

# Constructive and Destructive Relationships

*by Sophia Tutorial*



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how relationships can either support parties' needs and goals, or run counter to them. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Features of Constructive Relationships
2. Features of Destructive Relationships
3. Conflicts in Both Types of Relationships

## 1. Features of Constructive Relationships

A **constructive relationship** is a relationship characterized by flexibility of role, mutual concern for members' needs, as well as other factors.

In a constructive relationship, the people involved are not self-centered; rather, they are concerned with one another's needs.

In a constructive relationship, you'll typically find:

- Open communication
- Flexibility
- Trust
- Affection

Should a situation arise where one party needs help, the other party is willing to share responsibility. The parties also visibly care about each other, whether they are friends, partners, or coworkers. They like and trust one another.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Constructive Relationship**

A relationship categorized by flexibility of role, mutual concern for members' needs, and other factors.

## 2. Features of Destructive Relationships

A **destructive, or non-constructive, relationship** is a relationship characterized by inflexibility of roles, unequal concern for members' needs, and other factors.

This type of relationship might have one party that is more self-centered, demanding total loyalty from the other party.

Thus in a destructive relationship, you will typically find:

- Suspicion
- Jealousy
- Lack of affection
- Poor communication

Oftentimes, a destructive relationship may turn out to be physically or emotionally harmful to one of the parties involved.

We may then wonder why people would stay in destructive relationships when their needs are not being met, but there are a variety of reasons for this.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The relationship might be part of a person's comfort zone. This person has gotten used to the relationship; as unsatisfying or destructive as the relationship is, moving out of it may bring up fears.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The person is afraid, either physically or emotionally, of what this person might do should they try to leave.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Someone might also stay in a relationship because they are family and believes or hopes that that person will change, even if there is evidence to the contrary.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Destructive (Non-Constructive) Relationship**

A relationship characterized by inflexibility of roles, unequal concern for members' needs, and other factors.

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## 3. Conflicts in Both Types of Relationships

Conflicts will arise not only within destructive relationships, but also within constructive relationships. In either case, the conflict will occur because there are unmet needs.

In a destructive relationship, the unmet needs may be more obvious and consistent. But even in a constructive relationship, parties may find that from time to time, their needs aren't being met.

The difference between the conflicts in constructive and destructive relationships lies in how these unmet needs are addressed and handled.

In a constructive relationship, there is likely to be more open communication, and a willingness to:

- Talk about the issues

- Listen to the other party
- Take responsibility if necessary

These communication patterns are positive and thus can be helpful in resolving a conflict in a way meets the needs of both parties.

In a destructive relationship, where the communication patterns are poor, there is instead:

- A lack of trust
- No concern for the other party's needs

In many cases, when overseeing a conflict resolution process between members of a destructive relationship, it can be very helpful for the conflict-resolver to address the underlying emotional or relational needs that have made the relationship destructive in the first place.

The parties can then learn to communicate better in terms of speaking and listening to one another, and perhaps come to recognize a bit about the impact of their own behavior.



#### BIG IDEA

If two parties in a relationship, be it constructive or destructive, come into a conflict resolution situation in good faith to work on something, they can learn the communication and relational patterns that might be impeding them in resolving whatever conflict has presented itself.

Therefore, the conflict resolution process can be helpful in meeting the unmet needs for parties in both types of relationships.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **features of constructive and destructive relationships**. You now understand that **conflicts can arise in both types of relationships** because of unmet needs. The conflict resolution process is thus designed to improve communication and understanding by working through not only the presented conflict, but also the underlying the emotions that led to it. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

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