

Student Name
Date
Interpersonal Communication

Sample "Relationships" Paper

Relationships, especially close and trusting relationships, are very important for the positive, social and psychological growth of the individuals involved in the relationship. In our society, people in close relationships desire physical contact, emotional support, acceptance and love. These traits and feelings are part of human nature, and people strive for these types of interpersonal relationships in order to fulfill the void in people's lives and, above all, to make sense of life through trust, sharing and caring.

During my years in college, I have met many interesting people in the classroom, as well as in the dormitories. I made many new friends in The Segundo dormitories at The University of California, Davis. Although I hung out with many people and exchanged information about college life, I only developed a very close and intimate relationship with a girl in my psychobiology class during my first, fall quarter.

Mark Knapp suggests that interpersonal relationships develop through several stages. My relationship with my best friend, Betty, has gone through the coming together stages of initiating, experimenting, intensifying and integrating. At this point, we have only experienced the differentiating and circumscribing stages in the coming apart stages of Knapp's model.

During the first class meeting in psychobiology, I sat in class, scanning the rows to see if I was able to recognize a familiar face or see a friendly smile. I was very nervous because I did not know anybody in the class, did not know what to expect in a college class, and I was not used to being in a large class with 150 students. Suddenly, I noticed a girl who looked very familiar. She sat one row in front of me. I said hello, introduced myself to her, and told her that she looked very familiar. She smiled and reciprocated with a friendly greeting: "Hello, I am Betty. How are you doing?" I said, "I am fine." We were engaging phatic communication, where we stuck to very ritualistic communication, with very little thought behind the words. Then I asked her where she was living. At that point, I realized that we were staying in the same dormitory building on the third floor, which was an all girls' floor. Then we both established that we had similar living

arrangements, sharing a room with our best friend from high school, and had similar career interests in the medical field. During this **initiating phase**, our initial conversation during the first day of class was very natural because she was very easy to talk to about superficial topics such as her similar living arrangements and her opinion about taking this class. During this **initiating stage** of exchanging common information, the low communication apprehension between us laid down a positive foundation from which we can build on in order to foster our relationship. We were initially attracted to each other on an interpersonal level based upon similarities.

The next step in the relationship continued with the **experimenting phase** where we periodically made eye contact in the cafeteria and smiled at one another and, in many instances, decided to sit together. During this phase, we engaged in a lot of small talk, searching for common ground between us. It was a natural feeling and desire to want to get to know her better. I could tell from her nonverbal communication of friendly facial expressions and inviting hand gestures, the feeling of wanting to get to know me seemed mutual. We exchanged information about where we grew up, what schools we attended, why we chose Davis, and what major we wanted to pursue. We asked many superficial questions such as class schedules, likes and dislikes about professors, the challenges of living with a messy roommate and shared our opinions about the greasy and bug-infested food in the cafeteria. After discussing about the classes that we were taking, we realized that we were taking the same classes. Then I suggested we study together for the midterms and finals. She liked the idea and agreed.

During the **intensifying phase**, Betty and I began to develop a very close relationship. We tried to take the same classes together since we both declared the same major (Exercise Science). During my sophomore year in college, I had serious problems living with my best friend from high school. She had some severe psychological problems and took her aggressions out on me. She swore, kicked the doors and stole my personal belongings, completely violating my trust in her. The situation was so precarious that I did not even want to sleep in my own bed. I explained this situation to Betty. For the first time in a long time, I was able to self-disclose to a friend about my struggles and tribulations. From that point on, I knew that I was able to confide in her about my problems. Her active listening skills and ability to keep confidences inspired my

trust in her. It felt very natural to engage in some form of interpersonal communication. I admitted to her that I felt very sad, lost, and frustrated about this whole fiasco. Beyond telling her how I was feeling verbally, I let her see how this was affecting me, by allowing myself to show affect displays such as crying. She was very supportive because she listened attentively to my problems, comforted me, and welcomed me into her apartment for several weeks. She told me that she did not want me to fail my classes, and she offered to study with me for our finals. She empathized about my situation and insisted that I share her bed with her (platonically, of course) for the remainder of the quarter. I was very grateful for her hospitality and generosity, and disclosed that I was very happy that we became such good friends. She reciprocated the same feelings.

After living with her, every person that we encountered, whether in school or in a social arena, thought we were inseparable. We always studied together and ate together, whether going out to restaurants or to the cafeteria. We also went to the recreational hall together where we worked out together. On the weekends when we both went home to be with our parents, we found ourselves missing each other and wanting to maintain our communication. We often called each other to find out when the other person planned to go back to Davis. We were definitely entering the **integrating stage** of our relationship.

One day, Betty called me from her home, sobbing. After taking several deep breaths, she disclosed to me that she was having serious problems communicating with her father, and she was not getting along with him. I listened quietly, with empathy, as she explained that her father was Chinese and, in his culture, they are extreme introverts. They did not freely talk about their emotions. In addition, she told me that her father was not her biological father, which hindered their communication and the connection between them. Later, she told me that she felt lucky to have a friend that she could trust and share her feelings.

During the integrating stage, Betty and I were very close, and our friendship was identified as a social unit. During college, we were always invited to social gatherings and fraternity parties—together, not individually. When we did not want anybody to understand what we were saying, we used sophisticated nonverbal communication such as kinesics to exchange

information. As a result, with facial expressions such as a twist of our lips, eye stares and distinctive postural movements, we were able to read each other's minds. In many situations, we caught ourselves saying the same thing at the same time. It was as though we were on the same wavelength and did not always need to verbalize something in order to understand one another. One time we decided to go to a party together and laughed when we discovered we were planning to wear almost identical clothing—without consulting with each other in advance! The two of us were like one person.

After sharing an apartment for a short period of time, the **differentiating stage** took place. We were spending too much time together. The atmosphere in our apartment seemed stressful and lacked privacy. In the apartment, we felt that we never had a moment to ourselves or never were able to alone with our boyfriends. We spent an enormous amount of time studying together and practically spending every waking hours together. One night, the tension was so high that Betty voiced her opinion. This situation was our first serious conflict and was inevitable. She told me that she did not want to hurt my feelings, but she wanted to be honest with me and told me the truth about our excessive study time together and the lack of privacy when our boyfriends were over. We both agreed that the time spent studying together should change. Moreover, we agreed that when her boyfriend was over, I would stay at my boyfriend's apartment. We had a mutual understanding to honestly confront problems in order to maintain an excellent friendship as well as "re-establishing individual identities." During our time as roommates, our relationship often swung back and forth between the integrating and differentiating stages. However, most of our time seemed to be spent integrating.

After graduating from college, my friend and I entered the **circumscribing stage**. Betty got accepted to medical school in Washington D.C., while I remained in California. Unfortunately, the communication between Betty and I has plummeted in quantity and quality. We occasionally talk on the phone; however, the conversation is short and superficial since we are preoccupied with our overwhelming and busy lifestyles. We don't really avoid each other; we just don't spend time talking about the stage we are currently in. Since we have shared good and bad times

together, we will always have a special bond together and be close in spirit. However, the physical distance (proximity) between us may hamper our friendship. Only time will tell.

To reduce the likelihood of our relationship going through the final stages identified by Knapp in his relational development theory (stagnating, avoiding, and terminating), we will both have to rely upon various interpersonal communication behaviors. Although I will not have many opportunities to communicate with Betty face-to-face, I will need to keep in close contact with her, share emotional moments and share my intellectual curiosity and obstacles with her about medicine since we both plan to practice medicine in the future. The channels we plan to use to continue our emotional and intellectual sharing are telephone, cards, and email. When I have those few chances to visit her, the physical component of hugging or crying over her shoulder in time of need will help to maintain the closeness between us. Additionally, during our achievements and inevitable pitfalls in reaching our career goals, I will need to listen with empathy and understand her present stressful situation in medical school where her time for outside interests is limited. Soon, my situation in school will be comparable. As a result of our busy lifestyles, with an integrative approach on each other's part, we can collaborate to focus on the small goals to keep in touch, listen and support one another, and share our experiences in order to overcome rough times together and maintain a harmonious friendship.