

## HOW TO FOSTER A *healthy relationship*

By Miranda Huesman, MS, LAPC | Village EAP Counselor

**R**elationships come in various shapes and sizes. They require effort and energy to remain sustainable over time. Like a garden, relationships demand nurturing, adoration, attention, and plenty of patience to flourish. Think about a current relationship that you are involved in – Are you a flower or a gardener? The flower needs the gardener to water them with attention, praise, and love. The gardener sees their role as the primary caregiver and ensures the relationship stays on track. The roles of flower and gardener can change over time.

Here are three key qualities needed to foster a healthy relationship:

### 1. COMMUNICATION

Communication requires active listening, asking questions, clarifying and summarizing, being present, and being clear. It's important to understand the emotion and intentions behind the information or message that is being conveyed. Whether you are a flower or gardener, both need to be heard and understood. Communicate openly and honestly. When both individuals know what they want from the relationship and feel comfortable expressing their needs, fears, and desires, it can increase trust and strengthen the relationship bond. Try not to assume anything or mind-read; this can lead to dissatisfaction and frustrations in the relationship. Ask questions, even if they are hard or you feel uncomfortable.

### 2. ACCEPTANCE

Accept that there are some things you cannot change. Accept that your partner is not perfect. Welcome their flaws. Recognize that not everyone will behave as you do. Acceptance means understanding that something is what it is – nothing less, nothing more. Acceptance brings peace and opens us up for positive growth in our relationships. That's not to say you must accept everything in your relationship. Be willing to "weed" out the negative and have similar values to create a safe and healthy future together.

### 3. WARMTH AND AFFECTION

According to relationship researcher John Gottman, healthy and happy couples have a ratio of five positive interactions or feelings for one negative interaction or feeling. "One of the best predictors of a healthy relationship is how each person feels about the other's support," Gottman says. Affirming one another is essential to growing a beautiful connection. Make a point to practice kindness and express gratitude regularly.

