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## Teacher Skills Needed to Develop a Relationship- Driven Classroom

Certain skills are fundamental to the success of using relationships in the classroom. They are much the same skills fundamental to successful relationships in general, and this list is by no means exhaustive. Rather, of all available social skills, the following are the ones we find crucial in order to create the strong and healthy bonds necessary for effectively using relationships as a medium of behavioral change.

### SELF-AWARENESS

The key quality of self-awareness is the ability to step back from one's emotions and cognitive activity sufficiently to be able to discern what one is feeling and thinking. The other key quality is to have a reasonable understanding of why one does the

things one does and how one's feelings and thoughts influence one's actions. Those skilled in self-awareness are able to maintain this awareness as they are thinking and feeling and are able to make use of that small space between antecedent action and their behavior. Consequently, they can actively choose how they will respond.

This crucial skill ensures that we can maintain our own behavior as a conscious action rather than a reaction to what the child is doing. It also allows us to monitor our behavior and make the almost continuous small adjustments necessary to discourage inappropriate behaviors and encourage appropriate ones.

It is the fundamental skill upon which all other skills and, ultimately, all personal change is based. Self-awareness always must be present. Without awareness of what we are doing, it is impossible to make any kind of significant or lasting change.

## OBJECTIVITY

In goal-oriented methodologies objectivity is used in the scientific sense, referring to the practice of keeping assessment, intervention, and accountability solely in the external, observable realm in order to eliminate biased judgments. In a relationship-driven approach, *objectivity* is used in conjunction with its opposite *subjectivity* and refers to the ability to let go of the self-oriented point of view and to see things from either the perspective of another person or from a general perspective external to ourselves.

Mike had a little boy with Asperger's syndrome, and individuals presenting with this condition are denoted by their inability to see things from a perspective other than their own. He disliked ketchup immensely. With Asperger's syndrome, again, it's highly common for individuals to have acute physical sensations. As a consequence, this boy became very upset when other people put ketchup on their food because he had no ability to understand what they were doing. He believed they

were ruining their food by putting ketchup on it. He could not see that from their perspective it was alright to them. The ability to see from another point of view requires self-awareness so you actually know what you are feeling is subjective.

In cultivating objectivity, we recognize three things: (a) that our own perspective is limited; (b) that the other person also has limited perspective, which will be unique to them and different to ours, because they have had different life experiences and circumstances; and (c) that there is *always* a *bigger picture* that is both outside these individual subjective perspectives and inclusive of them.

When self-awareness and objectivity work in tandem, they allow us to see our own perspective *is* our own, to step back from it sufficiently to discern others have different points of view that will feel as internally valid to them as ours does to us, and to be able to step outside both to view the bigger picture.

Objectivity is not the same thing as empathy. Empathy is emotional congruence—feeling someone else’s experiences or pain as if they were our own. While this is often an admirable trait, it is nonetheless a subjective, not objective, behavior. Empathy does not involve perceiving from another point of view but rather subsuming another’s experience as if it happened to us and experiencing it subjectively within our own framework.

## ACCEPTANCE

There is a duality present within the relationship-driven approach. On one level it is all about self-awareness and objectivity, which means recognizing that what we think, feel and experience affects our actions, but also that we each think, feel, and experience differently. On another level, however, it is about recognizing that we are all, in fact, alike. Our differences are superficial. At our core, we are *all* much more alike than different.

Acceptance is a complex concept because it requires, among other things, that we hold two apparently opposite truths in

mind at the same time: that we are different, but yet we are the same. In other words, while we each have our own subjective realities and we need to be aware of this, we must also remember that we all share the same basic humanity, no matter how different we may appear from the outside. We all experience fear, joy, pleasure, anger, and discouragement. We all experience pain, fatigue, arousal, hunger, and illness.

An understanding of this commonality allows tolerance and acceptance to develop, because it enables us to let go of fear about the other person's differences. We're hardwired to be afraid of things we don't know or understand. The ability to perceive common traits allows us to understand that the other person, however different, bad, or repugnant, is at the heart really just like us, and so we don't need to fear them. It helps us realize that however bizarre, incomprehensible, or misguided their actions, they are acting in an effort to feel better or avoid pain, just like we do. This helps us accept the child is not a *beast* or *inhuman* or *unreachable* and that within him or her there will be feelings, sensations, perceptions and experiences like our own. And if we can connect with this common ground we have a chance of bringing about change.

## FRIENDLINESS

It isn't necessary to be an extrovert to make relationships work as a methodology, but it is necessary to be sincerely interested in other people and to find a natural enjoyment in interacting with them. External methodologies, where focus is solely on the maladjusted behavior and controlling it, are not dependent on personality characteristics of the teacher. In order for relationships to work as a means of behavioral change, however, the teacher needs a certain level of natural friendliness in order to be at ease forming relationships.

In addition to these necessary skills, there are seven philosophical principles that underpin and inform all action taken in the classroom.

## 1. Relationships Are a Process, Not a Goal

As the previous chapter was devoted to clarifying the difference between goal and process orientation, there is no need to expand further on this. Suffice it to say, relationships are a process. Consequently, it is essential to be comfortable with and skilled at process orientation, the ability to focus and work in the present, because this is at the core of a relationship-driven model of treatment and management of emotional and behavioral disorders.

## 2. There Is a Difference Between the Person and the Person's Actions

Most of the time we regard our consciousness as *me, the person*, because this is the seat of our awareness and the means by which we process all the information provided to us by our five senses. Consciousness alone, however, isn't enough. All of us will have encountered individuals with brain injury or Alzheimer's who still have consciousness, but the part that made them who they are is no longer functioning.

Who we are, what actually constitutes us as a person, is remarkably complex to grasp. While we innately know we're located somewhere *here* within our body, it's actually impossible to find. Each aspect we look at falls into the category of *part of me* but is never *me*. We can keep deconstructing, but we simply end up with smaller parts. We never find that single, magical essence that is *me*.

Both religion and culture step in at this point to provide an explanation for this paradox, and this tends to influence our perspective. In everyday life, however, most of us simplify our identity down to our thoughts and actions. "I am what I think." "I am what I feel." "I am what I do." This is a practical and generally workable method for coping in the concrete world with what is at its heart a very abstract matter. Nonetheless, it is important to understand what is actually going on here—that we *are* substituting concrete shorthand for a complex abstraction—because it has a powerful influence on how effective we are in dealing with problems.

If we start to deconstruct identity, it quickly becomes obvious that everything falls into the category of *part of me*. My consciousness is part of me. My arm is part of me. My DNA is part of me. My medical record is part of me. My family background is part of me. My cultural history is part of me. And so forth. No single thing is *me*. The reason for this is so simple as to be obvious and yet feels so intuitively wrong as to be unbelievable: The fact is there is no concrete *me*. *Me* is, in fact, just a collective term for a group of connected parts, some of which, like consciousness, soul, or history, have no physical existence.

This is most easily understood if we compare it to collective terms we are more used to thinking of as collective terms. For example, *the United States* is a collective term for 50 separate and individual states. None of the states in the union is the United States all by itself. Each is *part* of the United States. The government of the United States isn't the United States. It too is part of the United States. The foreign policy of the United States is not the United States. The history of the United States is not the United States, and so forth and so on. These things are all *parts* of the United States. The United States doesn't exist as something on its own. Instead, it is a collective term for 50 individual states, a government, a constitution, and so on connected together by various histories. The United States is simply the abstract term by which we identify all these different things as belonging together. *Me* or *you* or *Mike Smith* works the very same way. While they feel very solid to us, they are actually abstract terms for a body, senses, consciousness, intelligence, and more that are connected together by various histories.

Understanding this distinction between an abstract collective term and the concrete parts that make it up is important because, as the collective term is simply a concept, we can hold it constant in our mind. In the normal course of things, I remain me all my life. Mike Smith remains Mike Smith all his life. The United States remains the United States. Because it is simply an abstract term, it need not change. In contrast, the component parts will be changing all the time. My hair may go gray. I may

lose an arm in an accident. I may speak a new language or take up the beliefs of a different religion. I am still me, however. The collective term, because it is a mental abstraction, remains the same while the parts are constantly changing and constantly capable of change.

Understanding this distinction between the abstract constant and the ever-changing parts that make it up is the essence of understanding the difference between the person and the person's actions. This, in turn, is at the heart of developing a tolerant and nonjudgmental attitude toward ourselves and others regarding the following:

- *The capacity to change.* If a person's actions were as unchangeable as his identity, then there would be little scope for his learning new or more adaptive behaviors because "he'll always do that" or "he won't change." Understanding that a person *isn't* her actions, regardless of the number of times she has engaged in a certain action, allows us recognize she has the capacity for different actions.
- *The capacity to forgive or to move on.* Both forgiveness and letting go, whether of past hurts done to us or of past things we have done to others, would be impossible, were there no genuine capacity for change. Understanding a person *isn't* his actions and that what has happened in the past does not constitute how the person will always behave or *who the person is* allows us to forgive others and ourselves of past transgressions and to move forward in a more hopeful and positive manner.
- *The capacity to understand difficulty in changing behavior is not due to willfulness or lack of will.* If we assume our self is a single, concrete entity, this then leads to difficulty in understanding the very common scenario of knowing the right action in a given situation but failing to follow through with it. A familiar example of this for many of us is "I *want* to lose weight." I genuinely want this. I know and understand the reasons why I should

lose weight. I know and understand what the right actions are don't eat too much and take enough exercise. I sincerely try to do that. Nonetheless, too often I eat chocolate cake instead of spinach or I watch TV instead of going to the gym, even though I know these choices are counterproductive and even though I know no one else is cramming the chocolate cake down my throat. If I regard myself as a concrete, single *I*, then the only conclusions that can be drawn is that either I have willfully chosen to do wrong or I am weak willed. But what's actually going on here is much different. I'm not this concrete, single *I* that I feel like. That's just a word. I am, in fact, this collection of many parts, and I am ruled by committee. Sometimes my conscious mind full of newly learned healthy behaviors wins the committee vote, but sometimes my family history that has made me associate chocolate cake with good times and happiness wins. Sometimes my blood sugar wins. Sometimes my love of cooking wins. We've all had experience of these internal committee meetings where one part of us wants one thing and another part wants something different. And if adult life should have taught us anything, it is that it is extremely hard to get *anything* done by committee!

It's very important to understand this *committee* aspect when trying to make personal changes, whether it is oneself making the changes or whether one is supporting others making changes. While for practical, everyday purposes our minds solidify us into the concept of one person, we are, in fact, a collection of parts that can be all too democratic in the way they go about things.

### **3. No One Chooses to Be Unhappy**

We all want to be happy. We *all* want this. No one wakes up in the morning and thinks, "Wow, I want to feel miserable," or "What a good day to be anxious and oversensitive." Everything



we do, no matter how odd or misguided, is done because we think consciously or unconsciously that it will lead to our feeling happier. Of course, many of these things don't produce this desired result, no matter how endlessly we try them, but this is because we do not have the awareness or understanding necessary to connect our actions to the consequences of our actions. It isn't because we purposely set out to do something that makes us unhappy.

This is simply another way of saying "Everyone is doing the best he or she can." People engaging in difficult or destructive behavior do so in the erroneous belief that this will relieve their unhappiness. They are not actively trying to be unhappy. Instead, they are actively trying to be happy but going about it in an unproductive way, because (for whatever reason) they are simply not able to do differently at this point in time. It is crucial to understand this. A misbehaving child isn't willfully choosing to be unhappy. She genuinely hasn't come up with a more effective way of being happy.

#### **4. Misbehavior Is a Teaching Opportunity**

If everyone wants happiness and no one wants unhappiness, yet there is misbehavior that results in unhappiness, then it is safe to assume the person does not know how to do differently. If he did, he would be doing it, because unhappiness sucks. If, on the other hand, someone *doesn't* know how to do differently, then the appropriate response from those who do is to teach her how.

This single point is perhaps the most crucial difference between a relationship-driven approach and the other current methodologies. Their focus is on control of inappropriate behavior. The focus here is on teaching to change inappropriate behavior.

In perceiving inappropriate behavior as a teaching opportunity, we recognize that it is being both unrealistic and unfair to expect a child to be her own teacher. In other words, if a child knew how to be happy, she would be doing things to make

herself happy. That she is not doing these things indicates she is either unaware of the behaviors required or has not mastered these behaviors. If the child doesn't know something or cannot do it, it is unreasonable to expect her to be able to teach these things to herself. It is, therefore, necessary for us to teach what is required.

Here is a core problem with control methodologies. Imposing external control does not provide the child with more productive, alternative behaviors. Consequently, as soon as control is lifted, inappropriate behaviors often resume simply because they are familiar.

Most, if not all, children in programs for emotional and behavioral disorders will have considerable familiarity with dysfunctional adults and dysfunctional relationships. In contrast, they will have little experience of functional adults relating appropriately. It is thus both unrealistic and unreasonable to expect children to disengage from difficult cycles of behavior on their own without first gaining experience of the functional behaviors they need to emulate. In a relationship-driven methodology, functional behavior is taught actively via the teacher-child relationship and latterly peer to peer in order to give children experience of the appropriate behaviors they are expected to use.

Some aspects of appropriate behavior are taught by the teacher through active modeling. For example, the teacher will model the behavior of a functional adult, including such things as

- a functional adult behaves consistently and predictably;
- a functional adult has clear, fair boundaries;
- a functional adult is honest, fair, and moral;
- a functional adult has realistic expectations;
- a functional adult takes responsibility for his own actions;
- a functional adults knows how to deal safely and effectively with her own feelings;
- a functional adult thinks about others' welfare as well as his own;

- a functional adult will actively take care of children and not let them get hurt or be put into dangerous situations; and
- a functional adult will help children maximize their potential.

Other aspects are taught to the child directly, such as

- how a functional person manages his/her emotions,
- how a functional person relates appropriately to others, and
- how a functional person handles change, unexpected, or negative situations.

## 5. Everyone Can Change

This belief is *the* foundation upon which all the rest of the relationship-driven model is built. Everybody has the capacity to change.

This concept is at the very heart of all teaching, whatever the discipline. A teacher is there to bring about change in the student. None of us would choose an occupation that we knew at the onset to be an impossible task. *Everybody can change.*

This isn't Pollyanna thinking. Pollyanna says, "Everyone will change." This statement is just as black-and-white as "He'll never change." What we want to cultivate is the ability to stay positive about the *possibility* of change and the recognition that we are not omniscient. It's easy to fall into using black-and-white terms like *always* or *never* in regard to difficult behavior. But in doing so we are implying that the people and situations we are dealing with are fixed and discreet, and therefore entirely predictable, when they are, in fact, constantly changing and connected to and affected by an infinite number of other things of which we have no knowledge, insight, or control.

Because we may not be able to see how change will take place doesn't mean there is no chance for change. We need to promote personal change as doable and, in the process, distinguish in our own minds the difference between "I can't do any more to help this person" and "No one can help this person."

## 6. Personal Change Is Very Difficult

Permanently changing ingrained personal behavior is extremely hard to do because of a little thing called habit. We are hardwired to “do things as we’ve always done them.” Active learning takes place in one part of the brain, but once a skill becomes a habit, it switches to another part of the brain entirely and becomes *automatic*. Automatic behavior is more efficient (notice the difference between people learning to do a task and those who already know how to do it), and the familiarity of knowing how to do it is emotionally comforting. Most crucially for our purposes, automatic behavior is just that—automatic—which means it happens even if we don’t have to pay attention to it. We are all creatures of habit, a large portion of our daily activity being made up by automatic behaviors that have become so familiar to us that we are no longer aware of what we do to execute them. Think of reading, for example. Anyone reading this book will be automatically decoding the letters and taking in the meaning of the words. It is difficult, if not impossible, to look at the words on this page as if they had no meaning or as if they needed to be put together based solely on the letter sounds. Reading has become so automatic for us we can’t easily become aware of what we are doing that allows us to read.

This disconnection between action and our awareness of action that happens in automatic behaviors is the roadblock to change. Habit makes change arduous. This is true for everyone. Anyone who has tried to lose weight, give up smoking, eat more healthily, go to the gym regularly, or make some other personal change that is *good* will know how difficult it is not only to embark on the initial change but also to keep it up over the longer term until it replaces the original habit and becomes the automatic behavior. There are many contributors to this difficulty. Genetic makeup, personal history, cultural history, and environmental circumstances all factor in, as well as motivation and consequences. Oftentimes, these factors all interact to a point where it is difficult to tease out just what exactly is standing in the way of change taking place.

The most important thing to recognize is that it *is* very hard. For *everyone*. As a consequence, it is normal for the individual who is trying to change to make many approximations before managing the right behavior. It is also normal to slip up or fail many times before eventually achieving the behavior. What recognizing that it is very hard translates into is understanding that these approximations, slips, and failures are an expected part of the process rather than the outcome. Consequently, when we endeavor to change a child's inappropriate behavior, it is normal for the child to try but fail, to backslide, to slip up, to miss, and sometimes even to totally fail and come off the program. This does not mean that change is not underway nor that the change is impossible. It simply means we haven't reached it yet.

A second important aspect to recognize is that very few people can carry out major personal change alone. There are inspirational stories of the Herculean few who have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and triumphed over tremendous odds to become successful and healthy people. These are the exceptions. The vast, vast majority of us need help to change, sometimes a great deal of help, and often repeatedly, because habits are incredibly hard to break. Consequently, we fail at the first, second, third, or two thousandth time and have to keep trying.

If we keep in mind that people do not choose to be unhappy, we can then surmise that if they continue to do something that repeatedly makes them unhappy, it is because, for whatever reason, they are simply not able to do differently at this point in time. The appropriate response to this is patience. It means that they need more help or more time or both, not that they can't or won't or don't want to change. Sometimes it may turn out that we are not the person who can provide that time or help, and if this is so, this is all right. This is an honest assessment of the situation. It is crucial to be able to recognize the difference, however, between "I am not the right person to help" and "That person can't be helped."

In our experience, the following conditions must exist before personal change takes place:

- *Genuine awareness the problem exists.* Until we know we have a problem and understand precisely what the problem is, we can't change it.
- *Perceiving ourselves as having choices* and, therefore, the ability to affect our lives.
- *Accepting responsibility for the problem.* This means moving away from blaming someone else ("If he didn't always make me so mad, I wouldn't do that." "If my mother hadn't treated me that way growing up, I'd be more able to do this."), finding fault in the environment ("It's the heat causing it." "It's my allergy/disability/disorder causing it." "It's the current government/school/mother-in-law's policies causing it."), or assuming at the onset that nothing can be done about it ("It's simply my personality." "You can't fight city hall." "I didn't vote for this government," or "I've tried before and always failed.").
- *Accepting the behavior is out of control.* This means recognizing that we are not managing to keep this behavior within appropriate boundaries on our own and need help to change, whether it comes in the form of teaching, therapy, support from others, insight from books or courses, faith in God, and so on.
- *Showing compassion for oneself.* This means developing the awareness that we didn't get into this situation because we are evil or stupid or chose to, but because, for whatever reason, we simply didn't behave differently at that time. This looks at first glance as if it is not accepting responsibility for the problem, but there is significant difference. Accepting responsibility means accepting the problem belongs to us and we are in charge of sorting it out, as opposed to shifting the blame to things or people we can't control. Having compassion for oneself means accepting there is a difference between the person and his actions. Yes, we *are* responsible for our actions, and

yes, we have done wrong, but this does not condemn us as bad, shameful, or hopeless persons. We are each simply a person, like every other person. It is our actions that are wrong or misguided, and it is the actions that need to change.

Without this crucial component, self-esteem tends not to regenerate during the change process. Consequently, the individual does not achieve as much sense of personal satisfaction from the change, because she perceives herself simply as a bad person who is *acting* good and is thus a *fraud* when performing the changed behavior. Any changes that take place without improved self-esteem tend not to be internalized as a result. They are done only to satisfy external sources and therefore tend not to last once the external control is gone.

- *Identifying realistic increments of change.* It is normal for the increments of change to be small and the more entrenched the behavior, the smaller they usually have to be for success to be maintained. Because of this, it is necessary and, indeed, crucial to reward approximations of the desired behavior as one goes along. It is also important for both teacher and child to be aware from the onset that it *is* entirely normal to have to make such small steps and that the person making the change should be encouraged to be positive about any movement in the right direction, however minute the increments.
- *Persistence.* Because habit is very powerful, it is normal to fail many times in the effort to change it. It is important to instill the concept that while we may fail many times, we only *become* a failure at the point when we give up. Psychological research backs up persistence as the vital key to successful personal change, whether it is in terms of things like losing weight, stopping smoking, or changing unwanted behavior. Virtually everyone who has been successful at making one of these difficult changes has had at least 20 failed attempts before the successful one. So the key to this step is changing the child's thinking from "I can't do this" to "I'm still trying."

- *Adjusting self-image.* As personal change starts to take hold, it will begin to impact the environment around the child, which requires a self-image adjustment. Consequently, it is important to support this changing image as it emerges. This means actively moving away from labels that point out the individual's inappropriate behavior, such as "the one who doesn't keep quiet" or "the fidgety one" to more helpful descriptors. It also means responding to the changed person as he or she is in the present, as opposed to how he or she was, not in a gullible way but in a realistic way that allows the new behavior to settle in.
- *Hard is not impossible.* The bulk of this section has been all about how hard personal change is because our tendency is to underestimate its difficulty and then become discouraged by what we perceive as failure. However, it is equally important to understand that as hard as it is to make a genuine change in entrenched thoughts or actions, this is not the same as saying it is impossible. Hard, yes. Impossible, no.

## 7. The World Is Complex

Black-and-white thinking—the tendency to perceive things as all-or-nothing and thus able to be put into discernible, discreet and permanent categories—seems to be a hardwired trait for humans. We categorize and generalize by nature.

Black-and-white thinking is easy to grasp because it requires we deal only with literal perceptions. Such concreteness produces a sense of certainty, which in turn gives us a sense of control over what we are perceiving. Just as we know exactly where we are physically with concrete things we can touch and see, we know exactly where we are mentally when thinking in black-and-white. People are good or bad. Issues are right or wrong. There's none of that fuzzy grayness.

Unfortunately, this way of looking at the world, secure as it feels, gives us a false picture. It is two-dimensional thinking in what turns out to be a three-dimensional world. In reality



very little is certain, nothing is separate and disconnected, and everything is in a state of constant change. Thus, responding to the world as if things were definite, discreet, and permanent results in frustration and failure because not enough variables have been taken into account. From the perspective of a relationship-driven approach, three of the most important reasons for avoiding black-and-white thinking are the following:

- *Almost all behaviors are on a spectrum and not at the two (black or white) extremes. For example, we are virtually never entirely happy or entirely sad. Happy is one end of the spectrum, sad is at the opposite end, and we normally tend to fall somewhere in between. Recognizing the spectrum nature of behavior makes it much easier to accept approximations of appropriate behavior and to see positive movement toward the wanted behavior because we can see what is being done is further up the spectrum than the previous behavior. In contrast, black-and-white thinking allows us only two outcomes: success or failure.*
- *Black-and-white thinking tends to ignore time and the fact that all things change over time. We are not at all static creatures. We are never really the same twice. Skin has sloughed off and cells have died or regenerated while you are reading this. You have breathed in different molecules of air and exhaled others. You are now very slightly different than you were at the beginning of this sentence. Recognizing this continual process of change allows us to recognize the potential for things to be different than they are right now. In contrast, black-and-white thinking assumes permanence and looks for opportunities to reinforce that. Thus, once someone is in a category, the black-and-white thinker looks only for evidence that reinforces that category and ignores evidence of change, for example, "Once a bully, always a bully."*
- *Black-and-white thinking does not take into account the nature of paradoxes, also called dualism or levels in some quarters. To truly understand not only behavior*

but also how the world works in general, we need to be open to this concept of paradoxes, the idea that two apparently conflicting aspects are often operational at the same time in the same situation. There are many of these paradoxes that we all deal with every day. Objectivity versus subjectivity of perception is one example. We all, for instance, think subjectively by default (i.e., selfishly) from our own point of view. Children are born with this perspective, which undoubtedly has survival value. They need quality parenting in the early years to help them broaden their perspective to include others' points of view. Persons who primarily think subjectively will understand that tolerance, for example, should apply to *them*; however, if they are unable to think objectively, they will find it difficult to understand that tolerance should also apply to other people. They are usually only able to make this shift in perspective if there is something about the other person they can subjectively identify with (e.g., they can see how the person is like them). In order to develop genuine tolerance, this natural subjective perspective needs to be increasingly balanced with the ability to think objectively at the same time, to realize that while our perspective is true and legitimate for us, a different perspective may be just as true and legitimate for others. Consequently, we need to cultivate the ability to hold this paradox (that what we think subjectively is one valid reality while what is true objectively is another equally valid reality) in order to behave in a truly tolerant way.

Another paradox commonly encountered is free will versus fate or predetermination. In order to make successful changes, it is important to understand that we have free will, that we can *choose* to alter our lives effectively, and that ultimately we can gain a sense of control in almost every situation by learning to control our attitude. At the same time, however, we need an

understanding of *fate*—the insight that there are always going to be circumstances beyond our control which will influence us. These factors include things like our genes, our environment, our personality type, our personal history, our socioeconomic status, our culture, our physical state and/or limitations, and so on, as well the *chaos factor*—that randomness in life that results in our being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or conversely, the right place at the right time for no apparent reason. Without the ability to hold this paradox, the black-and-white thinker tends to come down on one of the two extremes. If they favor the free-will extreme, then everything becomes cause/effect. We are responsible for everything that happens to us. If we make a mistake, have an accident, or get a horrible illness it is because we have not read the signs right, have not seen the right connections and, thus, not done the right things. If the black-and-white thinker favors the opposite extreme of fate or predetermination, then everything becomes the fault of someone or something else and a victim mentality occurs. Consequently, in order to make effective changes in our behavior, we need to accept the paradox that sometimes we're the pigeon, and sometimes we're the statue.

So it is important when working with a relationship-based methodology that one have a clear understanding that the world *is* complex, that we can't reduce it to clear-cut, comprehensible certainties, as dearly as we would all love to do so. This kind of open-ended acceptance can be difficult in a goal-oriented, assessment-based culture that is, by its very nature, reductionist; however, it remains one of the most crucial attributes for success in the dynamic realm of relationships.