



SELF-WORTH & RELATIONSHIPS

Still Me

How to Stay Yourself in a New Relationship

A guide for anyone who has ever lost themselves in love — shrinking to be chosen, performing to be kept, or disappearing into someone else's world while their own quietly faded.

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"You do not have to earn your place in a relationship by becoming someone else. The right person will want the version of you that already exists."

New relationships carry a particular kind of magic — and a particular kind of risk. The risk is not heartbreak, though that is real. The deeper risk is disappearance: the slow erosion of your own preferences, opinions, friendships, and sense of self as you shape yourself around someone new.

For many people, this isn't a conscious choice. It's a pattern — one rooted in early experiences of love that felt conditional, inconsistent, or earned. When we learned that being loved required being agreeable, impressive, or low-maintenance, we carried that lesson into every relationship that followed.

This handout is an invitation to do something different. To bring yourself — your full, complicated, opinionated, uncertain self — into your relationships, and to trust that the right person will meet you there.

PART 1

Why We Lose Ourselves

Understanding the roots of self-abandonment in relationships.

Losing yourself in a relationship rarely happens all at once. It's gradual — a preference quietly set aside here, an opinion softened there, a friendship deprioritized to spend more time together. Before long, you look up and realize you're not sure



what you actually want anymore.

The roots usually go back further than this relationship.

Anxious Attachment

When early caregivers were inconsistent, we learned to monitor others' moods and adjust ourselves to maintain closeness. This hypervigilance follows us into adult relationships.

Conditional Love

If love in childhood felt earned — through performance, compliance, or emotional caretaking — we internalized the belief that we must continue earning it as adults.

Fear of Abandonment

The terror of being left can make self-erasure feel like a reasonable trade. "If I make myself easy to love, they won't leave" becomes an unconscious operating system.

Low Self-Worth

When we don't believe we are inherently worthy of love, we compensate by trying to be useful, agreeable, or impressive — anything to justify our place in the relationship.

People-Pleasing Patterns

Saying yes when we mean no, laughing at things that aren't funny, pretending to like things we don't — these small acts of self-betrayal accumulate over time.

Enmeshment Modeling

If we grew up in a family where boundaries were blurry and individual identity was discouraged, we may not have learned what healthy separateness in a relationship looks like.

Reflection: Where Does This Come From?

- *When did I first learn that love had conditions? What were those conditions?*
- *In past relationships, what parts of myself did I set aside to keep the peace or keep the person?*
- *What do I believe will happen if I show up as my full, unfiltered self in a new relationship?*

PART 2

The Validation Trap

What it looks like to seek approval — and why it backfires.

Seeking validation from a partner isn't inherently unhealthy — we all want to feel seen, appreciated, and loved. The problem arises when external validation becomes the *primary* source of our self-worth: when we need their approval to feel okay about ourselves.

"Validation-seeking becomes a trap when we start making decisions based on what will earn approval rather than what is true for us."

Signs you may be in the validation trap:

1 Checking in constantly

Texting frequently to gauge their mood, seeking reassurance that things are still good between you.



2 Performing instead of being

Presenting a curated version of yourself — your best moods, most impressive stories, most agreeable opinions.

3 Changing your mind to match theirs

Suddenly discovering you love their favorite band, share their political views, or agree with their take on everything.

4 Interpreting silence as rejection

A slow text response or a quiet evening becomes evidence that they're pulling away or losing interest.

5 Measuring your worth by their attention

Feeling good about yourself when they're attentive and worthless when they're distracted or busy.

6 Avoiding conflict at all costs

Swallowing your needs, feelings, and opinions rather than risking disapproval or disagreement.

7 Overgiving to secure the relationship

Doing more, being more available, and sacrificing your own needs to feel indispensable.

Healthy Interdependence	Validation-Seeking
I share my feelings and trust my partner to respond	I monitor their reactions before deciding how I feel
I can disagree and still feel secure	I change my opinion to avoid conflict or disapproval
My sense of worth comes from within	I feel good about myself only when they affirm me
I have my own life alongside the relationship	I reorganize my life around their preferences
I ask for what I need directly	I hint, perform, or over-give hoping they'll notice

PART 3

Staying Grounded in Who You Are

Practical tools for maintaining your identity as the relationship deepens.

Maintaining your sense of self in a relationship isn't about being guarded or withholding. It's about staying connected to your own values, interests, friendships, and inner life — even as you build something new with someone else.

Keep Your Friendships

Relationships that require you to abandon your friendships are asking too much. Protect your platonic connections — they are part of who you are.

Maintain Your Interests

The hobbies, passions, and pursuits that existed before this relationship deserve to continue. Don't quietly retire them to make more time or seem less "complicated."

**Notice Your Own Opinions**

Before sharing your partner's view on something, pause and ask: what do I actually think? Practice having and voicing your own perspective, even on small things.

Keep a Private Inner Life

You don't have to share everything immediately. Journaling, therapy, or simply sitting with your own thoughts helps you stay connected to yourself.

Honor Your Own Needs

Notice what you need — rest, space, connection, creativity — and advocate for it. Your needs are not inconveniences; they are information about who you are.

Stay Honest About Discomfort

When something doesn't feel right, say so — gently, but honestly. Suppressing discomfort to keep the peace is a form of self-abandonment.

Spend Time Alone

Regular solitude isn't a sign that something is wrong. It's how you stay in relationship with yourself. Protect your alone time as you would any other commitment.

Check In With Yourself

Regularly ask: How am I feeling? What do I want? What am I avoiding? These questions keep you anchored to your own experience rather than just responding to theirs.

Reflection: Staying Anchored

- *What are three things that are deeply "me" that I want to protect in this relationship?*
- *Is there anything I've already started to quietly set aside? Why?*
- *What would it look like to be fully myself in this relationship — and does that feel safe?*

PART 4

Setting the Tone Early

How the beginning of a relationship shapes everything that follows.

The early weeks and months of a relationship are when patterns are established. The way you show up now — how honest you are, what you tolerate, what you ask for — becomes the blueprint for the relationship going forward. This is the best time to practice being yourself.

1 Be honest about your preferences early

If you don't like something, say so gently. If you prefer something different, mention it. Small acts of honesty early on build a relationship where your real self is known.

2 Let them see you on an ordinary day

Not just your best days — your tired days, your grumpy days, your "I just want to stay in" days. A relationship built on your highlight reel will require you to maintain it indefinitely.

3 Introduce them to your actual life

Your friends, your routines, your weird habits, your complicated family. The sooner they know the full picture, the sooner you know whether they're staying for the real thing.



4 Notice how they respond to your boundaries

When you say no, decline an invitation, or express a different opinion — how do they respond? This is important data about whether this relationship is safe for your full self.

5 Don't over-explain or over-apologize

You don't need to justify your preferences, defend your feelings, or apologize for having needs. Practice stating them simply and letting them land.

6 Resist the urge to fix their discomfort

If they seem disappointed or frustrated, your first instinct may be to smooth it over by changing your position. Pause before doing this. Their discomfort is not always your responsibility to resolve.

◆ Remember: A relationship where you have to hide or shrink yourself to be loved is not a relationship that loves you — it loves a performance of you.

PART 5

When You've Already Lost Yourself

How to find your way back — without blowing up the relationship.

If you're reading this and recognizing a pattern that's already underway — you've already started shrinking, agreeing, performing, or disappearing — that's okay. Awareness is the beginning of change, not a verdict on the relationship.

"Coming back to yourself in a relationship is not a betrayal of the relationship. It is an act of honesty — and ultimately, of love."

Steps for finding your way back:

1 Name what you've given up

Make a list — mental or written — of the things you've set aside: interests, friendships, opinions, needs. You can't reclaim what you haven't acknowledged losing.

2 Start small

You don't need to dramatically reclaim your identity all at once. Start with one small act of self-expression: mention an opinion, say no to one thing, reach out to a friend you've been neglecting.

3 Be honest with your partner

You don't have to frame it as a problem with them. "I've realized I've been neglecting some things that matter to me — I want to make more space for them" is honest and non-accusatory.



4 Notice their response

A partner who loves you will welcome your return to yourself. A partner who resists it — who becomes threatened, controlling, or withdrawn when you take up more space — is telling you something important.

5 Work with a therapist

Patterns of self-abandonment are often deeply rooted and don't change through willpower alone. Individual therapy can help you understand the origins of the pattern and build new ways of relating.

6 Be patient with yourself

You didn't lose yourself overnight, and you won't find yourself overnight either. The process is gradual, and it requires self-compassion — not self-criticism.

Signs the relationship can hold your full self

They express curiosity about your opinions. They encourage your friendships and interests. They can handle your "no" without withdrawing. They seem to like you more when you're fully yourself.

Signs it may not be safe to be yourself

They seem threatened by your independence. They sulk or withdraw when you disagree. They've subtly discouraged your friendships. You feel more anxious, not more secure, over time.

WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

Validation-seeking and self-abandonment in relationships are often deeply rooted in early attachment experiences. Working with a therapist can help you explore these patterns in a safe, non-judgmental space. Consider reaching out if you notice:

You feel anxious or worthless when your partner is unavailable or distracted

This may signal anxious attachment or low self-worth that therapy can address directly.

You consistently prioritize your partner's needs over your own

Chronic self-abandonment often has roots in early caregiving dynamics worth exploring.

You struggle to know what you actually want or feel

Losing touch with your own inner experience is a sign that reconnection work is needed.

Past relationships have followed the same pattern

Repetitive patterns across relationships suggest something deeper that insight alone won't shift.

CLOSING

You Are Enough, As You Are

Affirmations for staying yourself in love.

◆ *I bring something irreplaceable to this relationship: myself.*

◆ *I do not have to earn love by becoming someone easier to love.*



◆ <i>My opinions, preferences, and needs are welcome here.</i>	◆ <i>I can be fully known and still be chosen.</i>
◆ <i>Disagreement does not mean disconnection.</i>	◆ <i>I am allowed to take up space in this relationship.</i>
◆ <i>My friendships and interests are not threats to this relationship — they are part of me.</i>	◆ <i>I notice when I am performing, and I gently come back to myself.</i>
◆ <i>The right relationship will make me more myself, not less.</i>	◆ <i>Love that requires my disappearance is not the love I am looking for.</i>

A Note From Dr. Ellis

The clients I work with who struggle most with this pattern are not weak or naive — they are people who learned very early that love was something you had to work for. That lesson made sense once. It no longer serves you.

Staying yourself in a relationship is one of the most courageous things you can do. It means risking being truly known — and trusting that you are worth knowing. That trust is something we can build together.

— Dr. Natalie Ellis, LCSW-QS

Ready to do this work?

Individual therapy can help you understand the roots of validation-seeking and build a secure, grounded sense of self that doesn't depend on a partner's approval.

Schedule a free consultation at sagesoltherapy.com