

Resources for Managing Social Demands

Relationships can be both a source of stress and a blessed resource for coping with stress. When we are overstressed, relationships can suffer. Consider these suggestions for building good relationships. Also refer to the “General Principles for Managing Stress” section on pages 17–22 for additional ideas.

A

Talking with Strangers

- **Identify and use your strengths.** Some people find talking with people energizing; others find it tiring. Both types of people can be effective missionaries. If you are someone who becomes weary talking with strangers, don’t give up trying. You have other strengths to contribute to missionary work, such as being a good friend to those you know well, having creative ideas, being insightful about people, or excelling at planning. You may assume others don’t like you, even though they really do. Seek inspiration and listen to the Spirit to help you use your strengths in His service and develop more of the attributes of Christ that you have access to as a missionary. You represent Jesus Christ, not yourself.
- **Learn to ask inspired questions.** Learn and practice questions to get other people talking. Ask people about their work, hobbies, family, or personal history. Ask about what matters most to them, what they yearn for or worry about. Listen for opportunities to testify of a gospel principle that will be relevant to them. Show your sincere interest. Be willing to answer their questions about you as well, keeping the focus on their needs and your message. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 183–84.)
- **Find simple ways to get others’ attention.** Try simply smiling, making eye contact, waving, saying hello, paying them a compliment, offering help, or asking questions that start with *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, or *how*.
- **Learn how to end conversations.** When you have discussed what you have felt was appropriate and have asked for referrals, try, “It’s been great to meet you (or talk to you). We better _____ (be going, get back to work, get to the bus, find Brother Smith before he leaves). We’ll see you later!”
- **Make a goal to get to know one new person at every meeting you attend.** Use the person’s name in the first minute and when you end the conversation. Write down the name to help you remember.
- **Practice at district meetings.** This is an ideal setting to practice social skills like listening and asking questions.
- **Ask for feedback.** Not everyone is good at “reading” other people. Ask your companion for help if you have been told you have trouble noticing when other people are uncomfortable or uninterested.

“My joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and all understanding; he comprehendeth all things, and he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name. Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast; for this is my life and my light, my joy and my salvation, and my redemption from everlasting wo. Yea, blessed is the name of my God.”

—Alma 26:35–36

- **Give yourself permission to sound confident, even if you don't feel it.** The counsel President Hinckley received from his father can apply to you as well: "Forget yourself and go to work" (*Ensign*, July 1987, 7). We can do this by ignoring our fears about our own performance and refocusing on our calling to serve others and preach the gospel.
- **Focus on helping and ministering to others.** As you turn your attention to others' needs, you will feel less self-conscious about your own needs or inadequacies (see Mosiah 2:17).

B**Wanting to Be Alone**

- **Create a sense of privacy occasionally by writing, praying, reading, or planning.** Even though you need to stay with your companion at all times, you can take a few minutes to close your eyes and be still.
- **Ask directly for some quiet time to think.** Reassure your companion that you are not upset. Continue to invest in your relationship and communicate with kindness.
- **Break up your day.** Don't do one type of activity for too long at a time. Vary the type of work you do. Intersperse your planned activities with small moments of stillness and appreciation; then return to work.

C**Communicating Openly with a Companion**

- **Listen first.** When you live with someone 24/7, you will notice some things that annoy you. You come from different backgrounds and have different expectations and "rules" for what is appropriate or normal. Your companion's behavior makes perfect sense to him or her, even if it doesn't to you. During companion inventory, find out more about how he or she sees things by asking questions and listening carefully. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 185–86.)
- **Respectfully explain what is bothering you.** If you are critical or angry, your companion is likely to become defensive rather than cooperative. Explain your problem and what you need rather than criticizing your companion's bothersome behavior. For example, "I have a real dislike for dirty dishes, but I also don't like doing them all myself. I wonder if we could set up a way to share this job." Or, "I worry you're angry with me when you're so quiet. Could you tell me what you're thinking?"
- **Be straightforward and kind.** Avoid negative labels or judgments. Don't bolster your position with long lists of your companion's faults. Try to keep an even tone that is not angry or self-pitying (see Ephesians 4:29–32).
- **Don't take offense.** Take suggestions, even if rudely given, with as much grace and humor as you can muster.
- **Compliment your companion often.** Thank him or her for things you appreciate.

Make a List

Things I am learning to love about the culture, history, and lifestyles of the people I serve:

- **Ask your companion for suggestions on how you can improve.** Also ask the Lord to help you see your weaknesses (see Ether 12:27).
- **Try to do something nice for your companion every day.** Fix lunch, listen, shine shoes, make his or her bed, smile, hang up towels, put away dishes, write a thank-you note to his or her parents, iron a shirt, compliment him or her.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure.”

—Moroni 7:48

D

Loving the People

- **Learn about the culture, history, and lifestyles of the people you serve.** Keep a list of things you love and appreciate.
- **Pray for the gift of charity.** Do so “with all the energy of heart” (Moroni 7:48). Ask for eyes to see others as God sees them.
- **Serve Church members, investigators, and others.** Ask them questions about their lives, beliefs, and experiences until their behavior makes more sense to you.
- **Pray for people.** Include in your prayers the ones who reject you and hurt you (see 3 Nephi 12:44).

E

Getting Along with Mission Leaders

- **Be humble (see D&C 112:10).** Humility is the fountain of all virtues. Ask your leaders for suggestions on how you can improve. Be willing to take counsel, and let them know they can count on you. Thank your leaders for their service, both verbally and in writing. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 120–21.)
- **Ask a leader or trainer for help and patience.** Some missionaries distrust authority figures or find it hard to take direction because they are used to being their own boss. Others feel competitive with leaders who are peers. Let leaders know if you have these challenges. Pray for humility to be a good follower.
- **Pray for your leaders.** Pray especially for any toward whom you have unkind feelings.
- **Realize that leaders are human.** If we think leaders are supposed to be much better than other people, we will be disappointed and become critical when they make mistakes, get impatient, show poor judgment, or misunderstand us. Expect imperfections, and look for positive attributes (see Mormon 9:31).
- **Learn from your leader’s strengths and mistakes.** Make a list of qualities you want to emulate or avoid when it is your turn to lead.

F

Managing Sexual or Romantic Feelings

- **Develop self-mastery.** Sexual and romantic thoughts and feelings are normal and God-given. As we keep our relationships and behavior within the bounds the Lord has set for us as missionaries, we will grow in strength and gain great blessings. Build your motivation to do so by prayerfully studying Doctrine and Covenants 121:45; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Mosiah 3:19; and Alma 38:12. Look up the terms “virtue,” “self-mastery,” and “temperance” in the Topical Guide. List blessings and advantages that will come to you now and in the future as you develop these traits.
- **Replace the thought.** Instead of becoming preoccupied with sexual or romantic thoughts and feelings, distract yourself; relax and get involved with something else. Sing hymns. Memorize scriptures and recite them. Focus on what you are grateful for. Think about plans for the day. Exercise. Recommit to your work. Have fun and be creative.

- **Avoid temptation.** Avoid places, circumstances, conversations, or people that provoke temptation. If you are exposed to a provocative image or idea, don't dwell on it. Change your mental channel to other things, and get away from the situation as soon as you can. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 118–19.)
- **Continue in hope and faith.** If you are struggling to manage your sexual feelings appropriately, the Lord wants you to know He still loves you. Never abandon your relationship with God because you feel unworthy. Though you may struggle to manage these feelings, He will not reject you. More than anyone, He understands what you are going through and values your efforts to resist temptation, learn from errors, and repent. Seek the counsel of your mission president, and continue striving to overcome these challenges. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 116–17.)
- **Don't get too hungry, lonely, tired, bored, or stressed.** All of these things can make temptation more difficult to resist. Get a snack, take a short break from or change your activity, have a good conversation, or practice relaxation exercises (see page 19).
- **Keep yourself safe.** Remember to always stay with your companion and never be alone with a member of the opposite sex. If you feel yourself being attracted to someone, contact the mission president and seek his counsel. If you sense that someone is trying to flirt with you, ask your companion to help you. Call the mission president to let him know what you are sensing.
- **Fast and pray for understanding and strength.** When we fast, we ignore our normal, healthy hunger for food for a period of time in order to seek spiritual strength and develop skills like self-control, empathy for those who are hungry, and sensitivity to the Spirit. These same skills can help us ignore normal, healthy sexual or romantic feelings as a missionary. Fasting will not eliminate sexual feelings, but monthly fasting may help us gain strength, self-awareness, and motivation to manage these feelings appropriately. (See *Preach My Gospel*, 93–95.)