sources

Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Intimacy*, 1989  
 David Richo, *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*, 2002  
 Pema Chödrön, *Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, 2012

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# Domain

Relational and Community

# Modality

Group and Relational