

MATURING RELATIONSHIPS

Author Stephen Covey sees maturity in relationships on a continuum from dependence ("You take care of me. I blame you for the results.") to independence ("I am responsible. I can choose.") to interdependence ("We can do it. We can cooperate and create something greater together.").

"Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success," says Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

GET INVOLVED

Linda Stout grew up in a trailer without running water. Her best friend couldn't visit "because to the girl's father, we were 'white trash.'" Although she won a partial scholarship to college, she couldn't afford more than a year and left to work in the mills.

But she "felt this incredible drive to work for change...I saw the way people were forced to live, their lack of options for health care and education." So Linda Stout founded the Piedmont Peace Project, a grass-roots, multiracial organization in North Carolina to help poor rural families help themselves.

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Having successfully battled alcoholism, Dick Grace came to realize that "a self-willed life was doomed to failure. We are here for another purpose."

"When I reviewed my life, I saw it was all about self," said Dick Grace, 58, a California winemaker. "Every decision I made, was self-generated."

Today, he and his wife Anne share their

In the world of spiritual endeavor, as in the world of athletic competition, we must learn never to be content with the level we have reached but, with the help of God and with our own determined efforts, we must aim at ever greater heights, at continual improvement, so that we may in the end reach maturity, 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'

Pope John XXIII

abundance and raise thousands of dollars for charities at wine auctions. Dick Grace works part of each year at a hospital founded by Mother Teresa in Nepal.

LIFETIME COMMITMENT

It was hard for Bill to have a good relationship with his younger brother Alex. Bill earned far more money. This intimidated Alex who avoided visiting him.

Not content to let it go, Bill invited his brother to split a beach-house rental. In this neutral setting, the families enjoyed time together fishing, cooking, walking and talking.

They have met at the beach every year since.

Alex has even started to visit Bill's home.

CARING, KINDNESS, LOVE

The Well Spouse Foundation is a support organization for spouses who care for their seriously ill mates at home.

Through conferences, classes and other activities, members learn not to neglect their own needs. The group offers emotional support.

Anita was 35 when her husband was shot and paralyzed. He could speak, breathe and

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use a mouth stick, but little more. "Bowel, bladder, feeding, dressing, grooming—all this has to be done for him," said Anita, who became his caregiver. "I do it because it's my responsibility and I love my husband. He's my family, the love of my life."

Caretaking at home isn't appropriate in all cases. It depends on what is really best for all.

ADMIT ERRORS

In a highly publicized 1996 incident, baseball star Roberto Alomar spat in an umpire's face during a disputed call. Supporters say it was out of character for him. But Alomar himself seems changed by the experience.

"I made a big mistake," he admits. He apologized and has contributed to charities the umpire supports. "I think I've grown up," said Alomar. "I think I've matured."



All is not lost if someone isn't on the road to maturity by the time they are 21 or 30 or any particular age. The human spirit is remarkable. People can change their lives for the better even if others think they will never "grow up."

Imperfections, struggles and repeated failures need not be insurmountable obstacles. They can lead to greater wisdom and maturity. And it takes a mature person to accept the fact that perfection is not possible.

As we grow in maturity, self-acceptance and love, we enhance our ability to help not only ourselves, but others we meet along the way.

Growth is open to us if we are open to it.

Let us go on toward maturity. Hebrews 6:1,3

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Growing Up

WHAT IT TAKES
TO BE MATURE
AT ANY AGE

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The ability to love and to work is one definition of maturity.

Emotional and spiritual maturity is not necessarily linked to physical age. People can and do grow throughout life.

Mature people develop the wisdom to know what they can and cannot control. They understand that they need determined self-discipline to achieve goals. They appreciate their responsibilities as much as their rights. They esteem themselves—and others—as people of worth, children of God.

KNOW— AND LIKE— YOURSELF

Rev. Charles M. Shelton, S.J. says in *Morality of the Heart* that self-esteem reflects our sense of inner goodness. “Without this experience, one is often overly inhibited or unable to take the necessary steps to further moral growth. Self-esteem allows...self-honesty (and)...support for necessary self-scrutiny.”

In *How To Make Your Emotions Work For You*, Dorothy Finkelhor writes about a student who indicated in a self-evaluation quiz that he had a violent temper. “His awareness of this inability to control his temper became a factor in all his decisions. He deliberately avoided situations which might give rise to an explosion. He showed emotional maturity by accepting his immaturity—his uncontrolled temper.”

Give your servant therefore an understanding mind...able to discern between good and evil.
1 Kings 3:9

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Dr. William Menninger of the Topeka, Kansas psychiatric foundation suggested standards for recognizing emotional maturity:

1. Ability to deal constructively with reality
2. Capacity to adapt to change
3. Few symptoms of tension and anxiety

4. Ability to find more satisfaction in giving than in receiving

5. Capacity to consistently relate to others with mutual satisfaction and helpfulness

6. Ability to direct hostile energy into constructive outlets

7. Capacity to love

Psychologist Gordon Allport says maturity is an ability to have warm and intimate relationships marked by empathy and compassion. Mature people show emotional security, humor

and insight. They get involved in the community and in causes bigger than themselves.

In *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman links emotional maturity with ethical behavior: “those who are at the mercy of impulse—who lack self-control—suffer a moral deficiency: The ability to control

impulse is the base of will and character. The root of altruism lies in empathy...Lacking a sense of another's need or despair, there is no caring.”

OFF TO A GOOD START

“Children learn from observing. If they see you treat people kindly and justly it will confirm for them that you truly value kindness and justice,” say Michael Schulman and Eva Mekler in *Bringing Up a Moral Child*.

Family life, school, church, community and culture impart values. Adults help children by encouraging certain behaviors and discouraging others and by being positive role models.

“I loved you enough to ignore what every other mother did or said...I loved you enough to let you stumble, fall, hurt and fail...I loved you enough to say no when you hated me for it.” In *Forever, Erma*, popular humorist Erma Bombeck wrote that parents are frequently unpopular as they guide youngsters toward maturity.

Impulsive adolescents often come from

A MATURE PERSON...

- Strives to live by a moral code
- Acknowledges an obligation to society
- Works to acquire self-knowledge
- Develops a capacity to set goals, delay gratification, accept reality
- Has a sense of humor and self-discipline
- Is able to love and respect others as well as himself/herself
- Appreciates differences among people
- Accepts himself/herself

homes where the parents lack self-discipline or love, according to M. Scott Peck, M.D. in *The Road Less Traveled*.

Peck says children need to feel valued. This “is essential to mental health and a cornerstone of self-discipline,” which is really self-caring. You show love through the time and care you consistently give someone.

Parents, relatives and teachers lay a foundation during the crucial early years. Later it's up to each individual to take charge of personal growth while being willing to nurture others. Persistence is needed to overcome problems and set-backs. Yet people do it every day.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.
1 Corinthians 13:11

ONE WOMAN'S STORY

It took real maturity for Dr. Angela Diaz, director of the Adolescent Health Center at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, to overcome a difficult childhood.

When she was eight, her mother left the Dominican Republic to work in the United States. Her daughter was deeply hurt that she'd been left behind. It was six years before Mrs. Diaz had enough money to send for her.

Still, she adjusted to her new language and culture and studied hard. At a program for teens interested in health careers, counseling helped her regain a sense of worth. Talent, persistence and hard work got Angela Diaz through college and medical school and earned her a fellowship.

“What I love most is my work here, helping teens lead healthy, productive lives,” says Dr. Diaz. “My life is everything I dreamed it would be—and it's still full of possibilities.”

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“Self acceptance is the foundation of emotional health. Emotional health, in turn, begets mature spirituality,” writes Robert Furey in *So I'm Not Perfect*.

Whether through faith passed down from parents or one embraced in adulthood, a relationship with God becomes the key element of life for many. Even those not involved with formal religion often seek spiritual fulfillment.

“Religion is not a religion of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ but a religion of ‘loving’ or ‘unloving.’” writes Sean Caulfield in *In Praise of Chaos*.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. Courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference.
Reinhold Neibuhr

Most people respect and value virtues such as kindness, courage, responsibility, honesty, forgiveness, respect, and love.

They want to live and share these principles with others.

“We work on ourselves...to help others. And we help others as a vehicle for working on ourselves,” write Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, authors of *How Can I Help?* “We...help through all that we do. But at the deepest level we help through who we are.”

Father Raymond Maiser, director of a retreat house near Seattle, says many people volunteer because it's “a good way to pay back to society and God for the good life they've had.”

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. James 3:13