LOVE, AUTHENTICALLY:
THE EXISTENTIAL WAY

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A Guide to Building Genuine Relationships
through Existential Wisdom

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1

PART I:
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR AUTHENTIC LOVE

1. Existential Relationships 101 15
2. Embracing Your Self and Connecting with Your Partner 35
3. R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Find Out What It Means to You (and Your Partner) 55
4. Balancing Between Freedom and Responsibility 77

PART II:
EMBRACING THE DEEPER CONNECTION

5. Mastering the Craft of Existential Conversation 97
6. Existential Anxiety: The Uninvited Guest in Your Relationship 118
7. Transforming Conflict into Connection 138
8. Overcoming the Hurdles to Authentic Love 161

PART III:
KEEPING THE LOVE ALIVE FOR THE LONG HAUL

9. Crafting a Shared Vision for Your Future 191
10. Growing Together While Staying True to Yourself 212
11. Keeping the Spark Alive Over Time 244
12. Love in the Age of Likes: Existential Relationships in the Digital Era 281
13. You Did It! Now What? The Final Word 312

RESOURCES 331

INTRODUCTION

Hey There, Fellow Relationship Adventurer!

Welcome to this exciting journey of self-discovery and relationship transformation. Before we jump in, let me share a bit about my own adventure in love, loss, and personal growth that led me to write this book. Like many of you, my path to finding authentic love was far from a straight line. In my young adult years, I experienced the exhilarating highs and devastating lows of romantic relationships. I still vividly remember the heart-wrenching pain of breakups and the sense of loss and grief that followed. I sometimes felt lost, confused, and unsure if I would ever find the genuine connection I craved.

But amidst the heartache, a spark of curiosity ignited within me. I began to wonder: what makes some relationships thrive while others crumble? This question led me on a personal and professional quest for answers.

As a psychologist and theologian, I found myself drawn to the profound insights of existential psychology. The more I delved into this fascinating field, the more I realised how its principles could be applied to the realm of relationships. Concepts like authenticity, freedom, responsibility, and finding meaning in life took on new depth and relevance when viewed through the lens of love and connection.

Slowly but surely, I began integrating these existential ideas into my own relationships. I learned to embrace vulnerability, communicate more openly and honestly, and take responsibility for my happiness. As I did so, something

remarkable happened: my relationships started to transform. I found myself connecting with others on a deeper, more authentic level than ever before.

The real turning point came when I met my partner over three decades ago. From the very beginning, we committed to building our relationship on a foundation of existential as well as spiritual principles. We navigated the ups and downs of life together, always striving to maintain our authenticity, respect each other's freedom, and find shared meaning in our journey. Through this experience, I witnessed firsthand the incredible power of an existential approach to love.

This "aha" moment inspired me to share what I had learned with others. I realised that the insights and strategies that profoundly impacted my relationships could help countless other young adults navigate the complexities of love in the modern world.

And so, this book was born. In the following pages, I'll guide you through the key principles of existential psychology and show you how to apply them to your own relationships. We'll explore practical exercises, real-life examples, and thought-provoking questions designed to help you build more authentic, fulfilling connections with others.

But before we embark on this journey together, I want to emphasise that this book is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Every relationship is unique; what works for one couple may not work for another. Instead, think of this book as a compass—a tool to help you navigate your own path to authentic love.

I invite you to approach this book with an open mind, a willingness to step outside your comfort zone, and a commitment to personal growth. Together, we'll explore the joys, challenges, and profound rewards of building genuine relationships in the 21st century.

Are you ready to take the first step on this exciting adventure? Let's go!

Why Existential Psychology Is Your Relationship Superpower

Picture this: you're standing at the base of a towering mountain, gazing up at the peak that seems to touch the sky. The journey ahead appears daunting, filled with twists, turns, and unknown challenges. But what if I told you that you possess a secret weapon—a powerful tool that can help you navigate the sometimes treacherous terrain of relationships with grace, authenticity, and resilience? That tool, my friend, is existential psychology.

At its core, existential psychology is a philosophy that encourages us to confront life's big questions head-on. It invites us to explore themes like freedom, responsibility, meaning, and authenticity—concepts that may seem abstract at first glance but hold profound implications for our relationships.

One of the key principles of existential psychology, as outlined by renowned therapist Irvin Yalom, is that we are fundamentally free and responsible for our choices. This means that we have the power to shape our lives and relationships through the decisions we make each day. While this freedom can be exhilarating, it also comes with a sense of responsibility. We must own our actions and their consequences for ourselves and our partners.

Another central tenet of existential psychology is the idea that we create meaning in our lives through our actions and relationships. As existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously said, "Existence precedes essence"—in other words, we are not born with a pre-determined purpose, but instead, we craft our own meaning through the way we choose to live.

These principles offer a powerful framework for building authentic, fulfilling connections when applied to relationships. Here, we are talking about a variety of relationships, including intimate ones, friendships, and professional and parental

relationships. But remember, each kind of relationship has its own unique approach and practice and it is important to be mindful of this. Many of the principles and practices we will be talking about are common across all relationships, such as communication. By embracing our freedom and responsibility, we can make conscious choices that align with our values and foster personal growth. We can communicate openly and honestly with our partners, even when it feels vulnerable or uncomfortable. We can take ownership of our own happiness and work together to create a shared sense of meaning and purpose.

The benefits of an existential approach to love are vast and far-reaching. When we engage with our relationships from a place of authenticity and self-awareness, we create space for deeper intimacy and connection. We become more attuned to our own needs and desires, as well as those of our partner. We develop greater resilience in the face of challenges, knowing that we have the power to choose our response and find meaning even in difficult times.

Existential psychotherapist Rollo May believed that the ultimate goal of therapy was to help individuals develop the courage to be themselves. In relationships, this means showing up fully and authentically without hiding behind masks or pretences. It means embracing the full spectrum of human experience—joy and sorrow, love and fear, connection and solitude—and allowing ourselves to be seen and loved for who we truly are.

Of course, building an existential relationship is not always easy. It requires a willingness to step outside our comfort zones, confront our fears and insecurities, and take responsibility for our own growth and happiness. But the rewards are immeasurable. When we approach our relationships with an existential mindset, we open ourselves

up to a world of possibility—a world where love is not just a feeling but a conscious choice, a daily practice, and a source of profound meaning and fulfilment.

As you stand at the base of that mountain, remember that you hold a powerful tool in your hands. Existential psychology is your relationship superpower—a guide to help you navigate the twists and turns of love with courage, authenticity, and grace. By embracing its principles and applying them to your journey, you can build the deep, meaningful connections we all crave. The path may be steep and rocky at times, but with existential psychology as your compass, you have everything you need to reach the summit of authentic love.

What to Expect from This Book (and What Not to Expect)

Alright, intrepid explorer of love, before we set off on this exciting adventure together, let's take a moment to map out the journey ahead.

Think of this section as your trusty guidebook—a sneak peek into the treasures that await you within these pages and a friendly heads-up about the paths we won't be taking.

First and foremost, expect to be treated like a friend throughout this book. I'll be your wise-cracking, story-telling, occasionally vulnerable companion on this quest for authentic love. We'll laugh together, ponder life's big questions, and maybe even shed a tear or two along the way. I firmly believe that the best learning happens when we feel connected and engaged, so get ready for a conversational tone that feels more like a heart-to-heart chat than a stuffy lecture.

As we explore the ins and outs of existential relationships, you'll find a wealth of practical exercises and tips to help you put these insights into action. Whether you're single and ready to

mingle or coupled up and looking to deepen your connection, these tools will empower you to take concrete steps toward more fulfilling relationships. From communication techniques to mindfulness practices, we'll cover a range of strategies that you can start implementing right away.

But this book isn't just about acquiring new skills—it's also an invitation to go deeper into your own psyche and explore what makes you tick. Throughout our journey, you'll encounter thought-provoking questions designed to spark self-reflection and help you gain a clearer understanding of your own beliefs, values, and experiences. As existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard put it, "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." By reflecting on your past and present, you'll be better equipped to create a future filled with authentic, meaningful connections.

Now, I want to be upfront about what this book is not. It's not a one-size-fits-all solution or a magic formula for perfect relationships. As existential psychology teaches us, every individual is unique, and what works for one person may not work for another. Instead, think of this book as a compassionate guide, offering insights and suggestions to help you navigate your own path to love and fulfilment. While we'll focus primarily on romantic relationships, the principles and strategies we'll explore can be applied to all kinds of connections—friendships, family bonds, and even the relationship you have with yourself. At its core, existential psychology is about learning to live authentically and create meaning in all areas of life.

Throughout this book, you'll find a judgement-free space to explore your own experiences and ideas about love. There's no right or wrong way to approach relationships, and I'm not here to tell you what to do or how to feel. Instead, I invite you to bring an open mind and a curious heart as we go into the big questions of life and love together.

As you read, I encourage you to take action and implement the lessons you learn. Existential psychology isn't just a theoretical framework—it's a way of life that requires courage, commitment, and a willingness to step outside your comfort zone. By putting these ideas into practice, you'll start to see profound shifts in your relationships and in your personal growth.

At the same time, I want to remind you that growth and change take time, effort, and patience. Building authentic relationships is a lifelong journey, not a quick fix or a one-time event. There will be ups and downs, challenges and triumphs, moments of clarity and periods of confusion.

But with the tools and insights you'll gain from this book, you'll be well-equipped to navigate even the toughest terrain with grace and resilience.

Finally, join a community of fellow relationship explorers. No one does it alone, and having a tribe makes all the difference on your journey to real love. Whether it's an online forum, a social media hashtag, or a local meetup group, find others who are also into personal growth and meaningful connections. We can inspire, support, and celebrate each other as we navigate the crazy, messy, amazing adventure of love in the 21st century.

So there you have it—the sneak peek. As existential therapist Irvin Yalom says, "The ultimate goal of psychotherapy is to help people face life with more meaning and less suffering." I hope this book does that for you—gives you a roadmap to more meaningful, authentic and fulfilling relationships and the tools to navigate life's inevitable challenges with more ease and resilience.

Ready to get started? Let's get into it and discover the magic of existential psychology together. Your journey to real love begins now!

A Note on the Structure of the Book

Before we embark on this transformative journey together, let's take a moment to familiarise ourselves with the roadmap ahead. This book is divided into three main parts, each designed to build upon the last and guide you toward more authentic, fulfilling relationships.

Part I: Laying the Foundation: In the first part of our journey, we'll focus on establishing a solid foundation for existential relationships. Just as a sturdy house requires a well-built base, a thriving relationship needs a strong groundwork of self-awareness, authenticity, and personal responsibility.

We'll start by exploring the core principles of existential psychology and how they apply to the realm of love and connection. You'll gain a deeper understanding of concepts like freedom, choice, and the search for meaning and learn how to integrate these ideas into your own life and relationships.

You'll develop a clearer sense of your values, beliefs, and relationship patterns through a blend of real-life examples, practical exercises, and reflective questions. This self-knowledge will serve as a compass, guiding you toward more genuine, fulfilling connections with others.

Part II: Deepening Connection: With a solid foundation in place, we'll go into the heart of the matter: creating and sustaining deep, authentic connections. In this section, you'll learn how to apply existential principles to your day-to-day interactions and cultivate more meaningful, intimate relationships.

We'll explore powerful communication techniques, such as active listening and vulnerable self-disclosure, that foster

understanding and empathy between partners. You'll discover how to navigate the inevitable challenges and conflicts that arise in relationships, using them as opportunities for growth and deeper connection.

Through a mix of case studies, dialogue prompts, and experiential exercises, you'll gain practical tools for building trust, enhancing intimacy, and creating a shared sense of meaning and purpose with your loved ones.

Part III: Nurturing Long-Term Success: In the final stretch of our journey, we'll turn our attention to the long-term horizon. Building an authentic, existential relationship is not a one-time event but a lifelong growth, adaptation, and renewal process.

In this section, you'll learn strategies for maintaining vitality and connection over the long haul. We'll explore topics like keeping the spark alive, navigating major life transitions, and continually reinventing your relationship to meet both partners' changing needs and desires.

You'll also gain insights into the existential challenges that can arise in long-term relationships, such as grappling with questions of commitment, autonomy, and mortality. Through a combination of philosophical wisdom and practical advice, you'll develop the resilience and flexibility needed to weather life's storms and emerge stronger, more connected, and more in love than ever before.

Throughout the book, each chapter is brimming with real-life stories, illustrative examples, and step-by-step exercises designed to help you translate abstract concepts into concrete action. Whether you're single or partnered, gay or straight, young or old, these tools and insights can be tailored to your unique situation and relationship goals.

At the end of each chapter, you'll encounter a series of

reflection questions inviting you to dig deeper into your own experiences, beliefs, and desires. These prompts are designed to spark self-discovery and encourage you to engage with the material personally and meaningfully.

As a bonus, the resources section at the end of this book is packed with additional resources to support you on your journey.

From recommended readings and YouTube videos to guided meditations, these supplemental materials will help you continue learning, growing, and applying the principles of existential psychology to your relationships long after you've turned the final page.

Time for Action!

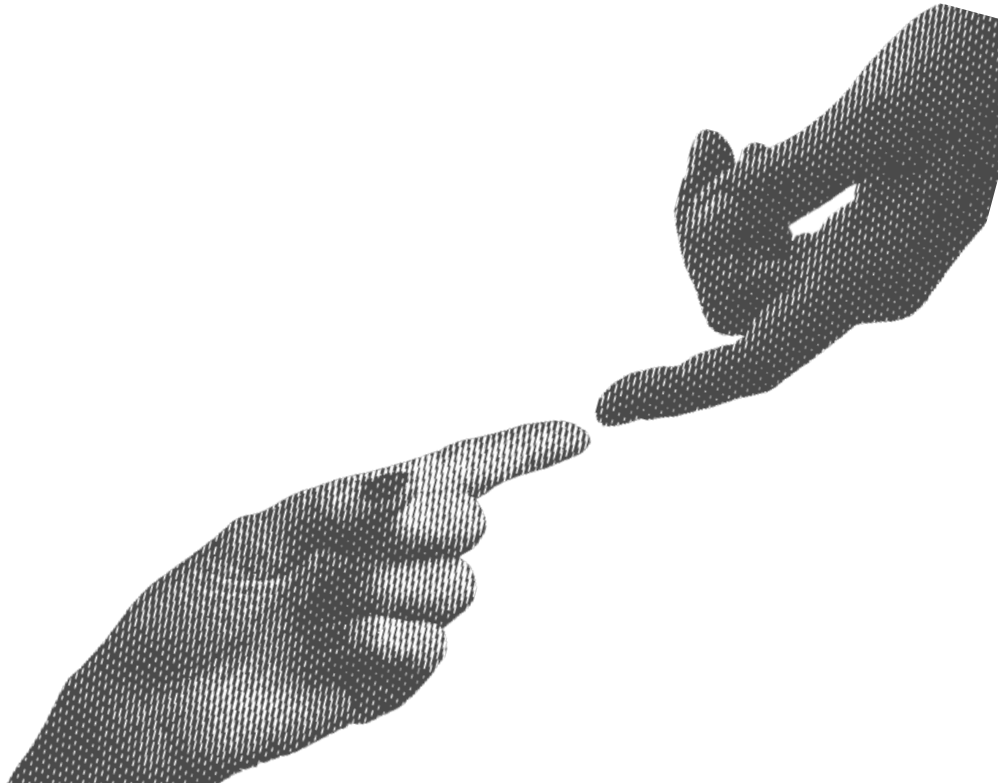
Before we explore further, I want to leave you with a challenge and an invitation. Engaging with the ideas and practices in this book will require more than just passive reading. It will ask you to step outside your comfort zone, question long-held assumptions, and take bold, intentional action in service of your relationship goals. Approach this journey with an open mind and a willingness to experiment. Be curious about your own inner world and the experiences of others. Embrace the discomfort that comes with growth and change, knowing that on the other side lies a richer, more fulfilling way of loving and being loved.

As the existential philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich once said, "The first duty of love is to listen." So, too, is the first duty of this book—to listen to your unique story, your hopes and fears, your triumphs and struggles. But the second duty of love, and of this book, is to challenge you to grow, to stretch beyond your current limitations and step into a more authentic, courageous way of being.

Are you ready to accept this challenge? Are you willing to show up fully, dive deep, and do the sometimes-messy work of building an existential relationship? If so, then let's begin. Your journey to a more authentic, meaningful love starts now.

PART I:

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR AUTHENTIC LOVE



CHAPTER 1:

EXISTENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS 101

1.1 UNDERSTANDING EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Imagine yourself transported back to 20th-century Europe, a period marked by significant turmoil and transformation. In the aftermath of two devastating world wars, many individuals found themselves grappling with existential questions about human existence, the quest for meaning in a turbulent world, and the intrinsic challenges of leading an authentic life. Within this backdrop, a group of visionary thinkers laid the groundwork for what would later be recognised as existential philosophy, and later, other brought these profound ideas into psychology.

Leaders like Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre were the pioneers of existential philosophy. These were not just philosophers but daring visionaries who probed into profound inquiries about human nature and challenged the established beliefs of their era.

Often seen as the pioneer of existentialism, Kierkegaard highlighted the significance of decisions and dedication when faced with life's uncertainties and absurdities. Nietzsche questioned ideas of morality and urged people to embrace their inner "will to power" to establish a life filled with meaning and purpose. Heidegger delved into the essence of existence itself, exploring how humans find themselves in a world filled with possibilities and limitations. Sartre, one of the renowned

existentialists, asserted that individuals have the freedom to shape their own lives and identities through their choices.

Although these philosophers approached existence from various perspectives, they all shared a belief in the importance of individual experiences in navigating life's challenges and opportunities. Instead of attempting to simplify human behaviour into universal laws or patterns, they aimed to shed light on the unique qualities inherent in each person's interactions with the world. In doing so, they paved the way for a profound new understanding of selfhood, interpersonal relationships and the intricate dynamics that unfold between individuals.

During the mid-20th century, as existential concepts made their way into the field of psychology, a new wave of thinkers and therapists emerged to translate these ideas into practical therapy methods. Influential figures such as Viktor Frankl, Rollo May and Irvin Yalom saw existentialism as a tool to help individuals address the profound challenges and opportunities in their lives.

Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust who later developed logotherapy, stressed the significance of discovering meaning and purpose in times of extreme hardship. May, a figure in American existential psychotherapy, delved into how people navigate issues like freedom versus responsibility, love versus willpower and creativity versus conformity. Yalom's impactful contributions to psychotherapy focus on how grappling with life concerns, like death, solitude, freedom and lack of meaning, can lead to significant personal growth and change.

As we explore the themes and principles of existential psychology, it's crucial to understand that this field is diverse and constantly evolving, not a rigid, singular ideology. Despite the variety of ideas within thought, common core concepts serve as a valuable framework for comprehending the

complexities of human relationships. Central to existentialism is the concept of freedom.

According to existentialists, humans possess freedom, allowing them to make choices and shape their own destinies in a world devoid of inherent meaning or purpose. This freedom carries both a sense of empowerment and responsibility; it necessitates that we take ownership of our actions, beliefs and interpersonal connections. When applied to relationships, this perspective encourages us to view partnerships as dynamic collaborations rather than predefined roles or expectations. It prompts us to engage in a process of mutual creation where both individuals contribute actively to shaping the trajectory and possibilities of their shared experiences.

Another significant theme in psychology revolves around authenticity. In a world where superficiality, conformity, and societal pressures often dominate, existentialists argue that true fulfilment and meaning come from staying authentic to oneself and embracing our desires, values, and ways of being. In relationships, this translates to being open and vulnerable with our partners, sharing our truths to create a space where both individuals can be fully seen and accepted in their imperfect humanity.

Linked closely to authenticity is the idea of responsibility in existentialism. It acknowledges that with freedom comes great responsibility for the choices we make and the lives we lead. In relationships, this involves taking charge of our needs, desires and behaviours by engaging in introspection and personal growth. It means understanding that while partners can offer support and inspiration, true happiness and fulfilment are journeys each individual must embark on.

Existential psychology underscores the significance of seeking a purpose in life. In a world filled with chaos and uncertainty, existentialists believe that each person must determine their purpose and direction. Regarding

relationships, this perspective encourages us to view our partnerships as opportunities for personal growth rather than just sources of comfort or validation. It prompts us to consider the kind of life we want to build with others, the impact we wish to make on the world, and how we can support each other in following our most genuine paths.

As Simone de Beauvoir, the famous existential philosopher, insightfully argued, authentic love is only possible when both partners are free and equal, not only in theory but in lived reality. Love becomes inauthentic when it devolves into dependency or domination. Instead of merging into a "we" that erases the self, she emphasised loving as two soverign beings choosing to transcend together. True intimacy, for Beauvoir, honours each person's freedom while inviting mutual creation of meaning through shard projects. In this way love is not a refuge from freedom but an expression of it.

Throughout this book, we will explore themes like freedom, authenticity, responsibility and meaning, exploring how they interconnect to offer a vision of love in its most genuine form. We will learn how existential concepts can guide us through the ups and downs of relationships—from the exhilarating rush of falling in love to the vulnerability of creating a shared future all the way to the poignant beauty of saying goodbye when necessary.

What's crucial is how looking through the lens of existential psychology can guide us in approaching the incredible journey of love with a sense of curiosity, openness and amazement and embracing the complexities and enigmas of human connections, finding potential for growth, change and fresh beginnings in every moment.

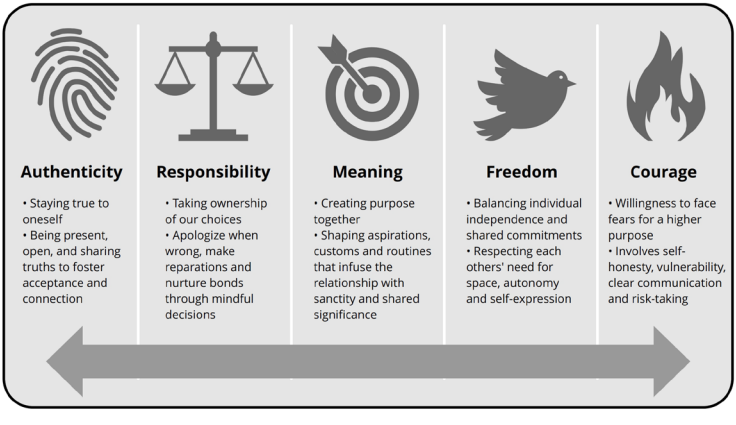
My fellow companions on this voyage, let's embark on this adventure with bravery and an open heart. Let's be ready to challenge our beliefs, face our fears head-on, and venture into the unknown with sincerity and compassion. Let's have

faith that the joys of living life to the fullest and loving deeply will outweigh any risks we take.

Key Takeaways:

- Existential psychology focuses on freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and meaning.
- These concepts shape our understanding of ourselves and our relationships.
- Existential ideas can help navigate life's uncertainties and challenges.

1.2 THE FIVE PILLARS OF EXISTENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS



As we start our journey into understanding existential relationships more deeply, it's crucial to establish a solid foundation for grasping the fundamental principles and methods that will shape our path ahead. The existential tradition offers a range of ideas and concepts. Existential

thinkers' works often contain recurring themes. These themes, known as the "five pillars" of relationships, serve as a valuable guide for navigating the complexities and rewards of genuine connections.

1. Authenticity: The first pillar is authenticity, which centres on staying true to oneself and embracing one's desires, values, and ways of being. In relationships, authenticity involves being fully present and open with our partners, sharing our truths to create a space where both individuals can be indeed seen and accepted in their imperfect humanity.

However, fostering authenticity in relationships is a challenge. Our world often promotes superficiality, conformity and the need to wear masks to fit in and be loved. Many of us learn from a young age to hide parts of ourselves out of fear of rejection or misunderstanding. We develop strategies to manage our image and shield ourselves from vulnerability in pursuit of the love and acceptance we seek deeply.

Existential thinkers often highlight the consequences of not being true to ourselves in relationships. Pretending to be someone we are not creates a gap between our inner thoughts and how we present ourselves externally. This can lead to feelings of being stuck, dissatisfied or resentful as we maintain an image that doesn't align with our true selves. It also prevents our partners from understanding and loving us for who we are, which can breed mistrust and emotional distance over time, even in the strongest connections. Building authenticity in relationships requires us to step outside our comfort zones and embrace some risks. It involves being honest about our needs, wants and boundaries—even when it is challenging. Effective communication with partners should stem from vulnerability and openness rather than defensiveness or manipulation. Establishing an environment where both individuals feel secure sharing their truths is

key; knowing they'll receive empathy, compassion, and understanding fosters trust.

Key Takeaways:

- Being true to oneself is crucial for genuine connections.
- Authenticity involves showing up as your real self, imperfections and all.
- Authentic expression fosters deeper intimacy.

2. Responsibility: The second pillar of existential relationships is the concept of responsibility. From an existential perspective, responsibility is the flip side of the freedom and agency that are our birthright as human beings. In relationships, responsibility is viewed as intertwined with the freedom and agency inherent in human interactions.

Because we have the freedom to make decisions and shape our paths, we must also accept responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions, not just for ourselves but also for those dear to us. In relationships, taking responsibility entails acknowledging our needs, wants, and behaviours and being open to self-examination and personal growth.

It involves understanding that while our partners can offer support and motivation, they cannot be the source of our happiness or fulfilment. That is a journey each of us must embark on independently. Responsibility also means taking ownership of how our choices and actions impact our partners and the relationship. It requires being ready for challenging converations, offering apologies when needed, making reparations with humility and compassion and recognising that every decision we make—whether in our words or how we invest our time and efforts—an either nurture or harm the strength of our bond. Developing a sense

of responsibility in a relationship demands a willingness to confront ourselves and our habits truthfully, even when it's uncomfortable or painful.

Self-reflection and self-inquiry involve understanding our motivations, fears, and areas where we may lack insight. It also entails taking responsibility for our growth and progress instead of relying on others to fix us or fill any voids within us.

Key Takeaways:

- We are responsible for our happiness and growth.
- Taking ownership of our choices improves relationship dynamics.
- Responsibility empowers us to create a positive change.

3. Meaning: The third pillar of relationships is the pursuit of meaning. For those who follow existentialist philosophy, seeking meaning is a human desire—a journey to discover purpose, worth, and importance in a world that often appears disorderly and absurd. Establishing shared meaning is crucial for constructing a strong and deep satisfying bond. Meaning is what makes our hearts sing.

When discussing meaning within a relationship, we allude to the direction and value that we collaboratively shape with our partners. It encompasses the perspective of what we are constructing together. The aspirations, dreams and objectives that give substance and form to our joint path. It involves the customs, routines and everyday habits that imbue our bond with a sense of sanctity and significance. Moreover, it entails how we interpret the challenges and hindrances we encounter by discovering growth and transformation amidst difficulties and anguish.

Fostering meaning in a relationship necessitates a readiness

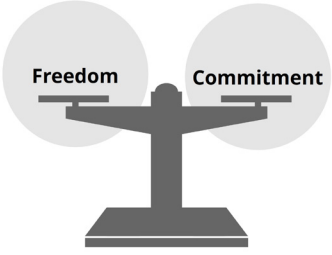
to go deeply into conversations about life's fundamental inquiries together. It entails discussing our principles, convictions, and long-term ambitions while discovering means to synchronise our journeys with a collective sense of purpose.

It entails consciously deciding how we invest our time and effort, giving priority to activities and moments that strengthen our bond and propel us toward our objectives. Moreover, it involves viewing the highs and lows in relationships as chances for personal development, learning, and fostering deeper closeness rather than as challenges to evade or fix.

Key Takeaways:

- Shared meaning strengthens bonds in relationships.
- Creating purpose together can enhance connection.
- Meaning is something we actively create, not passively find.

4. Freedom: The fourth pillar of relationships is freedom. As discussed earlier, freedom holds importance in existential philosophy. The belief is that individuals have the inherent freedom to choose and shape their destinies despite external constraints. In the realm of relationships, freedom revolves around maintaining an equilibrium between individual independence and shared commitments within a partnership. Fostering freedom in a relationship means respecting each other's need for space, autonomy and self-expression. It signifies acknowledging that even as we build a life together, we remain individuals with distinct needs, wants and ways of existing in the world. Granting each other space to evolve, grow, and pursue individual interests demonstrates trust in the belief that personal growth will enhance and deepen our bond over time.



Balancing Freedom and Commitment in Relationships

In a relationship, freedom involves choosing to be open and vulnerable with our partners, even when it's challenging.

It means letting go of defences and masks to embrace the beautiful journey of love and closeness. It's about remaining present during difficult conversations, believing that this leads to genuine growth and connection.

Developing freedom in a relationship is about finding the balance between independence and intimacy, safety and taking risks. It creates a foundation of trust, respect and support where both individuals can be themselves while cherishing their special bond.

Key Takeaways:

- Freedom involves balancing individual autonomy with commitment.
- Healthy relationships support individual growth.
- Freedom and commitment can coexist and strengthen each other.

The Existential thinker Jean-Paul Sartre says, "Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you."

5. Courage: The fifth and final pillar of existential relationships is courage. From an existential perspective, courage is not

about the absence of fear but about the willingness to face and move through fear in the service of a higher purpose or value. Courage plays a role in existential relationships. True courage isn't the absence of fear but rather facing fears for a purpose. In relationships, courage means showing up even when it's scary or uncomfortable.

Fostering bravery within a relationship involves embracing conversations, clearly communicating our needs and boundaries with kindness, and listening to our partners with an open heart and mind. It also means taking risks, sharing our deepest truths and fears, and believing in the power of empathy and understanding from our loved ones. Moreover, it entails confronting the challenges that come with relationships, as they are essential for building resilience, intimacy, and personal growth.

Courage in relationships also requires us to acknowledge our limitations, blind spots, and opportunities for personal development. It calls for self-honesty about how we may hinder our happiness and compassionate steps to address these patterns. Being willing to admit mistakes, apologise sincerely for any harm caused, and make things right with humility and generosity is crucial. Ultimately, nurturing courage in relationships is about having faith in the goodness of our hearts and the transformative strength of genuine connections that allow vulnerability to heal us. It's about taking a chance on the unknown and understanding that the joys of living and loving to the fullest outweigh the risks.

As we explore deeper into our exploration of connections, we'll revisit these five pillars time and again as guiding lights to comprehend the complexities and possibilities of genuine closeness. We'll witness how they interlace harmoniously to paint a transformative portrait of what it truly means to love and be loved in our complete humanity.

Let's pause and ponder how these pillars resonate with

our personal experiences and dreams. Which of these pillars resonates deeply with your own relationships? Which ones pose challenges or feel unfamiliar? How can you start fostering authenticity, accountability, significance, freedom, and bravery in your life and relationships? As we contemplate these questions, let's keep in mind that embarking on an existential relationship journey is not about reaching a destination but about embracing an adventure. It demands patience, perseverance, and a readiness to embrace uncertainty.

It's a journey filled with potential for rewards. A chance to deeply connect with ourselves and others to grow and evolve in ways we never imagined and to feel the profound joy and meaning that comes from living and loving wholeheartedly. So let's embark on this journey together, embracing curiosity, courage and an open mind. Let us be ready to challenge our assumptions, face our fears, and embrace the thrilling adventure of deep love. Let's believe that, in the end, the journey will be more than worth it.

Key Takeaways:

- Courage is essential for facing relationship challenges.
- Being brave enough to be vulnerable can deepen connections.
- Courage allows us to grow and evolve within our relationships.

1.3 QUIZ: HOW EXISTENTIAL IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

It's time to get real and put your relationship to the existential test! We've explored the lofty ideals of authenticity,

responsibility, meaning, freedom, and courage—but how do these concepts actually play out in the nitty-gritty reality of your day-to-day love life? Talking about the importance of vulnerability and open communication philosophically is one thing. Still, it's quite another to put these principles into practice when your partner is driving you up the wall or navigating the umpteenth disagreement about whose turn it is to do the dishes. That's where this handy-dandy quiz comes in! Think of it as a relationship check-up, a chance to take an honest look at the state of your union through the lens of existential thought. By answering these ten questions with ruthless honesty (and perhaps a dash of humility), you'll gain valuable insight into your partnership's strengths and growth areas and identify areas where you might want to focus more attention and intention.

Now, before we jump in, here is a quick disclaimer: this quiz is not meant to be a definitive verdict on the health or success of your relationship. It's not a pass/fail test or a cosmic compatibility meter. Every relationship is unique; what works for one couple may not work for another. Instead, think of this quiz as a conversation starter—a tool to help you and your partner reflect on your dynamic with curiosity and openness and to identify opportunities for growth and deepening connection.

Okay, enough preamble—let's get to the juicy stuff! Grab a pen and paper (or a notes app if you're a digital native), take a deep breath, and let's explore:

1. **When it comes to expressing your authentic thoughts and feelings to your partner, you:**

    a) Hold back out of fear of rejection or judgement.
    b) Share openly and vulnerably, even when it's uncomfortable.

c) Express yourself sometimes, but sugarcoat the harder truths.
d) Expect your partner to read your mind and meet your needs without you having to say anything.

2. When conflicts arise in your relationship, you:

a) Blame your partner and wait for them to fix it.
b) Own your part and work together to find a resolution.
c) Avoid the issue and hope it goes away on its own.
d) Get defensive and shut down emotionally.

3. The sense of shared meaning and purpose in your relationship feels:

a) Non-existent—you're just going through the motions.
b) Strong and clear—you know what you're creating together.
c) Present, but not always at the forefront of your mind.
d) Dependent on external factors, like success or approval from others.

4. Your experience of freedom and autonomy within the relationship is:

a) Constrained—you feel like you can't be yourself.
b) Balanced—you have space to grow while also feeling connected.
c) Imbalanced—you feel more like roommates

than partners.
d) Scary—you're afraid that your partner will leave if you assert your needs.

5. When it comes to facing fears and insecurities in your relationship, you:

a) Hide them at all costs and project an image of perfect confidence.
b) Share them with your partner and ask for support.
c) Acknowledge them to yourself, but struggle to be vulnerable with your partner.
d) Get overwhelmed and take it out on your partner or yourself.

6. Your communication with your partner tends to be:

a) Surface-level—you stick to safe topics and avoid deeper sharing.
b) Open and honest—you share your full truth, even when it's hard.
c) Hit-or-miss—you have moments of connection but also a lot of missed signals.
d) Reactive—you say things in the heat of the moment that you later regret.

7. When it comes to supporting each other's individual growth, you:

a) See it as a threat to the relationship and try to hold each other back.
b) Encourage each other to take risks and pursue your passions.

c) Give lip service to the idea but struggle when it requires real sacrifice.
d) Focus more on your own development and expect your partner to keep up.

8. The level of trust and emotional safety in your relationship is:

a) Low—you're always waiting for the other shoe to drop.
b) High—you feel seen, accepted, and free to be yourself.
c) Inconsistent—you trust each other sometimes but have doubts about others.
d) Fragile—you've been burned before and have a hard time letting yourself be vulnerable.

9. When it comes to creating shared experiences and memories, you:

a) Struggle to prioritise quality time together amidst daily demands.
b) Regularly make space for adventure, play, and meaningful connection.
c) Have fun in the moment, but don't have many traditions or rituals as a couple.
d) Put a lot of pressure on each experience to be perfect or Instagram-worthy.

10. Your overall approach to your relationship could best be described as:

a) Passive—you let things unfold without much intentionality or direction.
b) Creative—you see your relationship as a work

of art you're making together.

c) Practical—you focus more on logistics and problem-solving than big-picture visioning.

d) Perfectionistic—you hold yourselves to impossibly high standards and struggle with vulnerability as a result.

Whew, that was intense! Take a moment to shake off any residual existential angst and pat yourself on the back for showing up with such honesty and courage. The mere fact that you're engaging with these questions reveals a great deal about your commitment to creating an authentic, meaningful relationship.

It's time to tally up your score and see where you land on the existential relationship spectrum. Give yourself:

- 3 points for every B answer.
- 2 points for every C answer.
- 1 point for every A or D answer.

If you scored:

- 25–30 points: Congratulations! Your relationship is steeped in existential tea. You prioritise authenticity, vulnerability, and shared meaning-making and see challenges as opportunities for growth. Keep nurturing those existential muscles!
- 18-24 points: You've got a strong existential foundation, but there's room to go deeper. Look for opportunities to be more vulnerable, take ownership of your choices, and invest in experiences that bring you closer to your shared purpose.
- 10-17 points: Your relationship is more existential-

lite than existential-heavy. You may find yourselves defaulting to old patterns or shying away from the more confronting aspects of authentic relating. Gently challenge yourselves to have those uncomfortable conversations and take more emotional risks—the rewards are worth it!

- 0-9 points: Let's be real—your relationship is more "meh" than "meaningful" at the moment. But don't despair! Embracing an existential approach is like building any new habit—it takes practice, patience, and persistence. Start small, stay curious, and trust that every moment of connection is planting a seed for the relationship you want to grow.

Before you use these results as a weapon against your partner to showcase your existential skills (or criticise yourself for not meeting some elusive standard), remember that the purpose of this quiz isn't to pass judgement but to encourage introspection and conversation. Use your scores as a starting point for delving into these topics with your partner, sharing your own stories and desires, and and setting intentions for how you want to evolve within your relationship going forward.

Here are some questions to ponder upon:

- Which question challenged you the most or sparked deep thinking? Why?
- Where do you think your relationship resonates the most with principles? Where does it stray the furthest?
- What's an action you could take today to bring more genuineness, openness or mutual significance

to your relationship?

- How can you both encourage each other to embrace the existential challenges posed by this questionnaire, even when it seems daunting or uncertain?

Keep in mind that existential connections are not about striving for perfection. They're about embracing authenticity. It's consistently showing up in the messy yet beautiful dance of love and intimacy. It has the bravery to reveal yourself, the humility to acknowledge your role in the relationship dynamic, and the belief to pursue connection even when it feels challenging.

So take a moment to breathe, share a comforting gesture with your partner (or mentally send them good vibes if they're not physically present), and let these thoughts sink in. Have faith that each moment of introspection, meaningful conversation, and step taken towards being genuine leads you closer to the fulfilling relationship you seek.

If you ever feel like you need extra support on this journey, remember that there are people who care. Reach out to a trusted friend, therapist or someone specialising in relationships for advice and motivation. Engage with communities or discussion forums to connect with others on a similar quest. Immerse yourself in books, podcasts or workshops that ignite your passion for growth and discovery. Remember this quiz and bookmark the start of a journey of deep connections and self-discovery. There will be ups and downs, moments of joy, and moments of sadness. Throughout it all, remember your guiding light. The love and connection that fuels your soul.

Ultimately, existential relationships are not about theories or ideals but about embracing human love's messy beauty in all its imperfections. They are about being brave enough to be

yourself, embrace vulnerability, and keep choosing love when it's tough.

Cheers to you, explorer of existence. May your path be filled with awe, bravery and meaningful connections. May you find the courage to confront your fears, the compassion to forgive yourself for missteps, and the insight to continue choosing love every step of the way.

Always remember that regardless of your position on this journey, you have value, you deserve happiness, and you are never truly alone.

Key Takeaways:

- Self-reflection is crucial for relationship growth.
- Understanding your relationship dynamics can guide improvement.
- Regular check-ins can help maintain a healthy, existential approach to love.