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For more information, contact Holly Miner

Nutrition, Food Safety and Health Agent, Wildcat Extension District
haminer@ksu.edu, (620) 331-2690

Getting Your Heart Right

Relationships with family and friends can be challenging at times. Taking a little time to work on relationships and “get your heart right” will benefit those relationships long into the future.

Dealing with conflict requires more than just knowledge and skills. Conflict is a universal human problem. We all hope to have good relationships, thriving marriages and families, close friendships, and well-functioning teams at work. Yet, along the way, we all encounter conflict and disagreements despite our best efforts and intentions.

Even in our healthiest relationships, we sometimes get into arguments, have bad feelings, or push for what we want in ways that hurt the people we care about the most. Most of us experience more conflict than we want in important relationships. How can we heal these conflicts?

Personal biases make it difficult to evaluate conflicts fairly. Most of us believe we are good at assessing the people and events in our life; weaving our perceptions about people and events into stories that make sense to us and thinking we are able to objectively interpret truth. We are confident that we can trust our conclusions about life and our opinions of people. However, research has repeatedly found that all humans are biased. We rarely, if ever, see the whole picture and are guilty of forming opinions based only on partial truths.

Human conditions can be described as misunderstandings and conflict that are common in relationships. Although this may sound bleak; there is a way out of these misunderstandings. The key to solving this issue is getting our hearts right. Getting your heart right can require one to show healthy humility, compassion, and positivity.

Humility is the foundation of healthy relationships. Those who are humble are ready to learn from people and experiences. Some may think of humility as passivity or a lack of self-respect. However, healthy humility is neither of those things. Humility can look many ways:

- Recognizing that while our needs matter, other people’s needs do too
- Willingness to admit that we do not completely understand the truth
- Being open to other people’s opinions
- Admitting that we make mistakes, which in turn allows us to continue learning and growing

Compassion is being sensitive to the struggles and suffering of others. Full-fledged compassion involves feelings of tenderness for the struggles and hopes of all people, even those who are different from us or whom we disagree with. Compassion can connect us to one another.

Positivity is the practice of seeing the good in people. In every relationship, there are times of irritation and frustration. Positivity is deciding not to dwell on those moments or allow them to define the relationship. It is the choice to notice what is good about the other person and the relationship, focusing on all the ways the relationship enriches your life with that person. Positivity inspires kindness, and kindness sustains relationships.

Changing our hearts does not mean that we must always give in to others during times of conflict or that we stop persisting that our needs will be met. It means that we commit to having a different attitude when dealing with conflict. We are willing to be open to others and our own needs. We are willing to show empathy instead of hostility toward them. In this way, we can talk about needs in ways that do not harm the relationship. It will also help us seek creative solutions that will work for everyone.

Getting Our Hearts Right Three Keys to Better Relationships was written by Wallace Goddard and James Marshall, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and was adapted for this article.

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