

# A “Respect Test” for Men in Relationships

**T**his is a question you can ask about any interaction between people:

***‘Does this interaction build or lessen respect, safety and trust for this person, or does it demean them in some way?’***

Abusive behaviour is clearly at the expense of others, whereas respectful behaviour enhances all concerned. Healthy relationships are those where people feel free to disagree. This does not mean that people don’t like or are judging you; it simply means that, from their experiences and understanding, they have a different view. You can agree to disagree over an issue and still remain friends.

## Questions to Ponder

- What will help me remember to apply the Respect Test to my interactions?
- What would get in the way of me carrying out the Respect Test in my contact with others?
- How will I ensure that I will put the necessary time and energy into respecting others?
- What are the signs that I am demeaning a person when I interact with them?
- Will I give up the Respect Test as not useful if I find myself failing it or will I persevere until I get it right?

These questions are central to a non-abusive lifestyle. ‘I don’t know’ answers are okay. I know some men who carry little reminder cards in their wallets. Others approach situations that they know are going to be difficult by asking themselves the question: ‘How will I maintain my respect for this person for the time we are together?’

*Rodney (32), had great difficulty relating to his wife’s mother. Before she visited he would think of all the negative things about her. That warmed him up to act disrespectfully towards her when she arrived. He would end up arguing with her about all sorts of irrelevant issues, just for the sake of it. When Rodney was asked to apply the Respect Test to his*



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*interactions with his mother-in-law, he was less than willing. After putting aside his own resistance by focusing on how his behaviour put his wife in a difficult position, he reluctantly agreed to give it a go.*





*Reminding himself of the Respect Test, he prepared for his mother-in-law’s arrival by trying to put himself in her shoes. When she came in he said that while they had argued a great deal in the past he was not happy with this situation, and informed her he was planning to be more respectful towards her. Rodney stated that, for the first time, he was able to talk with his mother-in-law without just reacting to her. This was a major breakthrough.*

Rodney’s story shows that it is easy to develop patterns of disrespect that escalate to a point where they form the basis of all future interactions.

A couple of weeks later Rodney’s father-in-law was hospitalised with a heart attack. It was Rodney who picked up his mother-in-law and took her to the hospital, sitting with her through the early hours of the morning. This signalled a significant turning point in their relationship.

## Exercise

Think of three men and three women whom you respect:

-  What are the qualities about these people that contribute towards your respect for them?
-  How does the way these people act invite you to respect them?
-  How do you want to be respected — out of fear, or because of who you are and how you act towards others?
-  Now decide if these people are good models for you when it comes to respectful ways of being with others. You might want to talk with them further about how they have managed to achieve this and whether they have ideas that will be helpful to you.

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